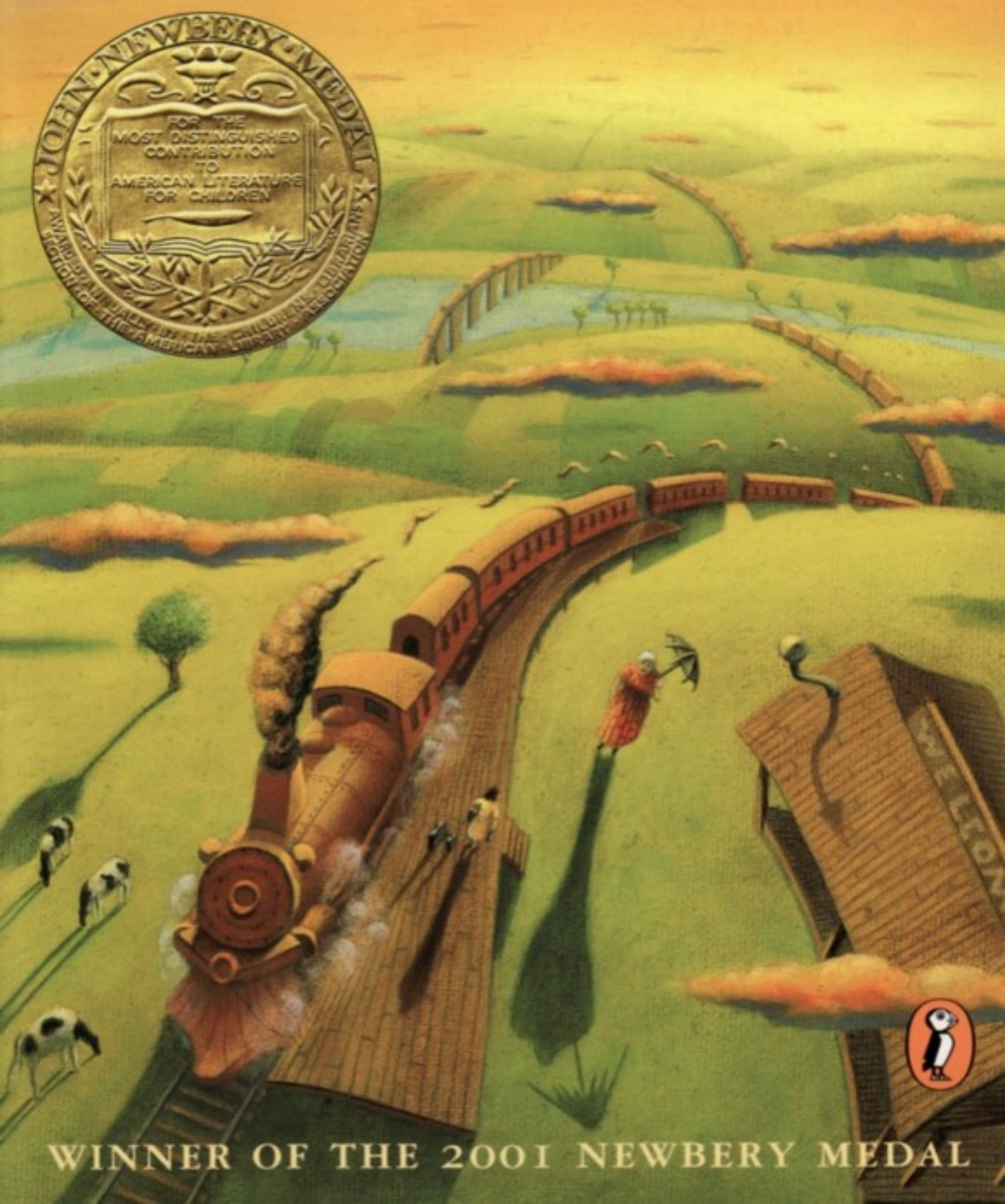


the sequel to the Newbery Honor Book A LONG WAY FROM CHICAGO

A Year Down Yonder

— RICHARD PECK



WINNER OF THE 2001 NEWBERY MEDAL

Rich Chicago Girl

Oh, didn't I feel sorry for myself when the Wabash Railroad's Blue Bird train steamed into Grandma's town. The sandwich was still crumbs in my throat because I didn't have the dime for a bottle of pop. They wanted a dime for pop on the train.

My trunk thumped out onto the platform from the baggage car ahead. There I stood at the end of the world with all I had left. Bootsie and my radio.

Bootsie was my cat, with a patch of white fur on each paw. She'd traveled in a picnic hamper. Bootsie had come from down here, two summers ago when she was

a kitten. Now she was grown but scrawny. She'd spent the trip trying to claw through the hamper. She didn't like change any more than I did.

My portable radio was in my other hand. It was a Philco with a leatherette cover and handle. Portable radios weighed ten pounds in those days.

As the train pulled out behind me, there came Grandma up the platform steps. My goodness, she was a big woman. I'd forgotten. And taller still with her spidery old umbrella held up to keep off the sun of high noon. A fan of white hair escaped the big bun on the back of her head. She drew nearer till she blotted out the day.

You couldn't call her a welcoming woman, and there wasn't a hug in her. She didn't put out her arms, so I had nothing to run into.

Nobody had told Grandma that skirts were shorter this year. Her skirrtails brushed her shoes. I recognized the dress. It was the one she put on in hot weather to walk uptown in. Though I was two years older, two years taller than last time, she wasn't one for personal comments. The picnic hamper quivered, and she noticed. "What's in there?"

"Bootsie," I said. "My cat."

"Hoo-boy," Grandma said. "Another mouth to feed." Her lips pleated. "And what's that thing?" She nodded to my other hand.

"My radio." But it was more than a radio to me. It was my last touch with the world.

"That's all we need." Grandma looked skyward.
"More noise."

She aimed one of her chins down the platform. "That yours?" She meant the trunk. It was the footlocker Dad had brought home from the Great War.

"Leave it," she said. "They'll bring it to the house." She turned and trudged away, and I was supposed to follow. I walked away from my trunk, wondering if I'd ever see it again. It wouldn't have lasted long on the platform in Chicago. Hot tongs wouldn't have separated me from Bootsie and my radio.

The recession of thirty-seven had hit Grandma's town harder than it had hit Chicago. Grass grew in the main street. Only a face or two showed in the window of The Coffee Pot Cafe. Moore's Store was hurting for trade. Weidenbach's bank looked to be just barely in business.

On the other side of the weedy road, Grandma turned the wrong way, away from her house. Two old slab-sided dogs slept on the sidewalk. Bootsie knew because she was having a conniption in the hamper. And my radio was getting heavier. I caught up with Grandma.

"Where are we going?"

"Going?" she said, the picture of surprise. "Why, to school. You've already missed pretty nearly two weeks."

"School!" I'd have clutched my forehead if my hands weren't full. "On my first day here?"

Grandma stopped dead and spoke clear. "You're going to school. I don't want the law on me."

"Grandma, the law's afraid of you. You'd grab up that



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★“In this hilarious and poignant sequel to *A Long Way from Chicago*, Peck once again shows that country life is anything but boring.”
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A Long Way from Chicago
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U.S.A. \$6.99
CAN. \$9.99
1014

ISBN 0-14-230070-5



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