

THE CROSSING

John Metcalf

Scene 1

On board the German steamer "Stuttgart", January 14th 1933. We are looking, as though from the sea, towards a deck walkway. The ship's railings run across our line of vision. At the railings, George Grosz is standing watching the water. He is dressed in an overcoat and holds his hat.

After a while, Käthe walks along the deck walkway behind George. He doesn't notice her. She is dressed in a warm coat and hat but does not give the impression of being well off. She walks past him, glancing, then stops and comes over to him, pleased.

K Excuse me but aren't you George Grosz ?
G For my sins.
K I saw you and I thought
G Yes ?
K I mean. I've very much admired your work.
G That's kind of you.
K My name is Käthe Goldstein. I met you once at a rally.
G Oh, that must have been a long time ago.
(Käthe is about to speak) Look, I'm afraid I don't remember. (George looks at the water. There is an awkward pause)
K Do you mind my talking to you ?
G Mind ? I was somewhere else that's all. (There is a further pause. He is not looking at her. Käthe looks out to the water too)
K I've never been on a ship before. The sea's really beautiful, don't you think ?
G In a way.
K It's obvious, I'm disturbing you.
G It's alright. Truly. Just...don't expect too much of me. I'm no longer with you. You understand ?
K Everyone knows you left the Party.
G Ah, yes.
K One comrade leaving doesn't halt the class....
G halt the class struggle ? The same old phrases, I see.
K They have meaning for me, Mr Grosz.
G I'm sure they have !
K The struggle goes on. We still like your work.
G And you still have all the answers. Listen . A while ago, I went to the Soviet Union. Met a chemist from Simbirsk. Little man, goatee beard, neat moustache and earnest eyebrows. An honest burgher. Pillar of society.
K And so ?
G He had a remedy for everything.
"What can I do for you ?"
"I've a funny rash on my chest"
"Syphilis ! You swine ! Effervescent selzerpulver. Twice a day. Next ?"
"I have a fearful feeling inside"
"Dangerous. Blue capsules. Every night for ten years. Next ! Well ?"
"I'm in despair. Sick with craving for Liberty"
"Arrgh ! Very dangerous. But you are fortunate, comrade. We can cure anything. Red pills until

further notice"

K A chemist ?
G Lenin ! Patent medicines for everything.
And now, if you'll excuse me Miss Goldstein. My my wife is sleeping in our cabin....
K I'm Mrs. Goldstein by the way.
G Forgive me, the thought hadn't crossed my mind.
(He leaves. Käthe stands at the railings)

Scene 2

The sailor enters. He begins to dance. The music is lively, insistent. After a while he approaches Käthe and stands motionless behind her. She turns. They dance together. At the end of the dance the Sailor is torn back and away from Käthe as if by an invisible force. He leaves. George returns.

Scene 3

K I'm glad you came back. Is your wife still sleeping ?
G Eva ? Yes.
Look. I'm sorry about that just now. I didn't intend to be rude.
K It doesn't matter
(They look out to sea)
G I....
K Are you....?
(They speak at the same time. George gestures to Käthe to continue)
Are you going for an exhibition of your work ?
G Yes.
K Are you well paid for it ?
G Not exactly. The idea is that people buy the pictures.
K Do they like them in America ?
G Look. I'd really ra(ther)...
(They are interrupted by a noise behind them. A woman is walking along the deckway. She is smartly dressed. She looks over and a slight smile passes across her face. She goes.)
On the prowl !
(Käthe shrugs her shoulders)
She walked past me earlier. Garish world.
Blessed box of freaks !
K You're very cynical'.
G Within us are every passion, every vice.
A thousand violet nights
etch deep wrinkles
in our faces.
Light from a thousand neon tubes
surrounds us.
On bridges of steel
between blocks of grey houses
we reel
Burning
In our nerves, in our veins
We know every sun and star