

Rio, 1946

by Erika Dreifus

Nothing in Max's nearly seventy-seven years—not 1914 and the Iron Cross that came with it, not the winter his son vanished along with all the December/January profits, not the *Kristallnacht* that had foreshadowed events beyond mention, not even the months Nelly had struggled day and night until the moment he watched the love of his life close her eyes one last time—nothing had prepared him for this day.

Grateful for the cold tea the Consul General had asked his secretary to serve, he studied the photograph of President Truman, and counted the stars on the flag, and even thanked God for this time beneath a ceiling fan that worked. He tried not to watch while the chief American official assigned to Rio de Janeiro examined his dossier, not even when the sound of silver slicing open Edith's most recent letter reminded him of the notes she had sent from France during the war and the photographs of the grandchild whom Max had never touched that were clipped to the thick ivory paper.

Now his daughter was an American citizen and Max wanted only the chance to board the *SS Maua* and disembark in New York. At the harbor he would search the crowd until he found those blue-gray eyes so like his own, and he would feel the slender arms around his tired bones, and he would say nothing until the tears dried and he would spend the rest of his days on this earth among those he loved best.

Max noticed that W. Brewster Shaw III—the name he'd discerned on a creamy framed document titled *Universitas Harvardiana* and dated the sixth of June 1915—had closed his dossier and seemed to be inspecting him from behind the broad brown desk.

Max flushed. "I don't wheeze every day, Your Honor. I promise to

work. I'll never burden your country." In another time, in another life, such words might have seemed almost humiliating. But now, humiliation was the least of his worries.

"Don't say another word, Mr. Haguenauer." Max trembled. The Consul reached for a pen and tapped the dossier. "Your daughter's letter is enough for me."

###

