

CHAPTER *No* 1



*Isabel Publicover—usually called Izzie—* looked out her bedroom window at the morning sea. A path of sunshine lay across the water, slightly ruffled by an early breeze.

She sighed. It looked so peaceful. But it wasn't—not really. It was 1941, and Canada was at war with Hitler's Nazi Germany. Beyond Shag Island, where the cormorants nested, she could see the far, flat horizon, sparked by a ribbon of glittering sunlight. She knew that out there—maybe right under that band of light—bad things

were happening. Nazi submarines were lurking beneath the surface, searching for Canadian ships, so that they could send their deadly torpedoes into their hulls.

But Izzie wasn't going to fill up her head with gloomy thoughts. Not this morning. Today was the day when she and Joey were going to Halifax, and she could hardly wait. Joey was only seven years old—too young to have much fun with, if you happened to be eleven. She wished that Jasper could come, because he was her best friend, and almost the same age as she was. But there wasn't enough space in the truck for that many people.

Izzie had been looking forward to this trip all week, ever since her father had told them that he had to go in to Halifax to buy a special kind of twine for his lobster traps. The lobster season would start on December 1, and that was just a few days off.

"You and Joey can come with me," he'd said. "You haven't had a look at the big city in a long

time. If we don't do it pretty soon, you'll forget what it looks like."

*But I'll never forget,* Izzie thought. She'd been nine years old the last time she'd been in Halifax, but she remembered the high buildings and big stores, the flowers and ducks in the Public Gardens, the wonderful yellow tramcars rattling along with their wicker seats and smiling conductors. And she especially remembered a big chocolate milkshake in the Green Lantern restaurant.

"Why don't we go to Halifax more often?" she asked her dad. "It isn't all that far. And they have movies there."

"Well," he answered, "with the war on, gas is rationed, and I don't like to use it just for pleasure. Besides, if the old truck wears out, I don't know where I'll find the money for another one." He looked worried—at least Izzie thought so. But Joey didn't notice. He was too young to care very much if parents worried about things. He figured they were smart enough to fix all the

bad stuff. Besides, he'd just heard Izzie mention movies.

"Hey, Dad!" he yelled, grabbing him by the wrist. "Could we maybe go to a movie? Or have one of those milkshake things that Izzie keeps telling me about?"

Izzie jumped up so fast that her bright-red frizzy curls looked ready to bounce right off her head. And her round, steel-rimmed glasses actually did slide right down her nose.

"Can we? *Can we?*" she begged.

Mr. Publicover grinned. "Maybe," he said. "Maybe. If there's time. But don't count on it. I have a lot of things to do while I'm in there."

But of course they did count on it—for six days. And it was on both their minds as they climbed into the truck that morning, ready to make the trip into the city.

When they reached Halifax, after bumping along the winding dirt roads until they joined the main route into town, their father set out to do his errands. And when he finally finished all his

jobs, he parked the truck in the west end of the city. Already they'd seen many groups of soldiers and sailors and air force people everywhere they'd gone, so they knew the traffic in Halifax's steep downtown streets would probably be crazy.

"We'll take a tramcar down to the Green Lantern," he said. "We'd never get a parking place anywhere near Barrington Street."

This seemed almost too good to be true. *A milkshake at a real restaurant, and a ride in a tramcar!* Izzie sighed with happiness. This was going to be even better than the last time.

But when the tram came, it was so crammed full of people that it didn't even stop. They had to wait ten more minutes for another Belt Line car. And when it opened its doors for them, they could just barely squeeze themselves in. They had to stand up all the way downtown, and they couldn't see anything but uniforms, uniforms, uniforms. They certainly couldn't sit on the funny wicker seats and look out the windows.

When they finally got off at the right stop,

Izzie could hardly believe how crowded the streets were, and she was amazed at all the many kinds of uniforms she was seeing.

“They’re from lots of different countries,” her father explained. “And from all over the world. This is a very big war.” Izzie loved the French sailors with the red pompoms on their hats.

Between the buildings, Izzie could see the harbour, and as she watched, a long line of ships moved out to sea. It was sort of like a parade, but there was something grim and silent about it. “Not a happy parade,” she said out loud.

“It’s a convoy,” said her father. “They’re staying close together for safety. Because of torpedoes.”

Izzie shivered. But she forgot about the convoy as soon as they approached the Green Lantern. Milkshakes! Something you never saw in Granite Cove. Izzie could almost taste the chocolate just by thinking about it.

But the crowded restaurant reminded them of the tramcars. You could see from the sidewalk how full it was inside, and a crowd of sailors was

trying hard to push through the entrance.

“We’ll never get in there,” said Mr. Publicover, “and if we did, the movie would be over by the time we got served.” He ducked into a drug store and came out with three ice cream cones. “Sorry, kids. But this’ll have to be your supper. It’s a Laurel and Hardy movie, and you’ll love it. You won’t even know you’re hungry.”

An ice cream wasn’t as exciting as a milkshake, but it looked pretty good. And now the kids had their minds fixed on that magic word: *Movie!*



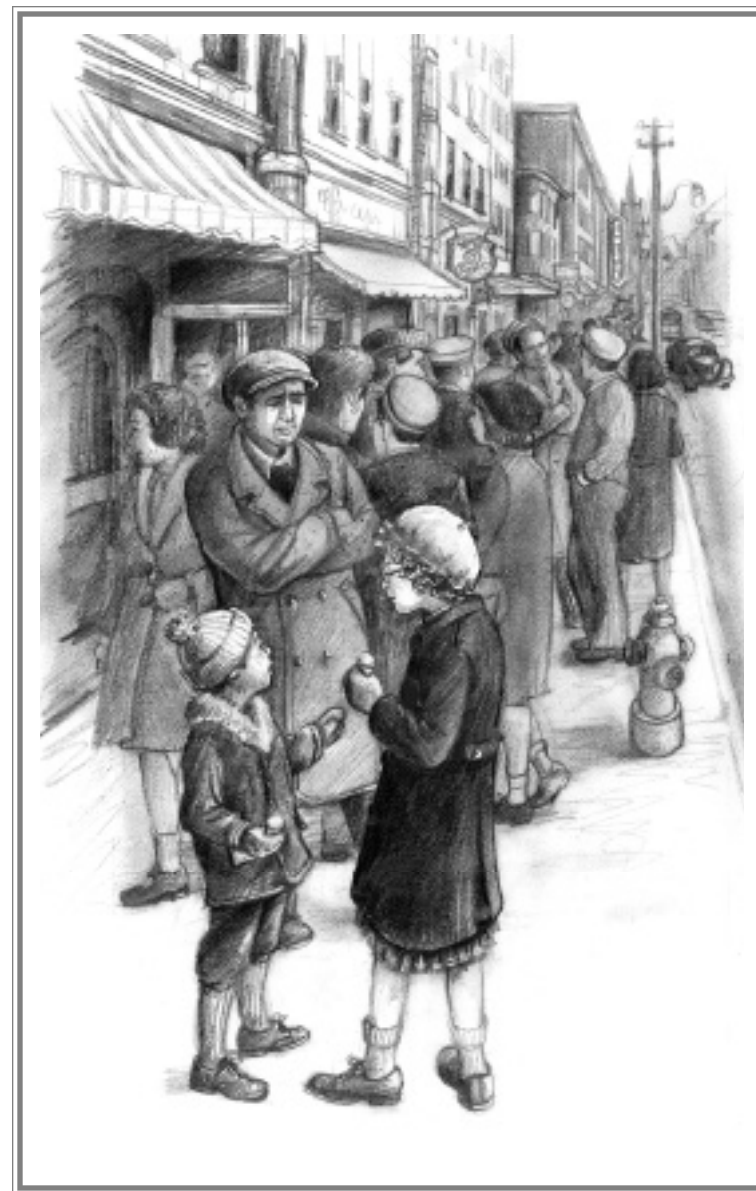
Izzie told herself later that she ought to have realized how it would all turn out. After all, bad things come in threes. One—squashed people in the tram. Two—no milkshake from the Green Lantern. Three? Three was staring them in the

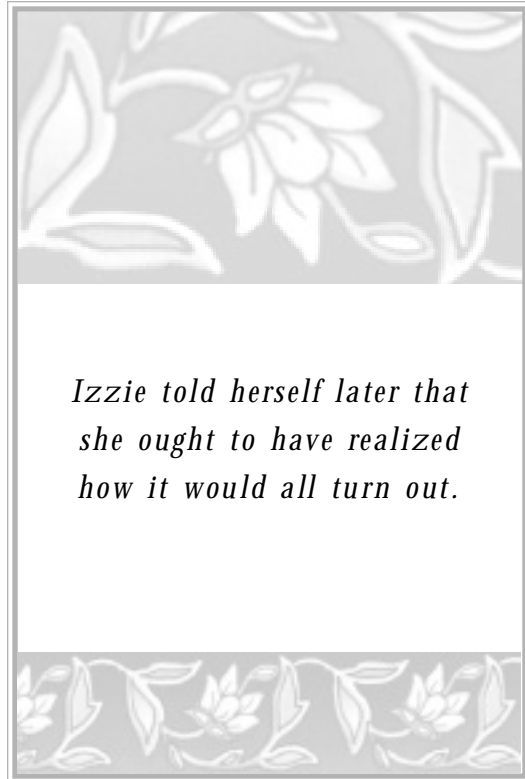
face as they got closer to the Capitol Theatre. The lineup for the movie stretched over to Salter Street, and then all the way down the hill to Hollis Street. They took their places at the end of the line, and as the people moved slowly up the hill they told themselves not to give up hope. It was 5:00 p.m. and getting colder. They stamped their feet to get warm, and Joey hugged himself, muttering, "Laurel and Hardy. Laurel and Hardy. Oh *please* let there be room for us."

But when they finally reached the ticket seller's little cage, it was 5:30—time for the movie to start. "Sorry," said the girl, with her long strip of pink tickets. "The theatre's full, and we can't take anyone else. You'd have to stand, and the company doesn't permit that."

Standing! Standing would be fine. Joey, who would have been happy to watch the movie while standing on his head, started to cry. Besides, he was cold. Inside the theatre it would have been warm.

Izzie felt like bashing the closed door of the theatre with her bare knuckles. Her father looked





too tired and discouraged to move, but he turned in the direction of the opposite corner and said, "C'mon, kids. We can wait for a tram on the other side. Sorry. But it's not the end of the world, you know." However, he looked as though it *was* the end of the world, and he didn't make them feel one bit better. He shoved his big handkerchief at Joey and said, "Blow!"

They had to wait until two full tramcars passed them by, and when they finally got on the third they still couldn't sit down.

Later, on their way home in the truck, Izzie and Joey filled the air with their complaints about the crowded tramcars, the missed milkshakes, the closed theatre, how cold they were, how tired. Mr. Publicover said nothing. When they arrived home, he got out of the truck, went in the back door, and shot upstairs to bed without a word. He didn't even go to the outhouse before he disappeared.

Mrs. Publicover made peanut butter sandwiches for Izzie and Joey, listened to the stories

about their awful day, and kept looking up the stairs towards the silent bedroom.

After a while, Izzie said, “You don’t look so good, Mum. You okay?”

“I’m okay,” said her mother. She picked up the oil lamp and led them upstairs to bed.