

Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories Study Guide

**Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories by
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Tevye Strikes It Rich, pp. 1-20

Tevye Strikes It Rich, pp. 1-20 Summary

Years ago, Tevye is impoverished. One night, Tevye's horse suddenly runs and then stops and Tevye sees two ghost-like figures. Soon Tevye finds out that it is only two women asking for the way back to Boiberik. They cannot walk any more and get Tevye to drive them back in his horse-drawn cart. After whipping the horse, Tevye wonders if he will make some money for his kindness or if he is being tricked. They arrive at a green dacha and the people there are happy to see the two women who have been missing all day. Wonderful food is set on the table to celebrate. After hearing about Tevye's poor family, the head of the household has Tevye's wagon loaded up with food. Tevye is given a chance to ask for payment but is laughed at when he asks for 3 rubles. Instead Tevye leaves with a handful of cash and a promise to pick up a milk cow the next day. Tevye's horse is missing but turns up eating oats in the barn.

Tevye returns home late with gifts and Golde is stunned when Tevye counts out the 37 rubles he has earned. The two of them hatch countless schemes to invest the money and end up deciding to buy an additional milk cow to the one that the rich woman Tevye helped is giving him. Tevye plans to sell dairy goods to the rich Jews of Yehupetz, especially in the summer at their dachas in Boiberik.

Tevye Strikes It Rich, pp. 1-20 Analysis

Tevye tells the story of how he became fairly well off, almost as if it is the story of a miracle. Tevye becomes wealthy one summer evening about 10 years ago, when he is hauling logs in desperate poverty. At that time, Tevye's family is facing near starvation. His sudden change in fortune symbolizes God's generosity. Tevye is riding his cart and horse and is exhausted. Tevye is coming back home one night from Boiberik, which is the home of summer dachas of the wealthy. He says his evening prayers with the fanatical intensity of the desperate, when suddenly his horse pulls him into the woods. The two creatures that Tevye meets in the woods at first seem to him to be ghosts or goblins. When he realizes that they are two women, his panic eases and Tevye talks to the women who can barely walk and ends up taking them back to their dacha. Still, Tevye has some doubts about the women because they are in a sense too good to be real. Nearing Boiberik, he finds out that the women live at a green dacha of a rich Jew.

At the green dacha, Tevye does not leave but hides in the corner. He is in a situation that he is not familiar with because there is a big separation between the poor and rich, even when both are Jewish. Finally, the master of the house calls out to Tevye and has Tevye drink some brandy. Tevye expects to get 2 or 3 rubles as a reward and is astounded when fistfuls of money are thrown to him, plus the promise of a cow in the morning. Tevye returns home to his complaining wife Goldie and brings in the packages of food, waking up his daughters to eat. Golde fears that Tevye committed some sort of



crime to get so much money at once but is reassured that he earned the money legitimately in a kosher manner. Indeed, many of the following stories center on whether a deed is done in a proper or kosher manner or not. Also, Golde says that she had a dream about grandma Tsaytl bringing her a big container of milk. Golde's belief in dreams is important in other episodes of the Tevye the Dairyman series.



Tevye Blows a Small Fortune, pp. 20-35

Tevye Blows a Small Fortune, pp. 20-35 Summary

People start to pay attention to Tevye when they see he is making money as a dairyman. Tevye goes to sell his goods in Yehupetz, his winter season market. He meets a cousin named Menachem Mendl, while looking at goods in the downtown shop windows. They go back to Tevye's house and Menachem gets a fine dairy meal, noting the wealth of his host. Menachem then spends half the night telling Tevye stories on how it is possible to get rich quick by investing in stock, and other financial investments. Menachem sleeps over and the next day suggests that Tevye invest his savings with him. Tevye is intoxicated by wild dreams of his money multiplying over and over again.

For weeks Tevye hears nothing from Menachem. Tevye goes into Yehupetz a few weeks later to sell his goods. He fantasizes that Menachem will be rich and at first refuse to see Tevye. Then, Tevye will get a pile of gold coins but just then Tevye awakens as his cart overturns. He recovers and goes into Yehupetz asking for Menachem. After a search, he is told to go to an area where stock speculators and currency traders gather to make deals. There's a lot of yelling and screaming there and Tevye looks in the surrounding area. There Tevye runs into Menachem who looks terrible. Without much talk, Tevye realizes that all his investment is gone. Tevye screams and protests but then realizes he is the victim of his own greed.

Tevye Blows a Small Fortune, pp. 20-35 Analysis

Tevye reflects on the stupidity that makes him lose all his savings. The craft of the story is in the telling, since as in many of the author's stories, the result is told in the beginning. The reader is thus made to reflect on how Tevye is fooled into parting with his savings. At first, Tevye is inclined to listen to Menachem because he is a relative. The two men speak of their relatives and Menachem tells Tevye that he lives in Yehupetz but has no residence permit. A Jew having no residence permit in Yehupetz is a common problem and foreshadows some of the later Railroad stories of the author.

Even Golde cannot think straight about Menachem, only remembering his kind relatives. Tevye agrees to become Menachem's partner and gives him 100 rubles to invest. The big joke is that after Menachem leaves, Tevye realizes that he does not know what Menachem does for a living. When Tevye arrives at the scene of the outdoor stock exchange, he sees that he put his money in a wild business before finding out that he lost it all. Tevye yells and screams but then realizes that the loss is his own fault. He knows that he made a mistake in trying to get easy money. Tevye decides that God has fated him to be a dairyman, though even in that business there are sometimes reverses. It is simply not Tevye's fate to be a rich man.



Today's Children, pp. 35-53, Hodl, pp. 53-69

Today's Children, pp. 35-53, Hodl, pp. 53-69 Summary

In Today's Children, Tevye goes to see Layzar Wolf and Tevye thinks that Layzar wants to buy his brown cow, when Layzar really wants to marry Tevye's daughter. Tevye is a bit put off that Layzar is ready to outright buy Tsaytl. After drinking lots of brandy and arguing, Tevye goes home and tells Golde about the upcoming marriage. Golde is at first angry because Tevye is stinking drunk, but soon becomes excited. The next day, Tevye is out on business and his friends all know about the engagement offer of Layzar Wolf and congratulate Tevye. On the way back, his cart overturns and he considers this a bad omen. Not long after, Tevye runs into his daughter Tsaytl who is crying. He has the rude realization that Tsaytl hates the idea of marrying Layzar Wolf. Tevye is too compassionate to force his daughter to marry Layzar. That evening, Motl Komzoyl, a young tailor confesses that he and Tsaytl have been planning to get married for over a year. Tevye is stunned that these young people have made their own marriage arrangement.

That night, Tevye pretends to wake up in the middle of the night, and screams. He tells Golde that he had a dream of her grandmother Tsaytl, who insists that Tsaytl is going to marry the tailor Motl Komzoyl. Tevye protests in the dream that Tsaytl is supposed to marry Layzar Wolf. Then the dead Mrs. Wolf, Frume Soreh, shows up and warns that Tsaytl cannot take over her house and jewelry. Frume Soreh threatens to strangle Tsaytl and also begins to strangle Tevye as he wakes up. After hearing this, Golde decides that Tsaytl must marry Motl.

In Hodl, Tevye offers a student named Pertchik a ride in Tevye's cart, and Pertchik is trying to pass his university entrance exams. Pertchik immediately speaks out his resentment of the rich Yehupetz Jews. Still Tevye likes Pertchik's ability to argue and has him come over for supper. Pertchik is small and black-haired and Tevye's family gives him the nickname of Peppercorn. Peppercorn makes a living by giving lessons and soon is giving lessons to Tevye's daughters, in exchange for a hot meal. Tevye notices that from time to time Peppercorn disappears. When Peppercorn comes back he does not tell what he has been doing. Peppercorn hates the rich and worships the working class, arguing with Tevye about this. Peppercorn also praises the sharp mind of Tevye's daughter Hodl. One day in Boiberik, Tevye is approached by Efrayim the Matchmaker, who claims he has a great match for Hodl. The man described is a wealthy youngish bachelor, but Efrayim is waiting until Hodl shows up in Boiberik. Just that evening on the way home, Tevye sees Peppercorn and Hodl walking closely together and talking. They announce their plan to marry and also that Peppercorn is after that being forced to go far away.



Golde is stunned that Tevye allows this quick marriage to happen. Soon Tevye has to go to the railroad station with Hodl to see off Peppercorn. After a few weeks, Hodl gets a message from a long haired man, and tells Tevye that Peppercorn is in jail. Months later, Hodl is suddenly more cheerful. She tells Tevye that she is going to Siberia to live with Peppercorn when he is released. Peppercorn will still have to stay in exile in Siberia. Tevye and his daughter stay up all night on the Jewish holiday of Hoshanah Rabbah, when the fate of each person is said to be sealed by God. Hodl insists that Peppercorn committed no crime and was only trying to help people through political action. Tevye knows that he is not likely to ever see Hodl again.

Today's Children, pp. 35-53, Hodl, pp. 53-69 Analysis

Today's Children- After losing his savings, Tevye is still in the dairy business. Layzar is a wealthy widower and when he sees Tevye at his house, he refers to the deal he wants. This sets the scene for a comedy routine where Tevye thinks Layzar wants his brown cow, when Layzar really wants Tsaytl. Of course, at first Tevye is all for the marriage proposal, while having some resentments from past offense. Golde is also wildly enthusiastic but, she is a bit nervous about the match, thinking about Layzar's dead wife Frume Soreh. Then Golde thinks of all the things that Layzar Wolf can buy Tsaytl, and gets happy and excited. The next day, Tevye buys drinks and celebrates. At night, Tevye is singing and dancing as his horse rides ahead, until suddenly his cart overturns. This omen symbolizes man's attempt to violate God's will, and the sudden reverses that such action causes. This story has some suspense, because the result is not told in the beginning.

Tevye meets Tsaytl in the woods, and soon understands that he would destroy his daughter if he forces her to marry Layzar. Tevye lets out his disappointment in a prayer to God, which upsets Tsaytl more, since she sees that Tevye is clearly unhappy. Finally, Tevye decides that the match between Layzar Wolf and Tsaytl was not fated to be. Tevye reflects on how every being including animals have to work for a living. There is no easy way out for him by having his daughter Tsaytl marry a rich man. At the same time, Tevye likes to look at the ordering of God's creation, and tries his best to figure out his proper place in the world. Soon, Motl Komzoyl approaches Tevye at home, and Tevye finds out why Tsaytl is refusing Layzar Wolf. Motl takes some time to explain that he and Tsaytl have agreed to marry, since such an agreement between a young man and young woman is totally against the social conventions of the time. Tevye accepts the new engagement of Motl and Tsaytl, but wonders how such a thing could happen and he has to get Golde to agree to this. Already, there has been foreknowledge that Golde thinks it is important to interpret dreams as messages from God. This gives Tevye the opportunity to make up a dream where grandma Tsaytl says that Tsaytl must marry Motl and that Layzar's dead wife will exact revenge. Motl and Tsaytl are officially engaged and soon married.

Hodl- Hodl is described as good-looking as Queen Esther and smart too. Hodl is trying to become educated like many young Jewish students. This is the first story that brings up the conflicts around young Jews becoming revolutionaries. They are never called



Communists, but referred to as advocates of the working class by the author. There is a conflict between the new ways of thinking of the revolutionaries and the traditions of Tevye. Tevye still has to marry off his other daughters and the next eldest one is Hodl. At the time, many young Jews try desperately to get into Russian Universities despite poverty and Jewish quotas. Peppercorn is one of these young students, who insist on studying though they are totally impoverished. Peppercorn is a pleasant young man and Tevye likes him until Peppercorn decides to marry Hodl.

Tevye finds Peppercorn and Hodl walking together in the woods. They are surprised to see Tevye, but soon Hodl announces that she and Peppercorn are engaged to be married. To make this even more of a shocker, Peppercorn also tells Tevye that they have to be married immediately, because he is soon leaving town. Another dimension is that Peppercorn states that he and Hodl are as good as married already. This implies that the two young people are already having sexual relations. Finally, Peppercorn is about to be sentenced to prison for his political activity.

When Peppercorn goes to the station, there is also another young revolutionary there, a man with long hair. With what sort of criminals is Peppercorn involved, Tevye wonders. It takes a long time for Tevye to admit that Peppercorn has committed no crime, but is a political prisoner. The separation between Hodl and Tevye is heartbreaking, but common in the times. Young Jews are going to America, or getting sentenced to exile in Siberia, while their parents are often left behind. Later, the parents are also forced from their villages and have to go to cities or flee to America or other lands.



Chava, pp. 69-82, Shprintze, pp. 82-97

Chava, pp. 69-82, Shprintze, pp. 82-97 Summary

In Chava, Tevye hopes that nothing worse happens to his next daughter, but it does. Tevye becomes upset when one day he sees the young tall non-Jew Chvedka talking with his daughter Chava by Tevye's house. Chava explains that Chvedka is like the Russian novelist Gorky, a self-educated man. Tevye is upset but is distracted from finding out what is going on by his work. One evening, as Tevye returns home he is stopped by the town priest. The priest tells Tevye that it is about the future of Tevye's daughter Chava, who is now under the priest's custody. Chava has decided to marry Chvedka the so-called Goy. In the morning, Tevye goes to the house of the priest. Tevye insists that the priest skip his usual justifications and tell Tevye if he can get his daughter back. The priest refuses to let Tevye see his daughter. Tevye goes home and tells his wife that nothing can be done, and it is time to begin the seven days of mourning for their lost daughter. After completing his days of mourning, Tevye states that to him his daughter Chava is dead. Then one evening, his horse is rambling in the grass on the way back home, and Chava appears in the woods. She steps in front of Tevye's horse and grabs the reins, begging that Tevye listen to her. Tevye refuses and runs away but after regrets that he did not talk to Chava.

In Shprintze, Tevye gets a new customer in Boiberik, who is a fairly young widow, and has a son in his early 20s, named Ahronchik. This story is introduced as a tragedy. When introduced to Tevye, Ahronchik laughs at Tevye's joke about the Constitution riots, and they become friends. Ahronchik decides he wants to visit Tevye, so Tevye invites Ahronchik and his friends to come over for the holiday of Shavuos. Ahronchik admires Tevye's daughter Shprintze and everyone is laughing. Tevye is busy, but one day he sees that Ahronchik and his fine horse are at his house. Ahronchik has Tevye go for a walk with him, and says that he intends to marry Shprintze. Tevye is against the idea because he knows that Ahronchik is a foolish young man, and that his mother, the widow will probably disapprove.

Ahronchik and his mother disappear, and Tevye is summoned to their dacha and meets the widow's brother. The brother proposes that he give Tevye some money for breach of contract. The brother implies that Tevye set up Ahronchik to fall in love with Shprintze, in order to get money, since Tevye should have known that the family would never accept the marriage. Tevye is flabbergasted and abruptly leaves the brother and goes off on his horse. When Tevye gets back, Shprintze is very quiet, actually too quiet. Shprintze is heartbroken, though she refuses to complain. Some weeks after there is an outcry, and Tevye hears that Shprintze has drowned herself in the nearby river.



Chava, pp. 69-82, Shprintze, pp. 82-97 Analysis

In Chava, Tevye reflects on his daughters, where Tsaytl married a poor but honest tailor and Hodl disappears into Siberia with her revolutionary man. Tevye sees that his attempt to maintain a traditional way of life is being defeated. Then he admits that a more horrible tragedy is about to happen to Chava, which is to marry a Non-Jew (a Goy). Tevye thinks of his beautiful daughters in a town of Russian peasants like Chvedka the Scribe, and the village priest. When Tevye sees Chava with Chvedka, he is upset because this is not normal. Chava excuses her friendship with Chvedka, and she goes on to bemoan the fact that Jews are separated from Christians. Tevye is stopped from a thorough questioning of Chava when his wife Golde calls him inside to eat. He is too busy to intervene on a situation that he knows has terrible implications for him.

Next it is announced that Chava is under the protection of the priest because she is going to become a Christian and marry Chvedka. It is never explicitly stated that Chava is converting, but it is implied. At home, Golde and Tevye's younger daughters are crying. Tevye starts to beat his horse, but realizes that it is insane to beat a brute beast. Golde knows to look for Chava at the priest's because she saw what was happening, but Tevye was too busy to notice the developing relationship between Chava and Chvedka. While the priest describes this as a wonderful new life for Chava, for Tevye this is a total disaster. Tevye refuses to speak any further when he finds out that he cannot see Chava, and goes home to mourn the death of Chava.

Months later, Tevye runs into Chava in the woods, but refuses to speak to her, since he had already declared her dead. He whips his horse till it goes on its way. Tevye wonders why there has to be this giant separation between Jews and Non-Jews. One time, Tevye even tries to take the train to visit Chava and her husband, but stops at the last minute. Tevye wonders if he has been unnaturally cruel. He could have stayed and at least listen to Chava.

In Shprintze, there are riots and pogroms in Russia against the Jews, as well as unrest around the new constitution. A new constitution has just been agreed to in Russia, which causes nasty reactions from anti-constitutional forces, and includes pogroms against Jews. Many rich Jews take refuge in the summer dacha colony of Boiberik, and Tevye has plenty of business. A customer who is a widow complains that her son Ahronchik only wants to go fishing and ride horses. It is interesting that Ahronchik is Jewish, and the problem that arises between him a Shprintze is caused by the difference between rich and poor Jews.

Ahronchik comes over to Tevye's house, and Golde is impressed by the rich young man and his friends, and prepares lots of blintzes. The guests come riding on horses, though this is prohibited on the holiday to religious Jews, so it is obvious that Ahronchik is not a traditional practicing Jew. Nevertheless, Ahronchik and his friends sit down at a table outside and eat their fill of blintzes. Ahronchik soon falls in love with Shprintze and decides to marry her, but he is too immature to stick to his decision when confronted by



his family on their class differences. When Tevye talks to Shprintze, she refers to Ahronchik as Arnold. Ahronchik is using his secular Russian name in his conversations with Shprintze, not his Yiddish name of Ahronchik. This helps explain why other Jews join the revolutionary political forces.

Ahronchik is immature and unable to defy his family. Soon after, Ahronchik stops coming to Tevye's house. Ahronchik and his mother go back to their hometown, and Tevye is told by the widow's brother that the widow and her son Ahronchik will not come back. The widow's brother proposes that he give Tevye some money to hush up the affair of the romance between Ahronchik and Shprintze. Shprintze is silent about the affair, but is obviously heartbroken when Ahronchik leaves town. This story is a counterpole to the previous story on how young Jews like Peppercorn become revolutionaries for the working-class and against the rich. The rich Jewish family of Ahronchik is very cruel, and their harsh decision to break up Ahronchik and Shprintze results in Shprintze committing suicide by drowning.



Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel, pp. 97-116, Lekh-Lekho, pp. 116-131

Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel, pp. 97-116, Lekh-Lekho, pp. 116-131 Summary

In *Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel*, Tevye's wife Golde has died, and his daughter Beilke is taking care of him. Tevye runs into Efrayim the Matchmaker in Boiberik, and Efrayim offers a rich contractor named Podhotzur as a match for Tevye's daughter Beilke. Beilke is an obedient daughter and agrees to marry the older man Podhotzur, though she really does not like him. The couple marries and goes on their honeymoon, but around Hanukah time, Tevye is summoned to visit the Podhotzur home in Yehupetz. Tevye thinks he will get a good job from Podhotzur, but barely gets into the door of the lavish mansion. There Podhotzur suggests that he leave for America, and Tevye agrees to go to Palestine. Tevye then gets to talk to Beilke alone. She says that Podhotzur is not a bad man, but he tells lies about his humble origins. That is why Podhotzur wants Tevye to leave the country. So Tevye ends up on the train to the port of Odessa, enroute to Palestine. Just then, Tevye meets Efrayim the Matchmaker. Efrayim complains he did not get paid enough for the match of Podhotzur and Beilke, but Tevye grumbles and ends up getting a bit of snuff tobacco from Efrayim.

In *Lekh-Lekho*, Tevye meets Sholem Aleichem on the train because he is still in Russia and never went to the Land of Israel. Instead, Tevye goes to help his daughter Tsaytl, after Tsaytl's husband Motl Komzoyl dies, probably of tuberculosis. Tevye by this time has sold his business, and moves in with Tsaytl and help her with her children. In the meantime, Podhotzur, the husband of Beilke has gone broke and the couple is forced to flee to America. There they both work in sweatshops. Tevye thinks that even Tsaytl and Hodl did better than Beilke in their husbands.

Tevye's Christian neighbors threaten to make a pogrom against him, but ask for his advice. They realize that it is foolish to attack Tevye, and instead everyone drinks vodka. Then one day an officer stops by Tevye's house and announces that all the Jews are being expelled from the villages in the area. Tevye argues that his ancestors have lived in the area for generations, but it does no good, and Tevye and his daughter Tsaytl are forced to start packing. With only 3 days time to make preparations, Tevye sells his house to Ivan Papparilo. As Tevye and Tsaytl prepare to leave the village, Chava shows up and Tevye is vague about whether he is able to reconcile with her. Tevye remarks that it is still great to be a Jew and to know the holy books. He only wishes he did not have to wander all over the world until the Messiah comes.



Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel, pp. 97-116, Lekh-Lekho, pp. 116-131 Analysis

In *Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel*, Tevye sees Sholem Aleichem on the train and Tevye is dressed up because he is traveling to the Land of Israel. Since Tevye has last seen Sholem Aleichem, Tevye's wife Golde has died. She had been broken-hearted because most of her daughters had grown up. After Golde's death, Tevye continues to work at dairy, and the house is taken care of by his youngest daughter Beilke. Tevye complains that Beilke sold herself by agreeing to marry Podhotzur, the man offered by the matchmaker. However, the traditional Tevye blocks out the fact that he first agreed to the match of Podhotzur and Beilke, and that he expects to profit from it.

When Tevye finally visits Beilke at her new mansion and talks to her, Beilke says that now is the time of self-interest, unlike the revolutionary days of her sister Hodl. Beilke does not regret marrying Podhotzur, since she wanted to marry a rich man and help Tevye her father. The joke is that Podhotzur now rejects Tevye, and gives Tevye money to leave the country. Tevye goes home to his village and sells all his worldly goods, including his old faithful horse. Tevye does not know if he will arrive to the Land of Israel safely but he is ready to take the ship there.

In *Lekh-Lekho*, In the days of riots over the Constitution, Tevye's neighbors come to his house and say that they must stage a pogrom. Tevye or Tevel is on good terms with all his Christian neighbors but they feel under pressure to have a pogrom in their town, like what is going on elsewhere. There is much hysteria against Jews, who are widely blamed for the revolutionary activity going on in Russia. Tevye manages to convince his neighbors that it would be a shame for them to destroy Tevye's house, and they decide to do the minimum that they can get away with and preserve their reputation. At this time, the infamous trial of Mendel Beilis is going on and anti-Semitic agitation is at its height.

Tevye thinks he has escaped hardship but then he is expelled from his village. Such expulsions cause Jews to immigrate en masse to America. After packing, the house is bare and Tsaytl is crying, but Tevye does not know why. Tevye tries to comfort her, but then Tsaytl explains that Chava, the daughter who married a Christian, wants to go with them. Tevye protests that this is impossible because Chava has been declared dead by him. Then out comes Chava to plea to be reconciled with her papa. The author does not make clear whether or not Tevye rejects her or accepts her. There is a certain amount of ambiguity over whether Tevye is reconciled to Chava. In fact, whether Tevye succeeds in going to America, or finding a new home is never clearly stated, and is left to the reader's imagination.



To the Reader, pp. 135-136, Competitors, pp. 136-143 , The Happiest Man in Kodny, pp. 143-152

To the Reader, pp. 135-136, Competitors, pp. 136-143 , The Happiest Man in Kodny, pp. 143-152 Summary

In *To the Reader*, the narrator is a commercial traveler who spends lots of time riding trains. He decides to take notes on the people he meets and things that happen to him.

In *Competitors*, two impoverished people, a man and a woman, compete to sell oranges, rolls and so on to passengers on a train. They always sell in the same car and charge the same prices. They beg passengers to buy from them, and not from their competitor. Then one day a mob goes into the train with the two competitors and Russian officials overturn their baskets. A young man and an older one argue over what Jews do to make a living. Then, the woman who was selling merchandise shows up and weeps on her basket. The older man goes to make a collection of donations, while the young man refuses to give. When the lady who was selling is offered the money, she begins to curse her competitor. She says she has 5 children, and her competitor ruined her business. He was a tailor and she was selling on trains doing well, and then the competitor began to sell to. It turns out that her competitor is her second husband.

In *The Happiest Man in All Kodny*, the man from Kodny is traveling with a professor to his native village. The man from Kodny has a sick son who has a constant fever. He hopes to get the boy treated at the same time that a professor comes to treat Borodenko's daughter. In Kodny there is a big manor estate that is owned by rich Jews, who have stopped obeying the Jewish dietary laws and so on, but are otherwise quite nice. The man from Kodny's name is Alter, and his son reads too many books. Alter tries to get the professor treat his son as well as Borodenko's daughter, but at first he gets the door slammed in his face. When the professor comes out of the house, Alter in desperation falls at the feet of the horses of the cart, and gets the professor's attention. So now, when the professor is returning on the train to Kodny, he leaves with Alter in a horse-cart to see Alter's son.

To the Reader, pp. 135-136, Competitors, pp. 136-143 , The Happiest Man in Kodny, pp. 143-152 Analysis

In *Competitors*, the story is one big joke about a man and a woman, who from the beginning are quite tied to each other in a vague fashion. They each sell the same goods at the same price, and always go to sell in the same train car. They yell and beg for sales, until they are totally obnoxious and are attacked by the train security people



that they have bribed. The subject that the train passengers then discuss is the ridiculous ways that Jews make a living. The two competitors have extreme resentment against each other, though the reader only hears the side of the woman. The woman keeps cursing the man who is her competitor, but it soon becomes obvious that it is her husband.

In *The Happiest Man in All Kodny*, the narrator is on a train when he sees a man smiling. The man is eager to talk and he is going to Kodny, which is at a nearby station plus a two hour cart ride. The man from Kodny is riding with a professor and their destination is the house of a rich man named Borodenko. The man is smiling because he now at least has some help of having his only son treated. The man from Kodny is in desperate poverty, but somehow must make an impression to get this professor treating a rich patient to also treat his son. It is a story of the desperation of the poor, and the man's inventiveness in getting attention and help. Somehow, the man is able to surmount class barriers and now he feels that his son has a chance, and that is why he is happy.



Baranovich Station, pp. 152-163, Eighteen from Pereshchepena, pp. 163- 166

Baranovich Station, pp. 152-163, Eighteen from Pereshchepena, pp. 163-166 Summary

In Baranovich Station, the Jews in the train car demand to hear a story about about a man named Kivke, which dates back many years. A Jew named Kivke gets into a big argument with a bunch of Russians in a tavern over who has the best religion. As punishment, Kivke is scheduled to be beaten by running the gauntlet. Reb Nissl arranges to have Kivke be declared dead and smuggled out of town. In six months, Kivke demands money or else he says he will have to kill himself, or return to Kaminka. A decent sum is sent to Kivke, and he is quiet for six months or a year. Next, there is a request for 200 rubles, because Kivke says that he is getting married and needs a dowry.

There is peace and quiet for a while, but then another letter from Kivke demands 200 rubles more, claiming to have been cheated by his new father-in-law. Next Kivke demands 400 rubles to go into business. This time the local Jews do not want to give the money. Reb Nissl has to give the money himself and writes a very nasty letter denouncing the parasite Kivke. The quiet does not last more than a year, and then Kivke demands money to go into business himself, and start a new store, this time asking for the sum of 1000 rubles. At this point the train arrives in Baranovich station and the storyteller has to leave. The train travelers never get to hear the end of the story, much to their dismay.

In Eighteen from Pereshchepena, Jews on a train are talking about the huge sums a man spent to get his sons into a Russian high school. Each town has tiny quotas for Jewish secondary school students. A man interrupts saying that they took 18 Jews from his town of Lower Pereshchepena. The other Jews cannot believe that the man's son was taken along with the others. It is so many Jews from one small town. Then the travelers are brought down to earth when the man says that the Jews in his town were drafted into the army, not sent to school. After this the travelers become quiet.

Baranovich Station, pp. 152-163, Eighteen from Pereshchepena, pp. 163-166 Analysis

In Baranovich Station, Jews are sitting in a train car and talking about the pogroms and about a police informer named Azef. At this point, a man from Kaminka refers to a case of a police informer even more infamous an Azef. For a persecuted minority group, a



police informer within their own ethnic group is one of the most dreaded things. The man named Kivke starts as an arrogant man who is sentenced to run the gauntlet, which is to be beaten while naked by a row of soldiers. The Jews of Kaminka are upset not because they think that Kivke will be killed, but they consider such a public beating to be a disgrace to the entire community. The case is brought before Reb Nissl Shapiro to ask what to do. Reb Nissl arranges with the Russian authorities to pretend that Kivke has died. Then Kivke is smuggled out of prison in a stagecoach which is made to look like it is transporting a corpse, and is taken to the Austrian border. Kivke makes it to Brody in Austria, and a great party is had in Kaminka by the Jews, who invite the jail keepers to celebrate as well. The whole story is a farce because so many people in the town know the secret of the fake death of Kivke that it is hardly a secret.

Kivke sends a letter to Reb Nissl that he is having trouble making a living with the Germans where he is. In reality, it is the beginning of a long stream of blackmail threats for money. This letter is ignored but then a more vehement and threatening letter is sent by Kivke and Reb Nissl sees no other recourse but to raise the funds and send them to Kivke. This pattern of blackmail could go on indefinitely, until Reb Nissl calls Kivke's bluff but then the storyteller leaves the train. Stories on the train often end in a frustrating manner as the teller suddenly has to get off at his stop.



The Man From Buenos Aires, pp. 166-177, Elul, pp. 177-183

The Man From Buenos Aires, pp. 166-177, Elul, pp. 177-183 Summary

In *The Man from Buenos Aires*, a rich man from Buenos Aires tells his life's story. He is beaten by his step-father, and runs away from him at a young age. In the town of Mitava, the man gets a job leading around a blind cantor who begs from door to door. Then he emigrates to Buenos Aires in Argentina. There he is sent to the countryside to handle livestock, but soon gets back to Buenos Aires. The man does odd jobs for low wages, until he becomes a sort of middle man and starts making money. The man tells of having spies to watch his partners and bribing the police. Then the man again takes the narrator out at a rest stop to sample a buffet. The narrator begins to think that the man's story is pure hot air. The man gives large amounts to charities, and is now returning to his hometown of Soshmakin, to give charity and also to get a wife. He wants a hometown girl, not an exotic beauty. The man talks about how he will educate his children. Just then, the man arrives at his stop. The narrator asks the man what exactly he does. The man only cryptically replies that he is not selling Chanukah candles.

In *Elul*, a man, a father tells of traveling with his wife to visit the grave of their only daughter, Etke who committed suicide. The daughter did not get involve in the political unrest of the day. The father finds out that Etkka, the cantor's daughter and a wormish boy named Navaredok are reading the book, *Sanine*, together. The father finds out that it is a strange story of a young man, *Sanine* and some young women and men. *Sanine* is a stud and has several love affairs, until he is murdered by an officer who is the lover of one of *Sanine*'s girlfriends. Then, some of the other people involved kill themselves. In real life soon after, there is peasant unrest in the town and the Russian military comes to calm things down. The cantor's daughter, *Chaika* has a love affair with an officer, who leaves her. *Chaika* commits suicide, like a character in the *Sanine* book. Then the father's daughter, *Etkka* also commits suicide, after writing a suicide note in Yiddish to her parents.

The Man From Buenos Aires, pp. 166-177, Elul, pp. 177-183 Analysis

In *The Man from Buenos Aires*, the narrator becomes friendly with a fellow traveler, and this man takes the narrator off the train at a rest stop, and buys him food and drink. It is clear that this man is a traveler is a rich man who readily shows his thick billfold, and tells his story. The rich man says that he travels in third class because he enjoys the conversation there. The rich man is a highly inflated spoof of the phenomena of the man



who lives on air, or nothing at all, but somehow has money. The question is, is the man brilliant, or a total charlatan? Someone like the man from Buenos Aires could be rich and happy, but perhaps he does nothing and is spending his last cent to see his hometown. The narrator wonders what business the man could be involved in. The now rich man tells of becoming the boss over his partners and establishing operations in cities all over the world, but the question still remains, doing what? This question is never answered.

In Elul, people are on a train going to, and coming back from the grave sites of their loved ones. It is the month of Elul, a Jewish month in the summertime that is a month of mourning. The girl called Etká was healthy but committed suicide, and the father still wonders why it happened. He had done everything possible to keep her out of revolutionary politics, and succeeds in this respect.

The father has been checking the books that his daughter reads and sees that she read nothing involving the reds. Etká graduates high school, and the father thinks of getting her married. The father's problem is that he has little real knowledge of the trends among youth, and he is hit totally off guard by the obsession of his daughter, her friend and a boy, concerning the novel called Sanine. The other problem is that the young Jewish girls are totally sheltered. When the cantor's daughter has an affair with a Russian officer, this cannot be passed off as an indiscretion. Instead, it is kept as a dirty secret and later as a reason to commit suicide. Etká also commits suicide, not because she had a lover, but purely to do it together with the cantor's daughter.



The Slowpoke Express, pp. 184-186, The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah, pp. 186-194

The Slowpoke Express, pp. 184-186, The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah, pp. 186-194 Summary

In The Slowpoke Express, a narrow gauge railroad line that goes through the town of Bohopoli is called by the Jews there, the Slowpoke Express. The Jews of Bohopoli are amazed that this line was even built, but now praise the line and make jokes about it. Here is a story about an accident that occurred on the line involving a Jew and a Russian priest.

In The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah, a Jew from the town of Sobolivke is walking around, and admiring the Slowpoke Express train resting at the station and a Russian priest traveling on the train comes down and meets the Jew. At this point the locomotive is not attached to the rest of the train. Berko and the Priest get on the locomotive, and Berko thinking he can run the train, has it move and cannot stop it. The locomotive heads toward Heysen and it is feared that it will hit a train going in the opposite direction. On the locomotive, Berle cannot understand why the locomotive does not stop when he turns the valve wheel back. Berle tries to use the brake, but the priest stops him. The priest wants to jump from the locomotive, but Berl argues that he will be killed. Berl insists that if God wants to save them he will. Shortly after, as they approach Heysen, the locomotive gradually slows down and then stops because it runs out of fuel. The priest is glad that the train stopped and they both shake hands. Berl goes off to enjoy the holiday in Heysen.

The Slowpoke Express, pp. 184-186, The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah, pp. 186-194 Analysis

The Slowpoke Express is a introduction to a series of stories about the so-called Slowpoke Express. Though the railroad is slow, it still transforms the lives of the people alongside the train tracks.

In The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah, according to a merchant from Heysen, this story happens toward the end of the Jewish holiday of Sukkos, on Hoshanah Rabbah. This holiday, as mentioned in the Tevye the Dairyman stories, is when it is said that God seals the Book of Life for the next year, that is that the fate of all people is decided. It is a fun story because it involves relations between Jews and non-Jews. A priest and a Jew named Berko talk, and Berko brags to the Priest that he knows how the train works. Berko plays with the wheels, and soon the train is moving. This Berko or Berle the



Vinegar-maker is quite mechanical because he invented a new process involving engines and boiling to make excellent vinegar. Nevertheless, the arrogant Berko actually has no idea how to operate a locomotive.

When the train crew and travelers see the locomotive going away, they are stunned. Some of them chase the locomotive, but for once it is going too fast to catch. The engineer sends a telegram warning of a runaway locomotive. The travelers are angry that they will not be at their destinations for the next day holiday of Simchas Torah. A telegram warns that the locomotive is still moving toward Heysen. The miracle of Hoshanah Rabah is that the locomotive simply runs out of fuel. This is not so remarkable, since it had stopped to get refueled. At least, the Jew Berko and the priest part of good terms.



The Wedding That Came Without Its Band, pp. 194-199, The Tallis Koton, pp. 199-207

The Wedding That Came Without Its Band, pp. 194-199, The Tallis Koton, pp. 199-207 Summary

In *The Wedding That Came Without Its Band*, a local Jew named Noyach Tonkonog is able to read a telegram that outside agitators are coming to stage the pogrom. Most of the Jews in town find a place to hide, but the Heysen merchant talks to the Jewish contractor Nachman Kassoy and arranges to bribe the local prefect. Then a telegram is intercepted that the pogrom agitators are coming. Then a locomotive pulls in, but it has no train attached to it. At the Krishtopovka station, that pogrom rioters had gotten so drunk that they forget to reattach the train to the locomotive when they stopped to reload fuel and rest. The pogrom forces walk to Heysen, but by then the town is patrolled by anti-riot squads of Cossacks.

In *The Tallis Koton*, there is a wealthy and pious Jew in Heysen named Yoel Tashker, who is a moneylender and a landlord. His wife died, and he got all of his children and relatives to go away from him. Tashker has a tenant next door, who is an irreligious Jewish man named Kompanyevitch, who is considered offensive by Tashker. A third character in the story is a man named Froyke-Sheygetz, who dresses in a Hasidic black coat, but is also a man who makes his own rules. Froyke bets that he can get the cheap Tashker to give money to a charity fund.

A few days later, Tashker is riding the train to a fair, in a train car full of Jews talking. Froyke and Kompanyevitch are also in the train car. The discussion turns to the wild behavior of Jewish youth who refuse to put on the ritual tefillin each day for prayer. Kompanyevitch suddenly comments that Jewish boys should at least wear the Tallis Koton, a fringed undershirt that religious Jews wear. The conversation becomes heated and Froyke comments that Tashker should not insult Kompanyevitch because he could wear a Tallis Koton himself. Tashker claims that this is impossible, and then Froyke asks him to bet 100 rubles, and if he is wrong and the man wears the Tallis Koton then, Tashker must give the money to the charity fund. After much urging, Kompanyevitch reveals a fringed undershirt and Tashker loses the bet.

The Wedding That Came Without Its Band, pp. 194-199, The Tallis Koton, pp. 199-207 Analysis

In *A Wedding That Came Without Its Band*, the Heysen merchant tells the story of when some hotheads in Heysen call for outside help to stay a pogrom against the Jews. The



story has an interesting inside angle that in many towns very few people want to stage attacks against the Jews. However, there is a small, possibly well-financed group that goes from town to town that makes pogroms happen. Still the Jewish merchant is able to appeal to the local prefect and bribe him to stop the pogrom. Then it becomes a race to see which force can mobilize first. The pogrom forces are in the next station and telegram that they are coming. The prefect and local police stand at the station against the local people who called in the outside agitators, with the prefect waiting for friendly Cossacks to arrive. The question is, did someone intentional go to the next town and unhook the train from the locomotive? It sounds like an occurrence too fortunate to occur merely by chance. This is possible if Noyach telegraphed his friends at the next station to unhook the train while all the hooligans were getting drunk.

The Tallis Koton is a very funny story involving the hypocrisy of the ultra pious Jew Tashker who refuses to give to a charity for the relief of the town Drozhne, which burned down. Froyke, real name Efrayim Katz, often works for Tashker in money dealing. Froyke is leading an effort to fundraise for the town of Drozhne, which had a fire and was burnt to the ground. The pious Tashker refuses to contribute to the fund, and Froyke pledges to get Tashker to contribute 100 rubles. Note that in the Jewish religion, as in others, charity giving is a strongly encouraged good deed.

Froyker sets up Tashker for the bet on whether Kompanyevitch is wearing a Tallis Koton, by appealing to the obsession of Tashker with the formal acts of Judaism. Tashker thinks only of whether a Jew eats pork or lights fire on the Sabbath, but not whether a Jew does good deeds. Therefore, Tashker cannot imagine that Kompanyevitch would want him to give charity, or that he could wear the fringed undershirt mentioned in the Bible, the Tallis Koton.



A Game of Sixty-Six, pp. 207-217, High School, pp. 217-229

A Game of Sixty-Six, pp. 207-217, High School, pp. 217-229 Summary

In *A Game of Sixty-Six*, a man on the train prefers to play the card game Sixty-Six to talking or reading the newspaper. The man discusses the perils of playing cards, including losing money to card sharks, and having others intervene in the game. Another time the man met an old fellow and a younger man claiming to be the man's son. They play cards in honor of the winter holiday of Hanukkah. The 60-year old gets involved in watching the game, where the older man seems inept, and the man demands to play. The younger man loses to him as the stakes are steadily raised to 25 rubles a game. At this point, the younger man begins to win, and soon has taken the 60-year old for all of his money. The man goes to the police, then recalls thinking that he may have been mad and imagined the whole incident. Just then the 60-year old takes out a pack of cards and starts to shuffle to play Sixty-Six with the narrator. The narrator gets an odd feeling that he is about to be taken advantage of, and denies knowing how to play the game Sixty-Six. The other man smiles, but is disappointed, and soon disappears.

In *High School*, Aharon Katz is dominated by his sharp wife. First the wife demands that their son go to junior high school. The boy fails his entrance examination in mathematics. After intensive tutoring, the boy gets higher scores but still cannot go to school because of the quota system. The boy is crushed, and starts to study with a tutor non-stop. This time he scores top grades in all subjects, but the boy is still not accepted to school. Aharon bribes the school director, and it is believed the boy will be accepted in January. The wife hears that Katz has been accepted, but they do not get the boy's first name. The wife demands that a big party be held for the boy. Opening day of the school arrives, but it turns out that the boy, named Moshke Katz is the wrong Katz. The boy is again crying. Finally, Aharon finds a high school in Poland that is one-half Jewish and one-half Christian. The catch is that the Jewish student has to bring and pay for a Christian student. Aharon finds a Christian boy, but at first the boy fails his entrance test in of all things, Christian religion, and has to be tutored by Moshke. Aharon has to drink with the father and get him to let his boy go, and now Moshke and his Christian fellow student are enrolled in the school. The next blow is that the wife demands to live with the boy in Poland by the school. Aharon tries to stay in his house and run his business without his wife, but ends up selling his business and moving to Poland by the school. He loses more money in a bad business deal. Then one day, Aharon meets his son in the street, and the boy is not wearing his school button. The students voted to go on strike. The wife tries to explain that this is the new way of thinking and freedom, but Aharon thinks the whole business is insane.



A Game of Sixty-Six, pp. 207-217, High School, pp. 217-229 Analysis

In *A Game of Sixty-Six*, the narrator is talking to a man about 60, who complains that it is hard to get a good conversation partner while on the train. He hates reading newspaper because they are not his hometown paper. The man prefers to play a card game called Sixty-Six. Someone this 60-year-old man seems to sense that the narrator may not be willing to be tricked out of his money in a rigged card game. So what follows is a long story and song and dance that seems designed to persuade the narrator to play cards and be tricked.

The sixty-year-old admits that the danger is to play cards with some card sharp who have the cards marked and know how to suck a victim into the game. At first they lose and look inept, and when the stakes are raised they pounce and fleece the victim of all his money. The man likes to play cards, though he gets disturbed when a crowd of Jews gathers around and even intervene into the game. On one occasion, the man and someone else were using a monk's back when a gossip intervenes and wakes up the monk. It is easy to feel an undercurrent in the story that the card playing man is trying to lure the wary narrator, but ultimately the card playing man is not successful and must search elsewhere for an easy target.

In *High School*, a middle-aged Jew named Aharon Katz is on the train and complains that he used to have money and a business, but lost them because of his wife and her demand to put their son in high school. The man readily admits that what really destroyed him is not the ambitious wife, but the Russian school quota system. The boy improves his grades, but still cannot get into school. The man is slowly ground down as he is caught between the racism of school officials and the vicious quota system on one side, and the wife on the other side. The big joke is that when the boy finally goes to school in Poland, all of a sudden radical revolutionary politics enter the picture. The boy goes on strike against the school, and is supported by the mother, who is more interested in staying up with the current trends than even her ambitions for her son.



The Automatic Exemption, pp. 229-238, It Doesn't Pay to Be Good, pp. 238-

The Automatic Exemption, pp. 229-238, It Doesn't Pay to Be Good, pp. 238- Summary

In *The Automatic Exemption*, a tall bearded Jew and his thin son are coming back from the draft board. The man is from Vorotolivke, lived a short time in Mazapevke, and now resides in Mezritch. His son is named Itsik, which is short for Avrom-Yitzhok, and is called by his mother, Alter, for good luck, after her other son Itsik died in an accident. Itsik is supposed to get an automatic exemption from being drafted into the army because he is an only son. However, Eisik, who died in Vorotolivke, never got a proper death certificate. Itsik has to strip naked for a medical examination twice, which he fails twice.

Back in Vorotolivke, when there was a census, years ago the mother gave Itsik's name as Alter, her good luck name for him. Now, Alter receives a draft notice, although this is the same boy, Itsik. The tall Jew is accused of trying to have his son evade the draft and the boy again has to go to doctors. His health is still frail and again he gets a white draft exemption card. Then, dead Eisik is drafted, and the father is told that Eisik, Yitzhak, Isaac, and Itsik are all the same name, so again the frail boy must go before the draft board. The father visits lawyers in Yehupetz, but they are too technical and cannot understand the simple facts of the case. Finally, one lawyer is able to make sense of it all, and tells the father that he has no problem, because the boy, no matter what he is called has three draft exemption cards. The father is still not convinced that his troubles are over.

In *It Doesn't Pay to Be Good*, a Jew on a train tells the story of the two orphans who he adopted, because he was childless. The girl, Rayzl is the daughter of his wife's sister, Perl. The sister's husband was wealthy, but lost all his money playing cards. It was such a scandal that Perl died of grief and the little girl ended up living with the man and his wife. The man brags that he treated Rayzl well, as if she were his daughter. The girl grows up and it is time to arrange a marriage for her. The man finds a young salesman as a potential husband, but Rayzl wants no part of him.

The man's brother named Moishe-Hirshl dies because he by accident pours hot water over his head. The brother's wife wants to remarry and the man decides to adopt the child named Paysi and raise him as his own. Paysi is a smart youth and learns French and other academic subjects. The man starts to arrange for Paysi to be married, and finds a local Jew with a daughter who is ready to pay a large dowry. Instead, Paysi elopes with Raysi, and the man blames this on the girl, and has a warrant out for her arrest. The pair are arrested and Paysi insists that the girl be freed from prison, and Raysi is sent to live with poor relatives. Not too long after Paysi runs off again, and the man suspects that his wife helped the young man. Paysi gets together with Rayzl and



they send a letter that they are married and living together on a tight budget. Paysi is taking examinations to study to be a doctor, the girl is studying, and they are both giving lessons. A year later, the man and his wife receive a letter that Rayzl has just given birth to a son named Hirshele after the man's dead brother and inviting them to the child's circumcision. The wife leaves and never comes back.

The Automatic Exemption, pp. 229-238, It Doesn't Pay to Be Good, pp. 238- Analysis

The Automatic Exemption is a wild story that is perhaps the ultimate in a long joke on mistaken identity and bad record keeping. It turns around the fact that the man has an only son, and also the general resentment among Jews against the Russian military draft system. The son has to go to doctors and lawyers and still may have to see the draft board for a fourth time. Itsik is an only son now, because his brother Eisik died in an accident when he made a samovar with boiling water fall on himself. The man has a bit of a problem with literacy, in that he actually named his two sons by the same name. Itsik, is a variant of Eisik, Isaac, and the Hebrew name Yitzhok. The added joke is that the census taker lists the same boy by his nickname Alter. Itsik gets a high draft lottery number, but still ends up being called to the draft board for a medical examination. The boy has three draft exemption card, but still gets called up a fourth time.

It Doesn't Pay to Be Good is purely a story about a man and his family, and his bad behavior. He adopts his dead brother's son Paysi, but the daughter of his sister-in-law Rayzl is never considered by him as part of the family. He arranges for her to marry, but is not very particular on the young man in the match. Paysi is told about the planned match but refuses to say a thing. A short time later, the man gets a letter saying that Paysi has eloped with Rayzl. The man is enraged and blames the whole thing on Rayzl. He reminds his wife that Rayzl's father was a bum, unlike Paysi's father and the wife nearly faints. The man is oblivious to the fact that he is also slowly alienating his wife.

The man goes to the police, claiming that the girl had stolen things and ran off with the adopted son. The police catch the pair and put them in jail. The man is willing to free only Paysi but Paysi forces him to arrange for Rayzl to be freed as well. Paysi returns to living with the man and his wife, while the man pays a poor relative to board Rayzl in another town. The second time the couple successfully elope, because the wife is helping them. The bad relationship between the man and his wife continues until the wife leaves him when the first son of Paysi and Rayzl is circumcised. The wife writes to the man that she is happy with her children and her grandchild, and that Paysi and Rayzl are making enough money to get by. The man in a rage threatens to cut the wife out of his will but the wife does not care.



Burnt Out, pp. 247-255, Hard Luck, pp. 255-259

Burnt Out, pp. 247-255, Hard Luck, pp. 255-259 Summary

In *Burnt Out*, Moshke is suspected of recently burning down his own store to collect insurance money. At the time the man is at an engagement party for his niece, when he gets a cryptic telegram saying that the family is sick and to come quick. Already, not too long ago, Moshke had a store and house that burnt down and he collected insurance money, which he did with ease. Things get more difficult the second time his store burns down. His first insurance agent refused to sell him a second insurance policy, but he found a new insurance salesman who was happy to sell him 10,000 rubles worth of insurance on his store, home and stock. There are also allegations that the man never bought the stock that he claims to have had when the fire destroyed everything. Moshke protests that he has a daughter to marry off and a son who wants to go to high school, and he needs the insurance money to pay the bills. A rich Boheslav Jew taunts him in the street and the police investigation goes on, but Moshke protests that he is clean. He has creditors who want money now, and a certain Dovid-Hirsh, who has to be paid to be quiet. Moshke promises that once he gets his insurance money, he will make contributions to the town treasury and to charity. When he marries off his daughter, there will be a huge party for everyone.

In *Hard Luck*, a Diamond Dealer has to stay awake all night to guard his gems and then goes to show the rich Jew the merchandise. The rich Jew is not interested and the Dealer leaves, hoping to drum up business elsewhere. Just then a young man runs up and asks if the attaché case he has is the Dealer's. It belongs to the Diamond Dealer and he thanks the young man profusely, since otherwise he would have been ruined. The Dealer takes the young man out to dinner and tells him about the expensive diamonds in the attaché case. After the dinner, the young man vanishes along with the attaché case. The Dealer faints, and finally calls the police. After a thorough search, the police find the young man with the diamonds. The Dealer goes to the jail and asks the young man why he stole the diamonds after returning the attaché case to the Dealer. The young man answers that he is a Jewish thief, and a good deed has nothing to do with him practicing his trade as a thief.

Burnt Out, pp. 247-255, Hard Luck, pp. 255-259 Analysis

In *Burnt Out*, Moshke used to be a storekeeper and his store burnt down, but its value was covered by insurance. The Jews in Boheslav say that the storekeeper arranged to have his own store and house burnt down in order to collect the insurance money. As



the story continues, it becomes more and more obvious that indeed Moshke burnt down his store and house twice. It seems like a horrible crime, since it is not clear that he even warns his family and they could have all burned to death, so Moshke is actually a very despicable person. Nevertheless, he plea that he is innocent is so tinged with desperation that it is funny.

The second time his store burns down, Moshke knows that he is going to get investigated. Moshke has a lot of trouble because the fire inspector thinks that this could be a case of insurance fraud. Soon, a police detective shows up and questions Moshke on why he was not home when the fire occurred. His claim is ready to be paid, but then Bohoslav Jews send letters to the insurance company, writing that they suspect that Moshke arranged for the fire to burn him out. Moshke protests that many fires are happening in Russia, and that he wanted to be safe by getting insurance. Moshke then implies that the other Jews in Bohoslava are just jealous that they are not able to collect 10,000 rubles. Moshke protests that it is none of the Bohoslavians business about what happened.

In Hard Luck, a Diamond Dealer traveling on a train talks of his experience with thieves. On one occasion, he is visiting a rich Jew in Yehupetz, whose daughter is getting married. He arrives at the rich Jew's house totally exhausted and forgets his bag with the diamonds. A young man runs after the Dealer and gives him the bag. The Dealer invites the young man to dinner and brags about his diamonds, which of course then the young man steals. The morale is that one thing has nothing to do with the other. The young man helped the Dealer with the parcel when he does a good deed, but later wants to steal, which is his profession as a thief.



Fated for Misfortune, pp. 259-269, Go Climb a Tree, pp. 269-274

Fated for Misfortune, pp. 259-269, Go Climb a Tree, pp. 269-274 Summary

In *Fated for Misfortune*, a worried Jew is appointed the Fiduciary to a man named Menasche's estate and agrees to manage it for the benefit of the widow and her four boys and a girl. Menasche is worth a lot of money, and the Fiduciary invests the money in his own store. At the same time, he has to pay for the upkeep of the widow's house and her children. The Fiduciary complains constantly of the widow's expenses, and schemes to get rid of the burden of the girl, a deaf boy, and another boy who goes to America. The last burden of the Fiduciary, besides the widow, is a boy named Danielchik, who is a bit wild. Danielchik as a young man gives away his boots and money, until the widow hardly has any cash at hand. The problem intensifies when Danielchik decides to marry Osna, the housemaid who works in his house. Danielchik demands a full outfitting of clothing for both him and his fiancé. The Fiduciary is ready to explode, but for the sake of peace decides to give Danielchik everything that he asks for. A month later, Danielchik comes again to visit the Fiduciary at his store and demands 230 rubles to buy a tavern for a livelihood. This keeps Danielchik from pestering the Fiduciary for a quite a while until Danielchik comes to announce that his wife Osna has left him, and he needs 300 rubles to buy a boat voyage to America. This makes the Fiduciary happy as he thinks that he is getting rid of Danielchik, the last of the widow's children causing him trouble, for good. The Fiduciary and his wife see Danielchik off at the station, and give him food and gifts for Danielchik's brother in America. A couple of years go by, and then a well-dressed Danielchik shows up at the Fiduciary's store. Danielchik has come as a representative of his family for a full accounting of his father's money, minus the costs of their support in the past. The Fiduciary suddenly realizes that he never kept any records or books of the fate of the invested money of the late Menasche, Danielchik's father. The Fiduciary goes to lawyers but finds no easy answers to his problem.

In *Go Climb a Tree*, Moyshe-Nachman is a fairly well-off man who has to visit several doctors in Yeheputz, but is not allowed to be there. Dovid is poor with a wife and many children, but he has a residence permit because he is a cleric in the wealthy Brodsky's synagogue. Moyshe-Nachman has no other place to stay, and when he gets to Dovid's house he hears that a serious crackdown is going on against Jews in Yehupetz without a residence permit. He hears that he is subject to arrest, with no chance of bribing his way out. Soon after he falls asleep there is heavy knocking at the door. Moyshe-Nachman tells his brother-in-law Dovid that they should switch identities. Dovid is in such shock that he readily agrees to switch papers. Moyshe lets the police in and they arrest Dovid, who is saying that he is Moyshe, the man without a residence permit.



Moyshe is also arrested, but quickly released. The result is that Dovid loses his residence permit and his job with Brodsky.

Fated for Misfortune, pp. 259-269, Go Climb a Tree, pp. 269-274 Analysis

In Fated for Misfortune, a worried Jew talks about his troubles while traveling. A simple man named Menasche died, leaving his wife and children to support. The Jew is thought to be honest in his community and is made the fiduciary over the assets that are inherited by the widow and children. Soon the Fiduciary finds out that Menasche was worth at least twice as was thought, with many loans and investments coming in. He sells the commodities and amasses the cash, and then he decides to invest this money in the Fiduciary's own store. By having a large amount of cash, the Fiduciary is able to buy extra stock and greatly augment his store's income. Therefore, the Fiduciary's income is highly augmented, and as it comes out at the end of the story, he makes no record of the appreciation of the widow's money. Therefore, the Fiduciary actually embezzles the money.

The expenses of running two households, the Fiduciary's own and the widow's, are considerable, but when the children grow up, the oldest two boys are handicapped, dealt with easily and discarded. It is clear that the Fiduciary is getting rid of the children of the widow one by one, and then probably hoping that either the widow dies, or she remarries. The girl gives him more difficulty, because the Fiduciary has to spend 1,000 rubles on her dowry, and pay for a big wedding. This is a large, but by no means huge expense compared to the amount of money the Fiduciary received. Another boy is a pain and a trouble, until he agrees to go to America.

Only Danielchik, as eccentric as he is, is able to challenge the Fiduciary. The Fiduciary thinks he can keep Danielchik quiet, and eventually get rid of him by giving him relatively small sums of money. It is clear to Danielchik that he can demand 300 to 500 rubles every couple of years, and the Fiduciary will give it to Danielchik. Finally, Danielchik comes back from America and demands a thorough accounting of his father's money. The ending is a surprise, because most people do not come back to Russia once they go to America, travel being slow and uncertain in those days.

In Go Climb a Tree, Moyshe-Nachman is a well-off Jew who has chronic asthma and a cough. Telling the story in the train, he relishes the idea that he pulled a joke on Yehupetz and the Russian authorities. He often needs to go into Yehupetz to see a doctor, but does not have the necessary resident permit. Since he has to see several doctors, he stays at the home of his brother-in-law Dovid. With so many doctor appointments, Moyshe-Nachman has no choice, but to stay over, even when the police are conducting a crackdown. Dovid the brother-in-law is afraid to defy the wealthier Moyshe-Nachman and ends up taking the rap and going to jail, for living in Yehupetz without a permit. The result is that Moyshe has to take over the expense of Dovid's family. Still Moyshe thinks the whole affair is amusing.



The Tenth Man, pp. 274-279, Third Class, pp. 279-284

The Tenth Man, pp. 274-279, Third Class, pp. 279-284 Summary

In *The Tenth Man*, making a minyan of ten men is especially important to a man who is mourning the death of his only son. The son was involved in revolutionary activity, framed up in a capital crime and hung. A Russian-looking man is suspected of being a Jew, and asks to join the prayer. The mourner says that the grudgingly Jewish man should get a medal, and he will tell the story after they all pray. The mourner quickly begins the afternoon prayer, and says the mourner's Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. After he tells a story about a Jewish couple that has a son and need a tenth man to make a minyan, and are able to stop a Jewish coachman riding through town. In another case, Jews at the beginning of the Sabbath are not allowed to put out a candle, but get a friendly non-Jewish Russian to put out the fire. Finally, a young Jewish man is saved from getting drafted when he removes his cap in front of the draft board, and reveals a large canker sore. The moral of the story is that the reluctant Jew saves the minyan as a Jew, he soon could help them when he becomes a non-Jew and that overall he is a sore and a bother.

In *Third Class*, the narrator recommends against traveling on a train in first or second class. He tells the story of a clean shaven young Jew flirting with an attractive young lady, but who becomes embarrassed when an obviously Jewish person recognizes him. The young lady named Rivka gets off the train looking Christian but is greeted by Jewish parents. In third class, Jews get to be crowded together, but are much more relaxed. They talk about life, including their sorrows and their illnesses. One can get medical advice that is liable to make a person sicker than ever but that is a hazard of such travel. People drink vodka and wine and if one wishes to talk, then someone will talk to them.

The Tenth Man, pp. 274-279, Third Class, pp. 279-284 Analysis

In *The Tenth Man*, nine Jews are in a train car and they need a tenth Jewish man to make a minyan, a proper prayer group. There is another man who is shaved and dressed like a Russian, but believed to be a Jew. They fear to anger him by asking him directly, but by deliberately being overheard by the man, get him to talk Yiddish and admit to being a Jew. The man in mourning is half crying and half laughing, as he quickly begins to pray with the assistance of the reluctant Jew. Then the mourner shows how a Jew can save the day, a Non-Jew can save Jews, and a canker sore can save a

religious Jew from the draft. Taken together, the message is that this reluctant Jew is a pain in the head.

In Third Class, the author describes how in first class, the traveler is comfortable but he does not get to talk at all. In second class, Jews get to have some conversation but they tend to do everything possible to not look Jewish. If you say something to someone alluding to their Jewishness, they are liable to have a heart attack. Only in third class, can the Jews share their poverty, their troubles, and their hopes and be happy as Jews. If someone opens some wine and vodka, they can be sure to forget their worries at least for a while.



Characters

Tevye appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Tevye is the philosophical dairyman who is ready to quote the Bible or some other Jewish text on every occasion. He is married to Golde and has 7 daughters. Tevye has so many dependents and a driving need to make money but fails when he tries investing in the stock market. Tevye is confronted with modern thinking and ways as he seeks to marry off his daughters. He is in a dilemma as most of his daughters refuse to accept arranged marriages. Tevye manages to raise himself from total poverty after he gets a large sum for rescuing two Jewish women lost in the woods. However, Tevye's attempt to quickly become wealthy is stopped when he loses all his savings in financial speculation. Each time that Tevye has a daughter to marry off, the situation seems to get worse. Finally, Tevye is expelled from his village and forced to wander as an old man.

Golde appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Golde is Tevye's wife and the mother of his children. Golde tends to be more tied to tradition than Tevye. She has to be reassured that her Grandma Tsaytl wants Tsaytl to marry Motl the tailor before she accepts the marriage. She is a typical Jewish housewife with a sharp tongue who is especially good at cooking dairy dishes such as blintzes. Golde's good cooking attracts young men to her house, along with her good-looking daughters, which cause her and Tevye lots of problems. Golde is rather nasty to Tevye without fear of the consequence. Tevye is quite forgiving of Golde's temper and at the time and in their income bracket, divorce is almost unknown. Golde is totally dedicated to raising her daughters and as they grow up, she loses her desire to live and dies.

Tsaytl appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Today's Children

Tsaytl is Tevye's eldest daughter. She falls in love with Motl Komsoyl the tailor and secretly agrees with Motl to marry. She cries bitterly when she hears that Tevye has arranged for her to marry Layzar Wolf. Tevye is not willing to force her into an unhappy marriage.

Hodl appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Hodl

Hodl is Tevye's second eldest daughter, who is intellectual and reads a lot. She is the star pupil of the tutor Peppercorn. They decide to marry. Hodl marries Peppercorn even though she knows he is going to jail and then to Siberia. She follows her husband in exile to Siberia.



Chava appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Chava

Chava is Tevye's third daughter. She falls in love with Chvedka the scribe, who she compares with the Russian novelist Gorky. Chava decides to marry the non-Jew Chvedka, even though this means coming under the protection of the town Christian priest. Tevye decides there is nothing he can do to stop this, and declares that Chava is dead and mourns for her.

Shprintze appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Shprintze

Shprintze is the daughter of Tevye who has the most unhappy fate of all. She falls in love with the rich young Jew Ahronchik who is totally dependent on his mother. When Ahronchik's family intervenes to break up the proposed marriage, Shprintze ends up committing suicide.

Beilke appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Beilke

Beilke is Tevye's youngest daughter. She takes care of Tevye after the death of Golde. Beilke agrees to marry Podhotzur who is chosen for her by the matchmaker. Beilke has difficulty adjusting to the lies and pretenses of Podhotzur the contractor, who is wealthy. Later, Podhotzur goes broke and Beilke and her husband flee to America where they work in sweatshops.

Efrayim the Matchmaker appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Efrayim the Matchmaker approaches Tevye on several occasions, meeting him in Boiberik and on the train while traveling. Efrayim offers Tevye many matches for his daughters, but only Beilke accepts the match with Podhotzur the contractor. Efrayim is having trouble doing business because more people are arranging their own marriages.

Layzar the Butcher appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Today's Children

Layzar is an older man who is a widower. He is wealthy and wants to marry Tsaytl, Tevye's daughter. He is a coarse man and literally approaches getting Tsaytl as his wife as if he were buying a cow. His proposal is rejected by Tsaytl who wants to marry Motl the tailor.



Ahronchik appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Shprintze

Ahronchik is a young man in his early 20s who does not work, and is supported by his wealthy widowed mother. Ahronchik becomes friends with Tevye and then meets and falls in love with Shprintze. They are to be married but Ahronchik and his mother go home and the engagement is broken.

Peppercorn appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Hodl

Peppercorn is a young intellectual and student who is impoverished. He becomes friends with Tevye and tutors Tevye's daughters. Peppercorn gets Hodl to agree to marry him, though because of his revolutionary activity he is about to be sentenced to jail. Peppercorn marries Hodl and is then sent to jail. The couple reunite when Peppercorn is sent in exile to Siberia.

Podhotzur appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Beilke

Podhotzur is a rich contractor who makes money off of government contracts during Russia's war with Japan. He contracts with the matchmaker to marry Beilke. Podhotzur is embarrassed over the humble origins of Tevye and so he gives Tevye money and sends him off to Palestine. Later, Podhotzur goes broke and flees with his wife to America.

The Vending Woman appears in Competitors

The vending woman has her goods knocked down as she gets on the train. She complains about her male competitor ruining her business selling goods on the train. Later, she reveals that her competitor is her husband.

The Man from Kodny appears in The Happiest Man in All Kodny

The man from Kodny is a poor Jew who desperately works to arrange for a Professor Doctor to see his sick son. He gets the Professor to visit his son, despite having little money to pay him.

Kivke appears in Baranovich Station

Kivke is a Jew who is arrogant and is sentenced to run the gauntlet of flogging. He avoids this when Reb Nissl arranges for Kivke to be declared dead and smuggled to Austria. In Austria, Kivke sends letters to Reb Nissl and blackmails him every year or so for more money.



The Man from Pereshchepena appears in Eighteen from Pereshpena

The Man from Pereshchepena seems to claim that 18 Jewish high school students go to school from his town. Actually, it turns out that he is referring to 18 boys who are sent to the Russian army.

The Man from Buenos Aires appears in The Man from Buenos Aires

The Man from Buenos Aires is wealthy, but has some big international business which is never defined. He is like the man of air, who makes money in a mysterious way out of nothing. This man is a romantic figure, who is returning to his home village to marry a hometown girl. The reader also asks whether he is actually some type of criminal or lunatic.

Elula appears in Etká

Etká is the daughter of the man who tells the story. She is a healthy graduate of high school who is carefully watched. She gets in trouble studying the book Sanine with the cantor's daughter and a boy. She ends up committing suicide at the same time as the cantor's daughter.

Berko, Berle the Vinegar Maker appears in The Miracle of Hoshanah Rabbah

Berko is a mechanical Jewish man who works with machinery making vinegar. He thinks that he knows how to run a locomotive and ends up on a runaway locomotive with a priest.

The Merchant from Heysen appears in The Wedding that Came Without its Band

The Merchant from Heysen arranges to get a bribe to the prefect in order to get Cossack forces to stop people from out of town who are organizing a pogrom. He succeeds in protecting the local Jews, when by some miracle or scheme, the incoming train comes in as a locomotive without its cars attached.



Froyker-Sheygatz, Efrayim Katz appears in The Tallis Koton

Froyker is an orthodox Jew, but known for taking certain liberties and being a bit wild. He is raising funds for a charity for a burnt-down village. He wants Tashker to give money, so organizes a trick where Tashker bets that Mr. Kompanyevitch is not wearing a Tallis Koton.

The Card Player appears in A Game of Sixty-Six

The Card Playing man is about 60-years old. He tells the commercial traveler stories about people playing Sixty-Six in order to suck the traveler into betting on the game. In reality, the Card Player is a card shark who plans to fleece his victim.

Mr. Katz , the Father appears in High School

The Blondish Man is named Ahronchik Katz and is the father of an only son. His wife makes him fight to get his son into High School. Finally the man gets the boy into school, while ruining his business, but then the boy goes out on strike. The man wonders why he ever married.

The Father appears in The Automatic Exemption

The father has an only son named Itsik who has had to go before the army draft board four times. The father desperately goes from doctors to lawyers trying to get his son to avoid the draft.

The Husband appears in It Doesn't Pay to be Good

The Husband is married with no children. He adopts his dead brother's son and takes in his wife's niece, but does not treat the girl the same. The husband becomes enraged at the girl when the boy, Paysi runs off with the girl Rayzl.

The Store Owner appears in Burnt Out

The Store Owner claims to not know why his stores burnt down. Soon it becomes clear that he burnt down his store twice to collect the insurance money for the store and his goods. He protests that he will be cleared by any investigation.



The Thief appears in Hard Luck

The Thief is a young man who first finds the Diamond Dealer's bag and is invited out to dinner by the Diamond Dealer. This same young man then proceeds to steal the bag. The thief later is in jail and explains that what does one good deed have to do with him working at his thieving profession.

The Fiduciary appears in Fated for Misfortune

The Fiduciary keeps protesting about his good deeds to a widow and her children. Actually, he embezzles a large some of money from the dead father's funds and invests it in his business. He gives the widow and her family the minimum amount of money he can.

Moshe Nachman appears in Go Climb a Tree

Moshe Nachman is a wealthy Jew from a small town. He is in Yehupetz without a residence permit to see doctors. He gets the poor brother-in-law Dovid to switch identities with him so Moshe is set free and Dovid remains in jail for not having a residence permit.

The Reluctant Jew appears in The Tenth Man

The reluctant Jew is a man who is clean-shaven and dressed like a Russian. He finally answers the nine Jews in Yiddish and tacitly consents to joining the Minyan. Later the mourning man jokes that the reluctant Jew can be a Jew, a non-Jew, and a pain in the neck.

The Commercial Traveler appears in The Railroad Stories

The Commercial Traveler is the narrator in all the Railroad Stories. He likes to talk on the train and ride in third class, usually crowded together with his fellow Jews.



Objects/Places

Boiberik, Dacha appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Boiberik is a summer colony of dachas or summer homes where rich Jews live. Tevye goes to Boiberik for work, first hauling logs, and later selling dairy goods.

The Stock Market, Options, Poptions appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Tevye's cousin Menachem Mendl gets Tevye to invest in the stock markets, also referred to as options and poptions, which operates outdoors in the city of Yehupetz. The partners lose all of Tevye's savings in Yehupetz.

Revolutionary Politics appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

Many young Jews become involved in Revolutionary Politics. This involves being against the rich and for the working man. Peppercorn is involved in these politics and sentenced to jail and then exile in Siberia. Other young Jews are hung for alleged crimes.

Dreams appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Tevye's wife Golde believes that dreams are a way for God to tell people things. She says that she dreamed that her Grandma Tsaytl came to her with a large container of milk before Tevye becomes a dairyman. Later Tevye uses a phony dream to sell to Golde the marriage of Tsaytl to Motl.

Goy, Goyish appears in Teve the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

A Goy is a Non-Jew, usually in these stories a Russian. Goyish refers to the Russian language. The term can be used in a derogatory way as in a Jew who dresses like a goy.



The Constantution, Constitution appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

The Constitution refers to a new Russian constitution that is enacted after disturbances, and that causes more disturbances, riots and pogroms. It is connected to pogroms that break out in cities and then smaller towns and villages. Apparently in the original, the author has Tevye deliberately mispronounce the word, constitution.

The Land of Israel, Palestine appears in Tevye the Dairyman

The Land of Israel, or Palestine is the scene of the events of the Bible, and such landmarks as the Wailing Wall and Rachel's Tomb. Tevye agrees to go to Palestine after being urged there by Podhodzur, but never actually goes there.

Expulsion, Pogroms appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

Jews are subject to Expulsion from villages in Russia, and Tevye and his daughter and grandchildren are expelled from their village. Pogroms are riots against Jews involving destroying Jewish property and in some cases killing Jews.

Tevye's Horse appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Tevye's horse is a thin and weak beast, but still it manages to pull Tevye around in his little cart. Often, Tevye talks to his horse, and sometimes beats it as a surrogate for the people in his life who do not listen to him.

The Train, the Railroad, Third Class appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

The train is the major means of long-range overland transportation in Russia, stretching from local lines to Siberia. In Third Class travel, is where the commercial traveler goes, where he is crowded with his fellow Jews and gets to talk.



Yiddish, Hebrew appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

Yiddish is the common day-to-day language of Jews in Russia, while Goyish refers to the Russian language. Hebrew is the language of many of the holy books and is only read by educated Jews.

Siberia appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Siberia is the vast, cold region of Russia. It is a place of prison and where exiles are sent for political crimes. Peppercorn is sent there and his wife Hodl joins him.

Dairy Cuisine, Kosher Laws appears in Tevye the Dairyman

The Kosher Laws are dietary laws that prohibit observant Jews from eating pork. Also meat and dairy meals must be separated. Golde cooks an extensive dairy cuisine that includes flour and eggs and makes such dairy dishes as blintzes.

Sabbath and Holidays appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

It is prohibited to work, ride and light fires on the Jewish Sabbath and major holidays such as Shavuos and Sukkos. These rules are ignored by non-observant Jews.

Kasrilevka appears in Tevye the Dairyman

Kasrilevka is a town near Tevye's village and the nearest train station to his village. It is in Kasrilevka where Tevye sees off his daughter Hodl who leaves for Siberia.

Shavuos, Sukkos appears in Tevye the Dairyman, Railroad Stories

Shavuos is the mid-summer holiday. Sukkos is the autumn holiday at the time of the harvest when Ahronchik visits Tevye in the story, Shprintze.

The Draft appears in Eighteen from Pereshchepena

The Draft is the dread call-up of Russians and Jews to the army. Unlike the high schools, Jews can join the army in any numbers and often try to avoid being drafted.



The Book, Sanine appears in Elul

Sanine is a book in which young people participate in romance and free love. There is the murder of a rival lover and several suicides. The cantor's daughter and Etká emulate the characters of Sanine and commit suicide.

The Slowpoke Express appears in The Slowpoke Express

The Slowpoke Express is a new narrow gauge train line that goes through towns such as Heysen and Bohopoli.

Tallis Koton, Tefillin appears in The Tallis Koton

A Tallis Koton is an undershirt with fringes that male religious Jews wear as part of their ritual. Tefillin are ritual objects that are only worn by male Jews for the morning prayers and then taken off again.

Sixty-Six appears in A Game of Sixty-Six

Sixty-Six is a card game that is often played on the train. It can be a friendly game but often large bets are waged on this card game and card sharks can cheat other travelers out of all their money.

The Quota System appears in High School

Under the Quota System only a fairly small proportion of young Jews are allowed to go to High School, despite having high grades. This causes anguish for many Jewish students and parents.

Residence Permit appears in Teyve the Dairyman, Go Climb a Tree

Jews in large cities like Yehupetz are required to have an official residence permit. Often Jews on business or other errands in the city go into these cities without the permit, but are then subject to arrest.



Draft Exemption appears in The Automatic Exemption

In Russia there is a general drafting of young men, but one draft exemption that usually applies is the one that exempts only sons. This exemption does not apply when there is a scarcity of men to draft.

Store Insurance appears in Burnt Out

The storekeeper in Burnt Out, gets store insurance for his house, store and stock of goods. After the store burns for a second time, he is accused of having the fire set and claiming that stock was destroyed that did not exist.

The Minyan appears in The Tenth Man

A Minyan is a group of ten adult male Jews that constitute the minimum quorum to have a public prayer. The mourner in the story, The Tenth Man, is very insistent that a non-observant Jew join the minyan as the tenth man.



Themes

Using a Sense of Humor to Undermine Authority

Both *Tevye the Dairyman* and the *Railroad Stories* involve much humor against authority and the bureaucracy. This is clearest in the short story, the *Automatic Exemption*. In this story, a boy named Itsik is drafted, although he has an automatic exemption as an only child. On the one hand, Russian Jews generally resent the Russian state and try to avoid being drafted into the army. On the other hand, the Russian bureaucracy tends to become confused and is totally inefficient. The authorities confuse Itsik with his dead brother Eisik, and with Itsik's nickname of Alter. This story is also the perfect example of an extreme joke around a case of mistaken identity.

Likewise, in the chapter of *Tevye the Dairyman*, *Today's Children*, Tevye sees his authority undermined as Motl the Tailor and Tsaytl decide on their own to get married. Tevye makes comments on the fact that he has never heard of a young man being the matchmaker, the groom, and the father-in-law at the same time. Yet, Tevye decides that he cannot really object to the marriage, and that he must convince Golde to accept the marriage too. Tevye undermines the authority of tradition and the matchmaker, by composing a dream that he claims to have had. In the dream, Grandma Tsaytl blesses the marriage of Motl and Tsaytl, and then Layzer Wolf's dead wife claims that Tsaytl has no business occupying her house and wearing her clothes. Often in general, it is too hard to directly challenge authority so the characters in the story try to outflank authority and subvert authority if possible.

Dealing With Persecution

The Jews of Russia are generally a persecuted community. This is not always clear. For example, in daily life, Tevye is more troubled by his need to cater to the rich Jews in the dachas of Boiberik, than by Russian authorities. Persecution of Jews is hinted at by incidence such as the priest protecting Chava after she joins the Christian community and leaving Tevye with no recourse. Things heat up for Tevye after the passing of the new Russian Constitution, and the widespread outbreak of pogroms. This persecution culminates in Tevye being expelled from his native village and turned into a wandering Jew. Such events explain the huge number of Jews that emigrate from Russia to America, and other lands.

The theme of persecution is also alluded to in the absurd occupations that Jews are driven into, such as the story *Competitors*, where a husband and wife compete to sell small items on a train. This persecution is not absolute, as in the hilarious episode of Tevye arguing with his Christian neighbors on whether they should stage a pogrom. Jews and Christians often talk and cooperate, but certain social forces try to stop this. Indeed, it is apparent that in reaction to the new Russian Constitution, there are social forces promoting attacks on Jews as a diversion to their own political and moral failures.



The author gets his bite by his humorous sketches on such themes. In the story, *The Wedding That Came Without Its Band*, the town of Heysen does not have enough hooligans to run an Anti-Jewish pogrom, and must telegram to import people to stage the pogrom. This pogrom is then stop, after a period of suspense, by friendly Cossack forces that are assembled by the local prefect, strengthened by a good bribe.

Tradition Confronted by Modern Ways

Tevye is directly confronted with modern ways and practices as against the traditions that he is used to when marrying his daughters. Tevye repeatedly goes to Efrayim the Matchmaker to arrange marriages for his daughters, but except for the case of Beilke, these arranged marriages are rejected. A horrible test for Tevye is when his daughter Chava falls in love and marries the non-Jew Chvedka. Tevye is tempted to reconcile with his daughter, but cannot since Chava has married out of her religion. In fact, because there are no civil marriages at the time, Chava must be married by a priest and presumably becomes part of the Christian community.

Another hard test for Tevye is the case of his daughter Shprintze falling in love with Ahronchik, the son of a wealthy widow. Ahronchik claims to be an independent young man, but is really not, and is torn away from Shprintze by his family. Class and money-differences between Jews are just as severe as the separation between Jews and Non-Jews. As in the case of Chava, where she is declared dead, Shprintze is actually driven to suicide by falling in love with a person far above her in social class. At the time, social class differences are being challenged but also embittered by widespread revolutionary political activity. Young people such as Peppercorn fight for the rights of the working-class and against the privileges of the rich. Tevye has a dim understanding of these arguments and only sees that young revolutionaries like Peppercorn end up in jail, exile, or can even be hung. Russian authorities are challenged by this political activity and tend to blame the Jewish community for producing a large number of political agitators.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is complex in that the stories are told to the narrator who presumably writes them down. The reader is told that Tevye meets Sholem Aleichem in his travels and Sholem Aleichem is the author who writes these stories down. This is also true in the case of the Railroad Stories. However, the reader quickly forgets the narrator, as the stories read as first-person accounts from Tevye the Dairyman. The reader only knows Tevye's inner thoughts and not those of Golde or of Tevye's daughters. Tevye is the somewhat confused but philosophical dairyman who tries to understand the world by comparing his situation to quotations from the Bible and other Holy Books that he knows. He is optimistic because he believes in God's justice but realistic in that he realizes that certain things are fated and unavoidable.

In the Railroad Stories, the point of view is more varied. Again, after the narrator introduces stories, the stories are often from a first-person standpoint, but they can be in the third person and are told by different people. The story, Competitors, is from a third-person standpoint as the narrator describes the scene after train officials knock down the merchandise of two train vendors. Baranovich Station is the story of a man on a train who recounts events of many years ago in the case of his ancestor Reb Nissl and a man named Kivke. The Man from Buenos Aires recounts the reaction of the narrator to the strange business of the man from Buenos Aires. The narrator never figures out what the man does to earn a living. Other stories such as Elul, The Automatic Exemption, and It Doesn't Paid to Be Good, are first-person accounts of incidents. The reader has to decide if the person telling the story is sincere or deceitful.

Setting

The setting of the stories is generally the small towns and villages of Russia, plus some cities such as the mythical Yehupetz and the port of Odessa. Tevye's village in Tevye the Dairyman is never named. The reader gets the feeling that the village is so small and nondescript that it may not even have a name. In the Tevye stories, the railroad and train station is also a setting. A good example is when Peppercorn takes a train to prison and exile. The country-like setting of Tevye's village is spotlighted as when Ahronchik visits at Sukkos time and all is green. This simple setting is contrasted with the rich summer dachas of Jews in the town of Boiberik. There fancy meals and parties go on, as poor Jews like Tevye have to work hard to satisfy the wants of the dachas of Boiberik.

The Railroad Stories offer a larger setting, with railroads stretching all over Russia. These trains vary from the crowded trains going to the busy port of Odessa, to the near empty new trains of the Slowpoke Express. The Jews of small towns and villages are not allowed to live in the city of Yehupetz, but often sneak in there to get medical



treatment and to make a living. After the Constitution is passed, reactionary riots break out and Jews are seen on the railroad fleeing from place to place. America remains as the last place of refuge from the pogroms, though reports from there warn that it can be a place of hard work, low wages, and sweat shops.

Language and Meaning

The novel, *Tevye the Dairyman*, and the *Railroad Stories* are originally written in Yiddish and are translated into English. The language flows fairly well, though it is a bit disconcerting that the vocabulary level is quite simple. This is broken up by quotations that were originally in Hebrew, other scholarly languages, or Russian, which are translated in the back of the book and often in the context of the book. Tevye faces his hard life armed with a slew of Biblical quotations that make his life seem important and bearable. The ending of *Tevye the Dairyman* is clear in that Tevye is glad to be a Jew and believes that God will eventually bring the Messiah to take away all the troubles of his people.

There is a change in style in the *Railroad Stories*, which generally lack the quotations in the novel. In the stories, different personality types are presented among travelers. The issues presented are those of honesty, trust, piety, hypocrisy and faith. The reader is asked to enjoy the character's sense of humor, and not to take the stories too literally. For example, in the *Man from Buenos Aires*, an extreme case is given of a man who has money but does not do anything defined. The narrator acknowledges that he is familiar with these types of men who are con artists and who deal in hopes, dreams, and financial speculation. In this extreme case, the man from Buenos Aires seems to have huge amounts of money but actually does not have anything real. By looking at the extreme case, there is a lot more humor and fun than the ordinary cases of the same tendency of man. Exaggeration is what gives these stories their bite. In the story, the *Automatic Exemption*, the hilarity is on the situation of the drafted boy, who has too many names that sound alike and their similarity to the names of his dead brother. Such are the ingredients of many comedy routines in the past and present.

Structure

The book is divided into a novel, *Tevye the Dairyman*, and 21 stories grouped together as the *Railroad Stories*. *Tevye the Dairyman* is also broken up 8 stories but these are united by the same Tevye and his family. Tevye is first introduced as a poor man who strikes it rich. Then the reader sees Tevye struck down in his attempt to become a rich man. The rest of the novel is united around Tevye's struggles to marry his seven daughters, of which only Tsaytl, Hodl, Chava, Shprintze, and Beilke are described. The stories are humorous but in each story, Tevye's situation and results become worse. Finally, Tevye is expelled from his village and becomes homeless and left to wander.

Among the *Railroad Stories*, the uniting structure is that they are jotted down by a commercial traveler and heard by him on the railroad. All the stories are told by

businessmen, who range from the rich who still enjoy riding in third-class compartments and the associated talk, to stories of thieves, embezzlers, and arsonists. The first story, *To the Reader*, is an introduction to the series, and the last story, *Third Class*, is an epilogue and a reminder to the reader on the joys of travel and being with fellow Jews. None of the stories is longer than 10 pages, although the shortest stories excluded the first and last are about 3 to 5 pages. The stories seem to have originally been written for newspapers or periodicals, thus explaining their length.



Quotes

"My wife milks the cows; the girls carry the cans and churn butter; and I as you see, go to the market every morning and from there to all the summer dachas in Boiberik" (Tevye Strikes it Rich, pg. 4.)

"I dreamed that I saw a big milk can filled to the brim, and Grandma Tsaytl was carrying it underneath her apron to keep the Evil Eye from seeing it, and all the children were shouting, "Look Mama, look" (Tevye Strikes it Rich, Golde speaking, pg. 18.)

"'Are you crazy,' I said. 'Since when can you be the matchmaker, the father-in-law, the groom all rolled into one?'" (Today's Children, pg. 48.)

"'Excuse me, but when was the engagement party? It's rather odd that you forgot to invite me to it, because if she'll be your wife, I just might be your father-in-law,'" (Hodl, pg. 61.)

"'Even if I told you, you wouldn't understand. Chvedka is a second Gorky'" (Chava, Chava speaking, pg. 71.)

"'I tell you, I didn't like it one bit: what kind of business was it to trade such a horse for my gluepot?'" (Shprintze, pg. 89.)

"'I can't afford to have a cheesemonger for a father-in-law'" (Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel, Podhotzur speaking, pg. 108.)

"'Tell me officer,' I said to him, 'are you aware of the fact that I've been living in the village longer than you have?'" (Lekh-Lekho, pg. 124.)

"'Ha, ha, that's a good one!' said a thick bass voice. 'What Jews don't call making a living!'" (Competitors, pg.138.)

"'Maybe you were sent by Providence to make me a gift of, my child, the one and only son left out of six that were born to me, may he live to a ripe old age'" (The Happiest Man in All Kodny, pg. 151.)

"'The man from Buenos Aires: What do I deal in? Ha ha! Not in Hanukah candles, my friend, not in Hanukah candles!'" (The Man from Buenos Aires, pg. 176.)

"'The punch line,' he says, 'is that the officer puts a bullet in his head, and so does the student, and Krasavitsa takes poison, and this Jew, Soloveichik- he's part of it also-goes and hands himself.'" (Elul, pg. 180.)

"'Seeing as how, they wrote, it was time to stand up and be counted in Heysen too, where there was a dearth of volunteers, could they please be sent reinforcements in a hurry'" (The Wedding that Came without Its Band, pg. 195.)



"It was only then, when I was totally cleaned out- when seeing my partner, flushed with victory, button up his vest, the truth hit home that I was as fleeced as a shorn lamb and broke as a dropped dish- it was only then that I began to take stock of what had happened" (A Game of Sixty-Six, pg. 215.)

"My Itsik- I mean my Alter- is brought in to the governor as naked, begging your pardon, as the day he was born, and this time a whole committee is there to perform the laying on of hands" (The Automatic Exemption, pg. 232.)

"Her life with the children, she wrote, lacked nothing, it should only always be as good, because Paysi was already in medical school and Rayzi was working as a midwife: in fact they were earning seventy rubles a month- did you ever?" (It Doesn't Pay to Be Good, pg. 246.)

"I've come from America on behalf of the whole family. I want a full accounting of my father's money" (Fated for Misfortune, pg. 268.)

"It had been a struggle, the boy's father told us, just to get the body returned by the prison so it could be brought to a Jewish grave- and the youngster, he swore, was perfectly innocent, he had been railroaded at his trial" (The Tenth Man, pg. 274.)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Tevye's trips back and forth to Boiberik. Is it like traveling between two worlds where one is rich and exclusive while the other is simple and in the country? What unites these two worlds?

Discuss Tevye's obsession with marrying off his daughters. Is this his social obligation or is there an economic dimension to it?

What defines a successful marriage for Tevye? Discuss the marriages of Tevye's daughters. Which daughter is most successful and which is least successful?

Discuss Tevye's relationship with Golde his wife. Is it a warm relationship? Is it a loving relationship or one due to social obligation?

Discuss the persecution of Jews and their attempts to counter it. In the story titled "Baranovich Station," how do the characters avoid a disgrace to the Jewish community? What is the result?

Discuss the confrontation between rich Jews and poor Jews. Is this as gaping as that between Jews and Non-Jews? How are rich and poor Jews united in their lives?

Discuss the relationship between traditional and non-traditional Jews. What is the reaction of the non-religious Jew in the story, the Tenth Man, to the Jews who demand he participate in a minyan?

Discuss less visible forms of discrimination against Jews. What is the reaction of the husband and wife to school quotas in the story titled, "High School?" Are they successful in dealing with these quotas?

In the stories "Fated for Misfortune," and "It Doesn't Pay to Be Good," the subject of the story is confronted with his moral conduct to his adopted children in one case, and to a widow and her children in the other case. Do these protagonists act moral? Are their explanations convincing?

Discuss the relationship between Jews and revolutionary political activity. Does such revolutionary activity play a role in provoking pogroms against Jews after the Constitution is put into effect? Is revolutionary activity a way to a better life for young Jews?