

# IN RETROSPECT

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**MENASHE LEVIN:**

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**HIS LIFE AND  
HIS WORK**

*Benny Ziffer*





The charm of the so-called minor poets, left behind on the shoulders of the cruel road of natural literary selection, resurfaces whenever the generation which had assessed the "giants" of its time tires of great poets, of geniuses of literature, and reaches back for the artists of its natural stature, who spoke in its own small, non-pretentious language. Charles Baudelaire for example, was a "minor" poet, if that, during his life, and was for many years eclipsed by the "great" Victor Hugo. His work and words became known over time, instructing us that history may actually prefer stubborn personages who swim against the current to those with a strong voice.

Menashe Levin was the minor poet in the court of *Turim* of Shlonsky, Alterman and Goldberg of the 1930s, just as Vogel was the minor poet who sprouted in the shadow of Bialik. However, while Vogel was redeemed from oblivion in an upheaval which seated him *beside* Bialik if not above him, Menashe Levin still awaits the savior who will anthologize his works and shed light on their inherent humble greatness.

Newspapers and periodicals were Menashe Levin's main vehicles for the dissemination of his poetry and prose. His only novel, *A Hundred Nights in Old Jaffa*, was dubiously received and was in fact not understood by his contemporaries. He was stigmatized as a "surrealist," a label customarily affixed to anything not understood at first glance and lacking the unequivocal message of, say, Hebrew literature and poetry of the 1930s and 1940s – "recruited" literature in euphemistic terms or, more bluntly put, ideological literature in the full sense of the word. Levin, and perhaps Levin alone, rejected the demand made of him at the outset, a demand already outmoded in European terms, that literature must "say something." At the time his refusal was considered an eccentric near-betrayal of lofty goals; we should not wonder that his works were ignored when written.

Indeed, the shocking first impression evoked by Levin's writing – from the excerpts of prose in *Turim* to what has thus far been considered his masterpiece, the novel *A Hundred Nights in Old Jaffa* – is that *they say nothing*. Levin, deliberately obdurate, attempts time and again to infuse his writing through and through with the conventionality of Realism, chronology and discipline, with the expression of an associative continuity of images which creates an "atmosphere", that mixture of colors, voices and odors which approaches the great Symbolistic ideal of integrating all the senses into a single literary experience.

Though Menashe Levin's contemporaries, too, were Symbolists in spirit, the force of their commitment to

ideals and ideologies compelled them to harness politics to passing exigencies. Levin's exigencies, which guided his behavior a priori, were those of aesthetics. This is why his poems are so "European" in appearance, so detached from the so-called "world of Eretz Israel". Levin lived not in the world of Eretz Israel but in literature; just as the French author Huysmans, vanguard of the Decadence movement, created in *Des Essentes* an uncompromising aestheticist who shut himself inside a house bedecked with objets d'art, the artist's ultimate expression of disgust at the filth of reality, so, too, Levin furnished his inner world not with reality but with other works of art, remote aesthetic ideals.

An unseverable thread runs between Levin's writing and his second occupation (which sustained him almost all his life): translator of some of the world's finest drama, short stories and novels. Unlike most writers of his time, who were brought up on Russian and who both read and translated English and French classics into Hebrew by its lights, Levin was thoroughly fluent in French (a novel he wrote in that language exists in manuscript form) and knew French literature intimately.

While Hebrew literature is indebted to him for any number of exemplary translations (which still surface in reprint form) his own writing, too, seems to have lent something of the French ambience to Hebrew literature.

Levin's most evident contribution in this field is undoubtedly his prose poetry, which was published bit by bit in the literary press of the 1930s and 1940s. This was the first Hebrew prose poetry; the subsequent harvest in this genre, too, has been highly sporadic. The prose poem, conceived in the early nineteenth century in France by Louis Bertrand (*Passengers of the Night*) and his successor Baudelaire (*Little Poems in Prose*) became the most conspicuous product of the aestheticist faction in French literature which rebelled against the authority of Realism and demanded a rephrasing of the conventions of poetry. Baudelaire regarded the prose poem as a "snake" which is chopped apart and reconnected differently, a clear allusion to the fact that poems – or prose – must shed all seemingly-pleasant conventions in favor of a new identity as laboratory exercises in writing of a type which yearns to discover itself, to reveal that which lies beyond the words, and to attain a composition style which forges the ingredients into a work of art and not, for example, a newspaper article or an advertisement.

Levin introduced this new sensitivity to Hebrew. As a pioneer and "lone wolf" in this genre, Levin



undeniably did a great deal of groping in the dark, experimenting, performing literary exercises. Much of his writing deserves such a definition. Beyond the surprising effect produced by their very newness, they nevertheless lack a certain element noticeable in the works of Baudelaire, Bertrand and their successors in France and the world over. Some of Levin's writing, however, emerges from the laboratory and joins the general corpus of literature of substance. This writing – from Levin's estate, some from the press of his time – has recently been anthologized in *Three Angels in the Snow*.

The contents of *Three Angels in the Snow* do not meet classical criteria of prose poetry; they rather leave a first impression of conventional stories of seemingly autobiographical hue. Painstaking examination, however, reveals the extent to which the surface level is only a disguise for literary innovations which otherwise would probably not have found their way into print. Of the anthology's offerings, the title story *Three Angels in the Snow* is an effective spotlight for Levin's writings in general. At first glance, *Three Angels in the Snow* tells of a typical town of the sort about which Third Aliya authors often wrote nostalgically or out of social criticism of the flaws of the "old world" they had left. From the very outset, however, it becomes clear that Levin's chief interest lies not in describing reality but in escorting the reader into a dream set in an indefinite time and place. The town is simply a circular stage set, the symbol of a round, cyclical time with a well in its center and the moon above: one framework within another, infinite framework. The plot, too, meets this description: Grandma Tultza – half-asleep half-awake – gazes at a painting on the wall which portrays the story of Abraham and the three angels. Now real events take place: the mask between the imaginary and the real, between art and daily life, is breached. Opposite the angels in the painting three "real" angels appear at the door, engage the old woman in conversation and vanish as they had come. The story ends; reality resumes. The reader, however, has lost his bearings: What was real? What was dream? What are the boundaries of each?

This device, this intermingling of imagination and reality, is common in literature of the previous century, primarily the so-called "Fantastic" genre: a guest ensconced in a castle finds that various objects come to life at night, only to resume their inanimate state at daybreak. *Three Angels in the Snow* conveys something of this Fantastic atmosphere, though without the tension which generally accompanies horror stories. The Fantastic embellishments have been

borrowed for a totally different purpose: they are Levin's vehicles for expressing an artistic message which he had apparently never voiced in theoretical terms, perhaps having lacked the confidence to do so. The message is this: artist and art, in contradiction to the stance of Levin's contemporaries in Hebrew literature, neither *express* nor *reflect* a reality but rather move in a totally different sphere, one autonomous of the considerations and requisites of actuality. It is the sphere of art, one endowed with its own law and logic: a half-awake, half-asleep world in which paintings give birth to stories and vice versa. The artist's task is to invent reality, not to imitate it.

The history of Hebrew literature refused to admit Menashe Levin, perhaps because he had taken an incomprehensible leap twenty years into the future. In an era when literature was "recruited" to the point of fanaticism, Levin expressed his inaudible desire as an artist to be allowed to live his life and to construct his aesthetic world as he wished, even a world of no "use" to anyone. The contents of *Three Angels in the Snow* – whatever their literary labels may be – are milestones along the path which Levin pursued with obdurate and relentless commitment.



# THREE ANGELS IN THE SNOW

1966

*Menashe Levin*

*Translated by Dalya Bilu*

Menashe Levin, *Three Angels in the Snow*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, Tel Aviv, 1983.

Menashe Levin. Born in 1903 near Warsaw, and immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1925. Playwright, prose writer and prolific translator, his works include *A Hundred Nights in Old Jaffa*, *Three Angels in the Snow* and the play *Samson and Delila*. He died in 1981.



Humped wooden houses, leaning onto one another's shoulders, clasped together with rusty bolts, broken pickets, bits of old planks; smokeless chimneys, slanting shadows over snowy roofs, with the end of Tevet sun speading a pale blue light over them; still, shuttered houses, grasping one another like a wheel of blind beggars, encircling the market square; at centre, the ancient well, surrounded by birch trees, their crooked trunks and bare branches blushing in the pink of approaching sunset. A flock of crows, breaking away from the treetops of the purple forest beyond the mill, squatted broken-ribbed on the hill, settled on the extinguished chimneys and stared with poking beaks at the marketplace where no horses neighed or hawkers and farmers shouted, but only a solitary goat strolled at his leisure, raising a clownish face from time to time and wagging his tail as if to say: How peaceful everything is today!

A spark of light shot from one of the roofs and penetrated the film of frost covering a window, moving to and fro in the chiaroscuro of the room with its green and red plush, obliquely splitting the face of an antique clock whose hands and numerals had been eroded by time and whose weights hung down to its rim, delving into two silver goblets standing on a chest of drawers between bowls full of painted fruit, dancing on a yellowing china tobacco box, climbing the spice tower sculpted of olive wood and surmounted by a glass ball containing a model of Rachel's tomb, caressing last year's *etrog* gleaming like old gold next to the balding fur of the *shtreimel* belonging to the grandfather who was taking a Sabbath nap in the next room, and coming to rest at last on the brown silk crocheted border of Grandma Tultza's headkerchief as she sat in the red plush chair gazing half-awake half-asleep at the picture by an anonymous Jewish artist from the Venetian ghetto, an engraving set into the *Taitsch-Hummash*\* lying on her lap and depicting Sarah our Mother standing next to a palm tree and eavesdropping on the three angels talking to her husband Abraham. The old woman shook her head in wonder: could this young girl with the heavy braids crowning her head really be the portrait of Sarah our Mother who was already a woman well advanced in age at the time of the incident recounted in the *Taitsch-Hummash*? A smile spread over Grandma Tultza's face, which still held a hint of the distant beauty of its youth: the Jewish artist from Venice was right to portray Sarah in the form of a young bride, something like her own granddaughter whom she had conducted this morning to the

\**Taitsch-Hummash* – Yiddish translation of the Pentateuch



synagogue for the early Sabbath prayers: a bride wrapped in a mantle of sky-blue velvet, her head covered in a lacy blue shawl, casting a gliding lilac shadow as of some winter flower on the snow which covered the market square and all the alleys leading down to the synagogue courtyard. The fading daylight which blurred the picture of the woman in the engraving and the subdued song of the pendulum of the clock made the old woman sleepy. The cat curled up on the green plush sofa, with his yellow fur collecting all the reflections of light flickering on the copper chandelier hanging from the shadowy ceiling, suddenly opened the slits of his eyes and rolled them at the window: he saw a shadow approaching, the shadow of Yaki the water-bearer. The cat leapt off the sofa and went to take cover among the folds of Grandma Tultza's dress, emitting long drawn-out growls; but the old woman's face, half-hidden in her lace collar, smiled sleepily at the Venetian engraving and the spectacles which had fallen from her nose onto the top of the palm tree depicted there. At that moment the front door creaked, and Yaki's figure appeared next to the clock. His square body, which seemed to be hewn from stone, the ginger beard frothing all over his face and rising all the way to the luxuriant brows overhanging his green eyes – everything about him bespoke the stillness of water: for year after year, with his two buckets he had been conducting rivers of water into the water barrels of all the houses of the hamlet. Now he was standing next to the clock, without the yoke on his shoulders, without the buckets in his stony hands, without the rope wound around his sheepskin coat, dressed in a Sabbath *kapota* green with age, girdled with a tattered sash and reaching to the tops of his resin-smeared boots. For a moment he stood stock-still, looking at the copper chandelier with its six candlesticks, glittering so prettily opposite the snowy roofs, at the ornaments on the chest of drawers, at the yellow cat, at the old woman's slightly trembling headkerchief, and he did not know how to say what he had come to say. His thumbs stuck in his sash, he stood chewing his beard and his silence. But as he stood there, the clock for some reason sighed and drew a sound up from its depths, a sweet melodious sound which evoked a musical response from all the other clocks hidden in the houses surrounding the marketplace. At this, Yaki roused himself, found a hoarse squeaky voice, and said:

“Good Sabbath, Madame Tultza!”

The old woman too roused herself, raised her head and turned to look in astonishment at the water-bearer:

“Ah, Yaki! Good Sabbath! What...? Water...today?...”

And he, accustomed to the silence he had learned from the water which he poured day after day in countless bucketfuls into the water-barrels until the housewives said, “Enough, Yaki, enough!” muttered from the thicket of his beard:

“Three people, Madam Tultza, yes, three people have been asking for you...”

The old woman's hands groped for her spectacles which had fallen onto the engraving, tucked them into the crotched border of her headkerchief and looked at the water-drawer:

“Three people, Yaki? Who are these three people?”

He gazed at the face of the clock and shrugged:

“Hard to tell, Madam Tultza...they're not people from hereabouts...wayfarers, it seems...”

“Are they Jewish people, Yaki?”

He fixed his eyes on the clock again, but to no avail; the oracle knew but it was silent.

“They're Jews-and-not-Jews, Madame Tultza, if I may say so...in any case they're not Jews from here...”

The old woman took off her spectacles, extracted a fine batiste handkerchief from the belt of her dress, passed it over her blue eyes, and looked again at the man facing her. Who and what he was nobody knew, or why he lived with his motherless daughter in a dilapidated hut by the river. People said that he once had a beautiful wife who had drowned herself in the river, and ever since then he had kept his silence and lived next to the river in order to be close to his wife.

“What do you mean, Yaki, Jews-and-not-Jews, and not from here?”

Muffled grunts emerged from the tangle of the man's red beard. How could he, a water-*golem*, explain to Madame Tultza, a woman renowned for her wisdom throughout the village, the meaning of the sight which he had seen outside: three camels, like the camels painted on the synagogue wall, standing at the entrance to the market-place, standing there as large as life as if they were horses, with three figures of men sitting on them, and one of the three turned to him, to Yaki, who was on his way, as usual at the close of the Sabbath, to the *Beth Midrash*, and asked him: “Perhaps you are familiar, sir, with the whereabouts of the home of Madame Tultza?”

“No, they're not Jews from here, no...” And he tore himself away from the clock, took a step forward in his heavy boots and stopped in front of the window which illuminated his slightly upturned beard. The old woman shook her head: why had Yaki suddenly abandoned his silence? Yaki, who had kept silent even when he had come to show her his motherless daughter: a child with fiery braids, a freckled porcelain



face and cornflower eyes. Clumsily stroking the head of the little girl, who was holding a faceless doll in a tattered dress in her hands, he had stood without a word, his green eyes smiling beneath his heavy brows. And now, he opened his mouth and spoke. Wearing a long Sabbath *kapota* he stood before her and addressed strange words to the copper chandelier:

"And there are three of them, Madame Tultza...there are three of them and they're riding on beasts that look like camels... Yes, exactly like camels..."

The old woman smiled faintly:

"Have you ever set eyes on a camel in your life, Yaki?"

He hung his head. He stood there wordlessly with his arms hanging by his sides. There was a pause. But he knew that this was no time for silence, although he was as long practised in silence as the water flowing in the river; and therefore he raised his head again, but this time his beard twitched as if in some spasm, and there was a strange fire flashing in his eyes:

"Yes, Madame Tultza, I've seen camels painted on the synagogue wall, I've seen camels embroidered on cloth...camels my wife, may she rest in peace, embroidered in red and green threads...red and green...they're hanging in my house, those camels..."

The old woman's glance fell on the engraving which stood out like a patch of light and shade on the dim page of the *Taitsch-Hummash*: behind the palm where Sarah was standing, there were indeed the silhouettes of camels with outstretched necks, added by the artist from the ghetto of Venice to embellish the landscape of his picture.

"And these three wayfarers are asking for you, Madame Tultza..."

A kind of dread descended on the old woman; for some reason she fingered the earrings in the lobes of her ears, picked up the Turkish shawl lying on the arm of her chair and wrapped herself in it:

"And didn't you ask them, Yaki, what they wanted of me?"

He recoiled a little from the window, illuminated by so much snow, and said in a voice which held, it too, a faint note of dread:

"I didn't ask them, Madam Tultza...a person doesn't ask people like that questions...They asked me...in these words; Yaki, (how did they know that my name was Yaki?) where does Grandma Tultza live?"

The old woman gazed at the clock, this household oracle which solved no riddles, and with her head averted from the water-bearer, she asked:

"And are the camels of these people real camels,

Yaki?"

There was a note of anger in Yaki's voice:

"As far as I could see, Madam Tultza, they really are real camels, and not painted camels..."

The old woman was silent. Twisting the fringe of her shawl around her fingers she reflected: What if all this was nothing but witchcraft?... Who knows... And as she reflected she saw herself peering into the mirror above the chest of drawers. It was a round mirror in a faded wooden frame, whose glass was all blurred with age, a mirror into which no one had looked for years, still hanging on the wall thanks to the images of the dead locked up within it: and this mirror, with its yellow, faded light, reflected the old woman's face back to her in a form which looked to her not like herself, but like some old crone out of an age-old legend.

"Yaki, do you mean that these people and these camels come from the Holy Land?"

A shudder ran through the water-bearer's beard: he lifted his hands and put them to his temples: it was as if a parable had suddenly become clear to him, to Yaki standing at the door to the *Beth-Midrash*, on the Sabbath before the afternoon prayer, and listening, half-awake, half-asleep, to the homilies of Rabbi Godil – a very thin man in whom everything seemed to come to a point: the forehead protruding beneath the silken hat tilted slightly backward, the humped nose with the spectacles tied to a black cord on its tip, and the beard divided into two sheaves, one short, one long, from his chin – speaking to a *minyan* of thick-bearded Jews, sitting on either side of the long table covered with a narrow grey cloth, cart-drivers listening half-awake, half-asleep, with thousands of miles of road running among their heavy, bowed heads:

"Of course, Madame Tultza, from the Holy Land..."

A silence: it was the clock silently pondering.

"Yaki, and what do they look like, these three people?"

The water-drawer shrugged his shoulders, fixing his eyes on the copper chandelier which appeared to be suspended in thin air because of the darkness obliterating the ceiling:

"What do they look like?...It seems to me that they look like nothing at all...or perhaps I could not see properly because of the snow...In any case, they're not from here, Madam Tultza, and they want to see you...for they are pressed for time, so they said..."

The old woman gripped the ends of her Turkish shawl, drew it tightly around her and stared at the window: the marketplace seemed to be whirling around while the humped houses, capped by roofs covered in blue snow, danced as if in welcome; in other words,



they were welcoming these wayfarers who had bidden Yaki, the water-mute, to announce their arrival in this godforsaken little hamlet crouching in the shadow of a forest which was filled with dread even on this fine Sabbath day in the month of Tevet! She uttered a heartfelt sigh, turned her head to the water-bearer, and said in the chant in which the *Taitsch-Hummash* is read:

"Yaki, go and tell the three people to be so kind as to come in!"

Even the clock accompanied Yaki's departure with a sigh: his old comrade in the drawing-up of time, which is like water, and the emptying of it into the void.

The houses which had been whirling in a circle stood still, and all the blind windows looked after the water-bearer stepping in his heavy boots towards the plain opening out before him, the plain with the amber hue of sand under a winter sun with the form of a sunflower, a plain with palms swaying to the sound of the little bells hanging from the necks of the camels emerging from the horizon, and slowly entering the village square and kneeling next to the deserted well like the ancient camels of old.

"Good Sabbath, Grandma Tultza, good Sabbath!"

The three wayfarers were standing next to the clock. Wrapped in citron-coloured robes falling down to their feet, their heads bound in white turbans, they stood silently like visitors who have come from very far away and are too tired to speak: but after a moment or two of silence, they spoke again, saying in voices which were not voices:

"Good Sabbath, Grandma Tultza, good Sabbath!"

But the old woman too was sunk in silence, a different silence – that of the hour when she covered her face with the hands which had lit the Sabbath candles, whose flames flickered on the cutglass of the wine decanter and the silver goblet standing opposite the two plaited loaves hidden beneath the cloth embroidered in letters of gold.

At that moment Yaki's voice rose in the air (where did this water-mute come by such a musical voice?):

"Madam Tultza, the visitors are wishing you a good Sabbath!"

She went on staring at the window opposite her, afraid to turn to look at the visitors, and said, in the same chanting voice:

"A good Sabbath to our dear guests! Tell them, Yaki, to be so kind as to sit down."

Yaki was about to pull up the heavy settee with its threadbare green velvet seat standing next to the chest, but the three waved their hands in a gesture indicating that he should not trouble himself. And since he understood from this that they were pressed for time,

he remained standing where he was.

The old woman drew her eyes little by little from the window and looked at the visitors: at first sight their garb seemed that of the Ishmaelites (where had she ever seen Ishmaelites before? – presumably in the *Taitsch-Hummash*) – but their faces were not the faces of Ishmaelites. No. These pure and beautiful eyes peeping at her from behind lowered lids, these faintly flushed cheeks, embellished with beards of silken black, beards of the same weave of the cotton in which the *etrog* is wrapped, beards the colour of cinnamon (for they resembled each other and yet did not resemble each other), these lips sealed with such smiling grace – they did not belong to Ishmaelites, no.

"Yaki, please ask our dear visitors if they would be so kind as to partake of some refreshment: there are nuts in the house, and even oranges..."

Smiles crossed the faces of the visitors:

"Thank you, Grandma Tultza," said one of them, "but we have brought you some fruit...that is why we have come..."

The old lady's wrinkled cheeks caught fire; she withdrew her hands from the Turkish shawl and put them to her cheeks: her hands were burning too. She raised her eyes, and peeping out of their corners (in order not to look directly at the visitors) she tried to catch the eye of the water-bearer, who shook his head at her in astonishment.

"A gift of fruit from a certain saintly woman..." said the one who had spoken before.

The old woman too shook her head in astonishment, and addressing herself to Yaki on the other side of the copper chandelier, she asked:

"And was it for this that our good guests have troubled themselves to come from such great distances?"

He spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders: how on earth should he, a simple water-bearer, know?

"Yes, for that was the wish of this same saintly woman..." said the three wayfarers with one voice.

And so saying, they put their hands into the pockets of their citron-coloured robes and extracted bags of white cloth embroidered at the edges with threads of gold – and by the time the nearby forest had finished telling its ancient oaks, with the squirrels dozing in their thick beards, and its demons and liliths waiting for their nightly revels to begin, the news of the coming of the three visitors who had brought with them on their camels fruits which the trees in these parts did not bear, neither in their springtime nor their summer nor their fall – the latter had already emptied their gold-embroidered bags onto Grandma Tultza's white



Sabbath tablecloth: a heap of long dates with their stems still on their heads and a bluish tinge hidden in their creases, a heap of figs round as little millstones and powdered with white, a heap of yellowish almonds, smooth as stones; a heap of small reddish nuts, and a heap of raisins transparent as honey.

The water-bearer raised himself onto the tips of his heavy boots and gazed with wondering eyes at the fruits which looked real and unreal at the same time, and laughter welled up in him, joyous as water, making his red beard tremble and his hands wave as they reached out for the heaps of fruit, only to draw back suddenly as if ashamed in front of the visitors.

The Turkish shawl slipped from the old woman's shoulders and fell onto the engraving in the *Taitsch - Hummash*; she rose to her feet and turned her flushed face fully to the miraculous fruits which the wayfarers had brought her from that same saintly woman... and as she stood looking at them with tear-filled eyes and mumbling lips, the market-square was filled with a melody which held not the sadness of the winter's day drawing to its close, but the calm of the little bells, swaying on the necks of the camels as they stepped through the snow inside the ring of houses, which opened to allow them to leave the village and set out toward the vast distances, toward the black tents between the palms; at the entrance to one of these an old woman stood, shading her eyes with her hands.

"Where are the visitors, Yaki?"

It was the clock which woke first from its slumbers, groaning within the meshes of its cog-wheels, its weights and its pendulum with the sound of a forest suddenly bereft of its beautiful deer, shaking the old woman with its sighs as she asked again, in a voice of terror: "Where are the visitors, Yaki?"

The water-bearer, suddenly drained of his happy laughter, turned his head from side to side and replied, his mouth twisted with sorrow.

"They've gone away, Madam Tultza, they've gone away..."

And so saying, he started from his place and went outside, imagining that he could see the shadows of the camels moving over the slopes of the snowy roofs.

"Hey!" cried the water-bearer as he crossed the market-square with a heavy tread, while the last strains of the singing broke from the shuttered houses, as if to clutch at the train of Dame Sabbath and keep her from returning to the forest, where the setting sun had lit a great fire, while the sickle moon had already hung itself over the synagogue roof.

"Hey!" cried the water-bearer as he ran with outstretched arms after the shadows of the camels,

whom he imagined he could see walking over the white fields towards the burning forest.

"Hey!" cried the water-bearer, pausing breathless and chewing his beard next to the last house of the hamlet, an uninhabited house whose roof was sliding into its broken windows. But it was a cry which was already voiceless, for the burning forest which had swallowed the shadows of the camels had turned to ashes, drifting over the humped roofs of the market-square.