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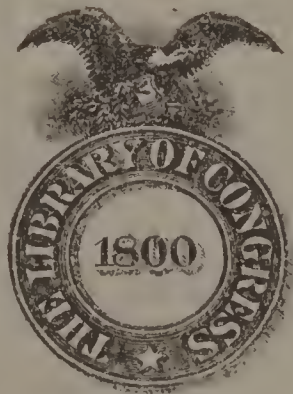
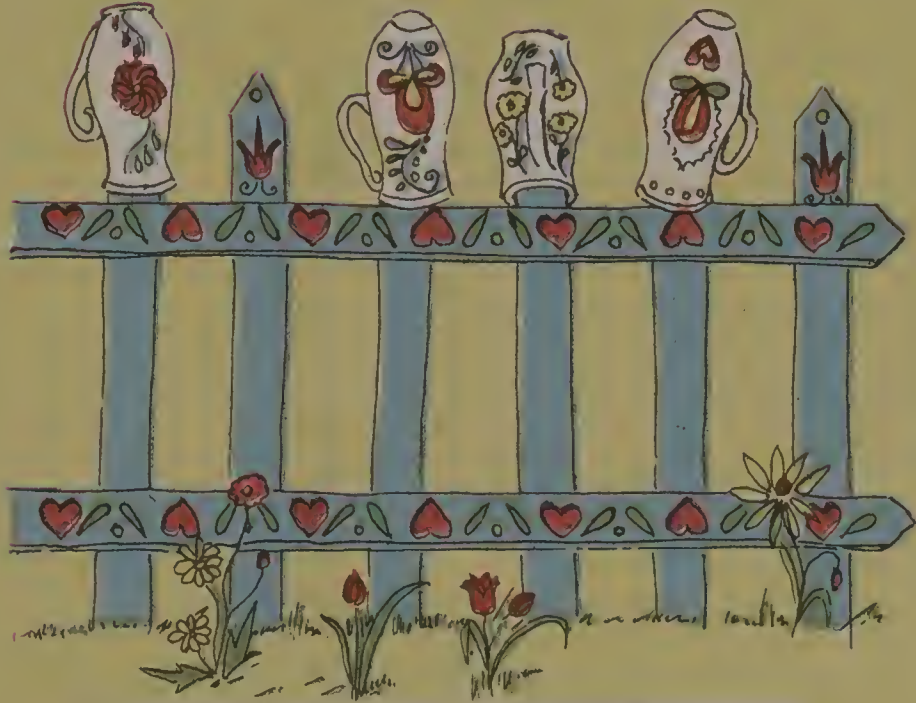
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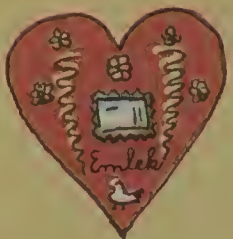


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MARIKA





MARIKA

by
SARI SZEKELY

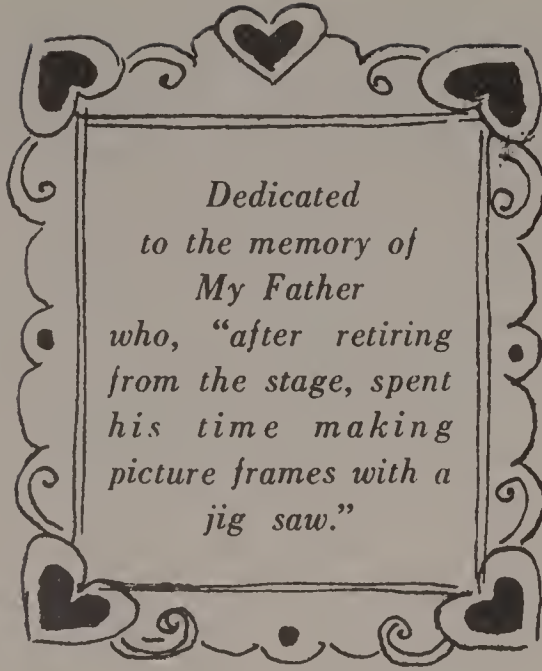


Illustrated by
BARBARA GABOR

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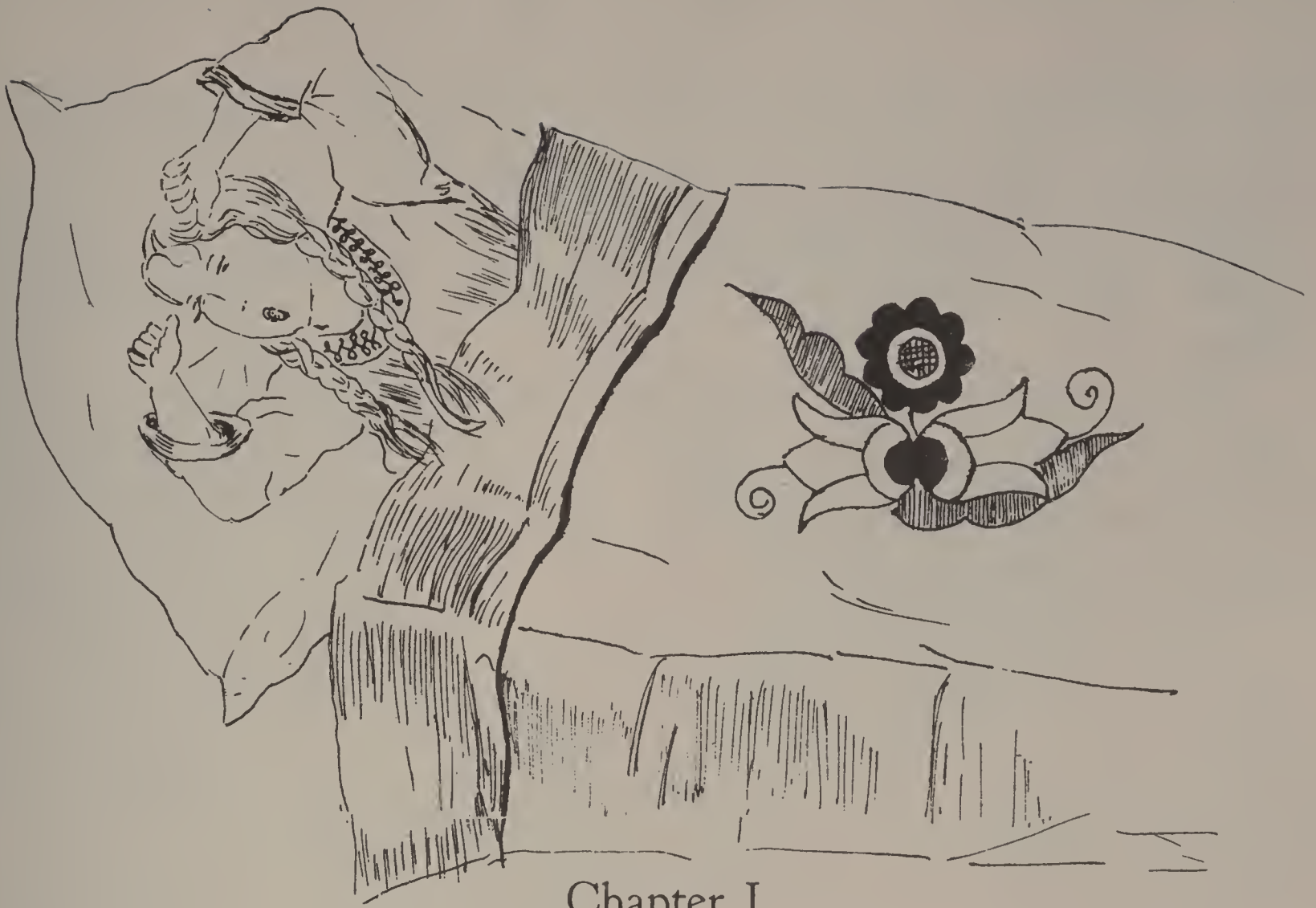
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The author wishes to voice her indebtedness to Miss Elsie Kraft, who helped create this brain child.



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Chapter I
UTAZUNK

MARIKA! *Utazunk!*” Mrs. Baan called from the bedroom door to her little daughter.

Two sleepy eyes opened; then Marika hopped out of bed as quickly as a bird. She was wide-awake and interested at once. *Utazunk* was one of the few Hungarian words she understood, and it means, “We are going on a journey!”

“*Utazunk?* Oh, Mother! Are we going very far this time? On the train?” questioned Marika eagerly.

“Yes, dear, and also on a huge ship across the ocean to Europe.”

“Mother!” exclaimed Marika, round-eyed, as an idea flashed through her tousled head. “Are we really going to Hungary at last?”

“We are,” replied Mrs. Baan, smiling happily.

Marika’s joy knew no bounds. She had been born in that country nine years ago, and was only a tiny baby when her parents brought her to America. Her father was the Hungarian

actor, Bela Baan, who had played in the United States for many years. As long as Marika could remember, her life had been the irregular one of the troupers, as people of the theatre are often called. She loved the whirl and adventure of going from place to place.

Now, with delightful plans tumbling about in her head, she dressed in half the time she usually needed. Then she perched on her little red chair in the living room and watched all that was going on around her.

Mrs. Baan was busy receiving messages, packing bags, and talking to newspaper men, who wanted to know all about Mr. Baan's European trip. The famous actor was seated at the telephone, lost in thought. Marika knew she must be quiet as a mouse, for her father was making important plans and was not to be disturbed.

Marika adored her father. Of course, she also dearly loved her mother; she was such a good mother to have. She combed Marika's hair very gently, tucked her tenderly into bed every night, baked good cookies, and sewed pretty dresses—all for Marika. More than that, she could tell wonderful stories about Hungary.

However, it was the world-famous father whom Marika adored and held in awe. Mr. Baan had only to raise his eyebrows at his little daughter when she was naughty, and the corners of her lips drooped and started to tremble. But when he called her "Little Squirrel," then she knew that he was pleased with her, and she tripped about gaily.

Marika sat patiently for an hour, until the trunks had been sent away and a taxicab waited outside. Then the family left a deserted-looking house, and Mr. Baan directed the driver to the station. Once there, they boarded the train immediately.

Nothing pleased Marika more than to sit at the window of a speeding train and watch the changing scenes or try to see shapes



She would sit at the window of a speeding train

in the rolling clouds. Sometimes they made her think of clumsy elephants or huge birds. Once she imagined they looked like a big factory with tall, smoking chimneys, which a moment later seemed to melt into a fairy-like ice palace.

At night she gazed out at the stars, the Milky Way, and the moon. After she lay in her bed, her mind raced along with the clatter of the train wheels, hearing in them songs that she hummed until they lulled her to sleep.

“Look, Marika,” said Mr. Baan when they arrived at the docks after the long train ride. “There is our boat waiting for us.”

Marika looked with wondering eyes. The size of the ship amazed her. It was so large that it didn't seem like a boat at all, as long as some blocks and as high as some buildings, it stood there strong and steady while excited crowds of people pushed about. Men in white caps and coats ran up and down the gangplanks; they were the stewards, her mother explained. Calls of “Fresh flowers!” and shouted farewells filled the air. Marika kept close to her father and mother as they went on deck and down to their cabin.

The next morning she wandered all around to see what a ship was like. Soon she was familiar with it all and had made many friends.

Among them were black-haired Pablo and Rosita, who were returning to their home in Spain. There was also little blue-eyed Betty, traveling to England with her mother and grandfather, a serious old gentleman who sat in his deck chair all day, wrapped in plaid blankets.

The four children, Marika, Betty, Pablo, and Rosita, became steady companions. Together they walked the decks and had many adventures. They made frequent visits to the second deck and also to the lowest deck, where the third-class passengers were quartered. It was not so clean there. The children were shabby,

the women tired-looking and carelessly dressed. The men looked strange and foreign.

Down in the boiler room the four friends found Hamsun, whose job it was to tend the furnace. Black as he was with coal dust, he was not a handsome sight, but he greeted the four with a jolly, "Hello there, mates." Soon they were sitting down, listening to him tell wonderful stories of the strange countries he had visited. The children went to see Hamsun often.

One day, before going on deck, Marika searched through her steamer trunk for a storybook and discovered a box she had never seen before, with her name written on it in large letters.

"Mother, what's this?"

"A surprise for you."

"May I see it?"

"Not yet, dear. Wait until the night of the masquerade."

"A masquerade?"

"Yes, dear. There is usually an evening on board ship given over to a costume party."

"Is it my costume? It is—it is! Please let me see it, Mother."

Marika pleaded so earnestly that her mother finally allowed her to open the box. She quickly removed the cover, and there, laid carefully in tissue paper was a little Hungarian peasant costume: three stiff, white petticoats; a skirt of bright red flowered percale; a snug little bodice with short, puffed sleeves; and a pleated apron edged with ribbon of the Hungarian national colors: red, white, and green.

"O-o-oh, Mother!" sang Marika, delighted. And the costume was out of the box and on Marika as fast as could be. One look in the mirror, and Marika skipped out of the cabin to show herself on deck. From then on she did not want to wear anything but the gay peasant dress.



Chapter II

A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

The third day out at sea Mother found Marika in the cabin, her face pink and wet from crying.

“What has happened? Why the tears, Marika?” asked Mrs. Baan.

“M—m—mother,” sobbed the little girl, “I’ve been *terribly* insulted.”

“Insulted! Why, my darling, who insulted you?”

“Betty’s grandfather. He told her not to play with me ’cause I’m—I’m a foreigner.”

“Well, dear, you must not feel so hurt because someone calls you a foreigner. After all, you *were* born in Hungary, you know, and that is the native land of your father and mother.”

Marika thought about that for a minute, her elbows on her mother’s knees. Then,

“But I’ve been in the United States such a long time, and I’ve gone to school there, and everything! I don’t feel like a foreigner. Why, I was the best speller in my class and the teacher said I led everyone in American history!” she boasted.



Marika in her peasant costume

“That’s all true, my dear,” comforted Mrs. Baan, “but even so, it won’t keep some unkind people from calling you a foreigner. Never mind, it isn’t a disgrace so long as you are loyal to your adopted country and obey its laws. You must be proud of both America and Hungary.”

“But that wasn’t all,” continued Marika, as new tears filled her eyes and rolled down her round cheeks. “He said dreadful things about my father.”

“What did he say?”

“That Betty’s mother is foolish to allow her to play with a girl who has been brought up around theatres, and that all actors are irre— —irresponsible.”

Mrs. Baan dried Marika’s eyes.

“And what was her answer to that?”

“She told me not to mind the old man.”

“Marika! You surprise me! You must never call Betty’s grandfather the ‘old man.’ Haven’t I always taught you to be polite to older people?”

“Betty’s mother said that. I wouldn’t call him an old man for the world. Not even if he did insult me.”

“You cry too easily, Marika. You must learn to be strong and not to take little hurts so seriously.”

Marika’s tears stopped flowing at sight of the candy that her mother gave her, and she began eating it almost happily. Almost, for her brown eyes had a far-away look, and a frown was gathering on her forehead. Suddenly she burst forth:

“Father is not—irre—sponsible, is he, Mother?”

Mrs. Baan put an arm around Marika.

“Of course not, child,” she replied proudly. “He takes the best of care of us, and you know that he is famous all over the world and is respected by everyone.”

Marika gravely accepted another piece of candy.

“Mother, what does that word mean?”

“‘Irresponsible’ means careless, unreliable, not to be depended upon,” she explained, smiling at the loyal little girl who had cried her heart out over a word whose meaning she felt but did not know.

“Why should Betty’s grandfather say that all actors are not to be depended upon?” continued Marika.

“They are no more so than men who do other kinds of work. No one would say every lawyer was dishonest for instance, just because there may be some who are not honest.”

Mrs. Baan laughed with Marika, but she realized that her little daughter would be slow to forget the hurt. However, she thought that she knew a way to help her forget.

“Suppose you invite Rosita and Pablo to a cup of chocolate this evening, and perhaps I will tell you some stories.”

Marika’s eyes sparkled. It would be a party!

“Tell the one about the Piggy and the Wolf! And may I invite Betty, too?” she asked.

“But her grandfather does not approve of us. Perhaps he considers it wicked even to go to the theatre.”

“Why should anyone think that, Mother?” asked Marika.

“I don’t know, dear. After all, a play is only a story acted out by real people.”

“And it’s much more fun than reading a book.”

“Yes, Marika, it is great fun, but the theatre is more than a place of entertainment. In some ways it is like a museum, where the histories and customs of nations are made to live again.”

“I’ll tell that to Betty’s grandfather, and I know he’ll let her come,” exclaimed Marika. Once more sure of herself, she flew out of the cabin to invite her little friends.

Betty did come to the chocolate party, and everyone had a merry time.

On the fifth day at sea, groups everywhere were talking about the program for the evening's entertainment. The committee of three men approached Mr. Baan and asked him to take part. He could not do that, however, for his contract did not allow him to perform outside of his regular engagements. With a twinkle in his eyes he suggested:

"I am not the only actor in my family. Perhaps Marika could take part instead of me."

The three men thought it an excellent idea and set out to find the little girl. After searching for some time she was discovered, to their great surprise, in the boiler room. A black smudge across the tip of her nose, she was in deep discussion with Hamsun over the workings of the big steamship.

Marika happily agreed to appear on the program, for there was nothing she liked better than acting. So she accepted the invitation. Her number would be called "IMPERSONATIONS, by Marika Baan."

"Ho, ho," remarked Hamsun after the men had left, "so you are an actress!"

"Oh, yes. Ever since I was two weeks old!" admitted Marika, very much flattered, and she told him about her first appearance on the stage. "I nearly ruined the play. The audience laughed and clapped when I kicked my feet out of the pillow."

Hamsun laughed heartily. He could well understand, for in Norway as well as in Hungary little babies are wrapped in pillows.

That evening, in the dining hall of the big ocean liner, the tables were removed, the lights were dimmed, and the audience sat waiting for the entertainment to begin. Marika, who had given up the beloved Hungarian costume for her prettiest party dress, sat in the front row before the stage, her eyes shining and her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

The program began. A girl dressed as a gay gypsy danced a



A black smudge was across the tip of her nose

tarantella or folk dance. A pianist played several numbers. A woman wearing a rose-colored velvet gown sang songs from grand opera. Pablo, accompanied on the piano by Rosita, played a lovely violin solo.

Then a jolly-looking sailor appeared and sang some rollicking songs. The most popular one was about an airman, and the chorus of it ran like this:

I'm an airman, I'm an airman,
And I fly, fly, fly, fly, fly,
Way up in the sky,
Oh, ever so high.
Swallows cannot catch me,
No matter how they try.
I'm an airman, I'm an airman,
And I fly, fly, fly, fly, fly.

The sailor was very funny. He raised his shoulders higher and higher each time that he repeated the word *fly*, and was rewarded by a roar of laughter from the audience. Again and again he was called back to sing it. He made a great hit, especially with Marika. She was just thinking that whoever followed him would have to work very hard when she heard the announcement, "IMPERSONATIONS, by Marika Baan."

Her heart leaped. She felt suddenly weak and in the pit of her stomach she had a heavy, dull pain. Slowly she walked up on the stage. How very, very small she felt.

But that lasted only a minute. For among the blur of faces her eyes found those of her father. He was looking at her with great confidence, as if to say, "Go ahead, Marika, and do your best."

She must not fail him.

She began by personifying stage and screen stars. The audience clapped generously, which encouraged her to go on.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she announced, stepping forward. "If

you please, I will imitate someone you have all seen and enjoyed.”

To the surprise of everyone, Marika sang, just as the sailor had, the song about the airman, even though she had heard it for the first time that evening. The passengers cheered and called for more.

In replying, her voice betrayed an added thrill.

“My father, as you know, cannot appear, but I should like to impersonate him in a scene from one of his greatest successes.”

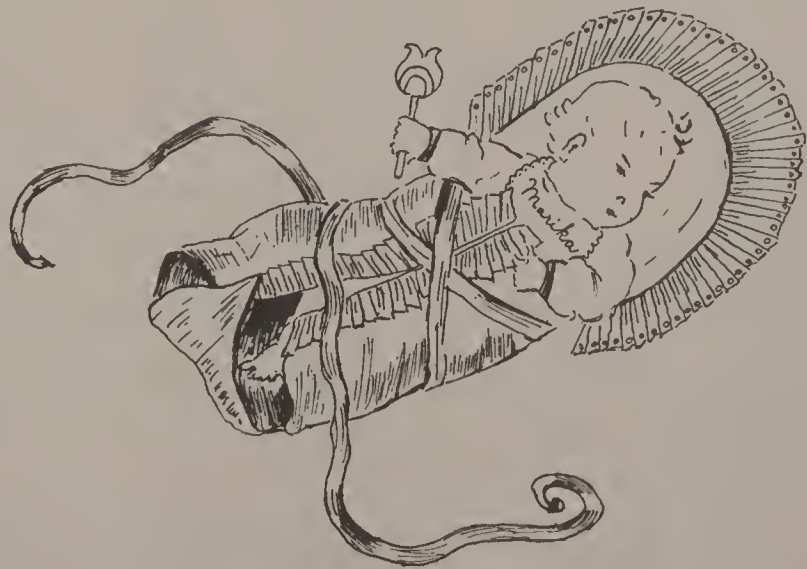
She followed with the difficult lines from a play by Shakespeare in which the character Hamlet talks to himself. The audience was greatly surprised. Many of them had seen the famous Bela Baan play that part. They were astonished that Marika could imitate so exactly his voice, his expressions, his slight foreign way of speaking, and also the habit of raising his right eyebrow. She did not see the tears of joy in her father’s eyes.

The audience stood on chairs and shouted for more, but Marika was tired. The jolly sailor lifted her to his shoulder and carried her off the stage. People crowded around and praised her; even Betty’s grandfather smiled and shook her hand. But her greatest happiness came when she heard people remark: “Her father’s daughter! A chip off the old block.”

In their cabin Mr. Baan took his little girl in his arms.

“Little Squirrel,” he whispered, “you were great!”

And Marika went happily to sleep, for she knew she had made her adored father proud of her.





Chapter III NAGYMAMA

All too soon the pleasant days on the ocean came to an end, and it was time for Marika to bid good-by to her friends. While the passengers gathered along the ship's railing to watch the shoreline of France become more and more distinct, she stole down to the boiler room to say good-by to Hamsun.

"So you're going to Hungary?" asked the big fellow. He wiped his hand and held it out to her.

"Yes," she answered, "but only for a year. We'll be going back to the United States next spring."

"You've been a good sailor, Miss Marika. I hope you'll take this same ship on your way home and come to see me again."

"Thank you, Hamsun. I hope I can. Good-by, Hamsun!" And with that she rushed to the deck where Father and Mother were waiting for her.

Whistles shrieked; there was a grinding noise, and the boat slowly came to a stop at the pier. Gangplanks were lowered, and in a few minutes the people who had been so happy together for a week had scattered in all directions.



“So you’re going to Hungary?” asked the big fellow

The Baan family boarded a cross-continental express which would carry them directly from the French port of Cherbourg to Hungary. They rode by themselves in a compartment, which is a private section of the train.

“Ho—hum,” sighed Marika on the second day. “I like train rides much better when they don’t last so long.”

“Be patient, dear. Tomorrow morning we’ll reach the Hungarian border,” encouraged Mrs. Baan.

So Marika sat by the window once more. When the train took her where she could see men or women or children, she noticed them carefully and compared them with people she had seen in the other countries through which she had passed. She did the same with buildings and the scenes in general. She hoped this would help her remember what she was seeing, but she called it playing a game with herself.

On the morning of the third day the train came to a stop.

“Marika, look!” cried Mr. Baan, pointing out of the window, “there is the Hungarian flag!”

Yes, indeed. There it was—red, white, and green—flying from the top of the customs house near the station. At the sight of it Marika could not feel the thrill that appeared on the faces of her parents. She was too young to understand what it meant for people who had spent years in foreign countries to come home, to see familiar landmarks, and to hear the mother tongue spoken once more.

“*Jó reggelt!*” shouted a fat man, opening the compartment door. Marika remembered the phrase. It means, “Good morning.”

“*Jó reggelt,*” answered Mr. Baan.

The fat man wore a uniform. He was not a soldier, as Marika first imagined, but a customs officer. He opened the baggage and carelessly pulled out everything. All the while he marked num-

bers in a little black book. Finally he added them up and handed a bill to Mr. Baan, who offered American money in payment of the amount. But the man shook his head and said that he could not accept American money; Mr. Baan would have to step off the train and exchange it for Hungarian money at the station.

“What did he want?” asked Marika.

Mother explained it to her. There were certain articles on which it was necessary to pay a duty or tax, before taking them into the country.

“Well, he could have been more careful with our things!” Marika observed, turning back to the window from where she saw her father enter the station.

Five minutes passed— — ten minutes— — No daddy came out.

“Why doesn’t he come?” asked Marika.

“He probably has to wait. There may be others who have money to exchange,” replied Mother.

With a troubled heart Marika noticed the usual things that mean it’s starting time for a train. The conductor waved his flag and shouted something. She decided it must mean “All aboard!” She was right. People who had been standing and walking about, hopped on the train at once.

“Oh, Mother!” exclaimed Marika, her eyes wide and anxious. “Daddy’ll miss the train!”

The big engine whistled long and loud and began to chug, slowly at first. The train was moving very slowly, but nevertheless moving. Marika still could not see her father. Her heart stopped beating for a second. Her adored daddy was being left behind! She began to cry. Mrs. Baan turned pale. For a moment she pictured herself and Marika sitting sadly on their trunks at the next station, wondering whether Daddy could find them there.

At last Marika spied her father running from the station. His

coat was flying behind him; his arms were full of paper money. The customs officer who had been waiting to be paid, followed along, puffing and shouting loudly. Mr. Baan threw a handful of bills toward him, and as they scattered to the ground, the fat man stooped and picked them up.

Mrs. Baan and Marika breathlessly watched at the window. Would Father catch up with them? Just then, as the train rounded a curve, they saw him reach the last coach and jump on the steps.

In a few minutes he entered the compartment, breathing hard. Marika jumped happily into his arms and exclaimed, "Oh, Daddy, I was so scared. I thought sure you'd be left behind. What would Mother and I do without you?"

Though Mr. and Mrs. Baan laughed heartily over his almost having been left behind, Marika did not think it was funny. "I don't know whether I'll like this country," she thought, but she did not say it aloud for fear of hurting her parents. She glanced at their faces and noticed their satisfied look, their shining eyes. They were at home again!

In a few more hours the Baan family came to the end of their journey on the express.

"Little Squirrel," whispered Mr. Baan as he lifted Marika off the steps of the train, "do you realize that this is the first time you have ever set foot on Hungarian soil?"

But Marika could not realize it. She was too tired to think about anything. Her mother quickly replied for her.

"Of course it is, Daddy," she said. "When Marika was here before, she was so tiny that we carried her around in pillows. Remember?"

"Indeed I do." Mr. Baan smiled fondly at his young daughter, but the smile quickly changed to a look of concern. "Why, what's the matter, Marika?"



The fat man stooped and picked them up

“I feel awfully queer. My head is so light, and the ground is moving out from under my feet.”

“That is only natural, after eleven days of travel,” suggested Daddy. “Do you think you can stand another ride? You see, Marika, we must go on for a short distance before we reach Grandmother Baan’s house.”

Marika felt better by the time the local train lazily pulled into the station. After the speed of the rushing express this train seemed hardly to crawl along. It had a tiny engine and the coaches were very small, much smaller than those in America. They were marked with the letters M.A.V., meaning *Magyar Allam Vasut*—Hungarian Government Railways—and were divided into compartments marked I, II, or III.

The Baan family entered a compartment marked I, and made themselves comfortable on seats of red plush with clean white towels spread on the arms and head-rests. Marika sat with her parents for a while and then to satisfy her curiosity, she wandered up and down the long corridor.

She heard a lively clatter of voices in one of the compartments, and dared to peep in. What she saw was women in short full skirts, their heads covered with bright kerchiefs, sitting crowded on wooden benches. On their laps they held huge wicker baskets. Men, wearing boots and white linen trousers gathered in at the waist, stood about in close groups. Marika could not understand the friendly chatter, but she saw that the faces of those people were simple and kindly. One of the women held a big red apple toward her, which she promptly accepted with a smile of thanks.

A few minutes later Marika said to her mother, “See the apple a woman gave me? She was wearing a costume just like mine.”

“She wasn’t wearing a costume, Marika. That was her everyday dress.”

“Does everyone in Hungary dress like that?”

“No, dear. Most of the people here dress much like the Americans. But the peasants still wear the same kind of clothes their grandparents wore.”

“And do only peasants sit on the wooden benches in trains?”

“Yes. The numbers which you saw on the outside of the compartments mark the different classes. Peasants ride in the third class, people who can pay more money go in the second class, and those who can afford luxuries ride first class.”

Marika sat down on the red plush seat and as she gazed lazily through the window, she thought about this custom of grouping people into classes, and about peasants, and big red apples. Her thoughts wandered to the grandmother whom she had never seen. Soon her eyes felt heavy-lidded. As she began to nod, she remembered that she had always envied children who could visit their grandparents. What—would her—grandmother—be—like?

The next thing Marika knew, Father was saying to her:

“This is the town where we get off, Little Squirrel. This is where Grandmother lives.”

Marika was wide-awake in a moment. Father quickly gathered the luggage, and the Baan family left the train. In a few more minutes they stood at the door of Grandmother’s house.

Marika was just about to close her eyes tight and try once more to imagine what Grandmother would look like when the door was opened by a sweet little old lady. Her hair was white, and in her eyes was the same merry twinkle that Marika loved in her father’s eyes. She wore a black silk dress with white collar and cuffs and at her throat was a brooch with Marika’s baby picture on it.

Then and there Marika knew that Grandmother looked just as she had always hoped her grandmother might look. Grandmother drew Marika into her arms and lovingly kissed her and smoothed her hair.

“Oh, I like her!” Marika decided instantly, and wanted to tell her so. But the little grandmother could not speak English, and Marika did not know enough Hungarian words. So she just said, “*Nagymama!*” which means “Grandmother,” and hoped that it expressed all she felt.





Chapter IV

THE FAMOUS GRANDFATHER

The rooms in Grandmother's house were so high that Marika felt very small in them. All the doors were double ones, which she delighted in swinging open. One door, however, was always closed. Marika stopped before it wonderingly. What was behind it? Did she dare open it? She reasoned: if it was forbidden for anyone to enter, the door would be locked. Marika tried the knob. It turned. She opened the door slowly, glanced within, and then stepped inside. She knew immediately that this room once must have belonged to someone now gone. Her first thought was to close the door again and run into the sunshine, but the dim, silent room fascinated her, and she remained.

Facing her on the opposite wall was an immense life-sized painting of a man. At first Marika thought it was her father. Looking more closely, she saw that it was an older man with gray hair and a kindly, wistful face.

He wore a splendid red velvet coat and tight-fitting black trousers richly braided with gold. From his shoulders hung a man-

tle or long coat trimmed with costly fur and held in place by jeweled clasps. His patent leather boots were edged at the top with gold cord, and two gold tassels dangled at the front. In one hand he held a beautiful sword set with many precious stones, and in the other a cap trimmed as richly as the mantle with fur and jewels.

Marika walked close to the painting to read the name engraved on a tiny plate under the frame—Baan Sándor. She remembered that once her mother had told her that Hungarians always place the family name first.

Tacked on the wall, over and around the picture, were wide ribbons tied in huge bows. Most were red, but others were green or blue, and many had the red, white, and green of the Hungarian flag. On all of them was black or gold lettering and, although the dates differed, each read the same—Baan Sándor-*nak*, To Sandor Baan.

“This,” thought Marika, “must be my famous grandfather about whom I have heard so many stories.”

There he was, all around the room, in pictures of every size. Each one showed him as a different character, for he had been a famous actor too, just like her father. The pictures hung in fancy hand-made frames.

Marika knew that after retiring from the stage, Grandfather had spent his time making picture frames with a jigsaw. These then, were some of the frames he had made. Marika looked closely at one or two of them and then crossed the room, where she saw silver wreaths under glass cases and large and small trophy cups on a shelf.

After studying the pictures and the bric-a-brac, without touching anything, she slowly walked out of the room and shut the door quietly behind her. Then she ran into the sunny garden where everything was bright and cheerful.

Grandmother's house was of whitewashed stucco, almost hidden behind a mass of climbing roses in full bloom. The entrance to the house was at the side, and the windows of the front room faced the street. Before the house, and twice the width of it, was a beautiful and sweet-smelling flower garden. In it were as many different kinds of flowers as Marika had ever seen. And many, many bushes of roses. She wandered about and counted them—seventy—and some almost as tall as trees!

A narrow path divided the flower garden into two equal parts and ran between the house and the vegetable garden back to the chicken coop. Marika followed this path to a white arbor covered with a grapevine, which kept it delightfully cool.

“Here,” she thought, “I can play with my dolls when it is too hot outside.”

It took her almost the entire morning to see everything in the garden. There were onions, tomatoes, peas, potatoes, beans, rows of cucumber mounds, and crawling vines of squash. There was even a patch of ripe strawberries, and raspberry bushes made a natural fence. There were fruit trees of every kind: apple, peach, pear, and plum, delicious apricots, sweet and sour cherries, and some walnut and almond trees.

A high iron fence enclosed everything, and a small gate led to the street. Marika was curious to know what was beyond the gate. She went to it and peered through the bars.

A little boy was whistling and busily rolling a yellow hoop. Up and down he skipped, and Marika watched the hoop longingly. That looked like fun, she thought, and besides, she would like a playmate. She watched him for a few minutes and then called, “Hello!” in a hopeful voice.

The little boy stood still, stopped his whistling, and the yellow hoop fell to the sidewalk. He looked around to see who had called, and discovered Marika pressed close to the bars of the



gate. For a moment the boy and the girl just looked at each other. The boy was in short blue trousers and a sleeveless sweater; his hair was tousled, his face freckled. Marika thought she had never seen a face so full of mischief. Evidently the boy had not understood her, for he looked puzzled.

“Hello!” repeated Marika.

The little boy laughed and pleasantly replied, “*Szervusz!*”

That must be a greeting, Marika decided, and came through the gate. When she pointed to the hoop, the boy seemed to understand that she wanted it and gave it to her. It was not such an easy thing to do, this hoop-rolling. Although the boy explained it at great length, Marika could not understand a word.

Soon, however, she could roll the hoop back and forth. But the boy did not think it was much fun to stand by while Marika played. His eyes grew more mischievous, and the next time Marika rolled the hoop past him, he gave it a push that sent it flying.



The yellow hoop fell to the sidewalk

Marika almost went flying, too. She looked at the boy, surprised, and then ran to pick up the hoop. The boy ran quietly after her, and pulled her brown braid. That puzzled Marika. Why should he do things like that? She tried to roll the hoop again, but the boy continued to tease.

That decided Marika. If he would not play fairly, she would have nothing more to do with him. And she certainly would not allow her hair to be pulled. She gave him the hoop and turned to the gate. The boy looked after her with a naughty grin and shouted. Probably he was calling her back, but she ran to the arbor, where she found her mother and grandmother setting the table for the noonday meal.

“*Szervusz, Nagymama!*” she called, proud to use the new word she had just learned. Mother frowned, but Grandmother only laughed.

“Oh, Marika,” corrected Mrs. Baan, “you should be more careful with your greetings. When you speak to Grandmother, or anyone very much older than yourself, you must say *Kezét csókolom!*—I kiss your hand. When you speak to strangers, you use *Jó reggelt*—good morning, *Jó napot*—good day, *Jó estét*—good evening, or *Jó éjszakát*—good night, depending on the time of day it happens to be. *Szervusz* is the greeting for friends of your own age, like the English ‘hello,’ which is used only in telephone conversations here.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Marika. “Now I know why the boy laughed when I said, ‘Hello.’ ”

Little by little Marika learned the language which was so very strange to her ears at first. Soon she could talk quite easily with the mischievous boy, who had the odd name of Kabosh Imre. They played together often, but when he became too provoking, Marika returned to the garden or played by herself in the cool arbor.



Chapter V THE PINTÉR HOUSE

“Marika, dear,” said Grandmother one morning, “will you gather the eggs for me, please?”

That was Marika’s favorite task, and she ran willingly down to the small enclosure where the chickens were scratching for grain. At the gate of the chicken yard, she stopped. What was that noise she heard? She waited, listening. Yes! She heard it a second time and the eggs were forgotten at once.

Marika went around the yard to the back of the chicken coop. There, beside an old box, as if guarding it, sat a little white dog with black and brown spots. She ran to Marika and tugged at the edge of her skirt, pulling her toward the box.

“O—o—oh! What darling little puppies! One, two, three—six of them!”

They were wriggling and scrambling on top of each other, and the mother dog gently but firmly pushed them about with her nose until they had found comfortable places. She looked at Marika with pleading eyes.

"I know what you want," exclaimed Marika, patting the dog's head. "Now you wait here, I'll be right back."

Into the house she ran as fast as her legs could carry her.

"Oh, Mother! Mother! Guess what I've found! Come, come quick! The dearest little puppies— —six of them— —there, behind the chicken coop."

She filled the biggest bowl she could find with milk, and hurried out, followed by Mother and Grandmother.

"I wonder where she came from," said Grandmother while the dog was eating. "I don't remember ever seeing her in this neighborhood."

"May I keep all of them, *Nagy mama?*" Marika begged.

"Well, if no one claims them— — But you must take care of them yourself."

Marika was so delighted that she threw her arms around Grandmother's neck and gave her a big kiss.

"May I take her to Lake Balaton in August when we go?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, but we must find homes for the puppies before then."

Then Marika sat down to choose a name for her dog. And what it should be, she couldn't think. None of the usual names were good enough for this dog that had six puppies. She thought and thought, and finally a word she had heard her father use while playing cards came into her mind—Ultimo. She didn't know what it meant. What difference did that make? But it sounded very fine. So she named her dog Ultimo.

It was the end of July. Marika, with her mother, father, and grandmother, had arrived at the little village near Lake Balaton to spend the month of August. They were living, not in a hotel but in a real peasant cottage, which was owned by the Pintér family: Pintér *bácsi*— —Uncle Pintér, Pintér *néni*— —Aunt Pintér, and two daughters, Terka and Katica. Finally, there was



A well was in the center

Bodri, the big brown shepherd dog, who became Ultimo's good friend, for of course Marika had brought Ultimo along. The puppies had all been placed in kind homes.

Hungarian village life was a new joy for Marika, who had been brought up in busy cities and Pullman cars. Never before had she had such a yard in which to play. A *gémies kút*, a well, was in the center, with a trough for the horses and cows. Pigs and chickens ran helter-skelter right under her feet. One side of this yard was fenced off for a flower garden. Under a big plum tree stood the simple table and benches. Here dinner was served every noon. Sometimes when the wind blew, plums fell from the branches— —splash!— —into the soup plates. And how Marika liked the half-ripe fruit!

The other side of the yard was shaded by an immense mulberry tree, which Marika was allowed to climb. It was great fun to gather the sweet berries and eat them as fast as she could. The juice of the mulberries stained her face a deep purple, and at times dripped down on her dress.

She also picked the mulberry leaves for Katica's silkworms, and watched the caterpillars wind themselves into golden cocoons.

Most interesting of all was the little thatched roof cottage, whose small windows, bright with red geranium plants, looked out on the quiet street. Like Grandmother's house, the cottage was built lengthwise across one side of the lot. A terrace ran the full length of the building. Along the wall was a low straw cot where *Pintér bácsi* slept during those months when the cottage was given over to city visitors.

Separate doors led from the terrace to the various rooms. Marika liked especially the door to the kitchen, for it was different from any she had ever seen. It was in two sections. The upper part stood wide open to let the sunshine in; the lower part remained closed to keep the chickens and the pigs out. Around

this door hung dried red peppers, dried ears of yellow corn, and braided ropes of onion and garlic.

Within the kitchen, pottery with designs of flowers and birds hung on the white walls; and lined up on the built-in shelves were heavy iron pots, strange kitchen tools, and jugs of all sizes. Marika had a difficult time with one odd-shaped jug, for it had no opening, and she could drink water only through a small lip on the hollow handle.

Then there was the stove of clay, built as part of the wall. Marika loved to watch the fire through the small opening of the black iron door. The baking was done in a large oven between the walls. It had a wide mouth covered by a wooden lid. Brushwood and turf were burned as fuel. When Pintér *néni* baked the great round loaves of bread, she always made a small *lángos* or pancake, out of a piece of the flattened dough, especially for Marika.

At the front of the house was the guest room, the pride of the household. And it may well have been called that, for there was not a dull spot anywhere. The room had no flooring, but yellow clay had been pounded to a hard surface. On the white-washed walls hung the best pottery and pictures of the saints. There was also a large portrait of Pintér *bácsi*. Marika could not help laughing at it, for she always saw him in comfortable, loose clothes, while in this picture he wore a tight soldier's uniform and looked stiff and frightened. His mustache was waxed to a needle point; his hair, parted in the middle and carefully brushed.

Brightly painted and elaborately carved furniture was placed in exact order against the walls. A bench and table were built into one corner. "This is like the breakfast nook we had in New York," declared Marika.

In another corner was the *búbos kemencze*, which served as a stove and was the only means of heating the room. It nearly



touched the ceiling. To Marika it was mysterious, for it had no door or opening of any kind. She found out that the fire was fed through an opening in the kitchen wall. All around the *búbos kemencze* was a clay bench. On cool evenings it must have been cozy to sit there with one's back to the warm stove.

Between the windows was the *tulipános láda*, a chest, so called because of the tulip decorations. The same flowers were painted on the chairs and the small dresser between the two beds.

As the guest room was the pride of the household, so the two beds were the pride of the guest room. They were placed against the wall opposite the door, and matched the table and *tulipános láda*. The amazing thing was the bedding, piled high on top, reaching almost to the brown beams of the ceiling. Huge pillows in embroidered slips were arranged very carefully on the very top. Marika was informed that the number of pillows indicated whether a family was rich or poor.



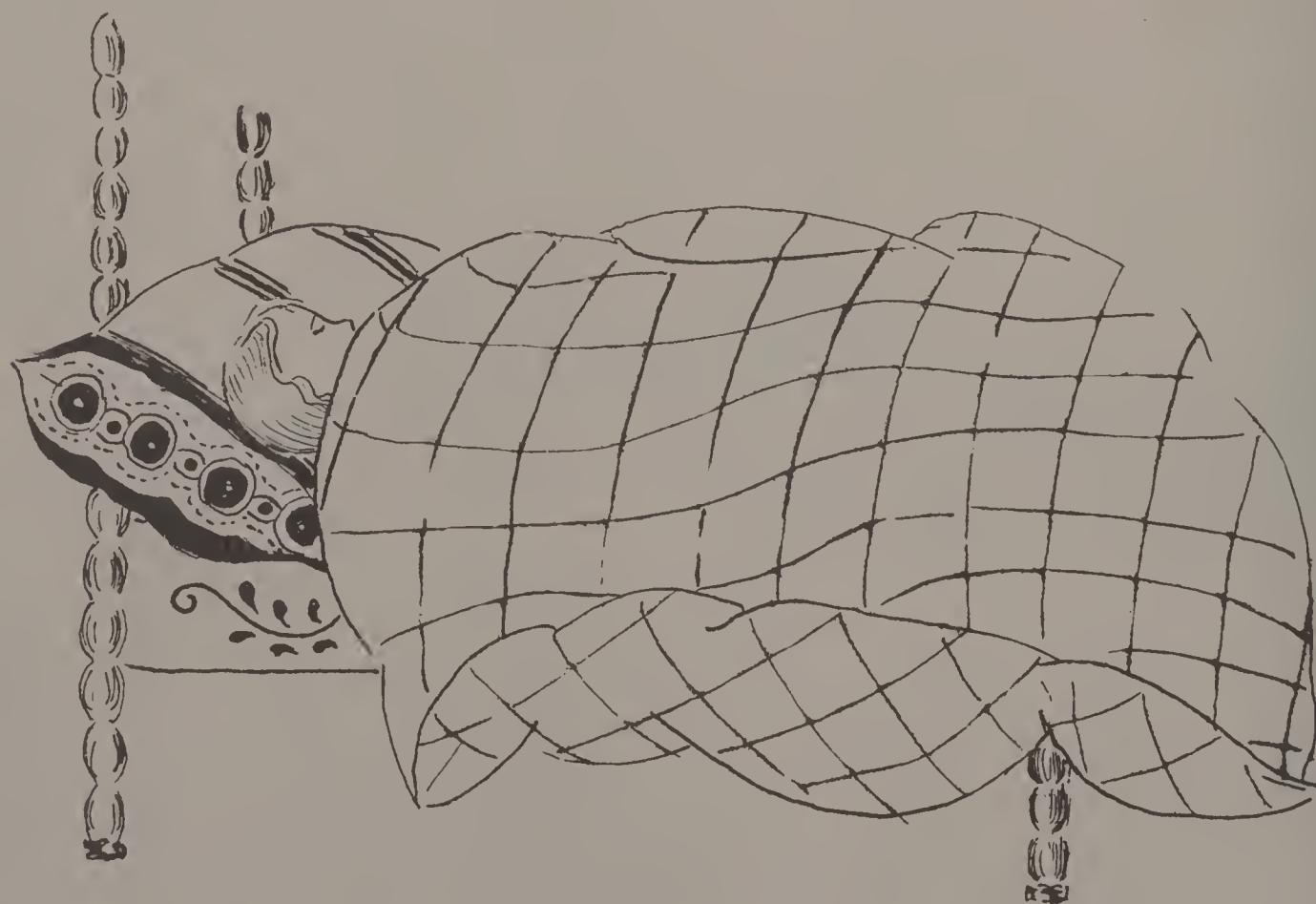
In another corner was the stove

What worried her was how anyone could possibly sleep in those beds. There was hardly space enough between the pillows and the ceiling for her doll. And surely one would need a step-ladder to reach the top.

The problem was solved the very first night. The pillows, which were for decoration only, rested on a light board that stretched from one end of the bed to the other. Board and pillows were lifted off; then the bedspread was removed. A large pillow, wide as the bed, with a pink gingham slip, and an enormous *dunyha*, which is a featherbed, smiled at Marika invitingly.

But she was frightened. She might be smothered under that huge cover! She crawled under to try it and was astonished to find that it was not even as heavy as a woolen blanket. It was filled, Pintér *néni* proudly stated, with down from her finest geese.

Lying wide-eyed in her snug bed under the towering *dunyha*, Marika thought of all the queer and interesting things in the cottage. The room was in half darkness. The small kerosene lamp flickered on the table. Now and then the clock struck solemnly.





Chapter VI BALATON

How different from roaring city nights were the quiet evenings in the little village! A peaceful calm filled the air. Even the breezes were hushed. When the Angelus bell rang out from the church tower, the people stopped their work for a few minutes of silent prayer.

Early every evening the cattle returned from the pastures. As soon as Marika heard the first faint tinkle of the cowbells far down the road, she ran to the gate.

The *pásztor*, who was the herdsman, followed the herd, cracking his long whip to keep the slowly moving cattle on the road. As he passed Marika, he humbly lifted his hat and quietly said, "*Dicsértessék!*" the first word of their regular greeting, meaning, "Praised be the Lord."

It pleased Marika to see how each long-horned cow recognized its home and entered the open gate.

Long after the herd had been swallowed up in hazy clouds of dust, she could hear the distant echo of the cowbells.

A gentle wind began to blow. It brought the strains of music; gypsies were playing in the *csárda*, the inn. The trees became dim shadows in the darkness. Lights twinkled in cottage windows. Night had fallen, and Marika went into the house.

On Sundays, Marika watched the peasants flock to church. Then the street was as gay and colorful as Grandmother's flower garden. The girls swung along in separate groups, their full skirts swaying from side to side. Each one carried a prayer book and a large, embroidered handkerchief stiffly starched and carefully folded. Their long braids were decorated with many colored ribbons, and their pretty *papucs*, or slippers, clitter clattered on the pavements.

The young men walked along importantly. They wore little round hats with sprays of maidenhair fern tucked in on the left side, and their black boots shone as brightly as mirrors. Indeed, Marika had seen more than one lad glance slyly down and give a final twist to his carefully waxed mustache.

The older men and women looked more solemn in their darker colors. But they, too, walked along in merry, friendly groups.

One Sunday afternoon Marika and her mother went to the park to hear the military band concert. Part of the time, while listening to the music, they wandered about, and Marika noticed many smartly dressed women and children.

Her mother said that they probably stayed at the beautiful hotels and added that people from all over the world came here in order to enjoy the health-giving waters of the Balaton. After a while Marika and her mother sat under a bright umbrella and ate what Marika thought was the most delicious vanilla ice cream she had ever tasted.

And what jolly times Marika did have on week days! There were such exciting things to do with Katica, Bodri, and Ultimo. Sometimes they spent the mornings rolling down the haystacks.



Marika watched the peasants flock to church

Sometimes Terka who was a little older, came along, and then they drove to the vineyards and picked ripe grapes and sweet yellow muskmelons.

Then, too, the beach of Lake Balaton was a wonderful playground. The Balaton is the largest lake in Hungary. One cannot see from one shore to the other, and it is more than twice as long as it is wide. Ships carry passengers from port to port.

The beach was not far from the Pintér house, and the children loved to play on the sand. Ultimo was always there, too. She refused to stay at home.

One afternoon the little dog played with the children by swimming out in the lake to bring back sticks they threw into the water. Afterwards Marika and her friends went in swimming, and Ultimo tried to bring them in, too!

“No, no, Ultimo!” laughed Marika. “Don’t pull *me* out! I want to swim!”

But Ultimo insisted upon dragging the children from the lake.

“Such a dog!” sighed Katica. “We can never have a good swim when she is along. Let’s leave her at home next time.”

“Oh, no, we can’t do that,” replied Marika. “She would howl and howl.”

“I know what,” said Katica. “We’ll tie Ultimo to the boat landing. Then she can’t jump in after us.”

So with a piece of rope they tied the dog to the boat landing, and every time poor Ultimo wanted to run after them, she was jerked back. When Marika finally untied the rope, the dog was so happy that she nearly knocked over the dripping little girl.

A few mornings later it was hot and sultry. Katica had to husk beans for Pintér *néni*, and Marika was helping her. At first she enjoyed the work, but it soon became dull.

She decided to go for a swim in the lake, and almost immediately she and Ultimo raced to the beach. As usual, she tied the

dog to the boat landing; then she waded into the cool water.

Ultimo sat quietly while her mistress splashed and played along the beach, but barked sharply later when she pushed a small boat into the water. Marika drifted about happily for some time on the smooth surface of the lake. Then—a sudden wind whipped the quiet water into waves.

The light boat upset without warning, and Marika was thrown into the water. She laughed, and with no thought of failure, started to swim toward the boat landing. But she soon found the waves surprisingly strong. Though she swam and swam, she seemed to get no nearer shore.

Her arms began to tire, and she thought, "How silly of me to work so hard. I'm not far out. I'll walk in!" Her toes searched for the bottom of the lake but touched only swaying weeds. The water was over her head! She bravely began to swim again. Gradually she moved her arms more and more slowly, for they were becoming, very, very tired.

Fear gripped her heart. She called, "Help!" Then she remembered the Hungarian word, "*Segítség!*" But her cries were lost in the wind. One pair of ears however could hear her; one pair of eyes could see her—Ultimo's! But in spite of wild efforts, the dog could not swim to the rescue of her beloved mistress, for the rope held her back.

Marika sank down. The wavy seaweeds at the bottom of the lake frightened her. Several large fish brushed by her. Water filled her eyes and mouth. She struggled to the surface, only to go down a second time. Again she struggled to the surface.

"*Segit—ség!*" she gasped.

But there was no one near. Ultimo barked violently. She leaped toward the water, only to be pulled back by the rope. Again and again she rushed headlong, tugging, tearing—

Marika went down the third time. Pictures chased each other

rapidly through her now sleepy brain. Mother—weeping. Grandmother—heartbroken. And her—adored—Daddy—

She hardly noticed it when a strong jaw firmly gripped her bathing suit. Ultimo had finally broken the rope and dragged Marika back to shore.

She lay quietly on the sand for a while, glad to rest and breathe in the good air. Ultimo jumped and barked joyfully about her. After a time she reached out her hand and patted Ultimo on the head.

“Thank you, Ultimo,” she whispered. “Good dog.” She thought for a minute, then added, “We won’t tell anyone about this, will we, Ultimo? They might not let us play here if they knew. But you will never be tied up any more, I promise you that!”





Chapter VII BUDAPEST

In September the Baan family went to Budapest. Sorrowfully, Marika left the pretty village and the Balaton behind her.

One day, standing with her mother before the National Theatre, Marika pointed to a round tower-like building near by. "Oh, Mother! What's that?"

"That's a signpost on which the daily programs of theatres and amusement places are advertised. They are located at convenient places, wherever people might have to wait for street cars."

"I never saw any like that in America."

"No. Large billboards are used for advertisements there. These towers look better, and also prevent the buildings from being cluttered up with posters."

They walked nearer to the tower. A man had just put up some new signs, and Marika's heart swelled when she saw her father's name in large black type on that very tower.

“Can you tell me in English what is printed on that poster, Marika?”

“Of course I can. It says:

BAAN BELA
The Great Tragedian
Back from His Triumphs
in
The United States

“Well,” replied Mother, very much pleased, “by the time we are ready to return to America, you will read and speak Hungarian as well as you do English. I think you deserve a reward. What would you say if we’d go on a sight-seeing trip while Daddy is rehearsing?”

“Oh, yes. Let’s do that.”

Mrs. Baan hailed a cab from the other side of the street. It was not an automobile, but an old-fashioned, horse-driven coach. Marika stared, round-eyed. High on the driver’s seat sat an old man with a grey mustache and blinking, red-rimmed eyes. He was wearing a small round hat, which he politely lifted as he climbed down. He stood aside while Marika and her mother took their places on the back seat.

To the clanking of the horses’ hoofs, the old man began to mumble and grumble. Marika could not understand a word, for his long mustache completely covered his lips. Mrs. Baan explained that the poor old man was complaining because the people wanted motor cabs, and he would soon have to go out of business for want of passengers.

“Isn’t that sad,” sighed Marika. “I think it’s great fun to ride in a horse cab. I can see everything much better. Automobiles go so fast that the streets seem to fly.”

As the horses slowly trotted over the cobblestones, Mother showed Marika the different places of interest. First they passed

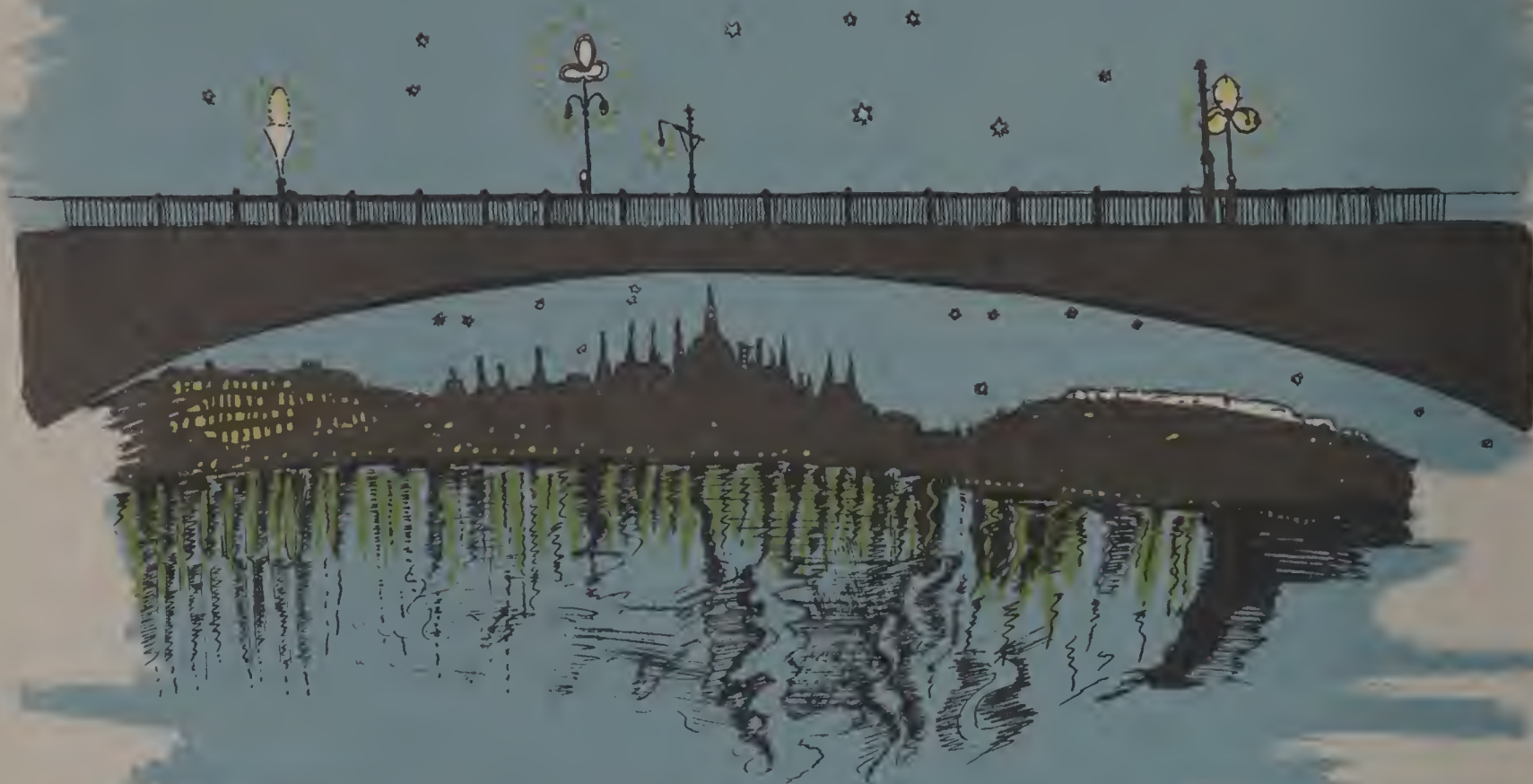
the New York Café, a favorite meeting place for people from the theatres. Then they traveled through the Octagon, an eight-sided park, surrounded by beautiful buildings. They passed the Nyugati-Pályaudvar, which is the Western Depot; the wonderful Vig-színház, or Gayety Theatre; and finally they reached the bank of a wide river. It was the beautiful blue Danube, made famous by the Viennese composer, Johann Strauss. The Hungarians call it *Duna*.

Marika learned that Budapest is really two cities divided by that lazily rolling river: Buda, the older of the two, on the right bank, and Pest on the left. Many wonderful bridges connect them. The oldest of the bridges is the great Lánchíd, the Chain Bridge; the longest is the Margit Híd, or Margaret Bridge. Then there are the Erzsébet Híd, Elizabeth Bridge; the Ferencz Jozsef Híd, Franz Joseph Bridge; and others on which the trains cross.

Marika and her mother drove to the Margit Híd. There they discharged the cab driver; then walked across a small footbridge which led from the center of the Margit Híd to an island in the middle of the Danube. This is called Margit Sziget, or Margit Island. It is a health resort and one of the most beautiful spots in the Hungarian capital.

Marika and her mother wandered through the parks, the rose gardens, and the cool arbors. Under a group of great oak trees they saw a statue of Arany János, the Hungarian poet, who wrote some of his most famous poems there. They visited the grey ruins, which remained to tell of past history. Then they walked through the gay amusement parks and bathing beaches. In a kiosk, a gay building with open sides, they ate ice cream, which of course pleased Marika very much.

“Oh, I almost forgot!” exclaimed Mrs. Baan as they left the pretty kiosk. “I promised to call up Daddy. Wait for me here, Marika, while I find a telephone.”



Marika, left alone, walked down the path. All along the way, benches were placed conveniently. Old ladies were sunning themselves; old gentlemen were reading their newspapers. Marika sat down, too. Almost at once an old, poorly dressed woman approached her and asked for money.

Marika supposed the old woman was a beggar, and replied that she was sorry she had nothing to give her. But the woman continued to demand two pennies. Finally Marika understood that she had to pay that amount for a seat on the bench or get up and walk. Fortunately Mother arrived in time to provide the two pennies.



An old, poorly dressed woman asked for money

“I think it’s funny to have to pay for a bench,” Marika said, still feeling her embarrassment.

“I don’t think so,” Mother replied. “It’s a way for a few old people to earn a little money. In return it is their duty to keep the seats clean.”

After darkness fell, they walked back to the Margit Hid, where Mother called to Marika’s attention one of the most beautiful views of all Europe. They stood on the bridge, delighted. The stars were shining, and Buda, on the hillside, twinkled with thousands of lights. High on the hilltop rose the King’s Palace. Its outline was reflected on the smooth, black surface of the river. On the opposite side stretched the splendid Parliament Building, like a brave guard watching over the vast city, the brightly lighted Pest behind it.

Marika sighed. “Oh, Mother, it’s lovely, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Marika, it is lovely,” agreed Mrs. Baan, pleased that her little daughter, too, saw beauty in this view of her beloved capital.

Another day, Mother rode with Marika to the Andrásy Ut, the world’s straightest and widest boulevard. Under it runs the first underground railroad ever built. On their way to the Város Liget, the city park, they passed the Opera House.

In the park there were theatres, amusements, open-air restaurants, and coffee houses. They visited the zoo and the art museum. Afterwards, while enjoying a boat ride on the artificial lake, Marika marveled at the beauty of the ancient castle, Vajda Hunyad.

Still another day was spent in the National Museum, where Marika learned about the beginning and early life of the Hungarian people, their great national characters, and events that had made history.

And that ended the sight-seeing, for from then on, Marika had to devote her time to schoolwork in order to catch up with her classmates.



Chapter VIII MIKULÁS

Like so many feathers shaken out of a pillow, the snow fell and covered Budapest. Winter had come, bringing merry days of ice-skating and sleighriding, which made the busy hours at school easier for Marika to bear.

“Tomorrow is Mikulás Day,” announced Mrs. Baan one morning. Answering the question in Marika’s eyes, she went on, “*Mikulás* is the Hungarian word for St. Nicholas. If you want Santa Claus to bring you something, you must put your shoes on the window sill tonight.”

“But, Mother,” replied Marika, surprised, “tomorrow is only the sixth of December. It’s much too early for Santa to come!”

“In Hungary,” Mother explained, “Santa Claus comes on Mikulás Day instead of Christmas Day.”

“Then Hungarian children have no Christmas, and no presents?”

“Oh, yes, they have. The gifts which they find under the Christmas tree are from the Krist Kindel, the Christ Child, whose birthday they celebrate.”

“O—o—oh, I like that, because then we really have two Christmas days.”

Marika very carefully placed her shoes on the window sill that night, and hopped out of bed early the next morning to see what the Mikulás had left in them. Besides bags of candy, a whistle, and a tiny doll in the toe of one shoe, she discovered two little figures. One of them was the Mikulás.

“Why, he’s dressed like a bishop!” exclaimed Marika.

“That is because St. Nicholas was an Italian bishop who became the special saint of children. Early Americans named him Santa Claus and gave him a red jacket and fat cheeks.”

“Who is the other, the ugly one with the long tail?”

“It is Krampus, the servant of Mikulás. All bad children fear him, but those who have been good find candy hidden in his switch.”

Marika must have been a good girl, for the candy that she found in the switch was the prettiest candy she had ever seen.

The spirit of the Mikulás was in the classroom, too, that day. The little girls, for only little girls went to Marika’s school, found it very hard to pay attention. Marika knew that something was going to happen. And something did happen!

In the midst of arithmetic problems the door opened, and an old man who looked like the little figure of the Mikulás entered. He was dressed in a white robe, and on his head was a miter, the kind of tall, fancy headdress worn by bishops. In one hand he carried a bishop’s staff, and in the other, a long chain by which he led the Krampus.

The Mikulás sat at the teacher’s desk and opened a large golden book. Stroking his white beard, he read the names of the good children. Those whose names were called received gifts from the bulging bag strapped to the back of the Krampus. From



The Mikulás was dressed in a white robe

a black book the Mikulás then read the names of the little girls who had been naughty.

“Baan Marika!” he called.

Marika slowly approached the desk.

“Now, Marika, you are a good little girl, but you are often late, and you have the bad habit of drooping your shoulders. Have you ever seen a camel?”

“Oh, yes! Ever so many! And I’ve seen monkeys, too!”

“Well,” continued Mikulás, smiling not at all, “unless you are more careful of the way you hold your shoulders, you will have a hump just like a camel.”

The Krampus stepped forward.

Marika did not wait to see what was in store for her. She thought only of the switch and the pain that it might cause. With lightning speed she turned about and dashed from the classroom, leaving a room of astonished children staring after her. Even the Mikulás was surprised at her unexpected action.

“I like Santa Claus better,” Marika later told her mother. “He has reindeer, not an ugly old Krampus, to carry the presents.”





Chapter IX CHRISTMAS

Eighteen days—seventeen days—sixteen— Marika, like millions of other children, counted the days until Christmas.

In the classroom everybody was talking about who would be in the Christmas play. Marika had no idea how that would be decided, but she knew that she loved to act more than anything in the world. And she was more experienced than any of her classmates. Surely the teacher would remember that and maybe, Marika eagerly hoped, she would be given the most important part!

But when the parts were passed out, Marika was not mentioned. She could hardly believe it, and was so hurt that it took all her will to keep the tears from rolling down her cheeks. After school she could hold back her feelings no longer and sobbed her disappointment to her mother.

“Never mind, Marika,” comforted Mrs. Baan. “You’ll have another chance. You must not blame the teacher for choosing girls she knows. It is hard work to train children for a play, and she may feel that you are not yet familiar enough with the Hungarian language, although I think that you speak very well. Now, I wouldn’t cry any more.”

Marika dried her tears and then curled up in a big chair to read her favorite book, and forget.

Scarcely a week before Christmas, one of the girls was forced to give up her part. Mumps was the cause of it. That worried the teacher, for she declared that there was no child in the class who could learn the part in so short a time.

Marika sat silent for a while. She wanted the part so badly, but if she offered to learn it, would the teacher refuse her? Finally she stood up and in a small voice, said, "I think I can learn it if you will only let me try."

And that is how Marika came to have the most difficult part in the play after all. She was to be a peasant boy who explained to foreign visitors how Christmas is celebrated in Hungary.

That pleased Marika immensely. She did not know anything about it herself.

She learned that the *Krist Kindel* brings the Christmas tree to the Hungarian home, all decorated and lighted with little candles, at eight o'clock on the night of December 24th. After his arrival bells ring, and the double doors of the hall are opened to reveal the tree in all its splendor, and surrounded by gifts, at the end of the room.

Then carolers come, bearing a mounted stand on which are carved wooden figures representing the story of the Nativity, the birth of Christ. Singing carols, the children carry it from house to house. They are rewarded with pennies and *diós-mákos patkó*, which are nut and poppyseed rolls, and other Christmas goodies.

After supper, which is usually a grand affair, the children go to bed, carrying their favorite toys. The grown-ups attend midnight mass. All theatres and public houses are closed that night. Those living away from home make every effort to be with their families. People who have no relatives are invited to the homes of friends. No one spends Christmas Eve alone.



“Isn’t that nice?” thought Marika. “It’s also a very good idea to receive the presents on Christmas Eve, because then I won’t have to spend the night listening for Santa Claus to come down the chimney.”

Long before the final rehearsal, Marika not only knew her part but the whole play as well. The teacher was more than satisfied. Yet, in spite of this, the play was almost called off.

A few days before Christmas, during the needlework hour—little girls in Hungary have to learn to do fancywork—Marika ran an embroidery needle under her thumbnail. When Christmas Eve arrived, the whole thumb was swollen and hurt terribly. She nearly fainted when the doctor treated it, but being a good little trouper, she gritted her teeth and went on with the play as if nothing had happened. Only the bandage on her hand carried the tale of her painful thumb.

The play was a huge success. Marika looked rather funny as a peasant boy. Her mother made her costume out of four white petticoats! One was pulled over each of her legs and arms and tied to look like the wide linen trousers and full, open shirtsleeves of a Hungarian peasant. A fancy braided vest and a gay handkerchief around her waist added the finishing touch.

And then of course her hair was covered with a small round hat. She looked quite dashing, especially with a big black mustache, which she twisted now and then just as she had seen the peasants do.

After the play a picture was taken of the cast. The photographer had a difficult time persuading all the children to be quiet and stand still at the same time. At last he was ready and began to count:

“One, two—now, children, smile—”

At that very moment Marika felt her beautiful mustache begin to slip. She quickly puckered her lips in a desperate effort to keep the mustache in place.

“Three!” shouted the photographer, and the picture was taken.

How funny Marika looked in it! The mustache hung in mid-air; her lips were puckered; her forehead wrinkled; and there was a desperate look in her eyes.

“Maybe, when I grow up,” she said, “I’ll be a comedienne, and make people laugh instead of cry.”

Chapter X
THE VIZSGA

After the Christmas vacation Marika had to work hard at school. Then, almost before she realized it, March and spring had arrived, and the snow began to melt. Marika, who seldom had lived in one place so long, became restless. Not that she no longer liked Budapest. She did. But a feeling that she wanted to go home grew stronger with every blade of grass that shot up from the ground.

In May the city was twice as beautiful as it had been in the fall. Acacia trees heavy with white blooms turned the country into a lovely sight. The blossoms, similar to sweet peas, grew in long grape-like clusters and covered the branches. The perfume of the flowers floated everywhere. Afterwards Marika never saw an acacia tree nor smelled its perfume without remembering this spring in Hungary.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Baan noticed that her little daughter often looked sad, and she thought she knew the reason.

“Have patience, darling,” she said cheerfully. “As soon as school is closed, we will start on our trip back to New York.”

The last day of school was given over to the *vizsga*, or final examination—a very different examination day from the ones Marika had known in the United States. Each room was decorated for the occasion, and every class had its own celebration. Each little girl was in her seat, hoping for the best. The mothers and fathers sat in rows behind the teacher’s desk. That is, all did except Mr. and Mrs. Baan, who were given a very special place.

At the teacher’s desk sat the superintendent and the members of the school board. The teacher stood or moved about the classroom, during the examination. It lasted several hours, and was divided into as many periods as there were subjects of study. The superintendent asked the questions, and the teacher named the pupils who were to give the answers.

Usually she knew which of the pupils could give the best answer, and she called on that one, but sometimes the superintendent indicated the pupil who was to answer and sometimes that pupil failed. Then the girl felt more than the usual disgrace, for she had publicly disappointed her parents.

The review of the last subject was drawing to an end when the superintendent's voice boomed out:

"Now I should like to hear a short outline of Hungarian history. Who will volunteer?"

Many hands were raised. The superintendent smiled broadly at the children's eagerness. The teacher's eyes darted around the room. The clock tick-tocked, tick-tocked, over the moment of waiting. Then—"Baan Marika!"

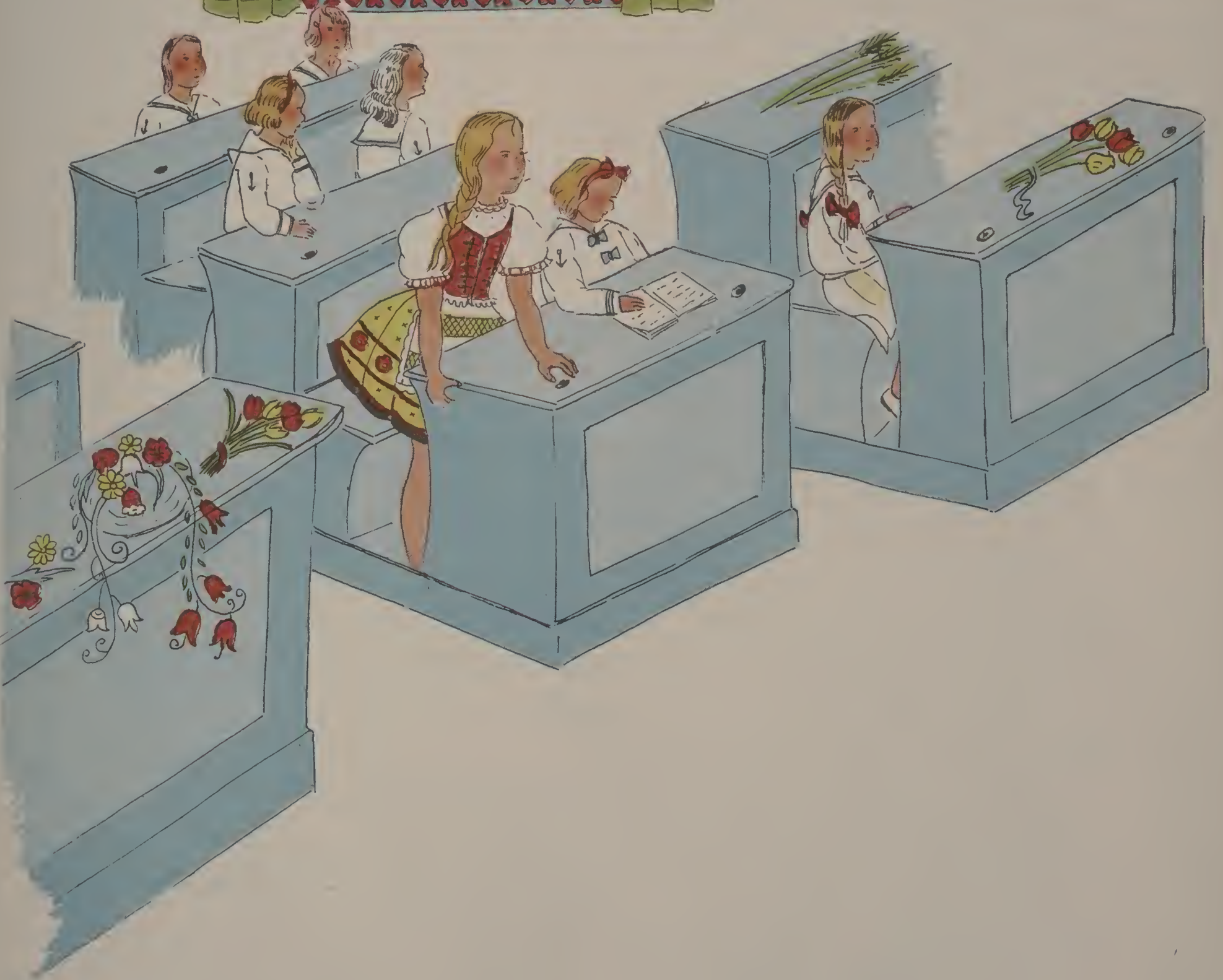
There was a buzz among the visitors.

"She is the great Baan's daughter!" stated one.

Another whispered, "She was brought up in America; had an English education. She could not speak Hungarian a year ago."

Her head held high, Marika began in a clear voice. Together with other facts, she told how the Hungarian people, more than a thousand years ago, came westward from the Ural Mountains and settled on the stretch of land between the two rivers, Duna and Tisza. How they had to defend their new home against Turks, Tartars, and surrounding enemies, who from time to time invaded their territory.

Marika told further how they preserved their language all through the centuries, in spite of long periods of oppression, and how they led other small nations in culture. She told how Hungary lost a greater part of her land after the World War, and how a large number of her people were placed under the rule of other countries. Marika concluded with the Credo, the prayer of every true Hungarian.



Her head held high, Marika began in a clear voice

After she finished speaking, there was a moment of silence. Then visitors and classmates alike expressed their admiration and approval by loud and long clapping. Even the superintendent joined in and praised Marika.

But Marika was deaf to all this. She couldn't get home fast enough. Her mind leaped to the hour when Mother and Daddy and she would leave for New York, and home. The trunks were packed and waiting. Perhaps she would meet Hamsun again!

The thought of seeing America and her old friends once more made her eager to be off. Oh, indeed, she loved Hungary, that beautiful native land of hers, and she was not altogether happy to leave it and the dear grandmother. And what about Ultimo? She hadn't thought of that before.

She ran to her father and asked anxiously, "Ultimo is going to the United States with us, isn't she, Daddy?"

"Marika, how can we take a dog on such a long trip? I'm afraid she'll have to stay with Grandmother."

Ultimo was following Marika about with trusting, appealing eyes, her little tail wagging hopefully.

"Oh, Ultimo! I can't leave you!" despaired Marika with her arms around the dog's neck.

The last trunk was being carried from the house.

"Please, please, Daddy, let me take Ultimo along!" she begged, her voice heavy with sobs.

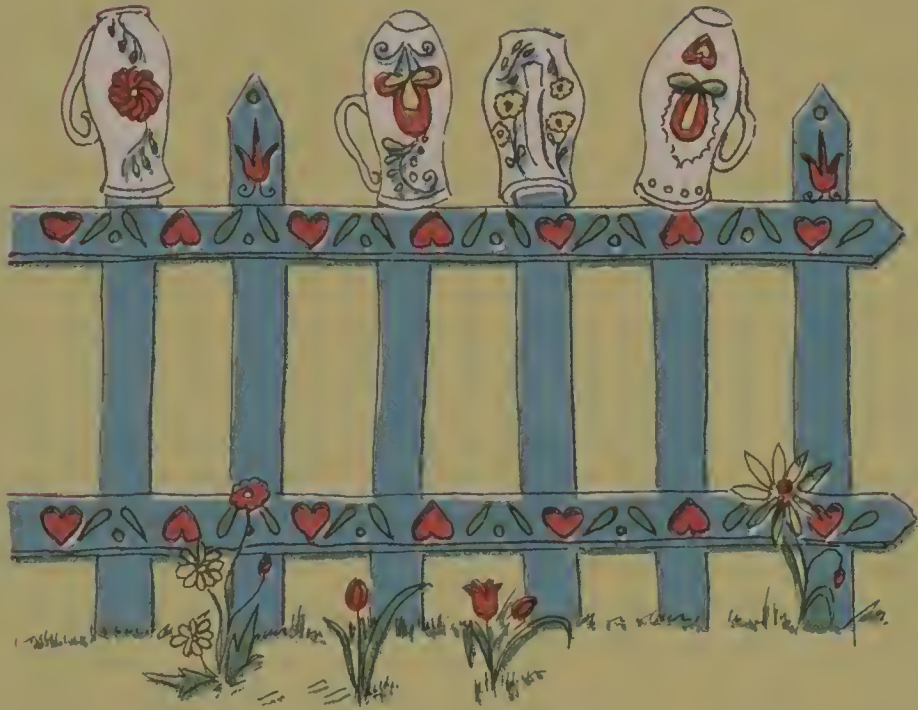
Daddy thought again as he tenderly stroked her hair.

"Well, Little Squirrel, if it means so much to you, we must find a way to take Ultimo with us."

Marika stopped in her joy and asked seriously, "Mother, what if American dogs call Ultimo a foreigner, too?"

"Oh, no, Marika dear! Only people do that. Dogs have a universal language. They all understand each other."

And so ended Marika's year in Hungary.





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