In 1847, German settlers arrived on the Texas frontier.

Adelsverein - The Gathering

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Book One of the Adelsverein Trilogy

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Chapter 2 – Gehe Mit Ins Texas

"Adelsverein!" Exclaimed Vati, with enthusiasm burning hectically in his eyes behind his thick spectacles. "It may be the answer to our dilemma, the situation in which we find ourselves! Magda, dearest child, you must read this. It's all here. What they are offering. Everything and a new life and land, besides! Land enough for all of you children to have a decent and prosperous life, and I should not have to take myself away to the city."

"Yes, Vati," his stepdaughter sighed. "I'll read it most carefully, before Hansi and Mutti see it." She took the slim pamphlet from him, although she was already carrying his box of watch-making tools, as the two of them walked along the narrow village street, of which Albeck only had four, including the one which led to the city of Ulm. A late snowstorm scattered a few feather-like flakes around them, which whispered as they settled on the muddy and oft-churned ground. They stepped aside as a pair of bullocks pulling a sledge with a load of manure went past.

"Is that not Peter Frimmel already mulching his field?" Vati squinted after them. "It is early, yet, I think…"

"It's March, Vati," Magda answered. She was a tall young woman with the dark hair and near-to-black eyes of her father, Mutti's first husband who had died when she was a baby. She had much of her mother's brisk manner and angular features wholly her own and thought to be too sharp and too forceful for beauty.

"Oh, so 'tis," Vati looked around him vaguely. He stood a head shorter than his step-daughter, a gnome-like and lightly-built little man of middle age, whose near-sighted grey eyes reflected both the gentle wisdom of years but still some of the innocent enthusiasm of a child. "I lose track of the days, in the shop and away from the land. And that is the problem, dear Magda. There is barely enough to support us now. How will you all live, when my share is divided between the boys and you have a dower-share as did Liesel when she married Hansi?"

"I don't care to marry," Magda answered with a toss of her head. "I don't care in the slightest for any of the eligible bachelors in Albeck, and I don't want to go elsewhere. Who would look after you and Mutti?"

"Even so. But you still should marry, my dear child. It would make your mother so happy," Vati said and looked at her very searchingly. "Don't you wish for it, in the least?"

"I don't know what I really want, Vati," Magda answered. "I would like a husband that I could talk to, as I talk to you. Someone who is kind, and amusing; if I could find someone just like you or like Uncle Simon, I think I would marry very happily. But there no one else like you in Albeck!"

"Alas, I am sui generis," Vati agreed somewhat smugly as they walked towards the gate that led into the Steinmetz holding, where a lantern burned primrose in the twilight of the cobbled yard and the range of fine timber and stone buildings surrounding it. "But still, my dear child, you should be caring for your own husband and children," he chided her, fondly. "Now, you see, there would be another reason for going to Texas. Besides three hundred and twenty acres of land — good rich land it is — for each family, there would be a chance for you to find a husband that would better suit you than a dull old farmer with his head among the cabbages. Some splendid young Leatherstocking hero or a bold Indian chief; would that content you, Magda?"

He looked teasingly sideways at her and thought she blushed slightly, even as she laughed and answered, "But it would mean going away from here, Vati — from everything."

The older man and the young woman paused in the gateway as if both of them had a single thought. This was the house where all of Friedrich Christian Steinmetz's ancestors had lived, where they had stabled their horses and cattle and gone out to tend their fields and pastures. Not an inch of it had known any but their hands for hundreds of years. Vati's, or any one of the previous Steinmetzes' hands alone had piled hay in the loft, repaired the tiled roofs of the barn, house, or chicken house, boiled cattle-feed in the great iron kettle. Their wives had born the next generation in the great bedroom

upstairs, and their children had run out to chase chickens in the yard. Here were their roots set, generations deep. Although Magda was not truly one of them by blood, she had still lived here for nearly all of her life as Vati's much-loved oldest daughter.

"So it would," and Vati's eyes looked grave behind his glasses, as he opened the door into the farmhouse kitchen. "We could hardly take it all with us." They stepped into the little entry and from there into the warmth of the kitchen, scoured as clean as a new pin, full of the smell of food cooking and the yeasty scent of bread on the rise,

"Christian, my heart, my hands are all over flour!" exclaimed Magda's mother from beside the trough of dough. "You are early." Hannah Vogel Steinmetz did not look like either of her daughters: she was a plump little wren of a woman, brown-haired and rosy. Vati kissed her on the lips with a good enthusiastic smack before he was swarmed by his sons, Friedrich and Johann and granddaughter Anna, with joyous shouts of "Vati! Opa!" and a treble chorus of questions and accounts of what had been going on over the last few days.

The boys were twins of the age of seven, as alike as two peas for looks, having Vati's grey eyes and Mutti's fair to light brown hair, but very different in nature. Johann was serious and shy, Friedrich a daring scamp. It baffled Magda when people claimed they couldn't tell the boys apart. Friedrich's face was rounder, and he was the outgoing, happy-go-lucky adventurer. Johann's face was thinner; he was the more timid and serious one. Magda didn't think much of people who didn't notice those elemental differences. Weren't they looking closely enough; how could they not see something so simple?

Their niece Anna had serious dark brown eyes like her father, Hansi Richter, her mother Liesel's dimples and brown curls too short and wispy to be woven into plaits. A solemn-faced little mite, she could on occasion be brought to laugh, a happy little trilling sound almost like a bird. All the younger children addressed Magda as 'Auntie Magda', since she was so very much older than they. Now Magda set Vati's box of tools in the cupboard by the door and put the emigrant pamphlet into the pocket of her apron, for later.

"Children!" Hannah chided them, "Boys, you must behave!"

"No they must not — they are only children," Vati answered indulgently and swept small Anna up in his arms, whereupon a look of comic distress crossed his face. "Oh, dear, she has had a small accident …"

"Liesel!" Hannah exclaimed, and Liesel, Magda's half-sister answered crossly from a chair by the fire:

"I'm nursing the baby, Mutti, I'll see to Anna when I can!"

"I'll do it, Lise," Magda said, taking her small niece into her arms, and Liesel said distractedly:

"Oh, of course you will!"

Magda and her parents exchanged a meaningful look, as Hannah murmured, "New mothers' nerves."

Magda shrugged and took Anna. Liesel was still in one of her black moods. She had always been that way, even before marrying Hansi and bearing her children. Vati had once observed, *"Annaliese is either on top of the tallest tower or in the cellar — nothing in between*!" When Hansi had been making fumbling attempts to court Magda — to Magda's hideous embarrassment, for Hansi had been her childhood playfellow, more like a brother than a suitor — Liesel had been serenely confident that he would be hers some day. She had adored Hansi since she was a tiny girl; Hansi, patient stubborn and reliable with dark brown eyes so like one of his own oxen.

"He is only courting you out of courtesy, because you are the oldest, "she said then.

Magda retorted waspishly, "And Vati will dower me with the small field adjacent to his … I can't help thinking that is my most attractive feature in his eyes!" She could look in Mutti's little silver hand-mirror and acknowledge that she was dark and over-tall, while her sister was dainty and fair and everything considered beautiful. And Liesel had giggled, while Magda added, "He is just like all the other marriageable men in Albeck; he fumbles for words when he talks to me but his eyes follow you like a hungry dog!"

"Well, once he brings himself to speak of marriage, "Liesel consoled her, "you may slap his nose and say of course not — and then he will come to me and I will console him. And you both will sigh with relief and Hansi and I will live happily ever after and have

lots of children, and you will marry a prince or a schoolmaster and come to visit us, riding in a grand barouche with footmen riding behind. You will live in a castle full of books …" She went on elaborating their fortunes until Magda had begun to laugh as well, for that was Liesel in her tallest-tower mood; merry and affectionate, and absolutely certain of Hansi's eventual affections. And so had it come to pass; Liesel's dark-cellar moods over the three years since had been infrequent. The worst one came after Anna's birth, and then again after Joachim, the baby. Magda supposed that the brunt of them now fell on Hansi, but he seemed well able to cope.

Now everyone, especially Magda put it out of their minds that he had ever courted her. Not an easy thing to do, when they all lived in the same house. But it was made easier by the fact that Hansi never talked of much beyond crops and his manure-pile. All very nice because such matters put food on the table for them all, but Magda privately thought she would shortly have gone mad from a lifetime of sharing Hansi's conversation about them. She would rather go on living as a spinster under Mutti's authority and talk with Vati about his books and notions, than endure more of it than she did already. Now this talk of Adelsverein and Texas made her uneasy, as if something whispered in the corner, something from one of Vati's old tales that always gave her the shivers. She took Anna into the other room to change her sopping-wet diaper, and when they returned, Hansi himself had just come in from the barn.

"I think to start spreading the muck, as soon as the weather lets up," he was saying conversationally. Magda reminded herself yet again that he made Liesel happy and worked Vati's fields for him, and that's what counted.

After supper, she closeted herself in the little room at the end of the upper floor, the little room she had to herself since Liesel married. She lit a tallow candle and began to read. When she was finished reading, it was late, but there was still someone downstairs in the big kitchen, where firelight still gleamed warmly over the polished copper pots and pans and on the row of pottery jugs hanging above the fire.

Vati sat with his scrap album on his lap, in the chair where Liesel sat to nurse the baby, leafing over pages neatly filled with carefully-cut news sheet articles. He looked up at Magda

"Well? What did you think?" The firelight gleamed on his spectacles, like the eyes of some large insect.

"It's almost too good to be true," she answered thoughtfully. "They offer so much. I wonder what they are to get out of it."

"A colony, land, hard workers." Vati took off his glasses and polished them absently on his shirt sleeve, and Magda sat down on the bench opposite him.

"The Firsts have all that of the common folk, now," Magda pointed out, sardonically. "Hard working tenants who take off their hats when one them walks by. Would they expect that of us, in Texas, then? Might this be some clever means of skinning those who have managed to put a little money aside? All the gold should flow uphill, into the Firsts' money-bags, as they so kindly relieve us of the heavy responsibility of deciding what we should do with what we earn. They have so many better notions of what to do with it, after all."

"Such a cynic, my Magda!" Vati chided her.

She answered bitterly, "Such as you have made me, by allowing me to read your books and newspapers, and talking to me of important matters."

"Maybe they look for the honor of doing a good deed for the people. They are very forward thinking gentlemen, all of them."

"Perhaps; they are all but men and capable of shabby deeds as well as the noble." Magda became aware that her step-father was staring thoughtfully into the fire, his expression very serious. "Vati, what is it? What is it that you know that you have not told us?"

Vati tore his gaze away from contemplation of the fire and looked gravely at her.

"It might be well to think about leaving, Magda my heart, and soon, while we can still afford it. All of us; Liesel and Hansi, and the children. There is talk in the air … oh, there has always been such, but this is new talk, talk such as I remember when I was a boy and the Emperor Napoleon was on the march. Talk of conscription and war and repressions. I do not like it …not for myself, you understand.

There is no one's army would want a decrepit old clockmaker! But the boys — yes, they would want Friedrich and Johann in a few years, if it came to pass, and I won't have it. There is also the fact that business has not been good. So many factories, so much mechanization of things, so much change! And they will change, whether we wish to change or not. There will be new rules and repression of so-called dangerous thoughts brought down upon those of us to dare to think about such matters! What to do, Magda, what to do …"

"It is advised to take all that you can in a cart and sell the beasts that pull it at the port," Hansi answered decisively from the other end of the room. Startled, Magda and Vati looked up. Liesel's husband stood in the doorway for a moment, with Anna in his arms, half asleep. "And take apart the cart, and ship it with all your goods, since a good one may be hard to come by in the wilderness."

Magda regarded her brother in law with considerable surprise; how long had Hansi been thinking the same things as Vati? He strode across the room and sat himself down on the bench next to Magda, settling Anna in his lap so that she curled up, sucking her thumb.

"Anna couldn't sleep, and Liesel was nursing the little one," he added half-defensively, but he looked levelly at the two of them, all diffidence and talk of the muck pile set aside. "I heard you talking, so I came downstairs."

They looked at each other for a long moment, before Vati finally asked, "How long have you been thinking about emigration, Hansi?"

"A while," he answered readily, and there was firmness in his voice, and in his answer to Vati that Magda had never thought to see in Hansi. He wasn't impulsive; there was no dash to him. In a thousand years he would never do anything that his neighbors and family hadn't already done before, but there it was. He had been thinking long and seriously about emigration for that was the way Hansi did things. "Go with us to Texas." Hansi savored the words, much as Vati had, and continued, "Everyone is talking about it in Albeck these last few weeks. I thought about going myself, first before we married. Then I thought about the two of us going together,

and then Anna was born and then the new baby. You are right, Vati. We should go now, while we still can."

"What about the fields?" Magda asked, the fields that he cared about to the exclusion of practically anything else, and Hansi shook his head, regretfully.

"It hurts me to say, but here is the truth of it. There's not enough. Not to grow enough hay for winter, not enough to grow what we need of beets or wheat or potatoes. There's just not enough, for all I break my back working at it and no way to get any more. The Adelsverein promises to send us all there, give us a house, everything we'll need for the first year — and three hundred and twenty acres." Hansi's face lit up in rapture as he said those last words. "Think of what I could do with that much good rich land. It's as much as all the fields around Albeck, almost."

Looking at the faces of Vati and her brother-in-law, Magda felt a chill around her heart, for it seemed to her that they were already decided, their feet all but set on that road.

Annaliese Richter was still awake when Hansi quietly returned upstairs with his slumbering daughter in his arms. She watched him through her eyelashes, savoring the very look of him, a solid square man, perhaps a little shorter than most, but a very rock for dependability. He moved quietly around the room, tenderly putting Anna in the truckle-bed at the foot of theirs and settling the covers around the child. She closed her eyes as he leaned over the baby's cradle, drawn close to her side of the bed. It was her secret pleasure to watch her husband when he didn't know that her eyes were on him. She never doubted that he would marry her, for she had adored him since she was a little girl in short skirts herself and he was a stocky boy more than a little taken with her clever older sister; Hansi, stout and stubborn and good with cattle. Steady and reliable, funny in a mild way when he felt like it.

It had always been a mystery for Liesel why her sister did not see or value those qualities in Hansi. Why had Magda not loved him? Magda with her head in books, Vati's favorite daughter, such a

mystery! But exactly as Liesel had known would happen, Magda had come to her sister saying impatiently:

'That blockhead of a boy asked me if I would marry him! I told him not to be ridiculous, and to ask you instead! You worship the ground he walks on, anyway. Don't be a ninny— say yes to him, so he'll stop pestering me!'

Liesel did not mind at all that Magda had left him to her. It only proved that books did not tell you everything. Oh, no —books did not tell you anything about certain pleasures of marriage, certain things that she was privy to now, as a married woman. Magda did not know about that, for it was not a thing that an unmarried girl should know about; it wasn't proper. But she did, Liesel thought — there were things she knew that her clever sister didn't! She listened to the soft sounds of her husband undressing and climbing into bed to settle himself at her back. Her heart warmed with renewed affection; he took such tender care, quietly returning to bed without disturbing her, after seeing to Anna! Liesel knew that many husbands wouldn't have bothered. Tending the children was the business of their mothers, no matter how exhausted from nursing a fretful baby, or the work of the farm. Many another man acted as if once their wives had spread their legs apart for them, that was all they needed to do in regards to their children. But Hansi wasn't like that, not a bit of it. In his own quiet way, he took as much an interest in Anna and baby Joachim as Vati took in his own children. And for that, Liesel loved him all the more, if that were possible. She turned in the bed, reaching out as if half-slumbering, asking drowsily, "Are you just now coming to bed, Hansi? Whatever were you talking about for so long?"

He did not answer at once, but his arm curled around her. At last he answered, "We talked about going to Texas, Lise."

All thought of sleep was banished as if Liesel had been doused with a bucket of ice-cold water. She found her voice at last.

"And what did you say on that, hearts-love?"

He took a long time in answering, for he was a careful and considerate man.

"We ought to not let such an opportunity pass, Lise. We should go."

Liesel Richter did not sleep well that night, for those words echoing in her troubled dreams.

We ought not to let such an opportunity pass … we should go.

In the morning, she did as she had done all her life – she asked her sister what she thought, as they milked the cows in the morning darkness in the barn.

"What did you and Vati talk to him about last night?" she asked, leaning her cheek against the warm flank of a cow as her hands rhythmically squeezed spurts of milk into a pail. Magda was similarly occupied. "The baby kept me awake. When he came to bed, he said you were talking about going to Texas. I thought he was joking with me, Magda. He can't be serious!"

"Hansi never jokes," Magda answered, somberly. "He is serious, and Vati, too."

"What do you think of it?" Liesel asked after some moments of anxious silence broken only by the quiet hissing of milk breaking the surface in their pails. Magda was clever; Vati's daughter of the soul, if Liesel was his in blood. She always knew what to do.

"It might be rather interesting," Magda ventured at last, and Liesel's heart sank. "They promise us a new house. I expect it will be rather like the one in Herr Sealsfields' Cabin Book, in a wild and beautiful garden. Think on it, Lise — a house of your own!"

"But to leave here!" Liesel's voice trembled. How could they think to leave Albeck, everything they had ever known? "To leave everything behind and just go! I can't bear the thought of taking the children all across that ocean, going out to the wilderness! I really can't! How can he even consider such a thing, Magda!?"

"Nonetheless, he is, and Vati also," Magda replied, blunt and practical. "And he is your husband, Lise. If he says that he wishes it, you must obey … just as Mutti and I must obey Vati."

No. This was horrible. Vati could contemplate such a thing; he was a willow-the-wisp for enthusiasms, a man of books and the tiny gears of clocks spread across his workbench. Not Hansi, who never had a thought which had not already occurred to his ancestors.

"But you have Vati twisted around your finger," Liesel pleaded, already knowing that she protested fruitlessly against the inevitable. "He would not make you go if you did not wish it."

"But Vati does wish to take the Verein's offer, "Magda sighed, from the other side of the cow. "He has already convinced himself that it would be for the best for us. He reads books and talks to people, Vati does. He sees that things are not good and growing worse." As Liesel watched, her sister deftly squeezed out the last rich drops of milk from the cow's udder. She stroked the creature's flank with brisk affection before moving her milk-stool and herself on to the next cow. She looked sympathetically at Liesel as she did so. "Lise … dear little sister, I think our father made up his mind long since. He just waited upon the opportunity, and now the Adelsverein have given it to him. He and Hansi will sign the contracts, no matter what you and Mutti will have to say about it."

"Oh, and Mutti will have plenty to say," Liesel predicted with gloomy relish, hoping against hope as she did so that perhaps Mutti might prevail against this insanity. "And she will weep tears by the bucket!"

"To no effect," Magda answered. "In their hearts, Hansi and Vati are already there, running their hands through rich soil and counting ownership of more land than either of them ever dreamed."

"What shall we do then?" Liesel asked. Her sister turned her head and smiled at her.

"Think on those things which we value the most, and contrive some means of taking them with us," she answered. "Tears will avail us nothing, Lise. Smile and be brave."

On the day of their leaving, a bright and clear September day, Mutti cried as if her heart were breaking in two. There was a small gathering in the farmyard, clustering around the Steinmetzs' and the Richters' carts: Hansi's older brothers Joachim and Jurgen and his parents, Mutti's friends and a scattering of younger women, Liesel and Magda's contemporaries. Auntie Ursula, the sister of Mutti's first husband and her husband Onkel Oscar had come out from where they lived in Ulm on this momentous day. There were not too many other

men, for it was harvest-time and most had already gone out to their fields. It felt very strange to Magda, for them not to be at work themselves, not to be gathering their own harvest, filling the storerooms and larder in the old house. It was as if they were already strangers.

At the moment when they had finished taking the last of their things from the house, Vati's friend from Ulm, Simon the goldsmith, came rushing into the yard with a small package in his arms.

"I was afraid I would be too late!" he gasped, as he and Vati embraced. "This is for you," he added, thrusting the package at Vati. "A quire of fine letter paper and ink and pens enough for two or three scriveners, all to encourage you to write to me, as often as you can. I shall want to know every detail of your venture, Christian!" And he beamed at Vati, while Vati thanked him effusively.

"My people are given to travel widely," Simon gracefully waved off the thanks. "But so far, I know few who have ventured into Texas! I will look forward to your letters with great interest." Simon smiled warmly at Magda, the skin crinkling around his wise old eyes, and added, "You must remind him to write, Miss Margaretha, since we both know how forgetful your father may be. I shall miss his company very much; letters will be a poor substitute."

"I won't forget, Uncle Simon," Magda answered. He smiled again, but did not embrace her as he did her father. Such was not the custom among his people, for a man to touch a woman not his wife, for all that Simon and her father were so close, close enough that they all called him their uncle.

"Good!" Simon looked at their carts, laden with all but the last few little things. "I see you took my advice about traveling with only the essentials. And all your papers are in order?"

"I have them right here." Vati patted the leather wallet, tucked into the inner pocket of his coat. It held all the necessary permits, visas and certificates; everything that the Verein had requested of Vati and Hansi to have in order before signing their contracts. "Don't worry, Simon — Magda shall see that I keep them safe. We arranged the sale of everything that is not in the carts," Vati added cheerily. Perhaps that was why Mutti wept in the arms of her dearest friend,

Auntie Ursula, now that the moment had come to leave behind everything that had made her home so comfortable and welcoming. "We expect to live like gypsies, at least until we get to our new homes in Texas. Did I tell you they had assured us each a house, built on our own lands? It will probably not be as solid as what we leave behind, but I expect we shall prosper, none the less." Certainly that was what Hansi expected. Even if Liesel seemed as apprehensive as Mutti about leaving, she always believed what Hansi said.

"If you have any need of help once you reach Bremen," added Simon, his eyes beginning to overflow, "call upon my cousin David. I have written to him already. A safe journey for you, a safe journey and a golden future, my friend!"

"To be sure," Vati answered happily, as he wrung Simon's hand again and consulted his pocket-watch. "It is time, my dears. Now let our adventure begin with a smile, Hannah-my-heart … Magda, boys …" He deftly detached Mutti from Auntie Ursula with many determinedly cheerful words and handed her up into the first laden cart, where she sat with her shawl pulled tight around her elbows and her cheeks wet with tears. She reached down to grasp Auntie Ursula's hand while both wept mournfully.

"… so far away," Auntie Ursula choked out, through her sobs, "… such fearful dangers, robbers and brigands! We will never see you and the children again!"

"Of course you will see us again," Magda said roundly although she did not believe it herself. She picked up her skirts and scrambled up to set next to Mutti. She worried that Mutti and Aunt Ursula's tears might frighten the children, especially Anna. They were leaving the only place they knew, bound to be frightening enough for them, especially if Mutti carried on too long about it. She put her arm around her mother's shoulders. The horses shifted restlessly in harness, and the twins drummed their heels on the sides of the wooden chests upon which they sat, until Magda turned and told them to stop.

"Are we leaving now, Auntie Magda?" asked Friedrich, excitedly.

Magda answered, "As soon as Vati is finished talking to Uncle Simon, Fredi."

On the other cart, Liesel had the baby in her lap. Anna sat prim and wide-eyed beside her. The moment had come. Hansi's brother Jurgen slapped his shoulder, and his mother hugged him too her one last time, ruffling his hair as if he were still a small boy.

"Go with us to Texas," he said jauntily. "I'll write and let you know when it's safe, Jurgen," and his brother Jurgen jeered half-enviously, as Hansi climbed up and picked up the reins of his team.

"Away with you," Jurgen called cheerfully after Hansi's cart, as it creaked slowly towards the gateway and the road beyond, "and have a care for the wild Indians!"

Vati embraced Simon one last time, clambered spryly into the cart, where there was just enough room for the three of them, and chirruped to the horses. Auntie Ursula walked beside it, still holding onto Mutti's hand and both of them sobbing uncontrollably until they reached the gate and passed out into the road with a lurch and a bump.

"Goodbye, goodbye!" the boys shrilled from the top of the pile of boxes and chests lashed to the cart, "Goodbye … we're off to Texas … here we go, we're away to Texas!"

Magda silently handed a handkerchief to her mother. They squeezed elbow to elbow on the narrow seat. Hannah dabbed her streaming eyes with the handkerchief and blew her nose. Vati looked across at her and smiled, as happily as his sons, saying, "The open road calls us, Hannah-my-heart… can't you hear it?"

"Nonsense," Mutti snorted. "All I hear is Peter Frimmel cursing because he has stacked the hay too tall and it has fallen off onto the road."

They passed the last buildings of Albeck, dreaming under a deep blue autumn sky. Out among the meadows, and golden fields of wheat and barley still bowed heavy-laden and un-harvested, or lay in neatly mown stubble. One or two of their neighbors, already hard at work, waved cheerfully as Hansi and then Vati's carts passed by on the little road that led to the bigger road that would take them towards Wurzburg and the north, to Bremen on the sea where waited the ship

that would take them away. At a turning in the road, Hansi's cart halted, and Vati said, "What can be the matter already; did one of the horses lose a shoe?"

But ahead of them, Hansi was standing and lifting Anna in his arms.

"Look," he called to them all, "Look back, for that is the last sight of Albeck! Look well, and remember — for that is the very last that we will see of our old home!"

Magda's breath caught in her throat. She turned in the seat, as Hansi said and looked back at the huddle of roofs around the church spire, like a little ship afloat in a sea of golden fields. All they knew, all that was dear and familiar lay small in the distance behind their two laden carts. Really, she would slap Hansi, if that started Mutti crying again. Even Vati looked sobered; once around the bend of the road, trees would hide Albeck from their sight, as if it had never been a part of them, or they a part of it.

Magda lifted her chin bravely and said to Vati, "Really, I wonder how suddenly Hansi got to be so sentimental. We should drive on, Vati. There's no good in dragging our feet like this. Texas may wait for us, but the Verein ship won't."

"Right you are, dearest child." Vati slapped the reins, and the horses moved on again. Only Mutti looked back, her face wet again with fresh tears. Many years later, Magda would wonder if that were an omen.

* * *

Letter from Christian Friedrich Steinmetz: Written on 2 November 1845, from our lodgings in Bremen, to Simon Frankenthaler, Goldsmith of the City of Ulm in Bavaria

My Dear Friend: I write to tell you that we are departing very early on the morrow with the other families recruited by the Adelsverein, on the brig Apollo. After a review of our papers and signing the contract, we waited in lodgings provided by the Verein for the ship to be properly victualed and outfitted for the

crossing and to have our many belongings stowed in her hold. The Apollo is a German-built ship, stoutly fitted, which seems to be a reassuring omen for us. We wait in company with many other families who have gathered from across Germany to venture our fortunes in a new land. We are grateful many times daily for the assistance of the Verein, without which we would otherwise fall to the importuning of the many scoundrels who prey upon those wishing to take ship for the Americas. I shudder to think on how we would have had to thread our way between perils, not knowing whom we could trust, aside from your cousin David in a place we know not! Son Hansi insisted that our two sturdy carts be disassembled and stowed with our other stored belongings, over the quartermaster's objections. Hansi was most determined upon this and prevailed. Our carts, in which we and our goods traveled from our old home, may prove to be of such stout service in our new one, on the other side of this grey ocean. You will be relieved to know that we now have seen the advantage of your wise advice to convert much of our goods into cash.

My dear Simon, I must confess to some apprehensions at this juncture. It seemed to be a very logical and necessary venture, sitting in the comfort of our late home, or the warmth of your little shop to consider all the reasons in favor of immigration and to boldly decide on them. But at this moment, as we are about to take that great step, all the uncertainties and dangers arise to torment my imagination. Can our situation in my ancestral home really have been so harsh? Should not we have attempted some other resolution, other than immigration? The perils and discomforts facing us on the morrow seem altogether more momentous when we are about to take that last irrevocable step, turning our backs forever on the ashes of our forbearers and the altars of our gods.

Hansi and all the children are anticipating the morrow with great excitement. My dear wife seems to be of an apprehensive and heavy heart, as does Annaliese, but they put on a cheerful face. Margaretha remains ever stoic; as always my stoutest and best support. I will write again, when we reach the port of Galveston, which we are anticipated to reach in

some seven or eight weeks, a fair wind allowing. Until then, from your old friend,

C.F. Steinmetz

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"It looks so small," Magda kept her voice low. "Surely that one ship can't be meant to carry all of us?" Behind her, the boys were jumping down from the coach, packed with families who had shared their lodgings. Vati reached up to help Hannah down from the step. From the look of horror that flashed across her face, Magda knew that her mother shared her own apprehensions.

"This way, this way!" The Verein representative in Bremen bustled along the stone quay, shouting to be heard above the crowd of people, thronging the space between warehouses on one hand, and the serried ranks of tall ship-masts on the other. Above them, seagulls dipped and whirled, crying their desolate, mewing call. A bitter-cold wind came off the sea from the north, and Magda pulled her thickest and heaviest shawl close around her. Another carriage clattered in from a narrow alleyway, disgorging more immigrants with their unwieldy bundles and boxes.

"It's larger than it looks, Magda, my heart. There would be three decks and a hold below," Vati replied, cheerily. "Here, Hansi, I'll take that." From the top of the coach, Hansi and the driver were handing down their own luggage; a great roll of blankets and bedding, a large provision-box, along with bags of clothing and necessities for the children. They joined the jostling, slow-shuffling mass of men, women, and children. Hansi and Vati carried the heavy box between them. Hannah and Magda walked with the twins between them, and Magda held Anna's hand as Liesel followed with the baby. Magda wished she could herself have held her mother's hand, for Hannah looked very grey and fearful.

"All here for the *Apollo*!" shouted a sailor through cupped hands from above the place where a stout plank was laid from the quay to a

little gate in the ship's rail. He stood on the deck rail, bracing himself against the gentle sway of the ship with an elbow looped through what looked to Magda like a many-stepped rope ladder, which extended from the side of the ship to the mast, far above. "Step lively, now, step lively! All for the *Apollo*; go with us to Texas, otherwise it's a damned long swim!" Another sailor stood by, helping people down the short step from plank to deck. The plank shifted slightly, scraping on the stones, as the Apollo shifted with the water's movement.

A ship's officer in a fine braid-trimmed coat had a list in his hand, standing on the quay by the Adelsverein officer in Bremen and another man, very grandly dressed. A crowd gathered close around them, ever-shifting, as men and families were counted off from the officer's list and crossed over to the Apollo's deck, even as more gathered from along the quay, taking their places.

Hansi turned his head and smiled at the women. "Smells like snow," he said.

"More like dead fish," Magda answered. "And dirty old privies."

"Imagine the reek on a hot summer day," Hansi pointed out, solemnly. "How can people bear to live in cities? I'll take my manure pile, any day." He and Vati were nearly up to the officers and the fine-dressed man.

"Your name?" bawled the officer. He spoke as if he were more used to bellowing at people a fair distance away and in a howling gale.

"Steinmetz and Richter," Vati answered.

The Adelsverein officer read from his list, "Steinmetz, Christian Friedrich, wife Hannah… daughter Margaretha, aged 22, sons Johann and Friedrich, aged seven."

"Boos-Waldeck," said the fine-dressed man, shaking Vati's hand with great enthusiasm. "You bring honor to us all in this venture. I commend your spirit. It's a beautiful country! We shall all find a great reward in building new lives in it."

"Baron!" Vati returned the handshake with the liveliest interest. "So we shall, so we shall. Now, about the country… is it all wooded?"

But the ships' officer was saying,

"Now, step careful now… one at a time," and the Baron was already turning towards Hansi and Liesel as their names were read.

"Hans Richter, wife Annaliese, daughter Anna aged three, infant son Joachim."

The Baron beamed down at the baby, and chucked Anna's cheek, "Here's a fine little Texan!" He shook Hansi's hand. "Don't let the little ones forget where they were born, hey? You are serving a great venture, you and your family."

"Allow me." A burly sailor took up the heavy box from Vati, balancing it on his shoulder as easily as if it were nothing at all, and stepped lightly over the gangway plank. "Now you, sir," He jumped down to the deck and turned around. "The ladies next; one foot in front of the other and best not to look down."

Vati looked everywhere but down, craning his head to look up at the tangle of ropes, rigging and canvas. Magda held her breath as one of his feet strayed perilously close to the edge of the plank.

"Keep moving, keep moving!" the ships' officer bawled again.

"You go now, Mutti." Magda nudged her mother. "Go on then, I'll hold your hand. Look ahead, look at Vati. He'll help you down." One step, two steps, three, and Hannah reached down for Vati's hands, and the waiting sailor lifted her down in a swirl of skirts. "Now the boys." Johann and Friedrich needed no encouragement or help. They stepped eagerly out on the gangplank with never a look down at the narrow wedge of water between the wooden swell of the *Apollo's* hull and the steep stone quayside.

"Now, miss. Just step onto the plank… don't look down." Magda looked straight ahead, as a sailor took her elbow; two steps, three steps.

"I'll take that for you, miss." A sailor took her bundle, and Vati swung her down to the deck, which swayed slightly under her feet. He handed her back the bundle, and chanted "Straight on down the companionway … families one deck down, single men two decks

down. Move along then, this way, then." And as if there were any chance of being confused, another sailor stood by what looked like a pair of double doors. A pair of short stairs led upwards to a higher deck level on either side of it.

"Down the steps, miss … mind your feet … lower your head, sir …mind the beam."

The way into the *Apollo's* lower deck was a stairway so precipitously steep as to be more of a ladder. It led them down into a windowless cave only slightly less cold than the outside air. Magda came down to the bottom of it with a thump, nearly blind in the sudden darkness below deck.

"Single men, down one more, families on this deck … just walk straight ahead and find yourselves a bunk, and stow away your clobber." Another of the steep staircases opened at a turn. "Come along, miss, Captain Feldheusen wants to catch the tide …"

Magda stepped forwards a little way, hesitating while her eyes adjusted to lantern-lit dimness. A baluster enclosed the steep stairs to the lower deck, but otherwise it looked to be just one large room, with slightly angled walls that curved together somewhere in the shadows ahead of her. Three rows of great roughly squared pillars marched at regular intervals the whole length of it, from which hung lantern brackets. It seemed that those lanterns accentuated the darkness, rather than shedding light upon it all. As her eyes adjusted, she made out the regular shapes of two or three immensely long tables with benches on either side flanking the center row of pillars, which stretched the length of the deck. There was some little space on either side of the table and benches, then another long series of bunks built between the other rows of pillars and the ship-wall, like two levels of nest-boxes in a henhouse, just barely wide enough for two people to sleep in it, side by side. There was a long, continuous bench along the lower level. At her back, Hansi remarked in a determinedly cheerful tone, "God in heaven, we'll have about as much room as my oxen did in their stall in the old barn. We'd better hurry, Magda, if we want a space where we can all be together."

"We want that?" Magda looked around in horror.

"We're family." Hansi took her arm, "We'll have to endure each other; strangers don't have that luxury."

Halfway along, Mutti was sitting on one of the bunk-side benches as if she could go no farther. She had an arm around Friedrich and Johann, huddled one on each side of her, as Vati stood irresolute in the narrow aisle between the benches. Mutti's voice was low, almost frantic. Magda caught the tail of it.

"… not endure! We cannot live like this, Christian, not for two months, not for two days! Oh, please let us go home, forget this madness!"

Hansi sighed patiently, and stepped in front of his sister-in-law.

"Mutti, we cannot return to Albeck. The house and lands are sold. We have already deposited the fees to the Adelsverein and signed the contracts, and there is nothing for us to go back for. Think how it would look to everyone, if we came crawling back."

"The die is cast, my dearest," Vati recovered his voice. "Hansi is right. We have burnt all of our bridges behind us. Think of the future before us, Hannalore, my heart. As we live in hope of the everlasting joys of heaven, think of this brief time on the *Apollo* as our time on earth, before we ascend to the bliss of the everlasting. Endure, with the hope of heaven before you, I beg!"

"And you call yourself such a free-thinker!" Hannah snorted derisively. She seemed to have recovered, and Magda sighed, inwardly. Vati could always talk her out of a black mood,

"Thinking to cozen me by quoting doctrine!" She took Vati's hands and looked up at him. Magda thought that her mother truly looked frightened. She firmly quashed her own distaste and horror at the thought of living in — as Hansi said it — a space hardly larger than a cattle stall, for the next few months.

"Dearest Christian, I shall endure, but I confess to such apprehensions!"

"Truly natural and understandable, my dearest." The lantern-light caught Vati's glasses again. Magda thought that perhaps he was himself a little taken back at the very spare condition which they must now endure. Dear Vati, with his head in the clouds always; no, this was not entirely his doing. Hansi, so dull and plodding was as stirred

by the promise of land as Vati, with golden promises on the other side of the ocean.

"Mutti, let us choose our own space, before too many more come aboard," Magda spoke calmly. "We wish to be all together. We can hang blankets between the bunks. We shall need …"

"Two spaces, above and below," Hansi spoke firmly. "Liesel and I, and you and Vati, with Anna and Magda and the boys above."

Mutti looked around and above where she sat despairing and answered, "Well, this shall do as much as any other, I suppose." Her chin lifted, the brave housewife reclaiming her territory as meager as it was; the space between two beams and a long table, to be their home for the duration of their voyage.

Vati and Hansi pushed the heavy box underneath the lower bunk.

"At least they have put in fresh straw," Mutti said.

Magda, standing in the bench and investigating the upper bunks answered, "We are expected to sleep on this, like animals in the barn?"

"Thank god, we have brought our own beds," Mutti sighed, as another family shouldered by her, carrying their own bulky roll of blankets and beds. "Excuse me, I am sure …"

"Vati, may we go on deck again?" Johann asked. He was wriggling with excitement.

"No, you may not, you'll be in the way of the sailors. Help Magda make up your bunk." He and Mutti unrolled the bedding with some difficulty as other travelers kept walking down through the space, seeking an empty bunk for themselves. Baby Joachim began to cry, a thin fretful complaint.

"He's hungry," Liesel said, desperately casting an eye around for a place where she could sit down, and unbutton the front of her dress to nurse him.

"No help for that, Lise. Look, we'll hang up a blanket here and you can sit in the bunk." Magda hopped down from the bench with a sigh, and set to work. Her head ached, from the noise around her, the fumes of cheap tallow candles and another heavy smell she couldn't identify, which seemed to permeate the whole deck.

A sailor with a collection of buckets, carried with the aid of a pole over his shoulder thrust through their bails walked the length the narrow aisle. He put down a bucket on the floor by every couple of bunks, and Magda asked, "What are those for?"

He looked at her with a knowing air and answered, "You'll find out soon enough, I'm thinking."

Chapter 3 – Voyager

Thinking on it much, much later, after a long and eventful life, Magda Vogel would remember crossing the Atlantic on the emigrant ship *Apollo* as one of the most horrific experiences of her life; a long purgatory of darkness and misery, jammed together with her family and dozens of others in the reeking 'tween-deck, and only let above-decks when the weather was fair and they would not be in the way of the sailors.

It had not seemed quite bad at first, settling into the Steinmetzes' crowded little corner, once Mutti had got over the shock of seeing where they were supposed to live. They spread out their bedding in the four bunks, and screened them with blankets for an illusive speck of privacy. Other families streamed down the companionway from the upper deck, pushing past them, searching for their own; a stout Swabian farmer and his wife with six children trailing after, an older man in clerical black, he and his wife both clutching bundles. Presently the traffic from above ceased and not a moment too soon, Magda thought. The place between the curving wooden walls was packed with families, all settling themselves into the shelf-like bunks. A sailor came halfway down the ladder-stair, shouting, "The captain orders everyone to stay below, while we're casting off. As soon as we're underway, we'll let you on deck, by turns - as long as you stay out of our way!"

New and strange noises came from overhead, the rattle of chains, and sailors chanting, and Magda gasped as the deck underneath her feet swayed with a wider motion. Mutti sat down heavily on the bench, her eyes suddenly wide and dark and the older man in clericals took his wife by the hand and declaimed fervently, "So the Lord said to Joshua, 'be strong and of good courage, for you shall go with this people unto the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them …it is the Lord who goes before you, he will be with you, he will not fail or forsake you, do not fear or be dismayed.'"

"I think rather it is the "*Apollo's*" figurehead, going before us," Vati remarked. "Superstitious nonsense." The old cleric looked at him, very sternly.

"You reject the consolations of faith, my good sir?"

"Frequently and with great vigor," Vati answered. "As a free-thinker, I can do no less."

Magda met her sisters' eyes — well, at least Vati hadn't made his usual remark about organized religions being a pustule on the buttocks of humanity. He would seem to have remembered they would have to spend eight weeks in close quarters with these people.

"Than I shall pray for your immortal soul," the cleric replied keenly. "And I hope that we are never in such straits as to lead yourself to seek such comforts, for then I know that we all shall be in great peril."

The *Apollo* then gave a great lurch, and there was a shout from above; and it seemed to Magda that the ship now canted at a decided angle. Yes, the lanterns hanging from the central beams now seemed to tilt. Vati's eyes lit up, and he said happily, "We have cast off from the quay, children … May I introduce myself, since it seems we are to be close companions, reverend pastor? Christian Friedrich Steinmetz, clockmaker of Ulm in Bavaria."

"Pastor Bernard Altmueller, Doctor of Divinity and late of Gersthofen near Augsburg." Pastor Altmueller was a little older than Vati, a gangling figure in clerical black, with cadaverous features and an expression both wry and worldly. "Hearing all this talk of immigration and the Verein plans, I obeyed a calling to minister in a new land and to travel with my flock. Our own children are grown and settled. It all was most providential. We did not wish to set ourselves apart, but travel as humble pilgrims."

"Humble it is, indeed," Vati agreed with great good humor. Magda and Mutti exchanged a fond and commiserating glance.

"My husband would be content in a lions' den, if he only had someone to converse with," Mutti said to Mrs. Pastor Altmueller, who agreed graciously that it was so with her husband. She was tiny and round-faced, the very opposite of her husband, but also had the same wry and worldly sparkle in her eyes.

"Please, call me Mrs. Helene," said Mrs. Pastor Altmueller. She was briskly tidying away hers and Pastor Altemeuller's bundles and bedding, as calmly as if she had set out for America every day of her life.

"Magda, when can we go up to the deck?" Friedrich asked, impatiently. He and Johann sat, swinging their legs over the edge of their upper bunk. "We want to see something … the sailors … Vati told us they climb high up to the top of the tallest mast to work the sails."

"This is the very biggest boat we have ever seen," Johann added seriously. "I do not see how the wind can move it, Magda, truly I don't."

"I shall ask one of the crew to explain it to you, boys," Vati said, fondly. "It is certainly possible; the force of the wind pressing against the great area of the sails is very much greater than the force of water pressing against the area of the wooden hull. The hull of the ship is designed, you see, to slip through the water while the sails are designed to catch as much of the wind's great force as possible." His eyes were alight with wonder and interest. "It's a wonderfully complex mechanism, boys; every tiny piece of it serves a purpose." Vati expounded at length, until they were allowed to come up to the deck, into the freshening breeze as the *Apollo* left the Weser estuary farther and farther behind. The shore was already a blue shadow behind a scatter of buildings like children's toys. Over their heads, canvas cracked in the wind like sheets billowing on a clothesline. Sailors climbed impossibly high amongst a dizzying tangle of ropes. They had left the last pearlescent rags of fog behind. Full sunshine sparkled on the tops of all the little waves all around the Apollo and the water looked more blue than grey.

Magda leaned her elbows against the carved wooden rail, watching the coastline diminishing gradually as the Apollo painted a gentle wake across the sea. The land seemed to melt, dissolve into an insubstantial blue shadow. Already it seemed like Albeck was merely a dream, something that had happened a long time ago to someone else entirely. And being young, and naturally optimistic, she thought on the future. What would Texas be like, and what kind of life would

they all be able to build for Anna and the baby and for her half-brothers? She looked over her shoulder; yes, Vati had buttonholed one of the ships' crew, who was good-naturedly explaining how the sails were worked. The boys looked enthralled. They had no interest in looking back, only forward, and Friedrich was already loudly voicing his desire to be a sailor when he grew up.

"Will they remember the home we leave behind?" Hannah came quietly up to the rail, beside her daughter.

"No, Mutti, I think not." Magda considered for a moment. "Friedrich and Johann will think on it only a little, as something long ago and far away and only when we remind them. Anna and the baby will not even remember it at all."

"And so," Magda saw her mothers' eyes fill, and spill over, "so fortunate for them. I have lived the greater part of my life in one place and will always be reminded of it. So greatly do I pray that Christian will be happy in this choice that he has made … for I am so filled with apprehension and I fear that I cannot entirely hide it. I put a brave face on it all, Margaretha … but I am so fearful."

"I am sure Vati knows." Magda put her strong young hand over her mother's work-worn one; what was this, Mutti always so brisk and self-assured, almost despairing. "And he understands — after all, it was his father's home before it was ours, and his father's father, before that." Upon reflection, she rather thought Vati probably hadn't noticed her mother's apprehension, so filled was he with optimism and enthusiasm for the journey and its many diversions. Best not to say, outright.

Hannah smiled, seemingly comforted and answered, "He is a saint, such a dear, dear man. I came to love him so very much, after we married. Such a surprise! I did not think I could ever love another man as I did your father."

Magda was herself diverted: Hannah talked about her father about as often as she herself thought of him, which was to say little and rarely.

"What was he like, Mutti?" she asked and Hannah smiled, fondly.

"Oh, so dashing! Tall and dark and gallant. We were so happy, and then he was gone so suddenly. He fell ill and died between one day and the next, before they could even send for me. He was gone, like a candle-flame blown out, and I never had a chance to say goodbye. I thought my heart well-broken. You and I went to live in Ulm with his sister — your Auntie Ursula. She was very kind. Her husband's house was near the old marketplace; I would often walk past the clockmaker's shop with you and that is when your stepfather first began to notice us."

"How old was I, then?" Magda thought she must have been very small indeed, for she could recall nothing of this.

"A baby, just old enough to walk. He would come out of the workshop and speak to us; he was also very kind. I thought of him as nothing more than a friend, but a very gentle and amusing one. Such a funny little man, nothing at all like your father, but he made so much of you. And then one day, he asked me to marry him and I thought I might as well, for I had no life, no home of my own. I had to provide for you. And if I had to be married, it may as well be to a friend. I only grew to love him later. In all those years, I never had cause to be unhappy until now."

"We shall be happy in Texas." Magda lifted her chin. "For I think Vati was right about the farm, and the boys. You are only sad now, Mutti because we have gone ahead and cannot go back."

"Perhaps," Hannah sighed, and her eyes went again, longingly to that last blue shadow of land. "Perhaps. Magda, I think I will go below. The ship rocks too much, and I do not feel well."

By the time the *Apollo* edged into the North Sea, under canvas bellying full from every mast, every one of her passengers realized what the buckets were for, although the children seemed to be least affected. Magda realized that she felt better immediately upon venturing into the open air, even if it were so cold that the spume flung by the wind from the tops of waves seemed half-frozen and everyone but the children had retreated to their shelf-bunks. She spent every minute on the Apollo's modest middle deck that she could when the weather was fair and passengers allowed to take the air,

tasting the salt on her lips and keeping an eye on her brothers and Anna.

Poor Anna, baby Joachim took up so much of Liesel's attention, just when Anna had begun to develop her own character. Magda wasn't much interested in babies. She thought of babies as helpless little boring lumps who made a lot of noise at one end and horrible messes at the other. A child who had begun to think and talk and notice things around her; to Magda that was far more interesting.

The ship's carpenter constructed some swings for the children and hung them from a boom over the lower deck so that the smaller children had something to play on. On one fair, cold day some three or four weeks into the voyage, Magda pushed Anna in the swing, chanting:

"All my little ducklings, swimming on the sea; their heads are in the water, their tails are all you see!"

Anna gurgled with laughter and Friedrich demanded, "Where are the ducklings, Auntie Magda? We don't see them at all! Is it just a story?"

"Yes, it is," Magda whispered, "but don't tell Anna."

"Vati says that there aren't any birds in the middle of the sea," Johann remarked, seriously. "He says the sailors told him that the birds only appear near to shore. Is that true, Magda?"

"If Vati said so, then it is most likely true," Magda answered.

"So, when we see birds again … that's how we'll know that we are almost there," Johann persisted.

"I expect so," Magda answered again, but Friedrich had already moved on to another worry.

"Magda, how will Father Christmas find us to bring our presents, when we are in the middle of the ocean?"

"How can you be sure that Father Christmas isn't bringing you a switch and a lump of coal, then?" Magda answered teasingly, and had to laugh at the expression on Friedrich's face, a transparent mixture of calculation and guilt. "Fredi-love, Mutti says that you should be spanked every day. If she doesn't know the reason, she is sure that you can think of one!"

"But what about Father Christmas?" Johann looked particularly woebegone. "He can find us, can't he, Magda?"

"I'm sure he can," Magda reassured them, "He is a saint, and saints can do miracles."

Both boys seemed reassured and Magda thought, 'We *shall really have to think up a good story for them. I suppose we could ask one of the sailors to be Father Christmas. I know Mutti will have something hidden away for the boys and Anna. Mutti always plans ahead.'*

But two days after that the *Apollo* encountered first one storm, which kept them all below, and then another and far worse, which sent everyone to their shelf-bunks, terrified and racked by seasickness. Mountains of white-streaked grey water rose on either side of the *Apollo's* fragile rails and washed across the deck. A great sheet of seawater cascaded down the companionway to the lower decks, mixing with the stink of vomit and the contents of the upset privy-buckets, washing back and forth across the floor as the *Apollo* rolled. The sailors were all aloft among the ropes and acres of canvas, fighting for mastery over forces that could smash the ship as easily as a man smashes a nutshell, too busy to see to the aid of passengers too sick to care for themselves.

At the height of the storm, Magda braced herself against the violent tossing of the *Apollo,* wedging her body crossways in hers and Anna's bunk, her back against the rough boards of the bunk side and her feet and one arm braced with all her strength against the cold-sweating bulwark that was the Apollo's hull. The ship plunged into a storm swell, shuddering as she rolled with a loud wooden groan of agony. With her free arm, she held Anna against her, grasping her tightly to her own body, sheltering the child against that violent tossing. The front of her shift and dress were soaked with vomit, her own and the child's, and Anna's fearful tears. She knew Anna was crying still by the jerk of her body against Magda's own ribs. The sound of her sobbing was lost in the cacophony of misery around them; groans and weeping, the sound of people being wretchedly sick, of gasped-out prayers from the mortally fearful. A woman screamed

from the rank of bunks across the deck … or she would have been, but for that she had been screaming since the storm began hours ago. Her throat was scraped so raw that the only sound emerging from it was a harsh croak.

Magda's arms ached. Her whole body hurt as if she had been beaten, but she still clutched Anna to her and knew absolutely that everything she had ever been told about Hell was wrong. Hell was not hot, filled with the shrieks of the damned. Hell was cold and dark, where people moaned and vomited with terror as the ship tossed end to end. The very timbers moaned as if the *Apollo* was about to crack apart and drop them all down into the cold black water. Worst of all, there was no end to it. Not a moment of surcease and comfort wherein to draw close all the cherished memories of Albeck dreaming under a mild summer sky, of Vati telling stories by the comfortable fireside, nor even to sit and talk with the others about hopes of a new life under another sky and beside a fine new fireplace.

No, there was only the now, in the cold Hell of the *Apollo's* lower deck and Anna in her arms, thinking that death might be welcome because there would be an end to suffering in that case. Death would hurt for a few moments - but it would be such a waste for it to happen now. Magda set her teeth. No, she wanted to live.

Amid all the noise, the screams and the groans, the roar of the storm all around, someone sang bravely in the dark. Magda braced herself anew against violent shuddering of the ship and strained her ears: a fine baritone voice, Herr Pastor Altmueller. Curious that such a rich, powerful instrument lived in such a lean and cadaverous old man! She caught a few words:

"… fortress is our god … defense and weapon … frees us from distress and need, that has us now o'ertaken … Our ancient evil foe …"

A mighty fortress — the Reformer's defiant hymn and talisman against evil and defeat. A scatter of voices joined, strengthened against the misery and fear that washed through the passenger deck like the watery sewage rolling back and forth under their feet; Hansi's pleasant tenor, a scattering of other voices:

"... can aught be don e... we'll soon be lost, rejected ... but for us fights the Valiant One ... whom God Himself selected..."

At her breast, Anna hiccupped; poor mite, she had nothing left in her to be sick with. Magda held her close and said, "Anna, sweeting, listen to them singing! Can you hear that? We are safe in Gods hands always, never forget. No matter what happens, we'll be safe … and we are together, always."

Magda fell into a doze shortly after that, exhausted and aching as the storm roared on, with Anna still locked against her. Sometimes when she swam up to the surface of consciousness, it seemed that the *Apollo* was not tossing so violently. Was it hours or days? Magda was not entirely sure of anything, only that the misery seemed a little less acute and that she and Anna were still alive and vaguely surprised to be so.

"You should drink a little water, children," remarked a voice at her back. Groaning, Magda let loose her hold on Anna. Her legs cramped as she straightened them. "The storm is over, praise be to Him."

Pastor Altmueller stood on the bench, peering in at the two of them and bracing a bucket of water between his body and the side of the bunk. It was not so dim. Someone had lit the lamps. As she rolled onto her back and sat up, she saw Vati with another water-bucket, also going from bunk to bunk. Pastor Altmueller filled the dipper and held it towards her, as she and then Anna drank greedily. Behind him, one of the *Apollo's* sailors carried a huge trug filled with— what was that? Magda squinted at it: slices of fat salted bacon. She could smell it. Oddly enough, it made her hungry.

"How are you feeling?" Pastor Altmueller asked, anxiously.

"Sore. As if I had been trampled by a mad cow!"

"That was a right proper storm and no mistake," said the sailor cheerily. "But a good little bit of salt pork will settle the stomach, right enough." He held out a piece and she ate it greedily, while Pastor Altmueller moved on with his bucket. "Swab out the mess, you'll feel as right as the rain."

Magda groaned again at the thought of that work. It revolted her that she had been lying for days in filth, that hers and Anna's clothing

and blankets were crusted with old vomit and urine. At least, the dirty water washing around on the deck had drained away. She swung her legs over the side of the bunk and scrambled down. Her knees nearly buckled under her. Hansi crawled out of his bunk, moving as carefully as if he were an old man and crippled with arthritis. Liesel still slept, the baby a small lump in the blankets beside her. He caught Magda's eye and grinned like a boy.

"Well, we'll know what to expect in the next storm! Anna sweeting, come down to Papa, don't sleep the day away."

He lifted Anna down from the bunk, grimacing slightly as he did so. "Liesel is still sick and so is Mutti. I guess it's up to the boys and us to clean things up. Not such a pleasant way to spend a morning, hey?"

"You're very cheerful," Magda answered, sourly.

"We're alive, and it is morning — what's there to be glum about?" he answered jauntily, as Pastor Altmueller came to refill his bucket of water from the cask at the foot of the stairway, which the sailors always kept full.

"That is the proper spirit," the old cleric remarked, approvingly. "The purser said that he could make some fresh hay available, too. But salt water is all there is for the washing, which is most unfortunate."

"It will not make things truly clean again." Magda straightened her shoulders. "But it will have to do! Friedrich! Johann! Come help me with the blankets, boys - we shall need to wash everything." She felt like groaning again, thinking of the labor of washing all the blankets in a wooden tub. Friedrich fairly bounced with excitement. He and Johann were quite recovered.

"Magda, shall we do what the sailors do for their laundry? They do the funniest thing … they throw it overboard!"

"What?" she exclaimed.

Johann said, seriously, "We watched them, one day. They tie their dirty things to a long rope and drag it after the ship for a while, until they are clean."

Hansi laughed, "Me, I wish they would drag me after the ship until I am clean again, too," He tickled Anna until she squirmed and giggled, "And Annchen also, my little piglet."

"Texas had better yet be a paradise." Magda pulled the bedding down from the upper bunks and made a pile of it on the bench, "Anything to make this all worth the trouble of getting there!"

"If it isn't," Hansi replied jauntily, "it will be by the time that we are done with it. And Joachim will have as much land as he can attend to, and not have to split his inheritance with his brothers."

Fateful words, as Magda remembered long afterwards, sitting in the parlor of the house that her husband had built for her, watching the shadows lengthen over the long pasture which reached from the white clouds of apple-blossom in the orchard, all the way down towards the riverbank. Little Joachim was fated never to reach Texas and never to share an inheritance with Hansi's other sons, even the one son who wanted no part of it.

Just before Christmas, passengers began falling ill, at first complaining of chills and fever, lying listlessly all day on their beds. And then the fever burned through their bodies, so hot they seemed to be on fire, their skin burning red with a crimson rash. Most recovered, although very slowly. But Liesel and the baby fell to it, followed by Mutti. Even Hansi complained of a headache for many days. Vati sat for hours at Mutti's side holding her hand, distraught and bewildered, almost like a child himself. They grew to dread the entry of the ship's boatswain's mate into the passenger decks, accompanied by a couple of ordinary sailors bearing a roll of canvas and a length of chain ballast or some such, especially if they all looked terribly solemn. It meant that someone had died, and the sailors were there to sew them into a canvas coffin.

"I daren't fall sick," Magda said through her teeth, when Pastor Altmueller chided her, mildly observing that she looked pale and ought to rest herself. "I cannot. Who would look after us, then? Don't tell me that God will provide. He is up there, and we are down here, leaving me with all the details."

"Margaretha, child, we are never sent more than our shoulders can bear," Pastor Altmueller answered sorrowfully. "So … I will sit with your father and your sister for a while. Take the little ones onto the deck. It will do no good to kill yourself with work, as if that would make some kind of bargain with Him. Go!" he made a shooing motion at her.

Vati lifted himself out of his lethargy to say, "Yes, Magda, the boys need sunshine and fresh air — go on then."

"I'll sit and keep you company," Mrs. Helene said firmly. Overruled, Magda lifted Anna onto her hip. The two women followed the boys up the steep ladder to the open deck where Mrs. Helene spoke to her of books and embroidery patterns, and even teased her gently about her marriage prospects.

"It seems that many of the young men have realized they can double their land-claim from the Verein by marrying," Mrs. Helene pointed out.

Magda answered, "Fine — then let them marry each other." She was not in a good temper, in spite of Mrs. Helene's conversation. She was half crazed with worry and exhaustion, with the closeness of the passenger deck and the constant noise. There was never a moment when she was alone, when it was quiet. Even in the middle of the night people talked; they moaned in their sleep or chattered to their children or argued in fierce low voices with their husbands or wives.

"We are never alone!" she said to Mrs. Helene. "The noise batters me as much as that awful storm battered the ship."

"It is a very great trial for us all," Mrs. Helene agreed, with something a little less than her customary serenity. "I try and imagine myself in the parlor of our house in Gersthofen. A spring day, with the windows open, and the roses outside in my garden all abloom."

"For myself, I would kill to be alone for ten minutes," she said fiercely, as Anna laughed and reached up her arms to be picked up. Magda sighed, and hugged the child to her, so dear and alive. "I would like to sit by a river in a green field, and listen to the birds singing."

"That sounds like a lovely dream to hold on to," Mrs. Helene said, and Anna looked up at her face and asked with interest.

"Birds?" Magda thought fondly that Anna could talk very well, for a three-year old. "Ducklings?"

"Yes, my heart, ducklings and dogs and deer. We will sit by a river in a green field, and watch the ducklings and dogs and the deer … and never, never have to set foot on a ship again!"

But Magda was wrong about that, for she would indeed set foot on a ship again to cross the Atlantic. But then she would spend her days in an elegantly paneled stateroom fitted out with an electric bell to call a steward and sleep at night on a fine spring mattress with a silk coverlet. She would call on the services of a stewardess and a lady's maid and drink coffee from a fragile china cup, poured out of a silver pot, while sitting on a private promenade wrapped in fur. And all the while, she would morn anew the loss of the one man who would have shared it with her and been enormously amused by the lavish luxury of it all.

"Magda … wake up." Someone shook her arm. She turned — a lantern, the light of it dazzling her eyes for a moment. Voices murmured from the bunks around them, like chickens disturbed at night. Mrs. Helene in her nightdress, and wrapped in a fine Turkey-work shawl. Her face was in shadow and but her voice reflected deep sorrow. "Magda — the baby has died. Your sister won't give him up."

From below her bunk, the tangled voices of her sister and Hansi, of Vati and Pastor Altmueller.

"… no, he is only sleeping … you cannot take him away, he needs me, he will be hungry soon …"

"Annaliese, give Joachim to me … you need to rest. We will take care of him …"

"No … you cannot … Please, Hansi, he is only asleep …"

"She is delirious with the fever," Mrs. Helene murmured quietly to Magda. "And your mother is still so terribly ill; I think your poor father is quite distracted."

"Give him to Hansi, Annaliese my heart's love. Your mother is asleep. If the baby starts to cry, then he will wake her."

"Yes, yes, he will begin to cry … he will be hungry, then."

"Let your sister hold him for a while, then," Hansi sounded pleading.

He, and Vati, and Herr Pastor Altmueller clustered around Hansi and Liesel's bunk, Liesel crouched as far as she could get from them, a tangle of blankets around her. Her hair flew around her face. She looked a madwoman clutching the baby to her. Magda was horrified to see that one of Joachim's little arms curved stiffly outwards. He must have died some hours ago, with Liesel unknowing in her fever.

"I made her a hot drink," Helene whispered to Magda. "I put laudanum in it, to make her sleep, if you can only get her to swallow it."

"Lise," Magda took the pottery mug cup from her and sat on the edge of the bunk. She made her voice very calm and gentle. Hansi moved a little way aside to make room for her, his coffee-dark eyes frantic with worry. She moved closer towards her sister.

"Lise, listen to me … you fed him just a little while ago. Let me take him to my bed, so he can sleep with Anna. You need to rest. You are sick and we need you to be better, for the children." She gestured impatiently to the others. All but Hansi withdrew a little apart. She went on talking, kindly and soothing words, as if everything were utterly normal. As if they were girls again in Albeck, and Liesel had a toothache, or a nightmare or some such childish ill, and Magda the comforting elder sister. "I'll bring him back to you, as soon as he begins to fuss, but he'll be quiet, he is ever such a good baby."

"Yes, he is a good baby," Liesel agreed; she seemed calmer and Magda held out the cup.

"See, we put your medicine in a hot drink. You should drink before it gets too cold. Give Joachim to me. We'll smooth out the blankets so you can lie down and get a good sleep. "

Liesel hesitated, and Magda's heart seemed to stop. Almost, almost. She cooed, approvingly, "There, take it in both hands, lest the ship rocking make you spill any of it. I'll take the baby …" Liesel took the cup uncertainly in one hand and Magda gently took Joachim

away. "There's a good little lad. He's fast asleep, Liesel. I'll just tuck him in beside Anna."

The baby was cold, his flesh rigid, stiff and unyielding. Life fled with breath, many hours ago. Magda wrapped the blanket around him as if he still lived and stood up. She nodded to Hansi, who took her place, murmuring soft encouragement and smoothing down the blankets. Vati and the Altmuellers huddled at the table which ran the length of the passenger deck, a few steps away. Vati looked at her pleadingly and she slowly shook her head. Helene Altmueller sighed.

"Oh, Magda - I will help with the laying-out, if you like." She stroked the baby's head with her well-tended fingers. "Such a little mite!"

"Burial at sea," Pastor Altmueller sighed. "I had hoped not to have to conduct another such a service. It does not seem right, somehow."

Hansi quietly joined them, saying, "She is asleep now." His cheeks were wet, but his voice steady. "Thank you, Magda. I don't know what came over her. I'll take … my son now. I suppose we must tell the purser so they can make arrangements."

"'Tis a very great grief to lose one of your children," Mrs. Helene murmured, sympathetically. From the look which she and the Herr Pastor exchanged, Magda comprehended that it was a grief they both knew very well. When she slipped into her blankets beside Anna, much, much later, she wrapped her arms around the child, sleeping deep and breathing regularly, as if the feel of the living flesh of her would banish the remembrance of the baby's unresponsive limbs. She cried a little herself, for guilt that she had not much interest in little Joachim and regret that she would never see him grow into a child like Anna or the twins.

Liesel slept restlessly, tossing in a fever-nightmare for many days. She was not able to come up for the sad little rites on the mid-ship deck or comfort her husband.

"So little, so little!" said Hansi as the tiny canvas-wrapped corpse of his son vanished with hardly a splash. Suddenly his solid composure shattered and he wept unashamedly, racked with grief.

Magda impulsively put her arm around him, as if they were still children themselves. He turned towards her and bowed his head to her shoulder, while Vati wordlessly held them both. Magda wondered why she had been so impulsive; still and all, they had known each other all their lives. And he was a good and loving father, nearly as good a father as Vati.

But greater grief was yet to come and it had become plain by the time that Liesel woke to consciousness around midday, two days after little Joachim's burial. She opened her eyes and looked calmly at her sister, saying only, "Joachim is dead, isn't he?"

"Yes," Magda answered simply. "And Mutti is dying."

Hannah Vogel Steinmetz's fever burned through her, for all that they could do. No remedy from their own stores, or provided by Mrs. Helene, or out of the ship's medical cabinet had any effect. Nor did Vati's long vigil, sitting at her side, holding her hand and talking of old times in Albeck, or what a grand future they would have when the Adelsverein granted them a new farm. She smiled a little for Vati and Magda and spoke a few words when she still had the strength.

"You look so like your father," she said drowsily to Magda. A little after that, she smiled at Vati with great fondness. Then the fever took her; she never opened her eyes or spoke again. She lay hardly breathing for three days and nights, while Vati and Magda hovered and Hansi and the Altmuellers came and went as quietly as they could. At the end of three days, the thready pulse in her wrists and temple simply faded away. It was the middle of the night, when all of life's tides are at lowest ebb. Her chest ceased its slight movement. Herr Pastor Altmueller brought out a small mirror and held it before her lips and nostrils as Vati watched him. He crossed himself and said heavily, "Into thy hands we commend thy dearly beloved servant, Hannah. She is with our Savior now, Christian. It was a gentle passing, thanks to be Him."

"Gentle indeed," replied Vati. "I don't know what manner of thanks is due to him, though." He took off his glasses and scrubbed at his eyes, while Pastor Altmueller patted his shoulder. He was a kindly man, less offended by Vati's free-thinking than Vati himself assumed.

"Should I wake Margaretha… and your son-in-law?" he offered, and Vati shook his head.

"No, let them sleep a little longer. They are tired, both of them and Liesel is much weakened. Let them rest. In any case, I should like to sit alone with her for a while."

He sat so for many hours, until bells sounded for the change of watch. The passengers began to stir. Magda sat up in her bunk and saw him sitting quietly below. She climbed down silently, not wanting to disturb Hannah or her sister. Just as she opened her mouth to ask after her mother, the boatswain's mate and two sailors came clumping heavily along the deck. Magda's heart grew cold behind her ribs; there was no need to ask. Vati's devastated face held all the answer she needed, that and the boatswain's mate, saying with clumsy sympathy, "I'm sorry, sir … we must take her away then. You understand how it is."

Hanna Vogel Steinmetz was buried at sea, a canvas-shrouded corpse who vanished into the water over the *Apollo's* side as silently and as uncomplaining as she had departed this life. Vati wept openly, a bewildered and sad-faced man who looked more like a gnome than ever. The bewildered twins clung to Magda, herself overwhelmed with the unreality of it all. Surely, Mutti was not gone: this was all some hideous dream.

She would wake up in the morning and Mutti would surely be there, brisk and bossy, clattering the pots in her kitchen. But when she woke up in the dark of morning on the passenger deck the day after that strange and unceremonious funeral, she knew it was true. Mutti was gone, taking the heart out of her family and out of Vati, too. Liesel was ill and Hansi grieving silently over his own loss, and that left Magda to look after them all. She clung to her vision of resting by a quiet river, the green meadow star-sprinkled with flowers, and bird-song among the leaves overhead. It became her talisman of hope against the nightmare present, a vision that never wore thin, as she hugged Anna against her going to sleep at night.

That very day, they saw the sea-birds again, great white creatures circling the *Apollo* and dipping down into the wake thrown up afterwards.

"We must be close to land again!" Johann said hopefully. "Look, Magda - there is another one!" The boys counted three or four and one of the sailors told them that he thought they would be able to see land in a few days, and so they did, but they were all chased below again immediately that happened, so that the sailors could run up their rope ladders into the sails. They needed to move the ship about to another heading, to go west, for they had seen the shoreline a long way off. It was a thin line just at the edge of the blue ocean, tan below and green above, gradually growing more distinct, above the rolling blue water. When they were let up again, they climbed the companionway with the greatest excitement and lined the carved wooden railing in company with most of the fit passengers.

"It's very green!" Friedrich said, excitedly. "Vati, is that where our land shall be?"

"No, children — I think it shall be farther inland. This is just the coastal plain."

"It looks quite beautiful," Magda said. "But now, I think that any dry land looks beautiful to me." She wondered if there was such a river just as she had imagined, running past a meadow covered with flowers, and thought probably not, for she had built her dream around what she knew, and this Texas was a new place entirely.

"It's supposed to be quite tropical," Vati said, with a ghost of his old enthusiasm. "A veritable paradise. I shall have to begin my second letter to Simon."

In 1847, German settlers arrived on the Texas frontier.

Adelsverein - The Gathering