



From just a single advertisement in the paper, Josef received a large number of letters from various parts of the city. In this ad, Josef gave his age and profession - an accountant at a Labour institution - [and] that he desired to make the acquaintance of a lady in her thirties with a fine character.

Besides the letters in response to his ad, on one occasion, Josef received a phone call from an unknown female voice. Over the course of their conversation, she invited him to come to her house in the Bronx. Her name was Mary. She would be expecting him.

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Before him, Josef saw a woman who looked no older than thirty-five, delicate, with pleasing features and tastefully dressed. Upon entering, his heart gave a shudder. He noticed a defect - Mary's right foot was bent towards the right. It was actually barely visible to the eye, but nevertheless, she did have a slight limp. In a good, familiar Yiddish, with an unhappy glance, she invited Josef into the guest room and asked him to make himself at home.

When they spoke, she inquired of Josef if her disabled foot had impacted him in some way. A while later, her parents came in from another room - elderly, respectable, middle-class folk. The father gave Josef a *shulem*<sup>1</sup> and immediately excused himself and left. The mother also greeted him warmly and followed her husband, closing the door after her, so as not to disturb their daughter and Josef in their conversation.

Mary sat next to Josef. She looked at him with friendly eyes and with a smile on her pleasant face. Sadly and quietly, she told about her life. She said that she was not some big cripple, God forbid - she had [simply] been born with her right leg slightly longer. She could have been operated on in her youth, but her mother had not allowed it. They came from the *shtetl* Opoczno in Poland. Josef surely must have known this *shtetl* - after all, he was Polish.

She had arrived here as a child. Here, she studied and here she was raised. She had been unable to choose a young man to her liking. [Men] much older than her, oftentimes wealthy, had pounded on her doors. This was bitter for her, and thus she remained unmarried. But thank God, fortune shone on her. And where? Precisely in the *shtetl* of her birth, Opoczno, where she was on a visit, some three months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, in July 1939. There, she was wed to a young man, who was a couple of years her junior, and who was delighted to have her as his wife. She filed the papers and was to bring him over legally to America. But unfortunately, the War broke out. The Nazis attacked Poland. She never saw her husband again. Mary's eyes filled with tears. Her husband had perished - she only discovered this once the War had ended.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Heb., "peace", also "shulem alaichem" (peace be upon you); traditional Jewish greeting.]

Josef became better acquainted with Mary. He was fond of her. It is said, that suffering purifies a person.

In Mary's silence, in her pleasant, sad smile, Josef found a close being. She looked up to him, like the younger girls in Warta in bygone days. True, he was older than her, but she was willing to share her life with him. She would be a loyal wife, a homemaker.

At the word "homemaker", Josef was suddenly stricken with sadness. Both were silent for the rest of the evening. And when Mary insisted Josef tell her why he was so unhappy today, he told her, "No, Mary – it won't do. You're still young and, to be happy, really happy, you need a child. And to become a father now, when I'm already over fifty years old, is something I do not wish to do. After the death of my little daughter Sure'le, fate scares me. I know it's not logical to speak like that. It should be the other way around - God can still be good to me. But that is my decision. That's how I feel. If you, Mary, are willing not to have any children, then fine."

Mary lowered her head. With teary eyes, mutely, without words, she said goodbye to him. The last minutes with her, on their walk in the late night hours around Bronx Park, were difficult for him. Josef walked Mary to her house. "Alright, Josef, give me time to think things over", Mary said as if weeping, standing at the entrance to her house.

Josef never heard from Mary again.

