

TWO WEDDINGS

by Simkhe Lazar

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A wedding in our town was considered big news. Weddings rarely occurred amongst us although we numbered about 1,600 Jewish souls. Couples who had kept company for years would frequently split up because of their parents' standing in the community or because of a deficiency in a dowery. But - if a couple did finally decide to marry, it literally energized the town. Not only the family, but neighbors and friends prepared for the event: new dresses and suits were sewn, new shoes were ordered.

Two weddings remain deeply ingrained in my memory. The first was the wedding of Sheinke Mattias' daughter - Khana. It took place on a Friday summer's evening. A few hours before the ceremony, girls began strolling about the market place, dressed in *essig un honig*.¹ Their hair was freshly cut and their faces enhanced by the application of powder and red paper dye to their cheeks. As the hour approached, Jewish ladies in long trained dresses rushed down Yanowar Street.

Little children ran wild over Sheinke's wooden floor. The house was so tightly packed that even a pin could not be slipped in. The bride's side gathered there, and directly opposite, the groom's side assembled. Meanwhile, young and old were gathering near the *bes ha-medresh*². When the *shammus*³ brought out the wedding canopy, everyone pushed forward so that they might hold a supporting beam. The bride and groom, accompanied by the musicians, appeared along with their two dozen wedding attendants. The famous musician from Dombrov - *Hershele*, a stocky Jew with a round belly and a cheerful demeanor, was perfect for such festive occasions.

¹Vinegar and honey - this is an expression that means they were dressed in their very best.

²Small Orthodox synogogue

³Beadle

He was accompanied by *Shmern* the musician and two musicians from Sukolov, *Yitzkhok Poplovski* who played the flute and *Zeidke Tsirkes*, on fiddle.

Rabbi Kolir conducted the marriage ceremony and then *Haskell Valurkas*' beautiful voice burst into song. A glass shattered and everyone shouted "*Mazel-Tov!*". The musicians began to play as everyone began to leave. People threw confetti on the bride and groom - little pieces of round, colored paper.

Mrs. Scheinke, holding the hem of her black silk dress in one hand, danced the *khasene-tantz*.⁴ A large crowd, carrying lit candles, had gathered near her house. The tables were laden with delicacies. Everyone was joyful and the bride's sisters, *Chaya* and *Rokhel* and their brother *Moshe* welcomed everyone. We celebrated the entire night, dancing until the dawn, a "*sherele*"⁵, a "*kazatske*"⁶, a waltz: eyes sparkling, faces blushing, and new romances blossoming....

The second wedding took place on Karpovatzer Street. Altar Kaminsky's eldest daughter Frieda, married a rabbi from Grodno. It seemed as if religious Jews were everywhere. People were in high spirits, they ate and drank for three days and three nights. After prayers were over, the older Jews began to dance: old Hillel the Deaf jumped on a large table, his gnarled walking stick in hand, and danced a "*shtek-tantz*"⁷, everyone around him clapping in time. It was an exquisite picture. We joked, discussed *Gemorrah*⁸, *dinnim*⁹ and *mitzvahs*¹⁰, hummed *Avinu*

⁴Wedding dance

⁵A lively Jewish dance

⁶A lively Jewish dance of Cossack origin

⁷A dance done with a stick

⁸That part of the *Talmud* which comments on the *Mishnah*

⁹Jewish laws

¹⁰Good deeds

*Malkeinu*¹¹ and *Hagbi Mukhn v'Mezumen*.¹²

¹¹Our Father and King - also the first words of a Jewish prayer recited during Jewish services on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, as well on the Ten Days of Repentance between *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur*. In the *Ashkenazic* tradition, it is recited on all fast days.

¹²The Torah scroll, rolled up after being read, prepared and ready