



A NEW HOME. A NEW ADVENTURE. BUT WILL AMERICA BE EVERYTHING GUSTAVE HOPED?

Gustave, a twelve-year-old Jewish boy, has made it to America at last. He no longer has to worry about being captured by the Nazis.

But life is not easy in America, either. Gustave feels out of place in New York. His clothes are all wrong, he can barely speak English, and he is worried about his best friend, Marcel, who is in grave danger back home in France. Then there is September Rose, the most interesting girl in school, who for some reason doesn't seem to want to be friends with him.

Gustave is starting to notice that not everyone in America is treated equally, and that his new country isn't everything he expected. But he isn't giving up. . . .

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YEARLING

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On the Atlantic Ocean
January 1942

Gustave had the dream again the last night on board the ship. The Nazi soldier was shoving his friend, Marcel, forcing him farther and farther away down a long, dark Paris street. As they turned the corner, Marcel stumbled and looked back, his eyes glistening. This time Marcel raised his arm, and before the soldier yanked it down, Gustave saw a flash of something yellow.

“Au secours!” Help! Marcel called. In the dream, Gustave tried to run toward his friend, but the air was heavy, and then Gustave was swimming, doing the breaststroke, frog-kicking his way across the Atlantic to France, yet the waves kept pushing him backward, pushing him toward America. He was struggling to keep his head above the waves, but when he tried to shout, salt water rushed at him, filling his mouth and lungs.

Gustave cried out, waking himself with a jerk when he heard his own strangled voice. He lay in the dark, gasping, his heart pounding, feeling the ship, the *Carvalho Araujo*, heaving up and down. His mind, half-asleep still, churned like the rough sea. What was that yellow thing in Marcel's hand? A feather, he suddenly realized. That yellow feather he and Marcel hadn't been able to find in a Boy Scout scavenger hunt one day back when they all lived in Paris. Marcel was trying to pass the feather to him. It felt desperately important.

But the ship rocked and creaked, and now Gustave was waking up all the way, his mind clearing. That scavenger hunt was long over. Gustave was on his way to America, and Marcel was still somewhere in Europe, no one knew where, far away now. No matter how much Marcel cried out, Gustave couldn't help him.

Gustave was shaking and drenched with sweat. He could feel the others still sleeping thickly around him. Papa was in the bunk below him, breathing evenly. An unpleasant stranger, Monsieur Lambert, who was their temporary cabinmate, snored loudly across from him on the other lower bunk. In the upper bunk across from Gustave, his cousin, Jean-Paul, turned over, the blankets rustling. Just a year and a half ago, in Paris, it had been the three of them against the world, Gustave, Jean-Paul, and Marcel. In Boy Scouts together, in school, hanging out in the afternoons, it was all for one and one for all, the Three Musketeers. Now there were only two of them, Gustave and Jean-Paul, sailing away from Europe and the

Nazis and heading, with their families, toward an inconceivable new life in America.

Gustave stretched his leg across the space between the bunks and nudged his cousin with his foot.

"Qu'est-ce qui t'arrive?" What's going on? Jean-Paul was instantly awake. He sat up abruptly and whacked his head on the low ceiling. "Ow!"

The men below were awake now.

"Shut *up!*" Even half-asleep, Monsieur Lambert sounded as if he wanted to strangle someone.

"Boys?" Papa's voice was weary. "What's the matter?"

Through the dirty porthole, Gustave could see a dim light in the sky. "I just . . . I wanted to be up early. Let's all go up on deck and be the first to see America."

"We won't be there for hours!" Papa said groggily. He turned over and went back to sleep. But across the aisle, Jean-Paul pushed off his blankets.

Gustave reached for his clothes at the end of his bed and wiggled into them, then scrambled down and fumbled in the darkness under Papa's bunk for his shoes.

"Don't you dare come back until we're awake!" Monsieur Lambert grunted as Jean-Paul pushed the cabin door closed behind them.

"Race you to the top deck!" Jean-Paul whispered, starting to run before he finished saying it.

"No fair!" Gustave sprinted after him down the corridor, up the winding stairway to the first deck, and across the inside of the ship. He squeezed past Jean-Paul on the first set of stairs, but he couldn't help hesitating for a split

second at the captain's news board outside the salon, and Jean-Paul pushed ahead of him and raced up the second flight of stairs.

"Beat you!" Jean-Paul shouted triumphantly as he shoved open the door to the top deck. A bitterly cold wind slammed into them. Gustave hurriedly buttoned his flapping coat and turned up his collar. The sun was rising behind the ship, a cold, distant yellow ball in the eastern sky. No other passengers were on deck yet, just one yawning sailor on watch.

"We're the first people awake," Jean-Paul exulted, panting and leaning forward over the railing. "We're going to see America first!"

The company of his cousin and the daylight sparkling on the waves were chasing away Gustave's dream. A thick band stretched across the horizon. "There!" Gustave pointed. "I see land!"

"That's fog."

Jean-Paul was right. A few minutes later, the gray band dissolved into nothingness.

"I wish we were sailing right into New York, not Baltimore." Jean-Paul yawned widely. "I want to see the Statue of Liberty."

New York. At the name, Gustave's brain belatedly processed the headline he had seen on the captain's news board. NAZI U-BOATS TORPEDO SHIP OFF MONTAUK POINT, NEW YORK. Images of people struggling in the cold, dark waves flashed into Gustave's head, images of a ship in flames. No wonder the New York harbor was closed.

Gustave scanned the ocean apprehensively, some-

thing he did every few minutes whenever he was on deck. Nothing visible at the ship's stern. No signs of a Nazi U-boat on the port side. No air tubes or periscopes from a submarine sticking above the waves to starboard. None beyond the prow.

Jean-Paul stamped his feet to warm them. "Do you think you'll like the United States when we get there?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, it'll be safer than France is right now."

"But what if they don't like people like us there either?"

"We'll be far away from the Nazis. They won't hate Jews." Gustave stopped, unpleasant memories floating up in his mind. Could that really be true?

"Far away from my father too, though." Jean-Paul's face clouded. His father, a French soldier, was in a German camp for French prisoners of war.

"But he'll come join you when he gets released. He knows where we're going."

"I guess. You're lucky you started learning English already. We hardly learned anything in Paris after the Nazis took over."

"Yeah, well, I can't say that much."

"Remember that Tintin book you had about America, where he gets captured by that Blackfoot chief?" Jean-Paul laughed. "Did you bring it?"

Gustave hesitated. "That one was Marcel's."

Jean-Paul fell silent, and his eyes went blank. Gustave was starting to recognize that look. It meant that Jean-Paul had gone off in his head, somewhere far away. These

days, he sometimes stayed like that for a long time, not answering if anyone talked to him. He hadn't been like that before the war. The change had happened sometime in the year and a half that they had been apart, Jean-Paul still in Paris with his mother and sister while Gustave and his parents were hiding in Saint-Georges, a tiny village in the countryside.

Gustave frowned at his unseeing cousin and then looked back at the sea. Jean-Paul wouldn't be any help in watching for U-boats now.

"I'm starving," Jean-Paul burst out suddenly. "Let's go get breakfast."

"You go. I'll keep watch."

"All right." Jean-Paul ran off.

Gustave watched him go and then turned his eyes away, over the port side of the ship. He glimpsed movement, and his muscles tensed. But it was something wonderful. A porpoise leapt out of the water and crested. Then another emerged from the sea right behind it, and the two of them raced the ship, flashing up over the waves, slipping down into the dark water, and leaping up again, joyfully, into the sunlight.

As the porpoises moved away, getting smaller and smaller against the horizon, Gustave realized that he had stopped scanning the sea. He shifted his eyes to starboard, and his heart jolted in alarm. There, jutting up from the glittering water, was a dark tube with a funny-shaped top.

Periscope. The word flashed through his mind as if he

were hearing someone say it. It was the periscope from a Nazi submarine. He tried to shout, but his voice wasn't working. For a long moment his feet wouldn't unstick from the deck. Then he was running, slipping once and righting himself.

"Help! Germans!" he managed to cry out, but the deck was empty now, and the wind swallowed his words. He darted to the stairs, glancing back at the periscope. It had shifted and was changing shape. A pair of wings stretched out, the periscope became the long neck of a cormorant, and the dark bird lifted up and flapped away over the water.

Gustave collapsed into embarrassed laughter, feeling it going on and on, strangely out of his control. When the laughter finally stopped, he drew in a few shuddering breaths. Luckily, the deck was still empty. No one had heard him shouting or seen him laughing like a crazy person. He rubbed his eyes with shaky fingers.

After a half hour or so, Jean-Paul thudded against the railing to Gustave's left, holding a partly eaten pastry.

"*Salut!*" he said, cheerful again. "Your turn for breakfast. Hey, while you're there, get me another one of these."

"Are our parents awake yet?"

"They're in the dining room with the other French passengers. When I left, everyone was talking about how they snuck extra money out of Europe and complaining about how you could starve on the little you're allowed to bring to America. Monsieur Benoit announced that 'the best hiding place is in plain sight.' He *is* pretty smart. Nobody but a jeweler would have thought of prying off

his old suitcase corners, making new ones out of gold, and painting them black. That's a neat trick!"

Gustave shifted nervously. "Papa didn't tell . . ."

"No. Your mother elbowed him when he opened his mouth. My fingers are still sore from rolling those bills around the corset bones."

"Mine too." Their family had several black market American bills, sewn into Maman's corset. Those and the two uncut diamonds buried deep in the sawdust of her pincushion were enough to keep them alive for about six months.

"*Dépêche-toi! Hurry!* They only serve breakfast for another half hour."

Gustave hesitated. "You'll watch for U-boats while I'm gone?"

"Of course! Go! And don't forget my pastry!"

Gustave's parents were just getting up from breakfast. He gobbled down some bread with plum compote, grabbed a sweet roll, and ran back up to the top deck. He handed the pastry to Jean-Paul, who stuck it into his coat pocket. Several sailors were now on deck, keeping watch. The ocean was calm, and light sparkled on the water. Finally, there was something that looked like land, a thick, dark strip bobbing above the horizon, disappearing, then bobbing up again, growing more and more solid.

"*That's America!*" Gustave shouted.

"Where?" Jean-Paul searched the horizon frantically. "Yes! That must be it!"

Soon the other passengers were gathering on both decks, squinting in the cold sunshine, dressed in their

best clothes for the arrival. Gustave's parents and Aunt Geraldine made their way through the crowd and joined him and Jean-Paul at their spot by the railing. Elderly Monsieur Benoit, the friendly jeweler from Lyon, who had been to the United States before, was with them. As a wave surged against the ship, Papa clutched Gustave's shoulder for support. His left leg was shorter than his right and slightly twisted, the lingering result of childhood polio. His bad leg had made it hard for him to balance during the sea voyage, but it had also kept him out of the French army. So he was here now, not in a German prisoner-of-war camp like Jean-Paul's father. Gustave flushed, glad that Papa was here, but also ashamed of being glad that Papa was free when Uncle David wasn't. He squeezed to the side to let Papa grip the railing. As he did, Giselle, Jean-Paul's little sister, slipped in next to Papa.

"Not so near the edge!" Aunt Geraldine gasped, clutching Giselle's dress and pulling her back. The shapes of buildings were starting to form on the horizon. No Statue of Liberty holding up her torch to welcome them, but it was definitely a city, definitely the United States.

"There it is," Maman said in a choked voice. "America."

"The land of freedom!" exclaimed Monsieur Benoit. "Where 'all men are created equal.'"

"No more laws making trouble for Jews," murmured Aunt Geraldine. "No Nazis."

"Finally!" Papa said, his deep voice cracking. "We're safe."

It was hard to believe, after they had barely escaped from Europe with their lives. Gustave watched as if America might disappear, might turn out to be a mirage, might sprout wings and fly away like the cormorant. But it was real.

Where all men are created equal, Gustave thought. His heart swelled in his chest. At least Jean-Paul was here now, even though he was different from the way he used to be. At least he was here and safe. If only Marcel were on the ship and could see this too, Gustave thought, sharp grief piercing him and mingling with his excitement.

A man standing by the railing was crying, quietly but openly, dabbing at his face with a white handkerchief. Crackly music boomed over the ship's loudspeaker. "O say, can you see . . ."

The few Americans on the ship began to sing their national anthem, and then several foreign voices picked up the tune, the different accents blending. Other passengers murmured prayers. After nineteen months of Nazi persecution, after travelling from France through Spain and Portugal, after the long, cramped, seasick weeks aboard the ship from Lisbon, they had made it safely across the Atlantic, untouched by U-boats. They really were leaving Europe and the Nazis behind. They really were coming to a land of freedom, of equality. Blinking the blurriness out of his eyes, Gustave stared at the skyline of the city coming more and more sharply into view, as their ship, the *Carvalho Araujo*, steamed forward into Baltimore harbor, forward to America.