

*When violence, political upheaval, and the shadow of an impending war drove them out of Europe, two families set sail for the "golden land" of America. Their paths different. This is the story of the adventures that brought them together.*

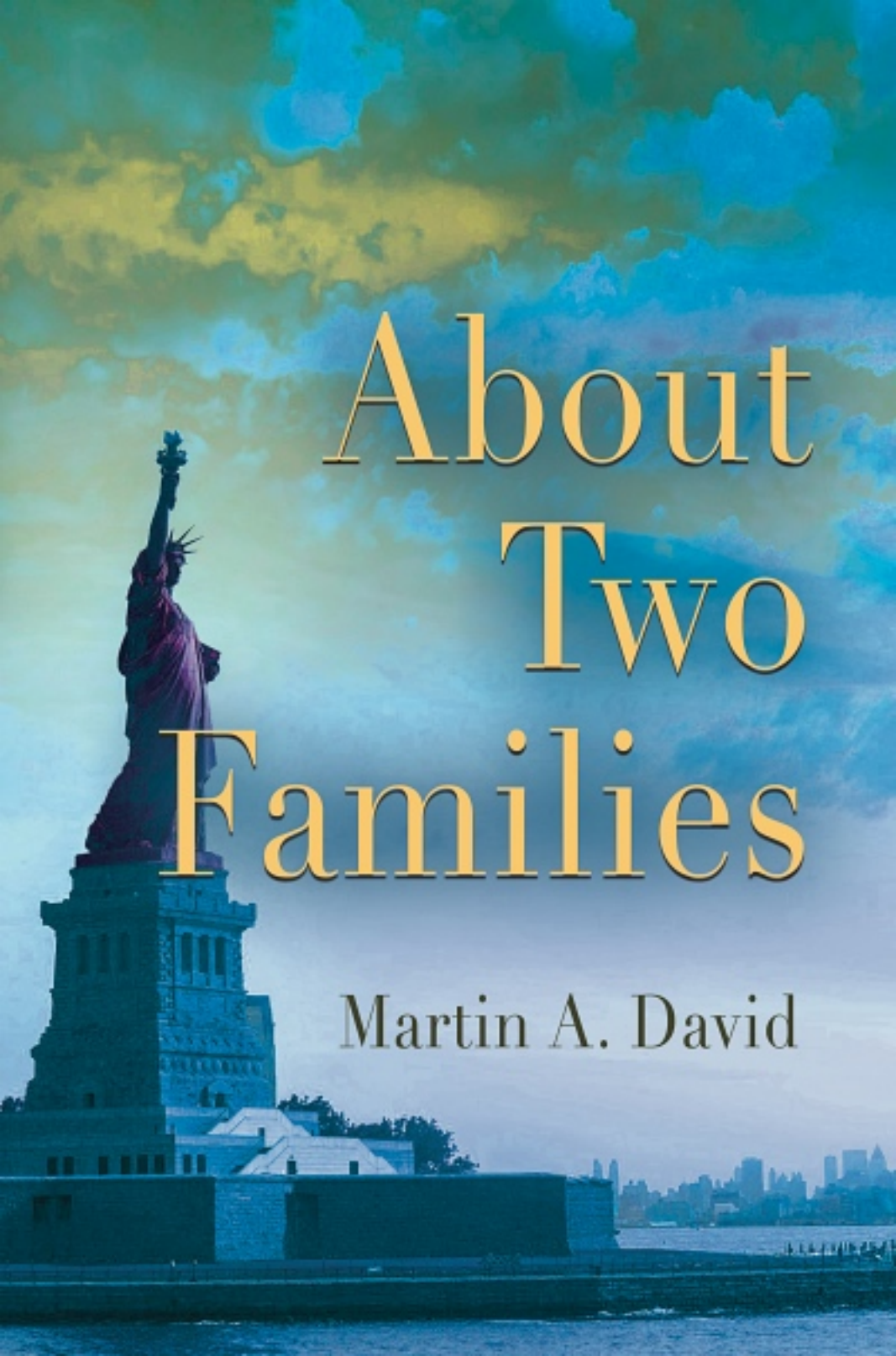
## **About Two Families**

By Martin A. David

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The background of the cover features a photograph of the Statue of Liberty on the left side, set against a dramatic sky with blue and yellow clouds. The city skyline is visible in the distance across the water.

# About Two Families

Martin A. David

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Picture a man walking on a path near a river near Suwalk, Poland. He is walking with his betrothed. They are, by the laws of his tribe, already sort of married. She is, by the laws of nature, already sort of pregnant. The man is whistling a happy tune. The woman is terrified. She is very young and still naïve. The many changes in her body have played with her emotions and her senses. She has been told that men whistle as signals to their gangs of ruffians. She imagines his friends appearing from the forest to pick her up and toss her into the tree-lined waters where she will die.

That doesn't happen. The man whose name is Avraham Rolnikovski is an honorable man. He loves the woman, whose name is Batsheva, very much. He is ecstatic to know that her beloved body is carrying their child. He has a plan to change and improve their lives. The whistling was a sign of nervousness. He had news to share with her and that is why he took her on a stroll along this deserted riverside path.

“I am going to America, but I will earn money and I will send for you.”

*“Amerikeh, das ist a lang veytkeyt. America is a long distance. I hope you will not forget me.”*

A pregnant, 17-year-old peasant woman from the Jewish section of a small, Polish town feels waves of panic as she imagines a message tucked inside that message. Perhaps it would have been better if he had drowned her in the cold water of the Czarna Hańcza River. Her neighbors already had a 16-year-old abandoned woman and her baby living in shame under their roof. Well, at least the two of them and their little bastards would have someone to talk to.

He would never “send for her.”

Before long the man will say farewell to the soon-to-be-mother of his child, he will also say farewell to his family. His mother, Miriam

had died years before. His father, Josef, a blacksmith, had always known this son would never learn to forge horseshoes or shape tools out of glowing iron, so he was not surprised by the news. He sighed and wished Avraham well on his journeys. Avraham's older brother, Mordecai is glad to see the young upstart go. One older sister, Basha, had been kicked by a horse when she was younger and she takes the news with the same confusion with which she takes all new information. The other older sister, Devorah cries and embraces her little brother.

"I hope I will see you again," she tells him.

That was in 1910. The seemingly abandoned Batsheva, resigned herself to her fate and stayed with her family. They laughed and mocked her when she told them Avraham would send for her from America. He was not the first man from their community who made that pledge before disappearing into the fantasy world of extravagant imaginings.

On her better days Batsheva believed that her beloved would live up to his promise. On her worse days she was almost suffocated by the visions conjured up by those around her.

*Batsheva dreamt of America. America was a name, a place, but not a picture. Batsheva floated like wind-blown leaves into clouds. Below her she saw a river so wide that not even the strongest boy in her village could throw a stone across it. That was the great ocean that they speak of, she thought. Her dream river was lined with smooth stones and she longed to touch them. Her dream trees reached up to catch her and pull her to earth, but she flew with their leaves too high and too fast for the branches to entangle her. The sky was warm and filled with colors. The sunshine surrounded her and caressed the life growing in her belly. After flying for what, in her dream seemed like days, Batsheva came to a city. The city, she understood, was America. The city that Batsheva knew was Suvalk. The city she flew over in her dream*

*was a hundred or more Suvalks crowded together so it seemed there was no room to walk or to breathe. She saw the long, low railway station, but in Batsheva's America-Suvalk, the station stretched many times longer. The two towers of Suvalk's Military Church reached up and tried to snag her on their crosses. She began to fall toward the intimidating and, for the Jews of her town, forbidden structure. Suddenly there were four churches, then ten, then more than she could count. Falling, she stretched out her arm and grasped a structure. It was the cross at the top of one of the dozens of towers that surrounded her. In her dream, she was in America, but stranded and alone in a dangerous place. She saw something alive on a distant tower. Sadness and panic fought in her for the right to wake her from her dream as she realized that the living thing she saw was the baby growing inside her.*

The dream, with a wide range of variations, returned numerous times but soon it was replaced by a baby. The baby, a girl baby, arrived with the assistance of a stooped old woman whose face was a map of wrinkles and warts. The darkened room in which the child met the earth was filled with the silence of one sentence, "The father is in America." Batsheva was not the first woman in the area whose swelling belly had sent a man to America, or Warsaw, or Moscow, or into the invisible land of some other disappearance.

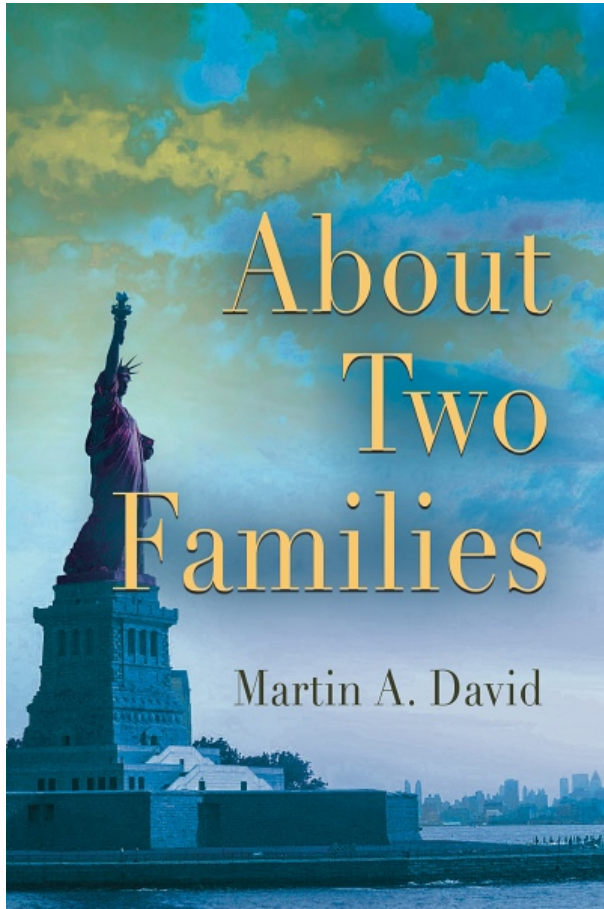
Then, a miracle happened. In early 1913 he did send for her.

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But let us leave that story for a moment and look into another tale.

There was a Jewish merchant's shop in another part of Poland. This town is called Łódź—or simply Lodz. The merchant is Menachem Kupiecki.

If the word "shop" makes you think of a large front window with signage advertising the latest bargains, please refocus your



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