



It was difficult for Josef to remain in the apartment, where he had previously lived with Rywka, even though he was immersed in work over his head. By day, he was in the bureau of the large Labour organisation and, in the evening, there were meetings - gatherings of the Bund and *landsleit*, the [United Czenstochover] Relief Committee and promulgating the Warta book.

He was unable to sit at home. He had to get out of there. Josef decided to change his residence and move closer to the office where he worked. He became a boarder with a Jewish family on Second Avenue.

Jewish refugees arrive in New York, among them a few *landsleit* from his town. He receives them in his office during the day and, in the evenings, in his home. He is no longer alone. He encounters acquaintances amongst the newly-arrived. [And] yes, he has [also] got two good, intimate friends from before that - these are Mirl and Miriam. He sometimes finds the time and visits Mirl's home. He notes how Symcha, Mirl's husband, looks askew at his visits, and receives him even more coldly than before. Thanks to Mirl's friendship with him, Josef does not see Symcha's strange attitude.

And here, one evening, while Josef was sitting at the table in Mirl's house, Miriam suddenly appeared. During the whole time, she had seemed to have disappeared. Now, following Rywka's departure, an old dream was revived in Miriam. True, Josef had not behaved well towards her. Miriam had hoped the closeness between them would have ended differently. After all, they had been registered as husband and wife for weeks and months - the long voyage, the joys and suffering that the two of them had gone through together - was nothing to come of all this? Would Josef forget it all?

Miriam felt offended by the manner in which Josef had freed himself of her after arriving in New York. Miriam did not understand clearly. Had the tragedy of the Second World War, the events with the Jews in Poland, actually disturbed him to such an extent? She was aware that Josef's relationship with Rywka had never been a good one. Why had he suddenly been so loyal to Rywka and so cold towards herself?

Josef greeted Miriam in a friendly manner. Nevertheless, the encounter was painful for him. Miriam clearly perceived that nothing would come of all the hopes she had had lately, after Rywka's departure. Josef simply wished to cut ties with the past - he said this openly. Rywka's journey back, and the manner in which they had parted, had troubled Josef to such an extent, that his attitude towards Miriam, as much as he had once loved her, took on a different character. As if to do it purposely to himself - to cause himself pain - Josef stifled all the feelings that still remained in him towards the girlfriend of his youth, Miriam. And Miriam felt this every time, when she met Josef at Mirl's house.

A single house remained for Josef, where he could sometimes come in the evening after work and find a close person [with whom] to talk and get things off his heart - this was Mirl's house. Mirl was the only one who could comfort him. After all his experiences, Mirl remained the only one who understood him and felt his pain along with him. He was drawn to be close to her, like once in Warta, even though she was a mother of an adult son, and although the years had greatly changed her appearance. To Josef, she often appeared like the Mirl of the old days.

He was oftentimes reminded of that morning, when he returned with Rywka from the *shtetl* where he had travelled to hold a lecture. Who knows? Had Rywka not made the trip with him to that *shtetl*, maybe he would have spared [them] all the suffering - but that was lost! Such was his destiny!

Mirl now evoked, in Josef, bygone memories. [But] it was only a friendship that remained to the two of them from the years of their youth. Josef felt good in Mirl's house. It never occurred to him that Symcha, who greeted him with a frigid "Hello" each time he found Josef deep in a conversation with Mirl, would actually suspect him of having an illicit affair with his wife.

One evening, Josef was sitting in the kitchen and chatting with Mirl. He was drinking a glass of tea, accompanied with a bite of home-baked cake. Mirl was now resting from working all day at the workshop and she enjoyed Josef's visit and the talk between them - the memories that wrapped themselves around each other of their own account, and brought both of them back to their youth.

They were so deep in their conversation, that they did not even notice Symcha's entry. Symcha's sudden, suspicious coming into the kitchen brought their chat to a halt, as if both had awoken from a dream. Josef sat a while longer, then rose and said good night. Symcha did not answer him.

Only once Josef had left, Symcha let loose his tongue. He did not want Josef in his house ever again. He and his stories! What did he want here? Why had he moved here from the Bronx? Why had he sent his wife away? Who was he looking for here?

Mirl burst out laughing and called him a *meshigener* [Yid. madman]. Symcha, however, stood his ground. Josef was not allowed to cross their threshold anymore.

Mirl tried to soothe her husband in a kindly manner. What did he want? Precisely now that Josef was alone, was it nice to drive away an old friend, who was seeking a warm home to come to? It was to no avail. Symcha threatened he would leave the house altogether, were he to find out she ever met with Josef.

This on its own was not enough for Symcha. He began pondering how to drive Josef out of New York. Mirl asked Josef over the telephone not to come to her house anymore, because Symcha was simply suspicious of his motives in visiting.

Josef smiled bitterly. No, he had not expected this. Well, alright. He would not come anymore, even if only God knew how desolate and lonely he was in the large New York City. In his heart, however, Mirl would always remain his good and true friend.

Symcha invented a malicious rumour about Josef. But Josef ignored the entire matter and decided to completely break off his friendship with Miriam and Mirl.

Josef's loneliness now became even harder for him. It seemed to him that the whole world was against him. The solitude consumed him. He would walk about the streets of New York on his own for hours on end. He sometimes thought he was losing his mind. He dreamt strange, wild dreams. In his sleep, he was filled with an indescribable fear and he would wake up with a sweating body. He felt his life was coming to an end.

But a miracle occurred - a couple of weeks passed and he began returning to himself. He found solace in reading, listening to music and, above all, in the renewed work of the relief committee for the surviving Polish Jews. Remarkably, through the work in the relief committee, he actually felt new strengths within him.

Josef decided to cut ties with the past. He would start anew. Nevertheless, he was still afraid of the solitude. He did not wish to die alone somewhere, a foreigner in the great city of New York. And he, once more, began to look for new friends amongst the refugees. Who knew? Maybe he was still destined to find a close person, and begin a new life in the new and free America. Maybe...

