

A Visit in Żarki

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A few days later, we came to a small town. We were striding down the middle of the street, when someone loudly cried out, "*Chajka, Chajka!*" And lo and behold, it was Szoszana Neuman - which meant we were in Żarki. Upon seeing me with my torn shoes and swollen feet, she burst into tears. Frantic questions began, one after the other - "Where is Cwi? Szmul? Szymson? Abraszka? Cypora? Chedwa?"

"Of Szymson, I know nothing at all", [Szoszana said], "Mendek¹ fell on the altar of others. Do you remember what he wrote when he was in the army? That he had to endure just one more month and he could not wait for the day of his release. He asked to be informed regarding the status of his *Aliyah* budget. He intended to make *Aliyah* immediately upon being discharged and now he is no more!"

We would never again hear his discourses on Marxism. He was a straight-shooter, who knew no winding ways. The option to escape - to desert - had been available to him. He had refused to do so. A war against fascism was being fought - his place was here. He would not desert. He gave his life fighting for a new and more beautiful world. Would he ever be remembered for his sacrifice? Will the world be grateful to us for the thousands and tens of thousands of young victims, who fell in different spots along the front? They are sure to forget, just like the Polish soldiers forgot - those alongside whom Mendel fought in his war against fascism, which was also a war to protect their homeland. "Abraszka is seriously wounded", Szoszana continued her account. "Cwi and Szmul are together with all the men of the *shtetl*, whom the Germans have concentrated in the Synagogue. No one knows what their fate will be".

The day after the Germans entered the town, they gathered all the Jews and informed them that, from that day onwards, they would be required to wash themselves every single day and tidy up their dwellings - for the end of their life, as parasites, had come and they would be required to work. This is how they described the Jews of Poland in Germany - savage creatures, who had nothing to do with European culture. They treated the Jews as half-animals. Szoszana and her family were without a roof over their heads. Their house had been burnt down. The entire *shtetl* was very much ruined. A Polish military regiment had been stationed there. Upon noticing enemy aircraft, they opened fire. The Germans began bombarding the *shtetl*. Most of the streets were obliterated. Once the Germans entered Żarki, they accused the Jews of shooting at their aeroplanes. They burnt the Synagogue down and deported 300 Jews to Germany.

Chajka Klinger

(from [the book] "*From a Diary in the Ghetto*")

¹ [TN: Pet name for Mendel.]