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editor

Avraham M. Goldstein,
managing editor

Chaya Sarah Cantor,
associate editor

N. Nodel, S. Greybar,
illustrations

Michel Schwartz,
cover art

Fayge Silverman,
teacher's guide

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TO OUR READERS

Welcome back to another year of *The Jewish Reader*. It is our pleasure to become reacquainted with our veteran readers and to say hello to first-timers.

As we start our third year, we are introducing a somewhat different design, featuring new typefaces and some computerized artwork. We hope that the changes will meet with your approval.

Most of us have heard or read something about the great chassidic leaders of previous and present generations. One of the first such men was Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhansk. This *tzaddik* was well-known not only to Jews, but to non-Jews, and "A Greater Force" is a true story about an incident involving Reb Elimelech and a Polish count.

"At Mama's Knee" is a series of true episodes revolving around a Jewish family which lived in Germany during the seventeenth century. "Stranger in Shanghai" is a series of non-continuing stories concerning the Jews who found a haven in China during the Holocaust. In the first installment, two yeshiva boys encounter a strange Russian man.

"Our Story" picks up where it left off last year — after the destruction of the Second Temple. You'll also find "Torah Highlights," "News in Review," and "Our Wonderful World."

All of us at *The Jewish Reader* wish all of you a Kesivah Vachasimah Tovah!

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MAIL ROOM

Praises Rabbi Joselman

I enjoyed "Rabbi Joselman" very much (Sivan). His skill in defending the Jewish people against their enemies was portrayed well. I also liked the entire "Our Story" series and I am waiting anxiously to read more about Jewish history in next year's *Jewish Reader*.

Shimon Green
Brooklyn, NY

Your contests are fun to enter. I

hope you will continue to offer them. I also like the "Rabbi & Tam" cartoon series.

Dana Cohen
Los Angeles, CA

We're glad you like the contests and we plan to continue to feature them.

This issue's cover, the painting of a *shofar*, is by the noted artist Michel Schwartz.

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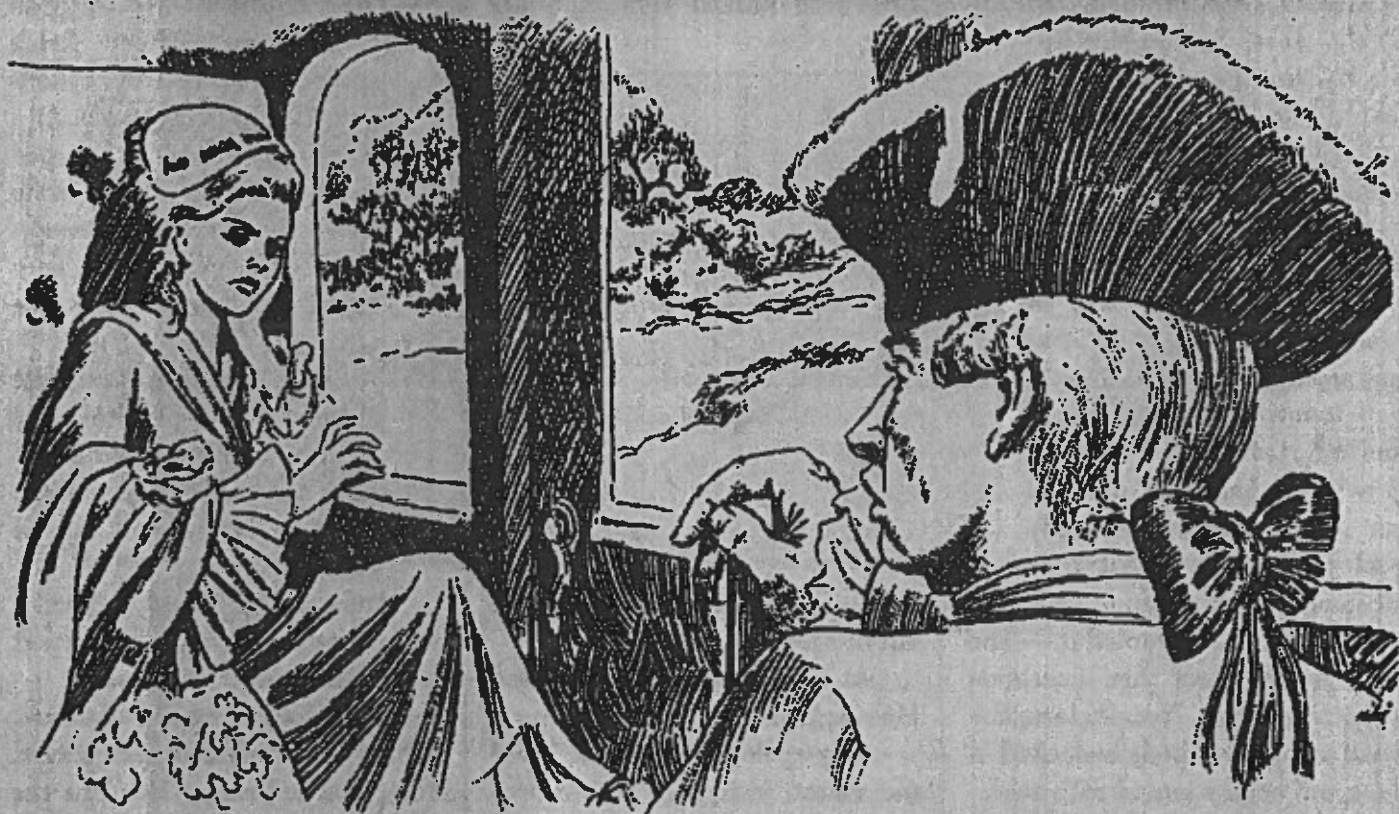
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A GREATER FORCE

(or, The Countless Countess)

By Chaya Sarah Cantor



Her slender fingers tapped against the sill in brooding rhythm.

We are all aware of the powers of righteous men, *tzaddikim*. As our Sages teach us, "*Tzaddik gozeir veHakaddosh Baruch Hu mekayem*" — a righteous man decrees and G-d abides by his wishes. But back

then — back when our grandparents risked the bandits and biting snows to seek a rebbe's blessing — even a non-Jew had the ability to recognize a holy man's power.

A case in point would be Count Pavel Pototzki, who nearly two

hundred years ago owned one of the largest territories in all of Poland. A goodly man, he provided ample livelihood to the local Jews, as had his father before him.

The Jews of that area prospered. One, in particular, Shraga Finger-

man, made a substantial income by leasing a portion of the count's vast estate. Besides tilling the fields, Shraga earned revenue by running a small mill. Typical of wealthy men, he became prominent within the Jewish community, and was a generous giver of charity.

Most of all, Shraga was a chassid and a follower of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhansk. "Everything I have gained I owe to him," he never tired of telling his acquaintances. "The Rebbe can bring down Heavenly blessings."

Shraga was also well liked by the count, who profited from the Jew's labor. So appreciative was Count Pototzki that he extended Shraga's lease, granting the latter five additional years.

Hence, both Jew and gentile led a fairly happy life, the kind that was seemingly free of troubles. Until Count Pototzki got married.

Countess Pototzki, who hailed from the eastern provinces, had been plucked out of a convent by her family and pushed into what they deemed a worthy union. Not that she herself really wanted it — she had actually set her heart on becoming a nun. Nonetheless, she went to the altar, body bedecked in lace and head adorned with gold.

No sooner did she cross the threshold of her new home than she made it clear who ran it. To the count she demanded that Christian images be placed in every room, even in the maid's cellar. Moreover, she bade the count provide a stipend for her old governess, the Mother Superior.

Gritting his teeth, her husband

complied. Whenever he grew too depressed, he tried to remind himself of his wife's beauty and the social prominence to which she had elevated him.

It was six months after the wedding when the count decided to amuse her with a grand tour of the estate. He summoned his carriage and nervously escorted his wife to the waiting door.

The initial moments were silent, as husband and wife, seated on opposite sides, gazed out their respective windows. Count Pototzki stole a glance in her direction. Her lips were pursed shut, and her

Both husband and wife beamed at the pastoral sight — the count because of the earth's natural wonder, and the countess because of all the material value.

slender fingers tapped against the sill in brooding rhythm.

At last she said, "You missed Mass again!"

"My apologies, my dear," said the count, cringing. "But I was detained by pressing business."

"Since when does business take precedence over spiritual affairs?"

"This was something that truly couldn't wait," the count replied.

"It concerned the income of our land holdings." He wheedled,

"Think of it, Maria. More money. More money for your gowns." He

added, "More money for Father

Thomas."

"Yes," she murmured, sufficiently appeased. "Father Thomas." Thoughts drifted to the sermon the previous Sunday morning, and the tirade against the Church's growing impoverishment. The good priest had harangued about the number of Poles whose livelihood was being taken away by a "foreign influence." She understood very well what he meant — Jews.

After hearing her husband's offer, she allowed her pretty, rouged face to relax. She even managed to concentrate on the rest of the ride.

The count's estate was magnificent. Wheat fields spilled into meadows, cotton-like with grazing sheep. At a riverbank, fishermen scooped out their fleshy catch, while above them cherry blossoms dangled in wait for the bees zigzagging from neighboring hives.

Both husband and wife beamed at the pastoral sight — the count because of the earth's natural wonder, and the countess because of all the material value.

At the sight of Shraga, conversing with the estate steward, she frowned.

"Who is that?" she asked.

The count leaned forward.

"Him?" He smiled in recognition.

"Oh, that's Shraga. He runs the property here."

"Runs the property?"

"Yes. He has leased part of the estate." He waved to the chassid, who bowed. "Everything you admire here I owe to him. He has been an excellent tenant."

The countess recoiled. "Do you mean to tell me that a Jew is running our estate?"



"The lease — rescinded!" he cried. "After the agreement we had made, the count came and declared it null and void!"

"Part of it," answered the count casually. He raised his silk sleeve and scratched his arm.

"Pavel, you're impossible!" she cried.

He stopped. "What is wrong?"

"Why . . . you, *that's* what's wrong."

The count gaped. "I don't understand—"

"Don't be coy with me!" she snapped. "Before my wedding day I was told I would marry someone pious, one who followed the

teachings of his faith." She began to sniff. "But no, I didn't. I married a demon, a loathsome creature who prefers the company of our enemies!"

"Our enemies?!" the count spluttered. "My dear wife, if you are referring to my Jewish tenant, then I must protest. Shraga Fingerman has served me well for many years. And my father. Even if he isn't of our faith, I have never in my life met a more righteous man."

"But he is a *Jew*, Pavel."

"And so what if he is?" retorted

the other. "I judge a man by his character, not his background." He lifted his sleeve and began to scratch again, this time with a vengeance. "He is everything a man of worth ought to be — modest, industrious, and honest." He snorted, "I would match him any day with your so-called saints!"

Immediately he regretted his words, for his wife burst into tears.

"You callous heathen!"

"Maria, I—"

"You don't love me at all!" she

Forgetting his woe, Shraga lapsed hypnotically into memory. "Something about a higher authority — about being compelled against his will. He said he was helpless." Shraga turned to the leader. "Then he told me about the lease."

wailed. "You don't care a fig about me. All you wanted was my family's position. You don't care if your estate is being taken over by leeches in long coats, who cause our countrymen to go hungry!"

"They are not leeches, Maria. They are hard-working people."

"You like them!" she declared.

The count stopped scratching. He stared at his arm and nodded slowly. "Yes. You're right. I do."

"Then you are a heathen!"

"Nonsense," tutted the count.

"Isn't love of our fellow man always preached in the Church? That's one thing I remember from all those sermons. I wouldn't dare argue with the priest on that." In disgust he began to scratch.

Maria sadly shook her head.

"Then don't you believe?"

"Believe," murmured the count.

He suddenly realized the emptiness of those words. Did belief entail simple obedience, or did it include independent thought? At this moment he hated himself for his inarticulation. At last he sighed. "I don't know."

"Then prove to me you do," she pleaded. "Get rid of that Jew."

"Get rid of him?"

"Replace him with an honest Pole!"

The count stammered, "That is not possible, Maria. As I said, he has served me faithfully. Why change horses in midstream?" He laughed feebly. "Besides, Shraga is under lease for another five years."

"Cancel it, then!"

"Cancel it?!" the count cried. "But I cannot go back on my word. I am a count, a man of honor. The lease is binding. I would not dare break it."

"You can find a way," she answered. "After all, he is not even a citizen. What legal rights does he have?" She primly shook her curls. "Didn't Father Thomas say they are foreigners? So there!" She smiled in triumph.

Then she sobered. "Can't you stop scratching?"

"No, I . . ." The count looked down at his arm. Near the elbow, alongside a prominent birthmark, an ugly red blotch had begun to form. "It must be an insect bite," he mused. "Certainly not uncommon this time of year."

He looked sadly at Shraga, who was ordering the pickers to unload their harvest. The sight of the Jew,

leaning squarely against a tree and raising the luscious fruit to the sky as if in offering, filled the count with sad irony. Were Shraga born into a different faith, he might very well have been sitting just as elegantly inside the carriage. The count had always detected in him a kind of noble spirit.

REB ELIMELECH

Reb Elimelech's study was sunny with the late spring day, and would have been cheerful were it not for the visitor. Shraga wailed before him, wringing his hands and sobbing his story.

"The lease — rescinded!" he cried. "After the agreement we had made, the count came and declared it null and void!" He clutched his chest. "Rebbe, I am penniless! My entire fortune went into that estate!"

Reb Elimelech, seated behind his desk, stroked the varnished wood in sorrow and pity. "Did the count give a reason?" he finally asked.

"No," answered the chassid. "In fact, I could tell he was uncomfortable about it. He came to my door himself, mumbled the words, and left. He did not even look me in the face."

"Do you recall what he said?" the *tzaddik* pressed.

"Well . . . no," said Shraga.

"Anything specific?"

"I . . . I don't remember."

"You must."

Solemnly Shraga stared at the massive bookcase. "Well . . . something about his wife. He has recently married."

The rebbe leaned forward. "Go on."

Forgetting his woe, Shraga lapsed hypnotically into memory. "Something about a higher authority

— about being compelled against his will. He said he was helpless." Shraga turned to the rabbi. "Then he told me about the lease."

"Go," ordered the rebbe, "You needn't remain there any longer. Move here. Bring your wife and family."

"But Rebbe, we have no money—"

"Do not worry," said the rebbe, smiling. "My Jews will take care of you. You, who have provided for so many— how can we not repay you? I myself shall help. There is a vacant house down the road. You'll stay there and open a tavern."

"A tavern?"

"Yes," replied the rebbe. "Plenty of peasants come this way. G-d will provide."

Reb Elimelech rose, and with a lightness of foot escorted the chassid out the door.

Noticing that the latter was bewildered, the rebbe said, "You must have faith, Shraga. Nothing goes on in this world without a reason. Soon it shall all be revealed."

THE ILLNESS

In the gallery, the physicians formed a mournful circle. They waited while one of them exited through the oaken door and shook his head. From within the closed room came the sound of moaning.

"We are all at a loss," mumbled one of them.

"Have they any idea what caused it?" said another.

"No. Only that the count had complained of an eczema while riding his carriage. That was a fortnight ago," said a scrawny gentleman.

"An allergy?" said the first simply.

The scrawny man coughed. "Perhaps. But he no longer itches. Instead he lies bleeding."

At the sound of hasty footsteps, all heads turned. Father Thomas clambered up the staircase, flanked by altar boys, one of whom clutched a Christian image. The doctors parted in mute respect before the man of the cloth.

The priest rapped sharply at the door, which opened to reveal the countess's tearstreaked face. She kissed the Father's hand and ushered him in. Behind her the Mother Superior approached and greeted him, ignoring the steward, who was huddled and weeping in a corner. The priest slowly advanced.

Count Pototzki lay in bed. His normally pale skin was flushed and pitted with hard red bumps. In some of the sores the flesh had ripped apart like crepe paper, oozing pus and blood.

When the count opened his eyes, and in a haze saw a form in robes raising its hands sacramentally, he sighed. Perhaps it was true, and he was dying. Either that, or his dear wife had ushered in yet another faith healer. After exhausting every conceivable doctor, she had turned to quacks and sorcerers in despair. Now there was no hope.

The count groaned and turned over. At this point he was better off dead, rather than submit to another bloodletting or incantation.

The priest furtively raised the blanket. The count's body was covered with the same rash. The same hard red bumps had uplifted themselves to congregate in a sickening mass, which seeped and stained the sheets.

Quickly the priest dropped the blanket and walked away.

"Can you do nothing?" the countess whispered.

"Alas, dear lady, we must prepare for the worst," answered Father Thomas.

With a howl the countess threw herself on the bed. She was gently pulled away by the governess, who led her out the door, followed by Father Thomas and his retinue.

Only the steward remained. Timidly he approached the bed, as soon as the sound of conversation dwindled.

"Sir," he said, "I know of someone who might cure you."

"Who?" the count managed to ask.

"A great sage . . . a Jew."

"A Jew?"

"His name is Reb Elimelech."

"Reb . . . Elimelech . . ."

Quickly the priest dropped the blanket and walked away.

"Can you do nothing?" the countess whispered.
"Alas, dear lady, we must prepare for the worst," answered Father Thomas.

murmured the count. "The name sounds familiar. How do you know this man?"

"I went to him once for help," answered the steward. "He saved my daughter's life. He has amazing powers."

"Is he a physician?"

"No, sir. But he is a holy man."

"And he is capable of helping someone not of his faith?"

"Sir, he can help anyone. His belief is great."

"Belief," mumbled the count. In a flash he remembered the conversation with his wife prior to his sickness. If this holy man carried an invisible link to the unknown, then he might possess a power far beyond any ridicule. Certainly he was better than a self-righteous man who worshiped a wooden cross.

Over the bumpy road the carriage jostled, throwing the count into new bouts of pain.

"Tell that accursed driver to slow down," he gasped, "or else I'll never get there in one piece."

"Just awhile longer," said his wife. Outside the window the Crimea burst into a rainbow of wildflowers. The sunny landscape, so reminiscent of the Mediterranean, filled her with sudden cheerfulness.

"Just think, Pavel," she sang. "We'll be swimming soon in the Black Sea."

"I'll be swimming soon," said the count. "Every day, in fact. Doctor's orders."

"Who is this man?" she asked. "He is not a doctor I ever heard of."

"He's not a doctor," answered the count.

"What is he, then?"

"A . . . mystic," said the count. "A miracle worker."

"A miracle worker?"

"Someone who has the power to . . . make the heavens thunder."

"Let's just hope he makes you well," retorted the countess. She tossed her head, bouncing back her curls. "How did you find out about him?"

"He was recommended."

"By whom? Father Thomas?"

"No, definitely not." In spite of himself, the count laughed.

Within days Count Pototzki had virtually showered any blessing he could on Reb Elimelech.

The red bumps had disappeared, cleansed away under the waves, along with all the blood and pus.

But when the stranger turned his face, the count froze in shock. The same pale skin . . . the same blond hair and birthmark!

The count dove again and again into the Black Sea, savoring the waters and their magical force. His skin tingled, filled once again with smoothness and natural color.

His wife waited. She too had benefited from the warm climate, and her face was radiant.

At week's end they prepared to leave. While the countess ordered the suitcases packed, the count, glowing with health, stood near an open window. Then he stopped.

The sea, a somber blue, undulated softly, as if calling to

him. Slight froths of white swirled to the surface like mermaids, enticing the count and beckoning him playfully.

"Maria," said the count suddenly, "I must go back to the water."

She spun around. "What?" she exclaimed. "Are you mad? We have no time."

"Maria, just once," pleaded the count. "Once more and I'll feel completely well."

He hurried to the shore, casting off his clothes as he went. No sooner did his feet touch the foam than he threw himself in.

His legs carried him away as the beach receded. The count kicked his legs and rotated his arms, reveling once again in the liquid medicine, while the current, warmed by the relentless sun, shouldered him afloat. Soon the count bobbed and dunked in a sudden undertow.

Gasping, he flipped his head and with growing uneasiness tried to paddle forward. But the water seemed to be holding him back. He called to a man nearby, also treading the waves, who ignored him.

But when the stranger turned his face, the count froze in shock. The same pale skin . . . the same blond hair and birthmark!

"Why, I must be looking in a mirror!" thought the count. He flapped his arms, but they were jelly against the turbulence.

Frantically he called, "Help me, sir! Help me, please."

But the stranger glided ashore, sneering and leaving the count at the mercy of the sea. In horror the count watched the form amble up the sand, while the countess,

(Continued on page 26)

Jerusalem, a magnificent city renowned to the ends of the earth."

While Josephus' description seems to be exaggerated (see the Notes to *The Jewish War*, Penguin Classics Edition), there can be little doubt that he had witnessed a heartbreaking scene of devastation. Still, the rest of the country was not at all as badly treated, and there were many Jews outside of the Land of Israel who suffered no physical discomfort during this time. One inconvenience was a tax imposed by the Romans in place of the tax which had been paid to the Temple treasury. While the Emperor Vespasian imposed the new tax in the third year of his rule, it was made retroactive to the second year, so that the Jews were saddled with an extra year's payment. The tax applied to all Jews living in the Roman Empire.

Vespasian died in the year 79 C.E., and was replaced by his son Titus, the destroyer of the Temple. It seems that the latter's view of the Jews had moderated, and Rabban Gamliel, along with Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer, embarked on a mission to Rome to try and secure some political rights for the Jews of the Land of Israel. However, Titus died before a meeting could take place, and was succeeded by his brother Domitian. The new ruler was no friend of the Jews, and the mission was abandoned.

(Next: *The Sanhedrin: Critical Issues*)

A Greater Force

(Continued from page 8)

followed by her servants, ran to him. The stranger gathered the clothing strewn along the beach, and together they walked away.

"Maria, help!" called the count. Suddenly the saltwater arched its back, hovering over him pensively. And it gave the count a mighty push.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on his back. He felt nothing — only the brine on his lips, and under him the sandy contours within a mound where the big wave had left him. He staggered up the beach, clumps of it clinging to him.

He caught up with one of his servants. "Fool, don't you recognize me?" he called. "I'm your master, the count."

The servant turned and watched the muddy sea creature. He shrugged and walked on. When the count called him again, the servant spun around and sharply said, "You lout! How dare you insult my master?"

He strode forward and gave the wet man a clout. The count slid to the ground, unconscious.

"Who was that, Anton?" asked the countess.

"Some lowlife, madam, who dared to call himself your husband."

The countess let out a peal of laughter. "Poor helpless fool."

THE LAUGHTER

Count Pototzki came to with a groan. He fluttered his eyes and discerned the watching crowd.

"Where . . . where am I?" he asked.

"Near the beach," a muscular

porter answered, bending over him. "And who might you be?"

"I am Count Pototzki."

At the sound of laughter, he swiveled his head. Men, women, and children convulsed in merriment.

"My, my. Doesn't he look regal?" one declared.

"But I *am!*" the count cried, and he rose. The cackling grew louder.

The count stamped his foot. "Quit laughing, you imbeciles!"

In vain. The crowd was in hysterics.

"I think the water got to him!" said a fishwife.

The count trembled. "I *am!* I *am!*" He ran to a butcher. "I came here with the Countess Maria."

"She left, 'Count.' Your carriage went far, far away."

"Go chase after it!" called an urchin. Once again the crowd roared.

In desperation the count circled around, but he beheld a human sea, surrounding and mocking him in its skepticism. At the sudden crash of thunder, the raindrops came dancing down. Morosely the count looked up. Even the heavens shared in the joke.

THE BEGGAR

During the next few weeks the count foraged the garbage bins for rags, which the townspeople had left for him. They began to pity this "Pavel," who continued to insist he was Count Pototzki, in spite of the response. One family tossed a bucket of filth at him, and another let its dog loose on him. After awhile they left him alone and wretched,

considering the poor man demented and better off in the company of beggars.

The count, ignorant of the ways of the street, had no choice but to turn to this very company. He tried to hide his distaste toward these poor souls who, with matted hair and glazed eyes, carried their bowls and hobbled from town to town.

Try as he might, the count could not emulate them. Usually he shied away at an approaching vehicle or philanthropist, and reminded himself that he was once, literally, on the other side of the curb.

The beggars tolerated him. They shared with him the scraps of food, which the count in his growing hunger learned to eat. But each time he raised a particularly moldy bread crust he would moan, "I am an aristocrat. I would never have thought of eating this."

The others spat. Nevertheless, they let him follow the beggars. He trailed along, all the while lamenting his loss of status and plotting some way to get it all back. Worse than the sudden poverty was this feeling of dependency, and of being out of control.

The count couldn't stop wondering: Who was the man who had taken his place? How did he look exactly alike? How did he, at that exact moment, happen to be swimming in the Black Sea, just a few feet away?

The count suppressed the urge to curse the holy man who had brought him there. "It would have been better for me to die in my warm-bed than to wither away, a victim of the elements," he muttered in despair.

A second beggar seized a rock and hurled it.



ON POLISH SOIL

By late summer the motley band had approached a town far from its original meeting place. At the sight of the signs in Polish the count realized that he was not far from his estate.

"I'm home!" he thought.

"Lads, look!" called a beggar. He held up a carcass, green and reeking of decay. "I found it near a cave. We will have a feast tonight!" He turned to the count. "Pavel, perhaps you'll throw it on the bonfire."

The others clapped their approval, but Pavel blanched. "Absolutely not!" he barked. "I am

a count. I do not eat rotten meat!" He turned and marched away.

He stumbled at the brutal thud against his back. The carcass bounced off him and landed on the ground.

"Snob!"

Livid, the beggar shook his fist.

"You and your airs!" he jeered.

"Whining all the time about your finery and precious things."

"Here's another precious thing. Take this!" A second beggar seized a rock and hurled it, missing the count by inches. Soon all of them followed suit.

The count, reeling, staggered away and fled within the grotto. The

tall woods blocked out the sound of hate, and the count slipped deeper and deeper within the leaves and branches. Soon they unfolded, revealing a dusty road, and a tavern.

A LOYAL FRIEND

"You must believe me," gasped the man. "My name is Count Pototzki."

Shraga doubtfully pondered the figure on the floor. Behind him his wife and children eyed the beggar with obvious repugnance.

The count's eyes were tearful and pleading. "You are Shraga Fingerman, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered the chassid in surprise.

"You once leased part of my estate."

"He's fooling you, Shraga," said the wife crossly. "He could have gotten that information from one of the count's employees."

"No, no, I swear I am telling the truth," cried the man. He knelt before the Jew. "I can prove it."

Shraga stared anxiously at the open window. "Please, I have no time for melodramatics," he said, raising his hands. "The countess will be here any minute. She will punish me if I don't have the order of liqueur ready." He sighed. "I'm afraid she is a bit of a shrew."

The count nodded in agreement. "How comes it that you run a tavern?" he asked.

"I lost my lease."

"For five years, wasn't it?"

"Why, yes." Shraga asked carefully, "How did you know?"

"Simple. I was the one who canceled it. My wife, actually." The count added, "Didn't I tell you I was helpless, and under a higher

authority?"

Shraga gripped his temples. In a haze he could see the saintly body of Reb Elimelech, materializing and gently raising his hands, like a beloved teacher.

"Pardon me, Count," he said. "I think there is someone you should meet."

THE ADVICE

Reb Elimelech eyed the figure with far less cynicism than had his chassid. In fact, he smiled when the count was admitted in — as if he had been expecting him.

"I took your advice," cried the count. "I went to the Black Sea and bathed there every day for a week."

"And it cured you?" asked the *tzaddik*.

The count sighed, "Alas, only my person, Rabbi. The rash is gone, but my heart is sore."

He related the strange encounter in the water and the degradation to which he had been reduced.

The count clutched his rags. "Four months I wandered through Europe, Rabbi, dressed like this. I was forced to sleep in ditches, eat food a pig wouldn't touch, and beg for alms. I've had stones and refuse thrown at me." He convulsed. "Rabbi, I don't know why all this had to happen." At last he broke down.

Reb Elimelech observed the weeping figure. "Poverty does not agree with you, then?"

The count looked up. "Of course not!"

"Yet you were willing to bring it on someone else," said the rebbe.

The count stiffened. He stared at the *tzaddik's* eyes, as mysterious as the Black Sea. "I-I don't

understand."

Reb Elimelech pointed to Shraga, who had humbly retreated near a bookcase. "You broke his lease, did you not? You deprived him of his sustenance, and nearly reduced him to a similar condition. A faithful tenant, an asset to your estate — not to mention a man with a wife and children to feed!"

The count cringed, and his face turned as scarlet as the rash. "Forgive me, Rabbi." He turned to his former tenant. "Forgive me, Shraga." His voice dwindled in humiliation. "I too have a wife."

Then he darkened. "And she is sharing my estate with a scoundrel — that . . . that imposter!"

"A man who looks just like you?" asked the rebbe.

"Yes . . . almost," replied the count in astonishment.

"Almost?"

"He bore my features . . . except his facial expression."

"In what way did it differ?"

The count silently contemplated. Finally he grimaced as he spoke. "I can't describe it exactly; it seemed sinister — otherworldly, in fact. A face devoid of any emotion. I was just a few feet away when I called out. And he just looked at me, Rabbi . . . staring and swimming away, as if I were a piece of driftwood. Then he went ashore to my wife."

"Otherworldly is correct, sir. That man does not really exist."

"What?" exclaimed the count.

The *tzaddik* squarely placed his hands on the woodwork, and his face hardened. "Any man incapable of feeling is no longer a man — only a shadow, a demon. G-d created the world with compassion. Without it we cannot exist. Yet did you show any for Shraga's plight? What you

did not only injured him, but yourself."

The count fell on his knees. "Indeed, I am sorry." He turned to the chassid. "Shraga, I shall reinstate your lease. I promise."

Then he turned to the rebbe. "But how? I can't return to the estate dressed like this. And that imposter has taken my place. Even my servant failed to recognize me."

The rebbe smiled. "You needn't worry about the imposter. He will kindly restore you to your rightful place. As to your clothes, I'll have my tailor make up a fine set."

"But how shall I get to see my wife?"

"Don't worry," the rebbe repeated, and he pointed to a carriage, ambling up the road and stopping before the tavern. "Shraga, I do believe you have some business to attend to?"

Shraga gasped in remembrance, and fled.

A FIGURE IN SILK

Two days later the carriage returned. Quickly the countess alighted.

"Just one moment!" she called to someone seated by the opposite window. The latter removed his handkerchief and waved. She turned, and with brisk movements entered the tavern.

A figure dressed in identical silk and hiding near the side of the road ran to the carriage door and leaped inside, to an empty seat. When the countess reappeared, he calmly withdrew an identical handkerchief and blew his nose.

She sat down, clutching a bottle. "How annoying. Because of that Jew I had to make a special trip."

"Yes, I suppose that was rather negligent of him."

The carriage took off. As it bumped up and down, the countess watched while the tavern shrank away.

"He showed complete disrespect," she said crossly. "My holiday . . . nearly ruined because of him. Why, he had completely forgotten about my order."

"I suppose he had more pressing matters," replied the count, yawning.

"Yes. More mischief, perhaps, against us?"

The road opened onto the town proper, and they observed a clique of chassidim leaving the synagogue. At the sight of Reb Elimelech, surrounded by a reverential sea of black, the countess sniffed.

"How vulgar," she exclaimed. "Why, Father Thomas was correct. They certainly are a menace."

"He is apt to feel threatened," remarked the count.

"He is positively prophetic!" declared the countess. "Why, his last sermon was brilliant . . . don't you agree?"

"Yes, yes, of course." Then he asked, "What did he say?"

"You know," answered the countess in amazement. "That the Jews will undermine our economy. He pointed to the widespread practice of leasing them property, and how it should be totally abolished. No doubt he was inspired by you and me."

"Yes, weren't we noble?"

"He is pushing the rest to not only refrain from any more dealings, but to rescind *all* the leases." The countess smugly crossed her arms. "I myself shall send letters, exhorting my friends."

"No, you shall not, my dear!"

The countess stared.

The count threw down his handkerchief. "First of all, I want to make one thing clear. I will not tolerate this groundless bigotry. I see no reason why any people, and especially one upon whose kindness we have endlessly relied, should be treated in such a shameful manner."

"But Pavel—"

"Secondly, their contribution to my own estate has been invaluable. On no account shall it be disrupted."

"But Pavel—"

"Thirdly, I not only intend to renew Shraga Finger's lease, but I shall extend it for five years beyond the time upon which we originally agreed. Moreover, I shall freely continue to deal with all his brethren, and if necessary grant them the same kind of business. I cannot think of worthier recipients."

"But Pavel—"

"And last of all . . . madam. I do believe that I am the master of the home, and that my decisions are final. I will not have you interfering with what does not concern you. Is that understood?"

Nodding, the countess seized his handkerchief and dabbed away the tears. As the carriage stopped momentarily, she whimpered, "You're not the man I thought I knew, Pavel."

"That is correct," said the count. "Let's just say . . . you married a demon."

He turned to the window, and thought he saw the rebbe smiling.

Was it a coincidence that in all of Poland the region of Count Pototzki — and Reb Elimelech — became known as the one most hospitable toward the Jews? It all depends, of course, on your point of view.