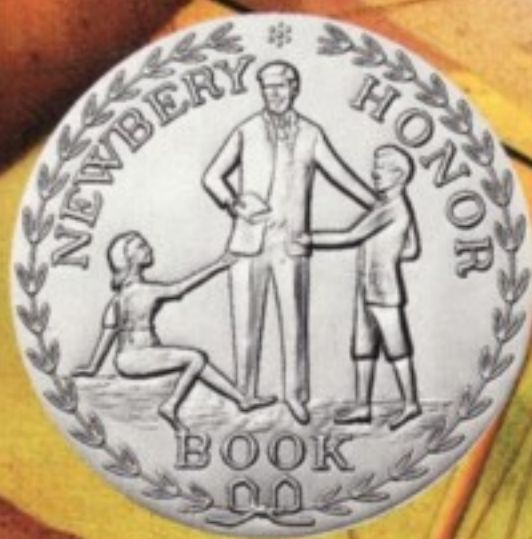


A NATIONAL BOOK
AWARD FINALIST

RICHARD PECK

A Long Way from Chicago



Shotgun Cheatham's Last Night Above Ground



1929

You wouldn't think we'd have to leave Chicago to see a dead body. We were growing up there back in the bad old days of Al Capone and Bugs Moran. Just the winter before, they'd had the St. Valentine's Day Massacre over on North Clark Street. The city had such an evil reputation that the Thompson submachine gun was better known as a "Chicago typewriter."

But I'd grown to the age of nine, and my sister Mary Alice was seven, and we'd yet to see a stiff. We guessed that most of them were where you couldn't see them, at the bottom of Lake Michigan, wearing concrete overshoes.

No, we had to travel all the way down to our Grandma Dowdel's before we ever set eyes on a corpse. Dad said Mary Alice and I were getting to the age when we could travel on our own. He said it was time we spent a week with Grandma, who was getting on in years. We hadn't seen anything of her since we were tykes. Being Chicago people, Mother and Dad didn't have a car. And Grandma wasn't on the telephone.

"They're dumping us on her is what they're doing," Mary Alice said darkly. She suspected that Mother and Dad would take off for a week of fishing up in Wisconsin in our absence.

I didn't mind going because we went on the train, the Wabash Railroad's crack Blue Bird that left Dearborn Station every morning, bound for St. Louis. Grandma lived somewhere in between, in one of those towns the railroad tracks cut in two. People stood out on their porches to see the train go through.

Mary Alice said she couldn't stand the place. For one thing, at Grandma's you had to go outside to the privy. It stood just across from the cobhouse, a tumbledown shed full of stuff left there in Grandpa Dowdel's time. A big old snaggletoothed tomcat lived in the cobhouse, and as quick as you'd come out of the privy, he'd jump at you. Mary Alice hated that.

Mary Alice said there was nothing to do and nobody to do it with, so she'd tag after me, though I was two years older and a boy. We'd stroll uptown in those first days. It was only a short block of brick buildings: the bank, the insurance agency, Moore's Store, and The Coffee Pot Cafe, where the old saloon had stood. Prohibition was on in

those days, which meant that selling liquor was against the law. So people made their own beer at home. They still had the tin roofs out over the sidewalk, and hitching rails. Most farmers came to town horse-drawn, though there were Fords, and the banker, L. J. Weidenbach, drove a Hupmobile.

It looked like a slow place to us. But that was before they buried Shotgun Cheatham. He might have made it unnoticed all the way to the grave except for his name. The county seat newspaper didn't want to run an obituary on anybody called Shotgun, but nobody knew any other name for him. This sparked attention from some of the bigger newspapers. One sent in a stringer to nose around The Coffee Pot Cafe for a human-interest story since it was August, a slow month for news.

The Coffee Pot was where people went to loaf, talk tall, and swap gossip. Mary Alice and I were of some interest when we dropped by because we were kin of Mrs. Dowdel's, who never set foot in the place. She said she liked to keep herself to herself, which was uphill work in a town like that.

Mary Alice and I carried the tale home that a suspicious type had come off the train in citified clothes and a stiff straw hat. He stuck out a mile and was asking around about Shotgun Cheatham. And he was taking notes.

Grandma had already heard it on the grapevine that Shotgun was no more, though she wasn't the first person people ran to with news. She wasn't what you'd call a popular woman. Grandpa Dowdel had been well thought of, but he was long gone.

That was the day she was working tomatoes on the

Meet the unforgettable Grandma Dowdel!

During the Great Depression, Joey and his sister, Mary Alice—two city slickers from Chicago—make their annual summer visit to Grandma Dowdel's sleepy Illinois town. Soon enough, they find that it's far from sleepy... and Grandma is *far* from typical. From seeing their first corpse (and he isn't resting easy) to helping Grandma trespass, pinch property, catch the sheriff in his underwear, and feed the hungry—all in one day—Joey and Mary Alice have seven summers they'll never forget!

◆ "Grandma Dowdel embodies not only the heart of a small town but the spirit of an era gone by... Peck deftly captures the feel of the times... Remarkable and fine."

—Kirkus Reviews, pointer review

A Newbery Honor Book
A National Book Award Finalist
An ALA Notable Book



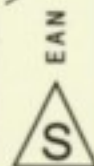
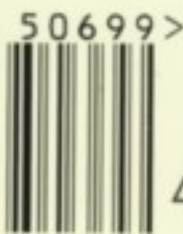
PUFFIN

U.S.A. \$6.99

CAN. \$9.99

Ages 8 up

ISBN 0-14-130352-2



VISIT US AT www.penguin.com

Cover illustration copyright
© Steve Cieslawski, 1998