

A NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER

AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS



I Live Here



GENNIFER CHOLDENKO

I. Devil's Island

Friday, January 4, 1935

Today I moved to a twelve-acre rock covered with cement, topped with bird turd and surrounded by water. Alcatraz sits smack in the middle of the bay—so close to the city of San Francisco, I can hear them call the score on a baseball game on Marina Green. Okay, not that close. But still.

I'm not the only kid who lives here. There's my sister, Natalie, except she doesn't count. And there are twenty-three other kids who live on the island because their dads work as guards or cooks or doctors or electricians for the prison like my dad does. Plus there are a ton of murderers, rapists, hit men, con men, stickup men, embezzlers, connivers, burglars, kidnappers and maybe even an innocent man or two, though I doubt it.

The convicts we have are the kind other prisons don't want. I never knew prisons could be picky, but I guess they can. You get to Alcatraz by being the worst of the worst. Unless you're me. I came here because my mother said I had to.

I want to be here like I want poison oak on my private parts. But apparently nobody cares, because now I'm Moose Flanagan, Alcatraz Island Boy—all so my sister can go to the Esther P. Marinoff School, where kids have macaroni salad in their hair and wear their clothes inside out and there isn't a chalkboard or

a book in sight. Not that I've ever been to the Esther P. Marinoff. But all of Natalie's schools are like this.

I peek out the front window of our new apartment and look up to see a little glass room lit bright in the dark night. This is the dock guard tower, a popcorn stand on stilts where somebody's dad sits with enough firepower to blow us all to smithereens. The only guns on the island are up high in the towers or the catwalks, because one flick of the wrist and a gun carried by a guard is a gun carried by a criminal. The keys to all the boats are kept up there for the same reason. They even have a crapper in each tower so the guards don't have to come down to take a leak.

Besides the guard tower, there's water all around, black and shiny like tar. A full moon cuts a white path across the bay while the wind blows, making something creak and a buoy clang in the distance.

My dad is out there too. He has guard duty in another tower somewhere on the island. My dad's an electrician, for Pete's sake. What's he doing playing prison guard?

My mom is in her room unpacking and Natalie's sitting on the kitchen floor, running her hands through her button box. She knows more about those buttons than it seems possible to know. If I hide one behind my back, she can take one look at her box and name the exact button I have.

"Nat, you okay?" I sit down on the floor next to her.

"Moose and Natalie go on a train. Moose and Natalie eat meat loaf sandwich. Moose and Natalie look out the window."

"Yeah, we did all that. And now we're here with some swell fellows like Al Capone and Machine Gun Kelly."

"Natalie Flanagan's whole family."

“Well, I wouldn’t exactly say they’re family. More like next-door neighbors, I guess.”

“Moose and Natalie go to school,” she says.

“Yep, but not the same school, remember? You’re going to this *nice* place called the Esther P. Marinoff.” I try to sound sincere.

“*Nice* place,” she repeats, stacking one button on top of another.

I’ve never been good at fooling Natalie. She knows me too well. When I was five, I was kind of a runt. Smallest kid of all my cousins, shortest kid in my kindergarten class and on my block too. Back then people called me by my real name, Matthew. Natalie was the first person to call me “Moose.” I swear I started growing to fit the name that very day. Now I’m five foot eleven and a half inches—as tall as my mom and a good two inches taller than my dad. My father tells people I’ve grown so much, he’s going to put my supper into pickle jars and sell it under the name Incredible Growth Formula.

I think about going in my room now, but it smells like the inside of an old lunch bag in there. My bed’s a squeaky old army cot. When I sit down, it sounds like dozens of mice are dying an ugly death. There’s no phonograph in this apartment. No washing machine. No phone. There’s a radio cabinet, but someone yanked the workings out. Who gutted the radio, anyway? They don’t let the criminals in *here* . . . do they?

So, I’m a little jumpy. But anybody would be. Even the silence here is strange. It’s quiet like something you can’t hear is happening.

I think about telling my best friend, Pete, about this place. “It’s the Devil’s Island . . . *doo, doo, doo.*” Pete would say in a deep

MURDERERS, MOB BOSSES, AND CONVICTS . . .

THESE GUYS ARE NOT YOUR AVERAGE NEIGHBORS.

Not unless you live on Alcatraz. It's 1935 and twelve-year-old Moose Flanagan and his family have just moved to the infamous island that's home to criminals like notorious escapee Roy Gardner, Machine Gun Kelly, and, of course, Al Capone. But that's just the beginning of Moose's troubles because on Alcatraz the kids are all cowed by the clever, danger-loving daughter of the warden, Piper Williams. Now Moose has to try to fit in at his new school, avoid getting caught up in one of Piper's countless schemes, and keep an eye on his sister, Natalie, who's not like other kids. All Moose wants to do is protect Natalie, live up to his parents' expectations, and stay out of trouble. But on Alcatraz, trouble is never very far away.

★ "Choldenko's pacing is exquisite. Often humorous and riveting . . . fascinating setting [with] some hysterically funny scenes. A great read!"

—*Kirkus Reviews*,
starred review

"The freshest voice since Jack Gantos's *Joey Pigza!* *Al* is the perfect novel for a young guy or moll who digs books by Gordon Korman, or Louis Sachar."

—*Time Out*
New York Kids



PUFFIN

ISBN 0-14-240370-9



9 780142 403709

50699>



EAN



U.S.A. \$6.99 / CAN. \$9.99

Ages 10 up

VISIT US AT www.penguin.com/youngreaders