

HOW I BOUGHT THE RUSSIAN PROSECUTOR
(This manuscript is untitled and undated)

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Between 1992-1996¹

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This is the story about how I *hot untergikeyft* (bribed, literally *under-bought*) a *tsucontuser* (concussed) Russian prosecutor and a judge of an appeal court in Vileyka. As I have written in my autobiography, when the Russians came, my partnership with Moshe ended. The Russians put me on a position to buy cows for them. And my former business partner had taken a *goy* (a peasant) from the village of Markuny as a partner, and Moshke used to buy cows and the *goy* used to resell them to the *goyim* which needed to pay taxes in meat, 50 kilos of live weight from each household. I warned Moshke that he should not do that, but my talk did not help. They caught the *goy* and interrogated him what was he doing, and the *goy* right away said he does that for Moshke, that he was a poor peasant and no livestock dealer.

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And so they have arrested Moshke, and there was a trial, and they sentenced him for 5 years in prison. And they put him in prison in Oshmiany.

Sore Rive, his wife, came to me, to the base in Ostrovets, (and asked that) I must take him out of prison. They sent an appeal and (the case was to be decided) in the appeal court in Vileyka. I did not want to do that, but Sore Rive started to wail that no one can do it except me. *He loved you so much, like he loved his children!* And so I had to agree that I will do everything what I can do to get him out of prison.

The first thing I did was I went to Bystrytsa, there was (lived) a Jew by the name Abramchik Bezdanski, who tanned skins for the suede and leather coats, and he bought a leather coat on my request. And Sore Rive

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gave me a golden wristwatch. The day before the (re)trial I went to Vileyka. I had there acquaintances, two brothers slaughterers. I came to them to find out where lives the prosecutor. They warned me that he is a *meshugener* (crazy person), from a *tsukontuzener fun milkhome* (concussion on a war).² They showed me where he lives. I was walking all over Vileyka the whole day, thinking how should I behave with him. If I make a wrong move, I too will sit in prison.

¹ This untitled essay appears to have been enclosed in the same envelope as Urke's *Autobiography*, postmarked Southington, CT 25 Mar 2002 (about five years after Urke's death), written sometime between 22 Nov 1991 and 8 Nov 1996.

² Translator note: *In our parts* (Belarus, Russia, Soviet Union), *to be concussed on a war was an excuse or explanation for an erratic or violent behavior.*

But then it was becoming dark, I put on the exquisite coat on my shoulders and went to the prosecutor. I knocked on the door and his wife opened. She looked at me and at the suede coat on my shoulder, they never saw such coats in Russia. She asked what do I want, and I said that I want to sell the coat. I got stuck and I need money.

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She asked me to wait and went to call her husband. He came, opened the door and asked me in. I took the coat off and put it on him. When he looked in the mirror he was delighted how well it fit him. And he said to me, the coat is extraordinary beautiful, but I don't have that much money to buy it from you. And I said *I will sell it for one hundred rubles*. He has understood right away that I want not more than a hundred rubles (for a reason). And he asked me: *Tell me, what is behind this coat*. I see that he understands me, and I say: *Tomorrow you will put on trial of my best friend, Moshe Aloy. And I want that you take the accusation off him*. Ah, he says, *der shpikuland* (that speculator) *is your friend? I cannot do that*. And for the judge I take out the golden watch and tell him: *You need to give the judge this very nice watch, golden*.

Then he says to me: *Tomorrow you must come to the court of law and to sit on a bench near the passageway. I will walk by you and*

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[if] *I give a nod with my head, that means it is all fixed with the judge. And if I will not make a nod with my head, that means that the judge does not agree*. I asked him that if they decide to free him that he calls to the prison and they set (Moshke) free right away. And he tells me that if they free him, he has to leave the Ostrovets raion immediately. I tell him that he has a sister in Miadel and he will go to his sister.

And so in the morning I came to the court, and he had passed me by and made a nod with his head. Then a rock had fallen from my heart. It all did not last long, they have announced the verdict—not guilty, and they called after the (court) meeting to Oshmiany that they should set (him) free from prison. He (Moshke) came back home and right away went to Miadel, to his sister. He was there till the Germans

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came.

He then came to Michaleshik to his family. My acquaintances in Vileyka could not understand how I was able to do all that, to bribe such a wild prosecutor, and to be not afraid that he will arrest me. The truth is that I was afraid, but I have procured for him to buy such an exquisite coat which they did not see those in Russia. And so I paid to Moshke a debt. He told everyone that *a dank em bin ikh givorn vos ikh bin itst* (thanks to him I became what I am now). Sore Rive did not know how to thank me, she said she knew that I will take him out of prison.

U. Blakher

Dovid, I send to you my biography, that it was hard for me to write, and how I took out Moshke, my business partner, from prison. In my biography it should be mentioned, that Shepsl Katz has no relation to your family.