ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

Emmy Budd and the Hijacked Train
Jean Blasiar
Charles River Press
978-1-936185-13-9

"Tween Detective" Emmy Budd teams up with T.J. Blake in this first installment of a seven-volume series. At twelve, Emmy wants T.J. to notice her cute pigtails although she dreads eliciting his worst insult: "FEMALE." For Emmy, T.J. represents Tom Sawyer, a boy who can fill carefree summer days with adventure and excitement.

Like Tom and Huck, T. J. and Emmy build a raft: "We were the *African Queen*, the first white settlers in hostile Indian territory, Tarzan and Jane, Robinson Crusoe and Friday." However, their biggest adventure begins when the pair boards an unguarded luggage car on the daily train from their hometown to Pittsburgh, a city to which the children have never been.

This is Emmy's first train ride, and she reasons that "hoboing" is probably not "too illegal." However, the escapade literally stops in its tracks when the train is hijacked by three armed men. While the thieves rob the train's passengers at gunpoint, T.J. pounds nails into the getaway car's tires. A violent struggle ensues when the police arrive, and when the two stowaways finally melt into the crowd in their hometown, they realize that revealing what they witnessed would involve divulging their own misdeed.

Unfortunately, the children soon learn that only two thieves were captured, and that Officer Craig was stabbed, possibly fatally, by the one who escaped. Only T.J. has seen his face, and he is convinced that if he had not punctured the getaway car's tires, no one would have been injured.

As the manhunt continues, Emmy faces new challenges: she must wear skirts to school this year, and a boy-crazed girlfriend asks "how far" she has gone with T.J. sexually. Emmy resents this abrupt return to the strictures of girlhood, never imagining that her starring role in solving the mystery of the missing thief is about to begin.

This novel is set in a halcyon era of stay-at-home moms and saleswomen who provide custom alterations on the spot. However, characters who pretend to be "the first white settlers in hostile Indian territory" rarely appear in new children's books. Instead, stories set in the past are infused with a more contemporary consciousness about race; books such as Paula Fox's *The Slave Dancer* and characters in the *American Girl* books regularly confront racism and render it

unpalatable. However, Emmy's rebellion against femininity will still ring true for many young readers, and T.J.'s single working mom provides a positive example of life as many children know it.

Rapidly following Emmy's just-published second adventure, *Don't Look Now, The Real Dog is Harry* comes out in December, 2010. A prolific novelist and playwright, Jean Blasiar won the 2010 Woman of the Year Award from the Women-in-Theatre organization for her distinguished contributions to her craft.

Elizabeth Breau