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The Tale of
the Scribe

(Dedicated to my wife, Esther)

1

THIS IS THE STORY of Raphael the scribe. Raphael was a righteous and blameless man who copied Torah scrolls, phylacteries, and *mezuzot* in holiness and purity. And any man in the household of Israel who was childless, Mercy deliver us, or whose wife had died, Mercy deliver us, would come to Raphael the scribe and say: "You know, Reb Raphael my brother, what are we and what are our lives? I had indeed hoped that my sons and my sons' sons would come to you to have you write phylacteries for them; but now, alas, I am alone, and my wife, for whom I had thought I would wait long days and years in the upper world, has died and has left me to my sorrows. Perhaps, Reb Raphael my brother, you can undertake to write a Torah scroll under the good guidance of God's hand, and I will compensate you for it. Let us not be lost both in this world and the next, my dear Reb Raphael. Perhaps God will be gracious unto me and the work of your hands will be found acceptable." And Raphael then would sit and write a Torah scroll to give the man and his wife a name and remembrance in the household of Israel.

What may this be likened to? To a man who travels far from his own city, to a place where he is not known, and the

watchmen who guard that city find him and ask: "Who are you and where do you live?" If the man is wealthy and a property owner, then as soon as he says I am So-and-so, the son of Thus-and-so, from such-and-such a place, they check the record books and documents, and find out how much he had given to the king's treasury, how much in property taxes he had paid, and they welcome him immediately, saying: "Come in, you blessed of God, the entire land is before you, dwell wherever you wish." But if the traveler is an ordinary man, and has neither property nor wealth, then he shows them a document written and signed by officials of his own city, which states that So-and-so is a resident of our city. Then he is permitted to remain and they do not hurry him out.

Likewise, when a man comes to the next world, and the evil angels meet him and ask, "Who are you and where are you from?"; if in his earthly life he had been an upright and blameless man, and left behind him good deeds, or sons busy with Torah and commandments, then these certainly serve as his good advocates. But if he had had none of these then he is lost. However, when Jews come to the synagogue to pray and take a Torah scroll out of the Ark and read from it, if the scroll was written as a memorial for the ascent of this man's soul, then it is immediately known on high that he had been So-and-so, a resident of such-and-such a place, and that is his identification. They then say to him, enter and rest in peace.

Raphael the scribe sat and wrote, and his wife, most blessed among women, the pious Miriam, stayed home and made life pleasant for him in a fine house with fine utensils which she scrubbed and cleaned and purified, so that her husband would do his work in a clean and pure atmosphere. She delighted him with delicate foods and savory beverages, and for Sabbaths and holidays, and sometimes even for the New Moon, she would buy a goose, cook the meat in a pot, or roast it; and Raphael would prepare the quills for writing

Torah scrolls, phylacteries, and *mezuzot*. He sat at the Torah and at God's service in holiness and purity, wielding the scribe's pen and fashioning crowns for his Creator.

2

Before we begin telling part of the story itself, let us tell about his way in his holy work. This was his way in holiness:

At midnight he would rise, seat himself on the floor, place ashes on his head, and weep for the destruction of Jerusalem, for the death of the righteous, the burning of the Temple, the length of the exile, the exile of the Divine Presence, the suffering under enslavement, and all sorts of hard and cruel decrees that are inflicted on the people of Israel day in and day out, and for our just Messiah, who is held in iron chains because of the sins of our generation. After that he would study the *Path of Life* and the *Book of Splendor* until the morning light, thus tying together what is proper for the night with what is proper for the day.

In the morning he would go down to the ritual bath and immerse his thin body in the water, then recite the morning prayers, return home and eat a piece of honey cake dipped in brandy, and fortify his weak body with a very light repast. After that he would go back and immerse himself again in the ritual bath, and then turn his heart away from all worldly matters. All day he sat in his house communing with his soul in solitude, completely within the frame of Torah. He did not mingle with other human beings and was thus saved from any of the transgressions between man and man, and remained holy in his speech, thought, and deed, and was spared all temptation and distraction. He sat secluded and isolated and no one was with him except His Name, may He be blessed, and he studied a portion of the Talmud in order to tie together the oral teachings with the written ones,

and concentrated on all the sacred meanings hinted at in Scripture. He was careful never to write the Holy Name without first having purified his body. For this reason he often wrote an entire sheet of parchment but left blank the spaces for the Holy Name, and later he wrote the Name in the blank spaces only after having immersed himself again in the purifying ritual bath.

He may thus be likened to a craftsman making a crown for a king: does he not first make the crown and then set into it the diamonds and other precious stones? Thus Raphael sat and wrote, until the beadle came, knocked on the window, and announced that the time had come for the afternoon prayers.

3

How good is a word in its proper time. Having told of his way in his sacred work, let us now note the place of this work.

He lived in a small house close to the big synagogue and to the old House of Study and to other houses of prayer, a few steps from—not to be mentioned in the same breath—the bathhouse which contained the ritual bath. His house was small and low. It had only one room which was divided in the middle by a partition made of boards. On the other side of the partition there was an oven and a range for pots, and between oven and range the pious and modest mistress of his house sat, and she cooked and baked and preserved and wove and knitted and looked to the needs of her home. Children they had none. Because the Holy One, blessed be He, desires the prayers of the righteous, He closed her womb.

When she completes the tasks that a wife is required to perform for her husband, she takes out a used garment and remakes it into clothing for an orphan. She is especially fond

of this task because it enables her to sit quietly, to pull thread after thread, and in her thoughts take stock of the world. And in order to avoid doubts, Heaven forbid, about God's ways, and not to complain, Heaven forbid, against Him, she recalls several pious tales of salvation. For example, the story of a childless woman like herself who saved money in a stocking to buy a ruby, which is a proven remedy against childlessness. Then she saw the officials of the Society for Clothing the Naked, and gave them all the money, and in addition sewed clothes for the orphan children. Not many days later her womb was blessed, and out of her came affluent men who served God in comfort.

Or another story about a woman who was making a small prayer shawl for an orphan, and suddenly she felt that the ritual fringes were being pulled and drawn upward, and a fragrance like that of the Garden of Eden was all around her. When she looked up she saw Reb Gadiel, the infant who had been born by virtue of his father's having taught Torah to Jewish children; Reb Gadiel was kissing the ritual fringes she had made, and she heard him say to her: "Know that your deeds are acceptable on high, and that you will yet merit making ritual fringes for your own sons and sons' sons." Not many days later she was rewarded and her womb was blessed, and out of her came righteous, God-fearing, good men, taken up with Torah and God's commandments. And this birth was out of the ordinary, because that woman had been barren by nature.

Thus the pious Miriam sits, drawing thread after thread, and a thread of mercy is drawn and extended on high, and good angels bring up before her various fantasies: for example, that she is preparing a garment for her son who is sitting in his schoolroom and studying Torah.

From time to time she raises her pure eyes toward Raphael, the husband of her youth, who sits on the other side of the partition, near the window, at the clean table covered with a prayer shawl. Also on the other side of the partition there

are a wardrobe and a bed. The bed is covered with a colored, clean spread, and the wardrobe contains rolls of parchment and sacred implements. In it her white wedding dress hangs, and in it also earth from the Land of Israel lies hidden away.

Across the top of the room a dark beam stretches from one end of the house to the other. On top of the beam there are a number of sacred books: some new, some old; some thick, some thin; some bound in cured sheepskins and some in a plain binding.

Near the beam, to the right, on the eastern wall, is the embroidered wall-hanging which Miriam had made in her youth at her father's house. It depicts a garden full of fruit trees, with a palace in the garden, and two lions watching over the garden. The lions' faces are turned toward each other, lion facing lion, one tongue reaching out toward the other; and stretching from tongue to tongue there is an inscription in large letters of gold, which says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," as if it were one mighty roar. In each of the four corners of the embroidery there is a square which contains the words: "I have set the Lord always before me."

Facing the east-wall embroidery, on the opposite wall, there is a mirror, and on top of its frame lies a bundle of willow twigs. Every year, on Hoshana Rabbah, Miriam brings home a bundle of the twigs that had been beaten against the prayer lecterns in the synagogue as part of the liturgy. A number of women had already been helped at childbirth by water in which such willow twigs were boiled. Only she herself has never yet made use of that water. The willow twigs continue to wither, and leaf after leaf is shed into the web that the spider has spun over the amulet that is near the bed. Her mother had given her the amulet on her wedding day to help keep away from the house the evil spirits that prevent births.

The amulet is written in the letters of the sacred alphabet but in the tongue of the gentiles, *Yak krova mloda*, etc., meaning, "When the cow is young and healthy why should she

not give birth to a calf?" It was written for her mother, peace be upon her, who had been childless for a number of years, by Rabbi Simon of Yaroslav during his stay at the inn operated by her mother. He wrote it at the insistence of several righteous rabbis, while she cooked red borsht and potatoes for them after they had gone without food for three days on their journey to their saintly rabbi, the "seer" of Lublin. And since at that time Rabbi Simon had not yet been ordained, he did not write the amulet in the sacred tongue; but the Hebrew letters in which the amulet was written spelled out the name of the angel in charge of pregnancy, with the Holy Name interwoven among them. Miriam tied the amulet with seven threads from seven veils of seven women from whom had come sons and sons of sons, none of whom had died during the lives of their parents.

From time to time Miriam comes softly to her side of the partition, and stands there letting her pure eyes rest on her husband as he sits at his work in holiness and purity. And if Raphael should interrupt his work and notice her standing there, immediately the pallor leaves her face and a blush takes its place, and she offers him the excuse that she had only come to fetch the Sabbath candlesticks to polish them in honor of the Sabbath. This is the rule of the house. Outside of the house nothing unclean ever appears, because the schoolchildren drive away any dog or pig that may wander into the street. The only animal present is the cat, which was created for the purpose of keeping the house free of mice. Geese and other clean fowl wander around the house. And the birds of heaven, at the time of their migration to the Land of Israel when the Torah portion *ki tavo* is read in the synagogue, and again at the time when they return on Passover to hear the recitation of the Song of Songs in the classroom, sing their own song at his window every morning.

4

Inside the house there is quiet and peace. A feeling like Sabbath rest prevails. And the beauty of the place is reflected in its dwellers. The beloved Miriam's head is always covered by a clean white kerchief knotted below her throat, with its ends resting upon her heart like a dove's wings. Unlike most women she uses no pin in her kerchief so that not even the smallest part of the covered area may become exposed, Heaven forbid. And if her hands were not busy with her work, one might mistakenly think that every day is Sabbath unto the Lord.

At times a poor man comes to the house to ask for alms, or a traveler comes in to have his phylacteries repaired, and they tell Raphael what they had seen and heard in the dispersion of Israel. "What shall we say and what shall we relate, Reb Raphael? If told it would not be believed. In the house of Thus-and-so the scribe, I saw with my own eyes a number of young men sitting day and night writing Torah scrolls, phylacteries, and *mezuzot*, thus making factory work of the sacred Torah. Not only this, but I have heard that another scribe even employs girls to sit and write."

Raphael listens respectfully and replies humbly: "Do not say this, my dear fellow Jew. Why should we slander the people of God? Indeed, we have reason to rejoice that we have reached a time such as this when the Torah is spread so widely that a single scribe for a city is no longer enough."

At times a woman neighbor comes in to consult Miriam on something related to cooking, or to ask when the new month will begin. And if there is a difficult birth in town, someone comes running to her to borrow her willow twigs. The woman says to her: "My dear Miriam, surely you wish to save two human souls, therefore please lend me your willow twigs. Tomorrow, God willing, I shall go from one

end of the town to the other end and find other willow twigs to replace these." And Miriam answers with a sigh: "Take the willow twigs, my dear soul, and may they bring good fortune and long life. As for me, I am not worthy of your going to any trouble about me; for myself, what will these willow twigs give or add, even if they were boiled in tears?" And her neighbor replies: "Don't, Miriam, don't, my precious life, let us not give Satan a foothold by complaining. We have a mighty Father in Heaven and His mercies are over all His works. Many barren women have given birth, and children have clung to their breasts. There is a women's prayerbook that has been brought from the Holy Land; nothing I can say matters, but in that book you will discover God's acts and miracles, and in it also you will learn how to entreat God."

When Miriam visits the bathhouse Raphael remains in the House of Study. When she returns home she dresses in fine clothes like a bride on her wedding day, and stands before the mirror. At that moment it seems as if the days of her youth were returning to her. She recalls an inn on a main road, frequented by gentile lords and ladies, and cattle dealers sojourning there, and herself sitting with her father and mother, and with Raphael the husband of her youth. She recalls the crown her mother placed on her head on her wedding day, and at that moment the thought enters her mind to make herself beautiful for her husband. But then she sees reflected in the mirror the east-wall embroidery with its scenes and those two lions with their mouths open; immediately she is startled and shrinks back: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

And when Raphael returns home after the prayers and sees his wife in her true beauty reflected in the mirror, he is immediately attracted to her. He goes toward her to make some pleasing remark. But when he is near her, His Name, may He be blessed, flashes before him out of the mirror. Immediately he stops and recites devoutly and in holiness: "I have set the

Lord always before me," and shuts his eyes before the glory and awe of the Name. Both turn away silently. He sits in one corner and studies the *Book of Splendor*, and she sits in another corner reading the women's prayerbook, until sleep invades their eyes. They take the large bucket of water with the large copper fish embossed on its bottom, and wash their hands in preparation for reciting "Hear, O Israel" before retiring.

5

When hope and patience came to an end and she no longer had the strength to weep and pray for children, she stood before her husband heartbroken and with great humility. Said Raphael to Miriam, "What is your wish, Miriam, and what is your request?" And Miriam replied: "My wish and my request, if I have found favor in my husband's eyes, and if it please my husband to do my wish and fulfill my petition, then let him write a Torah scroll for us also."

At that moment Reb Raphael took Miriam's head and placed it on his knees, then he placed his eyes upon her eyes, his face upon her face, his mouth upon her mouth, and said to her: "Please don't, my daughter, God has not yet withdrawn His mercy from us. We shall surely still behold seed upon the earth." Miriam lowered her eyelids and replied: "May the words of your mouth enter the ears of the Holy One, blessed be He." From then on her hands were busy making a mantle for a Torah scroll, and other sacred implements, as does a woman whose hands are busy making decorative ribbons, sheets, and coverings for the expected newborn baby.

6

"Good fortune is not forever." God chastises those He loves. One Sabbath morning Miriam returned from the synagogue, put down her prayerbook, and, before she was able to remove her outer garment and prepare her heart and soul to greet her husband properly, a sigh escaped from deep within her, she began to feel alternately chilled and hot, her face turned green, her bones began rattling in their joints, and her whole skin sought to escape from her body. She lay down on her bed and remained there and never again rose or left her bed. She had not been inscribed on high for a long life, and was plucked while still in her youth.

Miriam died in the prime of her days and left her husband to his sorrows. She died in the prime of her days and left behind her neither son nor daughter.

7

At the end of the seven days of mourning Raphael the scribe arose, put on his shoes, went to the marketplace, and obtained sheets of parchment, bundles of quills, a string of gallnuts for ink, soft gut-thread for sewing together the sheets of parchment, and set his heart to the writing of a Torah scroll in memory of the soul of his wife whom God had taken away.

What may this be likened to? To a great gardener who raised beautiful plants in his garden, and all the officials who were to see the king would first come to his garden and buy beautiful flowers to take with them. Once the gardener's wife was to see the king, and the gardener said: "All others

who visit the king take flowers from my garden. Now that my own wife is to visit the king it is only proper that I go down to my garden and pick flowers for her."

The comparison is clear. Raphael was a great gardener. He planted beautiful Torah scrolls in the world. And whoever was invited to appear before the King—the King over kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He—took a Torah scroll with him. And now that Miriam's time had come to appear before the King—the Holy One, blessed be He—Raphael immediately went down to his garden—that is, to his pure and holy table—and picked roses—that is, the letters of the Torah scroll which he wrote—and made a beautiful bouquet—that is, the Torah scroll he had prepared. Thus the work began.

8

Raphael sat and wrote. He wrote his Torah scroll day and night, interrupting the work only for prayers with the congregation and for the recitation of the kaddish. A prayer shawl was spread over the clean table, its fringes drooping below the table and getting intertwined with the fringes of the little prayer shawl he wore. On the prayer shawl lay a lined sheet of parchment dazzling in its whiteness as the sky itself in its purity.

From morning to evening the quill wrote on the parchment and beautiful black letters glistened and alighted on the parchment as birds upon the snow on the Sabbath when the Song of Moses is read. When he came to the writing of the great and awesome Name he would go down to the ritual bath and immerse himself.

Thus he sat and wrote until he completed the entire Torah scroll.

9

But the doing does not flow as fast as the words. Raphael sat at his toil a long time before he completed the writing of the scroll. His face shrank, his cheeks became hollow, his temples sunken, his eyes larger and larger, as he sat bewildered in the emptiness of his desolate house. Near its hole a mouse plays with a discarded quill, and the cat lies dejectedly on the abandoned oven. A month comes and a month goes, and time sprinkles his earlocks with gray. Raphael prods himself with the sage's saying: "Raphael, Raphael, do not forget death because death will not forget you." Month comes and month goes and there is no action and no work done. The sheet of parchment lies on the table and the quill lies in the sunshine, and the sun's reflection out of the quill shines as the hidden light from among the wings of the celestial creatures. Sunbeams come down to bathe in the scribe's inkwell, and when they depart in order to bid welcome to the shadows of the night, the sheet of parchment lies unchanged.

At times Raphael summoned strength, dipped the pen in ink, and wrote a word, but this did not lead to any more work because his eyes filled with tears. When he sat down to write a single letter in the Torah, immediately his eyes brimmed with tears which rolled down to the parchment.

In vain do builders build palaces
If a flooding river sweeps away their foundations;
In vain do people kindle a memorial candle
If the orphans extinguish it with their tears.

And when he swallowed his tears and said to himself, Now I will work, now I will write, he would reach such a peak of devout ecstasy that his quill spattered droplets of ink, and he was unable to write even a single letter properly.

It is told of the Rabbi of Zhitomir that he once asked the Rabbi of Berditchev about the biblical verse "And Aaron did so," on which the commentator Rashi, of blessed memory, commented that Aaron did not deviate from God's instructions. This is puzzling; how could it have been otherwise? The Holy One, blessed be He, told Aaron to kindle the lights; would it have been possible for Aaron to deviate? Had God instructed an ordinary man to do this, would that man have deviated? Therefore, what is so praiseworthy about Aaron's not having deviated? However, if the Holy One, blessed be He, had told the Rabbi of Berditchev to kindle the lights, he would surely have felt ecstasy and awe and fervor, and if he tried to kindle them he would spill the oil on the ground, and, because of his awe, would not succeed in kindling them. But Aaron, even though he surely possessed ecstasy and awe and fervor more than any other person, when he came to kindle the lights, he did as God commanded, without any deviation.

That winter it once happened that the bathhouse in Raphael's town was closed down by the authorities because it was near collapse, and when Raphael reached a place in the Torah scroll where the Name had to be written, he could find no bath of purification. He took an ax, went down to the river on the outskirts of the town, broke the ice, immersed himself in the water three times, and returned and wrote the Name with the joy of wondrous fervor. At that moment Raphael attained the merit of discovering the divine secret that before a man is able to rise to the height of joyous fervor he has to be like a man who stands in icy water on a snowy day.

From then on Raphael sat, physically weakened, in the joy of silence, and with emaciated hand he wielded the quill on the parchment until he completed his scroll. The wooden rollers on which the parchment sheets are rolled, and other sacred implements, he made by himself. In this he may be compared to a host who always had guests in his house and had several

servants waiting on them. Once he made a feast for the king. Who should properly wait on the king? Surely the host himself.

10

And now let us recall the custom—a custom in Israel is like a law—observed at the completion of the writing of a Torah scroll.

When a scribe is about to complete a scroll, he leaves several verses at the end unfinished, in outlined lettering, in order that any Jew who had not himself had the privilege to fulfill the biblical admonition "And now ye shall write down this song for yourselves" may be afforded the opportunity to come and fill in one of the letters of the Torah. And whoever is so favored takes a pen, dips its tip in ink, and fills in the hollow, outlined letter. Raphael put down his quill, having left several verses in outlined letters, and said to himself: "I shall go and invite a quorum of ten Jews, so that the Torah will not be lonely, and saintly Jews may see and rejoice in the completion of a Torah." He walked over to the mirror to look into it and straighten out his earlocks and his beard in honor of the Torah and in honor of those who would come to rejoice with him.

The mirror was covered with a sheet. From the day of Miriam's death, peace be with her, no one had removed this sign of mourning. Raphael pulled aside the end of the sheet, looked into the mirror, and saw his own face, and the east-wall embroidery across the room, and the scroll he had written, with the hollow, outlined letters at its end. At that moment his soul stirred and he returned to the table, took the quill, and filled in the letters in the scroll he had written in memory of his wife's soul. When he completed the task he rolled up the scroll, raised it high, dancing with great joy, and

he leaped and danced and sang in honor of the Torah. Suddenly Raphael stopped, puzzled about the melody he was singing in honor of the completion of the scroll. He felt sure that he had heard this melody before but could not remember where he had heard it. And now, even when he closed his lips the singing of the melody continued by itself. Where had he heard this melody?

11

Having mentioned the melody, I shall not refrain from relating where he had heard it.

It was the evening of the Festival of Rejoicing in the Torah. That evening the rabbi's House of Study was full of bright lights, every light fixture glowing with a radiance from on high. Righteous and saintly Hasidim clothed in white robes of pure silk, with Torah scrolls in their arms, circled the pulpit, dancing with holy fervor, and enjoying the pleasures of the Torah. A number of Hasidim as well as ordinary householders get the privilege of dancing with them, and they cling to the sacred Torah and to those who selflessly obey the Torah, and they forget all anger and all disputes and all kinds of troublesome trivialities. And their young children form an outer circle around them, each child carrying a colored flag, red or green or white or blue, each flag inscribed with letters of gold. On top of each flag is an apple, and on top of each apple a burning candle, and all the candles glow like planets in the mystical "field of sacred apples." And when young boys or girls see their father receive this honor, carrying a Torah scroll in his arms, they immediately jump toward him, grasping the scroll, caressing, embracing, kissing it with their pure lips that have not tasted sin; they clap their hands and sing sweetly, "Happy art thou, O Israel," and their fathers

nod their heads toward the children, singing "Ye holy lambs." And the women in the outer lobby feast their eyes on this exalted holiness.

When the seventh round of the procession around the pulpit is reached, the cantor takes a Torah scroll to his bosom and calls out to the youths: "Whoever studies the Torah let him come and take a Torah scroll," and a number of fine youths come and take scrolls in their arms.

Then the cantor calls out again: "The distinguished young man, Raphael, is honored with the honor of the Torah, and with the singing of a beautiful melody."

Raphael came forward, went to the Ark, accepted the scroll from the cantor, and walked at the head of the procession. The elders stood and clapped their hands, adding to the rejoicing. The children stood on the benches chanting aloud "Ye holy lambs" and waving their flags over the heads of the youths. But when Raphael began to sing his melody all hands became still and everyone stood motionless without saying a word. Even the older Hasidim whose saintly way in prayer and in dancing with great fervor is like that of the ancient sage Rabbi Akiba—of whom it is told that when he prayed by himself, his bowing and genuflecting were so fervent that "if when you left him he was in one corner, you found him in another corner at the next moment"—even they restrained themselves with all their might from doing this. They did not lift a hand to clap because of the ecstatic sweetness, even though their hearts were consumed with fire. The women leaned from the windows of the women's gallery, and their heads hung out like a flock of doves lined up on the frieze of a wall.

Raphael held the scroll in his arm, walking in the lead with all the other youths following him in the procession around the pulpit. At that moment a young girl pushed her way through the legs of the dancers, leaped toward Raphael, sank her red lips into the white mantle of the Torah scroll

in Raphael's arm, and kept on kissing the scroll and caressing it with her hands. Just then the flag fell out of her hand, and the burning candle dropped on Raphael's clothing.

After the holiday Raphael's father brought an action before the rabbi against the girl's father in the matter of Raphael's robe that had been burned because of the girl. The rabbi, indulging himself in the pleasure of a wise remark, said to the girl's father: "God willing, for their wedding day you will have a new garment made for him." Immediately they brought a decanter of brandy and wrote the betrothal contract. And for Raphael's and Miriam's wedding a new garment was made for him. This is the story of the melody.

And Raphael continues to circle the pulpit, singing sweet melodies. His voice is lovely and sad, numbing the senses but wakening the soul to rise and dance the dance of the Divine Presence. That dance without sound or movement, in which even the earlocks and beard remain motionless, and only the fringes of the prayer shawl drip down to the knees. The house is still, the feet are stilled, and the hands unmoved. The girls come down from the women's gallery to the House of Study to watch the youths dance. The youths continue to circle the pulpit, and the girls reach out with the tips of their fingers toward the Torah scrolls in the hands of the youths.

The sun has set, her last rays shine through the cracks in the shutters, and their light adorns Miriam's white dress. Raphael came toward Miriam and bowed before her with the Torah scroll held in his arm. He could not see her face because she was wrapped in her wedding dress. Silently Raphael stood and wondered where her wedding dress had come from, because he had taken it out of her wardrobe to have a curtain for the Ark made out of it. He walked over to see whether her dress hung there, but when he got there he no longer remembered what he had come for. He stood facing the wardrobe and looked into its black void. Suddenly

he noticed the little bag of earth from the Land of Israel. He had placed some of this earth on Miriam's eyes in her grave. Raphael took the little bag of earth in his hand and his heart trembled violently. His hand faltered and the earth spilled to the floor of the house. His heart became agitated as that of a man who stands on sacred soil.

The lamp flickers. Raphael is wrapped in his prayer shawl, a Torah scroll in his arm, and the scroll has a mantle of fine silk on which the name of Miriam the wife of Raphael the scribe is embroidered. The house becomes filled with many Torah scrolls, and many elders dancing. As they dance they neither lift their feet nor bend their knees, but move as if they had no joints. They dance without motion, revolving their bodies, and Miriam stands in the center, her face covered, dancing with her shoulders, her arms raised into the emptiness of the room. She approaches Raphael's scroll. She takes off her veil and covers her face with her hands. Suddenly her hands slide down, her face is uncovered, and her lips cling to the mantle of the Torah scroll in Raphael's arms.

The Holy One, blessed be He, removed His robe of light, and the world stood in silent evening prayer. The lamp flickered and the wick sank into the oil. Suddenly a tongue of flame leaped up and illumined the room. Its light framed the face of Raphael the scribe who sank down with his scroll. His wife's wedding dress was spread out over him and over his scroll.

Translated by ISAAC FRANCK