

42



The days Gołda was on the train, which brought her from Los Angeles to New York, dragged on for Josef like years. He was feverishly awaiting her arrival. He festively prepared himself to welcome her with the finest and the best. He himself dressed up, donning the newest suit with the finest white shirt. He felt young at heart - he was now going to meet his heart's chosen one. He trembled with joy and hoped the meeting would be at an auspicious hour.

Josef proceeded towards the railway station. He could not sit at home. It was a Sunday. A deep snow lay on the streets, which had fallen all night on the city. The air was cold. When Josef emerged from the subway, he climbed the stairs along with dozens of other people who, like himself, were in a hurry to get somewhere. He looked at the huge clock at the entrance to the terminal, and it was nine o'clock in the morning. The train was only due to arrive at ten - in an hour's time.

The minutes dragged on. Josef entered the cafeteria, ate something and returned to the waiting hall. He sat on a bench, holding a newspaper, and attempted to read the day's news. The words jumped about before his eyes.

Gołda, Gołda was coming! She would soon be standing here in front of him. How would she receive him?

Immersed in thought, holding the paper in his hand, he suddenly heard it announced that the train from Los Angeles was delayed due to the great snows on the way.

The train eventually arrived and, amongst the hundreds of passengers passing through the wide-open iron gate, Gołda appeared - a young woman of average stature, with an intelligent face and lively, black eyes, with a gleam of sadness in them. A thin smile hovered on her lips.

Was this Gołda? Yes, it was - the once beautiful, little Jewish girl, who was the pride of the I.L. Peretz kindergarten in Warta! The actress at the Yiddish school, beloved and appreciated by everyone.

Yes, this was Gołda, holding her little valise, wearing that wintry ladies' fur jacket, which she had received as a gift from America. Gołda also recognised Josef. This was evident from the smile which she conveyed to him as she came closer to him. Josef stretched out his hand and called out joyfully, "Gołda, Gołda! Did you recognise me?" - "Yes, Josef! Yes!", Gołda replied to him and fell into his arms.

They stood for a while, embraced in wordless silence. Tears appeared in their eyes. They kissed one another. Neither could find the words to say something.

Once more, they regarded each other wordlessly for a while. Josef broke the silence, "Yes, Gołda dear", he exclaimed, "you're here, you're here!"

They went to one side and proceeded towards the exit of the station. As they walked, Josef, a little restrained, but still excited with joy, said to Gołda, "I've prepared a room for you, Gołda dear, in a hotel, so you can rest after your long journey. But, before that, let's go in here and have a bite together, alright?"

Gołda shook her head smiling with bright eyes. Afterwards, Josef took her in a taxi to the hotel. He left her alone in the room, to rest and be with herself after their first meeting.

Late in the afternoon, Josef came to Gołda's hotel room. They had supper together, looking at each other with gleeful smiles, and gradually beginning to talk. What did they not speak about? After all, there was so much to talk about. Their conversation continued for hours on end, late into the evening. And, when they were both tired of speaking, Josef addressed Gołda in a contained, calm tone:

"Listen to me, Gołda. I want you to understand me well. It's true you've come to New York at my request – but, just as a good friend. You owe me nothing and are absolutely under no obligation. Don't take any step without your own desire. How to arrange your life is your own choice. Decide, if you wish, to remain here in the big city of New York. Look around, I beg you. Believe me, I tell you now, what I've already told you in my letters to you."

Gołda said nothing and just smiled. From time to time, she cast warm glances at Josef as he spoke, as if grateful for his words.

From day to day, she became closer to him. He would come to her in the hotel room at any free minute he could spare. A stream of words gushed from one to the other. Gołda also became more talkative from day to day. Josef would look at her and gulp down her words. Tears would run from Gołda's eyes, when she recounted her suffering during the years when Hitler's beasts were ravaging Poland, and, later, in the camps. It was easier for her after talking and weeping. She was grateful to him for listening to her.

New York City met with Gołda's approval. Josef would travel about with her in the evenings and the free Sundays to show her all the city's remarkable attractions. Gołda was also glad she was currently in New York. She was expecting to meet her brother as soon as possible.

Coming to New York had already paid off. Josef had also become very close to her, as her own brother. She had developed two-fold feelings towards Josef - something more than towards one who would only become her destined one in life. Josef would often seem to her like a very close relative, as her own flesh and blood. He felt her sadness, wept with her over her suffering and rejoiced with her over her happiness - that happiness that was winking to her, like a star in the open window.

Every evening, when she would remain on her own after Josef left, a gloominess assailed her in the lonely hotel room. In addition, she thought that staying in a hotel was a great expense for Josef.

Within a few days, Gołda herself suggested that Josef rent a room for her, near his residence. If possible, in the same house.

“It seems that I shall remain a New Yorker for a long time to come. I’ll wait here until my brother arrives. And living at a hotel is, after all, a luxury”, Gołda said, without finishing her sentences, smiling at every incomplete line.

As it so happened, there was a room to let in the same house, where Josef was living. Gołda moved in at once. Bit by bit, she started doing the housekeeping both for herself and for Josef. Being under the same roof brought the two of them even closer together.

Josef recounted to Gołda all his experiences down the years since he had left Warsaw. He also did not omit episodes from his previous life, from before the Second World War, his journey to France and back to Poland, the outbreak of the War, the years in Wilno and, finally, in the free America.