

"More than an account of Jewish survival in Nazi-occupied France, *Black Radishes* is an empowering, suspenseful story of a unique young boy with cunning, patience, and courage."

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**G**ustave doesn't want to move from the exciting city to the boring countryside, far from his cousin Jean-Paul and his best friend, the mischievous Marcel. But he has no choice. It is March of 1940, and Paris is not a safe place for Jews.

When Paris is captured by the Nazis, Gustave knows that Marcel, Jean-Paul, and their families *must* make it out of the occupied zone. And when he learns that his new friend Nicole works for the French Resistance, he comes up with a plan that just might work.

But going into Occupied France is a risky thing to do when you are Jewish. And coming back alive? *That* is nearly impossible.

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## ***Paris, March 1940***

**T**he Eiffel Tower was ugly. That was the only word for it, Gustave thought, gazing upward. It used to soar, a vivid red-brown, up into the sky over Paris. But now, quickly coated in dirty gray camouflage paint to disguise it from Nazi bombers, it somehow looked squat and sinister. From farther away in the city, earlier on this cool March afternoon, it had been hardly visible, melting eerily into the iron gray of the sky.

But that was the point, of course. And it was still obviously the Eiffel Tower. So why did the strange old man blocking Gustave's way on the sidewalk keep saying that it wasn't?

"That can't be the Eiffel Tower," the old man insisted again. "That's some gigantic piece of machinery."

“No, really, it is the Eiffel Tower,” Gustave tried to explain hurriedly.

How could the old man not know about the camouflage paint? He was definitely French, and everybody in France knew about the war preparations. Was he senile?

“It’s just that they painted it in case there is a bombing. You know, that’s why they piled the sandbags up around all the monuments,” Gustave told him.

The old man looked vaguely familiar. But Gustave was in too much of a hurry to find out why.

“Excuse me, but I need to go,” he blurted out. “My Boy Scout troop is having a scavenger hunt. My team is the Eagles, and it’s a race—”

But the old man interrupted.

“It’s all nonsense, this war,” he said. “The Nazis will never bomb Paris. We have the strongest army in Europe. But now, young man, can you tell me how to get to the post office?”

Gustave grimaced, dropped his rucksack, and started to explain. The old man had already insisted that Gustave stop to tell him about all the landmarks of Paris, and now he needed directions?

“So I turn right after three blocks?” asked the old man, after Gustave had patiently gone through the directions three times.

Gustave sighed. “No, left.” Why did the man keep misunderstanding the directions or forgetting them, making Gustave repeat himself over and over? How were the Eagles ever going to win the scavenger hunt? But maybe it was hard for old people to remember things.

Gustave took a deep breath, and as he started going through the directions for the fourth time, a smile broke across the old man's face.

"Thank you, Boy Scout," he said. "You have been very helpful."

The old man turned and walked away, more briskly than Gustave would have thought possible. Gustave sighed in relief, grabbed his rucksack, and ran down the street.

His bag thumped against his back as he ran, but luckily it was light, so it didn't slow him down. His best friend, Marcel, had the bag with the scavenger-hunt treasures their team had collected. Most of the objects hadn't taken the three of them very long to find. A pocketknife, a teacher's signature, two green marbles, a safety pin, a math textbook, a canceled postage stamp, a gas mask, and a domino with nine dots. But a yellow feather? That was the item that all the teams were having trouble with. Of course, maybe one of the other Eagles, Marcel or Gustave's cousin Jean-Paul, had found one by now.

They had split up to look for the feather in order to triple their chances. Jean-Paul had raced home to pull feathers out of the pillow on his bed to see if one of them was yellow. That didn't seem very likely to work, but Jean-Paul had thought it was worth trying. Marcel was sure that his aunt had a hat with a yellow feather in it, so he had run off to her apartment to try to coax her into lending it for the afternoon. But it was very possible that she wouldn't want to let him borrow anything of hers. Last week, when Gustave and Jean-Paul had decided to go to the park to sail their boats in the fountain, Marcel, who didn't have a boat, had talked

his aunt into lending him her umbrella—because it might rain, as he told her with a solemn face. The umbrella made a terrific boat, spinning around upside down in the water—but Marcel’s aunt had been angry at him ever since because two of the spokes of the umbrella had broken. It worked fine if you held it right, but she was mad anyway.

Since the old man had delayed Gustave so long, both Marcel and Jean-Paul were probably already on their way back to the synagogue basement where the troop met, Gustave calculated. But there was no way of knowing whether either one of them had gotten the feather. So Gustave raced toward Monsieur Jouvét’s hat shop, dodging around people on the sidewalk.

Monsieur Jouvét, who was an old friend of Papa’s, would definitely have feathers, Gustave thought as he ran down the crowded street. Monsieur Jouvét was a round-faced, cheerful man who always offered Gustave candy from a jar he kept behind the counter. Once, he had given Gustave a tour of the back of the shop. He had ribbons and flowers and feathers there in all sorts of colors. If he had a yellow feather, surely he would let Gustave have it. But it was getting late. Was there enough time to run to the hat shop, get the feather, race back to the bus stop, catch a bus, and be back at the synagogue basement in time for the end of the scavenger hunt?

“Hey, Gustave!” Four boys from the Boy Scout troop burst out of a doorway in front of him. “Looking for one of these?” Pierre reached into his bag and waved a long, yellow feather in the air. “I bet we’re the only ones who have one! Go, Bears!”

Gustave jumped and snatched at the feather, but Pierre held it out of his reach. "Where'd you get that?" Gustave panted.

"Pulled it out of my little brother's Indian headdress! Better hurry! The Bears are about to win!" The boys headed down the street, laughing and yelling.

Pierre's team acted as if they had everything. But maybe they didn't have a teacher's signature yet, Gustave thought hopefully. That one wasn't so easy either. And the Eagles had everything else, just the feather to go. Gustave sprinted down the last two blocks and around the corner.

He came to an abrupt stop where the display window of the hat shop should have been. Something was wrong. The iron shutters were pulled down over the shop front. A small handmade sign on the wall beside the iron shutters read CLOSED. SHOP OWNER MOBILIZED.

"Oh, no! Not him too!" Gustave gasped, thumping his fist against the sign in frustration. He leaned forward, his hands on his knees, catching his breath. So, Monsieur Jovet was a soldier now too and away in the war, just like Jean-Paul's father and Marcel's, all of them off defending France against the Germans. Gustave would miss Monsieur Jovet's smile and his silly jokes—not to mention the free candy.

Papa hadn't been mobilized with the other men his age because he walked with a limp from having had polio as a child. Last September, after the other men had left, Papa had stormed around the apartment for weeks, mad at everybody. Gustave twisted the ends of his Boy Scout neckerchief around his finger until it hurt, then let it go. He would

never tell anyone this, especially not Marcel or Jean-Paul, but secretly he was glad that his father was still home.

Gustave turned and headed back toward the bus stop, wondering if he should try going to the Ménagerie, the zoo at the Jardin des Plantes. Maybe at the Ménagerie he could find a yellow feather that had fallen off some exotic bird. Was there time? He looked at his watch, a gift for his eleventh birthday in February. Four-forty—no time to try anywhere else. The scavenger hunt was over at five o'clock.

He was near the carousel at the Champ de Mars now. Usually it was busy with children, but now it was silent and deserted. Its paint had not been renewed that year. With their colors faded, the horses looked wild and unfamiliar, rolling their eyes and baring their teeth. Gustave suddenly wanted to be back in the synagogue basement with Marcel and Jean-Paul and the others. A few blocks away, a bus was approaching. He ran toward it, the wind whipping his hair into his eyes, and jumped on.

As he found a seat, Gustave remembered something. There wouldn't have been much point in going to the Ménagerie after all. The animals had all been evacuated to somewhere in the countryside to protect them in case of a bombing. Gustave imagined a parrot squawking while an air-raid siren sounded, dropping a yellow feather in its panic. If he had been a parrot, he would have lost a feather or two the first time that happened. Maybe every time it happened, to be perfectly honest.

All the air-raid signals so far had turned out to be false alarms. But he always woke up stunned, his heart thudding in his chest, when the alarms wailed through the darkness.

Those nights were all blurred together except for the first one, which was permanently etched in his memory. Papa's hand gripping his shoulder, heavy and hot. White searchlights flashing across the sky. The crowd of people jostling one another, hurrying down the steps. The dank smell of the underground shelter.

But all the parrots and other exotic birds and animals were safely hidden away now, far from Paris. So probably there wouldn't be any yellow feathers on the ground at the Ménagerie. Still, Gustave could have gone and checked if only the old man hadn't slowed him down so much.

Pierre was so annoying, Gustave thought, breathing on the cold window of the bus and tracing a design on it with his fingernail. Pierre always won everything. The winning team was going to get chocolate bars, plus ten points toward their team total for the year. Gustave looked at his watch again and then out the window, watching clouds race across the darkening sky. Did Marcel and Jean-Paul have a yellow feather? Or was Pierre's team going to win—*again*?