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There Goes a Mensch

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There Goes a Mensch

A Memoir

Atara Press

Original title:

There Goes an Actor

Published by Atara Press, Los Angeles

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011961416

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Photo permissions: Akademie der Künste, Alexander Granach Archive, Berlin

Originally published in 1945 as *There Goes an Actor* by Doubleday Doran,

New York, and as *Da geht ein Mensch* by Neuer Verlag, Stockholm

Translated from the German by Willard Ropes Trask

Text set in Linotype Janson 11 pt.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9822251-5-8

Paper sourced from environmentally aware forest product companies.

Editions printed in the United Kingdom, United States, and Germany

Contents

1. I Bear the Name of a Friendly Man.....1
2. How I Came into This World on a Rainy Night.....8
3. How I Was Exorcised of a Little Toothless Goblin.....	...13
4. My Big Brothers, or One Is Missing.....	..17
5. Mama Dreams.....	..23
6. Two Families—Four Friendships.....	..44
7. The First Victim.....	..44
8. He Could Not Read the Bible. But Neither Had He Heard the Sermon of the Village Priest.....	..44
9. We Go Out into the Wide World, but It Wears the Same Face44
10. The Village Spits Us Out.....	..44
11. The County Seat Horodenka—Fierce Competition.....	..44
12. My Rabbi-Teacher, Schimshale from Milnitz, for Whom You Would Do Absolutely Anything.....	..44
13. Perhaps My First Part.....	..44
14. Moische, Does One Smash Windows?.....	..44
15. Our Family Grows Smaller, Our Poverty Greater.....	..44
16. My Brother Schmiel, with the Rich Imagination, Comes Home44
17. Everyone Fights with the Weapons He Has.....	..44
18. People and the Awakening of Love in Horodenka.....	..44
19. Away from Home It Is Cold—but Instructive.....	256
20. Curiosity.....	444

21. It Is Good to Have a Big Brother When You Are Far from Home.....	256
22. Malka.....	444
23. The Theater.....	444
24. A Dog, a Cart, and a Woman.....	444
25. First Steps in Berlin.....	444
26. The Word.....	444
27. There Is Something in a Name.....	444
28. And the Crooked Shall Be Straight.....	444
29. Alas for a Beautiful World!.....	444
30. Almost a Stranger in My Native Land.....	444
31. The Prospect for the Common Man.....	444
32. Let People See What People Are Like!.....	444
33. "We'll March Right into Sunny Italy!".....	444
34. Roads Always Lead Somewhere.....	444
35. Life Comes to Meet You Halfway.....	444
36. A Promise That I Shall Always Keep.....	444
37. "Home, Home—There's Where a Welcome Waits You!".....	444
38. A Man Is Not a Tree.....	444
39. Interrupted Rehearsals.....	444
40. Shylock.....	444

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I Bear the Name of a Friendly Man

The earth in East Galicia is black and juicy and always looks half asleep, like a sleek good-natured cow standing still to be milked. Thankfully and a thousand times over, the earth of East Galicia gives back whatever it receives, and you do not need to bribe it with manure or chemicals.

The earth of East Galicia is prodigal and rich. It spouts forth black oil, and bears golden tobacco, and grain as heavy as lead, and old dreamy woods, and rivers, and lakes, and, above all, handsome, healthy men: Ukrainians, Poles, Jews. The three all look alike, despite their different manners and customs.

The men of East Galicia are slow and good-natured, a little lazy, and fruitful like their mother earth. Wherever you look, you see children, like litters of little kittens. Children in the farmyards, children with the animals, children in the fields, children in the barns, children in the stables, children!—as if they grew on trees every spring like cherries.

When spring comes to a Galician village, there are calves and foals and suckling pigs, and lambs and chicks and ducklings and those small whimpering human creatures: children.

The village in which I was born is called Wierzbowce in Polish, Werbowitz in Yiddish, and Werbiwci in Ukrainian. It is near Seroka. Seroka is near Czerniatyn. Czerniatyn is near