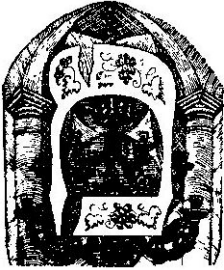


51



Mordche would come every Sunday to Golda's for lunch and to spend a couple hours. Golda could not hold him for long, and Josef said nothing to him. He welcomed him in a friendly manner and asked him how he was, but did not get into too many talks with him. He felt that he had no right whatsoever to meddle in his private life. Furthermore, Josef was afraid he would blurt out some unnecessary word that would hurt Golda, and he wished to avoid this.

Sitting and looking at Mordche as he ate, he perceived a paleness in his face. Golda noticed this, too.

"Look at yourself", Golda exclaimed. "You've completely changed in appearance. I beg of you, Mordche", Golda said with tears in her eyes, "live on your own, but come here every day to eat supper, like before".

This time, Mordche realised his sister was right. Restaurant food was not doing him any good. He acquiesced. However, it was hard to travel back and forth - from work to Josef's house, and afterwards back home to Broadway. [So] he rented a room not far from Josef's dwelling. Nevertheless, Mordche's appearance did not change for the better. Golda's good food was of no help to him at all.

She began worrying and, every morning, badgered him go to a doctor for an examination. It was evident that Mordche, himself, also sensed that his state of health was not on par with everyone else's. He felt a pain in his back lately. The work at the workshop was also getting harder for him from day to day. He went, with a card, to the union's large clinic for a general check-up.

On the following day, when Josef was still at work in the office, Golda telephoned him. With a wailing voice, she told him Mordche was at home. The doctor had sent for him after viewing the X-ray film and told him to immediately cease working, and that he would need to spend a short time in hospital.

"What do the X-rays say?", Josef asked apprehensively. At this point, Mordche himself went to the telephone and explained to Josef that the doctor was not sure yet, but that it was probably the lungs - a mild bout of TB, which could now be completely cured. But he would need to be in hospital for a good, few weeks and, later, perhaps in a sanatorium.

And that is how it was. Accompanied by his female friend Florence and by Golda, that same day, Mordche went to the state hospital. There, at the hospital, they informed him that he had nothing to be afraid of. It was TB, as the doctor had said, but it was a mild form and they would cure him. There was no need for him to become agitated or scared. He would get well.

Josef's home became filled with concern for Mordche. The relationship between Josef and Golda changed completely for the better. Mordche's illness brought the two of them together, even closer than they had been before. Josef's concern for her health, his constant comforting her to the effect that she ought not to worry so much, had an effect on Golda and she now saw, in Josef, the only trusted person she had in the world - particularly after Josef made efforts, through the Arbeiter Ring [Workmen's Circle], that Mordche should be admitted to the Arbeiter Ring sanatorium in Liberty, [New York].

There, in Liberty, Mordche's health condition really did improve a great deal. Golda would return from her visits to her brother in a better mood. She would joyously tell Josef how well Mordche was looking, and that the doctors there were saying that he would very soon be completely recovered. Medical science does wonders nowadays in curing TB patients.

Every fortnight, Golda would travel to Liberty to her brother, and she would bring back, from him to Josef, warm regards and a gratitude which cannot be expressed in words. It was only now that Josef's loyalty to her and to her brother was displayed. Never did a day go by without Josef mentioning Mordche and speaking about him. He took it intensely to heart and a feeling of guilt enveloped him, when he remembered his sharp words on that Saturday morning, when he told Mordche to leave the house.

"It might be", Josef thought, "that had I not spoken to him with such anger, the misfortune of his falling ill would not have happened".

Golda - who had already prepared herself and was studying to become a typist on a Yiddish typewriter, in order to find employment in some Yiddish communal institution - now discontinued her studies on account of Mordche's failing ill. She would weep day and night over her brother's fate. Such loyalty and affection to a brother, as Golda showed, seemed unnatural to Josef and he feared Golda might break down.

At every free minute, Josef looked after her and comforted her with the most heartfelt words. This worked and Golda also began to feel, in her heart, a love for Josef as never before.

Florence gradually became a stranger. She actually travelled to Europe for the whole summer. Upon her return in the autumn, she telephoned to inquire how Mordche was. They eventually stopped hearing from her altogether.

The time came when Mordche had to leave the sanatorium. His state of health had improved considerably and the doctors declared to him that he could already return to the city - although he needed to rest for a long time and, under no circumstances, return to his work. He was also required to be under the periodical supervision of a physician.

The joy in Josef's home was unimaginable, when Mordche rang to say he was coming home on the following day. Josef's small dwelling welcomed Mordche with open arms. His return home was a festive occasion for Golda, Josef and all his friends.

Due to the occasion of Mordche's return home, Josef made efforts to receive a larger apartment in the same building. Golda was beaming with joy when they moved.

Golda sought employment with a renewed eagerness and, to her good fortune, she found it immediately. Nevertheless, she had enough free time to devote to her brother. She pampered him and did everything humanly possible to make him forget his illness and see to regaining his strength more and more. For Mordche, Golda was both a sister and a mother.

“Such loyalty from sister to brother”, Josef thought, “has never yet been”.

And although his sister’s loyalty to him was often hard and sometimes wearisome, Mordche still felt well in Josef’s house. He now felt that here, with Golda and Josef, was his true home.

