

## MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

A GAUNT, sad-eyed Jewish youth was telling his story to the passport inspector at Rotterdam, Holland. He was born in Bessarabia, he said. There had been a terrible pogrom. He and a few of his friends had escaped to Shanghai, China. It was hard for them to live there, and the boy, Yussel Pelsky, made up his mind to go to the United States without waiting for a quota visa.

"For a hundred dollars," Brundy said, "I'll get you passage on a boat bound for Argentina. From there it will be easy for you to get into the United States."

One hundred dollars! Yussel only just managed to get it together. But he did scrape it up, gave it to Brundy, said a broken good-bye to Rachel, his sweetheart. She would wait for him, she said, no matter how long.

The captain looked curiously at the youth as Brundy brought him aboard. "You're always sending me weaklings!" he explained.

Yussel asked, "Captain, you are sure that this boat, she go to Argentina?"

"This boat, she go anywhere we steer her," the captain mocked.

Brundy laughed too, and slipped away. Yussel wondered what was so funny. He found out as soon as the ship sailed. She was not bound for the Argentine but for Rotterdam. And Brundy had paid nothing. The slim young boy, who had never even been at sea before, had to work his passage. He was sick and miserable. And when the ship docked at Rotterdam the captain put him off.

The passport inspector looked at him thoughtfully. He was sorry for the lad, but there was nothing he could do. "You can't stay in Holland," he said. "You've no passport."

"Then what shall I do, Mr. Inspector?"

"Ordinarily we'd ship you back to the country of your birth, but you were born in Bessarabia, which is no more. Roumania won't own you and China won't have you."

"Then—where *can* I go?" Yussel stammered despairingly.

"That's your problem. I only know that you can't stay here.

our sailor's visa expires in two days.

Yussel pleaded desperately for more time. He had an uncle in the United States, he said. He didn't know where he was, but if he had time he was sure he could locate him. "His name, like mine, is Pelsky. I will find him. I *must* find him. Only let me try!" he begged.

The inspector relented. "It's very irregular, Mr. Pelsky, but I'll give you one month's additional stay. After that—"

The New York City directory lists a number of Pelskys. In the fall of 1930 a letter came to each of them from Rotterdam. It was a hoax, most of them thought, a racket of some sort. After a casual or suspicious glance, they dropped it into the wastebasket. That is, all but one.

One man read the letter thoughtfully.

"Dear Mr. Pelsky:

*I: the United States some place is living my only relative, an uncle. His last name is Pelsky, like my own. In Bessarabia he was known as Chaim Pelsky. If you are my uncle,*

*then in the name of God, please help me. I am Yussel Pelsky, whose mother and father were killed in the pogrom. I went to Shanghai . . ."*

He read on to the end of the pitiful letter. Turned back and looked at the date. It had arrived two weeks earlier, while he was away on a business trip. Already the months' grace was nearly up.

He answered the letter immediately, but no further word came from Yussel Pelsky. He wrote to the immigration authorities at Rotterdam, but they could shed no light on the matter. Yussel Pelsky had disappeared the day before his month of grace was up. Perhaps, they suggested, he had stowed away on some ship, bound God knew where. Or, perhaps, he had found his uncle.

And that was the last ever heard of Yussel Pelsky. And the man who had answered that cry for help knew that whatever had happened to him, he had not found his only living relative.

For he was Yussel Pelsky's uncle.—Adapted from the "Old Letters" Program, Mutual Broadcasting System.

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