

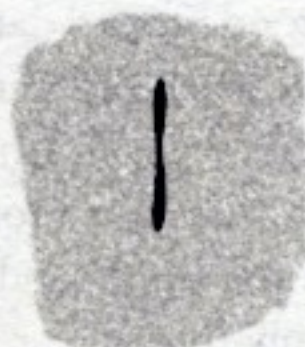
Gary D. Schmidt



Lizzie Bright *and* the Buckminster Boy



C H A P T E R



TURNER Buckminster had lived in Phippsburg, Maine, for fifteen minutes shy of six hours. He had dipped his hand in its waves and licked the salt from his fingers. He had smelled the sharp resin of the pines. He had heard the low rhythm of the bells on the buoys that balanced on the ridges of the sea. He had seen the fine clapboard parsonage beside the church where he was to live, and the small house set a ways beyond it that puzzled him some.

Turner Buckminster had lived in Phippsburg, Maine, for almost six whole hours.

He didn't know how much longer he could stand it.

Maybe somewhere out West there really were Territories that he could light out to, where being a minister's son wouldn't matter worth a . . . well, worth a darn. He hoped so, because here, being a minister's son mattered a whole lot, and pretending that it didn't matter to him was starting to peck at his soul.

He did have to admit that their arrival had something to it. Every member of Phippsburg's First Congregational—as well

as lost reprobates from other denominations—had gathered to greet the new minister and his family. A quartet of slick trombones played a Sousa march as the steamer *Kennebec* came in sight of the wharf. A red, white, and blue welcome banner unfurled at the end of the dock: WELCOME PASTOR BUCKMINSTER! The church deacons stood properly at the foot of the gangway, their hands grasping the lapels of their dark suits, their hats lifting in unison as soon as Mrs. Buckminster appeared on deck. A cheer at the sight of the new pastor, the quartet sliding into “Come, Ye That Love the Lord,” and the bronze bells of First Congregational suddenly tolling.

Then the three of them had stepped onto the shore of their new home, and the deacons grabbed their new pastor’s arms, and the women of the Ladies Sewing Circle of First Congregational grabbed their new pastor’s wife’s arms, and Turner . . . Turner stood alone at the edge of the dock, faced by the sons and daughters of the deacons and the women of the Ladies Sewing Circle. Not a single one of them grabbed his arms. They looked at him as if he’d stepped in something they didn’t want to be around.

He held up his hand. “Hey,” he said.

But it appeared that what he had heard in Boston was true: folks in Maine spoke a whole different language, and didn’t care for those who couldn’t speak it themselves.

That was the first time Turner thought about lighting out for the Territories.

Though things did get better. The Ladies’ Sewing Circle set out a picnic with enough cold chicken, cold pork, German potato salad, hard-boiled eggs, cucumbers, tomato slices, dill pickles, bacon strips, ham-and-butter sandwiches, apple-cranberry muffins, rhubarb muffins, gooseberry muffins, and strawberry and boysenberry preserves to feed the Five Thou-

sand. And after Deacon Hurd had prayed long enough to aggravate the prophet Elijah, Turner sat down and began to think that maybe Phippsburg wouldn't be such a bad place after all—once he learned the language.

And things got even better when Deacon Hurd called the sides for the afternoon baseball game. Turner's mother grinned at him, and he grinned back.

With whistles and calls and impossible boasts, the men and boys of First Congregational strolled across to Thayer's haymeadow—mown just the day before—and marked out the lines. They circled the pitcher's mound, and squared the batter's box beside the plate. Then Deacon Hurd, now Umpire Hurd, took off his jacket and held a bat out to Turner.

"You ever play this game before, young Buckminster?"

"Yes, sir," said Turner.

He wanted to say, "About a hundred thousand times." Or, "About a hundred million times." Or, "Mister, I can shimmy a ball down a line so pretty, there isn't a soul on God's green earth that can even get near it." But he held back and just grinned again.

"Then you're the first man up," said Deacon Hurd.

"Yes, sir," said Turner, and took the bat, the resin on it feeling like home.

It wasn't exactly the kind of field he might lay out on Boston Common. It was more stubble than grass. Home plate was tilted up and stamped on top with a cracked mollusk fossil. And since the other bases were set wherever a slab of granite showed its back, they weren't playing on anything you could rightly call a diamond. But Turner saw that the pines sided awful close to the left-field line, and he could spin a ball to make it touch in fair, then scoot off into the trees. He imagined that would be at least a triple. And even the trees in

Turner Buckminster is purely miserable. Not only is he the son of the new minister in a small Maine town, but he is shunned for playing baseball differently from the local boys. Turner feels as if everyone young and old is watching every move and every mistake he makes.

One huge mistake is his forbidden friendship with smart and lively Lizzie Bright Griffin, a girl from Malaga Island, a poor community founded by former slaves. Lizzie shows Turner a new world along the Maine coast, from digging clams to rowing a boat alongside a whale. When the powerful town elders, including Turner's father, decide to drive the people off the island to set up a tourist business, Turner stands alone against them. He and Lizzie try to save her community, but there's a terrible price to pay for going against the tide.

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