



The years run by, one day like another. Is he, Josef, happy in these last, rich years of his life? It would be difficult for him to answer this question. The best hours of the day are, for him, the early morning hours. He listens to the day's news on the radio and, as he hears the Yiddish commentator, whom he knows personally as a good friend, he delights in the good Yiddish, which rings so proudly at such an early hour across the great city of New York, where Jews live, *kein irbu*<sup>1</sup>, and where Jews feel so free.

He is now one of those proud American Jews! He is already a citizen of the country, with electoral rights to vote for senators, congressmen and even the president of the United States! The voice of the news commentator falls silent, and Josef hears the marvellously beautiful sounds of Yiddish and classical music, which he is so fond of listening to in the early-morning hours.

Now he has a day of work ahead of him - work with Yiddish books and periodicals, surrounded by cultural activists, authors and teachers, in an environment which is so dear to him and so embedded in his heart. Will he ever need to separate from these wonderful surroundings?

He opens the door leading to the bedroom. He casts a glance at the bed, where Gołda, his wife, is sleeping. She likes sleeping in. Her breathing is so light, as if a dream is hovering over her. He enjoys looking at Gołda while she sleeps. Any complaints or vexations that have mounted up against her vanish from his memory. He cherishes her face. He is grateful for these years of happiness - the last years of his life.

Nevertheless, he is not feeling all too well lately. His strength is leaving him. He is weak and fatigue seizes him. But during the daytime, at work, he forgets his health. He works but, in the evening, he collapses in exhaustion straight after supper.

On one such early morning, Josef got up as usual, washed himself and went up to the little table upon which the radio stood. He first closed the door to where Gołda was sleeping, and [then] tried to turn on the radio. He suddenly felt a pain in the left side of his heart, stabbing like needles. He clutched onto the edge of the table in order not to fall. His head was swimming, as if he was about to faint. A minute or two passed. The pain was unimaginable. But it passed, and he felt better. Immediately, he went to the tap, ran the cold water, wet his face, drank from the flowing cold water and felt refreshed. He sat down on a chair.

For a while, he sat at the table by the small radio in the early-morning silence and thought, "Should I tell Gołda or not?" He decided not to tell her. She would get scared, and a story with doctors and visits would ensue - perhaps even to hospital, which is the anteroom to eternity. Instead of considering staying home and going to see a physician, Josef silently left the house.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Heb., "So may they multiply!"]

Debilitated following the early-morning heart cramps, he barely dragged himself to the office in East Broadway. He entered the workroom, took out a couple of sheets of white paper and began writing a letter - a will of sorts - to Gołda and Mordche.

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It was only on the day after Josef's death that Gołda found the following letter in the big drawer of his writing desk:

*"My dears,*

*"I am writing you this letter from work at the office. It is still very early. None of the employees are here yet. The sun has only just risen and I see the young, early-morning stars through the window, shining over the East River. Everything is awakening to life.*

*The Manhattan Bridge, the symbol of strength, is beginning its day. Everything is now so gloriously beautiful, that one would wish to continue living and enjoying life. But I feel my strength is leaving me.*

*"One hour ago, I suffered a heart attack, but I refrained from waking you up, [Gołda,] and I also had no wish to trouble you, Mordche. To what end? I might go to a doctor, but I doubt he will still be able to help me. I feel the end is nearing. I wish to write this letter, my will, while I still have some strength. It is better now, for later it may be too late.*

*"You, my dears, Gołda and Mordche, are still young - although in experiences, in suffering and pain, you are perhaps older than me. I beg you to take my departure from you without grief and tears. Of course, I would have preferred to continue being with you for at least a few more years. But it is my feeling that it will not be long, and I will go to the place, where every flesh and blood is to walk his last path.*

*"And although I know that you possibly need me more than I need you, I am thankful for the years with you, and the peaceful nest in one of the little streets of the big New York, which you - first you, Gołda, my wife, and afterwards you, my dear Mordche - helped me to build.*

*"After so many years of pain and stumbling, the days and nights I spent with you were bliss. I chased my bit of luck, like a little bird in my window. Here, I almost had it my hand, and the little bird - my good fortune - vanished.*

*"Yes, my dears! I leave this earth with great grievances against the Master of all Worlds - and even more grievances against mankind! This discontent is not mine alone. I feel I may speak on behalf of thousands of others like me, who wish to see this world changed, with more honesty and justice, and with less hatred and envy between one*

*another, as opposed to the way He, the Master of the World, created this little world of His, where people kill each other and where we, the Jews, are to suffer more than all other nations, suffer without an end!*

*“During my life, I do not think I have ever wronged anyone, God forbid. On the contrary – others have insulted and wronged me, and sometimes just out of pure malice. Where does the evil in people come from? Why? Why cannot man, the paragon of creation, be truly and actually good? Then there would be absolutely no evil and everyone could leave this earth and part with life in happiness – and not as myself now, in bitterness, doubt and great disappointment...*

*“My plea to you, Gołda and Mordche, is as to those closest to me in my life. I speak to you as a father to his children, for oftentimes I have felt towards the two of you as towards my own flesh and blood, as if you had been my children.*

*“Dear Mordche! Your sister’s love and loyalty to you is her entire life - it is her contentment and existence. Do not take this devotion away from her - do not disappoint her! And be with her, because only your proximity will keep her alive.*

*“Gołda and Mordche - deepen your sense of family. Stick together! I still believe that the humanity in people, the good, will overcome the bad - and you can serve as an example of goodness to others.*

*“Be kind to the remainder of my family, my relatives, whose happiness I wished to see, and succeeded to do so in certain measure. I depart from this world conscious of the couple of good deeds that I have done both for my own and for other Jews - the landsleit of my dear hometown Warta.*

*“I am among the last of a generation who wished to see a new world of honesty and justice! Be my successors and do everything to root out the evil among people...*

*“Keep my books, my spiritual possessions, in their bookcases as I have left them. Peer into them, learn and find comfort in the wonderful words of our writers and thinkers.*

*“My funeral is to be carried out by the Bund, for it is with the Bund that I have joined my soul. No one is to hold any speeches over my casket. And whoever wishes to know about my life will be able to read it in my book, which I leave in manuscript form, and which I hope you, my heirs, will publish.*

*“In this book, which I leave behind, everyone will be able to see both my virtues and my flaws. I had both - as all flesh and blood on this sinful earth.*

*"This book is my Kaddish<sup>2</sup>!*

*"Do not weep at my funeral. Sing the Bundist 'Shvue'<sup>3</sup> with the comrades at my grave, without tears.*

*"Devoted in great love, yours,  
Josef."*

Josef died on the same day as his daughter Sure'le had died. It was on a Wednesday morning in October.

Upon returning from the funeral, Gołda and Mordche were unable to enter the house. From their great sorrow and despondency, they went into the little park where Josef had always loved to sit. They went up to the bench which Josef had often chosen, between two tall pine trees. Mordche and Gołda sat down here. In their hearts, both of them were weeping. Gołda's eyes were dry, as if the source of tears had run dry from the deep sorrow and pain that were clutching her heart.

A flock of white doves flew up and circled around them, as if they had come to console the two lonely mourners after their closest and warmest one, who had been taken from them.

"Look, doves", Mordche said.

"Yes", Gołda replied.

The source of tears was opened once again. She burst out crying. Tears now rolled down her cheeks.

"These are the same doves which circled around Josef and me as I walked with him to the *chuppah*."

Mordche stroked her trembling shoulders.

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: *Prayer for the souls of the dead.*]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: *"The Oath"; the Bund's anthem.*]