

A Wedding in Shtetl by Golda Gutman-Krimmer¹

Rough translation excerpted from

Yad I'Yedinitz; memorial book

for the Jewish community of Yedintzi, Bessarabia

(Yedintsy, Moldova)

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Already quite early a crowd of poor people, with torn shoes, with red and brown kerchiefs around their necks, stood around the porch. Filthy shirts stuck out from the encrusted skirts or hairy chests.

"Give something to the poor," they stretched their hands to Yoske and Rayzl (the bride's parents). "Give some clothing, we're naked and barefoot."

Maids had lit big fires on bricks in the courtyard and were placing big, strange things on them, the soups and fish were cooking for the wedding supper.

Bayle the seamstress had laid the ironed work on the bed and, smiling, called Sorke (the bride). "Bride, time to get dressed. It's already three o'clock!"

The birch walls of the *tshupforin* were hung with attached black flowered rugs, green and red roses in the pale *gedemftkayt* were clashing with the shouting redness of the braided chains of roses that were hung on the ceiling and around the walls. In an elevated place, the dais, near a little table with a big, silver candlestick in which *steorinene* [stearin is a material used to make candles] candles burned, the bride was seated among bundles of flowers.

Sholem Badkhen, a tall, dried up little Jew, lively as quicksilver, with a long neck and a dancing Adam's apple in the very center, with a ragged, thin, little beard, gave counsel to the *mekhutonim*, waving his hands.

"In honor of the *mehutn*, the father of the bride, Reb Yoske, may his days be long, let a fine '*mazl tov*' be played!"

Old Jewish men and women, young women in the middle, girls and boys, hands on each other's shoulders, heads raised, danced a *bulgarish*, weaving and stomping their feet on the trodden grass.

"Sholem--a *Rusaka*²--!" cried a broad-shouldered Bessarabian, already holding his hands in the air, banging his feet on the ground, and the walls trembled.

¹ According to the translation of the Yizkor book online at <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Yedintsy/Yedinitz.html> Golda Gutman-Krimmer wrote a book titled *Yedinitz, My Home*, Buenos Aires, 1946 –this wedding description may have come from that book, though it's not clear to me from what I see written in the online translation of the Table of Contents of the Yedinitz Yizkor Book.

² According to personal communications with www.eliznik.org.uk, Rusasca is now more commonly called Țărăneasca [peasant-like] in Romania and searching for this keyword brings up many videos of the current version

Sholem, an expert at taking money, performed for each of the *mekhutanim* separately, old and young, big and small. It spread about the walls, the courtyard, street trembled with the pounding of feet and the clapping of hands.

(back from the *khupe*)

Yoske walked around among the tables and helped serve the food: roasted and cooked fish, roasted turkey, soup with mandlen, compote, fruit. Klezmerim played one *freylekhs* after another. *Mekhutanim* clapped and got up from their places. . .

Stingotsh³, whom they had brought to play at the wedding supper, drew his long, bony, trembling fingers over the strings of his fiddle and various melodies were heard.

“Play, Stingotsh, a Jewish piece, a blessing on your *goyish* head!”

And Stingotsh closed his dark eyes and sounds of weeping, of hatred and bitterness, of pleading and humility, of pain and assurance bewitched the hall with a deep silence. When he opened his closed, dewy eyes, they were greeted by teary Jewish faces. Stingotsh straightened himself up and began to play a soothing song, calm, as after a storm, and the melody became brighter, more comfortable, as though he were God’s witness who led them over the quiet waters to still, green fields, and the audience began to sigh, “God-given [his musical talent].”

Sholem Badkhn stood on a bench in the middle of the room, his head back, swinging his thin neck even more with the excess bit of alcohol that he had drunk, and tried to amuse and awaken the guests.

“Men, women, *mekhutanim*, *mekhutenestes*, bride’s side--*Droshe* gifts!”

“The bride’s parents, may they live long, give five years of support and a half a house,” Sholem cried to everyone.

Sholem threw his head back on all sides, looking for the main *mekhutanim*.

“*Droshe* gifts! Reb Alter the furmaker and his wife Khontshe, may their days be long, give a thousand lei *droshe* gifts. Reb Moyshe Oyfer and his wife and six little children, may they be healthy, five hundred lei!”

In the blue dawn that in its coolness dewed under thin gusts of wind alike a blue enamel, the sounds of music carried over the quiet streets, accompanying the tired *mekhutanim*, father and mother and the young dreamy pair--home.

Note: Words in red haven’t been translated due to the fact that we can’t find them in the dictionary. If you know the meaning of these words, please contact me winklerh@hotmail.com

of this dance. Michael Alpert reports that until the mid-nineteenth century, Rusyn meant Ruthenian which meant Ukrainian. The dance called Rusasca would have referred to a dance similar to the Hutsulka or Kolomyika.

³ Ethnomusicologist Dr. WZ Feldman visited Edinet in the fall of the 2008 and reports that non-Jewish fiddler Stingaci was mentioned during his trip. Stingaci may have led the kapeleye in Yedinitz in the 1920’s or 1930’s.