



At the end of summer, Josef received numerous letters from his close relatives in the DP camps in Germany. These relatives were requesting assistance in coming to America. There was one letter which made a particular impact on Josef when he read it. It was a touching letter, full of entreaties and tears, written by his sister Hinda's two surviving children, Zygmunt and Różka. Josef was gladdened by the news that they had survived from the entire large family.

He was reminded of when Zalman and Rajzla (they were later called Zygmunt and Różka) would come to him still as small children, and a great compassion enveloped him. Tears choked him while reading the letter. He thought about his sister Hinda and his other brothers and sisters. What had become of them all? Josef decided he would do everything within his possibilities to bring Zygmunt and Różka here to New York. All they needed was an official affidavit, signed by an American citizen, ostensibly ensuring a residence and a workplace, so that they would not become a burden to anyone.

Josef did not rest. Rescuing his sister's children from the bloodied German soil was no trifling matter - to remain there one moment too long meant hell! He would do everything and at once - straight away! Thinking about a residence, an address, naturally no other name came to his mind besides that of Becky - his future companion in life. After all, she had truly been sent by God! He would be able to aid his own flesh and blood and bring them here, and he would feel more at home here, having relatives in this new country.

But Josef immediately noticed Becky's coldness when he excitedly, full of joy, gave her the news of his sister's two surviving children. Becky did not refuse on the spot to give her signature. She just said indifferently, "Alright, alright - give me the papers. I'll look at them and send them to you signed".

Josef immediately disliked the manner in which Becky had apparently consented to giving her signature on the affidavit. He waited for a week and [then] two. He did not even wish to ring Becky on the phone. It was like a touchstone [viz. test] to him - would Becky display her loyalty and closeness? If not, it was a bad sign and the whole match with her was no more than a matter of business.

It was only on the third week that the papers arrived, but unsigned. Becky's coldness since he had requested her to give the affidavit for Zygmunt and Różka tore at his heart. She had not even rung him to ask him how he was, and why he was not coming out every weekend as before. It became clear to Josef that he was still far from his dream of starting his life anew. Doubts stole into his heart. All of a sudden, he sensed that nothing would come of his meeting with her.

Nevertheless, he travelled to see Becky. This was the fourth week since they had seen each other. Becky actually welcomed him very heartily. She made him feel at home and gave him the impression she had missed him. Smilingly, she reproached him for not having called.

“How could you contain yourself and not come to see me?”, she inquired with a sly smile.

But regarding the affidavit and the papers, which she had sent back to him unsigned, not even a single word! Josef also did not wish to remind her, so as not to make her feel uncomfortable. He thought [it over]. Was he perhaps demanding too much of her? Was she perhaps afraid of Taking, upon herself, the responsibility and burden of two strangers?

Becky talked, her voice muddled his thoughts. He did not know what world he was in. He gazed at her, silently conceding to all her plans. In a week’s time, Josef would move in here with his things - his books and all his scant possessions. They would take out the marriage license at once, a couple of days after he moved in here.

It was a Friday morning. Josef got up and began packing his belongings. Outside, it was snowing heavily. The weather was worsening from minute to minute. It became a *zawierucha* [Pol., tempest], and Josef was forced to put off his trip to Toms River. He phoned Becky. What did she say? Could he travel in such bad weather? It was impossible. It seemed to Josef as if Becky was rather glad that circumstances had made it so that Josef would not be coming, and the plan of moving over would be postponed for the time being.

A week later, Josef travelled to Toms River. It was on a Friday at dusk, and he planned to stay for the weekend, as usual. At Becky’s, he found two female friends of hers from New York. He sensed something had happened here. Why had she invited people when he was here? This meant he would not even be able to be alone with her and talk things over properly. He met the two ladies, Mrs Nelson and Mrs Kusznir. In the conversation at the table, during the meal, he noted the sarcastic smile on Becky’s face, and the frequent whispering between themselves with her friends. “It’s not the same Becky”, Josef thought.

The telephone rang. Becky entered the other room, where there was an extension, a few steps up the stairs. Josef was left on his own. Why had she not wished to answer the phone here in the room, in Josef’s presence? Had she secrets from him? Was she hiding from him something that he was not meant to know? Josef picked up the receiver, listened for a while, and immediately felt ashamed of himself. He put back the receiver. Becky had meanwhile ended her telephone conversation. She came in with a blaze of anger in her eyes. She said nothing, stared at Josef, and finally burst out in an agitated voice, which was nothing like her character.

“You’re a true detective! I see you’ve got a very high opinion of me! What do you mean by listening in when I’m talking to someone on the phone? Ugh, that’s not nice - and I don’t like it!”, Josef said nothing in response.

Becky’s two friends came in from the kitchen, all of them now looking at Josef and smiled slyly. It seemed as if some secret was binding all three of them together. They made Josef feel that he was a stranger - a fifth wheel on a wagon. Now, every minute he stayed here was for

him a minute too long. Becky and her friends were chattering, winking their eyes and casting half words at each other. She notified both Josef and her friends, simultaneously, that she was expecting very important guests on the following day.

Josef did not even have the audacity to inquire of her as to who these guests were. He already understood everything. She was inviting people over one day after another in order to make him feel out of place. Josef surmised that something here was not right. Insulted, he thought that nothing would happen between him and Becky. Josef abruptly stood up and began packing his effects. "I'm going back to New York!", he told Becky, looking her in the face.

Becky was expecting this. She ostensibly attempted to talk him out of it and, with a simulated gentleness, asked him to stay for the night. When Becky went for a while to the kitchen, her two friends ran up to Josef and silently whispered into his ear, "You're doing right, Mr Szalit, by going. You're doing just the right thing - she is not for you!".

Josef parted coldly from Becky. "I'll be hearing from you, Josef", Becky said to him with an artificial smile. But Josef did not write to her [ever] again. He wished to forget, as soon as possible, about the small towns of Toms River and Lakewood, the bizarre meeting and the whole adventure with Becky.