

Julie and the Miracle

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by Ivan Olbracht



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Julie and the Miracle

People like to get something for their money, doing business is entertainment as well, and indeed there would be precious little fun to be got out of life in Polana if it were not so. It is equally entertaining for the seller, too; doing business without the entertainment may be a way of making money, but it just isn't business.

And so, in the village shop that smelt of the eastern regions of the country, not to mention vinegar, paraffin and printed cottons, Sura Fuchs was whiling away the time with Myter Mazucha, a Ruthenian peasant who, in the course of an hour and a half, had inspected and tapped all the scythes she had, and was now running his thumb along the edge of three carefully selected ones to see how sharp they were, and glumly tapping the best of those three best with his knuckle, as if trying to beat out of it those last fifty hammers which it seemed Sura was not going to knock off the price. Meanwhile Sura's father, Solomon Fuchs, was whiling away his time with a Ruthenian girl who was buying a kerchief, and with the three women who had come to help her buy it; he was taking red, green and yellow kerchiefs from the shelves, some of them sewn with spangles, some without; he would unfold them, shake them out, and hold them up to the light to show how the colours gleamed. On the general public's side of the counter was Baynish Zisovich, helping him to commend the quality and low price of his wares, but because Solomon Fuchs had asked twenty-five crowns for the red one with yellow roses and silver spangles, and the women had offered ten, and because so far they had only got to twenty-two crowns fifty

and Baynish Zisovich could see it was going to last a long time, leaving him little chance of a proper talk with Solomon, he went over to Sura.

'Weigh me out four kilos of flour, Sura,' he gave his order.

'For cash, mind, Baynish,' Sura answered.

'Ts!' replied Baynish with an offended toss of the head, for such low suspicion was beneath contempt.

Sura put a paper bag on the scales accordingly, and using a mug scooped the maize flour out of a chest.

'So you'll knock those fifty hallers off,' said Myter Mazucha in a voice which implied that the deal had long been officially settled between them.

'Uh-uh,' Sura smiled as she shook her head.

'Then throw in a bag of sweets for the children.'

'That'd be another crown.'

'Well, then, a piece of rock sugar, at least,' the peasant growled in a surly voice.

'Not even that.'

The bag of maize flour for Baynish Zisovich was weighed and done up, and he made as if to take it. But Sura was still holding on to it; now they both had their hands on it.

'Money first,' Sura laughed, for she'd have been worn out long ago if she had to spend all her time being angry.

'Who said I wasn't going to pay?'

'Come on, then, hand the money over.'

'Haven't I ever bought four kilos of flour from you before?' Baynish went on somewhat irritably.

'That piece of rock sugar for the children, then,' Myter Mazucha demanded noisily, slapping his money down on the counter boldly.

Sura carried the bag of maize flour off and put it on the shelf behind her, taking no notice of Baynish Zisovich

leaning right across the counter, tugging at her skirt and calling: 'Here, wait a minute, can't you?'

Sura went over to Mazucha and found the money twenty hallers short; the peasant refused to hear anything of the sort for some time. Then he returned to the bag of sweets for his children. Then he started to prove that the scythe was too dear anyway. Sura just stood there motionless, gazing into space over Mazucha's head, and when he started off about the price of scythes at Schönfeld's in the town, and what a disgrace it would be if she didn't give him at least that lump of rock sugar, Sura said in a bored voice, without withdrawing her eyes from space:

'It's twenty hallers short.'

'All right, I'll bring the rest tomorrow,' said Mazucha at last.

'Very well,' Sura replied courteously, gathering up the money and picking up the scythe to put it on the shelf behind her; 'I'll keep this for you until tomorrow.'

Mazucha protested that he needed it that very day, grumbling out loud, and Sura meanwhile served a child who had been sent for vinegar.

'Now what about it, Sura,' said Baynish resolutely, while Myter Mazucha angrily threw a twenty-haller piece on the counter.

'Uh-uh,' Sura shook her head.

'Solly,' Baynish shouted across at old Fuchs, who was at the door with the women and with the kerchiefs, and with the price at twenty-one crowns; for running to the door and then back to the counter again was one of the rules of the game.

'Uh-uh,' Solomon shook his head.

Baynish Zisovich leaned against the counter, scratching his chin through his chestnut beard, and thinking, while Sura weighed out a bag of cattle salt for some woman:

'Well, I haven't got it... Vampires! Bloodsuckers! A black year on you, pig-heads! I'd fling the five crown note down at your feet if I'd got it. I haven't got it, and so that's that!' Baynish was not thinking the way you do when vague notions drift through your mind; his thoughts were clad in definite words and the 'I haven't got it' was thought very loud and as it were in capital letters. 'I haven't got it, I haven't, I haven't... What am I to do? The wife's waiting at home for that flour.'

So he went towards the door where Solomon was standing with the three women and said to him in Yiddish: 'Won't you let me have four kilos of flour on credit, Solly?'

'No.'

'Don't you know I've got eight children?'

'That's none of my doing,' replied Solomon Fuchs coldly and he shook out the red kerchief with the yellow flowers in front of the women.

'I know that, but do you realise they've had nothing to eat since yesterday?'

'It's no good, Baynish. You've been eighty crowns in debt to me for the last two years...'

'Don't I work it off hauling for you with my horse?'

'Hauling for me with your horse, that's a good one! You do twenty crowns' worth of work and go off with twenty-five crowns' worth of goods!'

'That's a good one, that is—as if anybody ever gave me anything for nothing!'

'And your debt doesn't get any smaller. What's the use of talking, Baynish?' and Solomon Fuchs turned back to the women. 'All right, then, for the sake of good will...' and back he led them to the counter again, '... I'll say twenty.'

Baynish was leaning against the counter, thinking again: 'Just suppose—and there's no harm in imagining

a thing like that—just suppose I'd got a hundred crown note in my pocket, right now. Would I break into it just because of this mangy dog? Once you break into a nice green hundred crown note like that instead of putting it away untouched, it's just as if you hadn't got a hundred crowns any more. Women are on to money like demons: We need maize and potatoes and we've got to have white bread for *shabos* and under those rags she's wearing Hanele hasn't even got a shift and what are you going to do about boots for the winter... and goodness only knows what else.' Baynish sighed. 'Oy, oyoyoy... perhaps I'd break into it after all. Of course I'd break into it.' And he said to himself: 'Well, I haven't got it... Yoy! What a lot of money! A hundred crowns! Wherever would a poor carter get all that money these days?'

The business with those women looked as though it were going to last a long time; they were ready to run out again, they weren't offering more than thirteen yet, and Fuchs was only at nineteen-fifty, and so Baynish tried Solomon once more:

'You know, Solly, it really is serious. The children honestly haven't had anything to eat. It's only a trifle, five crowns, and I'll work it off...'

'No.'

'Have pity on my family, Solly!'

That was too much; Solomon Fuchs couldn't bear such strong language. He began shouting. He'd had enough, the same thing happened twice a week, week in, week out, and started all over again whenever it was a question of Baynish working off a debt. He didn't steal, either, and that was the end of it, and he wouldn't listen to another word, and: 'Not another haller, ever, not even if you stand on your head for it!'

Baynish was hurt to the depths of his soul. He stayed by the counter for a little while, cursing gently in his

friendly soul, and when there were several customers in the shop at once and nobody was taking any notice of him, he slipped quietly into the empty tap-room and from there into the kitchen.

Here, with her sleeves tucked up above her elbows and cutting into the plump flesh, Mrs. Fuchs was just rolling out noodles. She turned irritably to see who had come in. Her eyes, which people feared, did not exactly stab him right through at one go, but for a while they pricked him all over from head to foot.

'*Gut morgn!* I say, Esther,' said Baynish quickly and as if quite unconcerned, 'do you happen to have a bit of bread about? Just for a bite, I simply haven't had a moment today...'

'Ts!' Esther tossed her head angrily. 'Why don't you go and buy some in the shop?'

'I was just telling you, I only want to have a bite.'

Baynish Zisovich sat down on a low stool by the stove, thus showing his willingness to wait, and began to entertain Esther with gossip about the wedding of Khava Davidovich and Mendl Rosenthal in Pribuy. What the bride had worn, how young Gleizer, in a black coat, big stiff collar, and white cotton gloves, had looked like a poor Czech teacher laid out ready for his coffin, and how stout Malke Hergot's sister in America had sent her an old yellow dance frock embroidered with an enormous red wool rose, which fitted her so tight it was nearly bursting at the seams, and how the rose came just on her bosom and the end of the stem started just at the crotch. 'Khee!' Esther squealed, Baynish laughed heartily, Esther brushed her floury hands on her fat belly and went to cut Baynish a slice of white bread.

'What are you making for dinner?' Baynish sniffed the air.

'Dinner! What am I making for dinner? What's it to do

with you what I'm making for dinner?' Esther snapped.

That was a false step, and so Baynish went on retailing the wedding gossip; the way Miss Vilkovich had done her hair up she looked like the Tower of Babylon, and Izzy Hershkovich had on yellow shoes the size of boats, and old Rosenthal's nose was twitching all the time; Baynish kept breaking off bits of bread and eating it, and when Esther's eyes were safely on her noodles he stuffed a biggish piece into his pocket. When she showed signs of interest with a couple of high-pitched 'Khees!' Baynish got up to go, imparting the last bit of gossip from the door and adding as if by the way:

'You know, Esther, they don't want to let me have four kilos of maize on credit, out there in the shop. Just tell Sura...'

He had prodded a wasps' nest. Esther banged the rolling-pin down on the board. Then she began to yell, arms akimbo.

'Come, now, don't take on so...' Baynish beat a hasty retreat.

Esther was going strong by now. Did people think they stole, or what? Week in, week out, they never saw a penny, let me have this and let me have that, every day the same old song: let me have this and wait for your money. Solly didn't know where to turn, he had to pay for maize, he had to pay for goods, he had to pay the bank, he had to pay his taxes, and the whole village living and clothing themselves at his expense, she'd be going barefoot before long, and poor Sura had to cry her eyes out before she got a single rag for her back...

Baynish had gone.

Not through the tap-room and the shop, though; he went out through the back yard.

'Mangy creatures,' he thought to himself.

In the yard a shaggy dog was lying in front of its kennel.

There were geese marching in from the road, through the open gate, and the dog just glanced up at them without stirring. The devil only knows how the wealthy manage it! Look at that dog, now. He takes no notice of the Fuchs' geese, they can even dab at his food, but just let a strange goose get in among them and he's after it at once, the goose runs squawking and beating its wings, with the dog snapping at its tail feathers. The cunning creature! And nobody even had to teach him to do it.

Just you wait, you pig heads, Baynish went on in his thoughts, the Lord will repay you all right! He'll visit it upon your children! Your son will turn out a bad lot. Phee! The celebrations and the arrogance when he was born! That Fuchs woman sat on the bench in front of the shop all day long, one big fat breast uncovered; one hand held the child to suck while the other kept dipping a piece of white bread in the pot of warm goose-dripping by her side, and rivulets of fat trickled down her chin. Just so that everybody could see how grand and rich they were. Phee! That boy would grow up a good-for-nothing tramp. At home he stole whatever he wanted, he was always giving away sweets from the shop to his pals, he threw his boots at his sisters, and he and the *beder's* boy Riva were the two biggest mischief-makers in the village.

Baynish Zisovich went on up the village street. The thought of that bulging bag in Sura's hands and the thought of his wife at home waiting for that flour gave him something else to worry about. He paused for a while between the cottage fences. Then he slapped his thigh. 'Well, I haven't got it!' His brow furrowed and the left corner of his mouth, his eyes and his left nostril turned upwards in a grimace at once sorrowful and thoughtful. 'I haven't got it! ... I haven't got a crown, I haven't got fifty hallers, I haven't got a thing.'

He went to see Srul Nakhamkes. In the smithy.

'*Gut morgn!*' he greeted him as he reached the door.

Srul Nakhamkes was black all over, with pitch-black beard, side-curls, eyes and hands, and a black apron; he was just making a new horseshoe out of three bits of old iron in his black smithy. In one hand he held the tongs to turn the red-hot iron in the forge, while the other worked the bellows, tugging at the chain tied up with string.

'Hey, Srul, could you lend me two crowns?'

Both hands busy, Srul turned round angrily. 'A fine time to be lending anyone two crowns!'

'I know, never mind, if you can't, you can't,' Baynish replied with the left corner of his mouth, his left eye and shoulder, 'but you'll lend me a little basket of potatoes, won't you?'

Srul Nakhamkes looked as though he was going to lose his temper.

'Never mind, if you can't, you can't, it's all right.' Baynish hastened to stem the outburst. 'Just give me a pinch of tobacco.'

Srul took out a tin with a bit of tobacco in it and Baynish rolled himself a cigarette. Then he went to the chain tied up with string and began working the bellows for the blacksmith.

'Now you're a wise man, Srul; do you know why the *goyim* say "Good day" and we say "Good tomorrow"?'

'No, I don't.'

'Well, now, "*Gut morgn*" doesn't mean "Good morning", because "*morgn*" doesn't mean "morning", it means "tomorrow". And the *goyim* are nothing but horses. They think only of today, now, this minute. But we think further ahead. At least as far as the morrow. At least that.'

'Where did you get that from?'

'The *malamet* told the children in the *kheder*.'

'My girls would never remember a thing like that from

the *kbeder*. All they think about is eating... You know, that's a good one!

'It's a very good one, Srul. Tomorrow! Tomorrow is the main thing, Srul! Today doesn't matter at all, now we've lived to see it in; the Lord will see we live it out. I haven't got any flour: never mind, I haven't got any; I haven't got two crowns: never mind, I haven't got it; I haven't got a basket of potatoes: what of it? I'll not die before night. But what about tomorrow? That's the main thing, Srul, a good tomorrow. And after that new tomorrow another one, always a good tomorrow.'

Srul Nakhamkes pulled two bits of iron out of the forge with his tongs, glowing white-hot: he put them on the anvil and the men began hammering them, Srul with the big hammer and Baynish with the smaller one; the anvil rang, the iron faded slowly to red, and the sparks flew.

Returning the welded piece of iron to the forge Nakhamkes raked the coals together and said:

'I'm surprised at you, Baynish, trying to borrow two crowns. You've been in Pribuy over a week, carting stones for the road with that horse of yours.'

'Me? In Pribuy? Carting stones? For over a week?'

'That's right. Borach Davidovich saw you.'

'So Borach Davidovich saw me, did he? Why shouldn't Borach Davidovich have seen me? Over a week, indeed! Ts! Only one single day did I cart that stone. For fifteen crowns. How much maize can you get for fifteen crowns? And me with eight children? I was at my brother-in-law's for a week, if you want to know, helping him to build his cottage if he's to get it finished before winter comes. I'll tell you something else, Srul: do you know how people first got over to America?'

'How people got over to America? That's obvious—sailed over in boats, of course.'

'Of course it's obvious they sailed over. It's obvious

they must have got there somehow, mustn't they, since the days when Adam and Eve were created? When did they sail over, though?

'Well, when?'

'King Solomon took them over. He had boats big enough.'

'How did they get so red?'

'The sun did that.'

'Did the *malamet* say that, too?'

'Yes, he did, to my boy Khaim.'

'He's a learned man.'

'He is indeed. And Khaim's going to be one, too.'

Then, when they were shaping the three pieces of old iron into a horseshoe on the anvil, Srul holding them and hammering and Baynish hammering too, Baynish said:

'Listen, Srul, I'm dreadfully hungry. I've never been so hungry in my life. I'm just sweating with hunger. I didn't have any supper and I've had no breakfast either. Haven't you got a bite?'

'Go and ask Laya.'

Baynish went across the yard to the cottage and stuck his head into the room.

'*Gut morgn*, Laya, what are you cooking today?'

'What am I cooking? I'm not cooking anything,' replied the blacksmith's little wife.

It was true. The stove was cold. There was a heap of freshly pulled vegetables on the bench, though, radishes and onions. Baynish went straight towards it.

'Give me a couple—I'll pay them back.'

The tiny woman flew up like a hen, standing between him and the vegetables, defending them and ruffling her feathers:

'No, no, not one. What will the children get for their dinner?'

'Come on, now,' Baynish spoke reproachfully, 'as if your girls had never had a radish off me.'

'Just one, then,' the blacksmith's wife was scarlet.

'No, four. Half for each of them.'

'No,' Laya shouted.

'Three, then,' Baynish was shouting, too.

'One,' Laya was screeching.

'Three!'

'No!'

'Three!'

'Two!'

'Give them here, then,' his eyes glared as though he was ready to do murder; 'but I want three onions.'

'No!' Laya screeched again.

'Two!'

'No!'

'One!' Baynish yelled.

'Here you are.'

After this little scene, more like quick robbery than a deal between friends, Baynish sat down on the bench, still wrought up and trembling like a horse after a sharp gallop. The smith's wife was still defending her vegetables with her body, but she had got over the surprise of the attack and was preparing to burst into tears. Baynish disarmed her hastily by enlarging on the kindness she had done his children, and by promising to bring back apples for her girls when he drove down to the plain in the autumn.

The blacksmith's wife was still on the verge of tears and lamentation, though, and Baynish was a little afraid of her, so he thought it wiser to go back to the smithy and work the bellows for a while.

'Good-bye, Srul,' he said when the horseshoe was finished. 'Tell Laya she's a kind-hearted woman, and I'll bring her some cucumbers.'

He set out for home. It was half an hour's walk and he went with his shoulders hunched and his head bent forward so that it hurried ahead of him.

He went past the Ruthenian cottages he had no dealings with, past the Jewish cottages where the people had got nothing anyway, and past the little shops where they would not give him credit either because he was not a customer there or because he was already in debt to them.

A good tomorrow! That was the main thing. Somehow or other they would get through this day. Phee! Had he got through so few days like this in the course of his thirty-two years? And had the Lord ever let one of His Jews die of hunger? Never since the world had been a world had that happened. When things were at their worst He had always sent manna and quails from Heaven. Things might be even worse and still neither he nor his children would die of hunger. Very well. Borach Davidovich had seen him in Pribuy. Carting stone. Very well. He had earned fifteen crowns. They had paid him fifteen crowns, exactly fifteen crowns, not a haller more, not a haller less. And there was something else he had to keep quite clear in his mind, too: the foreman was paying out the wages and on the table there was an empty mug with the skin left by white coffee stuck to the bottom, and by it an open pocket knife with a horn handle, and next to that Baynish's money: a ten crown note and a five crown piece. There was nothing else there at all. Absolutely nothing; a bare, empty table. Those fifteen crowns he had given to his wife and she had bought maize with it and they had lived on that. And now just imagine: suppose he had never earned that fifteen crowns? Would he have died of hunger, now? Yet the foreman could just as well have given the job to Gutman Katz or Gobi Abramovich or Mordkhe Hershkovich. We-e-ll? Would his children have died of hunger? No, they would

not have died of hunger... tomorrow the good Lord would send them quails.

When Baynish had the village behind him and was drawing nearer home, and rounding a bend in the path saw the rags hanging on the fence round his cottage and his wife's red petticoat among them, and the pot upturned on a stake in the fence, the gnawing at his vitals changed to something that was no longer just hunger.

'Have you got it?' his wife asked before he had even shut the door.

'No,' he replied timidly, and turned his head away not to see the angry tears in his wife's eyes.

He turned to his first-born, to the ten-year-old boy standing by the table murmuring something from a Hebrew book, his black almond-shaped eyes gazing wisely at his father. And Baynish's fear of his wife's reproachful face was amply compensated for by his pride in those eyes, King Solomon's own could not have been more beautiful, his pride in that face softer than lamb's fleece, and in those golden side-curls gleaming in the sun.

There were many children, though, in that room with its mud floor, and they could not be ignored.

'Now, children,' said Baynish solemnly, lifting his forefinger, 'Father has brought you something. Something really good. There isn't much of it, of course, because you must never have too much of a good thing, but it's something that is good for you, and ever...' Baynish smacked his lips and brought the tip of his thumb to the tip of his forefinger '...ever so nice... Now, Mother, cut it up in pretty rings for our little ones... two nice radishes and a lovely little onion...' then, because Mother would not dream of doing it, and because Mother was angrily tugging the bits of washing down from the pole over the stove and throwing them to the end of the bench, Baynish

Zisovich did it all himself...‘ and now a pinch of salt... and it’s all set out nicely for good children... and for the very littlest ones Daddy has brought a bit of white bread, as white as new snow and as sweet as sugar... and that’s a dinner the President himself won’t be eating today...’

Then Baynish Zisovich called Khaimek, his first-born, out into the passage.

He sat down on an old sauerkraut barrel and took the boy between his knees.

How beautiful art thou, Joseph, son of Jacob! And Baynish Zisovich felt that if he were to gaze a little longer into the dark depths of those eyes, and if he were to stroke the fair, almost flaxen locks once more, and if that lovely mouth were to smile at him so wisely longer than was seemly, then the soft wave coursing down his spine would turn into something he could not allow himself to wish for just now. And so he said with the affectionate severity proper to a father:

‘Khaimek, you had three potatoes for breakfast.’

‘Only two,’ replied the boy.

‘That doesn’t make any difference, two or three. Look, Father is hungry, too, but we must leave the bit of food we have got for the littlest ones...’

The boy gazed at his father with his almond-shaped eyes and nodded eagerly, as though to say he thought exactly the same, and as though to drive away as hastily as possible even the shadow of suspicion that he might have thought otherwise.

‘... because we two are not *goyim* who think of nothing but food, we are Jews, and our thoughts must be turned to higher things, because we are not to be brought low by such trifles as a moment’s hunger, and because we know that the Eternal One has never let a Jew die of hunger, and that he will send us something before the day is out.’

Khaimek nodded eagerly and smiled his broad smile.

'Yes, I know, you are my good little scholar, my *bokabr*,' said his father, stroking the boy's hair and feeling again the wave of tender warmth through his body. 'Come along, now, let's go back to the children.'

How had Baynish Zisovich really imagined it? How many people had he wanted to satisfy with those few rings of radish and onion? How many times did he think the littlest ones would be able to bite into the crumbs that were all that was left of Esther Fuchs's slice of bread?

'Daddy, I'm hungry,' seven-year-old Gobi said crossly.

'Daddy, I'm hungry,' six-year-old Shloym was ready to cry.

Five-year-old Sammy realised words were in vain and burst out howling. Hanele started off after him. And then they were all crying, piteously, crossly, reproachfully, impudently, relentlessly, persistently, and then to cap it all, God in Heaven! his wife Royza burst in, over by the stove, banging first one saucepan lid and then another, and screaming fit to deafen him, yelling something about a good-for-nothing husband, an idler who spent a week gallivanting about somewhere with his horse and brought back fifteen crowns to show for it all, about the affliction of her birth, about her father and her dead mother, about the Rabbi, and then with clenched fists she rushed towards the table, the red patches on her face standing out, and then ten-year-old Khaimek started to scream too, yelling desperately: 'Mummy! Mummy!' and pushing her away with both hands pressed against her distended belly.

Baynish Zisovich was utterly bewildered by the revolution that had broken out in his home. He did not know what to do. His head was swimming and there was a mist before his eyes—but only for a moment.

He squatted on his heels in front of the children. He began to chuckle. He began to clap his hands.

'Hohohoh! Hahahah! The Zisovich children are going to cry? Hohohoh! Clap! Clap! Not on your life! Yulalah! Yulalah! The little Zisoviches never cry. Never, never. Because their father's a rich man and he's going to bring them food and whatever they want, because he's got lots of money, yuy, yuy, mountains of money, because he's a rich man and the Zisovich children are a rich man's children, yuy, yuy, yulalah, yula, yula, yulalah!' And in the pandemonium Baynish Zisovich was jumping up and down and trying to shout louder than them all: 'Yulalah! Yulalah! yula, yula, yulalah!' and dancing and hopping about, crossing his legs and then kicking them up in the air one after the other and then stamping as if to rush at them, his hands on his hips, then above his head, gesticulating and clapping, 'Yulalah! Yulalah! because Khaimek will be a great and learned man before the Lord... and he will make Gutman a great merchant... and he'll own three houses in Mukachevo, right in the Square, yuy, yuy... and little Gobi and Shloym will go to America, and Gobi will be king there and Shloym governor, yulalah! yulalah! ...and they'll send a wonderful boat back yuhaha! ...all first class berths... for little Sammy and Pinkas... and they'll send Hanele and Yentele a great big dowry, a million for each of them... yulalah! yulalah! yula, yula, yulalah!...'

And then ten-year-old Khaim joined his efforts to his father's and started dancing and leaping too, 'yulalah! yulalah!' and crossing his legs and kicking them out in front of him; then he and his father joined hands and they both kicked their legs up in the air and stamped as if they were rushing at the children, and 'yulalah! yulalah! yula, yula, yulalah! yulalah!... Yulalah! yula, yula, yulalah!...'

No, the Lord sent no manna raining down that day, and not even one tiny little quail before night came. The Lord God worked his miracle the day after, towards midday, when Baynish Zisovich was right at the other end of the village.

The moment he saw those two tourists, the gentleman in check cloth that must have cost at least sixty crowns a yard, and the nice plump lady who seemed to Baynish to walk with a slight limp, he knew the good Lord had sent them to him. As He sent the ram to Abraham. That they might be sacrificed instead of his children. Baynish's mind at once started working feverishly.

God's purpose was clear. If God's purpose is clear, everything is clear. Then it only remains for man to be guided by it and do all he can to carry it out. The Lord had sent these two to him. But God does not, and indeed cannot, take care of the details. That's man's business, and it is his responsibility to contrive to rearrange things around him so that the Lord's will can be carried out.

He waited for them on the road, and since the Law did not allow him to take his hat off, he stood there respectfully and said in a deferential but not a beggar's voice:

'Excuse me, Your Honour, but as there is a God in Heaven, my children have had nothing to eat since yesterday...'

The gentleman looked him over from head to foot with cold eyes, and asked:

'Is there a decent horse anywhere in the village?'

'A decent horse?' Baynish repeated the words. So that was it; the lady could go no further. She must have hurt her foot or twisted her ankle. Baynish's mind was hard at work. And his fantasy began to work feverishly, too. High above was the will of God, the one fixed point in space, as hard as diamond and as bright. Down below was the world, which had not lost its normal appearance,

but seemed to have acquired softer contours, as though it was of wax and could be shaped to need. Baynish's hands were at work shaping it. His fingers were still feverishly active when he asked, the words covering up what his fingers were doing: 'A decent horse?' Then, with a broad sweep of his arm as if to show the job was finished: 'There's only one decent horse in the village. Mordkhe Wolf's horse.'

'I know,' said the gentleman, 'a twenty-year-old hack, blind and lame.'

'Hm.' Baynish smiled politely at the joke. 'It's a seven-year-old, Your Honour. Mordkhe Wolf paid fourteen hundred for it. You will be very lucky indeed if he's got it at home, though, because there's not a single horse in the village today. They're all up on the high pastures or else they're in Pribuy, carting stone for the road.'

'Now wait a minute: is the horse at home or isn't it?'

'I think...'

'No thinking! Is it—or is it not?'

'Well, I expect it is.'

'There you are, you see.' The gentleman laughed. 'How far is it to this Mordkhe of yours?'

'How far? It's not at all far. Just a step.'

'What do you call a step?'

'If Your Honour is going towards the town, it's in that direction. Just a step. It depends how slow the lady walks.'

'So you've noticed that too, have you? A quarter of an hour?'

'A quarter of an hour.'

'Hm. That means half an hour.'

'Half an hour?' Baynish gave an injured smile.

'We could go on like this for ever.' Then he spoke to the lady in a foreign tongue, French, maybe, and it looked to Baynish as though things were turning out well, and

then the gentleman said: 'Now just you listen to me.' He glanced at his watch. 'I'm giving you twenty minutes. Then I'll pay. If it takes half a minute over the twenty you'll get nothing. Agreed? Or don't you want it?'

'Haven't I said so, Your Honour? Would the lady like to wait here?—Mordkhe Wolf would bring the horse for her to ride.'

'No. The lady would not like to wait here. The lady is very anxious to set eyes on that Arab steed first.'

Baynish took the tourists' rucksacks from them—God in Heaven, they were heavy!—and set off towards home at a trot.

'Give them our best regards!' the gentleman called after him.

Baynish slowed down to their pace. He was thinking hard: how much should he ask for the horse? He enquired:

'How long have you been staying in these parts, Your Honour?'

'Long enough not to let myself be taken in by you and Mordkhe!' the gentleman laughed.

'I might be able to get two horses. I'll go and ask...'

'No, you won't. We haven't finished hiring one yet. What do people here pay for a horse and a man, for the day?'

'Well, now, what do people here pay for a horse and a man, for the day? It's not always the same, what people pay for a horse and a man for the day!'

'I know that well enough!' the gentleman shook an admonishing finger at Baynish and laughed.

'This one is a very fine horse, too,' said Baynish, and thought to himself: Hm, this is a clever *goy*. He's in a good temper, though, he's laughing, and so is the lady, that's all to the good. 'The horse will fly like a swallow with the lady on her back, if the lady likes, and if the lady

doesn't like it, she'll carry her at a walk, like a lamb. And the way that horse climbs hills! Yuy! It's like a cat! What do people pay for a horse and a man for the day? How can I know what Mordkhe's going to ask?

In truth: doing business is not only the making of money. Business is entertainment as well. And often very exciting entertainment. For it is a question of nothing less than the opportunity to reshape the world over and over again. It is a mistake to believe that the world is what it appears to our senses, something fixed and outside us, independent of what we do. It is nothing of the kind. The world is what we ourselves make it. Even a moment of time is what we make it. And so are things, and people.

Baynish Zisovich was hurrying home. Dragging a lady and gentleman behind him. God performs only the miracle. The rest is man's to think out.

No, it did not take them a quarter of an hour. Anxious Baynish, who wanted to go ten times faster than the two were willing to walk, at least managed to get them through the huddle of cottages in the village street in that time, where mortal danger—in the shape of a horse—might have appeared from behind any of the hovels; he got them to where there were only single cottages scattered over the slopes rising above the road. It did not take them twenty minutes. Nor did it take them half an hour. It took them a good three quarters.

After the first quarter of an hour the gentleman's good temper began to fade away. He kept looking at his watch. He started asking questions twice every minute, and his questions got crosser and crosser. Then he said something to the woman in angry French. Then he began to swear. First at things in general, and then at Baynish. An anti-Semitic gentleman, of course—they always were. Then he got really furious. He shouted that he wasn't going

another step, started pulling the rucksacks off Baynish's back and threw them down in the dust; most dangerous of all, he yelled at everybody he could see near their cottages or working in the fields, to bring him a horse, now, at once, and he'd pay whatever they cared to ask. Thank Heaven, the people were afraid when they heard the gentleman shouting, and they couldn't understand what he was saying, so they either ran to hide in their cottages or stared at him in astonishment. The pretty lady began to shout, too, something about never having seen such impudence in her life, but when she tried to calm the gentleman down he answered her sharply and in the end they fell to quarrelling with each other.

When the rucksacks were pulled off his back Baynish stood modestly aside, about ten paces away, tactfully pretending not to be listening to the conjugal row. How long could a gentleman like that keep his anger going? A quarter of an hour? Half an hour? No longer, surely, it could not last longer than that. And so when the mad *goy* had got as far as to stop cursing the Jews and start calling only himself an ass and a fool, Baynish made bold to draw a few respectful steps nearer. And although the lady and the gentleman took no notice of him and although they did not admit his existence and although he was less than a worm to them then, less than the dust, nothing at all, and although he was just speaking into the empty air, still he did speak: about its being only a little way and just a few steps further round that bend in the path by the brook, and even if the lady would prefer some other horse it would take several hours to bring one down from the pastures and who knows what kind of an animal it would be and who knows whether they would reach the town by nightfall on its back. Then a fit of furious energy seized the gentleman. He suddenly dashed off up the hillside. All right, let him run, the Mazuchas haven't

got a horse, and if he goes any higher the Ivanyshes and the Kosyaks haven't got one, either. Baynish went on humbly standing where he was before. 'Yarda! Yarda!' the lady called after the gentleman as he came running out of the Mazuchas' cottage. But the gentleman was too furious to hear his name. He ran even higher, to the Ivanyshes. And the higher still, to the Kosyaks. Baynish was unobtrusively relating something to the lady, who was not listening. 'Yarda! Yarda!' she kept on calling him.

Well, of course, a quarter of an hour later Baynish was hitching the rucksacks on to his back again and off they went all three.

Business is sometimes very exciting entertainment, indeed.

The last quarter of an hour the eccentric gentleman went along as meek as a lamb and the two of them were as yielding as well-kneaded *barkbes* dough.

When they came in sight of the red rag on the fence round Baynish's cottage and the upturned pot stuck there, Baynish said in a very reproachful, injured tone:

'Well, and here we are in no time.'

He ran into the passage and called into the room so loud that they could hear him out on the road: 'Is Mordkhe Wolf at home?... Is the horse at home?' And added softly to his wife: 'Twenty-five crowns.' Then he ran out again.

'Hurrah!' he shouted happily. 'The horse is at home, I'm glad about that. Mordkhe's not at home himself, though. I'll go with you instead. His wife's coming at once. In five minutes the lady will be nice and comfortable on horseback.'

Royza stood at the door with her hands hidden under her apron.

'Now listen, Royza,' Baynish explained to her slowly. 'This lady and gentleman here would like to hire your

horse, the lady's hurt her foot. What does Mordkhe usually ask for it?'

'Twenty-five crowns,' replied Royza obediently without showing the slightest interest.

'Wha-a-at?' the gentleman was just going to lose his temper again but instead he made an abrupt gesture and turned away. 'Get on with the job, saddle the thing.'

Now Baynish carried the wooden saddle out of the dark stable—how ever does a horse manage to get inside?—and took as much time over it as he could. But sooner or later the critical moment had to be faced: now he was leading his Julie out. Over the threshold he managed to hide her behind his own body, but it was no good; it had to be: Julie appeared in the light of day, the whole of her, a fact Baynish could not talk away with his smiling 'Here we are, now, just a minute and everything'll be ready for the lady.' And when the irascible gentleman saw the finest horse in the whole village, the steed that would soon be off with the lady as fleet as a swallow—slightly larger than a goat, swollen like a football, dirty, knock-kneed, twenty years old if a day, with cataract on the right eye and sores on its neck where the bags of damp cheese carried down from the high pastures had rubbed it raw, all his wrath dissolved in laughter. Laughter which was angry only at the start, and soon changed into a hearty shout, peal after peal of merry and very loud laughter that made him throw his head about and jerked his body from side to side. The lady was gurgling like a dove, too, and infected by each other their laughter know no bounds and they did not know when to stop. Julie stood there indifferent, her head hanging and knees knocking as though she was ready to kneel down, dozing with her good eye as she waited for them to saddle her. Baynish was a little offended.

'It's a very good horse, though, I know it well.'

'We'll see about that,' the irascible gentleman tried in vain to save his face by speaking sternly. 'The District Hetman will give your Mordkhe what for, asking twenty-five crowns for a tottering wreck like this.'

'Will you get on the creature?' he asked his wife.

Wiping her eyes she gave him an answer in French which could not mean anything, but what else was she to do?

The gentleman shook his head in cheerful astonishment: 'As if I didn't know these scoundrels through and through! And still you fall for it every time.'

Baynish Zisovich brought some old torn petticoats belonging to his wife, and stuffed them under the saddle on the horse's back; to make the lady comfortable he laid old sacks flat on the saddle. The pregnant woman stood looking on, motionless and indifferent. Ten-year-old Khaim, wearing a solemn expression and giving not the slightest hint that he was dealing with his own father, brought him odd bits of string and chain from inside the cottage, and started fastening them together. The lady was talking French again. Once more it sounded cheerful and friendly. God's will was nearing fulfilment and Baynish felt he might already take part of his earnings.

And so while Khaimek was tying a big awkward knot in a frayed strip of webbing to join it to a bit of chain and thus make a stirrup, Baynish went respectfully up to the anti-Semitic gentleman:

'Excuse me, Your Honour, and don't be angry, but I've had nothing to eat since yesterday morning, and neither have my children, as God is my witness. Let me have something in advance; I'll look after you properly and we'll settle things with Mordkhe all right. I'd only like to buy some bread for the journey.'

The pretty lady was settling something with her husband, and said to Baynish: 'Open that rucksack!' When

Baynish had carried out her order she added: 'That's bread on top.'

It really was, wrapped in a white napkin, and not a trace of pork to be seen. In such circumstances it is permitted to take uncut bread from a *goy*. Baynish thanked her, polite but not servile, cut the bread in two and gave the bigger piece to his wife, saying:

'Take this to my wife, will you, please, Royza? She's to give it to the children.'

Khaimek gazed at the bread with his beautiful eyes.

Then the gentleman gave Baynish an advance of ten crowns as well.

'Take this to my wife, too, Royza.'

They were ready to set out.

Only the anti-Semitic gentleman, perhaps ashamed of the way he had started shouting, perhaps even a little affected by the poverty of the village, had something else to add, smiling as he spoke:

'And now, you rōgue, just tell me how much Mordkhe will have to pay you for fobbing a stupid *goy* off with this piece of carrion!'

Baynish was breaking off bits of bread and his mouth busy with chewing broadened into a happy smile: 'Of course, Your Honour, he'll have to let me have something.'

'As if I didn't know you through and through, you rascally lot!'

They rode up into the mountains, up a steep hillside, in order to reach the road down in the next valley, and follow it down to the nearest town. Spavined old Julie got into her stride, she was in no hurry, but plodded steadily on with the lady on her back and the rucksacks in front of the saddle; the plump lady was no circus rider, anyway, and was glad to be sitting down at all.

Fleecy clouds floated overhead in the sky, the steep slope ahead of them lay in the shadow, but the rest of the landscape, the mountains on both sides and the deep valley behind them with the stream at the bottom, were flooded with bright sunshine, and the stream gleamed and sparkled. Every now and again the lady reined Julie in, turned to look back at the valley, and sighed: 'God, how beautiful it is!' and the word 'God' came out with such feeling that it sounded as though she desperately needed Him at that very moment. The irascible gentleman smiled at her indulgently.

Naturally those were just the sort of fancies the gentry get; it was quite a nice day, true, and it wasn't bad going, with the fleecy clouds to give a bit of shade, but that was no reason to shout with joy in that mad way, especially since there was nothing, absolutely nothing worth looking at on those heaps of dead rock. Nevertheless Baynish joined in the lady's rejoicing, both out loud and in his heart. Not on account of the hills, but for the happiness in his heart. Inside him, too, the sun was shining and fleecy white clouds were floating, and everything was bending backwards and forwards joyfully, and everything was singing 'yulalah! yulalah!' and everything was dancing and legs were being crossed and kicked up in the air and stamped for joy, but it was all infinitely calmer than it had been the previous evening, as quiet as a shadow on the wall, yulalah! yulalah! yula, yula, yulalah! for Adonai had worked a new miracle and that which had not been yesterday was today, yulalah! yulalah! ('God, how beautiful it is!' the pretty lady exclaimed) and the thing which had not been yesterday and was today was a hundred crown note in a little linen bag on a string round his neck, the one he had earned by carting stone for six days for the road in Pribuy, the one which was lying on the table when the

foreman was paying out wages, next to the ten crown note and the five crown piece which he had given his wife, and next to the foreman's open pocket-knife, and next to the mug with the skin left by white coffee in it, the note which tomorrow he would put away with the other nine he had saved already and which were going to pay for Khaimek to study and become a rabbinical scholar, a *bokbr*, and which would be multiplied a thousand and ten thousand times because a poor man is no better than a man dead, yulalah! and because the hands do nought and all is done by the head, yula, yula, and because man must shape the world around him in accordance with God's will and because the Lord had never let a single one of His Jews die of hunger, yula, yula, yulalah!

A tiny morsel of this vast gratitude and tender feeling towards the Lord, a ridiculously insignificant little morsel, yet even so, as high as a mountain, was transferred to the instruments of His wisdom, to the two *goyim* here with him, whom the Lord had sent as He sent the ram to Abraham, that his first-born might not be sacrificed. What pleasant words should he say to them, what kindness could he do them, that they might rejoice with him?

'God, how beautiful it is!' the pretty lady sighed and turned back to look as she sat on Julie.

'That's nothing, lady,' Baynish smiled at her. 'There's far better to come!' and he thought of the streets in the town, of the shop-windows piled with goods, of chests of gold and silver and precious stones, of Khaimek's eyes and of all the really beautiful things he would like to show this kind *goy* woman.

'What's the name of that cone-shaped hill?'

'That hill? The cone-shaped one? Let me see, that's *Amborets*.' He called it the 'Ignorant One'.

'And that one over there?'

‘That one over there?’

Of course Baynish did not know the name of a single one of those hills; such foolishness could interest only *goyim*, and anyway, it was not of the least significance what they were called (as if a pile of earth and rock with nothing to consecrate it deserved a name at all!), but why shouldn't he make the lady happy, when that made him happy too? And so while the plump lady took a notebook with a gold pencil out of the breast pocket of her hiker's jacket—she really was nicely built, that lady!—and wrote down all he said, Baynish Zisovich went on inventing names: *Cickes* (the Dugs) and *Toches* (the Arse), the *Shames' Wife*, *Mikvah* (the Bath-house), *Ganev* (the Thief), *Kovetny* (the Lickerous One), *Tole* (the Thief on the Cross), Greater *Minborets* and Lesser *Minborets* (the Pagan Heretics), Greater *Kelev* and Lesser *Kelev* (the Dogs), and if need be he would go on inventing names for another three weeks.

‘What strange names,’ commented the pretty lady.

‘Oh, yes, the names are very interesting in these parts,’ replied the anti-Semitic gentleman. ‘Round here the Slav element came into contact with the Rumanian, while the original settlers were Tartars.’

‘Aren't there bandits in these hills?’ the lady enquired.

Baynish could not be sure; was she asking because she was afraid there were? Or did she want to hear stories about them? He was in a quandary. And then the world was at once arranged to fit in with his wishes, so that there were no longer any bandits about at all, and you could safely carry open loads of pearls and diamonds on Julie's back; but not so long ago the place had been full of the villains, committing horrible crimes, murder, arson and robbery, holding up travellers, ‘Oyoyoy, dreadful, it was!’

He accompanied those *goyim* not for one day, but for four. The gentleman called him Baynish and familiarly said 'thou'; the lady said 'you' and called him Mr. Baynish; they not only paid him twenty-five crowns a day, but gave him another five for his food; if he had been able to eat *treyfe* they would have stuffed him with food from morning till night; the anti-Semitic gentleman promised him an old suit and the pretty lady said his wife should have a coat and the children shoes, and Baynish had got their address in his pocket, so that he could remind them in case they forgot.

The miracle had been accomplished. The fervour passed. The burning bush in which the Lord had appeared to him in the desert had burned out, and the desert again appeared in the sober light of every day. The contours had hardened like wax which has grown cold and can no longer be shaped. Until the Lord speak His will again.

Blessed be His name!