

Riwe'le

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The First *Aleja* was a tumultuous, lively boulevard. From the Nowy Rynek [New Market] to ul. Wilsona, merchants ambled back and forth, talking loudly, shoving each other and gesticulating with their hands. On *Chol Ha'Moed* [weekdays of *Sukkos* and *Pesach*], Jews with Jewish hats graciously twirled their canes and umbrellas. Laughing lads and girls just strolled about. People went in and out of the shops, looking where they could buy the necessities for a few *groszy* less. Hatless young men argued about politics and mothers passed by with prams. Everybody clamoured, laughed, conversed gaily and hardly noticed how a tiny soul - a misshapen one - was getting entangled in their midst. This was *Little Riwe'le*.

Riwe'le was already grown up and [only] as big as a two-year-old child. [She was] stocky, with a sunburnt face, which was larger and broader than a regular person's. Her thick, black hair resembled an uncombed wig. Large teeth protruded from her mouth, as if she was laughing and her laughter made her look even more unsightly. She got embroiled with the happy walkers, pinching everybody. She pinched and pinched and, as soon as she was noticed, she would immediately stretch out her hand for a donation. And when someone gave her a *grosz*, she mumbled unintelligible words in a masculine, sing-song voice and showed her great teeth.

Riwe'le lived with her mother at Bajer's Hotel. This was a long courtyard, which stretched from ul. Nadrzeczna to the Warta. [The people who] lived there [were] coachmen, who had stables for their horses, water-carriers, porters with hand-carts, poor courtyard traders and innumerable beggars.

Riwe'le's mother, a beggar woman herself, had taught her the "rounds" on the pavements of the First *Aleja*. All weekdays, she hung about there at the feet of the pedestrians, but on *Shabbes* she was not to be seen.

Nobody dared to pick on Riwe'le. Even children seldom teased her - not because they pitied her, but because they feared her. She simply shocked them with her appearance - she struck terror.

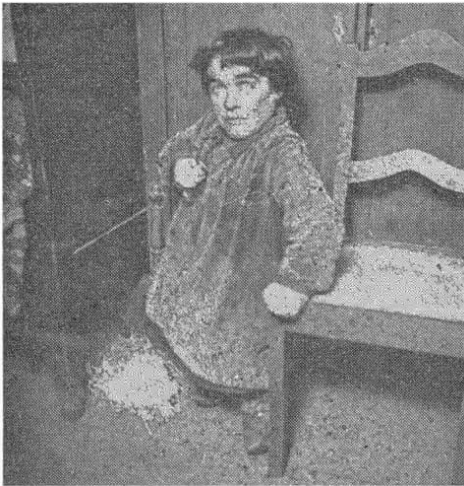
Riwe'le was, in fact, a peaceful person. She never did anyone any harm. She only liked pinching at people's clothes, at their leggings. She did not seek any *powodzenie* [(big) success], Heaven forbid. The only thing she desired was that people should look to the ground [and] notice the little misshapen one, who barely reached their knees, "Look down and see - it's me, Riwe'le. Riwe'le, too, wishes to live. Riwe'le, too, wishes to eat."

Riwe'le was never seen crossing the bridge into the Second *Aleja*. Her route was from Bajer's Hotel to the end of the First *Aleja*. These were later the boundaries of the "Big Ghetto". Everybody knew her. She seldom wept and perhaps it was difficult to recognise her half-laughing, half-crying voice. Whenever a young imp attempted to provoke her, she would fix her eyes [on him], show her great horse-like teeth and scare her tormentor off, like a *straszydło* [bogeyman]. Afterwards, she would laugh triumphantly.

She walked quickly, quickly with her little feet, as if she were travelling on wheels, rocking to and fro with her stocky, fat body and large head.

Thus she lived out her crippled existence, until the Germans appeared on the streets of Częstochowa with their swastikas.

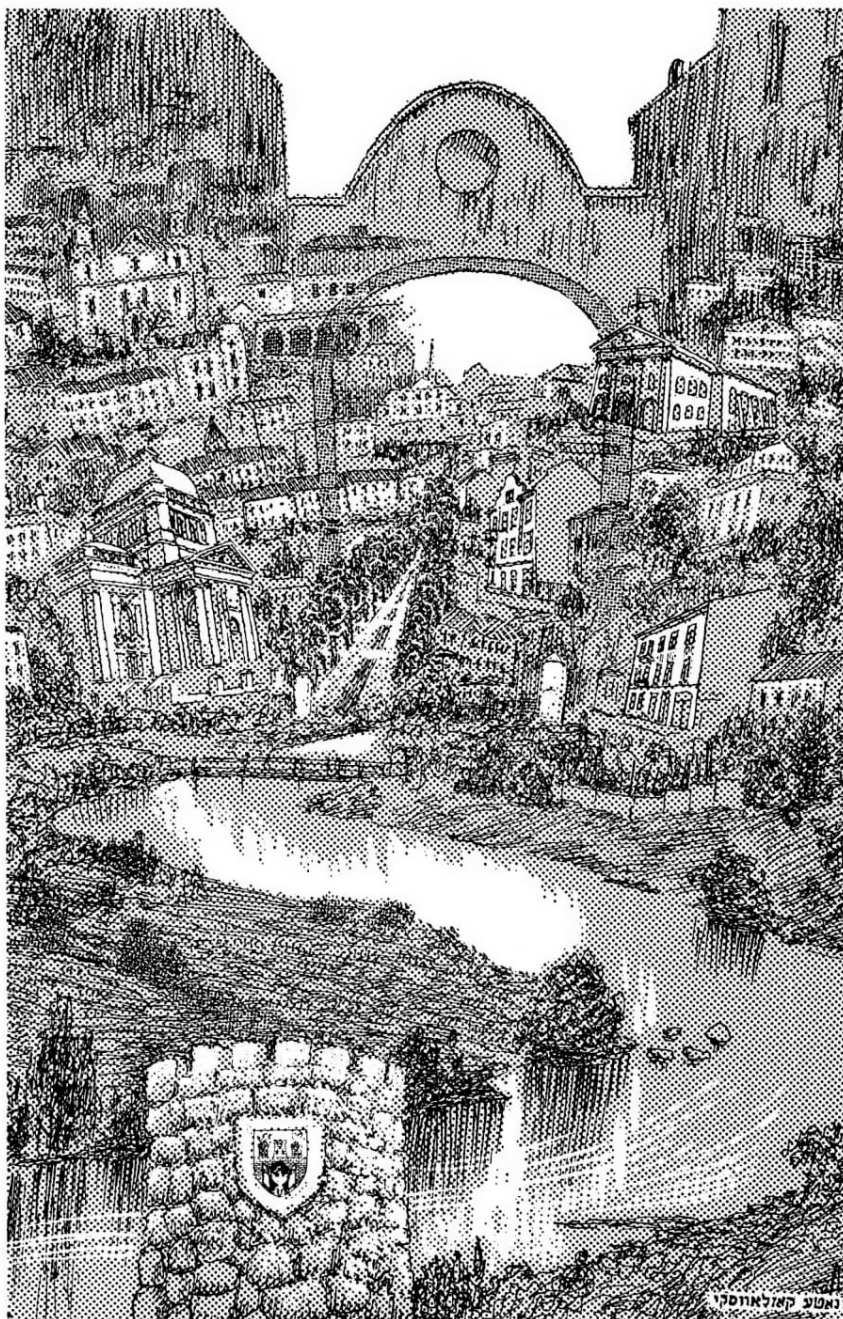
One fine day, when she came out onto the First Aleja, she no longer saw her merry promenading Jews and she had no one to pinch. The numbered passers-by no longer strolled leisurely, but hurried somewhere, with worried, unhappy faces and teary eyes. Eyes such as these no longer noticed Riwe'le. Riwe'le no longer had anyone to pinch - she had become redundant. Riwe'le returned home to Bajer's Hotel and, in hunger, awaited Death.



Riwe'le, the town dwarf



"Tzimmes," the town madman



**“Die Alte Rande” [The Old Border (name of the gate)]
and the River Warta in Częstochowa
(drawing by Nota Kozłowski)**