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My Mother's Last Minutes

These were my late mother's words:

"My children! By the merit of the holiday eve, there will be no *akcja* in our town.
Let us pray to God, beseech Him – He is sure to hear our prayers and tears."

It was with these words that our old mother consoled her children, who were packing their rucksacks and weeping for their youth. From the neighbouring houses, we heard the wailing of young and old. According to the schedule, tomorrow, on *Sukkos* Eve, an *akcja* was to be held in this part of the city - which meant sending the Jews away to their deaths. According to the deceitful promises of the German murderers, it meant sending them away to a labour camp.

Neighbours came in and asked us what we were doing and how long we would have to travel. They looked to my mother, who was filled with faith, confidence and a steadfast attitude. This made the neighbours become hopeful, and they also already began thinking, "Maybe, after all..."

A movement in the courtyard disturbs the stillness of the night. The Jewish police arrive, bearing the bitter tidings that tomorrow, at three o'clock in the morning, the *akcja* is to take place, and everyone has to be ready.

When this information reaches our house, my mother turns deathly pale. She stands up on her old, ailing legs, which are shaking. She looks about to see if all her children are here. The oldest and youngest sons are missing, because they live on other streets. Poor Mother does not know that her youngest daughter-in-law is already in Treblinka, among those annihilated by gas and fire. Mother asks us not to weep, and tells the daughters to fetch the neighbours – a *minyan* [prayer quorum] of Jews, ten Jews. Her daughters, viz. my sisters, look about in amazement and inquire, "Mother! What is wrong? Why do you want ten Jews?" Mother pleads with them, "Please do as I ask you, and call in a *minyan* of Jews – I wish to say farewell".'

The neighbours gathered at our house. My mother took out wine and refreshments from the pantry, served the *minyan* of Jews, and they made a *le'chaim* toast. In the presence of the *minyan* of Jews, my mother bade farewell to her deceased husband, the children that were present, and all her neighbours.

To the daughters present she said, "You are still young and, perhaps, you will be saved from the murderers' hands."

She turned to the *minyan* of Jews and declared, "How I shall perish and where my grave will be, surely no one will know - and who knows if my children will know when to start saying

Kaddish? You, the *minyán* of Jews, are witnesses that if this is the will of the Creator of the World, I accept it lovingly and am ready for my last road”.

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At daybreak on the following day, the brutal hands of the Nazi assassins pulled away the daughters, who were clinging tightly to their mother.

These were the last minutes of my sainted mother, Chana-Cypora, daughter of Reb Szlojme-Majer RIP.