

GLASS MONTAGUE

ELKAN
LUBLINER,
AMERICAN

Montague Glass
Elkan Lubliner, American

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Содержание

CHAPTER ONE	4
CHAPTER TWO	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	73

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CHAPTER ONE

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

POLATKIN & SCHEIKOWITZ CONSERVE THE HONOUR OF THEIR FAMILIES

"NU, PHILIP," cried Marcus Polatkin to his partner, Philip Scheikowitz, as they sat in the showroom of their place of business one June morning, "even if the letter does got bad news in it you shouldn't take on so hard. When a feller is making good over here and the *Leute im Russland* hears about it, understand me, they are all the time sending him bad news. I got in Minsk a cousin by the name Pincus Lubliner, understand me, which every time he writes me, y'understand, a relation dies on him and he wants me I should help pay funeral expenses. You might think I was a Free Burial Society, the way that feller acts."

"Sure, I know," Philip replied as he folded the letter away; "but this here is something else again. Mind you, with his own landlord he is sitting playing cards, Marcus, and comes a pistol

through the window and the landlord drops dead."

"What have you got to do with the landlord?" Polatkin retorted. "If it was your brother-in-law was killed that's a difference matter entirely; but when a feller is a landlord *im Russland*, understand me, the least he could expect is that he gets killed once in a while."

"I ain't saying nothing about the landlord," Philip protested, "but my brother-in-law writes they are afraid for their lives there and I should send 'em quick the passage money for him and his boy Yosel to come to America."

Polatkin rose to his feet and glared angrily at his partner.

"Do you mean to told me you are going to send that loafer money he should come over here and bum round our shop yet?"

"What do you mean bum round our shop?" Philip demanded. "In the first place, Polatkin, I ain't said I am going to send him money, y'understand; and, in the second place, if I want to send the feller money to come over here, understand me, that's my business. Furthermore, when you are coming to call my brother-in-law a loafer and a bum, Polatkin, you don't know what you are talking about. His *Grossvater, olav hasholem*, was the great Harkavy Rav, Jochannon Borrochson."

"I heard that same tale before," Polatkin interrupted. "A feller is a *Schlemiel* and a lowlife which he couldn't support his wife and children, understand me, and it always turns out his grandfather was a big rabbi in the old country. The way it is with me, Scheikowitz, just so soon as I am hearing a feller's grandfather

was a big rabbi in the old country, Scheikowitz, I wouldn't got nothing more to do with him. If he works for you in your place, understand me, then he fools away your time telling the operators what a big rabbi his grandfather was; and if he's a customer, Scheikowitz, and you write him ten days after the account is overdue he should pay you what he owes you, instead he sends you a check, understand me, he comes down to the store and tells you what a big rabbi he's got it for a grandfather. *Gott sei Dank* I ain't got no *Rabonim* in my family."

"Sure, I know," Philip cried, "your father would be glad supposing he could sign his name even."

Polatkin shrugged his shoulders.

"It would *oser* worry me if my whole family couldn't read or write. So long as I can sign my name and the money is in the bank to make the check good from five to ten thousand dollars, y'understand, what do I care if my grandfather would be deaf, dumb and blind, Scheikowitz? Furthermore, Scheikowitz, believe me I would sooner got one good live business man for a partner, Scheikowitz, than a million dead rabbis for a grandfather, and don't you forget it. So if you are going to spend the whole morning making a *Geschreierei* over that letter, Scheikowitz, we may as well close up the store *und fertig*."

With this ultimatum Marcus Polatkin walked rapidly away toward the cutting room, while Philip Scheikowitz sought the foreman of their manufacturing department and borrowed a copy of a morning paper. It was printed in the vernacular of the lower

East Side, and Philip bore it to his desk, where for more than half an hour he alternately consulted the column of steamboat advertising and made figures on the back of an envelope. These represented the cost of a journey for two persons from Minsk to New York, based on Philip's hazy recollection of his own emigration, fifteen years before, combined with his experience as travelling salesman in the Southern States for a popular-price line of pants.

At length he concluded his calculations and with a heavy sigh he put on his hat just as his partner returned from the cutting room.

"Nu!" Polatkin cried. "Where are you going now?"

"I am going for a half an hour somewheres," Philip replied.

"What for?" Polatkin demanded.

"What for is my business," Philip answered.

"Your business?" Polatkin exclaimed. "At nine o'clock in the morning one partner puts on his hat and starts to go out, *verstehst du*, and when the other partner asks him where he is going it's his business, *sagt er!* What do you come down here at all for, Scheikowitz?"

"I am coming down here because I got such a partner, Polatkin, which if I was to miss one day even I wouldn't know where I stand at all," Scheikowitz retorted. "Furthermore, you shouldn't worry yourself, Polatkin; for my own sake I would come back just so soon as I could."

Despite the offensive repartee that accompanied Philip's

departure, however, he returned to find Polatkin entirely restored to good humour by a thousand-dollar order that had arrived in the ten-o'clock mail; and as Philip himself felt the glow of conscious virtue attendant upon a good deed economically performed, he immediately fell into friendly conversation with his partner.

"Well, Marcus," he said, "I sent 'em the passage tickets, and if you ain't agreeable that Borrochson comes to work here I could easy find him a job somewheres else."

"If we got an opening here, Philip, what is it skin off my face if the feller comes to work here," Polatkin answered, "so long as he gets the same pay like somebody else?"

"What could I do, Marcus?" Philip rejoined, as he took off his hat and coat preparatory to plunging into the assortment of a pile of samples. "My own flesh and blood I must got to look out for, ain't it? And if my sister Leah, *olav hasholem*, would be alive to-day I would of got 'em all over here long since ago already. Ain't I am right?"

Polatkin shrugged. "In family matters one partner couldn't advise the other at all," he said.

"Sure, I know," Philip concluded, "but when a feller has got such a partner which he is a smart, up-to-date feller and means good by his partner, understand me, then I got a right to take an advice from him about family matters, ain't it?"

And with these honeyed words the subject of the Borrochson family's assisted emigration was dismissed until the arrival of another letter from Minsk some four weeks later.

"Well, Marcus," Philip cried after he had read it, "he'll be here Saturday."

"Who'll be here Saturday?" Polatkin asked.

"Borrochson," Philip replied; "and the boy comes with him." Polatkin raised his eyebrows.

"I'll tell you the honest truth, Philip," he said – "I'm surprised to hear it."

"What d'ye mean you're surprised to hear it?" Philip asked. "Ain't I am sending him the passage tickets?"

"Sure, I know you are sending him the tickets," Polatkin continued, "but everybody says the same, Philip, and that's why I am telling you, Philip, I'm surprised to hear he is coming; because from what everybody is telling me it's a miracle the feller ain't sold the tickets and gambled away the money."

"What are you talking nonsense, selling the tickets!" Philip cried indignantly. "The feller is a decent, respectable feller even if he would be a poor man."

"He ain't so poor," Polatkin retorted. "A thief need never got to be poor, Scheikowitz."

"A thief!" Philip exclaimed.

"That's what I said," Polatkin went on, "and a smart thief too, Scheikowitz. Gifkin says he could steal the buttons from a policeman's pants and pass 'em off for real money, understand me, and they couldn't catch him anyhow."

"Gifkin?" Philip replied.

"Meyer Gifkin which he is working for us now two years,

Scheikowitz, and a decent, respectable feller," Polatkin said relentlessly. "If Gifkin tells you something you could rely on it, Scheikowitz, and he is telling me he lives in Minsk one house by the other with this feller Borrochson, and such a lowlife gambler bum as this here feller Borrochson is you wouldn't believe at all."

"Meyer Gifkin says that?" Philip gasped.

"So sure as he is working here as assistant cutter," Polatkin continued. "And if you think that this here feller Borrochson comes to work in our place, Scheikowitz, you've got another think coming, and that's all I got to say."

But Philip had not waited to hear the conclusion of his partner's ultimatum, and by the time Polatkin had finished Philip was at the threshold of the cutting room.

"Gifkin!" he bellowed. "I want to ask you something a question."

The assistant cutter laid down his shears.

"What could I do for you, Mr. Scheikowitz?" he said respectfully.

"You could put on your hat and coat and get out of here before I kick you out," Philip replied without disclosing the nature of his abandoned question. "And, furthermore, if my brother-in-law Borrochson is such a lowlife bum which you say he is, when he is coming here Saturday he would pretty near kill you, because, Gifkin, a lowlife gambler and a thief could easily be a murderer too. *Aber* if he ain't a such thief and gambler which you say he is, then I would make you arrested."

"Me arrested?" Gifkin cried. "What for?"

"Because for calling some one a thief which he ain't one you could sit in prison," Scheikowitz concluded. "So you should get right out of here before I am sending for a policeman."

"But, Mr. Scheikowitz," Gifkin protested, "who did I told it your brother-in-law is a thief and a gambler?"

"You know very well who you told it," Scheikowitz retorted. "You told it my partner, Gifkin. That's who you told it."

"But I says to him he shouldn't tell nobody," Gifkin continued. "Is it my fault your partner is such a *Klatsch*? And, anyhow, Mr. Scheikowitz, supposing I did say your brother-in-law is a gambler and a thief, I know what I'm talking about; and, furthermore, if I got to work in a place where I couldn't open my mouth at all, Mr. Scheikowitz, I don't want to work there, and that's all there is to it."

He assumed his hat and coat in so dignified a manner that for the moment Scheikowitz felt as though he were losing an old and valued employee, and this impression was subsequently heightened by Polatkin's behaviour when he heard of Gifkin's departure. Indeed a casual observer might have supposed that Polatkin's wife, mother, and ten children had all perished in a common disaster and that the messenger had been indiscreet in breaking the news, for during a period of almost half an hour Polatkin rocked and swayed in his chair and beat his forehead with his clenched fist.

"You are shedding my blood," he moaned to Scheikowitz.

"What the devil you are talking nonsense!" Scheikowitz declared. "The way you are acting you would think we are paying the feller five thousand dollars a year instead of fifteen dollars a week."

"It ain't what a feller makes from you, Scheikowitz; it's what you make from him what counts," he wailed. "Gifkin was really worth to us a year five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand buttons!" Scheikowitz cried. "You are making a big fuss about nothing at all."

But when the next day Polatkin and Scheikowitz heard that Gifkin had found employment with their closest competitors Philip began to regret the haste with which he had discharged his assistant cutter, and he bore his partner's upbraidings in chastened silence. Thus by Friday afternoon Polatkin had exhausted his indignation.

"Well, Philip," he said as closing-time approached, "it ain't no use crying over sour milk. What time does the boat arrive?"

"To-night," Philip replied, "and the passengers comes off the island to-morrow. Why did you ask?"

"Because," Marcus said with the suspicion of a blush, "Saturday ain't such a busy day and I was thinking I would go over with you. Might I could help you out."

Philip's trip with his partner to Ellis Island the following morning tried his temper to the point where he could barely refrain from inquiring if the expected immigrant were his relation or Polatkin's, for during the entire journey Marcus

busied himself making plans for the Borrochsons' future.

"The first thing you got to look out for with a greenhorn, Philip," he said, "is that you learn 'em good the English language. If a feller couldn't talk he couldn't do nothing, understand me, so with the young feller especially you shouldn't give him no encouragement to keep on talking *Manerloschen*." Philip nodded politely.

"Look at me for instance," Marcus continued; "six months after I landed, Philip, I am speaking English already just so good as a doctor or a lawyer. And how did I done it? To night school I am going only that they should learn me to write, *verstehst du, aber* right at the start old man Feinrubin takes me in hand and he talks to me only in English. And if I am understanding him, *schon gut*; and if I don't understand him then he gives me a *potch* on the side of the head, Philip, which the next time he says it I could understand him good. And that's the way you should do with the young feller, Philip. I bet yer he would a damsight sooner learn English as get a *Schlag* every ten minutes."

Again Philip nodded, and by the time they had arrived at the enclosure for the relations of immigrants he had become so accustomed to the hum of Marcus' conversation that he refrained from uttering even a perfunctory "Uh-huh." They sat on a hard bench for more than half an hour, while the attendants bawled the common surnames of every country from Ireland to Asiatic Turkey, and at length the name Borrochson brought Philip to his feet. He rushed to the gateway, followed by Marcus, just as a

stunted lad of fifteen emerged, staggering under the burden of a huge cloth-covered bundle.

"Uncle Philip," the lad cried, dropping the bundle. Then clutching Marcus round the neck he showered kisses on his cheeks until Philip dragged him away.

"I am your uncle," Philip said in *Jüdisch Deutsch*. "Where is your father?"

Without answering the question Yosel Borrochson took a stranglehold of Philip and subjected him to a second and more violent osculation. It was some minutes before Philip could disengage himself from his nephew's embrace and then he led him none too gently to a seat.

"Never mind the kissing," he said; "where's your father?"

"He is not here," Yosel Borrochson replied with a vivid blush.

"I see he is not here," Philip rejoined. "Where is he?"

"He is in Minsk," said young Borrochson.

"In Minsk?" Philip and Marcus cried with one voice, and then Marcus sat down on the bench and rocked to and fro in an ecstasy of mirth.

"In Minsk!" he gasped hysterically, and slapped his thighs by way of giving expression to his emotions. "Did you ever hear the like?"

"Polatkin, do me the favour," Philip begged, "and don't make a damn fool of yourself."

"What did I told you?" Polatkin retorted, but Philip turned to his nephew.

"What did your father do with the ticket and the money I sent him?" he asked.

"He sold the ticket and he used all the money for the wedding," the boy replied.

"The wedding?" Philip exclaimed. "What wedding?"

"The wedding with the widow," said the boy.

"The widow?" Philip and Marcus shouted in unison. "What widow?"

"The landlord's widow," the boy answered shyly.

And then as there seemed nothing else to do he buried his face in his hands and wept aloud.

"Nu, Philip," Marcus said, sitting down beside young Borrochson, "could the boy help it if his father is a *Ganef*?"

Philip made no reply, and presently Marcus stooped and picked up the bundle.

"Come," he said gently, "let's go up to the store."

The journey uptown was not without its unpleasant features, for the size of the bundle not only barred them from both subway and elevated, but provoked a Broadway car conductor to exhibit what Marcus considered to be so biased and illiberal an attitude toward unrestricted immigration that he barely avoided a cerebral hemorrhage in resenting it. They finally prevailed on the driver of a belt-line car to accept them as passengers, and nearly half an hour elapsed before they arrived at Desbrosses Street; but after a dozen conductors in turn had declined to honour their transfer tickets they made the rest of their journey on foot.

Philip and young Borrochson carried the offending bundle, for Marcus flatly declined to assist them. Indeed with every block his enthusiasm waned, so that when they at length reached Wooster Street his feelings toward his partner's nephew had undergone a complete change.

"Don't fetch that thing in here," he said as Philip and young Borrochson entered the showroom with the bundle; "leave it in the shop. You got no business to bring the young feller up here in the first place."

"What do you mean bring him up here?" Philip cried. "If you wouldn't butt in at all I intended to take him to my sister's a cousin on Pitt Street."

Marcus threw his hat on a sample table and sat down heavily.

"That's all the gratitude I am getting!" he declared with bitter emphasis. "Right in the busy season I dropped everything to help you out, and you turn on me like this."

He rose to his feet suddenly, and seizing the bundle with both hands he flung it violently through the doorway.

"Take him to Pitt Street," he said. "Take him to the devil for all I care. I am through with him."

But Philip conducted his nephew no farther than round the corner on Canal Street, and when an hour later Yosel Borrochson returned with his uncle his top-boots had been discarded forever, while his wrinkled, semi-military garb had been exchanged for a neat suit of Oxford gray. Moreover, both he and Philip had consumed a hearty meal of coffee and rolls and were accordingly

prepared to take a more cheerful outlook upon life, especially Philip.

"*Bleib du hier,*" he said as he led young Borrochson to a chair in the cutting room. "*Ich Komm bald zurück.*"

Then mindful of his partner's advice he broke into English. "Shtay here," he repeated in loud, staccato accents. "I would be right back. *Verstehst du?*"

"Yess-ss," Yosel replied, uttering his first word of English.

With a delighted grin Philip walked to the showroom, where Polatkin sat wiping away the crumbs of a belated luncheon of two dozen zwieback and a can of coffee.

"*Nu,*" he said conciliatingly, "what is it now?"

"Marcus," Philip began with a nod of his head in the direction of the cutting room, "I want to show you something a picture."

"A picture!" Polatkin repeated as he rose to his feet. "What do you mean a picture?"

"Come," Philip said; "I'll show you."

He led the way to the cutting room, where Yosel sat awaiting his uncle's return.

"What do you think of him now?" Philip demanded. "Ain't he a good-looking young feller?"

Marcus shrugged in a non-committal manner.

"Look what a bright eye he got it," Philip insisted. "You could tell by looking at him only that he comes from a good family."

"He looks a boy like any other boy," said Marcus.

"But even if no one would told you, Marcus, you could see

from his forehead yet – and the big head he's got it – you could see that somewheres is *Rabonim* in the family."

"Yow!" Marcus exclaimed. "You could just so much see from his head that his grandfather is a rabbi as you could see from his hands that his father is a crook." He turned impatiently away. "So instead you should be talking a lot of nonsense, Philip, you should set the boy to work sweeping the floor," he continued. "Also for a beginning we would start him in at three dollars a week, and if the boy gets worth it pretty soon we could give him four."

In teaching his nephew the English language Philip Scheikowitz adopted no particular system of pedagogy, but he combined the methods of Ollendorf, Chardenal, Ahn and Polatkin so successfully that in a few days Joseph possessed a fairly extensive vocabulary. To be sure, every other word was acquired at the cost of a clump over the side of the head, but beyond a slight ringing of the left ear that persisted for nearly six months the Polatkin method of instruction vindicated itself, and by the end of the year Joseph's speech differed in no way from that of his employers.

"Ain't it something which you really could say is wonderful the way that boy gets along?" Philip declared to his partner, as the first anniversary of Joseph's landing approached. "Honestly, Marcus, that boy talks English like he would be born here already."

"Sure, I know," Marcus agreed. "He's got altogether too much to say for himself. Only this morning he tells me he wants a raise

to six dollars a week."

"Could you blame him?" Philip asked mildly. "He's doing good work here, Marcus."

"Yow! he's doing good work!" Marcus exclaimed. "He's fresh like anything, Scheikowitz. If you give him the least little encouragement, Scheikowitz, he would stand there and talk to you all day yet."

"Not to me he don't," Philip retorted. "Lots of times I am asking him questions about the folks in the old country and always he tells me: 'With greenhorns like them I don't bother myself at all.' Calls his father a greenhorn yet!"

Marcus flapped his right hand in a gesture of impatience.

"He could call his father a whole lot worse," he said. "Why, that *Ganef* ain't even wrote you at all since the boy comes over here. Not only he's a crook, Scheikowitz, but he's got a heart like a brick."

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference does it make if he is a crook?" he rejoined. "The boy's all right anyway. Yes, Marcus, the boy is something which you could really say is a jewel."

"*Geh weg!*" Marcus cried disgustedly – "a jewel!"

"That's what I said," Philip continued – "a jewel. Tell me, Marcus, how many boys would you find it which they are getting from three to five dollars a week and in one year saves up a hundred dollars, y'understand, and comes to me only this morning and says to me I should take the money for what it costs

to keep him while he is learning the language, and for buying him his clothes when he first comes here. Supposing his father is a crook, Marcus, am I right or wrong?"

"Talk is cheap, Scheikowitz," Marcus retorted. "He only says he would pay you the money, Scheikowitz, ain't it?"

Philip dug down into his pocket and produced a roll of ragged one and two dollar bills, which he flung angrily on to a sample table.

"Count 'em," he said.

Marcus shrugged again.

"What is it my business?" he said. "And anyhow, Scheikowitz, I must say I'm surprised at you. A poor boy saves up a hundred dollars out of the little we are paying him here, and actually you are taking the money from him. Couldn't you afford it to spend on the boy a hundred dollars?"

"Sure I could," Philip replied as he pocketed the bills. "Sure I could and I'm going to too. I'm going to take this here money and put it in the bank for the boy, with a hundred dollars to boot, Polatkin, and when the boy gets to be twenty-one he would anyhow got in savings bank a couple hundred dollars."

Polatkin nodded shamefacedly.

"Furthermore, Polatkin," Philip continued, "if you got such a regard for the boy which you say you got it, understand me, I would like to make you a proposition. Ever since Gifkin leaves us, y'understand, we got in our cutting room one *Schlemiel* after another. Ain't it? Only yesterday we got to fire that young feller

we took on last week, understand me, and if we get somebody else in his place to-day, Polatkin, the chances is we would get rid of him to-morrow, and so it goes."

Again Polatkin nodded.

"So, therefore, what is the use talking, Polatkin?" Philip concluded. "Let us take Joe Borrochson and learn him he should be a cutter, and in six months' time, Polatkin, I bet yer he would be just so good a cutter as anybody."

At this juncture Polatkin raised his hand with the palm outward.

"Stop right there, Scheikowitz," he said. "You are making a fool of yourself, Scheikowitz, because, Scheikowitz, admitting for the sake of no arguments about it that the boy is a good boy, understand me, after all he's only a boy, ain't it, and if you are coming to make a sixteen-year-old boy an assistant cutter, y'understand, the least that we could expect is that our customers fires half our goods back at us."

"But – " Scheikowitz began.

"But, nothing, Scheikowitz," Polatkin interrupted. "This morning I seen it Meyer Gifkin on Canal Street and he ain't working for them suckers no more; and I says to him is he willing to come back here at the same wages, and he says yes, providing you would see that this here feller Borrochson wouldn't pretty near kill him."

"What do you mean pretty near kill him?" Scheikowitz cried.

"Do you mean to say he is afraid of a boy like Joe Borrochson?"

"Not Joe Borrochson," Polatkin replied. "He is all the time thinking that your brother-in-law Borrochson comes over here with his boy and is working in our place yet, and when I told him that that crook didn't come over at all Meyer says that's the first he hears about it or he would have asked for his job back long since already. So he says he would come in here to see us this afternoon."

"But – " Scheikowitz began again.

"Furthermore," Polatkin continued hastily, "if I would got a nephew in my place, Scheikowitz, I would a damsight sooner he stays working on the stock till he knows enough to sell goods on the road as that he learns to be a cutter. Ain't it?"

Scheikowitz sighed heavily by way of surrender.

"All right, Polatkin," he said; "if you're so dead set on taking this here feller Gifkin back go ahead. But one thing I must got to tell you: If you are taking a feller back which you fired once, understand me, he acts so independent you couldn't do nothing with him at all."

"Leave that to me," Polatkin said, as he started for the cutting room, and when Scheikowitz followed him he found that Gifkin had already arrived.

"*Wie gehts*, Mister Scheikowitz?" Gifkin cried, and Philip received the salutation with a distant nod.

"I hope you don't hold no hard feelings for me," Gifkin began.

"Me hold hard feelings for you?" Scheikowitz exclaimed. "I guess you forget yourself, Gifkin. A boss don't hold no hard

feelings for a feller which is working in the place, Gifkin; otherwise the feller gets fired and stays fired, Gifkin."

At this juncture Polatkin in the rôle of peacemaker created a diversion.

"Joe," he called to young Borrochson, who was passing the cutting-room door, "come in here a minute."

He turned to Gifkin as Joe entered.

"I guess you seen this young feller before?" he said.

Gifkin looked hard at Joe for a minute.

"I think I seen him before somewheres," he replied.

"Sure you seen him before," Polatkin rejoined. "His name is Borrochson."

"Borrochson!" Gifkin cried, and Joe, whose colour had heightened at the close scrutiny to which he had been subjected, began to grow pale.

"Sure, Yosel Borrochson, the son of your old neighbour," Polatkin explained, but Gifkin shook his head slowly.

"That ain't Yosel Borrochson," he declared, and then it was that Polatkin and Scheikowitz first noticed Joe's embarrassment. Indeed even as they gazed at him his features worked convulsively once or twice and he dropped unconscious to the floor.

In the scene of excitement that ensued Gifkin's avowed discovery was temporarily forgotten, but when Joe was again restored to consciousness Polatkin drew Gifkin aside and requested an explanation.

"What do you mean the boy ain't Yosel Borrochson?" he demanded.

"I mean the boy ain't Yosel Borrochson," Gifkin replied deliberately. "I know this here boy, Mr. Polatkin, and, furthermore, Borrochson's boy is got one bum eye, which he gets hit with a stone in it when he was only four years old already. Don't I know it, Mr. Polatkin, when with my own eyes I seen this here boy throw the stone yet?"

"Well, then, who is this boy?" Marcus Polatkin insisted.

"He's a boy by the name Lubliner," Gifkin replied, "which his father was Pincus Lubliner, also a crook, Mr. Polatkin, which he would steal anything from a toothpick to an oitermobile, understand me."

"Pincus Lubliner!" Polatkin repeated hoarsely.

"That's who I said," Gifkin continued, rushing headlong to his destruction. "Pincus Lubliner, which honestly, Mr. Polatkin, there's nothing that feller wouldn't do – a regular *Rosher* if ever there was one."

For one brief moment Polatkin's eyes flashed angrily, and then with a resounding smack his open hand struck Gifkin's cheek.

"Liar!" he shouted. "What do you mean by it?"

Scheikowitz, who had been tenderly bathing Joe Borrochson's head with water, rushed forward at the sound of the blow.

"Marcus," he cried, "for Heaven's sake, what are you doing? You shouldn't kill the feller just because he makes a mistake and thinks the boy ain't Joe Borrochson."

"He makes too many mistakes," Polatkin roared. "Calls Pincus Lubliner a crook and a murderer yet, which his mother was my own father's a sister. Did you ever hear the like?"

He made a threatening gesture toward Gifkin, who cowered in a chair.

"Say, lookyhere, Marcus," Scheikowitz asked, "what has Pincus Lubliner got to do with this?"

"He's got a whole lot to do with it," Marcus replied, and then his eyes rested on Joe Borrochson, who had again lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Oo-ee!" Marcus cried. "The poor boy is dead."

He swept Philip aside and ran to the water-cooler, whence he returned with the drip-bucket brimming over. This he emptied on Joe Borrochson's recumbent form, and after a quarter of an hour the recovery was permanent. In the meantime Philip had interviewed Meyer Gifkin to such good purpose that when he entered the firm's office with Meyer Gifkin at his heels he was fairly spluttering with rage.

"Thief!" he yelled. "Out of here before I make you arrested."

"Who the devil you think you are talking to?" Marcus demanded.

"I am talking to Joseph Borrochson," Scheikowitz replied. "That's who I'm talking to."

"Well, there ain't no such person here," Polatkin retorted. "There's here only a young fellow by the name Elkan Lubliner, which he is my own father's sister a grandson, and he ain't no

more a thief as you are."

"Ain't he?" Philip retorted. "Well, all I can say is he is a thief and his whole family is thieves, the one worser as the other."

Marcus glowered at his partner.

"You should be careful what you are speaking about," he said. "Maybe you ain't aware that this here boy's grandfather on his father's side was *Reb* Mosha, the big *Lubliner Rav*, a *Chosid* and a *Tzadek* if ever there was one."

"What difference does that make?" Philip demanded. "He is stealing my brother-in-law's passage ticket anyhow."

"I didn't steal it," the former Joseph Borrochson cried. "My father paid him good money for it, because Borrochson says he wanted it to marry the widow with; and you also I am paying a hundred dollars."

"Yow! Your father paid him good money for it!" Philip jeered. "A *Ganef* like your father is stealing the money, too, I bet yer."

"*Oser a Stück*," Polatkin declared. "I am sending him the money myself to help bury his aunt, Mrs. Lebowitz."

"You sent him the money?" Philip cried. "And your own partner you didn't tell nothing about it at all!"

"What is it your business supposing I am sending money to the old country?" Marcus retorted. "Do you ask me an advice when you are sending away money to the old country?"

"But the feller didn't bury his aunt at all," Philip said.

"Yes, he did too," the former Joseph Borrochson protested. "Instead of a hundred dollars the funeral only costs fifty."

Anybody could make an overestimate. Ain't it?"

Marcus nodded.

"The boy is right, Philip," he said, "and anyhow what does this loafer come butting in here for?"

As he spoke he indicated Meyer Gifkin with a jerk of the chin.

"He ain't butting in here," Philip declared; "he comes in here because I told him to. I want you should make an end of this nonsense, Polatkin, and hire a decent assistant cutter. Gifkin is willing to come back for twenty dollars a week."

"He is, is he?" Marcus cried. "Well, if he was willing to come back for twenty dollars a week why didn't he come back before? Now it's too late; I got other plans. Besides, twenty dollars is too much."

"You know very well why I ain't come back before, Mr. Polatkin," Gifkin protested. "I was afraid for my life from that murderer Borrochson."

Philip scowled suddenly.

"My partner is right, Gifkin," he said. "Twenty dollars is too much."

"No, it ain't," Gifkin declared. "If I would be still working for you, Mr. Scheikowitz, I would be getting more as twenty dollars by now. And was it my fault you are firing me? By rights I should have sued you in the courts yet."

"What d'ye mean sue us in the courts?" Philip exclaimed. He was growing increasingly angry, but Gifkin heeded no warning.

"Because you are firing me just for saying a crook is a crook,"

Gifkin replied, "and here lately you found out for yourself this here Borrochson is nothing but a *Schwindler*— a *Ganef*."

"What are you talking about — a *Schwindler*?" Philip cried, now thoroughly aroused. "Ain't you heard the boy says Borrochson is marrying the landlord's widow? Could a man get married on wind, Gifkin?"

"Yow! he married the landlord's widow!" Gifkin said. "I bet yer that crook gambles away the money; and, anyhow, could you believe anything this here boy tells you, Mr. Scheikowitz?"

The question fell on deaf ears, however, for at the repetition of the word crook Philip flung open the office door.

"Out of here," he roared, "before I kick you out."

Simultaneously Marcus grabbed the luckless Gifkin by the collar, and just what occurred between the office and the stairs could be deduced from the manner in which Marcus limped back to the office.

"*Gott sei Dank* we are rid of the fellow," he said as he came in.

Although Philip Scheikowitz arrived at his place of business at half-past seven the following morning he found that Marcus and Elkan Lubliner had preceded him, for when he entered the showroom Marcus approached with a broad grin on his face and pointed to the cutting room, where stood Elkan Lubliner. In the boy's right hand was clutched a pair of cutter's shears, and guided by chalked lines he was laboriously slicing up a roll of sample paper.

"Ain't he a picture?" Marcus exclaimed.

"A picture!" Philip repeated. "What d'ye mean a picture?"

"Why, the way he stands there with them shears, Philip," Marcus replied. "He's really what you could call a born cutter if ever there was one."

"A cutter!" Philip cried.

"Sure," Marcus went on. "It's never too soon for a young feller to learn all sides of his trade, Philip. He's been long enough on the stock. Now he should learn to be a cutter, and I bet yer in six months' time yet he would be just so good a cutter as anybody."

Philip was too dazed to make any comment before Marcus obtained a fresh start.

"A smart boy like him, Philip, learns awful quick," he said. "Ain't it funny how blood shows up? Now you take a boy like him which he comes from decent, respectable family, Philip, and he's got real gumption. I think I told you his grandfather on his father's side was a big rabbi, the *Lubliner Rav*."

Philip nodded.

"And even if I didn't told you," Marcus went on, "you could tell it from his face."

Again Philip nodded.

"And another thing I want to talk to you about," Marcus said, hastening after him: "the hundred dollars the boy gives you you should keep, Philip. And if you are spending more than that on the boy I would make it good."

Philip dug down absently into his trousers pocket and brought forth the roll of dirty bills.

"Take it," he said, throwing it toward his partner. "I don't want it."

"What d'ye mean you don't want it?" Marcus cried.

"I mean I ain't got no hard feelings against the boy," Philip replied. "I am thinking it over all night, and I come to the conclusion so long as I started in being the boy's uncle I would continue that way. So you should put the money in the savings bank like I says yesterday."

"But – " Marcus protested.

"But nothing," Philip interrupted. "Do what I am telling you."

Marcus blinked hard and cleared his throat with a great, rasping noise.

"After all," he said huskily, "it don't make no difference how many crooks *oder Ganevim* is in a feller's family, Philip, so long as he's got a good, straight business man for a partner."

CHAPTER TWO

APPENWEIER'S ACCOUNT

HOW ELKAN LUBLINER GRADUATED INTO SALESMANSHIP

"WHEN I hire a salesman, Mr. Klugfels," said Marcus Polatkin, senior partner of Polatkin & Scheikowitz, "I hire him because he's a salesman, not because he's a nephew."

"But it don't do any harm for a salesman to have an uncle whose concern would buy in one season from you already ten thousand dollars goods, Mr. Polatkin," Klugfels insisted. "Furthermore, Harry is a bright, smart boy; and you can take it from me, Mr. Polatkin, not alone he would get my trade, but us buyers is got a whole lot of influence one with the other, understand me; so, if there's any other concern you haven't on your books at present, you could rely on me I should do my best for Harry and you."

Thus spoke Mr. Felix Klugfels, buyer for Appenweier & Murray's Thirty-second Street store, on the first Monday of January; and in consequence on the second Monday of January Harry Flaxberg came to work as city salesman for Polatkin & Scheikowitz. He also maintained the rôle of party of the

second part in a contract drawn by Henry D. Feldman, whose skill in such matters is too well known for comment here. Sufficient to say it fixed Harry Flaxberg's compensation at thirty dollars a week and moderate commissions. At Polatkin's request, however, the document was so worded that it excluded Flaxberg from selling any of the concerns already on Polatkin & Scheikowitz's books; for not only did he doubt Flaxberg's ability as a salesman, but he was quite conscious of the circumstance that, save for the acquisition of Appenweier & Murray's account, there was no need of their hiring a city salesman at all, since the scope of their business operations required only one salesman – to wit, as the lawyers say, Marcus Polatkin himself. On the other hand, Klugfels had insisted upon the safeguarding of his nephew's interests, so that the latter was reasonably certain of a year's steady employment. Hence, when, on the first Monday of February, Appenweier & Murray dispensed with the services of Mr. Klugfels before he had had the opportunity of bestowing even one order on his nephew as a mark of his favour, the business premises of Polatkin & Scheikowitz became forthwith a house of mourning. From the stricken principals down to and including the shipping clerk nothing else was spoken of or thought about for a period of more than two weeks. Neither was it a source of much consolation to Marcus Polatkin when he heard that Klugfels had been supplanted by Max Lapin, a third cousin of Leon Sammet of the firm of Sammet Brothers.

"Ain't it terrible the way people is related nowadays?" he said

to Scheikowitz, who had just read aloud the news of Max Lapin's hiring in the columns of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Record*.

"Honestly, Scheikowitz, if a feller ain't got a lot of retailers *oder* buyers for distance relations, understand me, he might just so well go out of business and be done with it!"

Scheikowitz threw down the paper impatiently.

"That's where you are making a big mistake, Polatkin," he said. "A feller which he expects to do business with relations is just so good as looking for trouble. You could never depend on relations that they are going to keep on buying goods from you, Polatkin. The least little thing happens between relations, understand me, and they are getting right away enemies for life; while, if it was just between friends, Polatkin, one friend makes for the other a blue eye, understand me, and in two weeks' time they are just so good friends as ever. So, even if Appenweier & Murray wouldn't fire him, y'understand, Klugfels would have dumped this young feller on us anyway."

As he spoke he looked through the office door toward the showroom, where Harry Flaxberg sat with his feet cocked up on a sample table midway in the perusal of the sporting page.

"Flaxberg," Scheikowitz cried, "what are we showing here anyway – garments *oder* shoes? You are ruining our sample tables the way you are acting!"

Flaxberg replaced his feet on the floor and put down his paper.

"It's time some one ruined them tables on you, Mr. Scheikowitz," he said. "With the junk fixtures you got it here I'm

ashamed to bring a customer into the place at all."

"That's all right," Scheikowitz retorted; "for all the customers you are bringing in here, Flaxberg, we needn't got no fixtures at all. Come inside the office – my partner wants to speak to you a few words something."

Flaxberg rose leisurely to his feet and, carefully shaking each leg in turn to restore the unwrinkled perfection of his trousers, walked toward the office.

"Tell me, Flaxberg," Polatkin cried as he entered, "what are you going to do about this here account of Appenweier & Murray's?"

"What am I going to do about it?" Flaxberg repeated. "Why, what could I do about it? Every salesman is liable to lose one account, Mr. Polatkin."

"Sure, I know," Polatkin answered; "but most every other salesman is got some other accounts to fall back on. Whereas if a salesman is just got one account, Flaxberg, and he loses it, understand me, then he ain't a salesman no longer, Flaxberg. Right away he becomes only a loafer, Flaxberg, and the best thing he could do, understand me, is to go and find a job somewheres else."

"Not when he's got a contract, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg retorted promptly. "And specially a contract which the boss fixes up himself – ain't it?"

Scheikowitz nodded and scowled savagely at his partner.

"Listen here to me, Flaxberg," Polatkin cried. "Do you mean

to told me that, even if a salesman would got ever so much a crazy contract, understand me, it allows the salesman he should sit all the time doing nothing in the showroom without we got a right to fire him?"

"Well," Flaxberg replied calmly, "it gives him the privilege to go out to lunch once in a while."

He pulled down his waistcoat with exaggerated care and turned on his heel.

"So I would be back in an hour," he concluded; "and if any customers come in and ask for me tell 'em to take a seat till I am coming back."

The two partners watched him until he put on his hat and coat in the rear of the showroom and then Polatkin rose to his feet.

"Flaxberg," he cried, "wait a minute!"

Flaxberg returned to the office and nonchalantly lit a cigarette.

"Listen here to me, Flaxberg," Polatkin began. "Take from us a hundred and fifty dollars and quit!"

Flaxberg continued the operation of lighting his cigarette and blew a great cloud of smoke before replying.

"What for a piker do you think I am anyhow?" he asked.

"What d'ye mean – piker?" Polatkin said. "A hundred and fifty ain't to be sneezed at, Flaxberg."

"Ain't it?" Flaxberg retorted. "Well, with me, I got a more delicate nose as most people, Mr. Polatkin. I sneeze at everything under five hundred dollars – and that's all there is to it."

Once more he turned on his heel and walked out of the office;

but this time his progress toward the stairs was more deliberate, for, despite his defiant attitude, Flaxberg's finances were at low ebb owing to a marked reversal of form exhibited the previous day in the third race at New Orleans. Moreover, he felt confident that a judicious investment of a hundred and fifty dollars would net him that very afternoon at least five hundred dollars, if any reliance were to be placed on the selection of Merlando, the eminent sporting writer of the *Morning Wireless*.

Consequently he afforded every opportunity for Marcus to call him back, and he even paused at the factory door and applied a lighted match to his already burning cigarette. The expected summons failed, however, and instead he was nearly precipitated to the foot of the stairs by no less a person than Elkan Lubliner.

"Excuse me, Mr. Flaxberg," Elkan said. "I ain't seen you at all."

Flaxberg turned suddenly, but at the sight of Elkan his anger evaporated as he recalled a piece of gossip retailed by Sam Markulies, the shipping clerk, to the effect that, despite his eighteen years, Elkan had at least two savings-bank accounts and kept in his pocket a bundle of bills as large as a roll of piece goods.

"That's all right," Flaxberg cried with a forced grin. "I ain't surprised you are pretty near blinded when you are coming into the daylight out of the cutting room. It's dark in there like a tomb."

"I bet yer," Elkan said fervently.

"You should get into the air more often," Flaxberg went on. "A feller could get all sorts of things the matter with him staying in a hole like that."

"*Gott sei dank* I got, anyhow, my health," Elkan commented.

"Sure, I know," Flaxberg said as they reached the street; "but you must got to take care of it too. A feller which he don't get no exercise should ought to eat well, Lubliner. For instance, I bet yer you are taking every day your lunch in a bakery – ain't it?"

Elkan nodded.

"Well, there you are!" Flaxberg cried triumphantly. "A feller works all the time in a dark hole like that cutting room, and comes lunchtime he *fresses* a bunch of *Kuchen* and a cup of coffee, *verstehst du*– and is it any wonder you are looking sick?"

"I feel all right," Elkan said.

"I know you feel all right," Flaxberg continued, "but you look something terrible, Lubliner. Just for to-day, Lubliner, take my advice and try Wasserbauer's regular dinner."

Elkan laughed aloud.

"Wasserbauer's!" he exclaimed. "Why, what do you think I am, Mr. Flaxberg? If I would be a salesman like you, Mr. Flaxberg, I would say, 'Yes; eat once in a while at Wasserbauer's'; *aber* for an assistant cutter, Mr. Flaxberg, Wasserbauer's is just so high like the Waldorfer."

"That's all right," Flaxberg retorted airily. "No one asks you you should pay for it. Come and have a decent meal with me."

For a brief interval Elkan hesitated, but at length he

surrendered, and five minutes later he found himself seated opposite Harry Flaxberg in the rear of Wasserbauer's café.

"Yes, Mr. Flaxberg," he said as he commenced the fourth of a series of dill pickles, "compared with a salesman, a cutter is a dawg's life – ain't it?"

"Well," Flaxberg commented, "he is and he isn't. There's no reason why a cutter shouldn't enjoy life too, Lubliner. A cutter could make money on the side just so good as a salesman. I am acquainted already with a pants cutter by the name Schmul Kleidermann which, one afternoon last week, he pulls down two hundred and fifty dollars yet."

"Pulls down two hundred and fifty dollars!" Elkan exclaimed. "From where he pulls it down, Mr. Flaxberg?"

"Not from the pants business *oser*," Flaxberg replied. "The feller reads the papers, Lubliner, and that's how he makes his money."

"You mean he is speculating in these here stocks from stock exchanges?" Elkan asked.

"Not stocks," Flaxberg replied in shocked accents. "From *spieling* the stock markets a feller could lose his shirt yet. Never play the stock markets, Lubliner. That's something which you could really say a feller ruins himself for life with."

Elkan nodded.

"Even *im Russland* it's the same," he said.

"Sure," Flaxberg went on. "*Aber* this feller Kleidermann he makes a study of it. The name of the horse was Prince Faithful.

On New Year's Day he runs fourth in a field of six. The next week he is in the money for a show with such old-timers as Aurora Borealis, Dixie Lad and Ramble Home – and last week he gets away with it six to one a winner, understand me; and this afternoon yet, over to Judge Crowley's, I could get a price five to two a place, understand me, which it is like picking up money in the street already."

Elkan paused in the process of commencing the sixth pickle and gazed in wide-eyed astonishment at his host.

"So you see, Lubliner," Flaxberg concluded, "if you would put up twenty dollars, understand me, you could make fifty dollars more, like turning your hand over."

Elkan laid down his half-eaten pickle.

"Do you mean to say you want me I should put up twenty dollars on a horse which it is running with other horses a race?" he exclaimed.

"Well," Flaxberg replied, "of course, if you got objections to putting up money on a horse, Lubliner, why, don't do it. Lend it me instead the twenty dollars and I would play it; and if the horse should —*Gott soll hüten*— not be in the money, y'understand, then I would give you the twenty dollars back Saturday at the latest. *Aber* if the horse makes a place, understand me, then I would give you your money back this afternoon yet and ten dollars to boot."

For one wavering moment Elkan raised the pickle to his lips and then replaced it on the table. Then he licked off his fingers and explored the recess of his waistcoat pocket.

"Here," he said, producing a dime – "here is for the dill pickles, Mr. Flaxberg."

"What d'ye mean?" Flaxberg cried.

"I mean this," Elkan said, putting on his hat – "I mean you should save your money with me and blow instead your friend Kleidermann to dinner, because the proposition ain't attractive."

"Yes, Mr. Redman," Elkan commented when he resumed his duties as assistant cutter after the five and a half dill pickles had been supplemented with a hasty meal of rolls and coffee, "for a *Schlemiel* like him to call himself a salesman – honestly, it's a disgrace!"

He addressed his remarks to Joseph Redman, head cutter for Polatkin & Scheikowitz, who plied his shears industriously at an adjoining table. Joseph, like every other employee of Polatkin & Scheikowitz, was thoroughly acquainted with the details of Flaxberg's hiring and its dénouement. Nevertheless, in his quality of head cutter, he professed a becoming ignorance.

"Who is this which you are knocking now?" he asked.

"I am knocking some one which he's got a right to be knocked," Elkan replied. "I am knocking this here feller Flaxberg, which he calls himself a salesman. That feller couldn't sell a drink of water in the Sahara Desert, Mr. Redman. All he cares about is gambling and going on theaytres. Why, if I would be in his shoes, Mr. Redman, I wouldn't eat or I wouldn't sleep till I got from Appenweier & Murray an order. Never mind if my uncle would be fired and Mr. Lapin, the new buyer, is a relation

from Sammet Brothers, Mr. Redman, I would get that account, understand me, or I would *verplatz*."

"*Yow*, you would do wonders!" Redman said. "The best thing you could do, Lubliner, is to close up your face and get to work. You shouldn't got so much to say for yourself. A big mouth is only for a salesman, Lubliner. For a cutter it's nix, understand me; so you should give me a rest with this here Appenweier & Murray's account and get busy on them 2060's. We are behind with 'em as it is."

Thus admonished, Elkan lapsed into silence; and for more than half an hour he pursued his duties diligently.

"*Nu!*" Redman said at length. "What's the matter you are acting so quiet this afternoon?"

"What d'ye mean I am acting quiet, Mr. Redman?" Elkan asked. "I am thinking – that's all. Without a feller would think once in a while, Mr. Redman, he remains a cutter all his life."

"There's worser things as cutters," Redman commented. "For instance – assistant cutters."

"Sure, I know," Elkan agreed; "but salesmen is a whole lot better as cutters *oder* assistant cutters. A salesman sees life, Mr. Redman. He meets oncet in a while people, Mr. Redman; while, with us, what is it? We are shut up here like we would be sitting in prison – ain't it?"

"You ain't got no kick coming," Redman said. "A young feller only going on eighteen, understand me, is getting ten dollars a week and he kicks yet. Sitting in prison, *sagt er!* Maybe you

would like the concern they should be putting in moving pictures here or a phonygraft!"

Elkan sighed heavily by way of reply and for a quarter of an hour longer he worked in quietness, until Redman grew worried at his assistant's unusual taciturnity.

"What's the trouble you ain't talking, Lubliner?" he said. "Don't you feel so good?"

Elkan looked up. He was about to say that he felt all right when suddenly he received the germ of an inspiration, and in the few seconds that he hesitated it blossomed into a well-defined plan of action. He therefore emitted a faint groan and laid down his shears.

"I got a *krank* right here," he said, placing his hand on his left side. "Ever since last week I got it."

"Well, why don't you say something about it before?" Redman cried anxiously; for he remembered that Elkan Lubliner was not only the cousin of Marcus Polatkin but the adopted nephew of Philip Scheikowitz as well. "You shouldn't let such things go."

"The fact is," Elkan replied, "I didn't want to say nothing about it to Mr. Polatkin on account he's got enough to worry him with this here Appenweier & Murray's account; and –"

"You got that account on the brain," Redman interrupted. "If you don't feel so good you should go home. Leave me fix it for you."

As he spoke he hastily buttoned on his collar and left the cutting room, while Elkan could not forego a delighted grin.

After all, he reflected, he had worked steadily for over a year and a half with only such holidays as the orthodox ritual ordained; and he was so busy making plans for his first afternoon of freedom that he nearly forgot to groan again when Redman came back with Marcus Polatkin at his heels.

"*Nu*, Elkan!" Marcus said. "What's the matter? Don't you feel good?"

"I got a *krank* right here," Elkan replied, placing his hand on his right side. "I got it now pretty near a week already."

"Well, maybe you should sit down for the rest of the afternoon and file away the old cutting slips," Marcus said, whereat Elkan moaned and closed his eyes.

"I filed 'em away last week already," he murmured. "I think maybe if I would lay in bed the rest of the afternoon I would be all right to-morrow."

Marcus gazed earnestly at his cousin, whose sufferings seemed to be intensified thereby.

"All right, Elkan," he said. "Go ahead. Go home and tell Mrs. Feinermann she should give you a little *Brusttee*; and if you don't feel better in the morning don't take it so particular to get here early."

Elkan nodded weakly and five minutes later walked slowly out of the factory. He took the stairs only a little less slowly, but he gradually increased his speed as he proceeded along Wooster Street, until by the time he was out of sight of the firm's office windows he was fairly running. Thus he arrived at his boarding

place on Pitt Street in less than half an hour – just in time to interrupt Mrs. Sarah Feinermann as she was about to start on a shopping excursion uptown. Mrs. Feinermann exclaimed aloud at the sight of him, and her complexion grew perceptibly less florid, for his advent in Pitt Street at that early hour could have but one meaning.

"What's the matter – you are getting fired?" she asked.

"What d'ye mean – getting fired?" Elkan replied. "I ain't fired. I got an afternoon off."

Mrs. Feinermann heaved a sigh of relief. As the recipient of Elkan's five dollars a week board-money, payable strictly in advance, she naturally evinced a hearty interest in his financial affairs. Moreover, she was distantly related to Elkan's father; and owing to this kinship her husband, Marx Feinermann, foreman for Kupferberg Brothers, was of the impression that she charged Elkan only three dollars and fifty cents a week. The underestimate more than paid Mrs. Feinermann's millinery bill, and she was consequently under the necessity of buying Elkan's silence with small items of laundry work and an occasional egg for breakfast. This arrangement suited Elkan very well indeed; and though he had eaten his lunch only an hour previously he thought it the part of prudence to insist that she prepare a meal for him, by way of maintaining his privileges as Mrs. Feinermann's fellow conspirator.

"But I am just now getting dressed to go uptown," she protested.

"Where to?" he demanded.

"I got a little shopping to do," she said; and Elkan snapped his fingers in the conception of a brilliant idea.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I would go with you. In three minutes I would wash myself and change my clothes – and I'll be right with you."

"But I got to stop in and see Marx first," she insisted. "I want to tell him something."

"I wanted to tell him something lots of times already," Elkan said significantly; and Mrs. Feinermann sat down in the nearest chair while Elkan disappeared into the adjoining room and performed a hasty toilet.

"*Schon gut*," he said as he emerged from his room five minutes later; "we would go right up to Appenweier & Murray's."

"But I ain't said I am going up to Appenweier & Murray's," Mrs. Feinermann cried. "Such a high-price place I couldn't afford to deal with at all."

"I didn't say you could," Elkan replied; "but it don't do no harm to get yourself used to such places, on account might before long you could afford to deal there maybe."

"What d'ye mean I could afford to deal there before long?" Mrs. Feinermann inquired.

"I mean this," Elkan said, and they started down the stairs – "I mean, if things turn out like the way I want 'em to, instead of five dollars a week I would give you five dollars and fifty cents a week." Here he paused on the stair-landing to let the news sink in.

"And furthermore, if you would act the way I tell you to when we get up there I would also pay your carfare," he concluded – "one way."

When Mrs. Feinermann entered Appenweier & Murray's store that afternoon she was immediately accosted by a floorwalker.

"What do you wish, madam?" he said.

"I want to buy something a dress for my wife," Elkan volunteered, stepping from behind the shadow of Mrs. Feinermann, who for her thirty-odd years was, to say the least, buxom.

"Your wife?" the floorwalker repeated.

"Sure; why not?" Elkan replied. "Maybe I am looking young, but in reality I am old; so you should please show us the dress department, from twenty-two-fifty to twenty-eight dollars the garment."

The floorwalker ushered them into the elevator and they alighted at the second floor.

"Miss Holzmeyer!" the floorwalker cried; and in response there approached a lady of uncertain age but of no uncertain methods of salesmanship. She was garbed in a silk gown that might have graced the person of an Austrian grand duchess, and she rustled and swished as she walked toward them in what she had always found to be a most impressive manner.

"The lady wants to see some dresses," the floorwalker said; and Miss Holzmeyer smiled by a rather complicated process, in

which her nose wrinkled until it drew up the corners of her mouth and made her eyes appear to rest like shoe-buttons on the tops of her powdered cheeks.

"This way, madam," she said as she swung her skirts round noisily.

"One moment," Elkan interrupted, for again he had been totally eclipsed by Mrs. Feinermann's bulky figure. "You ain't heard what my wife wants yet."

"Your wife!" Miss Holzmeyer exclaimed.

"Sure, my wife," Elkan replied calmly. "This is my wife if it's all the same to you and you ain't got no objections."

He gazed steadily at Miss Holzmeyer, who began to find her definite methods of salesmanship growing less definite, until she blushed vividly.

"Not at all," she said. "Step this way, please."

"Yes, Miss Holzmeyer," Elkan went on without moving, "as I was telling you, you ain't found out yet what my wife wants, on account a dress could be from twenty dollars the garment up to a hundred and fifty."

"We have dresses here as high as three hundred!" Miss Holzmeyer snapped. She had discerned that she was beginning to be embarrassed in the presence of this self-possessed benedick of youthful appearance, and she resented it accordingly.

"I ain't doubting it for a minute," Elkan replied. "New York is full of suckers, Miss Holzmeyer; but me and my wife is looking for something from twenty-two-fifty to twenty-eight dollars,

Miss Holzmeyer."

Miss Holzmeyer's temper mounted with each repetition of her surname, and her final "Step this way, please!" was uttered in tones fairly tremulous with rage.

Elkan obeyed so leisurely that by the time Mrs. Feinermann and he had reached the rear of the showroom Miss Holzmeyer had hung three dresses on the back of a chair.

"H'allow me," Elkan said as he took the topmost gown by the shoulders and held it up in front of him. He shook out the folds and for more than five minutes examined it closely.

"I didn't want to see nothing for seventeen-fifty," he announced at last – "especially from last year's style."

"What do you mean?" Miss Holzmeyer cried angrily. "That dress is marked twenty-eight dollars and it just came in last week. It's a very smart model indeed."

"The model I don't know nothing about," Elkan replied, "but the salesman must of been pretty smart to stuck you folks like that."

He subjected another gown to a careful scrutiny while Miss Holzmeyer sought the showcases for more garments.

"Now, this one here," he said, "is better value. How much you are asking for this one, please?"

Miss Holzmeyer glanced at the price ticket.

"Twenty-eight dollars," she replied, with an indignant glare.

Elkan whistled incredulously.

"You don't tell me," he said. "I always heard it that the

expenses is high uptown, but even if the walls was hung *mit* diamonds yet, Miss Holzmeyer, your bosses wouldn't starve neither. Do you got maybe a dress for twenty-eight dollars which it is worth, anyhow, twenty-five dollars?"

This last jibe was too much for Miss Holzmeyer.

"Mis-ter Lap-in!" she howled, and immediately a glazed mahogany door in an adjoining partition burst open and Max Lapin appeared on the floor of the showroom.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Miss Holzmeyer sat down in the nearest chair and fanned herself with her pocket handkerchief.

"This man insulted me!" she said; whereat Max Lapin turned savagely to Elkan.

"What for you are insulting this lady?" he demanded as he made a rapid survey of Elkan's physical development. He was quite prepared to defend Miss Holzmeyer's honour in a fitting and manly fashion; but, during the few seconds that supervened his question, Max reflected that you can never tell about a small man.

"What d'ye mean insult this lady?" Elkan asked stoutly. "I never says a word to her. Maybe I ain't so long in the country as you are, but I got just so much respect for the old folks as anybody. Furthermore, she is showing me here garments which, honest, Mister – er – "

"Lapin," Max said.

"Mister Lapin, a house with the reputation of Appenweier &

Murray shouldn't ought to got in stock at all."

"Say, lookyhere, young feller," Lapin cried, "what are you driving into anyway? I am buyer here, and if you got any kick coming tell it to me, and don't go insulting the salesladies."

"I ain't insulted no saleslady, Mr. Lapin," Elkan declared. "I am coming here to buy for my wife a dress and certainly I want to get for my money some decent value; and when this lady shows me a garment like this" – he held up the topmost garment – "and says it is from this year a model, understand me, naturally I got my own ideas on the subject."

Lapin looked critically at the garment in question.

"Did you get this style from that third case there, Miss Holzmeyer?" he asked, and Miss Holzmeyer nodded.

"Well, that whole case is full of leftovers and I don't want it touched," Lapin said. "Now go ahead and show this gentleman's wife some more models; and if he gets fresh let me know – that's all."

"One minute, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said. "Will you do me the favour and let me show you something?"

He held up the garment last exhibited by Miss Holzmeyer and pointed to the yoke and its border.

"This here garment Miss Holzmeyer shows me for twenty-eight dollars, Mr. Lapin," he said, "and with me and my wife here a dollar means to us like two dollars to most people, Mr. Lapin. So when I am seeing the precisely selfsame garment like this in Fine Brothers' for twenty-six dollars, but the border is from silk

embroidery, a peacock's tail design, and the yoke is from gilt net yet, understand me, I got to say something – ain't it?"

Lapin paused in his progress toward his office and even as he did so Elkan's eyes strayed to a glass-covered showcase.

"Why, there is a garment just like Fine Brothers' model!" he exclaimed.

"Say, lookyhere!" Lapin demanded as he strode up to the showcase and pulled out the costume indicated by Elkan. "What are you trying to tell me? This here model is thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents; so, if you can get it for twenty-six at Fine Brothers', go ahead and do it!"

"But, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, "that ain't no way for a buyer of a big concern like this to talk. I am telling you, so sure as you are standing there and I should never move from this spot, the identical selfsame style Fine Brothers got it for twenty-six dollars. I know it, Mr. Lapin, because we are making up that garment in our factory yet, and Fine Brothers takes from us six of that model at eighteen-fifty apiece."

At this unguarded disclosure Lapin's face grew crimson with rage.

"You are making it up in your factory!" he cried. "Why, you dirty faker you, what the devil you are coming round here bluffing that you want to buy a dress for your wife for?"

Elkan broke into a cold perspiration and looked round for Mrs. Feinermann, the substantial evidence of his marital state; but at the very beginning of Max Lapin's indignant outburst she had

discreetly taken the first stairway to the right.

"Bring that woman back here!" Max roared. Miss Holzmeyer made a dash for the stairway, and before Elkan had time to formulate even a tentative plan of escape she had returned with her quarry.

"What do you want from me?" Mrs. Feinermann gasped. Her hat was awry, and what had once been a modish pompadour was toppled to one side and shed hairpins with every palsied nod of her head. "I ain't done nothing!" she protested.

"Sure, you ain't," Elkan said; "so you should keep your mouth shut – that's all."

"I would keep my mouth shut *oder* not as I please," Mrs. Feinermann retorted. "Furthermore, you ain't got no business to get me mixed up in this *Geschichte* at all!"

"Who are you two anyway?" Max demanded.

"This here feller is a young feller by the name of Elkan Lubliner which he is working by Polatkin & Scheikowitz," Mrs. Feinermann announced; "and what he is bringing me up here for is more than I could tell you."

"Ain't he your husband?" Max asked.

"*Oser a Stück!*" Mrs. Feinermann declared fervently. "A kid like him should be my husband! An idee!"

"That's all right," Elkan rejoined. "*Im Russland* at my age many a young feller is got twins yet!"

"What's that got to do with it?" Max Lapin demanded.

"It ain't got nothing to do with it," Elkan said, "but it shows

that a young feller like me which he is raised in the old country ain't such a kid as you think for, Mr. Lapin. And when I am telling you that the concern which sells you them goods to retail for twenty-eight dollars is sticking you good, understand me, you could take my word for it just the same like I would be fifty-five even."

Again he seized one of the garments.

"And what's more," he went on breathlessly, "the workmanship is rotten. Look at here! – the seams is falling to pieces already!"

He thrust the garment under Lapin's nose with one hand, while with the other he dug down into his trousers pocket.

"Here!" he shouted. "Here is money – fifty dollars!"

He dropped the gown and held out a roll of bills toward Lapin.

"Take it!" he said hysterically. "Take it all; and if I don't bring you to-morrow morning, first thing, this same identical style, only A-number-one workmanship, which you could retail for twenty dollars a garment, understand me, keep the money and *fertig*."

At this juncture the well-nourished figure of Louis Appenweier, senior member of Appenweier & Murray, appeared in the door of the elevator and Max Lapin turned on his heel.

"Come into my office," he hissed; and as he started for the glazed mahogany door he gathered up the remaining garments and took them with him.

For more than half an hour Elkan and Max Lapin remained

closeted together, and during that period Elkan conducted a clinic over each garment to such good purpose that Max sent out from time to time for more expensive styles. All of these were in turn examined by Elkan, who recognized in at least six models the designs of Joseph Redman, slightly altered in the stealing by Leon Sammet.

"Yes, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, "them models was all designed by our own designer and some one *ganvered* 'em on us. Furthermore, I could bring you here to-morrow morning at eight o'clock from our sample racks these same identical models, with the prices on 'em marked plain like the figures on a ten-dollar bill, understand me; and if they ain't from twenty to thirty per cent. lower as you paid for these here garments I'd eat 'em!"

For at least ten minutes Max Lapin sat with knitted brows and pondered Elkan's words.

"Eight o'clock is too early," he announced at last. "Make it half-past nine."

"Six, even, ain't too early for an up-to-date buyer to look at some genuine bargains," Elkan insisted; "and, besides, I must got to get back to the shop at nine."

"But – " Lapin began.

"But nothing, Mr. Lapin," Elkan said, rising to his feet. "Make it eight o'clock, and the next time I would come round at half-past nine."

"What d'ye mean the next time?" Lapin exclaimed.

"I mean this wouldn't be the last time we do business together,

because the job as assistant cutter which I got it is just temporary, Mr. Lapin," he said as he started for the door – "just temporary – that's all."

He paused with his hand on the doorknob.

"See you at eight o'clock to-morrow morning," he said cheerfully; and five minutes later he was having hard work to keep from dancing his way down Thirty-third Street to the subway.

From half-past seven in the morning until six at night were the working hours of all Polatkin & Scheikowitz's employees, save only Sam Markulies, the shipping clerk, whose duty it was to unlock the shop at quarter-past seven sharp. This hour had been fixed by Philip Scheikowitz himself, who, on an average of once a month, would stroll into the shipping department at closing-time and announce his intention of going to a wedding that evening. Sometimes the proposed excursion was a pinocle party or a visit to the theatre, but the dénouement was always the same. The next morning Scheikowitz would arrive at the factory door precisely at quarter-past seven to find Markulies from five to ten minutes late; whereupon Markulies would receive his discharge, to take effect the following Saturday night – and for the ensuing month his punctuality was assured.

During the quarter of an hour which preceded the arrival of the other employees, Markulies usually dusted the office and showroom; and on the morning following Elkan's holiday this solitary duty was cheered by the presence of Harry Flaxberg.

Harry had sought the advice of counsel the previous day and had been warned against tardiness as an excuse for his discharge; so he was lounging on the sidewalk long before Markulies's arrival that morning.

"*Nu*, Mr. Flaxberg," Markulies cried, "what brings you round so early?"

"I couldn't sleep last night," Flaxberg said; "so I thought I might just so well be here as anywhere."

"Ain't that the funniest thing!" Markulies cried. "Me I couldn't sleep neither. I got something on my mind."

He unlocked the door as he spoke; and as he passed up the stairs he declared again that he had something on his mind.

"*Yow!*" Flaxberg said. "I should got your worries, Markulies. The simple little things which a shipping clerk must got to do would *oser* give anybody the nervous prostration."

"Is that so?" Markulies retorted. "Well, I ain't just the shipping clerk here, Mr. Flaxberg. You must remember I am in charge with the keys also, Mr. Flaxberg; and I got responsibilities if some one *ganvers* a couple sample garments once in a while, y'understand – right away they would accuse me that I done it."

"Don't worry yourself, Markulies," Flaxberg said. "I ain't going to *ganver* no garments on you – not this morning anyhow."

"You I ain't worrying about at all," Markulies rejoined; "but that young bloodsucker, Lubliner, Mr. Flaxberg – that's something else again. Actually that young feller is to me something which you could really call a thorn in my pants, Mr.

Flaxberg. Just because he is assistant cutter here and I am only the shipping clerk he treats me like I would be the dirt under his feet. Only last night, Mr. Flaxberg, I am locking up the place when that feller comes up the stairs and says to me I should give him the key, as he forgets a package which he left behind him. Mind you, it is already half-past six, Mr. Flaxberg; and ever since I am living up in the Bronx, Mr. Flaxberg, I am getting kicked out of six places where I am boarding on account no respectable family would stand it, Mr. Flaxberg, that a feller comes, night after night, nine o'clock to his dinner."

"You was telling me about Lubliner," Flaxberg reminded him.

"Sure, I know," Markulies continued. "So I says to him the place is closed and that's all there is to it. With that, Mr. Flaxberg, the feller takes back his hand – so – and he gives me a *schlag* in the stummick, which, honest, if he wouldn't be from Mr. Polatkin a relation, Mr. Flaxberg, I would right then and there killed him."

For two minutes he patted gently that portion of his anatomy where Elkan's blow had landed.

"He's a dangerous feller, Mr. Flaxberg," he went on, "because, just so soon as he opens the door after I am giving him the key, Mr. Flaxberg, he shuts it in my face and springs the bolt on me, Mr. Flaxberg – and there I am standing *bis* pretty near eight o'clock, understand me, till that feller comes out again. By the time I am at my room on Brook Avenue, Mr. Flaxberg, the way Mrs. Kaller speaks to me you would think I was a dawg yet. How should I know she is getting tickets for the theaytre that

evening, Mr. Flaxberg? And anyhow, Mr. Flaxberg, if people could afford to spend their money going on theaytre, understand me, they don't need to keep boarders at all – especially when I am getting night after night boiled *Brustdeckel* only. I says to her, 'Mrs. Kaller,' I says to her, 'why don't you give me once in a while a change?' I says – "

"Did Lubliner have anything with him when he came out?" Flaxberg interrupted.

"Well, sure; he'd got the package he forgets, and how a feller could forget a package that size, Mr. Flaxberg – honestly, you wouldn't believe at all! That's what it is to be a relation to the boss, Mr. Flaxberg. If I would got such a memory, understand me, I would of been fired long since already. Yes, Mr. Flaxberg, I says to Mrs. Kaller, 'For three and a half dollars a week a feller should get night after night *Brustdeckel*– it's a shame – honest!' I says; and —*stiegen!* There's Mr. Scheikowitz!"

As he spoke he seized a feather duster and began to wield it vigorously, so that by the time Philip Scheikowitz reached the showroom door a dense cloud of dust testified to Markulies's industry.

"That'll do, Sam!" Philip cried. "What do you want to do here – choke us all to death?"

Gradually the dust subsided and disclosed to Philip's astonished gaze Harry Flaxberg seated on a sample table and apparently lost in the perusal of the *Daily Cloak and Suit Record*.

"Good-morning, Mr. Scheikowitz," he said heartily, but

Philip only grunted in reply. Moreover, he walked hurriedly past Flaxberg and closed the office door behind him with a resounding bang, for he, too, had sought the advice of counsel the previous evening; and on that advice he had left his bed before daylight, only to find himself forestalled by the wily Flaxberg. Nor was his chagrin at all decreased by Polatkin, who had promised to meet his partner at quarter-past seven. Instead he arrived an hour later and immediately proceeded to upbraid Scheikowitz for Flaxberg's punctuality.

"What do you mean that feller gets here before you?" he cried. "Didn't you hear it the lawyer distinctively told you you should get here before Flaxberg, and when Flaxberg arrives you should tell him he is fired on account he is late? Honestly, Scheikowitz, I don't know what comes over you lately the way you are acting. Here we are paying the lawyer ten dollars he should give us an advice, understand me, and we might just so well throw our money in the streets!"

"But Flaxberg wasn't late, Polatkin," Scheikowitz protested. "He was early."

"Don't argue with me, Scheikowitz," Polatkin said. "Let's go outside and talk to him."

Philip shrugged despairingly as they walked to the office door. "Flaxberg," he began as he discerned the city salesman again using a sample table for a footstool, "don't let us disturb you if you ain't through reading the paper yet."

"Yes, Flaxberg," Polatkin added, "you could get down here so

early like you would be sleeping in the place all night yet, and what is it? Take from the table the feet, Flaxberg, and be a man. We got something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg said as he leisurely brought his feet to the floor. "I'm listening."

"In the first place, Flaxberg," Polatkin said, "did it ever occur to you that, even if your uncle would get fired up to Appenweier & Murray's, Redman designs for us a line of garments here which them people might be interested in anyhow?"

"*Yow*, they would be interested in our line!" Flaxberg cried. "Lapin wouldn't buy only Sammet Brothers' line if we got Worth and Paquin both working for us as designers. You couldn't convince him otherwise, Mr. Polatkin."

"That's all right," Polatkin went on; "but it wouldn't do no harm for you to anyhow see the feller and show him a couple garments which we got it here. Take for instance them 1080's, which we are selling Fine Brothers, *oder* that 2060 – that overskirt effect with the gilt net yoke and peacock-feather-design braid, Flaxberg. Them two styles made a big hit, Flaxberg. They are all hanging on that end rack there, Flaxberg, and you could look at 'em for yourself."

Polatkin walked across the showroom to the rack in question.

"Especially the 2060's," he said as he pulled aside the heavy denim curtain which protected the contents of the rack, "which you could really say is – "

Here he paused abruptly – for, with the exception of a dozen

wooden hangers, the rack was empty.

"What's this, Scheikowitz?" he cried with a sweep of his hand in the direction of the rack. "Where is all them 1080's and 2060's?"

Hastily the two partners examined every rack in the showroom; and not only did they fail to discover the missing samples, but they ascertained that, in addition, seven other choice styles had disappeared.

"See maybe is Redman using 'em in the cutting room," Scheikowitz suggested; and forthwith they made a canvass of the cutting room and factory, in which they were joined by Markulies.

"What is the matter, Mr. Scheikowitz?" he asked.

"We are missing a dozen sample garments," Scheikowitz replied.

"Missing!" Markulies loudly exclaimed. "What d'ye mean – missing, Mr. Scheikowitz? Last night, when I was covering up the racks, everything was in place."

Suddenly a wave of recollection swept over him and he gave tongue like a foxhound.

"Oo-oo-ee!" he wailed and sank into the nearest chair.

"Markulies," Polatkin cried out, "for Heaven's sake, what is it?"

"He must of *ganvered* 'em!" Markulies wailed. "Right in front of my eyes he done it."

"Who done it?" Scheikowitz cried.

"Lubliner," Markulies moaned.

"Lubliner!" Polatkin cried. "Do you mean Elkan Lubliner?"

"That's what I said," Markulies went on. "Comes half-past six last night, and that *ganef* makes me a *schlag* in the stummick, Mr. Polatkin; and the first thing you know he goes to work and steals from me my keys, Mr. Polatkin, and cleans out the whole place yet."

"Lubliner was here last night after we are going home?" Polatkin asked.

"Sure, he was," Markulies replied – "at half-past six yet."

"Then that only goes to show what a liar you are," Polatkin declared, "because myself I am letting Elkan go home at one o'clock on account the feller is so sick, understand me, he could hardly walk out of the place at all. Furthermore, he says he is going right straight to bed when he leaves here; so, if you want to explain how it is the garments disappear when you are in the place here alone, Markulies, go ahead with your lies. Might Mr. Scheikowitz stole 'em maybe – or I did! What?"

Markulies began to rock and sway in an agony of woe.

"I should never stir from this here chair, Mr. Polatkin," Markulies protested, "and my mother also, which I am sending her to Kalvaria – regular like clockwork – ten dollars a month, she should never walk so far from here *bis* that door, if that *ganef* didn't come in here last night and make away with the garments!"

"*Koosh!*" Polatkin bellowed, and made a threatening gesture toward Markulies just as Scheikowitz stepped forward.

"That'll do, Polatkin," he said. "If the feller lies we could easy prove it – ain't it? In the first place, where is Elkan?"

"He must of been sick this morning on account he ain't here yet," Polatkin said.

"*Schon gut*," Scheikowitz rejoined; "if he ain't here he ain't here, *verstehst du*, *aber* he is boarding with Mrs. Feinermann, which her husband is Kupferberg Brothers' foreman – ain't it?"

Polatkin nodded and Scheikowitz turned to Markulies.

"Markulies," he said, "do me the favour and stop that! You are making me dizzy the way you are acting. Furthermore, Markulies, you should put on right away your hat and run over to Kupferberg Brothers' and say to Mr. B. Kupferberg you are coming from Polatkin & Scheikowitz, and ask him is he agreeable he should let Marx Feinermann come over and see us – and if he wants to know what for tell him we want to get from him a recommendation for a feller which is working for us."

He turned to his partner as Markulies started for the stairway.

"And a helluva recommendation we would get from him, too, I bet yer!" he added. "Wasserbauer tells me Elkan was in his place yesterday, and, though he don't watch every bit of food a customer puts into his mouth, understand me, he says that he eats dill pickles one right after the other; and then, Polatkin, the young feller gets right up and walks right out of the place without giving any order even. Wasserbauer says he knows it was Elkan because one day I am sending him over to look for you there. Wasserbauer asks him the simple question what he wants you

for, and right away Elkan acts fresh to him like anything."

"He done right to act fresh," Polatkin said as they walked back to the showroom. "What is it Wasserbauer's business what you want me for?"

"But how comes a young feller like him to be eating at Wasserbauer's?" Scheikowitz continued. "Where does he get the money from he should eat there?"

"The fact is" – said Flaxberg, who up to this point had remained a silent listener to the entire controversy – "the fact is, Mr. Scheikowitz, yesterday I am taking pity on the feller on account he is looking sick; and I took him into Wasserbauer's and invited him he should eat a little something."

Here he paused and licked his lips maliciously.

"And though I don't want to say nothing against the feller, understand me," he continued, "he begins right away to talk about horseracing."

"Horseracing?" Polatkin cried.

Flaxberg nodded and made a gesture implying more plainly than the words themselves: "Can you beat it?"

"Horseracing!" Scheikowitz repeated. "Well, what do you think of that for a lowlife bum?"

"And when I called him down for gambling, Mr. Polatkin, he walks right out, so independent he is. Furthermore, though it's none of my business, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg went on, "Markulies tells me this morning early the same story like he tells you – before he knew the goods was missing even."

"Sure, I believe you," Polatkin retorted. "He was getting the whole thing fixed up beforehand. That's the kind of *Rosher* he is."

As he spoke Markulies entered, and there followed on his heels the short, stout figure of Marx Feinermann.

"What did I told you?" Markulies cried. "The feller ain't home sick at all. He eats his supper last night, and this morning he is got two eggs for his breakfast even."

"S'nough, Markulies!" Polatkin interrupted. "You got too much to say for yourself. Sit down, Feinermann, and tell us what is the reason Elkan ain't here this morning."

"You tell me and I would tell you," Feinermann replied. "All I know is the feller leaves my house the usual time this morning; only before he goes he acts fresh to my wife like anything, Mr. Polatkin. He kicks the coffee ain't good, even when my wife is giving him two eggs to his breakfast anyhow. What some people expects for three-fifty a week you wouldn't believe at all!"

"What do you mean – three-fifty a week?" Polatkin demanded. "He pays your wife five dollars a week *schon* six months ago already. He told me so himself."

"I ain't responsible for what that boy tells you," Feinermann said stolidly. "All I know is he pays me three-fifty a week; and you would think he is used to eating chicken every day from *zu Hause* yet, the way he is all the time kicking about his food."

Markulies snorted indignantly.

"He should got the *Machshovos* Mrs. Kaller hands it to me,"

he said – "*gekochte Brustdeckel* day in, day out; and then I am accused that I steal samples yet! I am sick and tired of it!"

"*Stiegen!*" Polatkin cried. "Listen here to me, Feinermann. Do you mean to told me the boy ain't paying you five dollars a week board?"

As Feinermann opened his mouth to reply the showroom door opened and Elkan himself entered.

"Loafer!" Scheikowitz roared. "Where was you?"

Elkan made no reply, but walked to the centre of the showroom.

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

Polatkin jumped to his feet.

"Before you speak to me a few words something," he said, "I want to ask you what the devil you are telling me lies that you pay Mrs. Feinermann five dollars a week board?"

"What are you bothering about that for now?" Scheikowitz interrupted. "And, anyhow, you could see by the way the feller is red like blood that he lies to you."

"Furthermore," Feinermann added, "my wife complains to me last night that young loafer takes her uptown yesterday on a wild fool's errand, understand me, and together they get pretty near kicked out of a drygoods store."

"She told you that, did she?" Elkan cried.

"That's what I said!" Feinermann retorted.

"Then, if that's the case, Feinermann," Elkan replied, "all I

can say is, I am paying your wife five dollars a week board *schon* six months already, and if she is holding out on you a dollar and a half a week that's her business – not mine."

"Don't make things worsen as they are, Lubliner," Flaxberg advised. "You are in bad, anyhow, and lying don't help none. What did you do with the samples you took away from here?"

"What is it your business what I do with 'em?" Elkan retorted.

"Don't get fresh, Elkan!" Polatkin said. "What is all this about, anyhow? First, you are leaving here yesterday on account you are sick; next, you are going uptown with Mrs. Feinermann and get kicked out of a drygoods store; then you come back here and steal our samples."

"Steal your samples!" Elkan cried.

"You admitted it yourself just now," Flaxberg interrupted. "You are a thief as well as a liar!"

Had Flaxberg's interest in sport extended to pugilism, he would have appreciated the manner in which Elkan's chest and arm muscles began to swell under his coat, even if the ominous gleam in Elkan's dark eyes had provided no other warning. As it was, however, Elkan put into practice the knowledge gained by a nightly attendance at the gymnasium on East Broadway. He stepped back two paces, and left followed right so rapidly to the point of Flaxberg's jaw that the impact sounded like one blow.

Simultaneously Flaxberg fell back over the sample tables and landed with a crash against the office partition just as the

telephone rang loudly. Perhaps it was as well for Flaxberg that he was unprepared for the onslaught, since, had he been in a rigid posture, he would have assuredly taken the count. Beyond a cut lip, however, and a lump on the back of his head, he was practically unhurt; and he jumped to his feet immediately. Nor was he impeded by a too eager audience, for Markulies and Feinermann had abruptly fled to the farthest corner of the cutting room, while Marcus and Philip had ducked behind a sample rack; so that he had a clear field for the rush he made at Elkan. He yelled with rage as he dashed wildly across the floor, but the yell terminated with an inarticulate grunt when Elkan stopped the rush with a drive straight from the shoulder. It found a target on Flaxberg's nose, and he crumpled up on the showroom floor.

For two minutes Elkan stood still and then he turned to the sample racks.

"Mr. Polatkin," he said, "the telephone is ringing."

Polatkin came from behind the rack and automatically proceeded to the office, while Scheikowitz peeped out of the denim curtains.

"You got to excuse me, Mr. Scheikowitz," Elkan murmured. "I couldn't help myself at all."

"You've killed him!" Scheikowitz gasped.

"*Yow!* I've killed him!" Elkan exclaimed. "It would take a whole lot more as that to kill a bum like him."

He bent over Flaxberg and shook him by the shoulder.

"Hey!" he shouted in his ear. "You are ruining your clothes!"

Flaxberg raised his drooping head and, assisted by Elkan, regained his feet and staggered to the water-cooler, where Elkan bathed his streaming nostrils with the icy fluid.

At length Scheikowitz stirred himself to action just as Polatkin relinquished the 'phone.

"Markulies," Scheikowitz shouted, "go out and get a policeman!"

"Don't do nothing of the kind, Markulies!" Polatkin declared. "I got something to say here too."

He turned severely to Elkan.

"Leave that loafer alone and listen to me," he said. "What right do you got to promise deliveries on them 2060's in a week?"

"I thought – " Elkan began.

"You ain't got no business to think," Polatkin interrupted. "The next time you are selling a concern like Appenweier & Murray don't promise nothing in the way of deliveries, because with people like them it's always the same. If you tell 'em a week they ring you up and insist on it they would got to got the goods in five days."

He put his hand on Elkan's shoulder; and the set expression of his face melted until his short dark moustache disappeared between his nose and his under lip in a widespread grin.

"Come inside the office," he said – "you too, Scheikowitz. Elkan's got a long story he wants to tell us."

Half an hour later, Sam Markulies knocked timidly at the

office door.

"Mr. Polatkin," he said, "Marx Feinermann says to me to ask you if he should wait any longer on account they're very busy over to Kupferberg Brothers'."

"Tell him he should come in here," Polatkin said; and Markulies withdrew after gazing in open-mouthed wonder at the spectacle of Elkan Lubliner seated at Polatkin's desk, with one of Polatkin's mildest cigars in his mouth, while the two partners sat in adjacent chairs and smiled on Elkan admiringly.

"You want to speak to me, Mr. Polatkin?" Feinermann asked, as he came in a moment afterward.

"Sure," Polatkin replied as he handed the astonished Feinermann a cigar. "Sit down, Feinermann, and listen to me. In the first place, Feinermann, what for a neighborhood is Pitt Street to live in? Why don't you move uptown, Feinermann?"

"A foreman is lucky if he could live in Pitt Street even," Feinermann said. "You must think I got money, Mr. Polatkin."

"How much more a month would it cost you to live uptown?" Polatkin continued. "At the most ten dollars – ain't it?"

Feinermann nodded sadly.

"To a man which he is only a foreman, Mr. Polatkin, ten dollars is ten dollars," he commented.

"Sure, I know," Polatkin said; "but instead of five dollars a week board, Elkan would pay you seven dollars a week, supposing you would move up to Lenox Avenue. Ain't that right, Elkan?"

"Sure, that's right," Elkan said. "Only, if I am paying him seven dollars a week board, he must got to give Mrs. Feinermann a dollar and a half extra housekeeping money. Is that agreeable, Feinermann?"

Again Feinermann nodded.

"Then that's all we want from you, Feinermann," Polatkin added, "except I want to tell you this much: I am asking Elkan he should come uptown and live with me; and he says no – he would prefer to stick where he is."

Feinermann shrugged complacently.

"I ain't got no objections," he said as he withdrew.

"And now, Elkan," Polatkin cried, "we got to fix it up with the other feller."

Hardly had he spoken when there stood framed in the open doorway the disheveled figure of Flaxberg.

"*Nu*, Flaxberg," Polatkin said. "What d'ye want from us now?"

"I am coming to tell you this, Mr. Polatkin," Flaxberg said thickly through his cut and swollen lips: "I am coming to tell you that I'm sick and so you must give me permission to go home."

"Nobody wants you to stay here, Flaxberg," Polatkin answered.

"Sure, I know," Flaxberg rejoined; "but if I would go home without your consent you would claim I made a breach of my contract."

"Don't let that worry you in the least, Flaxberg," Polatkin retorted, "because, so far as that goes, we fire you right here and

now, on account you didn't make no attempt to sell Appenweier & Murray, when a boy like Elkan, which up to now he wasn't even a salesman at all, could sell 'em one thousand dollars goods."

Flaxberg's puffed features contorted themselves in an expression of astonishment.

"Lubliner sells Appenweier & Murray a bill of goods!" he exclaimed.

By way of answer Polatkin held out the order slip for Flaxberg's inspection.

"That's all right," Flaxberg declared. "I would make it hot for you anyhow! You put this young feller up to it that he pretty near kills me."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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