

★ *Journey to America Saga* ★
BY
SONIA LEVITIN

Journey to America #1





Journey to America

BY SONIA LEVITIN

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Aladdin Paperbacks

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TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER
AND TO MY SISTERS,
EVA AND VERA

Contents

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Good-bye to Papa | 3 |
| Promises to Keep | 16 |
| The Sacrifice | 29 |
| The Last Barrier | 42 |
| Zurich——City of Refuge | 54 |
| New Faces | 66 |
| Ways Through the Woods | 80 |
| Erica | 95 |
| Questions and Quotas | 109 |
| Passport to Freedom | 124 |
| Are You My Papa? | 139 |

Good-bye to Papa

THAT WINTER had been the coldest and the longest I had ever known. It was a deep, chilling cold, the fog turning to rain, and rain turning to sleet and snow, until the streets of Berlin were white and silent. It was a strange silence, with people hurrying into their homes before late afternoon, as if the darkness itself might bring danger.

I sat in the window seat, my favorite place, for it was warm and cozy there, and I could see everything, both outside and in. Beside me lay my lesson book, with the arithmetic problems still unsolved. I had written only the heading, *Lisa Platt, February 7, 1938*.

"Are you doing your lessons, Lisa?" Mother came to ask, glancing anxiously down to the street.

"Yes, Mother."

We looked down together, neither of us speaking, watching the two uniformed men who strolled back and forth as if they were trying to reach a decision.

"If the doorbell rings," Mother began uneasily, then she said, "Never mind, Lisa. Just do your lessons. Everything will be all right."

How could I do my lessons, and how could everything be all right when Papa was leaving tonight? And what if the doorbell did ring, and those men asked for Papa?

I could hear my parents talking from the other room.

"I've packed six new handkerchiefs for you, Arthur," Mother said. "They're folded inside your shoes." Since early morning she had been packing and repacking the two suitcases. Papa would take no more than he could carry, as if he planned to return.

Papa chuckled. "Now, Margo, don't you think they sell handkerchiefs in America? You mustn't worry about such little things."

"I worry about little things," Mother replied, "to keep from thinking about the others."

"I know. Where's Ruth?"

"At her violin lesson—don't you remember?"

"I don't like her out so late."

"It's just past four, Arthur."

"I want her home!" Papa said sternly.

"I can't keep a fourteen-year-old girl in the house like a baby!" Mother cried.

There was silence, and I knew they had drawn close together, regretting the least little argument that they might remember after tonight.

"Are you meeting Benjamin at the station?" Mother asked, her voice gentle again.

"Yes. There's no reason for him to come here."

Annie burst in. "I want to see Uncle Benjamin!"

"Not tonight, dear. Papa's leaving."

Papa had left us before, two years ago, to get Ruth from boarding school in Marienbad. We had planned to move to Brazil. That was the year the Nazis made the law that Jewish children could not go to public schools anymore. It was, Papa said, a sign of worse things to come.

Mother, Annie and I had met Papa and Ruth in Italy; then we took a ship to Brazil. The heat in Brazil was unbearable. I was sick nearly all the time, and Mother, too, was miserable. Papa could find no work, for who wanted to buy coats in that tropical climate? So we returned to Berlin, and for a time it seemed that things might get back to normal, and that perhaps we had been foolish and hasty, as my uncles said, for leaving Germany in the first place.

But Papa had been right. Now the only way to escape was in secret, and the only place Papa wanted to go was to America. Who could picture America? I only knew that it was far, far away, and that I wouldn't see Papa for a long time.

I heard his footsteps and tried to smile.

"Ah, there you are, Lisa." He sat down on the cushioned seat. "I always know where to find you. While I'm away I'll think of you sitting here in your special place. But you haven't even started your lessons! What are you doing?"

"I've just been looking out," I said. He drew me close, and I shut my eyes for a moment, to remember this feeling.

"You must not neglect your schoolwork," he said seriously. Then he smiled and his dark eyes twinkled. "Num-

bers are the same, you know, even in America, so don't think your learning will be lost."

"I can't seem to concentrate."

"Sometimes we have to pretend, Lisa, that we don't see things."

"Like those two men? Why do they keep walking back and forth here?" I asked angrily. "Why don't they go away?"

"They're going now," Papa said. "See? There was nothing to worry about at all."

"Maybe that's what the Mullers thought," I said, immediately wishing I had not spoken.

"What do you know about them?" Papa asked, startled. "You hear everything, don't you?" He sighed, but in an instant his eyes were gay again. "Sometimes I forget that you're not a little girl anymore. When did that happen?" he teased. "Wasn't it just a few days ago that I came home from work and Frau Leuffelbein met me at the door and said, 'Dear me, another girl. Oh, I *am* sorry!'"

I laughed in spite of myself. "That was when Annie was born."

"Oh, yes," he said. "Now I remember. Poor Frau Leuffelbein—she had promised me a boy that time. She was quite shocked, I recall," he laughed.

Papa was always teasing about Frau Leuffelbein and about having all girls. "If I had ten children," he would say, "you can bet they'd all be girls." But he always carried our pictures with him in his wallet and showed them around to everyone.

Now he spoke seriously, "I'm depending on you to

help Mother while I'm away. You're so good with Annie, and I know you can take responsibility. And please, Lisa, don't worry Mother by talking about things like—like the Mullers."

"I won't, Papa. I'll be cheerful."

"Good! You're rather pretty when you smile, you know."

Annie came running in. "Am I pretty too?"

"You—you're a little clown!" Papa scooped her up in his arms and tickled her until she squealed, then he put Annie on his shoulders the way he used to do with me. Just then Ruth came in, with her cheeks red from the outside, and Mother tried to get us all settled down for supper.

"Stop playing, Arthur," Mother said, concealing a smile. "You're worse than the children. Go wash your hands, Annie. Ruth, you're dripping water on the rug. Lisa, ask Clara if dinner's ready."

"An organizer, that's what your mother is," said Papa. "Look at her, children! A fabulous woman—beautiful . . ."

"Oh, hush, Arthur. Come to dinner."

Clara had been cooking furiously all day, and scrubbing and cleaning in between. It was her way, when she was troubled, to keep her hands busy.

For dessert Clara had made Papa's favorite, plum cake.

"Clara, you're a genius!" Papa exclaimed. "How did you find plums in winter?"

"You can get anything for a price," Clara said, then she quickly excused herself, and I saw that there were

tears in her eyes.

Clara was like a second mother to us. She had been with us ever since Ruth was little, and when we returned from Brazil she was waiting at the station. "Frau Platt, you are like my own family," she always said.

Even when the Nazis made the law that Christians could not work for Jews, and the penalty was imprisonment, Clara refused to leave.

"I'm not afraid of them and their laws," she said, and her voice bristled with defiance.

"But I'm worried about you, Clara," Mother said. "You should find yourself another place."

"You think I'm like that Marie, to run off like a scared rooster?" Clara said. Marie had been hired to do the housework, while Clara looked after Annie and did the cooking. Now that Marie was gone, Clara's work was doubled, but still she remained firm.

"Oh, Clara, what's to become of you?" Mother sighed. "I think you'd thumb your nose at the devil!"

"Perhaps not at the devil," Clara laughed, "but at Herr Hitler, you can be sure!"

I tried to forget that Papa was leaving tonight, to pretend that it was an ordinary evening. But all through the meal I felt that I was just listening and watching, that I wasn't really a part of it.

"Lisa, you're dreaming," Mother said. "You haven't even touched your cake."

"I'll have it later. I'll go help Clara with the dishes." I purposely pushed aside the thought of my arithmetic homework. I wanted to be with Clara, watching as she washed the dishes in a large pan filled with suds. She

worked vigorously, but she talked in a gentle, easy way.

“Ah, Lischen, you’ve come to help me,” she said. “I was wishing for company. Tell me, did you have dancing at school today?”

“No. Tuesdays and Thursdays. I don’t want to talk about school.”

“So. Are you going to cry?” Her look was direct and challenging.

“If it weren’t for Uncle Benjamin,” I said, “Papa wouldn’t be leaving.”

“That’s nonsense,” Clara retorted. “Who told you that?”

“It was Uncle Benjamin’s idea for him and Papa to go to America together.”

“Your father didn’t need anyone to tell him. It’s the only wise thing to do.”

“Then why aren’t the others leaving?” I demanded. My grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins—all were staying in Germany. “Rosemarie says that her parents say there’s nothing to get upset about,” I went on heatedly. “They say that nobody should take Hitler seriously, and it’s silly for people to move away, because it will all blow over.”

“It’s far more silly for people to ignore what’s going on right under their noses!” Clara exclaimed. “Your father is just smarter than the others,” she continued, “and he has courage. Don’t you think it takes courage to give up everything, his home, his business, and to start all over again in a strange country? You,” she said sternly, “should be proud of your father.”

“I am!” I cried. Already I felt empty inside, as if Papa

had left. "I'll miss him," I whispered. "And what if they stop him at the border?"

"Now, now," Clara soothed. "I know you're thinking about the Mullers. I know you listen to everything. But think, Lisa. The Mullers were arrested because they were trying to smuggle out money."

"It was *their* money! It doesn't make sense . . ."

"They broke the law."

"What kind of law is that?" I demanded.

Clara sighed deeply, then she wiped her hands on her apron and turned to me.

"How can I explain it? I don't even understand it myself. What kind of law? you ask me—an evil law, that's all I can tell you. Laws should be for the good of people, not against them. But these are terrible times."

I knew that the Nazis hated us, and only because we were Jews. But why? What had we done? One of the laws was that Jews could not take money out of the country. The Gestapo, the secret police, saw to it that Hitler's laws were enforced.

The Gestapo had searched the Mullers at the border, even taking the baby from Frau Muller's arms to look through its clothing. Under the little vest they found a bundle of bills, and the Mullers were taken off to jail. What became of the baby, I didn't know.

"Your father won't take any chances," Clara said. "He is a clever man. And soon you'll be going. Think of it!" Her eyes shone. "Oh, what I wouldn't give to go to America!"

"Come with us then," I begged, flinging my arms around her. "Oh, please, Clara."

"No, Lischen, I can't. My mother is too old to travel, and I'm the only one she has. Go now. Your father wants to talk to you. And don't show such a long face!"

I went into my parents' bedroom. Papa's suitcases stood by the door; his overcoat and briefcase were laid out on the chair. I watched while Papa combed his hair, then patted his cheeks with shaving lotion and fastened his cuff links. I always liked watching him. When I was little he used to dab my cheeks with the foamy soap from his shaving brush. Then he would laugh. "Oh, pardon me. I forgot you're too young to shave."

When Mother and Ruth came in, Papa said, "Time now for talk, then for presents."

We sat on the bed, Mother and Ruth and I, and Papa pulled over a chair.

"Ruth," he said, frowning, "I'm going to have to ask you to make a sacrifice."

Ruth flushed slightly and stared at Papa.

"I'm afraid that you are going to have to interrupt your violin lessons for a while."

"But Papa!" Ruth began to twist the dark lock of hair on her forehead.

"I know how much it means to you, but you cannot be out alone so late in the afternoons," he said. "And I don't want your mother to be worrying about you."

"All right," Ruth whispered, and then she glanced at me as if to say, "Now, what will *you* sacrifice?"

There was nothing for me to give up. I had stopped taking ballet lessons from Frau Zimmerman more than half a year ago. "She cannot teach you anymore," Mother had told me, and I didn't ask why.

Papa leaned forward in his seat. "I want you to listen closely now. Listen well, and remember. I am going to send for you. As soon as possible, we will be together in America."

"When?" I whispered, almost frightened by the look in Papa's eyes.

"Soon," Papa said. "Don't ask me more. Ruth and Lisa, I am going to ask you for the most important promise you have ever made. You must not tell anybody about our plans, not even your closest friends. Promise me."

Together we promised, Ruth and I, and my heart was thumping as if, in some strange ritual, I had sworn a sacred oath in blood.

"It will take time," Papa continued, "for me to get settled in America and to make the arrangements. When it is time for you to leave, you will tell nobody where you are going. It will be as if you were only going on a short vacation, to Switzerland or to France."

"But how can people think that," Ruth asked, "when we'll be moving out?"

"You won't move out," Papa said, his hand uplifted for attention. "Everything will be left here."

"Everything?" I echoed.

"Yes," said Papa, "except for your clothes and personal things. But listen! The most important thing is that you must obey your mother, immediately and without question. Your lives," he said, "could depend on it."

"You are frightening them, Arthur," Mother said in a low tone.

"Better to frighten them," said Papa sternly, "than to take chances." He reached into his pocket, and in that

instant his eyes were gay again. Papa loved giving presents, I think, as much as we loved receiving them.

We knew that he had no patience with wrappings and strings. "Close your eyes," he said, "and hold out your hands."

When I opened my eyes, there was a ring on my finger so deeply red and glowing that it seemed to warm my



whole hand. I couldn't even think to say thank you—I only gasped, while Ruth exclaimed,

“Oh, thank you, Papa. Thank you!”

I saw that on her hand was a ring like mine, except that the stone was bright green.

“I'm glad you like them,” Papa said, chuckling. “You have good taste. These are real,” he added, taking each of our hands into his own. “Your stone is an emerald, Ruth, and yours, Lisa, is a ruby. But we'll pretend that they are only glass. That is another secret we'll keep between us.” He turned to Mother. “You could sell these anywhere, if necessary, and get a fair price.”

“You mean we won't keep them?” Ruth asked, and I could see that she was close to tears, for she pulled at the curl on her forehead.

“You'll keep them,” Papa replied, “unless your mother needs them. Then, of course, you must give them to her. You are to wear these always,” he said, “from the time you leave Germany until we are together again. That way you won't lose them.”

Papa looked at his watch. “It's time to say goodnight.”

It was the moment I had dreaded all day, and I saw Ruth go calmly to kiss Papa, as if tonight were like any other. I wondered why Ruth didn't feel as I did that terrible tightness inside. Or did she? Did she, too, hold back a cry? “Don't leave me, Papa. Don't go!”

I kissed Papa's cheek, and he put his hand on my hair for a moment, holding me close. “Goodnight, Lisa,” he said, and then he whispered close to my ear, “God keep you.”

For a long time after Ruth's breathing had grown deep

and even, I lay awake listening to the sounds in the house. Finally I heard the front door close. Papa was gone.

Promises to Keep

THROUGH THE LONG DAYS of waiting to hear from Papa, Mother was calm. But when we received the telegram, "Arrived safely, all is well," tears rolled down Mother's cheeks.

Since Papa had left, relatives came to visit every night, hoping for news, giving advice.

"Now that Arthur's gone, they might suspect something," my grandmother said. "Maybe you should send the children ahead to England, Margo. At least they would be safe. Many people are doing it."

"I won't do anything without consulting Arthur," Mother always said firmly. "The children and I will stay together."

"I'll be glad to keep Annie with me when you leave," Grandmother Platt offered. "Don't you think she's too young for such a trip?"

"No," Mother said. "I couldn't leave her."

Always their conversations turned, finally, to "the question." Then their voices were hushed and they glanced about as if the very walls had ears. How much longer should they wait? How much longer would it be safe for them to walk the streets of Berlin? Wouldn't someone, somehow, bring this madness to an end?

I tried not to listen. I wished I could be like Ruth, always in the midst of a good book or off on some project. Instead, I found myself hearing and knowing more than I wanted to. Every day brought new incidents.

"Isaac Cohn's store windows were smashed today. He's talking about leaving for China."

"Helen Kraus told me they came for her husband early this morning. They took him for 'questioning.' You know what that means."

"People won't come to my store, since the Nazis painted that sign on the wall. 'I can't buy from Jews,' one man told me. 'Nothing personal, you understand.'"

Despite everything, Mother said we were to act natural. We told Annie nothing of our plans. She was too young to be trusted, and too much of a chatterbox. We didn't even tell her that Papa would send for us. She believed that he was coming back.

Late in March Papa wrote that we must prepare to leave Germany as soon as possible. Hitler's armies had marched into Austria. We sat huddled by our radio listening to that thundering voice. "My German comrades, Austria is ours! It is only the beginning. It will come to pass, my comrades, as I have promised. Germany will rule the world!"

Even in his letter, Papa was careful to reveal nothing,

for nobody questioned the actions of the Gestapo anymore. They could and did barge into homes and restaurants, hauling people away without explanation. They could and did inspect the mail to learn the names and intentions of those who were "unfriendly" to their cause.

"I think it would be a good idea," Papa wrote guardedly, "for you to take the girls to Switzerland for a short vacation. Make all the arrangements, Margo, and write me of your plans."

"When are we leaving?" I asked Mother again and again, and she always shook her head. "I'm not sure. There is so much to do."

"May I tell Rosemarie that we're planning a vacation?"

Mother hesitated, then nodded. "I suppose we might as well tell our friends, but only that we're going on a vacation. It would be the natural thing to do."

I had not shown Rosemarie my ring, afraid that I might reveal something. We had never had any secrets before.

I told her at school one day, while we were sitting on the bench waiting for Frau Meyers, the ballet teacher. "I think we'll be going on a vacation soon, Rosemarie."

"That will be nice," she said, smiling. "Where?"

"To Switzerland, I think."

Just then Hanna Hendel came up, smiling in her mysterious way and shaking her head to make her curls bob. "Have you heard?" she said breathlessly. "Have you heard about Eleanor?"

"No," I said, tired of Hanna's endless gossip.

"Nobody's supposed to know," Hanna said, "but

Eleanor and her family have left for good. Don't you want to know how I found out?" She looked at Rosemarie and me, wanting us to coax her to tell, but we kept our faces blank.

"I know you're dying to tell us," Rosemarie said.

"Well, our Lucy knows the woman who worked for Eleanor's parents," Hanna said, flushed with eagerness, "and she told Lucy that they are going to America."

I looked down at the floor, so that Hanna would not guess how I felt at hearing the word "America."

"I wouldn't want to go to America," Hanna went on. "They speak French there, you know, and who wants to have to learn French? I'd hate it."

We didn't even correct her. I was too disgusted by her gossip and her hating things. She hated school; she hated Frau Meyers and the ballet lessons, and I think she hated me. Maybe it was because Frau Meyers said I was the best dancer in the class, and Hanna couldn't stand to take second place. She had a way of finding people's weaknesses and picking on them. Even on my first day at school, she had noticed the scar on my leg and asked rudely,

"Where did you get that scar? Were you in an accident?"

"I had an infection there," I told her. "It happened when we were in Brazil." I really didn't feel like talking about it.

"How awful!" she gasped. "You'll always have to wear thick stockings. I hate thick stockings, don't you?"

It was then that Rosemarie came up to me and, smiling, introduced herself, and warned me about how un-

pleasant Hanna could be. It was the day that Rosemarie and I became best friends.

Now I told Rosemarie, "We might be leaving even before school is out. Mother is going to see about our passports today. I just want to tell you . . ."

"Don't tell me anything," Rosemarie said quickly, taking my hand. "Just give me a picture of yourself that I can keep while you're in Switzerland. Look, here's Frau Meyers. Let's get in line."

There is something about dancing that makes me forget everything else. I feel free then, as if I am flying. How I love the feel of ballet slippers on my feet!

But it was to be the last dance lesson. Frau Meyers was leaving. One by one the teachers were leaving, without explanation. We had learned to ask no questions, knowing that answers were impossible to give.

"Don't ask any questions," Mother told me again that afternoon when we were on our way to the passport office. "Don't talk, unless you are spoken to."

Ruth had decided to stay home and practice her violin, and Annie was napping. I had begged Mother to let me come with her.

"I'm glad you're with me," Mother admitted as we stood before the large office building. "Are you afraid?" she asked.

"No. I am *not*." But my heart was pounding when we walked through the door.

The man behind the desk had a square, strong face. He breathed heavily, through his mouth, and his thick fingers were busy among the papers on his desk. "Well?" he said, without looking up. "What do you want?"

"I have come to pick up my passports," Mother said, and I marveled that her tone was so calm and even. "Here is the receipt showing that we have paid all our taxes."

"Why do you want to leave Germany?" he demanded.

"My children and I have planned to take a short vacation in Switzerland. You will see that all my papers are in order."

Mother handed him the tax receipt, and as I glanced at it I saw a word printed across the top in bold red letters, *Jude, Jew.*

The man glanced at the papers, then looked fully at Mother. "Your papers are definitely *not* in order," he said, breathing deeply. His face was red from some great effort. "I cannot give you a passport." He waved his hand and called loudly, "Next!"

"But I have everything ready," Mother said patiently. She pressed my hand tightly, warning me to be still.

"You had a passport before," he declared. "What happened to it?"

"It was taken from me two years ago," Mother answered, "when I returned to Germany from Brazil."

"So!" His breath was a hiss, and his eyes seemed to bulge from his face. "People have been known to sell their passports. We have strict rules . . ."

"Oh, Karl," came a loud voice from the back of the room, and I jumped, not having noticed that anyone else was with us. Now a tall young man came forward. "Why are you making such a fuss about this?" he asked, grinning and shaking his head. "Can't you see this woman just wants to take her children on a little holiday? I can't

blame her—it is a superb time to go.”

He smiled at me, and I struggled to return his smile.

“But you know the rules, Fritz,” the other man objected.

“Her passport was taken by our own officers,” the young man said impatiently. “Don’t you see the notation here?” He pointed to one of the papers. “Come on now, and don’t take all day about it. We’ll miss our afternoon coffee.”

“Then you must take the responsibility,” said the other stiffly. “I refuse to be responsible.” But as he spoke he took a slim green book from his desk drawer, stamped it several times and handed it to Mother. “The children,” he said gruffly, “can go on your passport.”

“Thank you,” Mother said briskly, and I kept my face rigid, as if I didn’t really care.

“You are allowed to take out ten marks for each person,” the man said.

“Ten marks!” Mother’s eyes were plainly troubled. “I thought it was more.”

“Ten marks,” he snapped. “The rules change, you know.”

“Have a pleasant holiday!” the young man called after us. And as we left I heard him say, “Oh, Karl, you are getting so suspicious,” to which the other replied, “But Fritz, they are Jews.”

Ruth and Annie were sitting on the front step waiting for us when we got home. “There’s a man in the living room!” Annie cried happily.

“Did you get it?” Ruth asked. Her tone was low and urgent.

"Yes, dear. But who is here?"

"Herr Mendel," Ruth replied. "We didn't know whether to let him in."

"He insisted on seeing you," said Clara softly, "and Ruth told me you know him, so I thought it was all right."

"Yes, I know him," Mother said. "My husband did business with him. But what could he want?"

I followed Mother into the living room. I had left a book on the window seat, and now I went there, as if to read. The drape was half closed, and I sat very quietly with the open book on my lap.

Herr Mendel did not even seem to notice me, although he had been very nice the day Papa took me to his shop. Herr Mendel made the patterns for the coats that Papa designed. I remembered seeing the stacks of bright cloth that were cut into peculiar shapes, bits of wool and silk that were left over. Herr Mendel gave me a sack full of the scraps to take home to use for making doll clothes.

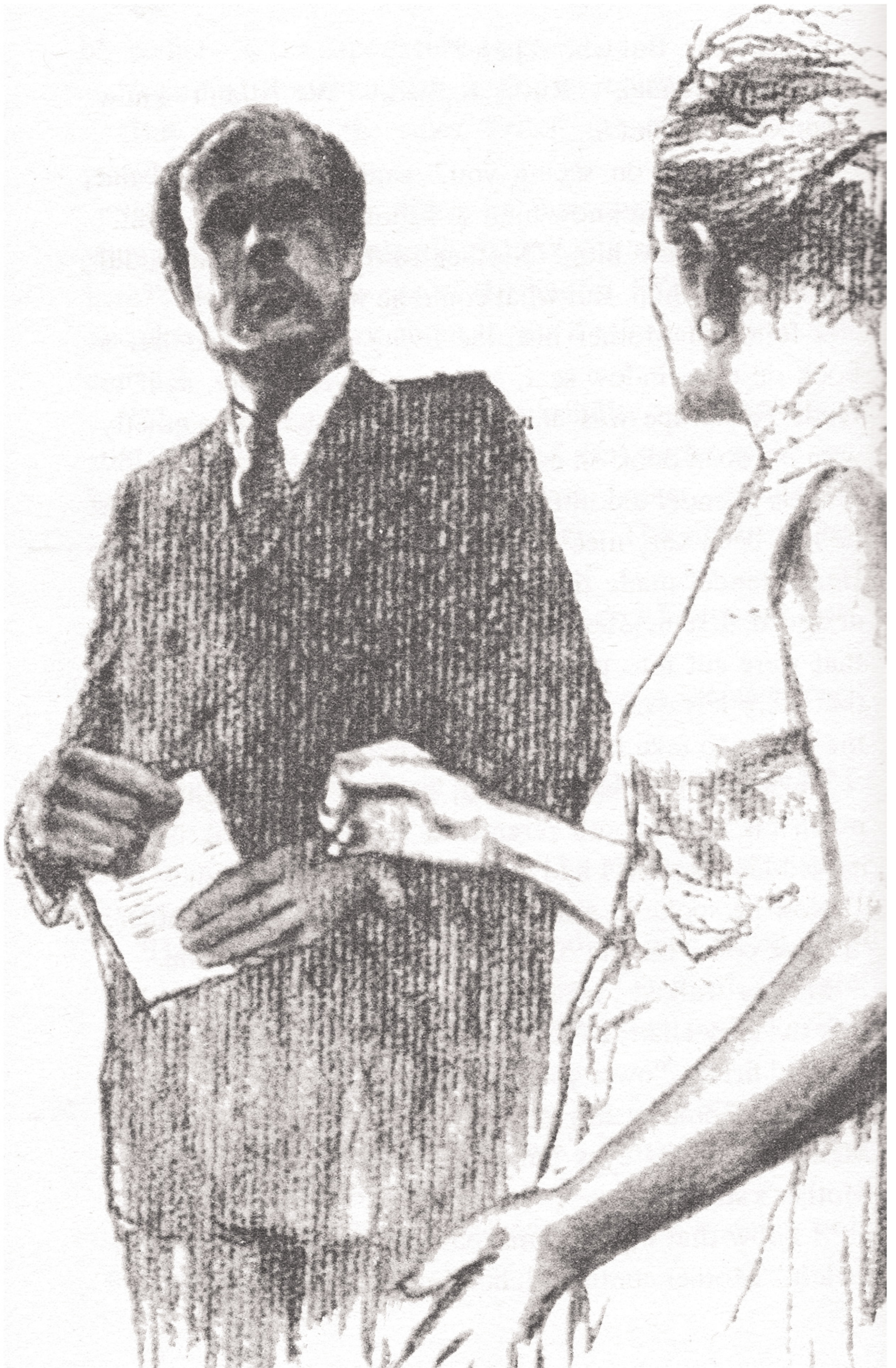
He had smiled at me then, and I had thought how much his little mouth resembled a prune, for he barely moved his lips, and I had very nearly laughed aloud.

Now he spoke in a different voice as he faced Mother. "I have come for the money your husband owes me."

Mother walked toward him slowly, then she stood beside the easy chair, as if to steady herself. "My husband," she said firmly, "owes you nothing."

For a moment they only looked at each other, Herr Mendel with his eyes narrowed, as if he were judging Mother's strength.

"I know that my husband paid all his accounts before he left," Mother continued, holding her ground.



"He never paid me for the last delivery," Mendel insisted. He took a yellow piece of paper from his vest pocket. "You see? Here is the order form. Check it for yourself."

"The order is right," Mother said, "but apparently you forgot to mark that it was paid. My husband always pays his bills on the first of the month. In all the years he has worked with you," she said heatedly, "you have never had to come and ask for your money. Isn't it true?"

"My dear Frau Platt," said Mendel smoothly, "I have no doubt that it was an honest mistake. Probably in the excitement over his trip, your husband simply forgot to pay me. His plans were rather sudden, weren't they? It's not as if I am desperate for the money. I have, in fact, a large contract from the government to make uniforms. So you see, I am on good terms with the Nazis."

"I see," Mother whispered, blinking rapidly.

"Everyone knows your husband has left," he continued. "It might be difficult for you, unpleasant indeed, if I had to go to the police about this. It's only a small matter—two hundred marks. I'm sure your husband would want you to pay it—under the circumstances."

"Wait here," Mother said. All the color had gone from her face, and I could see her anger in the way she walked.

When Mother was out of the room, Herr Mendel moved toward me. He smiled with his thin lips pursed and held out his hand, but I could not make myself go toward him. "How are you, my dear? I suppose you miss your Papa. He and I have always been good friends. Are you going to see him soon?"

My throat was so dry I couldn't have spoken had I

wanted to. I wondered whether he could see in my face how I hated him, and I wished desperately that I had never taken his gift, that bag of brightly colored scraps.

"Here you are, Herr Mendel," Mother said stiffly, and she watched him as he counted the money. "You may give me that order form as a receipt."

"Gladly," Mendel replied, smiling. "I want everything to be done properly. Everybody knows how I do business."

"I'm sure," Mother said, taking him to the door and closing it swiftly behind him.

Mother sank into a chair, breathing heavily. "Call Clara," she told me, and when Clara stood before her she said, "From now on, Clara, don't let anyone into the house when I am gone."

"What is it, Frau Platt?" Clara asked, wringing her hands.

"He said my husband owed him money, and I had to give it to him. He would have gone to the police."

Clara shook her head. "He told me he was your friend! How sorry I am, how sorry!"

"You couldn't have known," Mother sighed. "It's times like these that prove what people really are. Well, let's have supper. I feel exhausted." She coughed, pressing a handkerchief to her lips. "It's this cold," she murmured, "that's making me tired. I should see Dr. Michels. Ah, there is so much to do. At least we have our passports. That's the main thing."

"Oh, there's a letter," Clara said, "from Herr Platt. It came while you were gone."

Instantly Mother's face brightened, and Annie cried,

"Read it! What does he tell me? Read it!"

Annie climbed up into Mother's lap, and Ruth and I stood close beside her to see Papa's handwriting while she read.

My dear Wife and Daughters,

My thoughts are with you constantly, and I hope you have made plans for your holiday in Switzerland. Annie, be a good girl and stay very close to your mother on the trip.

I have found a place in a rooming house where the landlady speaks German. The woman is a good soul, and reminds me somewhat of our Clara, although, of course, her cooking cannot compare.

We all looked at Clara, and she smiled self-consciously.

At night I go to school to learn English. My girls, you would laugh to see me sitting behind a desk like a young schoolboy!

My very dear friend has a job selling neckties. He also works in the mornings, sweeping and dusting in one of the large office buildings. In the afternoons he goes to the garment district to sell his neckties and to talk with men in the clothing business. He is hoping to go into the coat business here some day.

All my love,

Papa

"What does he mean?" I whispered. "His very dear friend?"

★ Journey to America Saga ★

It was 1938, and something terrible was happening in Germany. Suddenly, there were more and more restrictions for the Jews: yellow stars they had to wear, schools they could not attend, things they were forbidden to do. The Nazis were in power. And Lisa Platt was scared.

Her father knew they had to escape, and he left for America in the middle of the night. He promised to send for Lisa, her mother, and her two sisters when there was enough money. Until then, they were to live in Switzerland. And so they did, waiting, in hardship none of them could ever have imagined.



SONIA LEVITIN, like Lisa Platt, escaped from Germany in the late 1930's. Among her acclaimed books for young readers are *The Mark of Conte* (also available as an Aladdin paperback) and *The Return*.

Visit the author's website at www.ben2.ucla.edu/~levitin

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