

.21 A Wedding in Shtetl, by Rivke Khamut

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Freyde, did you know that there is a wedding today? We must go to the wedding canopy (khupe); we are all close in-laws. Even those that were not invited will be there. The invited guests will be indoors and all others will have to stand under the windows.

At an auspicious moment, we go to seat the bride. The badkhn (jester) holds forth with his tearful speech to the bride, who sheds a tear as the best man arrives with the groom. The badkhn cries out:

“Ladies ("wives") bless the groom!” And the ladies shout: “May G-d bless him so that he will not have to look for help from other people!” The groom uncovers the bride, the music plays and we go the wedding canopy.

On the way to the wedding canopy, the klezmerim play and the canopy is erected in the large synagogue. Afterwards, we return home, where the whole town is waiting, and there, standing on a table, a young girl reads a blessing for the bride and groom.

The guests go to the tables and everyone gets ready for the meal. The mother-in-law on the bride's side rushes into the kitchen and asks that first the finest portions be given to the groom's side, so that they shouldn't, G-d forbid, be offended . . . And, with G-d's help, when the eating was over, everyone turned their attention to the speech-making directed at the young couple.

Someone gets up on the table and enumerates all the gifts. After that, come the klezmerim to continue playing, and we begin to dance a sher (Scissors Dance). Parents used to "buy dances" to show off their children's dancing abilities.

The wedding would last until morning, with true joy, and sometimes for a couple of days until the young couple would have to start to worry about tomorrow.

Rivke Khamut