



Gołda met many friends of her youth in New York. Among them, her school friend Władek. Władek was an assimilated young man with artistic talents. He had gone through the Second World War in Poland. He had joined a group of Polish partisans and no one in this Polish partisan group knew that Władek was a Jew. The one who helped Władek become familiar with the Polish underground partisans was a Christian girl named Ola, the daughter of a Polish officer. Ola subsequently saved Władek from a certain death, when the Polish partisans accidentally discovered that Władek was Jewish. Władek escaped with Ola and spent some time in the German DP camps. They married and, after liberation, they came with their child, a boy, to New York, along with all the other Jewish DP refugees.

Władek's house was a place where the surviving Polonised Jewish refugees, from the German camps, would gather. These were young men and women who, just like Władek, were estranged from Jews and Judaism. They never spoke Yiddish, even if they knew the language from their childhood years. Now, they went about with a profound feeling of guilt that, all the years before the War, they had been distanced from Jews, and had considered themselves as fully-fledged Poles. Here, in New York, the majority of these assimilated Polish Jews returned to Jews and the Yiddish language, even if they still spoke Polish amongst themselves, as they could not part so quickly with the language.

Ola, Władek's wife - the Polish woman - learned Yiddish and spoke it constantly. With that, she wished to show how close and cherished the new Jewish surroundings were for her. With all her heart, Ola strove to become more Jewish - like one of the survivors. But her husband Władek remained the typical assimilationist, the stranger. Władek quickly learned English and refused to utter a Yiddish word under any circumstances. He even boasted that he did not know Yiddish. Nevertheless, he was close to all the Jewish-Polish intellectuals, professionals, doctors, engineers and Yiddish actors from Warsaw, who had received their education in the higher Polish schools, and to whom the Polish language was not foreign.

Each of these Jewish-Polish intellectuals, former DP camp internees, had been through a great deal. Each of them had, during the War, gone through the Nazi *seven lairs of hell* and had what to tell the others. All of them were drawn to the artistic-intellectual Władek's home. There, with Władek and his pleasant wife Ola, they felt as in the bygone pre-war Poland, and they had the illusion they had become younger in years.

A sentiment of yearning for those normal, romantic times enveloped everyone at these gatherings. But, suddenly, after a glass of liquor, after warming themselves with talk and drink, everyone remembered just how lonely they were and what the great destruction had done to them. Each of them had lost sisters, brothers, wives and children. Each individual was like a sole-surviving orphan, all alone in the huge and alien New York. In their hearts, all those

gathered at Władek's house carried an unhealed wound, and no one knew when it would heal.

But these refugees' urge for life was strong, and they gradually started seeking partners, getting married and establishing family nests, in order to dispel the loneliness that was torturing all of them here. It even happened that older men married young women, and the other way around - older women with young men. Gradually, odd, mismatched couples [began] appearing at these little celebrations and gatherings and, with the glass of wine, everyone brought out their sentiments of hopelessness and doubt, laughing and weeping. While one recounted a happy episode with ostensible cheer, another suddenly burst out in tears, crying out in despair and despondency, "What is my life now? It's too late, too late!"

Josef and Gołda also made frequent appearances in these surroundings. Both of them felt both at home and alien in Władek's house. At home, because all those gathered reminded them of their bygone home in Poland, in Warta, when he, Josef, was still young and brimming with life and activity, serving with his capabilities the Jewish Labour movement, of which he was a part. These surroundings of the newly-arrived were also close to Gołda. They were only a bit shocked and put off by the depression, despair and doubts that gripped these newcomers in moments of self-confession, when they revealed their inner feelings and thoughts.

These strange confessions telling everything, openheartedly getting things off one's chest - had an effect on Gołda. She felt it would also be easier for her, were she to divulge everything to her closest friend - Josef.

Months of thinking and rethinking went by. Once, the two of them were sitting in a park, not far from their home. Gołda was in a depressed mood. She was just sad and empty in her soul. The darkness of the approaching evening, the shadows cast around the benches, the last rays of the setting sun - all affected her mood. Gołda kept silent and looked forlornly at Josef.

"What's with you today?", Josef inquired.

"Nothing, Josef, nothing. But I've something to tell you. Maybe it'll be easier for me if I speak."

"Well, who's not letting you speak?"

And Gołda started recounting, "Listen, Josef! In the last weeks before my journey from Germany to America, I met a young man named Bolek. That was when I was still working as a Yiddish kindergarten teacher in the Feldafing DP camp. This same Bolek knows you very well, because he was also an active member of the Bund in Warsaw.

"Had it not been for the fate that bound me to you, and my strong desire to travel to America, I might have married him there in Germany because, with every day of our acquaintance, he became ever fonder of me. I was not clear as to my own feelings towards him. My moods in Germany, my experiences at the time - I wasn't fond of anyone. I hated the world and even myself. I forgot my whole acquaintance with him and his affection for me.

“But hear now, Josef, in the last few days, Bolek has arrived in New York. He came to see me a couple of days ago. I don’t know who gave him my address. He is my age. We talked things over and I put it quite plainly to him that there could be no talk of marriage with him.

“Josef, I’ve decided to become your wife according to the rite of Moses and Israel! It is because of this, Josef, that during the whole time I didn’t give you a clear answer to all your proposals. I wanted to talk it over with Bolek first.

“Bolek accepted my decision with understanding. Now I’m free - I’m free, Josef, and wish to forget all the past! I’m now ready to settle down to a life with you, Josef. I’ve already become accustomed to you, and I’ll do everything to adapt myself to you and your life. I’ll try to make the life of both of us as nice as possible. Perhaps, Josef, the sun will shine on us with mercy.”

Gołda sighed heavily.

Throughout the duration of Gołda’s speech, Josef gazed at her inquisitively and lovingly. After her last words and deep sigh, Josef kissed her wordlessly. They were kisses of happiness and joy.

The wedding was held in August, 1950 - a quiet wedding, without ceremony. They had the marriage licence issued at the New York City Hall. The witnesses to their marriage were their newly-arrived friends, Karl and his wife Gertruda. Smiling happily, Josef and Gołda walked down the stairs and saw a multitude of doves circling around them, as if the doves had flown up to congratulate them. One by one, the fluttering doves alighted on the hands of the newlywed couple.