

GLASS MONTAGUE

THE
COMPETITIVE
NEPHEW

Montague Glass

The Competitive Nephew

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The Competitive Nephew

CHAPTER ONE

THE COMPETITIVE

"That's the way it goes," Sam Zaretsky cried bitterly. "You raise a couple of young fellers up in your business, Max, and so soon they know all you could teach 'em they turn around and go to work and do you every time."

Max Fatkin nodded.

"I told it you when we started in as new beginners, Sam, you should got a lady bookkeeper," he said. "The worst they could do is to get married on you, and all you are out is a couple dollars cut-glass for an engagement present and half a dozen dessert spoons for the wedding. But so soon as you hire a man for a bookkeeper, Sam, he gets a line on your customers, and the first thing you know he goes as partners together with your designer, and what could you do? Ain't it?"

"Louis Sen was a good bookkeeper, Max," Sam rejoined.

"Sure, I know," Max agreed, "and Hillel Greenberg was a good designer. That sucker is such a good designer, Sam, he will take away all our trade."

"Not all our trade, Max," Sam declared. "*Gott sei dank*, we got a few good customers what them suckers couldn't steal off of us. We got, anyhow, Aaron Pinsky. I seen Aaron on the subway this morning, and he says he would be in to see us this afternoon yet."

"That's nothing new, Sam. That feller comes in here whenever he's downtown. I guess some of our customers think he's a partner here."

"Let 'em think so, Max, it don't do us no harm that people should think we got it a rich man like Pinsky for a partner."

"Sure, I know," Fatkin rejoined. "But the feller takes liberties around here, Sam. He tells us what we should do and what we shouldn't do. If it wouldn't be that Pinsky was all the time cracking up Louis Sen I would of fired him *schon* long since already. Louis was always too independent, anyhow, and if we would of got rid of him a year ago, Sam, he wouldn't have gone as partners together with Hillel Greenberg, and we wouldn't now be bucking up against a couple of dangerous competitors."

"That's all right, Max. As I told you before, Aaron Pinsky is a good customer of ours, and if a good customer butts into your business he is only taking an interest in you; whereas, if a fellow which only buys from you goods occasionally, y'understand, butts in, then he's acting fresh and you could tell him so."

"But Pinsky butts into our business so much, Sam, that if he was the best customer a concern ever had, Sam, he would be fresh anyhow. The feller actually tells me yesterday he is going to bring us a new bookkeeper."

"A new bookkeeper!" Zaretsky exclaimed. "Why, we already got it a new bookkeeper, Max. I thought we hired it Miss Meyerson what used to be with Klinger & Klein. She's coming to work here Monday. Ain't it?"

"Sure, she is," Fatkin replied.

"Well, why didn't you tell him so?"

Fatkin shrugged.

"You tell him," he said. "I didn't got the nerve, Sam, because you know as well as I do, Sam, if I would turn him down and he gets mad, Sam, the first thing you know we are out a good customer and Greenberg & Sen would get him sure."

"Well, we got to go about this with a little diploomasher, y'understand."

"Diploomasher?" Max repeated. "What is that – diploomasher?"

"Diploomasher, that's French what you would say that a feller should watch out when you are dealing with a grouchy proposition like Aaron Pinsky."

"French, hey?" Max commented. "Well, I ain't no Frencher, Sam, and neither is Aaron Pinsky. And, furthermore, Sam, you couldn't be high-toned with an old-fashioned feller like Aaron Pinsky. Lately I don't know what come over you at all. You use such big words, like a lawyer or a doctor."

Sam was working his cigar around his mouth to assist the cerebation of a particularly cutting rejoinder, when the elevator door opened, and Pinsky himself alighted.

"Hallo, boys," he said, "ain't this rotten weather we are having? December is always either one thing or the other, but it is never both."

"You shouldn't ought to go out in weather like this," Max said. "To a feller which got it a cough like you, Aaron, it is positively dangerous, such a damp mees-erable weather which we are having it."

Aaron nodded and smiled at this subtle form of flattery. He possessed the worst asthmatic cough in the cloak and suit trade, and while he suffered acutely at times, he could not conceal a sense of pride in its ownership. It sounded like a combination of a patent automobile alarm and the shaking of dried peas in an inflated bladder, and when it seized Aaron in public conveyances, old ladies nearly fainted, and doctors, clergymen, and undertakers evinced a professional interest, for it seemed impossible that any human being could survive some of Aaron's paroxysms. Not only did he withstand them, however, but he appeared positively to thrive upon them, and albeit he was close on to fifty, he might well have passed for thirty-five.

"I stood a whole lot of Decembers already," he said, "and I guess I wouldn't die just yet a while."

As if to demonstrate his endurance, he emitted a loud whoop, and started off on a fit of wheezing that bulged every vein in his forehead and left him shaken and exhausted in the chair that Max had vacated.

"Yes, boys," he gasped, "the only thing which seems to ease it is smoking. Now, you wouldn't believe that, would you?"

Max evidenced his faith by producing a large black cigar and handing it to Pinsky.

"Why don't you try another doctor, Aaron?" Sam Zaretsky asked. Pinsky raised his right hand with the palm outward and flipped his fingers.

"I've went to every professor in this country and the old country," he declared, "and they couldn't do a thing for me, y'understand. They say as I grow older, so I would get better, and certainly they are right. This is nothing what I got it now. You ought to of heard me when I was a young feller. Positively, Max, I got kicked out of four boarding-houses on account the people complained so. One feller wanted to make me arrested already, such hearts people got it."

Max Fatkin nodded sympathetically, and thus encouraged Aaron continued his reminiscences.

"Yes, boys," he said, "in them days I worked by old man Baum on Catherine Street. Six dollars a week and P.M.'s I made it, but even back in 1880 P.M.'s was nix. The one-price system was coming in along about that time, and if oncet in a while you could soak an Italiener six twenty-five for a five dollar overcoat, you was lucky if you could get fifty cents out of old man Baum. Nowadays is different already. Instead of young fellers learning business by business men like old man Baum, they go to business colleges yet, and certainly I don't say it ain't just as good."

Sam Zaretsky exchanged significant glances with his partner, Max Fatkin, and they both puffed hard on their cigars.

"You take my nephew, Fillup, for instance," Aaron went on. "There's a boy of sixteen which just graduated from business college, and the boy writes such a hand which you wouldn't believe at all. He gets a silver medal from the college for making a bird with a pen – something remarkable. The eyes is all little dollar marks. I took it down to Shenkman's picture store, and seventy-five cents that sucker charges me for framing it."

"That's nothing, Aaron," Sam Zaretsky broke in, with a diplomatic attempt at a conversational diversion. "That's nothing at all. I could tell you myself an experience which I got with Shenkman. My wife's mother sends her a picture from the old country yet – "

"Not that I am kicking at all," Aaron interrupted, "because it was worth it. I assure you, Sam, I don't begrudge seventy-five cents for that boy, because the boy is a good boy, y'understand. The boy is a natural-born bookkeeper. Single entry and double entry, he could do it like nothing, and neat – that boy is neat like a pin."

"Huh, huh!" Max grunted.

"Yes," Aaron added, "you didn't make no mistake when you got me to bring you Fillup for a bookkeeper."

It was at this point that Max threw diplomacy to the winds.

"Got you to bring us a bookkeeper!" he exclaimed. "Why, Aaron, I ain't said a word about getting us this here – now – Fillup for a bookkeeper. We already hired it a bookkeeper."

"What?" Aaron cried. "Do you mean to say you got the nerve to sit there and tell me you ain't asked me I should bring you a bookkeeper?"

"Why, Aaron," Sam interrupted with a withering glance at his partner. "I ain't saying nothing one way or the other, y'understand, but I don't think Max could of asked you because, only this morning, Aaron, Max and me was talking about this here, now – what's-his-name – and we was saying that nowadays what future was there for a young feller as a bookkeeper? Ain't it? I says to Max distinctively: 'If Aaron would bring us his nephew we would give him a job on stock. Then the first thing you know the boy gets to be a salesman and could make his five thousand dollars a year.' But what could a bookkeeper expect to be? Ain't it? At the most he makes thirty dollars a week, and there he sticks."

"Is that so?" Aaron retorted ironically. "Well, look at Louis Sen. I suppose Louis sticks at thirty a week, hey?"

"Louis Sen is something else again," Sam replied. "Louis Sen is a crook, Aaron, not a bookkeeper. That feller comes into our place two years ago, and he ain't got five cents in his clothes, and we thought we was doing him a charity when we hired him. It reminds you of the feller which picks up a frozen snake and puts it in his pants-pocket to get warm, and the first thing you know, Aaron, the snake wakes up, and bites the feller in the leg. Well, that's the way it was with Louis Sen. Gratitude is something which the feller don't understand at all. But you take this here nephew of yours, and he comes from decent, respectable people, y'understand. There's a young feller, Aaron, what we could trust, Aaron, and so when he comes to work by us on stock, Aaron, we give him a show he should learn all about the business, and you take it from me, Aaron, if the boy ain't going out on the road to sell goods for us in less than two years he ain't as smart as his uncle is, and that's all I can say."

Aaron smiled, and Sam looked triumphantly at his partner.

"All right, Sam," Aaron commented, "I see you got the boy's interest at heart. So I would bring the boy down here on Monday morning. And now, Max, let's get to work on them misses' Norfolk suits. I want eight of them blue serges."

There was something about Miss Miriam Meyerson that suggested many things besides ledgers and trial balances, and she would have been more "in the picture" had she been standing in front of a kitchen table with her sleeves tucked up and a rolling-pin grasped firmly in her large, plump hands.

"I don't know, Sam," Max Fatkin remarked on Monday. "That girl don't look to me an awful lot like business. Mind you, I ain't kicking that she looks too fresh, y'understand, because she reminds me a good deal of my poor mother, *selig*."

"Ain't that the funniest thing?" Sam Zaretsky broke in. "I was just thinking to myself she is a dead ringer for my sister Fannie. You know my sister, Mrs. Brody?"

"I bet yer," Max Fatkin said fervently. "That's one fine lady, Mrs. Brody. Me and my Esther had dinner there last Sunday. And, while I got to admit my Esther is a good *cook*, y'understand, Mrs.

Brody – that's a *good* cook, Sam. We had some *fleisch kugel* there, Sam, I could assure you, better as Delmonico's – the Waldorf, too."

Sam nodded.

"If she is as good a bookkeeper as Fannie is a cook, Max," he replied, "I am satisfied. Sol Klinger says that she is A Number One. Always prompt to the minute and a hard worker."

"Well, why did he fire her, Sam?" Max asked.

"He didn't fire her. She got a sister living in Bridgetown married to Harris Schevrien, and Miss Meyerson goes up there last spring right in the busy time. Of course Klinger & Klein has got to let her go because under the circumstances, Max, she is the only sister Mrs. Schevrien got, y'understand. Then when the baby is two weeks old it gets sick, y'understand, and Miss Meyerson writes 'em not to expect her back before August. Naturally they got to fill her place, but Sol Klinger tells me she is a dandy, Max, and we should be lucky we got her."

"Well, certainly she don't seem to be loafing none," Max commented, with a glance toward the office where Miss Meyerson was making out the monthly statements. "So far what I could see she is working twicet as fast as Louis Sen, and we ain't paying her only fifteen dollars."

"Sure, I know," Sam said, "but you got to consider it we would also got to pay Fillup Pinsky five dollars a week, so we ain't in much on that."

"Why ain't we, Sam? I bet yer we would get our money's worth out of Fillup. That boy ain't going to fool away his time here, Sam, and don't you forget it."

The corners of his mouth tightened in a manner that boded ill for Philip, and his face had not resumed its normal amiability when Aaron Pinsky entered, with his nephew Philip in tow.

"Hallo, boys," he said. "This is the young man I was talking to you about. Fillup, shake hands with Mr. Zaretsky and Mr. Fatkin."

After this operation was concluded, Mr. Pinsky indulged in a fit of coughing that almost broke the carbon filaments in the electric-light bulbs.

"Fillup," he gasped, as he wiped his crimson face, "make for them a couple birds with a pen."

"That's all right," Max interrupted, "we take your word for it. Birds is nix here, Aaron. We ain't in the millinery business, we are in the cloak and suit business, and instead Fillup should be making birds yet, he shouldn't lose no time, but Sam will show him our stock. Right away we will learn him the line."

"Business ahead of pleasure, Aaron," Sam broke in hurriedly, with a significant frown at his partner. "The boy will got lots of time to make birds in the dull season. Just now we are rushed to death, Aaron. Come, Fillup, I'll show you where you should put your hat and coat."

Max forced an amiable smile as he handed Aaron Pinsky a cigar.

"I congradulate you, Aaron," he said. "You got a smart boy for a nephew, and I bet yer he would learn quick the business. For a start we will pay him three dollars a week."

Aaron stared indignantly and almost snatched the proffered cigar from Max's hand.

"Three dollars a week!" he exclaimed. "What do you take the boy for – a greenhorn? Positively you should pay the boy five dollars, otherwise he would put on his clothes and go right straight home."

"But, Aaron," Max protested, "I *oser* got three dollars a week when I started in as a new beginner. I was glad they should pay me two dollars a week so long as I learned it the business."

"I suppose you went to business college, too, Max. What? I bet yer when you first went to work you got to think hard before you could sign your name even."

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"Birds, I couldn't make it, Aaron," he admitted; "but the second week I was out of Castle Garden my mother, *selig*, sends me to night school, and they don't learn you birds in night school, Aaron. But, anyhow, Aaron, what's the use we should quarrel about it? If you want we should pay the boy five dollars a week – all right. I'm sure if he's worth three he's worth five. Ain't it? And what's

more, Aaron, if the boy shows he takes an interest we would give him soon a raise of a couple of dollars. We ain't small."

"I know you ain't, Max," said Aaron, "otherwise I wouldn't bring the boy here at all."

He looked proudly toward the rear of the showroom where Philip was examining the ticketed garments under the supervision of Sam Zaretsky.

"The boy already takes an interest, Max," he said; "I bet yer he would know your style-numbers by to-night already."

For half an hour longer Sam Zaretsky explained the sample line to Philip, and at length he handed the boy a feather duster, and returned to the front of the showroom.

"The boy is all right, Aaron," he said. "A good, smart boy, Max, and he ain't afraid to open his mouth, neither."

"I bet yer he ain't," Aaron replied, as Philip approached with a sample garment in one hand and the feather duster in the other.

"Look, Mr. Zaretsky," he said, "here's one of your style twenty-twenty-two with a thirty-twenty-two ticket on to it."

Sam examined the garment and stared at his partner.

"The boy is right, Max," he said. "We got the wrong ticket on that garment."

For one brief moment Aaron glanced affectionately at his nephew, and then he voiced his pride and admiration in a paroxysm of coughing that made Miss Meyerson come running from the office.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Couldn't I do something?"

For almost five minutes Aaron rocked and wheezed in his chair. At length, when he seemed to be at the point of suffocation, Miss Meyerson slapped him on the back, and with a final gasp he recovered his breath.

"Thanks, much obliged," he said, as he wiped his streaming eyes.

"You're sure you don't want a doctor?" Miss Meyerson said.

"Me? A doctor?" he replied. "What for?"

He picked up his cigar from the floor and struck a match. "This is all the doctor I need," he said. Miss Meyerson returned to the office.

"Who's that?" Aaron inquired, nodding his head in the direction of Miss Meyerson.

"That's our new bookkeeper which we got it," Max replied.

"So you hired it a lady bookkeeper," Aaron commented. "What did you done that for, Max?"

"Well, why not?" Max retorted. "We got with her first class, A Number One references, Aaron, and although she only come this morning, she is working so smooth like she was with us six months already. For my part it is all the same to me if we would have a lady bookkeeper, or a bookkeeper."

"I know," Aaron continued, "but ladies in business is like salt in the cawfee. Salt is all right and cawfee also, but you don't got to hate salt exactly, y'understand, to kick when it gets in the cawfee. That's the way with me, Max; I ain't no lady-hater, y'understand, but I don't like 'em in business, except for saleswomen, models, and buyers, y'understand."

"But that Miss Meyerson," Sam broke in, "she attends strictly to business, Aaron."

"Sure, I know, Sam," Aaron replied. "Slaps me on the back yet when I am coughing."

"Well, she meant it good, Aaron," Sam said.

"Sure, that's all right," Aaron agreed. "Sure, she meant it good. But it's the *idee* of the thing, y'understand. Women in business always means good, Max, but they butt in too much."

"Other people butts in, too," Max added.

"I don't say they don't, Max. But you take it me, for instance. When something happens which it makes me feel bad, Max, I got to swear, y'understand. I couldn't help it. And, certainly, while I don't say that swearing is something which a gentleman should do, especially when there's a lady, y'understand, still, swearing a little sometimes is good for the *gesund*. Instead a feller should make another feller a couple blue eyes, Max, let him swear. It don't harm nobody, and certainly nobody

could sue you in the courts because you swear at him like he could if you make for him a couple blue eyes. But you take it when there is ladies, Max, and then you couldn't swear."

"Sure, I know," Max rejoined; "and you couldn't make it a couple blue eyes on a feller when ladies would be present neither, Aaron. It wouldn't be etty-kit."

"Me, I ain't so strong on the etty-kit," Sam broke in at this juncture; "but I do know, Max, that we are fooling away our whole morning here."

Aaron Pinsky rose.

"Well, boys," he said, "I got to be going. So I wish you luck with your new boy."

Once more he looked affectionately toward the rear of the room where Philip industriously wielded the feather duster, and then made his way toward the elevator. As he passed Miss Meyerson's desk she looked up and beamed a farewell at him. He caught it out of the corner of his eye and frowned absently.

"I wish you better," Miss Meyerson called.

"Thanks very much," Aaron replied, as the floor of the descending elevator made a dark line across the ground-glass door of the shaft. He half paused for a moment, but his shyness overcame him.

"Going down!" he yelled, and thrusting his hat more firmly on his head he disappeared into the elevator.

Three days afterward Aaron Pinsky again visited Zaretsky & Fatkin, and as he alighted from the elevator Miss Meyerson came out of her office with a small package in her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Pinsky," she said, "I've got something for you."

"Me?" Aaron cried, stopping short in his progress toward the showroom. "All right."

"You know I couldn't get to sleep the other night thinking of the way you were coughing," she continued. "Every time I closed my eyes I could hear it."

Evidently this remark called for comment of some kind, and Aaron searched his brain for a suitable rejoinder.

"That's nice," he murmured at last.

"So I spoke to my cousin, Mrs. Doctor Goldenreich, about it," she went on, "and the doctor gave me this medicine for you. You should take a tablespoonful every four hours, and when it's all gone I'll get you some more."

She handed the bottle to Aaron, who thrust it into his overcoat-pocket.

"Thanks; much obliged," he said hoarsely.

"Don't mention it," she commented as she returned to the office.

Aaron looked after her in blank surprise. "Sure not," he muttered, starting off for the showroom in long, frightened strides.

"Say, Max," he said, "what's the matter with that girl? Is she *verrückt*?"

"*Verrückt!*" Max exclaimed. "What d'ye mean — *verrückt*? Say, lookyhere, Aaron, you should be careful what you are saying about a lady like Miss Meyerson. She already found where Louis Sen makes mistakes, which *Gott weiss wie vile* it costed us yet. You shouldn't say nothing about that girl, Aaron, because she is a cracker-jack, A Number One bookkeeper."

"Did I say she wasn't?" Aaron replied. "I am only saying she acts to me very funny, Max. She gives me this here bottle of medicine just now."

He poked the package at Max, who handled it gingerly, as though it might explode at any minute.

"What d'ye give it to me for?" he cried. "I don't want it."

"Well, I don't want it, neither," Aaron replied. "She ain't got no right to act fresh like that and give me medicine which I ain't asked for at all."

He looked exceedingly hurt and voiced his indignation with a tremendous whoop, the forerunner of a dozen minor whoops which shaded off into a succession of wheezes. It seemed to Max and Sam that Aaron would never succeed in catching his breath, and just when he appeared to

be at his ultimate gasp Miss Meyerson ran up with a tablespoon. She snatched the bottle from Max's grasp and, tearing off the wrapping paper, she drew the cork and poured a generous dose.

"Take this right now," she commanded, pressing the spoon to Aaron's lips. With a despairing glance at Max he swallowed the medicine, and immediately afterward made a horrible grimace.

"T'phooee!" he cried. "What the – what are you trying to do – poison me?"

"That won't poison you," Miss Meyerson declared. "It'll do you good. All he needs is about six more doses, Mr. Fatkin, and he'd be rid of that cough in no time."

Max nodded.

"Miss Meyerson is right, Aaron," he said. "You ought to take care of yourself."

Aaron wiped his eyes and his moustache with his handkerchief.

"You ain't got maybe a little *schnapps* in your desk, Max?" he said.

"*Schnapps* is the worst thing you could take, Mr. Pinsky," Miss Meyerson cried. "Don't give him any, Mr. Fatkin; it'll only make him worse."

She shook her head warningly at Aaron as she and Sam walked back to the office.

"What d'ye think for a fresh woman like that?" he said to Max as Miss Meyerson's head once more bent over her books.

"She ain't fresh, Aaron," Max replied. "She's just got a heart, y'understand."

"But – " Aaron began.

"But nothing, Aaron," Max broke in. "I will wrap up the medicine and you will take it home with you. The girl knows what she is talking about, Aaron, and the best thing for you to do is to leave off *schnapps* a little while and do what she says you should. I see on the bottle it's from Doctor Goldenreich. He's a *specialitist* from the chest and lungs, and I bet yer if you would go to him he would soak you ten dollars yet."

No argument could have appealed so strongly to Aaron as this did, and he thrust the bottle into his breast-pocket without another word.

"And how is Fillup coming on?" he asked.

"We couldn't complain," Max replied. "The boy is a good boy, Aaron. He is learning our line like he would be with us six months already."

"That's good," Aaron commented. "I bet yer before he would be here a month yet he would know the line as good as Sam and you."

Max smiled.

"I says the boy is a good boy, Aaron," he said, "but I never says he was a miracle, y'understand."

"That ain't no miracle, Max," Aaron retorted. "That's a prophecy."

Max smiled again, but the prediction more than justified itself in less than a month, for at the end of that time Philip knew the style-number and price of every garment in Zaretsky & Fatkin's line.

"I never see nothing like it, Sam," Max said. "The boy is a human catalogue. You couldn't stump him on nothing."

"Sure, I know," Sam replied. "Sometimes I got to think we make a mistake in letting that boy know all our business."

"A mistake!" Max repeated. "What d'ye mean a mistake?"

"I mean, Max, that the first thing you know Aaron goes around blowing to our competitors how well that boy is doing here, Max, and then a concern like Sammet Brothers or Klinger & Klein would offer the boy seven dollars a week, and some fine day we'll come downtown and find that Fillup's got another job. Also the feller what hires him would have a human catalogue of our whole line, prices and style-numbers complete."

"Always you are looking for trouble, Sam," Max cried.

"Looking for it I ain't, Max. I don't got to look for it, because when a feller got it a competitor like Greenberg & Sen, Max, he could find trouble without looking for it. Them suckers was eating lunch in Wasserbauer's on Monday when Aaron goes in there with Fillup. Elenbogen, of Plotkin &

Elenbogen, seen the whole thing, Max, and he told it me this morning in the subway to make me feel bad. Sometimes without meaning it at all a feller could do you a big favour when he tells you something for spite. Ain't it?"

"What did he tell you?" Max asked.

"He says that Greenberg & Sen goes over to Aaron's table and the first thing you know a box of cigars is going around and Fillup is drinking a bottle of celery tonic. Elenbogen says you would think Aaron was nobody, because them two fellers ain't paid no attentions to him at all. Everything was Fillup. They made a big holler about the boy, Max, and they asks Elenbogen to lend 'em his fountain pen so the boy could make it birds on the back of the bill-off-fare. Elenbogen says his fountain pen was put out of business ever since. Also, Sen insists on taking the bill-off-fare away with him, and Elenbogen says Aaron feels so set up about it he thought he would spit blood yet, the way he coughs."

"That's a couple of foxy young fellers," Max said. "You could easy get around a feller like Aaron Pinsky, Sam. He's a soft proposition."

Sam nodded and was about to voice another criticism of Aaron much less complimentary in character, when the elevator door clanged and Aaron himself entered the showroom.

"Well, boys," he said, "looks like we would get an early spring. Here it is only February already and I feel it that the winter is pretty near over. I could always tell by my throat what the weather is going to be. My cough lets up on me something wonderful, and with me that's always what you would call a sign of spring."

"Might it's a sign that Miss Meyerson's medicine done you good, maybe," Max commented.

"Well, certainly it ain't done me no harm," Aaron said. "I took six bottles already, and though it ain't the tastiest thing in the world, y'understand, it loosens up the chest something wonderful."

He slapped himself in the region of the diaphragm and sat down deliberately.

"However," he began, "I ain't come to talk to you about myself. I got something else to say."

He paused impressively, while Max and Sam exchanged mournful glances.

"I come to talk to you about Fillup," he continued. "There's a boy which he got it ability, y'understand. Five dollars a week is nothing for a boy like that."

"Ain't it?" Max retorted. "Where could you find it a boy which is only six weeks in his first job and gets more, Aaron?"

Aaron waved his hand deprecatingly.

"I don't got to go very far away from here, Max," he said, "to find a concern which would be willing to pay such a boy like Fillup ten dollars a week, and that's twicet as much as five."

"But, Aaron – " Max began, when Sam Zaretsky rose to his feet and raised his hand in the solemn gesture of a traffic policeman at a busy crossing.

"Listen here to me, Aaron," Sam declared. "Always up to now you been a good friend to us. You bought from us goods which certainly we try our best to make up A Number One, and the prices also we made right. In return you always paid us prompt to the day and you give us also a whole lot of advice, which we took it in the spirit in which it was given us. That's all right, too."

He stopped for breath and wet his dry lips before he proceeded.

"Also," he continued, "when you come to us and wanted us we should take on Fillup, Aaron, we didn't need him, y'understand, but all the same we took him because always you was a good customer of ours, and certainly, Aaron, I got to say that the boy is a good boy and he is worth to us if not five dollars a week, anyhow four dollars a week."

There was an ominous silence in the showroom as Sam gave himself another rest before continuing his ultimatum.

"But," he went on, "when you come to us and tell us that Greenberg & Sen offers the boy ten dollars a week and that we should raise him also, Aaron, all I got to say is – we wouldn't do it. Greenberg & Sen want your trade, Aaron; they don't want the boy. But if they got to pay the boy ten dollars a week, Aaron, then they would do so, and if it was necessary to pay him fifteen, they would

do that, too. Then, Aaron, when you would buy goods off of them all they do is to add Fillup's wages to the price of the goods, y'understand, and practically he would work for them for nothing, because the wages comes out of your pocket, Aaron, and not theirs."

"I never said nothing at all about Greenberg & Sen," Aaron blurted out.

"No one else would make such a proposition, Aaron," Sam said, "because no one else wants business so bad as that. Ourselves we could offer the boy ten dollars, too, and although we couldn't raise prices on you, Aaron, we could make it up by skimping on the garments; but we ain't that kind, Aaron. A business man is got to be on the level with his customers, Aaron, otherwise he wouldn't be in business long; and you take it from me, Aaron, these here two young fellers, Greenberg & Sen, would got to do business differencely or it would be quick good-bye with 'em, and don't you forget it."

Aaron Pinsky rose to his feet and gazed hard at Sam Zaretsky.

"Shall I tell you something, Sam?" he said. "You are sore at them two boys because they quit you and goes into business by themselves. Ain't it?"

"I ain't sore they goes into business, Aaron," Sam replied. "Everybody must got to make a start, Aaron, and certainly it ain't easy for a new beginner to get established, y'understand. Also competition is competition, Aaron, and we ourselves cop out a competitor's trade oncet in a while, too, Aaron, but Greenberg & Sen takes advantage, Aaron. They see that you are fond of that boy Fillup, and certainly it does you credit, because you ain't married and you ain't got no children of your own, Aaron. But it don't do them credit that they work you for business by pretending that they want the boy because he is a smart boy and that they are going to pay him ten dollars a week because he's worth it. No, Aaron; they don't want the boy in the first place, and in the second place he ain't worth ten dollars a week, and in the third place they ain't going to pay him ten dollars a week, because they will add it to the cost of their garments; and, Aaron, if you want any fourth, fifth, or sixth places I could stand here talking for an hour. But you got business to attend to, Aaron, and so you must excuse me."

He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets and walked stolidly toward the cutting room, while Aaron blinked in default of a suitable rejoinder.

"My partner is right, Aaron," Max said. "He is right, Aaron, even if he is the kind of feller that would throw me out of the window, supposing I says half the things to you as he did. But, anyhow, Aaron, that ain't neither here nor there. You heard what Sam says, Aaron, and me, I stick to it also."

Aaron blinked once or twice more and then he put on his hat.

"All right," he said. "All right."

He turned toward the front of the showroom where his nephew was sorting over a pile of garments.

"Fillup!" he bellowed. "You should put on your hat and coat and come with me."

It was during the third month of Philip Pinsky's employment with Greenberg & Sen that Blaukopf, the druggist, insisted on a new coat of white paint for the interior of his up-to-date store at the northwest corner of Madison Avenue and One Hundred and Twenty-second Street. His landlord demurred at first, but finally, in the middle of June, a painter's wagon stopped in front of the store and Harris Shein, painter and decorator, alighted with two assistants. They conveyed into the store pots of white lead and cans of turpentine, gasoline, and other inflammable liquids used in the removal and mixing of paints. Harris Shein was smoking a paper cigarette, and one of the assistants, profiting by his employer's example, pulled a corn-cob pipe from his pocket. Then, after he had packed the tobacco down firmly with his finger, he drew a match across the seat of his trousers and forthwith he began a three months' period of enforced abstinence from house-painting and decorating. Simultaneously Blaukopf's plate-glass show-window fell into the street, the horse ran away with the painter's wagon, a policeman turned in a fire alarm, three thousand children came on the run from a radius of ten blocks, and Mr. Blaukopf's stock in trade punctuated the cremation of his fixtures with loud explosions at uncertain intervals. In less than half an hour the entire building was gutted, and when the firemen withdrew their apparatus Mr. Blaukopf searched in vain for his prescription books. They had resolved

themselves into their original elements, and the number on the label of the bottle which Aaron carried around in his breast-pocket provided no clew to the ingredients of the medicine thus contained.

"That's a fine note," Aaron declared to Philip, as they surveyed the black ruins the next morning. "Now what would I do? Without that medicine I will cough my face off already."

He examined the label of the bottle and sighed.

"I suppose I could go and see that Doctor Goldenreich," he said, "and right away I am out ten dollars."

"Why don't you ring up Miss Meyerson over at Zaretsky & Fatkin's?" Philip suggested.

Aaron sighed heavily. His business relations with Greenberg & Sen had proved far from satisfactory, and it was only Philip's job and his own sense of shame that prevented him from resuming his dealings with Zaretsky & Fatkin.

As for Sam and Max, they missed their old customer both financially and socially.

"Yes, Sam," Max said the day after Blaukopf's fire, "things ain't the same around here like in former times already."

"If you mean in the office, Max," Sam said, "I'm glad they ain't. That's a fine bookkeeper we got it, Max, and a fine woman, too. Ain't it a shame and a disgrace for young fellers nowadays, Max, that a fine woman like Miss Meyerson is already thirty-five and should be single? My Sarah is crazy about her. Her and Sarah goes to a matinee last Saturday afternoon together and Sarah asks her to dinner to-morrow."

Max nodded.

"With some bookkeepers, Sam," he said, "you couldn't do such things. Right away they would take advantage. Miss Meyerson, that's something else again. She takes an interest in our business, Sam. Even a grouch like Aaron Pinsky she treated good."

"I bet yer," Sam replied. "I seen Elenbogen in the subway this morning and he tells me Aaron goes around blowing about paying a thousand dollars to a professor uptown and he gives him a medicine which cures his cough completely. I bet yer that's the same medicine which he got it originally from Miss Meyerson."

"I bet yer," Max agreed as the telephone bell rang. Sam hastened to answer it.

"Hallo!" he said. "Yes, this is Zaretsky & Fatkin. You want to speak to Miss Meyerson? All right. Miss Meyerson! Telephone!"

Miss Meyerson came from her office and took the receiver from Sam.

"Hello," she said. "Who is this, please?"

The answer made her clap her hand over the transmitter.

"It's Aaron Pinsky," she said to Max, and both partners sprang to their feet.

"What does he want?" Sam hissed.

Miss Meyerson waved them to silence and resumed her conversation over the 'phone.

"Hello, Mr. Pinsky," she said. "What can I do for you?"

She listened patiently to Aaron's narrative of the fire in Blaukopf's drug store, and when he had concluded she winked furtively at her employers.

"Mr. Pinsky," she said, "won't you repeat that over again? I didn't understand it."

Once more Aaron explained the details of the prescription book's incineration, and again Miss Meyerson winked.

"Mr. Pinsky," she said, "I can't make out what you say. Why don't you stop in here at twelve o'clock? Mr. Zaretsky is going to Newark and Mr. Fatkin will be out to lunch."

She listened carefully for a few minutes and then her face broke into a broad grin.

"All right, Mr. Pinsky," she concluded. "Good-bye."

She turned to her employers.

"He's coming here at twelve o'clock," she said. "He told me that the drug store burnt down where he gets his cough medicine, and he wants another prescription. And I said I didn't understand him so as to get him over here."

"Well, what good would that do?" Max asked.

"I don't know exactly," Miss Meyerson answered, "but I saw Mr. Pinsky coming out of Greenberg & Sen's last week and he looked positively miserable. I guess he's just as anxious to get back here as you are to have him."

"Sure, I know," Max commented, "but we wouldn't pay that young feller, Fillup, ten dollars a week, and that's all there is to it."

"Perhaps you won't have to," said Miss Meyerson. "Perhaps if you leave this thing to me I can get Pinsky to come back here and have Philip stay over to Greenberg & Sen's."

"Huh!" Max snorted. "A fine chance that boy got it to keep his job if Aaron Pinsky quits buying goods! They'll fire him on the spot."

"Then we'll take him in here again," Sam declared. "He'll be glad to come back at the old figure, I bet yer."

"That's all right," Max grunted. "Never meld your cards till you see what's in the widder. First, Miss Meyerson will talk to him, and then we will consider taking back Fillup."

"Sure," Sam rejoined, "and you and me will go over to Wasserbauer's and wait there till Miss Meyerson telephones us."

It was precisely twelve when the elevator stopped at Zaretsky & Fatkin's floor. Aaron Pinsky alighted and walked on tiptoe to the office.

"Hallo, Miss Meyerson!" he said, extending his hand, "is any of the boys around?"

"They're both out," Miss Meyerson replied, shaking Aaron's proffered hand. "It looks like old times to see you back here."

"Don't it?" Pinsky said. "It feels like old times to me. Is the boys busy?"

"Very," said Miss Meyerson. "We're doing twice the business that the books show we did a year ago."

Aaron beamed.

"That's good," he said. "Them boys deserves it, Miss Meyerson. When you come to consider it, Miss Meyerson, I got pretty good treatment here. The goods was always made up right and the prices also. I never had no complaint to make. But certainly a feller has got to look out for his family, and so long as my nephew gets along good I couldn't kick if oncet in a while Greenberg & Sen sticks me with a couple of garments. Last week they done me up good with eight skirts."

"And how is Philip?" Miss Meyerson asked.

"Miss Meyerson," Aaron began, "that boy is a good boy, y'understand, but somehow or another Greenberg & Sen don't take no interest in him at all. I don't think he learns much there, even though they did raise him two dollars last week."

"And how is your cough getting on, Mr. Pinsky?" Miss Meyerson continued.

"Since I ain't been taking the medicine it ain't been so good," Aaron announced, and, as if in corroboration of his statement, he immediately entered upon a fit of coughing that well-nigh strangled him. After Miss Meyerson had brought him a glass of water he repeated the narrative of the burned-out drug store and produced the bottle from his breast-pocket.

"That's too bad that the prescription was burned," Miss Meyerson said. "I'll get another one from my cousin's husband to-night and bring it down here to-morrow."

"Hold on there, Miss Meyerson," Aaron said. "To-morrow them boys might be in here, and I don't want to risk it."

"Why, they wouldn't bite you, Mr. Pinsky," she declared.

"Sure, I know. But the fact is I feel kind of funny about meeting 'em again – just yet a while, anyhow."

"But, Mr. Pinsky," Miss Meyerson went on persuasively, "it's foolish of you to feel that way about it."

"Maybe it is," Aaron admitted, "but, just the same, Miss Meyerson, if you wouldn't think it fresh or anything, I'd like to come up and call on you to-night, if you don't mind, Miss Meyerson, and you could give me the prescription then."

"Why, certainly," Miss Meyerson cried heartily. She turned to her desk and opened her handbag.

"Here's my card," she said. "I live with my cousin, Mrs. Goldenreich."

"Thanks; much obliged," Aaron murmured, pocketing the card. "I'll be there at eight o'clock."

Once more he glanced furtively around him and then, with a final handshake, he started off on tiptoe for the stairs. As soon as he disappeared Miss Meyerson took up the receiver.

"Ten-oh-four-oh, Harlem," she said.

"Hello," she continued, "is this you, Bertha? Well, this is Miriam. Will you send over to Reisbecker's and get a four-pound haddock? Never mind what I want it for. I'm going to have company to-night. Yes, that's right, and I want to make some *gefüllte fische*. You say you have plenty of onions? Well, then, I'll bring home ten cents' worth of Spanish saffron and half a dozen fresh eggs. I'll make some *mohnkuchen* after I get home. Did my white silk waist come back from the cleaners? I don't care. You can't jolly me. Good-bye."

It was almost one o'clock before she remembered to telephone over to Wasserbauer's, and when Sam and Max returned they dashed into the office and exclaimed: "Well?" with what the musical critics call splendid attack.

"He's coming over to call on me to-night," Miss Meyerson replied with a blush, "and I'll see what I can do then."

"You see, Sam," Max commented, "I told you you shouldn't reckon up how much chickens you will got till the hen lays 'em."

Max Fatkin visited a buyer at an uptown hotel on his way to the office the following morning, so that it was nearly nine before he entered his showroom. As he walked from the elevator he glanced toward Miss Meyerson's desk. It was vacant.

"Sam," he cried, "where's Miss Meyerson?"

Sam Zaretsky emerged from behind a rack of skirts and shrugged his shoulders.

"She's late the first time since she's been with us, Max," he replied.

"Might she is sick, maybe," Max suggested. "I'll ring up her cousin, the doctor, and find out."

"That's a good idee," Sam replied. Max was passing the elevator door when it opened with a scrape and a clang.

"Hallo, Max!" a familiar voice cried.

Max turned toward the elevator and gasped, for it was Pinsky who stepped out. His wonder grew to astonishment, however, when he beheld Aaron tenderly assisting Miss Meyerson to alight from the elevator.

"Good morning," she said. "I'm late."

"That's all right," Max cried. "Any one which is always so prompt like you has a right to be late oncet in a while."

He looked at Aaron shyly and wet his lips with his tongue.

"Well," he began, "how's the boy?"

"Fillup is feeling fine, *Gott sei dank*," Aaron replied. "But never mind Fillup now. I come here because I got to tell you something, Max. Where's Sam?"

"Here I am, Aaron," Sam said, as he came fairly running from the showroom. "And you don't got to tell us nothing, Aaron, because a feller could buy goods where he wants to. Always up to three months ago you was a good friend to us, Aaron, and even if you wouldn't buy nothing from us at all we are glad to see you around here oncet in a while, anyhow."

"But, Sam," Aaron replied, "give me a chance to say something. Goods I ain't buying it to-day. I got other things to buy."

He turned to Miss Meyerson with a wide, affectionate grin on his kindly face.

"Yes, Sam," he continued, "I got a two-and-a-half carat blue-white solitaire diamond ring to buy."

"What!" Sam cried, while Max gazed at Miss Meyerson with his eyes bulging.

"That's right," Aaron went on; "a feller ain't never too old to make a home, and even if there would be ten years difference in our ages, ten years ain't so much."

"Especially when it's nearer twenty," Sam added gallantly.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," Aaron said. "The thing is, Max, that a woman ain't got no business in business unless she's got to, and Miriam ain't got to so long as I could help it. Yes, Sam, three months from to-day you and Max and Mrs. Fatkin and Mrs. Zaretsky would all come to dinner at our house and Miriam would make the finest *gefüllte fische* which it would fairly melt in your mouth."

"I congratulate you, Miss Meyerson," Sam said. "We are losing the best bookkeeper which we ever got."

"Well, that's all right, Sam," Aaron cried. "You know where you could always get another. Fillup ain't going to hold that job with them suckers any longer."

"And since we aren't going to be married for two months yet," Miss Meyerson added, "I'll keep my position here and break Philip into his new job."

"That suits us fine," Sam declared. "And to show you we ain't small we will start him at the same money what we pay Miss Meyerson – fifteen dollars a week."

Aaron turned toward the two partners and extended both his hands.

"Boys," he said, "I don't know what I could say to you."

"Don't say nothing," Max interrupted. "The boy is worth it, otherwise we wouldn't pay it. Business is business."

"I know it, boys," he said; "but a business man could have also a heart, ain't it?"

Max nodded.

"And you boys," Aaron concluded, "you got a heart, too, believe me. What a heart you got it! Like a watermelon!"

He looked at Miss Meyerson for an approving smile and, having received it, he gave final expression to his emotions of friendship and gratitude in the worst coughing-spell of his asthmatic career.

CHAPTER TWO

OPPORTUNITY

"What is brokers?" Mr. Marcus Shimko asked. "A broker is no good, otherwise he wouldn't be a broker. Brokers is fellers which they couldn't make a success of their own affairs, Mr. Zamp, so they butt into everybody else's. Particularly business brokers, Mr. Zamp. Real-estate brokers is bad enough, and insurings brokers is a lot of sharks also; but for a cutthroat, a low-life bum, understand me, the worst is a business broker!"

"That's all right, too, Mr. Shimko," Harry Zamp said timidly; "but if I would get a partner with say, for example, five hundred dollars, I could make a go of this here business."

Mr. Shimko nodded skeptically.

"I ain't saying you couldn't," he agreed, "but where would you find such a partner? Nowadays a feller with five hundred dollars don't think of going into retail business no more. The least he expects is he should go right away into manufacturing. Jobbing and retailing is nix for such a feller, understand me – especially clothing, Mr. Zamp, which nowadays even drug stores carries retail clothing as a side line, so cut up the business is."

Harry Zamp nodded gloomily.

"And, furthermore," Shimko added, "business brokers could no more get you a partner with money as they could do miracles, Mr. Zamp. Them days is past, Mr. Zamp, and all a business broker could do nowadays is to bring you a feller with experience, and you don't need a business broker for *that*, Mr. Zamp. Experience in the retail clothing business is like the measles. Everybody has had it."

"Then what should I do, Mr. Shimko?" Zamp asked helplessly. "I must got to get a partner with money somewhere, ain't it? And if I wouldn't go to a business broker, who then would I go to? A bartender?"

"Never mind!" Mr. Shimko exclaimed. "Some people got an idee all bartenders is bums, but wunst in a while a feller could get from a bartender an advice also. I got working for me wunst in my place down on Park Row a feller by the name Klinkowitz, which he is now manager of the Olympic Gardens on Rivington Street; and if I would have took that feller's advice, Mr. Zamp, instead I am worth now my tens of thousands I would got hundreds of thousands already. 'When you see a feller is going down and out, Mr. Shimko,' he always says to me, 'don't show him no mercy at all. If you set 'em up for a live one, Mr. Shimko,' he says, 'he would anyhow buy a couple of rounds; but a dead one, Mr. Shimko,' he says, 'if you show him the least little encouragement, understand me, the least that happens you is he gets away with the whole lunch-counter.' Am I right or wrong?"

Mr. Zamp nodded. He resented the imputation that he was a dead one, but he felt bound to agree with Mr. Shimko, in view of the circumstance that on the following day he would owe a month's rent with small prospect of being able to pay it. Indeed, he wondered at Mr. Shimko's amiability, for as owner of the Canal Street premises Shimko had the reputation of being a harsh landlord. Had Zamp but known it, however, store property on Canal Street was not in active demand of late, by reason of the new bridge improvements, and Shimko's amiability proceeded from a desire to retain Zamp as a tenant if the latter's solvency could be preserved.

"But I couldn't help myself, Mr. Zamp," Shimko went on. "I got no business keeping a restaurant at all."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Shimko's late restaurant was of the variety popularly designated as a "barrel-house," and he had only retired from the business after his license had been revoked.

"Yes, Mr. Zamp," Shimko continued; "in a business like that a feller shouldn't got a heart at all. But I am very funny that way. I couldn't bear to see nobody suffer, understand me, and everybody takes advantage of me on account of it. So I tell you what I would do. My wife got a sort of a relation

by the name Miss Babette Schick, which she works for years by a big cloak and suit concern as a designer. She ain't so young no longer, but she got put away in savings bank a couple of thousand dollars, and she is engaged to be married to a young feller by the name Isaac Meiselson, which nobody could tell what he does for a living at all. One thing is certain – with the money this Meiselson gets with Miss Schick he could go as partners together with you, and pull you out of the hole, ain't it?"

Mr. Zamp nodded again, without enthusiasm.

"Sure, I know, Mr. Shimko," he said; "but if a young feller would got two thousand dollars to invest in a business, y'understand, why should he come to me? If he would only got five hundred dollars, Mr. Shimko, that would be something else again. But with so much as two thousand dollars a feller could get lots of clothing businesses which they run a big store with a couple of cutters, a half a dozen salesmen, and a bookkeeper. What have I got to offer him for two thousand dollars? Me, I am salesman, cutter, bookkeeper, and everything; and if this feller comes in here and sees me alone in the place, with no customers nor nothing, he gets an idee it's a dead proposition. Ain't it?"

Shimko pulled out a full cigar-case, whereat Zamp's eye kindled, and he licked his lips in anticipation; but after Shimko had selected a dark perfecto, he closed the case deliberately and replaced it in his breast-pocket.

"A business man must got to got gumption," he said to the disappointed Zamp; "and if you think you could got a partner just by bringing him into the store here, and showing him the stock and fixtures which you got it, you are making a big mistake."

"Well, of course I am expecting I should blow him to dinner maybe," Zamp protested, "with a theayter also."

Shimko evidenced his disgust by puffing vigorously at his cigar.

"You are just like a whole lot of other people, Zamp," he said. "You are always willing to spend money before you make it. Meiselson comes in here and sees you only got a small stock of piece goods, understand me, and you couldn't afford to keep no help, and then, on the top of that yet, you would take him out and blow him. Naturally he right away gets the idee you are spending your money foolishly, instead of putting it into your business, and the whole thing is off."

Zamp shrugged impotently.

"What could I do, Mr. Shimko?" he asked. "I got here a small stock of goods, I know, but that's just the reason why I want a partner."

"And that's just the reason why you wouldn't get one," Shimko declared. "A small stock of piece goods you couldn't help, Zamp; but if you let that feller come into your store and find you ain't got no cutters or customers, that's your own fault."

"What d'ye mean, Mr. Shimko?" Zamp demanded.

"I mean this," Shimko explained. "If I would got a store like you got it here, Zamp, and a friend offers to bring me a feller with a couple thousand dollars for a partner, understand me, I would go to work, y'understand, and get a couple cutters and engage 'em for the afternoon. Then I would turn around, y'understand, and go up and see such a feller like Klinkowitz, which he is manager of that theayter on Rivington Street, and I would get him to fix up for me a half a dozen young fellers from his theayter, which they would come down to my store for the day, and some of 'em acts like customers, and others acts like clerks. Then, when my friend brings in the feller with two thousand dollars, understand me, what do they see? The place is full of customers and salesmen, and in the rear is a couple of cutters chalking lines on pattern papers and cutting it up with shears. You yourself are so busy, understand me, you could hardly talk a word to us. You don't want to know anything about getting a partner at all. What is a partner with two thousand dollars in a rushing business like you are doing it? I beg of you you should take the matter under consideration, but you pretty near throw me out of the store, on account you got so much to do. At last you say you would take a cup coffee with me at six o'clock, and I go away with the two-thousand dollar feller, and when we meet again at six o'clock, he's pretty near crazy to invest his money with you. Do you get the idee?"

"Might you could even get the feller to pay for the coffee, maybe," Zamp suggested, completely carried away by Shimko's enthusiasm.

"If the deal goes through," Shimko declared, in a burst of generosity, "I would even pay for the coffee myself!"

"And when would you bring the feller here?" Zamp asked.

"I would see him this afternoon yet," Shimko replied, as he opened the store door, "and I would telephone you sure, by Dachtel's place, at four o'clock."

Zamp, full of gratitude, shook hands with his landlord.

"If I would got such a head like you got it to think out schemes, Mr. Shimko," he said fervently, "I would be a millionaire, I bet yer!"

"The thinking out part is nothing," Shimko said, as he turned to leave. "Any blame fool could think out a scheme, y'understand, but it takes a pretty bright feller to make it work!"

"If a feller wouldn't be in business for himself," Shimko said to Isaac Meiselson, as they sat in Wasserbauer's Café that afternoon, "he might just as well never come over from Russland at all."

"I told you before, Mr. Shimko," Meiselson retorted, "I am from Lemberg *geborn*."

"*Oestreich oder Russland*, what is the difference?" Shimko asked. "If a feller is working for somebody else, nobody cares who he is or what he is; while if he's got a business of his own, understand me, everybody would respect him, even if he would be born in, we would say for example, China."

"Sure, I know, Mr. Shimko," Meiselson rejoined; "but there is businesses and businesses, and what for a business is a small retail clothing store on Canal Street?"

"Small the store may be, I ain't denying it," Shimko said; "but ain't it better a feller does a big business in a small store as a small business in a big store?"

"If he does a big business, yes," Meiselson admitted; "but if a feller does a big business, why should he want to got a partner?"

"Ain't I just telling you he *don't* want no partner?" Shimko interrupted. "And as for doing a big business, I bet yer we could drop in on the feller any time, and we would find the store full of people."

"*Gewiss*," Meiselson commented, "three people playing auction pinochle in a small store is a big crowd!"

"No auction pinochle gets played in that store, Meiselson. The feller has working by him two cutters and three salesmen, and he makes 'em earn their money. Only yesterday I am in the store, and if you would believe me, Meiselson, his own landlord he wouldn't talk to at all, so busy he is."

"In that case, what for should he need me for a partner I couldn't understand at all," Meiselson declared.

"Neither could I," Shimko replied, "but a feller like you, which he would soon got two thousand dollars to invest, needs *him* for a partner. A feller like Zamp would keep you straight, Meiselson. What you want is somebody which he is going to make you work."

"What d'ye mean, going to make me work?" Meiselson asked indignantly. "I am working just as hard as you are, Mr. Shimko. When a feller is selling toilet soaps and perfumeries, Mr. Shimko, he couldn't see his trade only at certain hours of the day."

"I ain't kicking you are not working, Meiselson," Shimko said hastily. "All I am telling you is, what for a job is selling toilet soaps and perfumery? You got a limited trade there, Meiselson; because when it comes to toilet soaps, understand me, how many people takes it so particular? I bet yer with a hundred people, Meiselson, eighty uses laundry soap, fifteen *ganvers* soap from hotels and saloons, and the rest buys wunst in six months a five-cent cake of soap. As for perfumery, Meiselson, for a dollar bill you could get enough perfumery to make a thousand people smell like an Italiener barber-shop; whereas clothing, Meiselson, everybody must got to wear it. If you are coming to compare clothing with toilet soap for a business, Meiselson, there ain't no more comparison as gold and putty."

Meiselson remained silent.

"Furthermore," Shimko continued, "if Zamp sees a young feller like you, which even your worst enemy must got to admit it, Meiselson, you are a swell dresser, and make a fine, up-to-date appearance, understand me, he would maybe reconsider his decision not to take a partner."

"Did he say he wouldn't take a partner?" Meiselson asked hopefully.

"He says to me so sure as you are sitting there: 'Mr. Shimko, my dear friend, if it would be for your sake, I would willingly go as partners together with some young feller,' he says; 'but when a business man is making money,' he says, 'why should he got to got a partner?' he says. So I says to him: 'Zamp,' I says, 'here is a young feller which he is going to get married to a young lady by the name Miss Babette Schick.'"

"She ain't so young no longer," Meiselson broke in ungallantly.

"By the name Miss Babette Schick," Shimko continued, recognizing the interruption with a malevolent glare, "'which she got, anyhow, a couple thousand dollars,' I says; 'and for her sake and for my sake,' I says, 'if I would bring the young feller around here, would you consent to look him over?' And he says for my sake he would consent to do it, but we shouldn't go around there till next week."

"All right," Meiselson said; "if you are so dead anxious I should do so, I would go around next week."

"Say, lookyhere, Meiselson," Shimko burst out angrily, "don't do me no favours! Do you or do you not want to go into a good business? Because, if you don't, say so, and I wouldn't bother my head further."

"Sure I do," Meiselson said.

"Then I want to tell you something," Shimko continued. "We wouldn't wait till next week at all. With the business that feller does, delays is dangerous. If we would wait till next week, some one offers him a good price and buys him out, maybe. To-morrow afternoon, two o'clock, you and me goes over to his store, understand me, and we catches him unawares. Then you could see for yourself what a business that feller is doing."

Meiselson shrugged.

"I am agreeable," he said.

"Because," Shimko went on, thoroughly aroused by Meiselson's apathy, "if you're such a fool that you don't know it, Meiselson, I must got to tell you. Wunst in a while, if a business man is going to get a feller for partner, when he knows the feller is coming around to look the business over, he plants phony customers round the store, and makes it show up like it was a fine business, when in reality he is going to bust up right away."

"So?" Meiselson commented, and Shimko glared at him ferociously.

"You don't appreciate what I am doing for you at all," Shimko cried. "I wouldn't telephone the feller or nothing that we are coming, understand me? We'll take him by surprise."

Meiselson shrugged.

"Go ahead and take him by surprise if you want to," he said wearily. "I am willing."

In point of fact, Isaac Meiselson was quite content to remain in the soap and perfumery trade, and it was only by dint of much persuasion on Miss Babette Schick's part that he was prevailed upon to embark in a more lucrative business. It seemed a distinct step downward when he compared the well-nigh tender methods employed by him in disposing of soap and perfumery to the proprietresses of beauty parlours, with the more robust salesmanship in vogue in the retail clothing business; and he sighed heavily as he contemplated the immaculate ends of his finger-nails, so soon to be sullied by contact with the fast-black, all-wool garments in Zamp's clothing store.

"Also, I would meet you right here," Shimko concluded, "at half-past one sharp to-morrow."

After the conclusion of his interview with Isaac Meiselson, Shimko repaired immediately to Zamp's tailoring establishment, and together they proceeded to the office of Mr. Boris Klinkowitz, manager of the Olympic Gardens, on Rivington Street. Shimko explained the object of their business,

and in less than half an hour the resourceful Klinkowitz had engaged a force of cutters, salesmen, and customers sufficient to throng Harry Zamp's store for the entire day.

"You would see how smooth the whole thing goes," Klinkowitz declared, after he had concluded his arrangements. "The cutters is genu-ine cutters, members from a union already, and the salesmen works for years by a couple concerns on Park Row."

"And the customers?" Zamp asked.

"That depends on yourself," Klinkowitz replied. "If you got a couple real bargains in sample garments, I wouldn't be surprised if the customers could be genu-ine customers also. Two of 'em works here as waiters, evenings, and the other three ain't no bums, neither. I called a dress-rehearsal at your store to-morrow morning ten o'clock."

On the following day, when Mr. Shimko visited his tenant's store, he rubbed his eyes.

"Ain't it wonderful?" he exclaimed. "Natural like life!"

"S-s-sh!" Zamp exclaimed.

"What's the matter, Zamp?" Shimko whispered.

Zamp winked.

"Only the cutters and the salesmen showed up," he replied.

"Well, who are them other fellows there?" Shimko asked.

"How should I know?" Zamp said hoarsely. "A couple of suckers comes in from the street, and we sold 'em the same like anybody else."

Here the door opened to admit a third stranger. As the two "property" salesmen were busy, Zamp turned to greet him.

"Could you make me up maybe a dress suit *mit* a silk lining?" the newcomer asked.

"What are you so late for?" Zamp retorted. "Klinkowitz was here *schon* an hour ago already."

The stranger looked at Zamp in a puzzled fashion.

"What are you talking about – Klinkowitz?" he said. "I don't know the feller at all."

Zamp gazed hard at his visitor, and then his face broke into a broad, welcoming smile.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am making a mistake. Do you want a French drape, *oder* an unfinished worsted?"

For the next thirty minutes a succession of customers filled the store, and when at intervals during that period Klinkowitz's supernumeraries arrived, Zamp turned them all away.

"What are you doing, Zamp?" Shimko exclaimed. "At two o'clock the store would be empty!"

"Would it?" Zamp retorted, as he eyed a well-dressed youth who paused in front of the show-window. "Well, maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't; and, anyhow, Mr. Shimko, if there wouldn't be no customers here, we would anyhow got plenty of cutting to do. Besides, Shimko, customers is like sheep. If you get a run of 'em, one follows the other."

For the remainder of the forenoon the two salesmen had all the customers they could manage; and as Shimko watched them work, his face grew increasingly gloomy.

"Say, lookyhere, Zamp," he said; "you are doing here such a big business, where do I come in?"

"What d'ye mean, where do *you* come in?" Zamp asked.

"Why the idee is mine you should get in a couple salesmen and cutters," Shimko began, "and –"

"What d'ye mean, the *idee* is yours?" Zamp rejoined. "Ain't I got a right to hire a couple salesmen and cutters if I want to?"

"Yes, but you never would have done so if I ain't told it you," Shimko said. "I ought to get a rake-off here."

"You should get a rake-off because my business is increasing so I got to hire a couple salesmen and cutters!" Zamp exclaimed. "What an idee!"

Shimko paused. After all, he reflected, why should he quarrel with Zamp? At two o'clock, when he expected to return with Meiselson, if the copartnership were consummated, he would collect 10 per cent. of the copartnership funds as the regular commission. Moreover, he had decided to refuse

to consent to the transfer of the store lease from Zamp individually to the copartnership of Zamp & Meiselson, save at an increase in rental of ten dollars a month.

"Very well, Zamp," he said. "Maybe the idee ain't mine; but just the same, I would be back here at two o'clock, and Meiselson comes along."

With this ultimatum Shimko started off for Wasserbauer's Café, and at ten minutes to two he accompanied Meiselson down to Canal Street.

"Yes, Meiselson," Shimko began, as they approached Zamp's store. "There's a feller which he ain't got no more sense as you have, and yet he is doing a big business anyhow."

"What d'ye mean, no more sense as I got it?" Meiselson demanded. "Always up to now I got sense enough to make a living, and I ain't killed myself doing it, neither!"

For the remainder of their journey to Zamp's store Shimko sulked in silence; but when at length they reached their destination he exclaimed aloud:

"Did you ever see the like?" he cried. "The place is actually full up with customers!"

Zamp's prediction had more than justified itself. When Shimko and Meiselson entered, he looked up absently as he handled the rolls of piece goods which he had purchased, for cash, only one hour previously. Moreover, his pockets overflowed with money, for every customer had paid a deposit of at least 25 per cent.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Zamp," Shimko cried. "This is Mr. Meiselson, the gentleman which I am speaking to you about. He wants to go as partners together with you."

Zamp ran his hand through his dishevelled hair. He was more than confused by his sudden accession of trade.

"You got to excuse me, Mr. Shimko," he said, "I am very, very busy just now."

Shimko winked furtively at Zamp.

"Sure, I know," he said, "but when could we see you later to-day?"

"You *couldn't* see me later to-day," Zamp replied. "I am going to work to-night getting out orders."

"*Natürlich*," Shimko rejoined, "but couldn't you take a cup coffee with us a little later?"

Zamp jumped nervously as the door opened to admit another customer. The two clerks, supplemented by a third salesman, who had been hired by telephone, were extolling the virtues of Zamp's wares in stentorian tones, and the atmosphere of the little store was fairly suffocating.

"I couldn't think of it," Zamp answered, and turned to the newly arrived customer. "Well, sir," he cried, "what could I do for *you*?"

"Say, lookyhere, Zamp," Shimko exploded angrily, "what is the matter with you? I am bringing you here a feller which he wants to go as partners together with you, and –"

At this juncture Meiselson raised his right hand like a traffic policeman at a busy crossing.

"One moment, Mr. Shimko," he interrupted. "You are saying that I am the feller which wants to go as partners together with Mr. Zamp?"

"Sure!" Shimko said.

"Well, all I got to say is this," Meiselson replied. "I ain't no horse. Some people which they got a couple thousand dollars to invest would like it they should go into a business like this, and kill themselves to death, Mr. Shimko, but *me* not!"

He opened the store door and started for the street.

"But, lookyhere, Meiselson!" Shimko cried in anguished tones.

"*Koosh*, Mr. Shimko!" Meiselson said. "I am in the soap and perfumery business, Mr. Shimko, and I would stay in it, too!"

Six months later Harry Zamp sat in Dachtel's Coffee House on Canal Street, and smoked a post-prandial cigar. A diamond pin sparkled in his neck-tie, and his well-cut clothing testified to his complete solvency.

Indeed, a replica of the coat and vest hung in the window of his enlarged business premises on Canal Street, labelled "The Latest from the London Pickadillies," and he had sold, strictly for cash, more than a dozen of the same style during the last twenty-four hours. For the rush of trade which began on the day when he hired the "property" salesmen and cutters had not only continued but had actually increased; and it was therefore with the most pleasurable sensations that he recognized, at the next table, Isaac Meiselson, the unconscious cause of all his prosperity.

"Excuse me," he began, "ain't your name Meiselson?"

"My name is Mr. Meiselson," Isaac admitted. "This is Mr. Zamp, ain't it?"

Zamp nodded.

"You look pretty well, considering the way you are working in that clothing business of yours," Meiselson remarked.

"Hard work never hurt me none," Zamp answered. "Are you still in the soap and perfumery business, Mr. Meiselson?"

Meiselson shook his head.

"No," he said, "I went out of the soap business when I got married last month."

"Is that so?" Zamp commented. "And did you go into another business?"

"Not yet," Meiselson replied, and then he smiled. "The fact is," he added in a burst of confidence, "my wife is a dressmaker."

CHAPTER THREE

THE SORROWS OF SEIDEN

"Say, lookyhere!" said Isaac Seiden, proprietor of the Sanspareil Waist Company, as he stood in the office of his factory on Greene Street; "what is the use your telling me it is when it ain't? My wife's mother never got a brother by the name Pesach."

He was addressing Mrs. Miriam Saphir, who sat on the edge of the chair nursing her cheek with her left hand. Simultaneously she rocked to and fro and beat her forehead with her clenched fist, while at intervals she made inarticulate sounds through her nose significant of intense suffering.

"I should drop dead in this chair if she didn't," she contended. "Why should I lie to you, Mr. Seiden? My own daughter, which I called her Bessie for this here Pesach Gubin, should never got a husband and my other children also, which one of 'em goes around on crutches right now, Mr. Seiden, on account she gets knocked down by a truck."

"Well, why didn't she sue him in the courts yet?" Seiden asked. "From being knocked down by a truck many a rich feller got his first start in business already."

"Her luck, Mr. Seiden!" Mrs. Saphir cried. "A greenhorn owns the truck which it even got a chattel mortgage on it. Such *Schlemazel* my family got it, Mr. Seiden! If it would be your Beckie, understand me, the least that happens is that a millionaire owns the truck and he settles out of court for ten thousand dollars yet. Some people, if they would be shot with a gun, the bullet is from gold and hits 'em in the pocket already – such luck they got it."

"That ain't here nor there, Mrs. Saphir," Seiden declared. "Why should I got to give your Bessie a job, when already I got so many people hanging around my shop, half the time they are spending treading on their toes?"

"*Ai, tzuris!*" Mrs. Saphir wailed. "My own husband's Uncle Pesach is from his wife a cousin and he asks me why! Who should people look to for help if it wouldn't be their family, Mr. Seiden? Should I go and beg from strangers?"

Here Mrs. Saphir succumbed to a wave of self-pity, and she wept aloud.

"*Koosh!*" Mr. Seiden bellowed. "What do you think I am running here – a cemetery? If you want to cry you should go out on the sidewalk."

"Such hearts people got it," Mrs. Seiden sobbed, "like a piece from ice."

"S enough!" said Mr. Seiden. "I wasted enough time already. You took up pretty near my whole morning, Mrs. Saphir; so once and for all I am telling you you should send your Bessie to work as a learner Monday morning, and if she gets worth it I would pay her just the same wages like anybody else."

Mrs. Saphir dried her eyes with the back of her hand, while Mr. Seiden walked into his workroom and slammed the door behind him as evidence that the interview was at an end. When he returned a few minutes later Mrs. Saphir was still there waiting for him.

"Well," he demanded, "what d'ye want of me now?"

For answer Mrs. Saphir beat her forehead and commenced to rock anew. "My last ten cents I am spending it for carfare," she cried.

"What is that got to do with me?" Seiden asked. "People comes into my office and takes up my whole morning disturbing my business, and I should pay 'em carfare yet? An idee!"

"Only one way I am asking," Mrs. Saphir said.

"I wouldn't even give you a transfer ticket," Mr. Seiden declared, and once more he banged the door behind him with force sufficient to shiver its ground-glass panel.

Mrs. Saphir waited for an interval of ten minutes and then she gathered her shawl about her; and with a final adjustment of her crape bonnet she shuffled out of the office.

Miss Bessie Saphir was a chronic "learner" – that is to say, she had never survived the period of instruction in any of the numerous shirt, cloak, dress, and clothing factories in which she had sought employment; and at the end of her second month in the workshop of the Sanspareil Waist Company she appeared to know even less about the manufacture of waists than she did at the beginning of her first week.

"How could any one be so *dumm*!" Philip Sternsilver cried as he held up a damaged garment for his employer's inspection, "I couldn't understand at all. That's the tenth waist Bessie Saphir ruins on us."

"*Dumm*!" Mr. Seiden exclaimed. "What d'ye mean, dumb? You are getting altogether too independent around here, Sternsilver."

"Me – independent!" Philip rejoined. "For what reason I am independent, Mr. Seiden? I don't understand what you are talking about at all."

"No?" Seiden said. "Might you don't know you are calling my wife's relation dumb, Sternsilver? From a big mouth a feller like you could get himself into a whole lot of trouble."

"Me calling your wife's relation dumb, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver cried in horrified accents. "I ain't never said nothing of the sort. What I am saying is that that *dummer* cow over there – that Bessie Saphir – is *dumm*. I ain't said a word about your wife's relations."

"Loafer!" Seiden shouted in a frenzy. "What d'ye mean?"

Sternsilver commenced to perspire.

"What do I mean?" he murmured. "Why, I am just telling you what I mean."

"If it wouldn't be our busy season," Seiden continued, "I would fire you right out of here *und fertig*. Did you ever hear the like? Calls my wife's cousin, Miss Bessie Saphir, a *dummer Ochs*!"

"How should I know she's your wife's cousin, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver protested. "Did she got a label on her?"

"Gets fresh yet!" Seiden exclaimed. "Never mind, Sternsilver. If the learners is *dumm* it's the foreman's fault; and if you couldn't learn the learners properly I would got to get another foreman which he could learn, and that's all there is to it."

He stalked majestically away while Sternsilver turned and gazed at the unconscious subject of their conversation. As he watched her bending over her sewing-machine a sense of injustice rankled in his breast, for there could be no doubt the epithet *dummer Ochs*, as applied to Miss Saphir, was not only justified but eminently appropriate.

Her wide cheekbones, flat nose, and expressionless eyes suggested at once the calm, ruminating cow; and there was not even lacking a piece of chewing-gum between her slowly moving jaws to complete the portrait.

"A girl like her should got rich relations yet," he murmured to himself. "A *Schnorrer* wouldn't marry her, not if her uncles was Rothschilds *oder* Carnegies. You wouldn't find the mate to her outside a dairy farm."

As he turned away, however, the sight of Hillel Fatkin wielding a pair of shears gave him the lie; for, if Miss Bessie Saphir's cheekbones were broad, Hillel's were broader. In short, Hillel's features compared to Bessie's as the head of a Texas steer to that of a Jersey heifer.

Sternsilver noticed the resemblance with a smile just as Mr. Seiden returned to the workroom.

"Sternsilver," he said, "ain't you got nothing better to do that you should be standing around grinning like a fool? Seemingly you think a foreman don't got to work at all."

"I was laying out some work for the operators over there, Mr. Seiden," Philip replied. "Oncet in a while a feller must got to think, Mr. Seiden."

"What d'ye mean, think?" Seiden exclaimed. "Who asks you you should think, Sternsilver? You get all of a sudden such *grossartig* notions. 'Must got to think,' *sagt er*! I am the only one which does the thinking here, Sternsilver. Now you go right ahead and tend to them basters."

Sternsilver retired at once to the far end of the workroom, where he proceeded to relieve his outraged feeling by criticising Hillel Fatkin's work in excellent imitation of his employer's bullying manner.

"What is the matter, Mr. Sternsilver, you are all the time picking on me so?" Hillel demanded. "I am doing my best here and certainly if you don't like my work I could quick go somewheres else. I ain't a *Schnorrer* exactly, Mr. Sternsilver. I got in savings bank already a couple hundred dollars which I could easy start a shop of my own; so I ain't asking no favours from nobody."

"You shouldn't worry yourself, Fatkin," Sternsilver said. "Nobody is going to do you no favours around here. On the contrary, Fatkin, the way you are ruining garments around here, sooner as do you favours we would sue you in the courts yet, and you could kiss yourself good-bye with your two hundred dollars in savings bank. Furthermore, for an operator you are altogether too independent, Fatkin."

"Maybe I am and maybe I ain't," Fatkin retorted with simple dignity. "My father was anyhow from decent, respectable people in Grodno, Sternsilver; and even if I wouldn't got a sister which she is married to Sam Kupferberg's cousin, y'understand, Sam would quick fix me up by the Madison Street court. You shouldn't throw me no bluffs, Sternsilver. Go ahead and sue."

He waited for his foreman to utter a suitable rejoinder, but none came, for in Fatkin's disclosure of a two-hundred dollar deposit in the savings bank and his sister's relationship to Sam Kupferberg, the well-known legal practitioner of Madison Street, Philip Sternsilver conceived a brilliant idea.

"I ain't saying we would sue you exactly, understand me," he replied. "All I am saying, Hillel, is you should try and be a little more careful with your work, y'understand."

Here Sternsilver looked over from Hillel's bovine features to the dull countenance of Miss Bessie Saphir.

"A feller which he has got money in the bank and comes from decent, respectable people like you, Hillel," he concluded, "if they work hard there is nothing which they couldn't do, y'understand. All they got to look out for is they shouldn't Jonah themselves with their bosses, y'understand."

"Bosses!" Hillel repeated. "What d'ye mean, bosses? Might you got an idee you are my boss maybe, Sternsilver?"

"Me, I ain't saying nothing about it at all," Sternsilver declared. "I am only saying something which it is for your own good; and if you don't believe me, Hillel, come out with me lunch time and have a cup coffee. I got a few words, something important, to tell you."

For the remainder of the forenoon Sternsilver busied himself about the instruction of Miss Bessie Saphir. Indeed, so assiduously did he apply himself to his task that at half-past eleven Mr. Seiden was moved to indignant comment. He beckoned Sternsilver to accompany him to the office and when he reached the door he broke into an angry tirade:

"*Nu*, Sternsilver," he began, "ain't you got to do nothing else but learn that girl the whole morning? What do I pay a foreman wages he should fool away his time like that?"

"What d'ye mean, fool away my time, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver protested. "Ain't you told me I should learn her something, on account she is a relation from your wife already?"

"Sure, I told you you should learn her something," Seiden admitted; "but I ain't told you you should learn her everything in one morning already. She ain't such a close relation as all that, y'understand. The trouble with you is, Sternsilver, you don't use your head at all. A foreman must got to think oncet in a while, Sternsilver. Don't leave all the thinking to the boss, Sternsilver. I got other things to bother my head over, Sternsilver, without I should go crazy laying out the work in the shop for the foreman."

Thus admonished, Sternsilver returned to the workroom more strongly convinced than ever that, unless he could carry out the idea suggested by his conversation with Fatkin, there would be a summary ending to his job as foreman. As soon, therefore, as the lunch-hour arrived he hustled Fatkin to a Bath-brick dairy restaurant and then and there unfolded his scheme.

"Say, listen here, Fatkin," he commenced. "Why don't a young feller like you get married?"

Fatkin remained silent. He was soaking zwieback in coffee and applying it to his face in such a manner that the greater part of it filled his mouth and rendered conversation impossible.

"There's many a nice girl, which she could cook herself and wash herself A Number One, y'understand, would be only too glad to get a decent, respectable feller like you," Sternsilver went on.

Hillel Fatkin acknowledged the compliment by a tremendous fit of coughing, for in his embarrassment he had managed to inhale a crum of the zwieback. His effort to remove it nearly strangled him, but at length the dislodged particle found a target in the right eye of an errand boy sitting opposite. For some moments Sternsilver was unable to proceed, by reason of the errand boy's tribute to Hillel's table manners. Indeed, so masterly was this example of profane invective that the manager of the lunchroom, without inquiring into the merits of the controversy, personally led Hillel's victim to the door and kicked him firmly into the gutter. After this, Philip Sternsilver proceeded with the unfolding of his plan.

"Yes, Hillel," he said, "I mean it. For a young feller like you even a girl which she got rich relations like Seiden ain't too good."

"Seiden?" Hillel interrupted, with a supercilious shrug. "What is Seiden? I know his people from old times in Grodno yet. So poor they were, y'understand, his *Grossmutter* would be glad supposing my *Grossmutter*, *olav hasholam*, would send her round a couple pieces clothing to wash. The whole family was beggars – one worser as the other."

"Sure, I know," Philip said; "but look where he is to-day, Hillel. You got to give him credit, Hillel. He certainly worked himself up wonderful, and why? Because the feller saves his money, understand me, and then he turns around and goes to work to pick out a wife, and married right."

"What are you talking nonsense – got married right?" Hillel said. "Do you mean to told me that Seiden is getting married right? An idee! What for a family was all them Gubins, Sternsilver? The one Uncle Pesach was a low-life bum – a *Shikerrer* which he wouldn't stop at nothing, from *Schnapps* to varnish. Furthermore, his father, y'understand, got into trouble once on account he *ganvers* a couple chickens; and if it wouldn't be for my *Grossvater*, which he was for years a *Rav* in Telshi – a very learned man, Sternsilver – no one knows what would have become of them people at all."

For the remainder of the lunch-hour Hillel so volubly demonstrated himself to be the Debrett, Burke, and Almanach de Gotha of Grodno, Telshi, and vicinity that Sternsilver was obliged to return to the factory with his scheme barely outlined.

Nevertheless, on his journey back to Greene Street he managed to interrupt Hillel long enough to ask him if he was willing to get married.

"I don't say I wouldn't," Hillel replied, "supposing I would get a nice girl. *Aber* one thing I wouldn't do, Sternsilver. I wouldn't take no one which she ain't coming from decent, respectable people, y'understand; and certainly, if a feller got a couple hundred dollars in savings bank, Sternsilver, he's got a right to expect a little consideration. Ain't it?"

This ultimatum brought them to the door of the factory, and when they entered further conversation was summarily prevented by Mr. Seiden himself.

"Sternsilver," Mr. Seiden bellowed at him, "where was you?"

"Couldn't I get oncet in a while a few minutes I should eat my lunch, Mr. Seiden?" Sternsilver replied. "I am entitled to eat, ain't I, Mr. Seiden?"

"'Entitled to eat,' *sagt er*, when the operators is carrying on so they pretty near tear the place to pieces already!" Seiden exclaimed. "A foreman must got to be in the workroom, lunch-hour *oder* no lunch-hour, Sternsilver. Me, I do everything here. I get no assistance at all."

He walked off toward the office; and after Sternsilver had started up the motor, which supplied power for the sewing-machines, he followed his employer.

"Mr. Seiden," he began, "I don't know what comes over you lately. Seemingly nothing suits you at all – and me I am all the time doing my very best to help you out."

"Is that so?" Seiden replied ironically. "Since when is the foreman helping out the boss if he would go and spend a couple hours for his lunch, making a hog out of himself, Sternsilver?"

"I ain't making a hog out of myself, Mr. Seiden," Philip continued. "If I am going out of the factory for my lunch, Mr. Seiden, I got my reasons for it."

Seiden glared at his foreman for some minutes; ordinarily Sternsilver's manner was diffident to the point of timidity, and this newborn courage temporarily silenced Mr. Seiden.

"The way you are talking, Sternsilver," he said at last, "to hear you go on any one would think you are the boss and I am the foreman."

"In business, yes," Philip rejoined, "you are the boss, Mr. Seiden; but outside of business a man could be a *Mensch* as well as a foreman. Ain't it?"

Seiden stared at the unruffled Sternsilver, who allowed no opportunity for a retort by immediately going on with his dissertation.

"Even operators also," he said. "Hillel Fatkin is an operator, y'understand, but he has got anyhow a couple hundred dollars in the savings bank; and when it comes to family, Mr. Seiden, he's from decent, respectable people in the old country. His own grandfather was a rabbi, y'understand."

"What the devil's that got to do with me, Sternsilver?" Seiden asked. "I don't know what you are talking about at all."

Sternsilver disregarded the interruption.

"Operator *oder* foreman, Mr. Seiden, what is the difference when it comes to a poor girl like Miss Bessie Saphir, which, even supposing she is a relation from your wife, she ain't so young no longer? Furthermore, with some faces which a girl got it she could have a heart from gold, y'understand, and what is it? Am I right or wrong, Mr. Seiden?"

Mr. Seiden made no reply. He was blinking at vacancy while his mind reverted to an afternoon call paid uptown by Mrs. Miriam Saphir. As a corollary, Mrs. Seiden had kept him awake half the night, and the burden of her jeremiad was: "What did you ever done for my relations? Tell me that."

"Say, lookyhere, Sternsilver," he said at length, "what are you trying to drive into?"

"I am driving into this, Mr. Seiden," Philip replied: "Miss Bessie Saphir must got to get married some time. Ain't it?"

Seiden nodded.

"*Schon gut!*" Sternsilver continued. "There's no time like the present."

A forced smile started to appear on Seiden's face, when the door leading to the public hall opened and a bonneted and shawled figure appeared. It was none other than Mrs. Miriam Saphir.

"*Ai, tzuris!*" she cried; and sinking into the nearest chair she began forthwith to rock to and fro and to beat her forehead with her clenched fist.

"*Nu!*" Seiden exploded. "What's the trouble now?"

Mrs. Saphir ceased rocking. On leaving home she had provided herself with a pathetic story which would not only excuse her presence in Seiden's factory but was also calculated to wring at least seventy-five cents from Seiden himself. Unfortunately she had forgotten to go over the minor details of the narrative on her way downtown, and now even the main points escaped her by reason of a heated altercation with the conductor of a Third Avenue car. The matter in dispute was her tender, in lieu of fare, of a Brooklyn transfer ticket which she had found between the pages of a week-old newspaper. For the first ten blocks of her ride she had feigned ignorance of the English language, and five blocks more were consumed in the interpretation, by a well-meaning passenger, of the conductor's urgent demands. Another five blocks passed in Mrs. Saphir's protestations that she had received the transfer in question from the conductor of a Twenty-third Street car; failing the accuracy of which statement, she expressed the hope that her children should all drop dead and that she herself might never stir from her seat. This brought the car to Bleecker Street, where the conductor rang the bell and invited Mrs. Saphir to alight. Her first impulse was to defy him to the point of a constructive assault, with its attendant lawsuit against the railroad company; but she discovered that, in carrying out her project to

its successful issue, she had already gone one block past her destination. Hence she walked leisurely down the aisle; and after pausing on the platform to adjust her shawl and bonnet she descended to the street with a parting scowl at the conductor, who immediately broke the bell-rope in starting the car.

"Nu!" Seiden repeated. "Couldn't you open your mouth at all? What's the matter?"

Mrs. Saphir commenced to rock tentatively, but Seiden stopped her with a loud "*Koosh!*"

"What do you want from me?" he demanded.

"*Meine Tochter* Bessie," she replied, "she don't get on at all."

"What d'ye mean, she don't get on at all?" Seiden interrupted. "Ain't I doing all I could for her? I am learning her the business; and what is more, Mrs. Saphir, I got a feller which he wants to marry her, too. Ain't that right, Sternsilver?"

Philip nodded vigorously and Mrs. Saphir sat up in her chair.

"Him?" she asked.

"Sure; why not?" Seiden answered.

"But, Mr. Seiden – " Sternsilver cried.

"*Koosh*, Sternsilver," Seiden said. "Don't you mind that woman at all. If Bessie was my own daughter even, I would give my consent."

"*Aber*, Mr. Seiden – " Sternsilver cried again in anguished tones, but further protest was choked off by Mrs. Saphir, who rose from her seat with surprising alacrity and seized Philip around the neck. For several minutes she kissed him with loud smacking noises, and by the time he had disengaged himself Seiden had brought in Miss Bessie Saphir. As she blushing laid her hand in Sternsilver's unresisting clasp Seiden patted them both on the shoulder.

"For a business man, Sternsilver," he said, "long engagements is nix; and to show you that I got a heart, Sternsilver, I myself would pay for the wedding, which would be in two weeks at the latest."

He turned to Mrs. Miriam Saphir.

"I congratulate you," he said. "And now get out of here!"

For the next ten days Mr. and Mrs. Seiden and Miss Saphir were so busy with preparations for the wedding that they had no leisure to observe Sternsilver's behaviour. He proved to be no ardent swain; and, although Bessie was withdrawn from the factory on the day following her betrothal, Sternsilver called at her residence only twice during the first week of their engagement.

"I didn't think the feller got so much sense," Seiden commented when Bessie Saphir complained of Philip's coldness.

"He sees you got your hands full getting ready, so he don't bother you at all."

As for Seiden, he determined to spare no expense, up to two hundred and fifty dollars, in making the wedding festivities greatly redound to his credit both socially and in a business way.

To that end he had dispatched over a hundred invitations to the wholesale houses from which he purchased goods.

"You see what I am doing for you," he said to Sternsilver one morning, a week before the wedding day. "Not only in postage stamps I am spending my money but the printing also costs me a whole lot, too, I bet yer."

"What is the use spending money for printing when you got a typewriter which she is setting half the time doing nothing, Mr. Seiden?" Philip protested.

"That's what I told Mrs. Seiden," his employer replied, "and she goes pretty near crazy. She even wanted me I should got 'em engraved, so *grossartig* she becomes all of a sudden. Printing is good enough, Sternsilver. Just lookyhere at this now, how elegant it is."

He handed Philip an invitation which read as follows:

MR. AND MRS. I. SEIDEN AND MRS. MIRIAM SAPHIR

REQUEST THE HONOUR OF

THE INTERCOLONIAL TEXTILE COMPANY'S

PRESENCE AT THE MARRIAGE OF HER DAUGHTER

BESSIE

TO

Mr. PHILIP STERN SILVER

ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1909, AT SIX O'CLOCK

NEW RIGA HALL, 522 ALLEN STREET, NEW YORK

Bride's Address:

c/o SANSPAREIL WAIST COMPANY

Isaac Seiden, *Proprietor*

**Waists in Marquissette, Voile, Lingerie, Crepe and Novelty
Silks also a Full Line of Lace and Hand-embroidered Waists**

800 GREENE STREET, NEW YORK CITY

"What's the use you are inviting a corporation to a wedding, Mr. Seiden?" Philip said as he returned the invitation with a heavy sigh. "A corporation couldn't eat nothing, Mr. Seiden."

"Sure, I know," Seiden replied. "I ain't asking 'em they should eat anything, Sternsilver. All I am wanting of 'em is this: Here it is in black and white. Me and Beckie and that old *Schnorrer*, Mrs. Saphir, requests the honour of the Intercolonial Company's presents at the marriage of their daughter. You should know a corporation's presents is just as good as anybody else's presents, Sternsilver. Ain't it?"

Sternsilver nodded gloomily.

"Also I am sending invitations to a dozen of my best customers and to a couple of high-price sales-men. Them fellers should loosen up also oncet in a while. Ain't I right?"

Again Sternsilver nodded and returned to the factory where, at hourly intervals during the following week, Seiden accosted him and issued bulletins of the arrival of wedding presents and the acceptance of invitations to the ceremony.

"What do you think for a couple of small potatoes like Kugel & Mishkin?" he said. "If I bought a cent from them people during the last five years I must of bought three hundred dollars' worth of buttons; and they got the nerve to send a half a dozen coffee spoons, which they are so light, y'understand, you could pretty near see through 'em."

Sternsilver received this news with a manner suggesting a cramped swimmer coming up for the second time.

"Never mind, Sternsilver," Seiden continued reassuringly, "we got a whole lot of people to hear from yet. I bet yer the Binder & Baum Manufacturing Company, the least you get from 'em is a piece of cut glass which it costs, at wholesale yet, ten dollars."

Sternsilver's distress proceeded from another cause, however; for that very morning he had made a desperate resolve, which was no less than to leave the Borough of Manhattan and to begin life anew in Philadelphia. From the immediate execution of the plan he was deterred only by one circumstance – lack of funds; and this he proposed to overcome by borrowing from Fatkin. Indeed, when he pondered the situation, he became convinced that Fatkin, as the cause of his dilemma, ought to be the means of his extrication. He therefore broached the matter of a loan more in the manner of a lender than a borrower.

"Say, lookyhere, Fatkin," he said on the day before the wedding, "I got to have some money right away."

Fatkin shrugged philosophically.

"A whole lot of fellers feels the same way," he said.

"Only till Saturday week," Sternsilver continued, "and I want you should give me twenty-five dollars."

"Me?" Fatkin exclaimed.

"Sure, you," Sternsilver said; "and I want it now."

"Don't make me no jokes, Sternsilver," Fatkin replied.

"I ain't joking, Fatkin; far from it," Sternsilver declared. "To-morrow it is all fixed for the wedding and I got to have twenty-five dollars."

"What d'ye mean, to-morrow is fixed for the wedding?" Fatkin retorted indignantly. "Do you want to get married on my money yet?"

"I don't want the money to get married on," Sternsilver protested. "I want it for something else again."

"My worries! What you want it for?" Fatkin concluded, with a note of finality in his tone. "I would *oser* give you twenty-five cents."

"S enough, Fatkin!" Sternsilver declared. "I heard enough from you already. You was the one which got me into this *Schlemazel* and now you should get me out again."

"What do you mean, getting you into a *Schlemazel*?"

"You know very well what I mean," Philip replied; "and, furthermore, Fatkin, you are trying to make too free with me. Who are you, anyhow, you should turn me down when I ask you for a few days twenty-five dollars? You act so independent, like you would be the foreman."

Hillel nodded slowly, not without dignity.

"Never mind, Sternsilver," he said; "if my family would got a relation, y'understand, which he is working in Poliakoff's Bank and he is got to run away on account he is missing in five thousand rubles, which it is the same name Sternsilver, and everybody in Kovno – the children even – knows about it, understand me, I wouldn't got to be so stuck up at all."

Sternsilver flushed indignantly.

"Do you mean to told me," he demanded, "that I got in my family such a man which he is stealing five thousand rubles, Fatkin?"

"That's what I said," Hillel retorted.

"Well, it only goes to show what a liar you are," Sternsilver rejoined. "Not only was it he stole ten thousand rubles, y'understand, but the bank was run by a feller by the name Louis Moser."

"All right," Fatkin said as he started up his sewing-machine by way of signifying that the interview was at an end. "All right, Sternsilver; if you got such a relation which he *ganvered* ten thousand rubles, y'understand, borrow from him the twenty-five dollars."

Thus Sternsilver was obliged to amend his resolution by substituting Jersey City for Philadelphia as the seat of his new start in life; and at half-past eleven that evening, when the good ferryboat *Cincinnati* drew out of her slip at the foot of Desbrosses Street, a short, thick-set figure leaned over her bow and gazed sadly, perhaps for the last time, at the irregular sky-line of Manhattan. It was Sternsilver.

When Mr. Seiden arrived at his factory the following morning he found his entire force of operators gathered on the stairway and overflowing on to the sidewalk.

"What is the matter you are striking on me?" he cried.

"Striking!" Hillel Fatkin said. "What do you mean, striking on you, Mr. Seiden? We ain't striking. Sternsilver ain't come down this morning and nobody was here he should open up the shop."

"Do you mean to told me Sternsilver ain't here?" Seiden exclaimed.

"All right; then I'm a liar, Mr. Seiden," Hillel replied. "You asked me a simple question, Mr. Seiden, and I give you a plain, straightforward answer. My *Grossvater*, *olav hasholam*, which he was a very learned man – for years a rabbi in Telshi – used to say: 'If some one tells you you are lying, understand me, and –'"

At this juncture Seiden opened the factory door and the entire mob of workmen plunged forward, sweeping Hillel along, with his quotation from the ethical maxims of his grandfather only half finished. For the next quarter of an hour Seiden busied himself in starting up his factory and then he repaired to the office to open the mail.

In addition to three or four acceptances of invitations there was a dirty envelope bearing on its upper left-hand corner the mark of a third-rate Jersey City hotel. Seiden ripped it open and unfolded a sheet of letter paper badly scrawled in Roman capitals as follows:

"December 12.

"I. Seiden:

"We are come to tell you which Mr. Philip Sternsilver is gone out West to Kenses Citter. So don't fool yourself he would not be at the wedding. What do you think a fine man like him would marry such a cow like Miss Bessie Saphir?

"And oblige yours truly,

"A. Wellwisher."

For at least a quarter of an hour after reading the letter Mr. Seiden sat in his office doing sums in mental arithmetic. He added postage on invitations to cost of printing same and carried the result

in his mind; next he visualized in one column the sum paid for furnishing Bessie's flat, the price of Mrs. Seiden's new dress – estimated; caterers' fees for serving dinner and hire of New Riga Hall. The total fairly stunned him, and for another quarter of an hour he remained seated in his chair. Then came the realization that twenty-five commission houses, two high-grade drummers, and at least five customers, rating L to J credit good, were even then preparing to attend a groomless wedding; and he spurred himself to action.

He ran to the telephone, but as he grabbed the receiver from the hook he became suddenly motionless.

"*Nu*," he murmured after a few seconds. "Why should I make a damn fool of myself and disappoint all them people for a greenhorn like Sternsilver?"

Once more he sought his chair, and incoherent plans for retrieving the situation chased one another through his brain until he felt that his intellect was giving way. It was while he was determining to call the whole thing off that Hillel Fatkin entered.

"Mr. Seiden," he said, "could I speak to you a few words something?"

He wore an air of calm dignity that only a long rabbinical ancestry can give, and his errand in his employer's office was to announce his impending resignation, as a consequence of Seiden's offensive indifference to the memory of Hillel's grandfather. When Seiden looked up, however, his mind reverted not to Hillel's quotation of his grandfather's maxims, but to Sternsilver's conversation on the day of the betrothal; and Hillel's dignity suggested to him, instead of distinguished ancestry, a savings-bank account of two hundred dollars. He jumped immediately to his feet.

"Sit down, Fatkin," he cried.

Hillel seated himself much as his grandfather might have done in the house of an humble disciple, blending dignity and condescension in just the right proportions.

"So," he said, referring to Mr. Seiden's supposed contrition for the affront to the late rabbi, "when it is too late, Mr. Seiden, you are sorry."

"What do you mean, sorry?" Mr. Seiden replied. "Believe me, Fatkin, I am glad to be rid of the feller. I could get just as good foremen as him without going outside this factory even – for instance, you."

"Me!" Fatkin cried.

"Sure; why not?" Seiden continued. "A foreman must got to be fresh to the operators, anyhow; and if you ain't fresh, Fatkin, I don't know who is."

"Me fresh!" Fatkin exclaimed.

"I ain't kicking you are too fresh, y'understand," Seiden said. "I am only saying you are fresh enough to be a foreman."

Fatkin shrugged. "Very well, Mr. Seiden," he said in a manner calculated to impress Seiden with the magnitude of the favour. "Very well; if you want me to I would go to work as foreman for you."

Seiden with difficulty suppressed a desire to kick Hillel and smiled blandly.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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