



Ice cream! You scream!

Sammy learned to live by his wits on the voyage from Poland to his new home in New York City. New York is filled with new things, but Sammy's favorite is the delicious vanilla ice cream he buys from the candy store. It's not long, though, before he discovers that the vibrant, noisy streets of the city are alive with challenges. Will it be Sammy's wits or his beautiful singing voice that keep him and his new friends out of trouble?

Rona Arato has written a humorous, life-affirming story about a young boy standing up for himself amid peer pressure, prejudice, and his own desire for acceptance.

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Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Ice Cream Town

Rona Arato



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CHAPTER 1

End of a Journey

1920

Sammy leaned over the ship's rail. "Come here, come here." He motioned to a white seagull circling overhead.

The bird hovered in midair, studied the boy with beady yellow eyes, and then swooped down and snatched the meat from Sammy's outstretched hand.

"He took it! See, Max? I told you he would. Seagulls will eat anything. Even a smelly sausage," Sammy laughed, his dark eyes sparkling with mischief.

Max grinned. "Wait until Mrs. Kowalski finds her sausage missing."

"Uh-oh. I think she already has." Sammy pointed to a short, pear-shaped lady who was storming toward them across the deck. Her hands clawed at the air, as if she were swimming through it.

"You!" The woman's arm shot forward, her hand outstretched like an arrow pointed at Sammy's heart.

"Hi, Mrs. Kowalski." Sammy waved.

Max removed his cap and held it against his chest. "And how are you this beautiful morning?"

"How am I? How am I? Hungry—that is how I am. You boys should be ashamed of yourselves, stealing a woman's food."

Sammy forced back a giggle. "Why would we steal your food, Mrs. Kowalski? We are good boys."

"Good?" She shook a plump finger under Sammy's nose. "Good for nothing, that's what you are."

"And you, Max Blimsky," she added, turning to his friend. "You the Americans should send back."

"They should send you back because you smell bad," Max muttered to Mrs. Kowalski's back as she turned to greet Sammy's sister Malka.

Malka stepped between the boys and the angry woman. Sammy noticed how pale she was, with dark smudges under her eyes.

"Max, apologize to Mrs. Kowalski. And you, Sammy. Are you making trouble again? I'm sure Sammy meant no harm." Then Malka broke into a coughing fit that left her gasping for breath.

Mrs. Kowalski pulled Malka against her chest and pounded her back. When the coughing subsided, Malka sagged against the woman's shoulder.

“Malka, darling. Such a cough you cannot have on Ellis Island. You do not want the doctors to think you have consumption. People with consumption they always send back to their own country.” Mrs. Kowalski sighed deeply.

“And you two.” She gave Sammy and Max a withering look. “Malka has enough problems without you making more trouble for her.”

Mrs. Kowalski stomped away. Malka glared at her younger brother.

“Sammy. Did you steal her food?”

Sammy wrinkled his nose. “You know that smelly liverwurst she had hanging from the ceiling over her bunk?”

“Everyone knows that sausage. It stinks up the whole cabin.”

“It was making poor old Mr. Finkelman sick. So Max climbed up and cut the string.” Sammy tried to look contrite but a smile tickled his lips. “And I got rid of it.”

Malka placed her hands on her hips. “And exactly how did you get rid of it?”

“We were going to put it in there”—Sammy pointed to a wooden toolbox near the railing—“but...”

“But what?”

“We were trying to open the box, and the ship tilted.” Sammy made a swooping motion with his arms.

“Then I slipped and hit the rail,” said Max.

“And the sausage flew out of his hands.” Sammy pointed

toward the water.

“And then?” Malka was still staring at Sammy but a smile had replaced her frown.

“And then,” Max opened his arms wide, “a seagull grabbed it in its beak and flew away.”

“That is what happened, Malka. Really.” said Sammy.

“Oy, Sammy. What am I going to do with you? And you, Max.” Malka shook her head and a coppery curl danced against her cheek. “Go back to your mother so she can worry.”

“Look! Look!” a man standing behind them shouted. “The Statue of Liberty!” Suddenly everyone on deck crowded up to the ship’s rail. Men shouted, women cried, and the man who had first spotted the statue hoisted a small boy onto his shoulders.

“See, Gino? See how she holds her torch? She is welcoming us to America.”

The little boy clapped his hands.

Sammy threw his arms around Malka’s waist. “We are here, Malka. We are finally in America!”

“Yes.” His sister smiled. “And once we are in New York, you can drive Papa crazy. He will have his hands full, but I suppose he can take care of you.”

Sammy’s smile faded. How would Papa take care of them? While he, Mama, and Malka were starving because there was no food in their village, Papa was safe and well-fed in America. After the war, while they waited for Papa

to send them steamship tickets, Mama and Malka got sick with the flu. Then Mama died. In his head, Sammy knew that none of this was his father's fault. But in his heart, he still blamed his father for their suffering.

Sammy and Max watched two fat tugboats attach ropes to the steamship to pull it into port.

"How can those little boats pull this big ship?" Sammy said.

"I'm little and I can pull anything. See?" Max held up his arms and flexed his muscles.

Max was eleven, a year older than Sammy with light brown hair, brown eyes, and a wicked grin. He was Sammy's height but wider, with muscled arms and hands made strong from digging the soil on his father's farm.

"Can you pull that?" Sammy pointed across the deck to a cart loaded with baggage.

"C'mon." Max motioned for Sammy to follow him. When they got to the cart, Max grasped the handle.

"Sammy! Max!" Malka stepped in front of them. "Stop that. Sammy, come downstairs. We have to get our things."

"Yes, Malka." Sammy sighed. "See you in New York, Max."

Sammy and Malka climbed down into a steerage section of the ship. After the fresh air on deck, the stink of overcrowded sleeping quarters choked them. The smell of vomit, unwashed bodies, filthy clothes, and overflowing slop buckets made breathing unbearable. They had spent

ten days in this airless dungeon. Ten days of eating dried fish, salami, onions, and hard bread that Malka had brought for the trip.

Sammy packed his bag. "Malka, things will be better here."

"Can they be worse?" Malka asked, covering her mouth and nose with her hand. She checked their bunks. "Do we have everything?"

Sammy inspected their parcels: a canvas bag filled with his clothes, Malka's battered valise tied together with a thick rope, and Sammy's good-luck box—a red and gold tin chocolate box that his mother had brought back from a long-ago visit to Warsaw. Sammy carried that box everywhere. He slept with it under the bunched-up shirt he used as a pillow.

Someone had stolen Malka's good silk purse on the third night of their journey. But no one was going to steal Sammy's personal treasures: the green speckled stone from the river that ran through his town of Logov, the English word book that Papa had sent from America, and the small picture of his mother taken the year he was born. He opened the box and studied the image of a dark-eyed young woman in a white blouse with ruffles that tucked up under her chin.

"Hi, Mama," he whispered. "We are in America. Soon we will see Papa."

"Sammy!"

"I'm coming, Malka." Sammy kissed the picture,

returned it to the box, and snapped the lid shut. He hoisted the bag over his shoulder. Malka took their suitcase, and together they clambered up the stairs and out of steerage for the very last time.

After the ship docked in New York Harbor, Sammy and Malka waited for their turn to board the ferry that would take them to Ellis Island.

Malka smiled. "See, Sammy? We are really in America." She pointed to the tops of the tall buildings beyond the docks.

"The first-class and second-class passengers, they are in America," said a man standing beside them.

"Why is that, Mr. Kowalski?" said Malka.

"Because for them, the inspectors came on board the ship. They were finished many hours ago. Poor third-class passengers like us; we have to go to Ellis Island, where they will decide if we are fit to enter America."

"Come, Abraham." Mrs. Kowalski stepped up and took his arm. "We do not want to miss the ferryboat." She turned to Malka. "Remember what I told you, Malka darling. Whatever happens, do not cough during the inspection! And you," She glared down at Sammy. "Take care of your sister. And"—she shook her finger in his face—no more pranks!"

Sammy pulled off his cap and held it over his heart. "I promise, Mrs. Kowalski."

Sammy looked around the crowded dock. It seemed

to him that the entire world had arrived in America on the very same day. People moved like bubbles in a wave, bumping into each other, heads disappearing then bobbing up again and rising above the crowd. Everyone clutched bundles or valises. Women pushed. Babies cried. Everyone was in a hurry to become American. He searched for Max but could not find him in the crowd.

Finally it was Sammy and Malka's turn to board the ferry. A man in uniform blew a whistle and motioned for them to move up the gangplank. A short time later, Sammy stared over the boat's rail at the castle-shaped building on an island just beyond the Statue of Liberty. He thought, *That is Ellis Island, where our new lives will begin. Soon we will be Americans.*

Then a voice deep inside him whispered, *I hope.*