

Apolonia Starzec Visiting The Irena Solska's Tumb



This is me at the tomb of Irena Solska. She was a very important person in my life during the war. In Warsaw in 1943 there was that action, a trap set up for Jews on the Aryan side, the so-called Hotel Polski. It was a provocation, they took money from people, promising them safe passage to the States or elsewhere. I was already visiting Samsonowicz, receiving money that we distributed as allowance among people. I remember I had no job. I had already placed my sister in a safe place. Now, to be okay with my kenkarta, I needed an address. I met an acquaintance from Nowolipie, she asks me what's up. 'I'm looking for a place, have you heard of something?' 'I'm

vacating a room in Mokotow, because I've signed up for emigration, at the Hotel Polski, you know. It costs a lot but I hope it'll work.' I don't remember her name. I don't even remember her face anymore. She gave me Irena Solska's address. 'I have a place but the sofa there has been borrowed from Irena Solska. You have to sleep on something. Here's her address - tell her I sent you and ask whether you can continue using the sofa.' It was then that I heard about the Hotel Polski. I hurried to Ignacy Samsonowicz and I tell him, 'Tell me, what's this Hotel Polski because I have no means of providing for myself on the Aryan side, and a sister to pay for?' We paid that janitor; he needed money to get by too. And I had no prospects for a job of any kind. I tell him, 'Perhaps I could sign up for the thing too, what do you think, are there any possibilities? I have no money.' And he says, 'Listen, darling, it'll be easier to jump into the Vistula from the Poniatowskiego bridge. Don't try that, it's a dirty business.' And so I went to Irena Solska and I found a way to survive. I didn't know Solska before the war. I only knew she was a renowned theater actress. An artist. I went to her, there was a cosmetics store in the front, and she lived on the first floor at the back. I say 'A lady such-and-such has sent me and can I keep the borrowed sofa because I need a place to stay?' And she starts telling me, in an utterly theatrical voice, the old dramatic school, Nina Andrycz style, 'I receive wool here that needs to be taken to the clients?' And she trembled, it was advanced Parkinson, she was already old. 'Your job is to take the material to the clients, pick up the money, the pay is so and so, breakfast and dinner included.' I'm waiting for an answer about the sofa and she's telling me all that in that theatrical voice of hers! I ask, 'But, madam? are you making this offer to me?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Do you know who you're talking to?' 'I do.' 'But I can be stopped with the material and the money and never return, because I'm a Jew.' 'I can tell. But I trust nothing bad will happen to you, I believe in what my intuition tells me.' And it was like being on cloud nine. I had a way to earn my living, to have a place to stay, money, and even to pay for my sister. 'Nothing bad will happen to you with me.' And I worked for her right until the Warsaw uprising.