



Boat of Stone

Maureen Earl

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In October 1940, as the storm clouds of World War II gathered, the S.S. Atlantic set sail for Palestine. A condemned and overcrowded ship, it was filled to overflowing with bedraggled Jewish refugees who, having bought their way out of Nazi Germany, hoped to find safety from the burgeoning concentration camps that had begun to claim their brethren. They were not destined to find the safety they sought, however. Besides a merciless voyage, beset by shortages of fuel and food and raging epidemics, the survivors were ultimately incarcerated on a British penal colony off the eastern coast of Africa. These events, though factual, are little known. And it is from these true happenings that Maureen Earl has crafted a novel of power, poignancy, and redemption: a work that manages to transform tragedy into hopefulness, a paean to the determination to survive, to work, to get on with the business of life. Her fictional narrator is the elderly Hanna Sommerfeld, now living with her son and his family in Haifa. Her present life is seamlessly interwoven with her recollections of times past, of her flight from Germany as a young married woman, of her ambivalent relationship with her husband, and of her coming of age in the jungles of Mauritius. Hanna is one of the most unforgettable characters you are likely to meet: a gritty, humorous, wise, and adventurous woman who, in an age of victims, refuses to become one.

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