1c- From Germany to the US

Her grandfather, Stefan Blau, was only thirteen when he ran away from his hometown in Germany one rainy November night in 1894. Convinced he lived in the most fascinating time possible—an age of transformation and discovery—he'd felt restless in Burgdorf. Too many traditions. Too many restrictions. America, he believed, was the country where people brought about changes instead of resisting them.

But his parents didn't want to listen when he read to them about immigrants earning fortunes, about inventions, about gold in the hills; they didn't know that America had grafted itself to his mind so tenaciously that he had dreams of it every single night, dreams of an odd and magnificent landscape that fused what he had culled from various books, a landscape inhabited by buffaloes and by buildings so tall they pierced the clouds. When Stefan bought an English dictionary and memorized forty new words each day, his parents shook their heads and told him they were not about to leave Germany, and when he suggested he'd make the passage alone and send for them and his sister once he'd made his fortune, they smiled. "What a child he still is," they said to each other.

They were asleep when he left. When he reached Rotterdam and was unable to trade labor for passage to America, he started toward Amsterdam and walked through cold nights and days, resting in barns or churches only when he was too chilled and exhausted to keep moving. But he never lost his enthusiasm because with each step—so he reminded himself—he was getting closer to America. Besides, people helped him along the way as if to make certain that he'd really get there.

One dawn at sea Stefan awoke early and couldn't get back to sleep because he started thinking about the good jacket his father had sewn for him in his tailor shop, and how it must have hurt his parents that he hadn't taken it along. He worried more about that jacket than about the note he'd left for his parents, telling them he was going to America, and it wouldn't be until he was a father and his own son, Tobias, would run from him in anger, that he'd begin to understand how his leaving must have devastated his parents.

Once he thought about the jacket, he remembered other items he'd left behind, especially the telescope his mother had given him for his seventh birthday. She'd set it up for him by the kitchen window next to the larger telescope that used to belong to her grandfather whose name had also been Stefan. His mother knew everything about stars and planets because her grandfather had shown her how to draw star charts when she was a girl. "You can inherit interests the same way you inherit money," she'd told Stefan and his sister, Margret, and she'd taught them about the stars long before they'd learned the alphabet.

To escape his uneasiness and the stale air of the sailors' quarters, Stefan climbed the stairs to the promenade deck, bracing against the icy fog. All sky was as gray as the sea, blurring the horizon. In the last few days he'd seen whales and flying fish, waves as tall as his parents' house, but now the gray made everything seem flat, though he could feel the ship heaving in the waves.

From *The vision of Emma Blau*, Ursula Hegi, 2000