

America

Eugenie Miletitsch*

IT IS a friendly day in October, 1951, in Bremerhaven, Germany. A short, piercing whistle of the ship vibrates through the air and mixes with the rumble of the machines. The passengers stay on the deck, waiting for the great moment when the United States Navy Ship *General McRae* weighs her anchor to set sail for New York.

There is a deep silence among the people; everybody tries to catch with his eyes enough of the receding landscape to shut this picture in his heart as a souvenir of the Old World. Aside from the group is Mrs. Marie Tauber, who like all the others had lost her home during the war and is now to be admitted to the United States as a displaced person under the Alien Act. She is small and grey-haired; one would say that she has already passed sixty. Around her she hears many strange languages, and she has not made any new friends yet. Suddenly she turns around; she hears the familiar sounds of her mother tongue spoken by two girls, and she smiles happily.

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The girls are surprised when she addresses them in a German that is spoken in the northern part of Yugoslavia. She wants to know the name of the village where they come from, and without waiting for an answer she is telling that she makes this voyage all by herself, that in the camp in Bremerhaven she became separated from her son, who has accidentally embarked two days before in another ship. She was told that they would meet each other in New York. Now she seems helpless and worried: will she really meet her son in New York? Perhaps he has already been sent to their relatives in Detroit, since he does not know when she will arrive. Who will take care of the luggage when she goes through the customs? She does not speak English, but her son does. She fears those days ahead of her.

In the following days on shipboard, whenever the girls come to see her she is always gay and talkative, because she is ashamed of having such emotions. But inside she is still worried about the arrival in the new country. She watches the young people busy helping where they are needed and others who are trying to hold a conversation in English. They are merry and excited about the new country—she cannot understand their cheerfulness. Every beginning is hard, she thinks. Oh yes, they are young, and before them lies a future in a new and free land. It will not take too long for them to become accustomed, for they will forget the hard years quickly, but she is too old to become an active member of the new society. But her son, the only one left of her family, is young and deserves a happy life. Therefore she must go with him. He made such beautiful plans for the future, for their life in America.

Finally, after a stormy trip, on the ninth day news goes from mouth to mouth that it will take only a few more hours to reach New York. One can see the lights of the coast already. And again the people are on the deck when the ship arrives in the port. It is evening; the lights from the large city are glowing like a welcome sign. Mrs. Tauber stays on deck, keeping her eyes steadily on the metropolis, which with its gigantic skyscrapers makes an immense impression on her. In what a pitiable position is the individual among these giants! Then the loudspeaker sounds, and she hears her name: Mrs. Marie T a u b e r . She hurries as fast as she can to the office, and a few minutes later she stands before a tall American naval officer who asks her a question in English. In her excitement she can only say "Sprechen Sie nicht Deutsch?" and seems disappointed that he can not. With a pleasant smile he hands her a telegram, a telegram from her son who will expect her the day after the disembarkation. She reads it once, twice, and three times while she returns on deck. She sees before her the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of America, and smiles while her eyes are full with tears. She is one of the happiest mothers of the new continent.