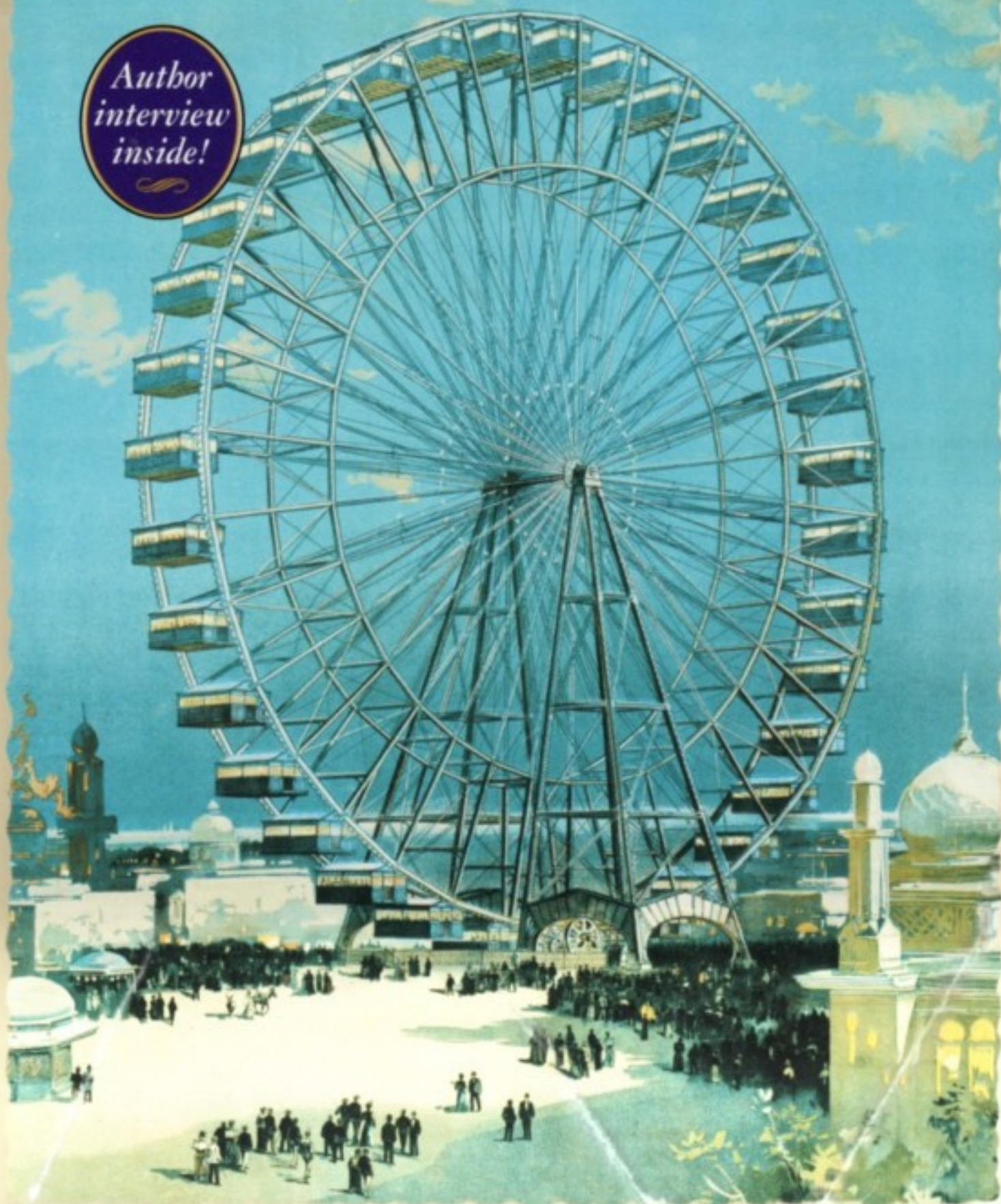


RICHARD PECK

Author of the Newbery Medal-winning *A Year Down Yonder*

Fair Weather

Author
interview
inside!



AN INVITATION FROM AUNT EUTERPE



It was the last day of our old lives, and we didn't even know it.

I didn't. It looked like any old day to me, a sultry summer morning hot enough to ruffle the roofline. But then, any little thing could come as a surprise to us. We were just plain country people. I suppose we were poor, but we didn't know it. Poor but proud. There wasn't a blister of paint on the house, but there were no hogs under the porch.

I was sitting out in the old rope swing at the back of our place because the house was too full of Mama and my sister, Lottie. I wasn't swinging. I thought I was pretty

nearly too old to swing. In the fall I'd be fourteen, with only one more year of school to go.

I was barefoot, bare almost up to the knee. And I wasn't sitting there empty-handed. We were farmers. We were never empty-handed. I was snapping beans in the colander.

After I'd gathered the eggs and skimmed the milk, I'd been out in the timber with a pail for raspberries, wild strawberries, anything going. I'd kept an eye out for mulberries the raccoons might have missed. They loved mulberries. I'd worked up a sweat in the cool of the morning. Now I was enjoying a little quiet here in the heat of the day.

It was all too peaceful to last.

My brother, Buster, was creeping up behind me. He meant to scare me out of my swing and send my beans flying. I snapped on like I was alone in the world. But I knew when he was lurking behind the privy. I knew when he made a dash for the smokehouse. Now I could hear him come stealing up behind me.

Twigs broke. Birds flew off. You'd have to be a corpse not to know. But a boy will pull the same fool stunt over and over like he's just thought of it. He'd be carrying a dead squirrel.

By and by I felt boy-breath on the back of my neck. My hair was in braids. On the nape of my neck I felt a tickle. It might have been a woolly caterpillar off the tree.

But it wasn't. It was the tip end of a squirrel tail. It itched powerfully, but I didn't let on.

He kept it up as a boy will. Presently something hot and clingy dropped over my shoulder. I looked aside and I was eye-to-eye with a dead squirrel, draped there with his little paws dangling down.

As if I hadn't seen every kind of dead animal there is. Many's the time I'd watched Dad gut a pig.

I brushed the squirrel off into the weeds and went on with my work. Buster darted forward, showing himself, and grabbed the squirrel by the tail.

He wore bib overalls and not a stitch else. Fumbling in his pocket, he drew out a folding knife. He had to hold the squirrel by the tail in his teeth to get the blade open.

Squinting, he gripped the squirrel upside down by its hindquarters and made a cut with the knife just above the tail. Then he dropped the squirrel on the ground and tramped his bare foot on the bushy tail to keep it in place. He stooped over, working his fingers into the slit he'd made. Then he stood up right quick, lifting the skin off that squirrel in a single move. A squirrel skins easy. The carcass, pinky-white like a chicken thigh, fell back in the tall grass. Buster held up the pelt, all in one piece like a doll's winter coat.

He was testing me.

Skinning an animal never had fazed me. Neither had killing a snake or shooting a rat in the rain barrel. But I

Postcard 3

IT WAS THE LAST DAY OF OUR OLD LIVES,
AND WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT.

Thirteen-year-old Rosie Beckett has never strayed further from her family's farm than a horse can pull a cart. Then a letter from Aunt Euterpe arrives, and everything changes. It's 1893, the year of the World's Columbian Exposition—the “wonder of the age”—otherwise known as the Chicago World's Fair. Tucked inside the pages of the letter are train tickets to Chicago, because Aunt Euterpe is inviting the Becketts to come for a visit and go to the fair! For Rosie, it's a summer of marvels—a summer she'll never forget.

★ “Peck's unforgettable characters, cunning dialogue and fast-paced action will keep readers of all ages in stitches as he captures a colorful chapter in American history.”
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “Readers will feel that they've actually been to the fair.”
—*Booklist*, starred review



A PUFFIN BOOK

U.S.A. \$5.99
CAN. \$8.99
1014

ISBN 0-14-250034-8



UPC



VISIT US AT www.penguinputnam.com

Cover art (chromolithograph of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition Ferris wheel) by Charles Graham, courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society

Cover design by Jim Hoover