

From: *Tevye the Dairyman* by Sholem Aleichem.
(Joseph Simon-Pargloss Press) Ch. "Lech Lecho" - "Get thee Out!"

erty, turned everything into money, and then went to hire a wagon to cart off the remaining odds and ends of poverty.

But what happened after that—only to Tevye do such things happen! Listen attentively, I won't keep you long, I'll tell it to you in two, as they say, words.

Just before it was time to leave, I entered the house. It was no longer a home, it was a ruin. Bare walls that literally shed tears! The floor was strewn with bundles, bundles, and bundles! On the stove sat the cat, a poor, orphaned creature—it looked so mournful, it cut me to the heart and brought tears to my eyes...If I weren't ashamed of showing such weakness before my daughter I would have had me a good cry. After all, as one says, my father's house!.. Here I grew up, this is where I struggled and suffered all my days, and now, suddenly—*Lech-lecho!* Say what you will, it is a sorrowful thing!

But Tevye is not a woman, so I restrained myself and pretended to be in a cheerful mood. I called out to my daughter the widow: "Come here, Tzeitl," I said, "where are you?"

She came out from the other room, her eyes red and her nose swollen. Aha, I said to myself, my daughter has started her lamentations again, like an old woman on the Day of Atonement! These women, I tell you, the least excuse and they cry! Tears come cheap with them.

"Fool!" I said to her. "What are you crying for again? Aren't you silly? Just think of the difference between you and Mendel Beiliss."

But she paid no attention to my words and said:

"*Tateh*, you don't know why I am crying."

"I know the reason very well, why shouldn't I know it? You are crying," said I, "because it grieves you to leave your home. Here you were born, here you grew up, so it hurts you to part from it!.. Believe me, if I weren't Tevye, if I were someone else, I would kiss these bare walls and these empty shelves... I would drop down to this ground!.. I am just as sorry as you are for every last bit! Foolish child! Even this cat—do you see how it sits there on the stove like a poor orphan? A mute tongue, an animal, and yet—what a pity, it is being left behind all alone without a master, *tsar-balekhaim*—a pity for living things..."

"There is someone else who is still more to be pitied," said Tzeitl.

"Namely?"

"Namely," she said, "we are going away and leaving one person here, lonely as a stone."

I couldn't understand what she meant. "What are you babbling about? Where's the fire? What person? What stone?" I asked.

"*Tateh*," she answered, "I am speaking about our Chava."

When she said these words I felt, I swear, as if I'd been scalded with boiling water or clubbed over the head! My anger aroused, I began to shout:

"Why all of a sudden Chava?! How many times have I told you that Chava was never to be mentioned or remembered!"

Do you think this scared her? Tevye's daughters have a power in them!

"*Tateh*," she said, "don't get so angry, better remember what you yourself have said many times. You said that it stands written that a human being must have compassion for another human being, as a father has compassion for his child."

How do you like that? Her words exasperated me still more, and I cried:

"You're speaking of compassion? Where was *her* compassion when I cringed like a dog before the priest, his name should be blotted out, when I kissed his feet while she was probably in the next room and heard every word?... Or where was her compassion when her mother, may she rest in peace, was lying—this shouldn't happen to you—right here on the floor covered with a black cloth? Where was she then? And what about the nights when I couldn't sleep? And the heartache I suffered all the time and still suffer when I remember what she did to me, for whom she exchanged us—where was her pity for me?" I couldn't talk any more, my heart was pounding so...

Perhaps you think that Tevye's daughter found no words to answer me with?

"You yourself, *Tateh*, say that even God Himself forgives those who repent."

"Repentance?" I cried. "Too late! The twig that has once torn itself away from the tree must wither! The leaf that falls must rot, and don't you dare speak to me of this any more—'*Up to here and no further!*'"

In short, when Tzeitl saw that words availed her nothing—Tevye is not a person who can be won over with words—she fell on my neck, began to kiss my hands and cry:

"*Tateh*, may evil befall me, may I die right here on the spot if

you repulse her as you did that time in the woods when she stretched out her hands to you and you turned your horse in the other direction and fled!"

"Why are you heckling me so?! What a nuisance, what a misfortune on my head!"

But she wouldn't let go of me, she held me by the hands and went on protesting: "May evil befall me, may I drop dead if you don't forgive her, she is your daughter just the same as I am!"

"What do you want from my life!" I cried. "She is no longer my daughter! She died a long time ago!"

"No," said Tzeitl, "she never died and she is again your daughter as before, because from the very first minute she learned that we were being sent out she told herself that we were *all* being sent out—she, too. Wherever we went—Chava herself told me this—she would also go. Our exile is her exile... Look, *Tateh*, here is her bundle!"

All this my daughter Tzeitl said in one breath, as we recite the names of Haman's ten sons in the *Megilah*, she didn't let me put in a word. She pointed to a bundle tied up in a red shawl, and immediately opened the door to the other room and called: "Chava!"

That is how it was, as I live...

So what shall I tell you, dear friend? She, Chava, just as they write in the story-books, appeared in the doorway, healthy, strong, and as beautiful as before. Hadn't changed the slightest bit, only there was a worried look on her face and her eyes were a little clouded. She held her head up proudly and looked at me—and I at her. Then she stretched out both hands to me, and could utter only one single word, almost in a whisper:

"*Tā-teh...*"

Please forgive me, but when I remember that day tears come to my eyes. But you shouldn't think that Tevye, God forbid, dropped a tear, or showed that he had a soft heart—nonsense! That is, what I then felt deep in my heart—that's something else. You yourself are also a father of children and you know as well as I do the meaning of the words, "*A father hath mercy on his children.*" When a child, however it may have sinned, looks right into your heart and soul, and says "*Tateh!*"—come on, just try and drive it away!.. But on the other hand, I recalled the fine trick she had played on me... Fedka Galagan, damn him... and the priest, may his name be



forgotten... and my tears... and Golda, may she rest in peace, stretched out on the floor, dead... Oh, no! Tell me yourself, how can one forget, how can one forget such things?.. But on the other hand again... how is it possible! After all, she was my child. "*A father hath mercy on his children.*" How can a man be so cruel when God says of Himself that he is a "*long-suffering God and slow to anger...*" Especially since she had repented and wanted to return to her father and to her God!..

What have you to say to this, Mr. Sholom Aleichem? You are, after all, a man who writes books and you give the world advice, so tell me, what should Tevye have done? Should he have embraced her and kissed her, and said to her, as we say on Yom Kippur at Kol Nidre: "*I have forgiven thee in accordance with thy prayers*"—come to me, you are my child? Or perhaps I should have turned the shafts, as I did that time in the woods, and said to her: "*Lech-lecho*"—begone, that is, go back in good health to wherever you've come from?.. No, suppose you were in Tevye's place, tell me frankly, as between good friends, what would you have done? If you cannot answer me at once I'll give you time to think it over... Meanwhile, I must go—my grandchildren are already waiting for me, looking out for their grandfather. You must know that grandchildren are a thousand times more precious than children. "*Children and children's children*"—no small matter!

Please forgive me if I have given you a headache with my talk; at least, you'll have something to write about... And now—good-bye. If God wills it we shall probably meet again some day.

1914

[*Yekhalaklakoy's*—"Slippery Places"—is a very short story previously never translated from the Yiddish,* written in 1916, just before that author's death, as an addition to "Get Thee Out!" In it Tevye, meeting the author by chance in a train, elaborates on how he managed to avert the lesson *Balak*—Vengeance—when the peasants came to beat him up or burn down his house. He told them that if they were in the right they would be able to repeat God's own words, hence the story might be called "Tongue-twisters." The following is the last paragraph of the story.]

*Our translator, Miriam Katz, apparently overlooked Curt Leviani's translation of this story as "Tevye Reads the Psalms" in *Old Country Tales* (1966)—The editors.