

# We Own the Sky

**RODMAN  
PHILBRICK**



Scholastic Press

New York

Copyright © 2022 by Rodman Philbrick

Photo ©: 194: Missouri State Archives.

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-73629-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 22 23 24 25 26

Printed in the U.S.A. 37  
First edition, September 2022

Book design by Elizabeth B. Parisi

June 21, 1924  
Biddeford, Maine

## 1. *In Which Our Fortunes Change*

ASIDE FROM THE priest and the gravediggers, me and my sister, Jo, are the only ones to witness our dear mother, Eva Morin Michaud, being lowered into her grave. Papa having perished in a mill accident some years previously, the hard, hard loss of our mama makes us orphans.

When I begin to cuss the lung ailment that so cruelly took her from us, Jo hushes me.

“Wait until the priest is out of earshot,” she says, hugging me tight. “Then I shall join you, and we’ll cuss like pirates. We’ll turn the air blue, Davy, I promise.”

I won’t put down what we said, exactly, for fear it’ll set this page on fire. First, I cussed the illness, then I cussed the cotton dust that gave her the illness, then I cussed the mill foreman for not letting our mother’s many friends attend her burial, it being a workday. I vowed that he

should fall through the floor of a stinking outhouse, and be buried up to his neck until his odor improved, if ever it did. Then Jo took to cussing the run of bad luck that has got the best of us, and may end with me in a home for little wanderers, which I dread more than anything.

We cuss like sailors, but no, we do not take our Lord's name in vain. Mama, who never missed Mass, would not approve of such a thing. When, finally, we run out of steam, Jo has tears in her eyes and I'm blubbering like a baby.

"Don't worry, little brother," Jo says. "I have a plan. I will quit school and apply for Mama's job, or one like it."

"You'll do no such thing! You must go on to teachers' college, like you always wanted. It's me who'll quit school. The nuns would have me sent to what they call a boarding school for boys, but that's just another name for a Sisters of Mercy orphanage. No way! I'll take a factory job instead. They'll have me as a mill monkey, on account of my size."

Mill monkeys are what some call the children who work in and around the belts and spinners that power the great looms. It is dangerous work, and Jo does not approve of any child laboring, let alone me. Her face gets stony and her tears dry up. She's about to point a finger in my face and tell me off when at that very moment a horn honks twice, as if to get our attention.

A grand, gleaming red automobile makes a turn onto the graveyard road. It's a Cadillac V-63, which I've been mooning over in the advertisements. The beautiful machine comes to a stop not ten feet from us, and out leaps an athletic young woman dressed in formal black, carrying flowers.

“Oh dear! Have I missed it?”

We've never met, but I recognize her from the newspapers and magazines. Those high cheekbones and wide-apart eyes. It is Ruthie Reynard, our mother's famous cousin. Record-setting aviatrix, and star of her very own flying circus.

“Come here, children,” Ruthie says, striding to the grave. “We have much to discuss.”

I gulp and reach for my sister's hand.