

CULTURE  
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Nineteenth-Century  
Jewish Literature  
*A Reader*

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and Nadia Valman*

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

## Israel Zangwill, "Transitional" (1899)

Although not religiously observant himself, Zangwill wrote repeatedly about the place of Judaism in the modern world, sometimes critiquing the blind superstitions of eastern European orthodoxy and sometimes eulogizing the unique spiritual intensity of traditional Judaism and the racial bond that united Jews throughout the diaspora. He was not a supporter of reform Judaism but his thought often moved toward a notion of universalism grounded in Jewish ethics. In "Anglicization," in Section 3 of this volume, a Jewish character experiences a moment of spiritual elevation in a cathedral, opening her mind to the common ground between Jewish and Christian worshippers. In contrast, in his most famous play, *The Melting Pot* (1908), Zangwill was to propose American national identity as a kind of universal faith beyond the particularisms of ethnicity and religion.

In an article for the intellectual journal the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, in 1889, Zangwill described English Judaism as "transitional," and the possible future paths it might take furnished the subject of much of his fiction. His story "Transitional" was first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1899 and reprinted in the same year in Zangwill's collection "*They That Walk in Darkness*": *Ghetto Tragedies*, reissued and expanded from its 1893 first edition. The volume's title daringly utilizes a phrase conventionally applied by Christians to Jews, referring to their refusal to acknowledge the new religion of Christ. Rather than dismissing this idea as simply anti-Judaic, however, Zangwill explores the various ways in which an unquestioning attachment to traditional faith shapes modern Jewish lives.

440 Zangwill was writing in the context of a long tradition of apologetics in Anglo-Jewish writing, in which Jewish writers, like Grace Aguilar, had felt obliged to refute charges that Judaism was unspiritual and legalistic. By the late nineteenth century, Judaism was also often represented in the language of ethnography as a primitive, tribal religion. "Transitional," however, deploys a Dickensian mix of sentimental melodrama and sharp social satire to defend what Zangwill regards as highly refined Jewish ideals while critiquing the hypocrisies of nominal Jews. He does this through the figure of Schnapsie, the young idealist who argues in "Transitional" that Judaism is a religion with values as noble as those of Christianity. In this respect we can see a clear echo of Kompert's *The Peddler* (1849), in which the pro-

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tagonist returns to Judaism with an altered sense of its spiritual potential. However, the story also imagines religious renewal beyond the level of the individual, looking to what Schnapsie calls the "nobler future" of Judaism itself.

I.

The day came when old Daniel Peyser could no longer withstand his wife's desire for a wider social sphere and a horizon blacker with advancing bachelors. For there were seven daughters, and not a man to the pack. Indeed, there had been only one marriage in the whole Portsmouth congregation during the last five years, and the Christian papers had had reports of the novel ceremony, with the ritual bathing of the bride and the breaking of the glass under the bridegroom's heel. To Mrs. Peyser, brought up amid the facile pairing of the Russian pale, this congestion of celibacy approached immorality.

Portsmouth with its careless soldiers and sailors might be an excellent town for pawnbroking, especially when one was not too punctiliously acceptant of the ethics of the heathen, but as a market for maidens—even with dowries and pretty faces—it was hopeless. But it was not wholly as an emporium for bachelors that London appealed. It was the natural goal of the provincial Jew, the reward of his industry. The best people had all drifted to the mighty magic city, whose fascination survived even cheap excursions to it.

Would father deny that they had now made enough to warrant the migration? No, father would not deny it. Ever since he had left Germany as a boy he had been saving money, and his surplus he had shrewdly invested in the neighbouring soil of Southsea, fast growing into a watering-place. Even allowing three thousand pounds for each daughter's dowry, he would still have a goodly estate.

Was there any social reason why they should not cut as great a dash as the Benjamins or the Rosenweilers? No, father would not deny that his girls were prettier and more polished than the daughters of these pioneers, especially when six of them crowded around the stern granite figure, arguing, imploring, cajoling, kissing.

"But I don't see why we should waste the money," he urged, with the cautious instincts of early poverty.

"Waste!" and the pretty lips made reproachful "Oh's!"

"Yes, waste!" he retorted, "In India one treads on diamonds and gold, but in London the land one treads on costs diamonds and gold."

"But are we never to have a grandson?" cried Mrs. Peyser.

The Indian item was left unquestioned, so that little Schnapsie, whose childish imagination was greatly impressed by these eventful family debates, had for years a vivid picture of picking her way with bare feet over sharp-pointed diamonds and pebbly gold. Indeed, long after she had learned to wonder at her father's naïve geography the word *India* always shone for her with barbaric splendour.

Environed by so much persistent femininity, the rugged elderly toiler was at last nagged into accepting a leisured life in London.

## II.

And so the family spread its wings joyfully and migrated to the wonder-town. Only its head and tail—old Daniel and little Schnapsie—felt the least sentiment for the things left behind. Old Daniel left the dingy synagogue to whose presidency he had mounted with the fattening of his purse, and in which he bought for himself, or those he delighted to honour, the choicest privileges of ark-opening or scroll-bearing;<sup>1</sup> left the cronies who dropped in to play "Klabberjagd" on Sunday afternoons;<sup>2</sup> left the bustling lucrative Saturday nights in the shop when the heathen housewives came to redeem their Sabbath finery.

And little Schnapsie—who was only eleven, and not keen about husbands—left the twinkling tarry harbour, with its heroic hulks and modern men-of-war amid which the halfpenny steamer plied; left the great waves that smashed on the pebbly beach, and the friendly moon that threw shimmering paths across their tranquillity; left the narrow lively streets in which she had played, and the school in which she had always headed her class, and the salt wind that blew over all.

Little Schnapsie was only Schnapsie to her father. Her real name was Florence. The four younger girls all bore pagan names—Sylvia, Lily, Daisy, Florence—symbolic of the influence upon the family councils of

1. Opening the ark and carrying the scrolls of the Torah during the synagogue service are considered great privileges; in recognition of this the congregant so honoured is expected to make a monetary donation to the synagogue.

2. Klabberjass, a card game particularly popular among Jewish communities.

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5. Traditionally worn by

the three elder girls, grown to years of discretion and disgust with their own Leah, Rachael, and Rebecca. Between these two strata of girls—Jewish and pagan—two boys had intervened, but their stay was brief and pitiful, so that all this plethora of progeny had not provided the father with a male mourner to say the *Kaddish*.<sup>3</sup> But it seemed likely a grandson would not long be a-wanting, for the eldest girl was twenty-five, and all were good-looking. As if in irony, the Jewish group was blond, almost Christian, in colouring (for they took after the Teuton father), while the pagan group had characteristically Oriental traits. In little Schnapsie these Eastern charms—a whit heavy in her sisters—were repeated in a key of exquisite refinement. The thick black eyebrows and hair were soft as silk, dark dreamy eyes suffused her oval face with poetry, and her skin was like dead ivory flushing into life.

### III.

The first year at Highbury, that genteel suburb in the north of London, was an enchanted ecstasy for the mother and the Jewish group of girls, taken at once to the bosom of a great German clan, and admitted to a new world of dances and dinners, of "at homes" and theatres and card parties.<sup>4</sup> The eldest of the pagan group, Sylvia—tyrannically kept young in the interests of her sisters—was the only one who grumbled at the change, for Lily and Daisy found sufficient gain in the prospect of replacing the elder group when it should have passed away in an odour of orange blossom.<sup>5</sup> The scent of that was always in the air, and Mrs. Peyser and her three hopefuls sniffed it night and day.

"No, no; Rebecca shall have him."

"Not me! I am not going to marry a man with carroty hair. Leah's the eldest; it's her turn first."

"Thank you, my dear. Don't give away what you haven't got."

Every new young man who showed the faintest signs of liking to drop in, provoked a similar semi-facetious but also semi-serious canvassing—his person, his income, and the girl to whom he should be

3. In orthodox tradition the Jewish memorial prayer for the dead can be recited only by male relatives.

4. An "at home" was an informal reception in a private house.

5. Traditionally worn by brides in Europe and America.

allotted supplying the sauce of every meal at which he—or his fellow—was not present.

Thus, whether in the flesh or the spirit, the Young Man—for so many of him appeared on the scene that he hovered in the air rather as a type than an individual—was a permanent guest at the Peyser table.

But all this new domestic excitement did not compensate little Schnapsie for her moonlit waters and the strange ships that came and went with their cargo of mystery.

And poor old Daniel found no cronies to appeal to him like the old, nothing in the roar of London to compensate for the Saturday night bustle of the pawnshop, no dingy little synagogue desirous of his presidential pomp. He sat inconspicuously in a handsome half-empty edifice, and knew himself a superfluous atom in a vast lonely wilderness.

He was not, indeed, an imposing figure, with his ragged graying whiskers and his boyish blue eyes. In the street he had the stoop and shuffle of the Ghetto, and forgot to hide his coarse red hands with gloves; in the house he persisted in wearing a pious skull-cap. At first his more adaptable wife and his English-bred daughters tried to fit him for decent society, and to make him feel at home during their "at homes." But he was soon relegated to the background of these brilliant social tableaux; for he was either too silent or too talkative, with old-fashioned Jewish jokes which disconcerted the smart young men, and with Hebrew quotations which they could not even understand. And sometimes there thrilled through the small-talk the trumpet-note of his nose, as he blew it into a coloured handkerchief. Gradually he was eliminated from the drawing-room altogether.

But for some years longer he reigned supreme in the dining-room—when there was no company. Old habit kept the girls at table when he intoned with noisy unction the Hebrew grace after meals; they even joined in the melodious morceaux that diversified the plain-chant. But little by little their contributions dwindled to silence. And when they had smart company to dinner, the old man himself was hushed by rows of blond and bugle eyebrows; especially after he had once or twice put young men to shame by offering them the honour of reciting the grace they did not know.

Daniel's prayer on such occasions was at length reduced to a pious

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mumbling, which went unobserved amid the joyous clatter of dessert, even as his pious skull-cap passed as a preventive against cold.

Last stage of all, the mumbling of his company manners passed over into the domestic circle; and this humble whispering to God became symbolic of his suppression.

#### IV.

"I don't think he means Rachael at all."

"Oh, how can you say so, Leah? It was me he took down to supper."

"Nonsense! it isn't either of you he's after; that's only his politeness to my sisters. Didn't he say the bouquet was for me?"

"Don't be silly, Rebecca. You know you can't have him. The eldest must take precedence."

This changed tone indicated their humbler attitude toward the Young Man as the years went by. For the first young man did not propose, either to the sisterhood *en bloc* or to a particular sister. And his example was followed by his successors. In fact, a procession of young men passed and repassed through the house, or danced with the girls at balls, without a single application for any of these many hands. And the first season passed into the second, and the second into the third, with tantalising mirages of marriage. Balls, dances, dinners, a universe of nebulous matrimonial matter on the whirl, but never the shot-off star of an engagement! Mrs. Peyser's hair began to whiten faster. She even surreptitiously called in the Shadchan,<sup>6</sup> or rather surrendered to his solicitations.

"Pooh! Not find any one suitable?" he declared, rubbing his hands.

"I have hundreds of young men on my books, just your sort, real gentlemen."

At first the girls refused to consider applications from such a source. It was not done in their set, they said.

Mrs. Peyser snorted sceptically. "Oh, indeed! and pray how did those Rosenweiler girls find husbands?"

"Oh, yes, the Rosenweilers!" They shrugged their shoulders; they knew they had not that disadvantage of hideousness.

6. Professional marriage agent.

Nevertheless they lent an ear to the agent's suggestions as filtered through the mother, though under pretence of deriding them.

But the day came when even that pretence was dropped, and with broken spirit they waited eagerly for each new possibility. And with the passing of the years the Young Man aged. He grew balder, less gentlemanly, poorer.

Once indeed, he turned up as a handsome and wealthy Christian, but this time it was he that was rejected in a unanimous sisterly shudder. Five slow years wore by, then of a sudden the luck changed. A water-proof manufacturer on the sunny side of forty appeared, the long glacial epoch was broken up, and the first orange blossom ripened for the Peyser household.

It was Rebecca, the youngest of the Jewish group, who proved the pioneer to the canopy,<sup>7</sup> but her marriage gave a new lease of youth even to the oldest. And miraculously, mysteriously, within a few months two other girls flew off Mrs. Peyser's shoulders—a Jewish and a pagan—though Sylvia was not yet formally “out.”

And though Leah, the first born, still remained unchosen, yet Sylvia's marriage to a Bayswater household had raised the family status, and provided a better field for operations. The Shadchan was frozen off.

But he returned. For despite all these auguries and auspices another arctic winter set in. No orange blossoms, only desolate lichens of fruitless flirtation.

Gradually the pagan group pushed its way into unconcealable womanhood. The problem darkened all the horizon. The Young Man grew middle-aged again. He lost all his money; he wanted old Daniel to set him up in business. Even this seemed better than a barren fine ladyhood, and Leah might have even harked back to the parental pawnshop had not another sudden epidemic of felicity married off all save little Schnapsie within eighteen months. Mrs. Peyser was knocked breathless by all these shocks. First a rich German banker, then a prosperous solicitor (for Leah), then a Cape financier—any one in himself catch enough to “gouge out the eyes” of the neighbours.

“I told you so,” she said, her portly bosom swelling portlier with exultation as the sixth bride was whirled off in a rice shower from the

7. The Jewish marriage ceremony is conducted under a canopy.

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Daniel pressed her hand  
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8. *Tefilin* (phylacteries) are small boxes  
from the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the



Highbury villa, while the other five sat around in radiant matronhood. "I told you to come to London."

Daniel pressed her hand in gratitude for all the happiness she had given herself and the girls.

"If it were not for Florence," she went on wistfully.

"Ah, little Schnapsie!" sighed Daniel. Somehow he felt he would have preferred her hymeneal felicity to all these marvellous marriages. For there had grown up a strange sympathy between the poor lonely old man, now nearly seventy, and his little girl, now twenty-four. They never conversed except about commonplaces, but somehow he felt that her presence warmed the air. And she—she divined his solitude, albeit dimly; had an intuition of what life had been for him in the days before she was born: the long days behind the counter, the risings in the grey dawn to chant orisons and don phylacteries<sup>8</sup> ere the pawn-shop opened, the lengthy prayer and the swift supper when the shutters were at last put up—all the bare rock on which this floriage of prosperity had been sown. And long after the others had dropped kissing him good-night, she would tender her lips, partly because of the necessary domestic fiction that she was still a baby, but also because she felt instinctively that the kiss counted in his life.

Through all these years of sordid squabbles and canvassings and weary waiting, all those endless scenes of hysteria engendered by the mutual friction of all that close-packed femininity, poor Schnapsie had lived, shuddering. Sometimes a sense of the pathos of it all, of the tragedy of women's lives, swept over her. She regretted every inch she grew, it seemed to shame her celibate sisters so. She clung willingly to short skirts until she was of age, wore her long raven hair in a plait with a red ribbon.

"Well, Florence," said Leah genially, when the last outsider at Daisy's wedding had departed, "it's your turn next. You'd better hurry up."

"Thank you," said Florence coldly. "I shall take my own time; fortunately there is no one behind me."

"Humph!" said Leah, playing with her diamond rings. "It don't do to be too particular. Why don't you come round and see me sometimes?"

8. *Tefilin* (phylacteries) are small boxes containing parchments inscribed with writings from the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the forehead and arm during men's daily prayers.

"There are so many of you now," murmured Florence. She was not attracted by the solicitors and traders in whose society and carriages her mother lolled luxuriously, and she resented the matronly airs of her sisters. With Leah, however, she was conscious of a different and more paradoxical provocation. Leah had an incredible air of juvenility. All those unthinkable, innumerable years little Schnapsie had conceived of her eldest sister as an old maid, hopeless, senescent, despite the wonderful belt that had kept her figure dashing; but now that she was married she had become the girlish bride, kittenish, irresistible, while little Schnapsie was the old maid, the sister in peril of being passed by. And indeed she felt herself appallingly ancient, prematurely aged by her long stay at seventeen.

"Yes, you are right, Leah," she said pensively, with a touch of malice. "To-morrow I shall be twenty-four."

"What?" shrieked Leah.

"Yes," Florence said obstinately. "And oh, how glad I shall be!" She raised her arms exultingly and stretched herself, as if shooting up seven years as soon as the pressure of her sisters was removed.

"Do you hear, mother?" whispered Leah. "That fool of a Florence is going to celebrate her twenty-fourth birthday. Not the slightest consideration for *us!*"

"I didn't say I would celebrate it publicly," said Florence. "Besides," she suggested, smiling, "very soon people will forget that I am *not* the eldest."

"Then your folly will recoil on your own head," said Leah.

Little Schnapsie gave a devil-may-care shrug—a Ghetto trait that still clung to all the sisters.

"Yes," added Mrs. Peyser. "Think what it will be in ten years' time!"

"I shall be thirty-four," said Florence imperturbably. Another little smile lit up the dreamy eyes. "Then I *shall* be the eldest."

"Madness!" cried Mrs. Peyser, aloud, forgetting that her daughters' husbands were about. "God forbid I should live to see any girl of mine thirty-four!"

"Hush, mother!" said Florence quietly. "I hope you will; indeed, I am sure you will, for I shall *never* marry. So don't bother to put me on the books—I'm not on the market. Good-night."

She sought out poor Daniel, who, awed by the culture and standing

of his five sons-in-law, not to speak of the deserted supper-room, smoking the caterer's men, who were the august of the caterer's men, who were

Having duly kissed her father, Leah turned to Browning's love-poems. Her mother sought to restore her ruffled nerves to the

Poor portly Mrs. Peyser was not depressed for more than a few years. But the cup, with only the bitter drop of the Young Man. Environed by the gotten, Mrs. Peyser breathed that which was the breath of her Jewish every other month. It was a seething religious ceremonies connected with the cal recipes for their bodily salvation grandmotherliness usually received babies were deported to scattered seeds that the summer of her death found a bad cold, with only Daniel and little the others could be called, Mrs. Peyser Portsmouth bed, overlooked by the old London dining-room.

It was a curious end. She did not was anxious she should not be reft into immemorial proclamation of the Unit to appall her with the grim knowledge

He was blubbering piteously, yet still days of his struggle came back, the first then the long years of progressive pros Portsmouth ere she had grown fashionable a vast self-pity mingled with his pitiful

9. "Shema Yisrael," the deathbed prayer, is an allusion to note 8.

of his five sons-in-law, not to speak of the guests, was hanging about the deserted supper-room, smoking cigar after cigar, much to the disgust of the caterer's men, who were waiting to spirit away the box.

Having duly kissed her father, little Schnapsie retired to bed to read Browning's love-poems. Her mother had to take a glass of champagne to restore her ruffled nerves to the appropriate ecstasy.

V.

Poor portly Mrs. Peyser was not destined to enjoy her harvest of happiness for more than a few years. But these years were an overbrimming cup, with only the bitter drop of Florence's heretical indifference to the Young Man. Environed by the six households which she had begotten, Mrs. Peyser breathed that atmosphere of ebullient babyhood which was the breath of her Jewish nostrils; babies appeared almost every other month. It was a seething well-spring of healthy life. Religious ceremonies connected with these chubby new-comers, or medical recipes for their bodily salvation, absorbed her. But her exuberant grandmotherliness usually received a check in the summer, when the babies were deported to scattered sea-shores; and thus it came to pass that the summer of her death found her still lingering in London with a bad cold, with only Daniel and little Schnapsie at hand. And before the others could be called, Mrs. Peyser passed away in peace, in the old Portsmouth bed, overlooked by the old Hebrew picture exiled from the London dining-room.

It was a curious end. She did not know she was dying, but Daniel was anxious she should not be left into silence before she had made the immemorial proclamation of the Unity.<sup>9</sup> At the same time he hesitated to appall her with the grim knowledge.

He was blubbering piteously, yet striving to hide his sobs. The early days of his struggle came back, the first weeks of wedded happiness, then the long years of progressive prosperity and godly cheerfulness in Portsmouth ere she had grown fashionable and he unimportant; and a vast self-pity mingled with his pitiful sense of her excellencies—the

<sup>9</sup> "Shema Yisrael," the deathbed prayer, is an avowal of the divine unity. See Chapter 1, note 8.

children she had borne him in agony, the economy of her house management, the good bargains she had driven with the clod-pated soldiers and sailors, the later splendour of her social achievement.

And little Schnapsie wept with a sense of the vanity of these dual existences to which she owed her own empty life.

Suddenly Mrs. Peyser, over whose black eyes a glaze had been stealing, let the long dark eyelashes fall over them.

"Sarah!" whispered Daniel frantically. "Say the Shemang!"

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," said the sensuous lips obediently.

Little Schnapsie shrugged her shoulders rebelliously. The dogma seemed so irrelevant.

Mrs. Peyser opened her eyes, and a beautiful mother-light came into them as she saw the weeping girl.

"Ah, Florrie, do not fret," she said reassuringly, in her long-lapsed Yiddish. "I will find thee a bridegroom."

Her eyes closed, and little Schnapsie shuddered with a weird image of a lover fetched from the shrouded dead.

## VI.

After his Sarah had been lowered into "The House of Life,"<sup>10</sup> and the excitement of the tombstone recording her virtues had subsided, Daniel would have withered away in an empty world but for little Schnapsie. The two kept house together; the same big house that had reeked with so much feminine life, and about which the odours of perfumes and powders still seemed to linger. But father and daughter only met at meals. He spent hours over the morning paper, with the old quaint delusions about India and other things he read of, and he pottered about the streets, or wandered into the Berth-Hamidrash,<sup>11</sup> which a local fanatic had just instituted in North London, and in which, under the guidance of a Polish sage, Daniel strove to concentrate his aged wits on the ritual problems of Babylon. At long intervals he brushed his old-fashioned high hat carefully, and timidly rang the bell of one

10. Cemetery.

11. Institution, often attached to a synagogue, for studying rabbinic texts.

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monstrating baby; but they all live  
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Figure then the septuagenarian's a  
he was shuffling about in his carpet  
word that his six daughters demanded  
drawing-room.

The shock drove out all thoughts  
with a painful premonition of he kn  
visit recalled funerals, weddings. He k  
four carriages drawn up, and that cor  
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shone with gold necklaces, and impre  
aroma of powders and perfumes. He fe  
this pungent prosperity, like some more  
congress of his own monsters.

They did not rise as he entered. The  
group were promiscuously seated—ma  
the ancient landmarks. They all looked a  
standstill buxom matronhood.

Daniel stood at the door, glancing  
coughed; others fidgeted with muffs.

"Sit down, sit down, father," said Ra  
tained the armchair,—and there was a gen  
But the old embarrassment returned as th  
when Daniel had drooped into a stiff chair.

of his daughters' mansions, and was permitted to caress a loudly re-monstrating baby; but they all lived so far from him and one another in this mighty London. From Sylvia's, where there was a boy with buttons, he had always been frightened off, and when the others began to emulate her, his visits ceased altogether. As for the sisters coming to see him, all pleaded overwhelming domestic duty, and the frigidity of Florence's reception of them. "Now if you lived alone—or with one of us!" But somehow Daniel felt the latter alternative would be as desolate as the former. And though he knew some wide vague river flowed between even his present housemate's life and his own, yet he felt far more clearly the bridge of love over which their souls passed to each other.

Figure then the septuagenarian's amaze when, one fine morning, as he was shuffling about in his carpet slippers, the servant brought him word that his six daughters demanded his instantaneous presence in the drawing-room.

The shock drove out all thoughts of toilet; his heart beat quicker with a painful premonition of he knew not what. This simultaneous visit recalled funerals, weddings. He looked out of a window and saw four carriages drawn up, and that completed his sense of something elemental. He tottered into the drawing-room—grown dingy now that it had no more daughters to dispose of—and shrank before the resplendence with which their presence reinvested it. They rustled with silks, shone with gold necklaces, and impregnated the air with its ancient aroma of powders and perfumes. He felt himself dwindling before all this pungent prosperity, like some more creative Frankenstein before a congress of his own monsters.

They did not rise as he entered. The Jewish group and the pagan group were promiscuously seated—marriage had broken down all the ancient landmarks. They all looked about the same agelessness—a standstill buxom matronhood.

Daniel stood at the door, glancing from one to another. Some coughed; others fidgeted with muff's.

"Sit down, sit down, father," said Rachael kindly, though she retained the armchair,—and there was a general air of relief at her voice. But the old embarrassment returned as the silence re-established itself when Daniel had drooped into a stiff chair.

At last Leah took the word: "We have come while Florrie is at her slumming—"12

"At her slumming!" repeated Sylvia, with more significance, and a meaning smile spread over the six faces.

"Yes?" Daniel murmured.

"—Because we did not want her to know of our coming."

"It concerns Schnapsie?" he murmured.

"Yes, your little Schnapsie," said Daisy viciously.

"Yes; she has no time to come and see *us*," cried Rebecca. "But she has plenty of time for her—*slumming*."

"Well, she does good," he murmured apologetically.

"A fat lot of good!" sniggered Rachael.

"To herself!" corrected Lily.

"I do not understand," he muttered uneasily.

"Well—" began Lily. "You tell him, Leah; you know more about it."

"You know as much as I do."

He looked appealingly from one to the other.

"I always said the slums were dangerous places for people of our class," said Sylvia. "She doesn't even confine herself to her own people."

The faces began to lighten—evidently they felt the ice broken.

"Dangerous!" he repeated, catching at the ominous word.

"Dreadful!" in a common shudder.

He half rose. "You have bad news?" he cried.

The faces gloomed over, the heads nodded.

"About Schnapsie?" he shrieked, jumping up.

"Sit down, sit down; she's not dead," said Leah contemptuously.

He sat down.

"Well, what is it? What has happened?"

"She's engaged!" In Leah's mouth the word sounded like a death-bell.

"Engaged!" he breathed, with a glimmering foreboding of the horror.

"To a Christian!" said Daisy brutally.

He sank back, pale and trembling. A tense silence fell on the room.

12. Contemporary term used somewhat sneeringly of middle-class philanthropists who worked amongst the poor.

"But how? Who?" he murmur

The girls recovered themselves

"Another slummer?"

"He's the son of an archdeacon

"An awful Christian crank."

"And that's your pet Schnapsie

"If *we* had wanted Christians,

years ago."

"It's a terrible disgrace for us."

"She doesn't consider us in the

"She'll be miserable, anyhow. W

it up to her that she's a Jewess."

"And wouldn't join our Daught

time."

"Wasn't going to marry—turned

men!"

"But she would have told me!"

believe it. My little Schnapsie!"

"Don't believe it?" snorted Leah.

"Have you spoken to her, then?"

"Have we spoken to her! Why, st

will disgrace us all."

The blind racial instinct spoke th

turies of tested separateness. But Da

scious religious horror.

"But is she to be married in a Chri

"Oh, she isn't going to marry—yet

His poor heart fluttered at the rep

"She doesn't care a pin for *our* feelin

she won't marry while *you* are alive."

Lily took up the thread. "We all te

we'd all be glad to have you—in turn

could have you herself; her Alfred wou

religious feelings that keeps her back.

"God bless her, my good little Schn

brain did not grasp all the bearings, w

"But how? Who?" he murmured at last.

The girls recovered themselves. Now they were all speaking at once.

"Another slummer."

"He's the son of an archdeacon."

"An awful Christian crank."

"And that's your pet Schnapsie."

"If *we* had wanted Christians, we could have been married twenty years ago."

"It's a terrible disgrace for us."

"She doesn't consider us in the least."

"She'll be miserable, anyhow. When they quarrel, he'll always throw it up to her that she's a Jewess."

"And wouldn't join our Daughters of Mercy committee—had no time."

"Wasn't going to marry—turned up her nose at all the Jewish young men!"

"But she would have told me!" he murmured hopelessly. "I don't believe it. My little Schnapsie!"

"Don't believe it?" snorted Leah. "Why, she didn't even deny it."

"Have you spoken to her, then?"

"Have we spoken to her! Why, she says Judaism is all nonsense! She will disgrace us all."

The blind racial instinct spoke through them—the twenty-five centuries of tested separateness. But Daniel felt in super-addition the conscious religious horror.

"But is she to be married in a Christian church?" he breathed.

"Oh, she isn't going to marry—yet."

His poor heart fluttered at the reprieve.

"She doesn't care a pin for *our* feelings," went on Leah. "But of course she won't marry while *you* are alive."

Lily took up the thread. "We all told her if she'd only marry a Jew, we'd all be glad to have you—in turn. But she said it wasn't that. She could have you herself; her Alfred wouldn't mind. It's the shock to your religious feelings that keeps her back. She doesn't want to hurt you."

"God bless her, my good little Schnapsie!" he murmured. His dazed brain did not grasp all the bearings, was only conscious of a vast relief.

Disgust darkened all the faces.

He groped to understand it, putting his hand over the white hairs that straggled from his skull-cap.

"But then—then it's all right."

"Yes, all right," said Leah brutally. "But for how long?"

Her meaning seized him like an icy claw upon his heart. For the first time in his life he realized the certainty of death, and simultaneously with the certainty its imminence.

"We want you to put a stop to it *now*," said Sylvia. "For our sakes make her promise that even when—You're the only one who has any influence over her."

She rose, as if to wind up the painful interview, and the others rose, too, with a multiplex rustling of silken skirts. He shook the six jewelled hands as in a dream, and promised to do his best; and as he watched the little procession of carriages roll off, it seemed to him indeed a funeral, and his own.

## VII.

Ah God, that it should have come to this! Little Schnapsie could not be happy till he was dead. Well, why should he keep her waiting? What mattered the few odd years or months? He was already dead. There was his funeral going down the street.

To speak to Schnapsie he had never intended, even while he was promising it. Those years of silent life together had made real conversation impossible. The bridge on which his soul passed over to hers was a bridge over which hung a sacred silence. Under the weight of words, especially of angry parental words, it might break down for ever. And that would be worse than death.

No; little Schnapsie had her own life, and he somehow knew he had not the right to question it, even though it seemed on the verge of deadly sin. He could not have expressed it in logical speech, was not even clearly conscious of it; but his tender relation with her had educated him to a sense of her moral rightness, which now survived and subsisted with his conviction that she was hopelessly astray. No; he had not the right to interfere with her life, with her prospect of happiness in her own way. He must give up living. Little Schnapsie must be nearly

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The answer

"It's all righ  
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"You have l

"Yes," he sai

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"But do you

"A Christian  
man, eh?" He l

Little Schnap  
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"But I thoug

"Thought I v



thirty; the best of her youth was gone. She should be happy with this strange man.

But if he killed himself, that would bring disgrace on the family—and little Schnapsie. Perhaps, too, Alfred would not marry her. Was there no way of slipping quietly out of existence? But then suicide was another deadly sin. If only that had really been his funeral procession!

"O God, God of Israel, tell me what to do!"

### VIII.

A sudden inspiration leapt to his heart. She should not have to wait for his death to be happy; he would *live* to see her happy. He would pretend that her marriage cost him no pang; indeed, would not truly the pang be swallowed up in the thought of her happiness? But *would* she be happy? *Could* she be happy with this alien? Ah, there was the chilling doubt! If a quarrel came, would not the man always throw it in her face that she was a Jewess? Well, that must be left to herself. She was old enough not to rush into misery. Through all these years he had taken her pensive brow as the seat of all wisdom, her tender eyes as the glow of all goodness, and he could not suddenly readjust himself to a contradictory conception. By the time she came in he had composed himself for his task.

"Ah, my dear," he said, with a beaming smile, "I have heard the good news."

The answering smile died out of her eyes. She looked frightened.

"It's all right, little Schnapsie," he said roguishly. "So now I shall have seven sons-in-law. And Alfred the Second, eh?"

"You have heard?"

"Yes," he said, pinching her ear. "Thinks she can keep anything from her old father, does she?"

"But do you know that he is a—a—"

"A Christian? Of course. What's the difference, as long as he's a good man, eh?" He laughed noisily.

Little Schnapsie looked more frightened than ever. Were her father's wits wandering at last?

"But I thought—"

"Thought I would want you to sacrifice yourself! No, no, my dear;

we are not in India, where women are burnt alive to please their dead husbands."

Little Schnapsie had an irrelevant vision of herself treading on diamonds and gold. She murmured, "Who told you?"

"Leah."

"Leah! But Leah is angry about it!"

"So she is. She came to me in a tantrum, but I told her whatever little Schnapsie did was right."

"Father!" With a sudden cry of belief and affection she fell on his neck and kissed him. "But isn't the darling old Jew shocked?" she said, half smiling, half weeping.

Cunning lent him clairvoyance. "How much Judaism is there in your sisters' husbands?" he said. "And without the religion, what is the use of the race?"

"Why, father, that's what I'm always preaching!" she cried, in astonishment. "Think what our Judaism was in the dear old Portsmouth days. What is the Sabbath here? A mockery. Not one of your sons-in-law closes his business. But there, when the Sabbath came in, how beautiful! Gradually it glided, glided; you heard the angel's wings. Then its shining presence was upon you, and a holy peace settled over the house."

"Yes, yes." His eyes filled with tears. He saw the row of innocent girl faces at the white Sabbath table. What had London and prosperity brought him instead?

"And then the Atonement days, when the ram's horn thrilled us with a sense of sin and judgment,<sup>13</sup> when we thought the heavenly scrolls were being signed and sealed. Who feels that here, father? Some of us don't even fast."

"True, true." He forgot his part. "Then you are a good Jewess still?"

She shook her head sadly. "We have outlived our destiny. Our isolation is a meaningless relic."

But she had kindled a new spark of hope.

"Can't you bring him over to us?"

"To what? To our empty synagogues?"

"Then you are going over to him?" He tried to keep his voice steady.

13. A ram's horn (Hebrew *shofar*) is blown in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement.

"I must; his father is a  
"I know, I know," he  
archangel.

"But you do not believe

"I believe in self-sacrifice

"Is it? I thought it was

"That is not the essential

"Thank God!" he said.

happy with him? Such difficult  
to him."

She laughed and blushed  
ing up, father."

"But if after marriage you  
throw up to you that you are

"No, Alfred will never do

"Then make haste, little,  
see you under the canopy."

She smiled happily, believing  
she said.

"Well, well, whatever it is  
that it might be a Cross.

It was agreed between them that  
sisters should not be told, and  
as privately as possible. The arrangement  
to perform the ceremony in the  
Farm. After the short honeymoon  
the couple in Whitechapel, for  
labours. Poor Daniel tried to  
Whitechapel was a more Jewish  
bury.<sup>14</sup> But the unhomely immigrant  
son-in-law neutralized everything

14. Whitechapel was a working-class  
large Jewish immigrant population.

"I must; his father is an archdeacon."

"I know, I know," he said, though she might as well have said an archangel.

"But you do not believe in—in—"

"I believe in self-sacrifice; that is Christianity."

"Is it? I thought it was three Gods."

"That is not the essential."

"Thank God!" he said. Then he added hurriedly: "But will you be happy with him? Such different bringing up! You can't really feel close to him."

She laughed and blushed. "There are deeper things than one's bringing up, father."

"But if after marriage you should have a quarrel, he would always throw up to you that you are a Jewess."

"No, Alfred will never do that."

"Then make haste, little Schnapsie, or your old father won't live to see you under the canopy."

She smiled happily, believing him. "But there won't be any canopy," she said.

"Well, well, whatever it is," he laughed back, with horrid imagining that it might be a Cross.

## IX.

It was agreed between them that, to avoid endless family councils, the sisters should not be told, and that the ceremony should be conducted as privately as possible. The archdeacon himself was coming up to town to perform the ceremony in the church of another of his sons in Chalk Farm. After the short honeymoon, Daniel was to come and live with the couple in Whitechapel, for they were to live in the centre of their labours. Poor Daniel tried to find some comfort in the thought that Whitechapel was a more Jewish and a homelier quarter than High-bury.<sup>14</sup> But the unhomely impression produced upon him by his latest son-in-law neutralized everything. All his other sons-in-law had more

<sup>14</sup> Whitechapel was a working-class district in the East End of London also home to a large Jewish immigrant population.

or less awed him, but beneath the awe ran a tunnel of brotherhood. With this Alfred, however, he was conscious of a glacial current, which not all the young man's cordiality could tepefy.

"Are you sure you will be happy with him, little Schnapsie?" he asked anxiously.

"You dear worrying old thing!"

"But if after marriage you quarrel, he will always throw it up to you that you are—"

"And I'll throw it up to him that he is a Christian, and oughtn't to quarrel."

He was silenced. But his heart thanked God that his dear old wife had been spared the coming ordeal.

"This too was for good," he murmured, in the Hebrew proverb.

And so the tragic day drew nigh.

### X.

One short week before, Daniel was wandering about, dazed by the near prospect. An unholy fascination drew him toward Chalk Farm,<sup>15</sup> to gaze on the church in which the profane union would be perpetrated. Perhaps he ought even to go inside; to get over his first horror at being in such a building, so as not to betray himself during the actual ceremony.

As he drew near the heathen edifice he saw a striped awning, carriages, a bustle of people entering, a pressing, peeping crowd. A wedding!

Ah, good! There was no doubt now he must go in; he would see what this unknown ceremony in this unknown building was like. It would be a sort of rehearsal; it would help to steel him at the tragic moment. He was passing through the central doors with some other men, but a policeman motioned them to a side door. He shuffled timidly within.

Full as the church was, the chill stone spaces struck cold to his heart; all the vast alien life they typified froze his soul. The dread word *Mesbomad*—apostate—seemed echoing and re-echoing from the cold pillars. He perceived his companions had bared their heads, and he hastily snatched off his rusty beaver. The unaccustomed sensation in his scalp completed his sense of unholiness.

15. A north London suburb.

Nothing seemed g  
aisle he became aware  
gish. For a moment he  
and his eyes filled with

A craning forward  
man peer forward.

He saw, at the far cr  
four men, in strange, f  
eyes from the sight of tl  
lives. When he opened l  
have to kneel, he wond  
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bouquets, appeared on t  
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A stir and a buzz swe  
to file in. At its head wa  
cheerful young man. Ot  
maids reappeared. And fi  
glory of white veil suppor  
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Ah, that would be he ar  
neath all these curious Chr  
walk. He tried to rehearse  
her; he paced pompously  
arm, a glory of white veil.

He saw himself slowly  
cross; then everything swan  
his seat. His little Schnapsie  
ful heathendom, to the sedu

He sat in a strange daze, v  
and that some preacher's reci  
up again, the bridal party be  
mist. He passed his hand ove  
of the recitative pierced sharp  
"Therefore if any man car

Nothing seemed going on yet, but as he slipped into a seat in the aisle he became aware of an organ playing joyous preludes, almost jig-gish. For a moment he wondered dully what there was to be gay about, and his eyes filled with bitter tears.

A craning forward in the nondescript congregation made the old man peer forward.

He saw, at the far end of the church, a sort of platform upon which four men, in strange, flowing robes, stood under a cross. He hid his eyes from the sight of the symbol that had overshadowed his ancestors' lives. When he opened his eyes again the men were kneeling. Would *he* have to kneel, he wondered? Would his old joints have to assume that pagan posture? Presently four bridesmaids, shielded by great glowing bouquets, appeared on the platform, and descending, passed with measured theatric pace down the farther avenue, too remote for his clear vision. His neighbours stood up to stare at them, and he rose, too. And throughout the organ bubbled out its playful cadenzas.

A stir and a buzz swept through the church. A procession began to file in. At its head was a pale, severe young man, supported by a cheerful young man. Other young men followed; then the bridesmaids reappeared. And finally—target of every glance—there passed a glory of white veil supported by an old military-looking man in a satin waistcoat.

Ah, that would be he and Schnapsie, then. Up that long avenue, beneath all these curious Christian eyes, he, Daniel Peyser, would have to walk. He tried to rehearse it mentally now, so that he might not shame her; he paced pompously and stiffly, with beautiful Schnapsie on his arm, a glory of white veil.

He saw himself slowly reaching the platform, under the chilling cross; then everything swam before him, and he sank shuddering into his seat. His little Schnapsie! She was being sucked up into all this hateful heathendom, to the seductive music of satanic orchestras.

He sat in a strange daze, vaguely conscious that the organ had ceased, and that some preacher's recitative had begun instead. When he looked up again, the bridal party before the altar loomed vague, as through a mist. He passed his hand over his clouded brow. Of a sudden a sentence of the recitative pierced sharply to his brain:—

"Therefore if any man can show any just cause why they may not

lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

O God of Israel! Then it was the last chance! He sprang to his feet, and shouted in agony: "No, no, she must not marry him! She must not!"

All heads turned toward the shabby old man. An electric shiver ran through the church. The bride paled; a bridesmaid shrieked; the minister, taken aback, stood silent. A white-gloved usher hurried up.

"Do you forbid the banns?"<sup>16</sup> called the minister.

The old man's mind awoke, and groped mistily.

"Come, what have you to say?" snapped the usher.

"I—I—nothing," he murmured in awed confusion.

"He is drunk," said the usher. "Out with you, my man." He hustled Daniel toward the side door, and let it swing behind him.

But Daniel shrank from facing the cordon of spectators outside. He hung miserably about the vestibule till the Wedding March swelled in ironic triumph, and the human outpour swept him into the street.

## XI.

His abstracted look, his ragged talk, troubled Schnapsie at the evening meal, but she could not elicit that anything had happened.

In the evening paper, her eye, avid of marriage items, paused on a big-headed paragraph.

### "I FORBID THE BANNS!"

#### STRANGE SCENE AT A CHALK FARM CHURCH.

When she had finished the paragraph and read another, the first began to come back to her, shadowed with a strange suspicion. Why, this was the very church—? A Jewish-looking old man—! Great heavens! Then all this had been mere pose, self-sacrifice. And his wits were straying under the too heavy burden! Only blind craving for her own happiness could have made her believe that the mental habits of seventy years could be broken off.

16. The "banns": a public announcement in a parish church of an intended marriage. Forbidding the banns is raising an objection to the intended marriage (e.g., because of suspected bigamy).

"Well, father," she now."

His lips quivered.

"I am very glad." "I you will be happy!"

"But haven't we ta

"Yes—but you kne up—that—"

"Nonsense, nonsense thought struck her po

"And you are sure y

"Quite sure."

"Then I am glad." F

She broke down an came the comforter in

"Don't cry, little Sch

Alfred is a good man, i throw it—" The mumb

That night, after a long wrote a letter:—

"DEAREST ALFRED,— to write. I find at the you to state my reaso being crowned by uni find that this consent that it was only to pr means for an old man from all his life-long pt trying to do for me. B breaking his heart over

"You will say, let us : I am not cold-blooded not think it is fair to y

"Well, father," she said brightly, "you will be losing me very soon now."

His lips quivered into a pathetic smile.

"I am very glad." He paused, struggling with himself. "If you are sure you will be happy!"

"But haven't we talked that over enough, father?"

"Yes—but you know—if a quarrel arose, he would always throw it up—that—"

"Nonsense, nonsense," she laughed. But the repetition of the old thought struck her poignantly as a sign of maundering wits.

"And you are sure you will get along together?"

"Quite sure."

"Then I am glad." He drew her to him, and kissed her.

She broke down and wept under the conviction of his lying. He became the comforter in his turn.

"Don't cry, little Schnapsie, don't cry. I didn't mean to frighten you. Alfred is a good man, and I am sure, even if you quarrel, he will never throw it—" The mumbling passed into a kiss on her wet cheek.

## XII.

That night, after a long passionate vigil in her bedroom, little Schnapsie wrote a letter:—

"DEAREST ALFRED,—This will be as painful for you to read as for me to write. I find at the eleventh hour I cannot marry you. I owe it to you to state my reason. As you know, I did not consent to our love being crowned by union till my father had given his consent. I now find that this consent was not the free outcome of my father's soul, that it was only to promote my happiness. Try to imagine what it means for an old man of seventy-odd years to wrench himself away from all his life-long prejudices, and you will realise what he has been trying to do for me. But the wrench was beyond his strength. He is breaking his heart over it, and, I fear, even wandering in his mind.

"You will say, let us again consent to wait for a contingency which I am not cold-blooded enough to set down more openly. But I do not think it is fair to you to let you risk your happiness further by

use hereafter forever

he sprang to his feet,  
to annoy him! She must

an electric shiver ran  
and shrieked; the minister  
hurried up.

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and the March swelled in  
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the music at the evening  
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ARCH.  
When she first began  
her motion. Why, this was  
great heavens! Then  
her wits were straying  
for her own happiness  
of seventy years

1 intended marriage. For-  
e.g., because of suspected

keeping it entangled with mine. A new current of thought has been set going in my mind. If a religion that I thought all formalism is capable of producing such types of abnegation as my dear father, then it must, too, somewhere or other, hold in solution all those ennobling ingredients, all those stimuli to self-sacrifice, which the world calls Christian. Perhaps I have always misunderstood. We were so badly taught. Perhaps the prosaic epoch of Judaism into which I was born is only transitional, perhaps it only belongs to the middle classes, for I know I felt more of its poetry in my childhood; perhaps the future will develop (or recultivate) its diviner sides and lay more stress upon the life beautiful, and thus all this blind instinct of isolation may prove only the conservation of the race for its nobler future, when it may still become, in very truth, a witness to the Highest, a chosen people in whom all the families of the earth may be blessed. I do not know; all this is very confused and chaotic to me to-night. I only know I can hold out no certain hope of the earthly fulfilment of our love. I, too, feel in transition, and I know not to what. But, dearest Alfred, shall we not be living the Christian life—the life of abnegation—more truly if we give up the hope of personal happiness? Forgive me, darling, the pain I am causing you, and thus help me to bear my own.

"Your friend till death,

FLORENCE."

It was an hour past midnight ere the letter was finished, and when it was sealed a sense of relief at remaining in the Jewish fold stole over her, though she would scarcely acknowledge it to herself, and impatiently analysed it away as hereditary. And despite it, if she slept on the letter, would it ever be posted?

But the house was sunk in darkness. She was the only creature stirring. And yet she yearned to have the thing over, irrevocable. Perhaps she might venture out herself with her latch-key. There was a letter-box at the street corner. She lit a candle and stole out on the landing, casting a monstrous shadow which frightened her. In her over-wrought mood it almost seemed an uncanny creature grinning at her. Her mother's death-bed rose suddenly before her; her mother's voice cried: "Ah,

Florrie, do not fret. I will fir  
groom—was this the only on

"Father! father!" she shrieked

A door was thrown open  
pers—a dear, homely, reassu  
kerchief which had helped to  
face was smeared; his eyelids  
red: he, too, had kept vigil.

"What is it? What is it, little

"Nothing. I—I—I only want  
enough to post this letter—to

"Good enough? Why, I shall

He took the letter and essay  
superscription.

"Ho! ho!" He pinched her cheek  
out writing to him, eh?"

She quivered under this unfeeling

"No," she echoed, with added

"But go to bed at once, little  
stay up so late writing him  
bride."

"No," she repeated, "I won't

She heard the hall door close  
and her eyes dimmed with divi  
awaited his return.



Florrie, do not fret. I will find thee a bridegroom." Was this the bridegroom—was this the only one she would ever know?

"Father! father!" she shrieked, with sudden terror.

A door was thrown open; a figure shambled forth in carpet slippers—a dear, homely, reassuring figure—holding the coloured handkerchief which had helped to banish him from the drawing-room. His face was smeared; his eyelids under the pushed-up horn spectacles were red: he, too, had kept vigil.

"What is it? What is it, little Schnapsie?"

"Nothing. I—I—I only wanted to ask you if you would be good enough to post this letter—to-night."

"Good enough? Why, I shall enjoy a breath of air."

He took the letter and essayed a roguish laugh as his eye caught the superscription.

"Ho! ho!" He pinched her cheek. "So we mustn't let a day pass without writing to him, eh?"

She quivered under this unforeseen misconception.

"No," she echoed, with added firmness, "we mustn't let a day pass."

"But go to bed at once, little Schnapsie. You look quite pale. If you stay up so late writing him letters, you won't make him a beautiful bride."

"No," she repeated, "I won't make him a beautiful bride."

She heard the hall door close gently upon his cautious footsteps, and her eyes dimmed with divine tears as she thought of the joy that awaited his return.

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FLORENCE."

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slept on the letter,

only creature stir-  
evocable. Perhaps  
re was a letter-box  
re landing, casting  
er-wrought mood  
her. Her mother's  
voice cried: "Ah,