

AUDREY COULOUMBIS

*Newbery Honor-Winning Author of *Getting Near to Baby**



*The Misadventures of*  
MAUDE MARCH



# ONE

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HE HEAT WAS AWFUL.

The breeze, when we got one, felt like it came out of an oven. Aunt Ruthie hoped to take our minds off our misery by taking us to town. Even in the dim cool of the mercantile, sweat made our clothing cling to our skin.

My dress was the worst, made out of some kind of muslin that got itchy once it stuck to me. Every two minutes, Aunt Ruthie would say, "Stop scratching, Sallie, it isn't polite."

The shooting didn't start until we'd stepped outside of the mercantile. The screen door whacked shut behind us, and we were greeted by a volley of shots. It was stunning really. Then it was scary. The noise was too great to take it all in at once.

It's strange the way time stretched in that moment and seemed to go on forever. The entire morning passed through my mind, starting when my older sister Maude ate my biscuit with jelly that I had left over from breakfast.

When I complained there were no more biscuits, and that was the last of the black currant jelly, she said, "If you wanted it, you shouldn't have left it laying around." So while Aunt



Ruthie said it was the heat, I knew it was that biscuit that had me squabbling with Maude all day.

As we neared the barbershop, walking to town, Maude pulled Aunt Ruthie toward a stone bench, saying, "You're tiring yourself. Come sit down for a minute," and I dragged on Aunt Ruthie's other arm, saying, "It gets too hot to sit on that rock in the sun. Let's go someplace cooler."

Aunt Ruthie said, "I've had enough of being pulled apart."

In the mercantile, she showed her teeth at us and whispered, "You are to keep your distance, both of you. I don't care to listen to you bicker for another minute." We promised to be good. To this, she said, "Stay over there by the farm goods."

In these aisles, there were only smelly jars of lanolin and herbal salves to examine, and such things as curative oils for ear mites and wireworm to avoid, having nasty little pictures of the ills on the side of the bottles. This bothered me so bad that I pulled a dimer out of my pocket and set to reading it instead.

But Aunt Ruthie was right in sending us there. It was not two minutes before Maude started up again. She told me that Joe Harden, Frontier Fighter, was never a real man. "Those books weren't meant for girls to read, either," she said.

"How would you know?" I said to her. Maude didn't like for me to read dime novels. Sad to say, Maude thought dimers were a waste of learning how to read.

"It's just a made-up name for made-up stories out of books," she said. "Boys probably look up to him, but Joe Harden is just a story figure."



"Like David?" I asked her.

"David who?"

"David who slew Goliath. Is he made up?"

"Of course not, Sallie," Maude said. "What a terrible thing to say. Don't you let Aunt Ruthie hear you talk like that."

I didn't think Aunt Ruthie would care all that much. She hardly ever cared about anything but whether the work was done right. Maude was the one who cared about such things.

Maude and me were orphaned when our folks took sick with the fever. Aunt Ruthie had already started out from Philadelphia to come live with us and teach school. By the time she got to Cedar Rapids, Aunt Ruthie had to take us in. Or rather, we took her in, and she took care of us.

I'm forgetting Uncle Arlen. He was Aunt Ruthie's, and Momma's, younger brother, but he had gone west not long after our folks died, and we had not heard from him in years. So he didn't count as kin. Aunt Ruthie herself said he was as good as dead to us.

She felt he ought to have stayed around to help her raise us, I guess. Around the middle of winter, she felt he ought to have stayed around to chop wood; that was when I heard his name mentioned most often. Aunt Ruthie could hold a grudge second to none.

"David's out of a book," I said stubbornly, "and I ain't never seen any giants."

"That's because he killed them all," Maude told me. "You have to stop reading those cheap stories. Your grammar is atrocious."

"You ever seen any Indians?" I asked her.



★ “[A] rollicking Wild West adventure. Hard to put down, and a fun read-aloud.”  
—*School Library Journal*, Starred

Eleven-year-old Sallie March is a whip-smart tomboy and voracious reader of Western adventure novels. When she and her sister Maude are orphaned for the second time, they decide to escape their self-serving guardians for the wilds of the frontier and an adventure the likes of which Sallie has only read about. This time, however, the “wanted woman” isn’t a dime-novel villain, it’s Sallie’s very own sister! What follows is the rollicking, edge-of-your-seat story of what really happened out there on the range. Not the lies the papers printed, but the honest-to-goodness truth of how things went from bad to worse and how two sisters went from being orphans to being outlaws—and lived to tell the tale!

Packed with memorable characters, fast-paced action, and laugh-out-loud moments, *The Misadventures of Maude March* is Newbery Honor winner Audrey Couloubis’s most unforgettable work yet.

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