

If I Were a Tailor

JEWISH · Walter J. Kin · Rigli Publishing

<https://jewishthemovie.com/music/russian/if-i-were-a-tailor>

← Jewish Songs in Russian

Russian Songbook · Sung by Elechka

Если был бы я портным

If I Were a Tailor

An old tailor's daydream, stitched together with Ashkenazi humor and heart.

"If I Were a Tailor" is a beloved Jewish folk classic, the kind of song that has been carried from one kitchen table to the next for generations. It belongs to the warm, wry world of Yiddish-rooted humor, where an ordinary tradesman lets his imagination wander: if only he were richer, a tailor, even a tsar, what then? The answer, sung with a smile, is that he would simply keep on sewing. That gentle joke, big dreams that circle right back to honest work, is pure Ashkenazi soul, and it is why listeners so often hear in it the spirit of Sholem Aleichem and his Tevye the Milkman.

What makes the song endure is its mix of laughter and tenderness. It is a dance tune you can clap along to, and at the same time a small portrait of a whole way of life: modest, hardworking, full of self-deprecating wit and quiet pride. The melody invites everyone in, which is why people of many backgrounds find themselves humming the chorus and passing it on to children and grandchildren.

In this recording the song is sung in Russian by Elechka, with Russian lyrics, produced by Walter J. Kin (Владимир Кин) for the RIGLI channel. It is part of a project that carried these Jewish songs into Russian so that a wide audience could hear them anew, and it has reached tens of thousands of listeners online.

These Russian-language originals are also where the larger story began. The English-language musical film JEWISH grew out of these recordings, building on the same melodies and the same spirit of Jewish humor and heart that made the originals so loved. What you hear here is one of those first sparks, an old tailor's daydream given fresh voice.

Lyrics, line by line

The full Russian text of the recording, with a plain English translation under each line.

Если был бы я портным

If I were a tailor

Шил бы я по будням и по выходным

I would sew on weekdays and on weekends

Весь бы город говорил за мной
The whole town would talk about me
Есть у нас портной
We have a tailor
Я кроил капотку диги диги дон
I was cutting out a little coat, digi digi don
А пошил обмотку диги диги дон
But I sewed a foot wrap, digi digi don
Как же это вышло как же это вышло
How did that happen, how did that happen
Диги диги диги дон
Digi digi digi don
Если был бы повар я
If I were a cook
Мной гордились бы друзья
My friends would be proud of me
Были б халы и коржи
There would be challahs and cake layers
Чудо хороши
Wonderfully good
Тесто замесил я диги диги дон
I kneaded the dough, digi digi don
А муку забыл я диги диги дон
But I forgot the flour, digi digi don
Как же это вышло как же это вышло
How did that happen, how did that happen
Диги диги диги дон
Digi digi digi don
Тесто замесил я диги диги дон
I kneaded the dough, digi digi don
А муку забыл я диги диги дон
But I forgot the flour, digi digi don

Как же это вышло как же это вышло
How did that happen, how did that happen
Диги диги диги дон
Digi digi digi don
Был бы я тенор или бас
If I were a tenor or a bass
Я бы песни пел для вас
I would sing songs for you
Очень громко пел бы я
I would sing very loudly
Громче соловья
Louder than a nightingale
Песенка простая риги диги дон
The little song is simple, rigi digi don
Я пою как знаю риги диги дон
I sing as best I know how, rigi digi don
Ну давайте вместе риги диги диги дон
Come on, let us sing together, rigi digi digi don
Ну давайте вместе риги диги диги дон
Come on, let us sing together, rigi digi digi don
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What listeners say

Real comments left under the recording on YouTube, translated into English, with the original Russian beneath each one.

This melodic and funny little song reminds me of the work of Sholem Aleichem and his immortal Tevye the Milkman... by the way, Sholem Aleichem himself lived for a time in my native Lviv (Ukraine).

Ця мелодійна і забавна пісенька нагадує мені творчість Шолома-Алейхема і його невмирущого Тев'є-молочника...до речі і сам Шолома-Алейхем в певний час проживав у моєму рідному Львові (Україна)

@ОлексаДовбуш-я2щ

Brilliant!!! Elechka, you are a wonder!!!! Bravo!!!!

@ОльгаГурова-б2д