



Disappointed by all his experiences, by the blows which life had struck him, Josef fell into a mood of utter resignation. "I shall remain alone like this for the few remaining years which I am destined to live", he often thought to himself. "Without a home and without any close ones, to whom to sometimes pour out my heart".

The only consolation - the single piece of contentment in his life - were the hundreds of letters full of hearty gratitude, which Josef received, day in and day out, from the Surviving Remnants, who found themselves in Germany in the DP camps, and in France, Sweden and the Land of Israel. The letters, which Josef received, were both from *landsleit* and acquaintances, whom he remembered since his youth, and also from strangers, who knew about Josef's broad activity here in New York, and of his efforts and the work he was doing for the surviving victims of the dark Nazi Germany.

Things improved a little for Josef with the arrival of Rózka and her brother Zygmunt, the children of his annihilated sister Hinda. With Rózka also came her husband Wolf and their child Ruche'le, a dear little girl. They came as refugees and Josef helped them in every way he could, with advice and deeds. He would visit them frequently in their dwelling. They lived together with the brother, Zygmunt - and Josef was no longer as lonely as before.

Among the letters Josef received, a letter arrived from Montreal, Canada, from the Działoszyński refugee family - Pola and her husband Lutek had been miraculously saved from the Nazis, and they were now in Montreal. With them was also a child of her elder sister Regina, whom the Nazis had annihilated. The child took Pola for her mother and that is how things would stay. Pola's younger sister Rena also came. The letter to Josef had, in fact, been written by Rena, but Josef was under the impression that the one writing to him was not Rena but Pola, because it was signed by all three of them - Pola, Rena and Lutek.

Josef knew this family well, for he had lived in the house next to theirs in Warta. Additionally, they were also his relatives - Josef's uncle Jakow, his aunt Hinda's husband, was a full sibling of Pola and Rena's father.

Over a long period, Josef corresponded with Pola - or rather with Rena, thinking she was Pola. In the last letter, they were asking him to come to them to Toronto for a visit. "It will be a true *yomtev*<sup>1</sup> for us if you come", they wrote to him.

Josef accepted the invitation. It just so happened, that he had to use his vacation time, in the summer weeks of July, to travel across the country, organising the ongoing aid for the refugees in the camps and, most particularly, for the *landsleit* of his hometown. The plan was to be in Montreal, Canada, and at the end of his mission also in the city of Toronto.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: *Yid.*, from the Heb. "good day", i.e. holiday or festive occasion.]

When Josef arrived in Montreal, he met with Rena. He learnt that Pola and her husband Lutek were in Toronto, and that she was the one who had written all the letters he had received.

During the couple of days Josef spent in Montreal, he became very friendly with Rena. She revealed to him her most intimate experiences. It emerged that she was living in Montreal, because she had left Toronto due to a romance. A young Christian had fallen in love with her, and she was also not indifferent to him. However, she dreaded marrying a non-Jew. While she recounted her experiences, Josef was thinking that back at home, in Warta, Rena had been assimilated, had always spoken in Polish, and had mostly spent time with Christian girlfriends and Polish *gimnazjum* students. She was actually capable of [taking] such a step as becoming estranged from the Jews.

Pola had also been such a type, but she had actually married a Jewish young man. Her husband Lutek was also distant from Jews and Judaism, to no lesser extent than Pola. Josef thought, "Blessed be America, that in this free country, the once assimilated youth gradually become more Jewish in spirit, and return to the Jews and a Jewish environment". Rena now spoke Yiddish - truly, not as well as Polish, which was practically her mother-tongue, but she would soon learn in time and would speak Yiddish no worse than any other Jew.

Josef expressed his happiness that Rena had been strong enough to leave her sister's house, parting from a home, and preferred to be here on her own, if only to avoid taking the fatal step of marrying a non-Jew. Josef well knew how these "marriages" ended. After all, he was a strong Jew at heart, and it pained him to hear when someone among the *landsleit* he knew made the mistake to marry a Christian girl, or when a Jewish daughter joined herself to a Christian for life.

Josef approved of Rena, with her intelligence and knowledge. It pained him to hear of her experiences during the years, when she was in the camps of the Nazi murderers. He shuddered when Rena told him, in full detail, about the years in the concentration camps to which the German assassins had dragged her.

"Now", Josef said, "forget all that! You must get closer to Jewish life here. Become acquainted with the Yiddish literature and music. I know that it won't be easy for you. After all, you're one of the typical Jewish-Polish assimilated girls, whom I well remember from home, with their way of looking down on Jews and their culture.

"But do as I say. Here, in Montreal, you've got every possibility of getting close to. Jewish youth. There is a Jewish intellectual circle here. Go to the [Jewish] Public Library - you'll meet poets, who stand on no lower level than today's best Polish poets, even than [Julian] Tuwim and [Antoni] Słonimski, who, by the way, are also Jews or descended from Jews. But they still aren't Yiddish poets, but Polish ones - they are, in essence, spiritual deserters!"

Rena listened to Josef's interesting speech. She had not imagined, at all, that one could discuss cultural issues so finely and profoundly in Yiddish, as Josef had shown in his conversations with her.

"Yes, my friend", Rena said. "I shall do as you say. After all, I'm so lonely here - distanced from Jews, and Polish culture gives me nothing here. I have yet to learn English".

Josef bade Rena farewell, in the hope of meeting again. "Let's write to each other. Will you reply, as until now, to my letters?", Josef inquired.

"Why do you need to ask, Josef?", Rena responded, smiling. "You'll see how I keep my word! I only hope that you, too, Josef, will keep your word and not forget me in that big New York".

From Montreal, Josef travelled to Toronto and spent a few days there. He constantly spoke of Rena and what a fine impression she had made on him, and hinted to her sister that, although Rena was quite a few years younger than himself, the years of her youth had already also practically slipped away. After all, Rena, to her great misfortune, had lost her youth in the camps.

"Yes, Josef, my friend", Pola said. "I'd count myself lucky to see my sister married. And you, Josef - I wish to say this openly - I like you very much. Write about it to Rena".

The correspondence with Rena continued for a good couple of months, until the spring. Josef suddenly realised Rena was avoiding answering all his direct questions as to the future of the two of them. In time, Rena took up painting. She had already displayed a talent for painting as a young girl in Warta. Now, in her loneliness in Montreal, once again, she took to painting. In the evenings, she studied in a special school and found her expression in painting. But her love for the Christian young man, from whom she had fled, had broken her heart. She had decided never to marry again.

When Josef came a second time to Montreal, she told him openly and clearly, "I'm fond of you. The few years you're older than me wouldn't have mattered. But I shall remain as I am. As it seems, I shall never get married. Now I've got my art, the painting and, in painting, I find content in my loneliness". Sad and forlorn from Rena's bold words, Josef travelled back to New York.

After the bizarre and incomprehensible match-making and romantic encounters with Becky and Rena, Josef was left even more disappointed and, this time, truly vowed to himself never again to seek any relationships through advertisements in the *Lonely Hearts* columns of the newspapers. Resigned to this, he thought to remain on his own for his last few remaining years in the great New York. That was his fate. In this manner, his destiny would repay him for the few bright days of joy in Poland of old. Now, in the autumn of his life, he would pay back for every minute of that bygone happiness. As the philosopher Schopenhauer teaches us, "For every minute of joy, one pays back with pain."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: It is unclear whether this is a specific quote, or a summary of Schopenhauer's philosophy; we have translated verbatim as it appears in the Yiddish original.]

The hundreds of letters that he received now, day in and day out, from the DP camps in Germany, from Poland, from his hometown Warta, and also from the Land of Israel were a consolation. Those writing to him were unknown Jews of the Surviving Remnant, the unhappy remnants of the Jewish settlement of many millions in the Poland of old. Josef, himself, was not sure how they had obtained his address. It would seem that the work he had managed to carry out since arriving in America had made his name so well-known everywhere throughout the globe, wherever the refugees found themselves.

Josef threw himself even more ardently and passionately into the work of helping alleviate the need of the refugees. There was what had to be done. It was necessary to rescue the refugees as quickly as possible from the German camps and help them settle down - [to] bring them here to the American countries, [or] see to it that they should be able to travel to the Land of Israel, to settle there and start a new life.



האמץ הכלכלי