



As of late, Josef had been very agitated. Various despondent ideas assailed him, especially during the nights. Even though he was tired after a day of hard work at the office, it was difficult for him to fall asleep. At night, Josef thought of Gołda. During the day, he was consumed by his work, distracted by the people coming to him with various issues.

At night, however, he lay awake thinking of Gołda, half asleep and half in a doze. It seemed to him as if what he was dreaming was real. He seemed to be going on a long journey, wishing to arrive at some destination. But the more he walked, the more endless the road seemed to him, never coming to an end. Who knew, he wondered, if he would ever reach his intended destination safe and sound?

During the last few weeks, a tiredness seized him - a tiredness of everything and everyone. To him, life had become senseless. He felt as if someone had cast him out into an alien world, to a country where no one knew him and no one wished to know him. He was left as if in a prison, neither outside nor inside.

Things had only changed for the better for Josef once he had started corresponding with Gołda. Something lit up inside him. A yearning, for which there are no words, assailed him, and sparks of hope were ignited like small fires, as if promising good and bright days.

But, when Josef stopped receiving the heartfelt, warm letters which Gołda would regularly write him, it troubled him. Not hearing from her literally gave him no repose. Who knew what had happened to her there, in "liberated" Poland? The story of the pogrom in the city of Kielce came to his mind. Josef felt as if black clouds had covered the skies, and he would fall asleep in the nights in dark thoughts, pondering what could have happened there with Gołda, from whom he had stopped hearing.

To his great surprise, once more, the sun shone in his little room. Unexpectedly, as a messenger sent by Providence herself, the telephone rang early one morning, while Josef was still lying in bed and preparing to rise.

"Who's calling so early?", Josef asked himself, and anxiously took up the receiver. He heard a familiar voice, "Hello, this is Helen speaking - Alkona's wife. I'm in New York now. How are you, Josef? I've got good news for you. Gołda has arrived in America safe and sound. Yesterday evening, I received a telegram from Los Angeles. Gołda's in Los Angeles - she's staying with Josl Berliner."

In her conversation, Alkona's wife repeated the words of the telegram over and over again. Gołda felt encouraged and was full of joy to, finally, be in the free country of America. After the talk over the phone with Alkona's wife, Josef was left sitting in a state of excitement from the joy of the sudden good news.

“Gołda is already in America! Gołda is here! Gołda is here!”, he murmured joyously to himself, but was immediately saddened. Why, he asked himself, had Gołda not stopped, for even a day or two, in New York? Why had she not rung him on the telephone? Feelings of joy and disappointment were intermingled in his heart.

Josef ran to his desk and began writing a letter to Gołda, at the address of his friend Josl Berliner. He wrote that he was grateful to the friend of his youth for showing such friendship in inviting Gołda into his home. Yes, at Berliner’s, Gołda would come back to herself. She would feel at home there and would lack for nothing.

Josef sat at his desk and wrote page after page - and the more he wrote, the lighter his mood became. For Josef, it has always been much easier to get things off his chest and express himself in writing, rather than by speaking. And this is what Josef wrote:

“Dear Gołda,

“I have just received a phone call from Alkona’s wife that you’re already in California. How did this miracle happen? At the moment, perhaps my question is not important. The main thing is - you’re in America, on the sunny Californian soil! May it be in good fortune! Mazel tov to you - mazel tov!

“As I write these words to you, thoughts and pictures are racing through my mind, which appear to me like a film. Warta, my Warta! The kindergarten, ul Krótka, comrades, ghetto, pain and suffering, graves and missing people, and thousands and thousands of annihilated martyrs, of whom not even a grave remains. [And] now the small number of survivors, who are setting forth towards a new life, towards freedom and redemption!

“How strongly I would’ve wished to see you, dear Gołda! I hope that you believe me that you would’ve been a welcome guest here in my home. Your stay in New York would’ve been a festive occasion for me. Sadly, this did not happen. It is probably punishment for some sin. If it is my fault, please forgive me.

“Were I not such a pauper, I would now, this very minute, buy a ticket and fly to California to see you! I would sit and chat with you about everything and everyone! Next to you, I’d feel as if I were in Warta - the bygone one and the current-day one - in the city for which I am dying with longing, because I have family ties to everything that happens there, and even more so when such a person as close as you arrives from there, dear Gołda.

“You are now staying with my good friend Josl Berliner. He is a goodhearted man and will do anything in the world for you to feel at home there in his house. If you don’t feel at home with him, Heaven forbid, write to me immediately! And if you’re thinking of coming here to settle in New York, I will do anything within my capabilities to enable you to settle down here.

“Be healthy and strong.

“Yours, Josef”

A few days later, Josef received a letter from Golda - a reply full of warm and hearty gratitude. This letter brought much joy and consolation into Josef's lonely life.

Golda wrote:

“My dear friend Josef,

“I read your¹ letter with tears of joy. I also received the glorious flowers that you, dear friend Josef, sent to me. That was something I had not been expecting! The flowers, and, in particular, your warm and heartfelt words, brought me great joy - and I thank you a thousand times. You cannot imagine, at all, what your letters mean to me at the moment.

“Yes, after so many troubles in Germany, after spending a year there, I came by a miracle to America. I was only in New York for a couple of hours. I wanted very much to see you. It was in the evening. I didn't have your home address - only the address of the office where you work. So, I rang, but no one answered. It really made me cry.

“Upon arriving in New York, I saw relatives waiting for the refugees from my transport. I saw how the relatives and friends embraced and kissed my fellow ship-brothers and ship-sisters. But no one was waiting for me. I couldn't contain myself, and tears rolled from my eyes - my heart was very heavy.

“When I found out I was travelling to San Diego and would be stopping in Los Angeles, I sent a telegram to our good friend Alkona. However, to my disappointment, when I arrived in Los Angeles, he did not come to see me. Our good friend Alkona was actually in New York with his wife Helen at that precise moment.

“It's a good thing Alkona's daughter Chawa'le, with his cousins and friends, came to wait for me at the station. Alkona's cousins took me to their house and, there, I rested from my long journey. I had something to eat, and then went to our friend Josel Berliner, and it's actually at Berliner's that I'm currently staying.

“Berliner is just as you describe him - a simple and goodhearted man; I've no words to relate to you his kindness towards me.

¹ [TN: In Yiddish, as in many other languages, different singular second-person subject pronouns and verbs are used when addressing someone informally, such as one's family or friends (“du bist” – you are), as opposed to formally, e.g. one's teacher or doctor (“ir zent” – you are). While Josef writes to Golda informally (“du”), she replies using the more formal, respectful style (“ir”).]

"Am I happy that I left Europe? It's difficult for me to answer regarding being happy. I've only got one desire - to work, to find employment in order to be able to save a little money from my earnings and help my brother Mordche, who still finds himself in the accursed Germany. I don't know what's happening with him there now. I'm waiting for a letter from him.

"If only you knew, dear friend Josef, how deeply my brother Mordche is impressed upon my heart! He has registered to come to America, but who knows? If only the doctor lets him through. After all, for a considerable time, he lay in Germany with a severe lung disease. If, Heaven forbid, Mordche cannot come here, it will be impossible for me to remain here. Mordche is my entire life! Do you understand this? He's the only brother I have left and he's the only one who gives me the strength to live.

"My dear friend Josef, write. A letter from you is a great treat.

"Kisses. Yours, Gofda"

This is what Josef replied to her letter:

"Dear Gofda,

"On Saturdays and Sundays, I'm free from my work at the office. I could barely wait till Monday, hoping to hear from you. The two days stretched longer than ever. I barely made it to Monday morning, when my post arrived. Among the letters, I also finally saw the envelope with your handwriting.

"Your letter made me happy. Your writing brought me great pleasure, but also a little heartache. Before anything else, I beg you not to address me as 'ir'. True, I'm a bit older than you - but only in years, not in spirit and mood. That's how I feel, at any rate. I do not have, by any means, the feeling, as I read your letters to me, that I'm your grandfather. I want you to write to me as to a true family friend and to stop thinking that you're all alone here and on your own in the world.

"My dear, no more 'friend Josef' - just simple, warm "Josef". Alright, Gofda? Now we shall chat a bit.

"I'm glad my letter brought you joy. There's no need to thank me. It vexes me intensely that, for a good couple of hours, you were in New York, as you write, and were unable to arrange it so that you could stay here. After all, we could have met and seen each other. A great wrong has happened to the two of us. But that's the past! Such was our luck. It was apparently not meant to be.

"I'm very happy that everything is as I predicted to you. I'm glad friend Josef Berliner took you in so warmly and kindly, and that you're living so well with him and his wife.

"Don't worry about work. Berliner will help you find employment. If it turns out to be difficult for you, then accept my invitation and come here. I shall be glad to take over providing for you.

"I don't understand why you're not happy that you left Europe - or glad, if not completely happy, for what does the word happiness mean? You can be happy if, from now on, you take your life into your own hands. Don't take your brother's situation so tragically. He will completely recover and make it here safe and sound. That's what I feel. All we need to do is what we can do in practice. We must see to it that he reaches the shores of America. I'm convinced your brother will arrive safely here in America and be next to you.

"The last lines in your letter, that you're living with hopes for the future, made me happy. That's what you should always think and strive for. You write that living alone, without a purpose, is really not good and that it's exhausting. Yes, I agree with you. Indeed, I share your opinion and am sure, Gołda dear, that if one only has a friend, one can endure, and then life receives a purpose. In your life, you will someday find a close person, who will understand you, and your life will be content.

"I'm alone. I'm hurt and disappointed. A friend - a close friend - is for me now the greatest ideal. I could write to you like this, page after page, not a letter, but a whole book of all that I've been through. But writing is not enough. I would gladly see you and speak with you. I believe I would have what to talk about.

"So, what shall we do? The road to you is a long one. One needs time and money for that. All that remains, then, is for me to want it very strongly, and for you to also strive for that - and, then, I'm sure that coming to you is something that will come to pass within a short time.

"I kiss you warmly.

"Yours, Josef"

