The background of the cover is a vibrant sunset over the ocean. The sky transitions from a bright yellow near the horizon to a deep orange and red at the top. In the foreground, the white railing of a ship's deck is visible, with a person in a dark jacket and a red hat leaning over it, looking out at the sea. Several birds, likely terns, are shown in flight against the sunset sky. The title text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

THE
DOUBLE
CROSSING

SYLVIA PATIENCE

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FIRST EDITION

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HAMBURG SATURDAY, MAY 13

DAVID

“THE SON OF A JEW and an Aryan is an abomination,” the Director had said when he kicked me out of school with all the Jewish students. His ugly words stuck with me. I thought about them while we stood in the customs line watching Nazi inspectors shout rudely at passengers ahead of us.

“David and Rebekah let’s be quiet and not attract attention,” my father whispered to me and my sister. “These customs inspectors are not friendly.”

The line wound through a huge shed that looked like a warehouse. Once we got past customs, we could board the ship to Cuba. The other passengers were mostly quiet and probably nervous like us, but the high shed roof echoed with shouted questions of the Nazi inspectors. They scowled and yelled while examining passports stamped with a red letter “J” for Jew, like ours. If they found something they didn’t like, they could stop us from getting on the ship.

The Double Crossing

The smell of the Elbe River blew in from outside. Even though it stank a little of diesel and sewage, it reminded me of good times when Papa and I used to come down to the river to watch birds. I tried not to think about leaving our home in Hamburg to go live in a strange foreign country until Herr Hitler was gone.

Rebekah, my eight-year-old sister, held tight to our mother's hand. She whispered, "Mama, I'm scared."

"Don't worry, *Maus*. We'll be on the ship soon."

I thought Rebekah was getting big to be called mouse, but she was the youngest, the baby.

Papa reached over to smooth Rebekah's hair, his eyes still on the inspectors.

I was thirteen and not about to say I was scared. Even if maybe I was. I looked around at the other passengers. Some of them were traveling alone, mostly men. And some had shaved heads. Suddenly an inspector yelled at one of those men and a couple of guards dragged him out.

"Papa," I said into his ear, "What's happening? Why are they taking that man away? Why is his head shaved?"

Papa leaned close. "They shave men's heads in the camps. Now hush and don't say anything."

I knew about the concentration camps. Prisoners that came back told stories of lice and rats, of being starved and beaten, some people killed for no reason.

One of the men noticed me staring at him. I looked away quickly.

Finally, it was our turn. The inspector looked at us like we were bugs. I didn't think we had anything we weren't supposed to, but still ... he could stop us from getting on the ship. He messed our things up, digging through our suitcases, tossing everything around.

All I had in my suitcase was my clothes and binoculars. When the inspector found Papa's binoculars and mine, he pulled them out. "What are you going to use these for?"

My heart just about fell into my stomach. Please, please don't take them.

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“We’re bird watchers,” Papa said. “We hope to see new birds on the voyage, and in Cuba.”

“Hmmp!” The officer held both pairs of binoculars in his hands, like he was weighing them. The Nazi party badge caught my eye, pinned to his uniform sleeve. “I’ll let you keep them, but you’d better not watch anything besides birds. There are Gestapo on board and if they find you spying, you’ll be brought back and severely punished.”

“Yes, sir.” Papa’s face was red. I could see he was barely holding in his anger. I clenched my fists and didn’t look at the inspector. So there were going to be Gestapo, Nazi secret police, on board the *St. Louis*.

At last we made it out of customs. None of our things had been taken. I could breathe again. We followed the crowd onto the quay. Rain had started falling while we were inside. The *St. Louis* towered before us, like a black and white cliff.

I tucked my hands in my jacket pockets and hunched my shoulders against the cold. A band under an awning played one of those oompah tunes. Passengers and their families and friends stood in a crowd, most wearing overcoats, and holding umbrellas. I saw a lot of other boys and girls boarding with their families. Maybe I’d make friends on the ship. At home the other boys had begun to stay away from me. They called me *schmutziger Jüde*, “dirty Jew,” even though only my father was Jewish. And we weren’t religious.

People hugged and cried as passengers said good-bye to relatives staying behind. We didn’t have to say any sad good-byes to anyone. Our only relatives, Papa’s sister and her family, were already in England. Mama had family in Germany, but I’d never met them. They wouldn’t have anything to do with us because Mama married a Jew.

Crew members rushed around, loading supplies. Gulls wheeled, landed, and took off again. I heard a familiar *Kee-har* call and looked up to see a Black Headed Gull.

The Double Crossing

A man stood on the gangway with a camera, taking photos of passengers as they started up to the ship. Some of them hid their faces. All his shots seemed to be of people who looked poor. He was ignoring the nicely dressed passengers and the little children.

Another man, this one short and wearing an officer's uniform, pushed his way down the gangplank to the photographer. He acted like he was in charge and spoke angrily. He said something to the photographer, who said something back. I couldn't hear what they were saying until the officer shouted, "Get off my ship!"

The first man ignored him and started to take another picture.

"Get off—or I'll personally throw you overboard. And you can report that to the Propaganda Minister!" The officer shoved him.

That got him. The photographer stomped away, holding tight to his camera.

Papa turned to Mama. "That must be the captain. Good for him. I bet that man was taking pictures for more anti-Jewish propaganda."

I looked for the Nazi Party badge on the captain's uniform sleeves but I didn't see one. He had a little mustache, like Hitler's, but lots of men did.



When we got to the top of the gangway, a sailor in a white jacket greeted us. "Welcome aboard! May I show you to your cabins?"

He talked to us with respect, so different from the officers in the customs shed. Maybe things would be better on the ship.

"Here, let me carry those for you, ladies." The crewman reached out to take Rebekah and Mama's suitcases.

Rebekah giggled at being called a lady.

"Thank you." Mama handed over the bags.

We followed the crewman down two flights of stairs and through a hallway to our cabins in tourist class on the D deck. The thrum of the engines sounded louder the farther down we went. I

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was sharing a cabin with Rebekah. Our parents were next door. I looked around at twin bunks, one on each side of the room, an armchair and dresser with a mirror, and wood-paneled walls. Pretty nice.

“This one’s mine!” Rebekah threw her suitcase onto one of the beds. She ran to look at the tiny bathroom. I peeked over her shoulder while she pulled back the shower curtain.

“It’s perfect. Can you believe it’s all ours? Come on! Let’s go out. I want to see where the games are, and the swimming pool.”

“This isn’t a pleasure cruise,” I almost said. We were running for our lives. Germany was our country. Hamburg was home. But since the Nazis smashed Papa’s dentist office on *Kristallnacht*, he couldn’t work. Rebekah and I were kicked out of school even though we weren’t really Jewish because Mama wasn’t. We were forced to leave Germany.

Still, Rebekah’s excitement about the ship was contagious. We might as well try to enjoy ourselves.

“Okay.” I smiled for the first time that day. “Let’s explore. We have to tell Mama we’re going.” I grabbed my binoculars from my suitcase. They were good ones. Papa gave them to me for my birthday when I turned thirteen.

We climbed up and down staircases, wandered through hallways, peeked into the tourist class restaurant, or *saloon*, as we heard the sailors call it, and even the first-class dining saloon. Everything shone, all white tablecloths and chandeliers. A luxury ship, just like the brochure said.

We’d seen most of the ship and were looking around the upper deck. Rebekah, sounding disappointed, said, “I thought there was going to be a swimming pool here at the back. Where is it?”

A steward nearby must have heard her because he came over to us, smiling. “You heard right, young lady. We’ll erect the swimming pool right here and fill it with water once we get into the warmer Gulf Stream. The name for this part of the ship, the back, is the stern, and the direction is aft. You’ll soon learn the terms.”

The Double Crossing

The ship wasn't supposed to leave until eight o'clock in the evening. The upper deck where we were was called the A deck. It was a perfect place to watch some of the gulls wheeling above us. I went to the rail and lifted my binoculars. There were more Black Headed Gulls, which are easy to recognize by their black heads, and some larger birds, probably Herring Gulls. I got involved in watching them and trying to identify species. Leg color. Bill color.

"Are you going to just stand here and look at birds now?" Rebekah grumbled.

I'd forgotten her. "Oh, sorry. Just give me a minute."

"That's okay. I'm going back to the cabin to get ready for dinner. Don't forget about dinner." She wagged her finger at me.

"I won't. Don't get lost." She'd be alright. She was eight, and she wouldn't get off the ship.

Rebekah rolled her eyes and skipped away.

I raised my binoculars again to look at the circling birds. When one dove into the water and came up with a small fish, others mobbed it and tried to steal the prize. Pigeons as well as gulls strutted around the quay, pecking at scraps.

A man's voice startled me. "Nice pair of Busch binoculars. I have the same model."

I turned and saw the officer with the mustache, the one who'd chased the photographer away. He was shorter than me!

"Thank you, sir. Are you the captain?"

"I am. Captain Gustav Schroeder, at your service." He held out his hand.

The HAPAG line insignia shone on his uniform. I could clearly see now that he wasn't wearing a Nazi party badge. I took the captain's hand and we shook, like two grown men.

"David Jantzen, sir."

"Welcome aboard the MS *St. Louis*, David. I see you're interested in birds."

"Yes. I love watching them. I'm learning to tell the gulls apart."

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Captain Schroeder pointed to one of the large gulls down on the quay. “Do you know that one? It’s a Herring Gull. And look! Here’s a Caspian Tern flying over.” He pointed to a large gull-like bird skimming above our heads. I aimed the binoculars at the bird with its long, bright orange bill, black cap and black legs.

“I wasn’t sure about the Herring Gull, but I’ve seen Caspian Terns before. My father’s a bird watcher too. He gave me the binoculars.”

“Ah! He and I will have to have a talk. I have several books on ornithology, the science of birds. It’s my hobby. Perhaps you’d like to see them sometime.”

“Yes, sir. I would. Thank you.”

A bell rang nearby. Another white-jacketed sailor walked toward us along the deck, swinging a hand bell.

“The steward is giving the signal for dinner,” the captain said. “You’d better join your family now.”

“I will. But can I ask you a question about birds?”

“If it’s quick. I have to get back to the bridge.”

“Will gulls follow the ship all the way across the ocean? Will we see different birds out there?”

The captain laughed. “That’s two questions. Let’s talk tomorrow. I tour the ship in the morning but come find me on the bridge deck after lunch. Tell Leo, my steward, I invited you.” Smiling, he turned to go.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sylvia Patience has written two other books for middle grade readers: *Toto's Tale and True Chronicle of Oz*, the beloved Oz adventure retold from the point of view of Dorothy's little dog, and *The Weaver's Daughter*, which follows a young girl's immigration journey from Mexico. *The Weaver's Daughter* received a 2020 Moonbeam Children's Book award.

Several of Sylvia's short fairy tales have won prizes in the international Hans Christian Andersen contest in Sestri Levante, Italy, including first prize for a foreign entry in 2022. Her poems have appeared in *The Porter Gulch Review*, *Calyx Journal*, and poetry anthologies. Sylvia is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

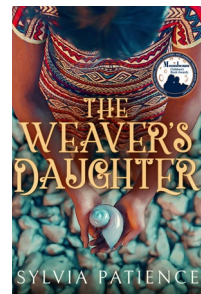
Sylvia lives in Santa Cruz, California with her family and small dog, where she enjoys seeing the variety of birds found along the coast, in the wetlands, and the mountains. You can find out more about her world and works at her website, sylviapatience.com.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

THE WEAVER'S DAUGHTER

*Sometimes people disappear into the North
and are never heard from again.*

2020 Moonbeam Children's Award winner



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In 1939, shortly before World War II breaks out in Europe, thirteen-year-olds David and Hannah attempt to escape Nazi Germany, along with over nine hundred other Jewish refugees, on the historic voyage of the St. Louis. Together, they discover a Nazi spy plot, and dare to interfere, nearly at the cost of Hannah's life.

When the ship is forced to return to Europe, the passengers are divided between four countries. Despite their wishes, David and Hannah are sent to different destinations... perhaps separated forever.

Learning about these refugees of nearly a century ago will give young readers insight into today's refugee crisis. It will help them understand why sometimes people must leave their countries, and what can happen to them when forced to return to regions they are trying to escape.

