

I SURVIVED

THE WELLINGTON
AVALANCHE, 1910



by **Lauren Tarshis**
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Special thanks to Martin Burwash.

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ISBN 978-1-338-75256-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

22 23 24 25 26

Printed in the U.S.A.
First printing 2022
Designed by Katie Fitch

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Her pigtailed little daughter sat next to her, shrieking, “*Peekaboo!*” at anyone who walked by.

Nobody seemed to notice Janie. And why would they? She’d combed the knots from her hair and scrubbed her nails clean. She had mended the holes in her stockings and shined her boots with spit. She’d made herself look like a normal, respectable eleven-year-old girl.

Nobody would guess that she had a bundle of stolen diamond jewels inside her coat. The glittering rings and earrings were tucked into a secret pocket that rested against Janie’s heart.

She glanced across the station at the gorilla-sized man lurking in the corner. He was the one person here who knew what Janie was really doing. Janie didn’t know his real name — everyone just called him Hammer. One look at his gigantic fists explained why. He was here to keep an eye on Janie, to make sure she didn’t run off with the jewels or get herself into trouble.

When the Seattle train arrived, they’d both get on. Until then, Janie was supposed to sit quietly.

“Don’t talk to anyone,” Hammer had told her.
“Try to disappear.”

Janie was good at that — blending in, fading away. And that’s what she had been doing. But now she spotted an old lady hobbling along, lugging a giant suitcase. The woman was small and frail and looked like she might keel over. Without thinking, Janie jumped up.

“Ma’am,” she said. “May I help you?”

“Aren’t you a dear!” the lady said with a kindly smile. “I just need to sit down for a few minutes.” Janie took the suitcase and led the lady to a bench.

“There you go,” Janie said. She turned to leave, but the lady reached for Janie’s arm.

“Sit with me for a few minutes, dear,” she said. “I’d like some company.”

Janie could feel Hammer’s eyes burning into her. Helping old ladies was *not* part of the plan.

But what choice did Janie have?

“I’m Mrs. Letts,” the lady said, patting the bench next to her.

Janie sat down.

“Nice to meet you,” she said, purposely not saying her own name back. Never tell anyone your real name.

“Are you going to Seattle?” Mrs. Letts asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” Janie answered with a fake smile. “I’m visiting my grandma.”

A lie.

Janie had no grandma. No mother or father either. They’d both passed away in a motorcar accident when Janie was six. After that, Janie moved from California to live with her aunt Barbara, here in Spokane, Washington. Aunt Barbara wasn’t the mothering kind. But at least Janie didn’t wind up in an orphanage.

“What a nice girl you are,” Mrs. Letts said.

Janie’s fake smile wavered. *Nice?* she thought. *What a joke.* If only Mrs. Letts knew the truth: that Janie was a criminal. She worked for the gangster Ray Malvo. Her job was to help get stolen loot out of Spokane.

Tonight her job was to ride the train across the state to Seattle. One of Malvo’s goons would