

Rosh Hashana 1945

Krakow 1945. End of summer, the days are getting shorter. In the boulevard the leaves are turning, falling slowly to the ground.

An autumn mood. Reality is grim; all dreams of liberation and freedom have faded away... I am lonely in my own city; it is alien to me. Walking the streets and every house, every park (*garden?) brings me a memory from a faraway past, the sweet years of childhood and autumn youth.

Four months passed since the bells of freedom tolled for us. Four months since I threw away prisoner clothes crawling with lice. Four months now that I do not wake up to shouts of 'capo' 'a German' hurry to line up, damned Jews'; I do not hear curses, I am not **hungry!** But is this how I imagined that freedom will be?

The road home with my little sister was full of agony and fear.

There is Anti-Semitism everywhere. All the time I hear biting remarks, mocking and sarcastic curses: 'Jews are to blame for all our misfortunes.' But there are no more Jews! We hid our identity, crossed ourselves before every church. Is this freedom?

I arrive to Krakow... No house... no family... only the seeking, only the asking: does anyone know, did anyone hear, see, meet?

A reception by few of my parent's polish acquaintances: 'On the name of Jesus and holy Mary! You survived!'

In the streets we heard remarks: 'Jews are like cockroaches, they always come back.'

Today is Rosh Hashanah 'Happy new year to you, Stenia' I greet myself. I am alone. My little sister is staying in a sanatorium. She is 15 years old, a graduate of a ghetto and three concentration camps. I decided to go to 'temple' the only synagogue that remained from the tens that stood in Krakow. On my way I pass by my school, and once again memories come, such sweet memories, kept deep in my heart... I swallow a tear and keep walking. Trembling I go through the gates.

Looking around... maybe I will meet someone close to me? Maybe someone survived?

I do not have a prayer book. Thirsty I drink every word that the cantor utters....

I am filled with breakage. Broken in body and soul. Will I ever be able to be whole? Make body and soul one? When shall I hear a real trumpeting voice, a privet one, just for me that will announce good things?

I am sitting deep in thought and suddenly I burst into tears, I couldn't contain myself. I see myself in the ghetto sitting with my mother in the tiny apartment that was made into a place of prayer for the holiday. We snuck here during our break. And like today the cantor says the prayer. My mother hugs me tight and whispers: "(.....)"

We are crying bitterly, aware of our grim reality... 'Whom by water and whom by fire whom by thirst and who be strangulation...'

We sat hugging each other and cried and didn't know that in a few days she will be the one that would be sentenced to die by hunger, thirst and strangulation. I look around me: I am not the only one that cries, everyone is crying, each of us mourning his loved ones, whose sentence was sealed not from above – only by the terrible voice of a German: did not pass... their verdict was written.

I did not move until the prayer end. Silently, silently I wept.

The prayer came to its end. People emerge from the synagogue, whispering among themselves... A group here, another one there...

Asking, inquiring' seeking some information. There's still hope. Maybe someone met pr heard about...

Suddenly I hear a voice calling my name: Miss Hollander. I turn my head: this is Magister* Salpeter, a good friend of my parents.

'Shana tova'. How wonderful it is to hear this blessing!

'Shana tova to you too,' I answer, moved and excited. He hands me an envelope: 'look, I was a representative of the survivors in the first Jewish Congress that took place in London after the war, and while there I received a telegram from your father.'

From my father! I cry, He is alive!

I open the envelope with trembling hands, tears streaming from my eyes.

But these are tears of happiness. I read: 'Yehuda Hollander is in Tel Aviv. Looking for his daughters Erna and Adyta, asking Slepter to help them go to Israel.

I have only one wish now: to reach him as soon as possible and feel that we belong to someone, with someone. Not lonely orphans. To leave the Gola and leave the devastation and the destruction behind us. To make alia to Israel and build a life there.

'Shana tova to me' I whisper to myself. There is no one to say this to me now, but next year I hope it will be different.