



*My Brother Eliyahu's Drink*  
(an abbreviated excerpt)

Written by  
Sholem Aleichem

Illustrated by  
David Labkovski

**“For one ruble- a hundred rubles! Any one of you can earn a hundred rubles a month and more. All you have to do is read our book costing a mere ruble plus postage. Hurry, buy! Stop what you are doing and take advantage of this great opportunity or you will miss out!”**

That is what my brother Elyahu read somewhere in a newspaper...As soon as my brother heard about that book, he immediately sent off a ruble (his last ruble) by mail and told our mother she need not worry any longer.

Hooray, the book arrived! No sooner did we unpack it than my brother Elyahu sat down to read it. Oh my, what didn't he find in that book! So many ways to earn money! A recipe for making the best inks that could earn a hundred rubles a month. A recipe for making good black shoe wax that could earn you a hundred rubles a month. A recipe for driving out mice, cockroaches, and other vermin that could earn you a hundred rubles a month. A recipe for making liqueurs, sweet brandy, lemonade, soda water, kvass, and other cheaper drinks that could earn you a hundred rubles a month and more...



The kvass my brother Elyahu concocts according to the recipe is not bottled kvass and doesn't shoot out. Our kvass is a different kind of drink. How it's made, I cannot tell you. My brother Elyahu doesn't let anyone near while he is making it. Only when he pours the water in are we allowed to look... But if you promise me you will keep it a secret, I can tell you what's in that drink because I have seen what he prepared beforehand. Lemon peel, honey, something they call cream of tartar that is as sour as vinegar, and the rest—water. Water is the main ingredient. The more water- the more kvass. The ingredients are all

mixed together thoroughly with an ordinary stick, that's what it says in the book, and the drink is ready...

Once the first batch of kvass was ready it was decided I would be the one to peddle it on the street... I was thrilled to hear the news. My brother Elyahu began teaching me what to do. I had to hold the jug by a cord in one hand, the glass in the other hand and to get people to stop, I had to sing in a loud voice:

People, a drink!

A kopek a glass!

Cold and sweet-

Come quench your thirst!...

I don't know whether it was my singing they liked or that the drink was so good or whether the day was so hot. I sold out the first jug in half an hour and came home with almost three quarters of a ruble. My brother Elyahu gave the money to our mother and soon refilled my jug... The drink cost us very little, one can say, almost nothing. All the money went for ice, making it essential to sell the jug full of drink all the faster so the block of ice could be used for a second jug and for a third jug and so on...

We were, *kayn eyn horeh*, on a lucky streak. One day was hotter than the next. They were scorchers! People were passing out from the heat, children were dropping like flies. If not for that glass of kvass they would have burned up. I was returning with the jug, without exaggeration, ten times a day!

Then he hit on an idea and poured in a few more pails of water. I had this idea even before he did. I must confess to you that I did some mischief a few times... All my friends got some kvass, free of charge, without paying a kopek! But in order to make up for the loss, I added water. For each glass of kvass I gave away free, I added two glasses of water. The same was done at home...

Be a prophet and know that a tragedy would befall us and that our drink would become unfit to drink, good only to be poured onto the slop pile. I was lucky not to have been dragged off to the police station. Listen to this story!

One day I wandered over to our neighbor Pessi's with my jug of kvass. Everyone started drinking kvass, I among them. I figured I was down twelve or thirteen glasses and went to the place for water. But instead of finding the water barrel, I apparently went to the tub where the laundry is washed and poured in fifteen or twenty glasses of soapy water into my jug and went merrily on my way down the street...

I was stopped by a man who paid me a kopek and asked for a glass of kvass. He downed the glass and screwed up his face: "Little boy! What kind of drink is this?"

I paid him no heed. Two more people were waiting to be served. One sipped half a glass, the other a third of a glass. They paid, spat out the drink and walked away. Another brought the glass to his lips. He tasted the drink and said it smelled like soap and tasted salty. Another looked at the glass and returned it to me, saying: "What is this?"

"It's a drink, that's what it is," I said.

"A drink?" he exclaimed, "That's a stink, not a drink!"

Another person came over, tasted the drink and splashed it right in my face. In a minute I was surrounded by a whole circle of men, women, and children. All were yammering, gesticulating, fuming. A Russian policeman came by and seeing an angry crowd asked what was going on. They told him. He peered into my jug and asked for a sample. I poured him a glass of kvass. The Russian policeman drank it down and spat it out, becoming enraged. "Where did you get this slop?" he demanded. "It's from a book." I said to him, "my brother's business. My brother made it himself."

"Who is your brother?" he asked me.

"My brother Elyahu," I answered him.

"Who is this Elyahu?" he asked me.

“Speak not, foolish youth, concerning thy brother!” several Jews spoke in a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish designed to baffle the policeman’s understanding. The crowd became unruly, noisy, ready to riot. New people kept arriving on the scene. The Russian policeman held me by the hand and was about to haul me and my drink right over to the police station. The shouting became louder. “An orphan, a poor orphan!” I heard from all sides. My heart told me I was in a tight spot. I looked at the crowd surrounding me.

“Jews, have pity!” I exclaimed.



They tried to bribe the Russian policeman but he refused. One of the men, an old Jew with shifty eyes, cried out to me in a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish: “Motl! Pull your hand away from the Russian policeman and take to your heels as fast as you can!” I tore away and ran full speed home. Half dead, I burst into my house. “Where’s the jug?” my brother Elyahu asked. “At the police station!” I answered and ran into my mother’s arms in tears.