

## A JUNIOR LIBRARY GUILD SELECTION

“Children will cheer for Susan’s courage in defying the injustice in her world.”—*School Library Journal*

“It’s unusual to find a chapter book for younger readers that takes on the painful history of racial segregation and discrimination. . . . An enjoyable chapter book with great potential for discussion.”—*Booklist*

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Clayton, Missouri, is so different from Susan’s old home in New York City. The accents, the baseball fans, and even worse, the *prejudice*—against Jews, African Americans, and the Japanese. Susan learns that she and her new friend Marlene must be covert about their friendship with Loretta, the daughter of their building’s black janitor, for Jim Crow laws still exist in 1943 Missouri.

But as Susan gets used to Clayton, her outrage over these unfair laws grows. She decides that it’s time to strike a blow against them. Her small yet courageous stand might get her in big trouble . . . Or will it send a powerful message against hate and discrimination? Take that, Jim Crow!

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# CHAPTER



I was hanging as far as I could out of the third-floor window of my grandmother's Manhattan apartment and craning my neck to look west. I could see slices of the Hudson River through some trees, but across the river, the cliffs of New Jersey blocked my view of the rest of the country.

And I was yelling at Judy Wasserman who lives up on five through my empty soup can, connected by string to hers—homemade phones. I couldn't tell if they worked or not, because we were both yelling so loud we could hear each other just fine without any help.

“All I can see is New Jersey,” I hollered.

“I told you,” she hollered back.

Just then, my cousin Barbara tugged at the back of my skirt. “You're going to fall out and kill yourself,” she said. “And don't yell out the window. It's not nice.”

“I gotta go,” I yelled, letting go of my phone so Judy could pull it up.

“Okay, bye,” Judy yelled, letting go of her phone so I could pull it in.

The tin cans rattled down the front of the building and clattered onto the sidewalk. I ducked in fast in case anyone down below wondered who was throwing junk out of the window.

“Your dad is telling Grandma right now,” Barbara whispered nervously, once I was inside. “They’re in the kitchen.”

I started for the bedroom door, and she grabbed my arm. “Nobody’s in there but the two of them,” she warned.

“Barbara,” I said, “quit grabbing me.”

Barbara let go. She’s twelve, two years older than I am, but she’s afraid of me. I don’t know why. Anyway, she let go, and we tiptoed through the living room where two great-aunts and two great-uncles were dozing (we’d had our usual Sunday potluck lunch), and then through the dining room, where the bunched-up napkins were still scattered around on Grandma’s big, claw-footed table. We got to the kitchen door just in time to see Grandma sink to the linoleum, murmuring, “Cowboys! Wild Indians!”

Daddy folded a dishtowel and tucked it under Grandma’s head. Then he sat down cross-legged next to her on the floor.

“It’s the dratted war, Mother,” he explained. Grandma was my mother’s mom, not his, but he always respectfully called her Mother.

Grandma opened a teary eye and gave him one of her looks. Daddy continued, “My boss, Mr. Pollock, has a bad heart, and he’s been ready to retire for a long time. But he kept his dress-making factory open so his son, Dan, would have something to come back to after the war.”

Grandma’s eyes both were closed now, but she gave a tiny nod. “The thing is, Mother,” Daddy said quietly, “Dan was killed in action a couple of weeks ago.” He paused and cleared his throat. “So you see, now Mr. Pollock has no reason not to retire. Now he has a bad heart and a broken heart. He’s closing his business. And I am out of a job.”

My father had not been out of a job through the whole of

the Great Depression. He had not been out of a job since he quit school in the eighth grade and went to work to help his mom take care of his younger brother and sister. How could such a scary thing happen to him now, in 1943, when The Depression seemed so far away and the country was in the middle of a war?

“But I’ve been lucky,” Daddy was saying. “I’ve found another good job. There’s room for advancement, too, Mother. It’s not just a job, it’s an opportunity. Except it’s in Missouri.”

“In Missouri.” Grandma groaned again.

“In Missouri,” Daddy confirmed.

“Cowboys,” she stubbornly repeated. “Wild Indians.”

“Nothing of the sort,” Daddy assured her.

“Poor Grandma,” sniveled Barbara.

“Barbara,” I turned to face her, “don’t you know it’s wrong to eavesdrop? You better scoot before Grandma finds out you’ve been listening to every word they’ve said!”

“Oh!” she squeaked, her hand covering her mouth and her eyes opening wide before she fled.

“Now, Mother,” my exasperated father was saying, “remember what President Roosevelt said: ‘The only thing we have to fear is fear itself . . .’”

Daddy admired our President and quoted him whenever he could. “I can’t speak the way he does,” Daddy had told me. “But the President and I think exactly alike.”