



*The Enchanted Tailor*  
(an abbreviated excerpt)

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**And it came to pass** that one summer day Shimmen-Eli's wife, Tsippa-Baila-Reiza, came home from the market with her basket of purchases, flung down the bunch of garlic, the few parsnips and potatoes that she had bought, and cried out angrily, "The devil with it! I'm sick and tired of it all. Day after day, day after day, I break my head trying to think what to cook for dinner. You need the brains of a prime minister to think of

something new. Every day it's dumplings and beans, beans and dumplings. May God forgive me for complaining, but look at Nechama-Brocha, will you—a pauper like that, without a kopek to her name or a whole dish in her cupboard—and she has to have a goat! Why is it?

Because her husband, though only a tailor, is still a man! So they have a goat, and if there is a goat in the house you can have a glass of milk for the children, you can cook porridge with milk, you can make a milk soup for dinner, noodles and milk for supper, and besides you can count on a pitcher of sour cream, a piece of cheese, a bit of butter. Think of it. If we only had a goat!"

"You're quite right, I'm afraid," said Shimmen-Eli mildly. "There is an ancient law that every Jew must own a goat. Let me quote you..."

"What good are your quotations?" cried Tsippa-Baila-Reiza. "I tell you about a goat and you give me quotations. I'll give *you* a quotation in a minute and you'll see stars! He feeds me quotations, the breadwinner of mine, the *shlimazl*\*. I would trade all your quotations and all your learning for one good borscht\* with cream! Do you hear?"

\*shlimazl- Yiddish for an unlucky person.

\*borscht- Beet soup

From that time on Shimmen-Eli began to save his groschens. He denied himself many necessary things, pawned his Sabbath gabardine\*, and by the greatest economy managed to save up a few rubles.

It was decided that he should take the money and go over to Kozodoievka to buy a goat.

Why to Kozodoievka? For two reasons. First of all, because Kozodoievka was famous for its goats, as the name implies—koza meaning goat in Russian. And secondly, because Tsippa-Baila-Reiza had heard from a neighbor of hers with whom she had not been on speaking terms for a number of years, and who in turn had heard it from her

sister who lived in Kozodoievka and who had visited her not long before, that there was a melamed, a teacher, in that town, named Chaim-Chana the Wise (because he was such a fool) who had a wife name Tema-Gittel the silent (because she was so talkative), and this Tema-Gittel owned two goats, both giving milk.

“Now, I ask you,” said Tsippa-Baila-Reiza, “why should she have two goats, both of them giving milk? What harm would there be if she had only one? There are plenty of people who don’t have even half a goat. And yet they live.”

“You’re quite right, my wife,” said Shimmen-Eli. “That is an old complaint. As the saying goes. . . “

“There he goes again! Another quotation!” interrupted his wife. “You talk about a goat and he comes to you with a quotation. Take my advice. You go to that melamed in Kozodoievka and tell him this: ‘It has come to our attention that you have two goats, both giving milk. What do you need two goats for? For pets? And



since you don't need the two, why don't you sell one of them to me? Will it hurt you?' That's the only way to talk to these people, you understand?"

"Of course I understand. Why shouldn't I?" said Shimmen-Eli. "For my good money do I have to beg them? With money you can get anything in the world. 'Silver and gold,' said our wise men, 'make even pigs clean.' The only thing that's bad is not to have any money at all."

And once more she instructed her husband how to approach the memamed, how to feel him out, and how to close the deal.

But suppose he didn't want to sell his goat? . . . Why shouldn't he want to sell it? Why should he have two goats, both of them giving milk? There are so many people who don't have even half a goat. Well, do these people die? They manage to live.

And so on and so on, in the same vein.

\*sabbath gabardine refers to the fine clothes worn on the sabbath