

A Tale of Two Weddings (the manuscript is untitled)

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The two weddings in Michaleshik that made *di gantse shtetl iz gegangen af redlakh* (the whole *shtetl* go nuts), as they used to say in Michaleshik in such a case.

Wedding Number One of Avremele son of Sheyne-Rashkes Baltsvinik, who was 75 years old, and Khayke daughter of Yudke Gershater, that was 17 years old.¹ Avremele Baltsvinik was a widower who had no children. He had a two-family house with a little store. The front part of the house he used to rent out, and in the other part he lived himself.

Yudke Mikhkes Gershater² that lived at the *boyne* (slaughterhouse) had 5 children, 2 boys and 3 girls. His eldest daughter Dobke lived with her grandmother and grandfather across the street from us on a lane where there were 2 houses, of Ure the Cobbler and of Mikhke Gershater, Yudke's father. The elder son Moshke was a smith, the second son Yashke and daughter Sorke went as *halutzim* (pioneers) to Israel. Yudke and his wife Basheve remained with the youngest daughter Khaike who was a *nitderbakene* (literally not fully baked; mentally retarded), 17 years old. And Yudke decided to marry his daughter to Avremele Baltsvinik.

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How long would Avremele live? And then Khaike will become a widow with a two-family house and a small store. That was Yudke's plan. He had described that to Avremele, and Avremele agreed to marry Khayke and live with her.

The whole *shtetl iz gegangen af redlekh* (went crazy) as they used to say in such cases in Michaleshik. In the day of the wedding the young people turned the world upside down, they stood under the windows of the Avremele's house and wanted to see and hear what Avremele was doing with Khayke. But Yudke's plan was not realized, for Avremele and Khayke perished in Ponary, together with all Michalishker Jews.

Wedding Number Two between Khone Yankelevitch and Mnukhke Budgar from Svir.³ Khone's whole family were bricklayers, his father Yosel Dovid was from those children that were seized

¹ The record of this wedding can be found among the LitvakSig marriage records: At Mikaliskis, on 20 Sep 1934, Abram Baltsvinik, 60, s of Berel & Szejna to Chaja Rochel Gershater, 21, d. of Judel & Basewa [Record 10, Film Link 2205057, Item 3, Image 649, Archive/Fond/Inventory LVIA/728/3/1522]

² Yudke Mikhkes Gershater is also mentioned in Jórek Blacher's *The Tale of Yutke-Mikhkes Gershater*.

³ The record of this wedding can be found among the LitvakSig marriage records: At Mikaliskis on 31 Oct 1938, Chona Yankelevich, 68 of Mikaliskis, son of Yosef David & Libe to Menucha Budgar, 38 of Svir, daughter of Mordukh & Heni, witnesses: Gershon Kupershtokh & Berl Palestin [Record 34, Film Link 2205057, Item 3, Image 670, Archive/Fond/Inventory LVIA/728/3/1522]

Also among the LitvakSig birth records can be found the births of three children - On 20 Mar 1927 twins - daughter

and made to serve in the Tsar's army for 25 years. When he *flegtsekh tsukokhn* (became infuriated), he used to throw his hands in the air and yell: *Ya sluzhil Tsaru 25 let!* (I served the Tsar for 25 years!) His brother Fayve, people used to call him *Fayve der Muler*⁴ (the Bricklayer),

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was a respectable person, and he built for the *der porets* (local landlord/*gospodar*) Kotowicz⁵ in his Turle estate a mill, a brewery and a stable, and a whole marketsquare of houses for the *shtetl's* Jews, and the communal bath. It was all done before my time. His son Berl Dovid was also in the profession, and he used to build houses and ovens with his son Hirshele and with Khone's son, and with Khone. And they used to whitewash with lime the Jewish houses in the *shtetl*, as there was no electricity, and the walls became dark with smoke of the kerosene lamps and so they had to whitewash the houses during the year.

Khone had a wife that was called Sore Rifke, *eykh a nitderbakene* (also a not-fully-baked), as they used to call retarded people in Michalishok. They had a son who was a very fine young man, and he went to South America, I am not sure to which country, and Khone remained with his wife Sore Rifke. On a cold winter night Sore Rifke got upon the oven to get warm. The oven was very hot, and Sore Rivke fall asleep, and she burnt her whole backside, and from that she died. And Khone became a widower. In spite of his retardation,

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he was a strong man, and a good worker. It's one thing that his faculties did not work, but his hands functioned very well. His son Yisroelke used to send him some money from South America, and his cousin Berl Dovid decided that they should organize a marriage for Khone, so that he will not be alone.

But where to take a person with whom to make a marriage? *Aklal as men zukht gefint men* (literally, *in short when one seeks, one finds*). In Svir lived a bride, 20 years old, [originally] from Michalishok. There lived a mother with 4 children, 2 sons and 2 daughters. Their family name was Budgar. The elder daughter was called Mnukhke, she had a liaison and got a girl, what was called in Michalishok—a *mamzer* (illegitimate child). Mnukhke was more or less beautiful, but she got one lame foot, and she wanted to get married. She agreed to marry Khone. The *firer fun shidekh* was Khone's cousin Berl Dovid (the person who acted as matchmaker was Khone's cousin Berl Dovid).

Of course, the whole *shetl iz vayter gegangen af redlakh*, according to the Michalishok expression used in such a case. Berl Dovid had organized the whole wedding, and when it came

Chana & son Mordekhay Gdalya Yankelovich, children of Chonan & Mnucha, each record noting that child was a twin and that the given Hebrew dob (7 Adar II 5687) seems incorrect [Records F2b & M2a, Film Link 2205057, Item 3, Image 536-544, Archive/Fond/Inventory LVIA/728/3/1522]; On 3 Feb 1935, Chasya Yankelevich, d. of Chanan & Menucha, comments: father b. in 1874, mother b. in 1895 [Record F2, Film Link 2205057, Item 3, Image 593-598, Archive/Fond/Inventory LVIA/728/3/1522]

⁴ Yosel Dovid and *Fayve der Muler* are also mentioned in S.D. Levine: "*Mayn Geburt-Shtot Michalishok*" in *Kapitlen fun mayn lebn, zikhroynes*, New York, Knight Printing, 1971; and in Jewish Gen SuccessStories, 2009 - *The Redlich Story* (with photographs of both).

⁵ Perhaps Kotwicz. In 1823, the *miastecko* of Michalishok was acquired by Mateusz Kotwicz, and through the remainder of the 19th century, the Kotwicz noble family were *gospodars*.

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to the *khupe* (wedding canopy) [when it came to the actual wedding ritual], Khone says—*No*, he will not have a marriage. Then Moshke, who lived in a house near Khone says [to all]: *You'll see how I make him agree to go under the khupe. And he says to him: Khone, if you don't go under the khupe, I go and call a policeman!* And Khone got scared and got back under the *khupe*. It is impossible to describe what was going on that day in the *shtetl*.

Menukhke with Khone had many children, as he used to say, *a vogn mit kinder* (literally, a wagon with children), and I think that was five. The *umgezetslekhe meidl* (illegitimate girl) that Menukhke has brought from Svir got involved with certain Itske Wainer, also not a 100 percent (normal) person, that became some sort of an official in ghetto, and she had a girl from him, out of wedlock. She with the girl had perished in Kena peatworks camp when it was liquidated.⁶ Khone became half dead, but he remained in the ghetto,⁷ and Menukhke with other children perished in Ponary in [near] Vilne, with other Michalishker Jews.

This is the story of the two Michalishker weddings, of which the *shtetl* could not forget for a long time.

U. Blakher

⁶ The labor camp at the Kena peatworks was liquidated by Bruno Kittel on 8 Jul 1943. The only survivor was Uri Blakher.

⁷ According to Esther Katz Livingston in her *Michalishki Names*, Chone died in 1943 at work in Jonjsbiskes, Lithuania.