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*This optimistic tale of Jewish immigration fills a niche
with its appealing warmth and energy.”*

—Qull & Quire

Jesse is in trouble. His class project is due tomorrow and he hasn't even started.

How is he supposed to know why his ancestors came to Canada? Even his mom can't help him. Jesse's only hope is in the attic—maybe his great-great grandfather's traveling case will have some letters, passports, or even a diary inside. But the case contains only an old photograph and a Star of David.



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Chapter One

“Remember, children, your family reports are due tomorrow,” Ms. Brannigan reminded the class as they headed out the door.

Jesse groaned.

That stupid assignment. He hadn't even started it yet.

What was he going to do?

Scowling, he shoved his hands in his

pockets and started across the school field.

Tomorrow? No way.

What a dumb project anyway. "Find out how your relatives came to Canada," Ms. Brannigan had said. "Find out when they came and why they came, and what the conditions were like in the country where they came from. Write it all up in a report. Then we'll put all the reports together in a big scrapbook that the whole class can share."

Yippee, Jesse thought, kicking a stone. As if he cared about his dumb old relatives. What difference did it make when they came to Canada, or why, or how? They were all dead now, had been dead for years. They got here and now Jesse's family lived here — that was all that mattered. So why bother going back in time to find out all that stuff?

Jesse whacked at a tree with a stick.

And how was he supposed to find it all out anyway? He knew nothing about his relatives, didn't remember hearing any

stories. He had no papers or pictures or scrapbooks or diaries, like some of the other kids. And the stupid report was due tomorrow.

Jesse aimed a stone at a telephone pole.
Ping!

Shoot. He'd have to ask his parents. And then they'd know he'd left it until the last minute. Again. Last time, with the science project, was bad enough. But now, again ...

Well, there was no help for it. No one else to ask. Might as well face the music — and hope his mom or dad could bail him out.

He entered the kitchen. No sign of his dad, but his mom was there, stuffing papers into her briefcase.

"Hey, Mom," he said, "how's it going?" No harm buttering her up a bit first.

"Hi, Jesse." She waved a hand as she hurriedly slipped on her dress shoes.

"Got a minute?"

"As a matter of fact, no. I've got to

dash. What's up?"

"Where're you going?"

"Big meeting at the office — remember?"

Jesse's heart sank. "But Mom, I need your help."

"For what?" she said, stuffing papers into her briefcase.

"A social studies report. About our relatives."

"Which relatives? What about them?"

"The long-ago ones. The ones who first came to Canada. I need to know when they came and why they came and how they came and —"

Jesse's mom laughed. "That's quite a project."

"I know, Mom, that's why I need to ask you —"

"Not now, that's for sure."

"But Mom —"

"Sorry, Jesse, I'm running late as it is. Tell you what. We'll sit down tomorrow after school. You can ask me all the questions

you want. Promise.” She ruffled his hair, then started putting on her jacket.

Panic set in. “But Mom, it’s due tomorrow.”

She stopped with the jacket halfway on. “It’s what?”

Jesse lowered his eyes.

“You left this until the last minute?”

“Well, yeah, but —”

“Jesse!”

“Aw, Mom, you know how much I hate Social Studies, and it’s a dumb assignment anyway —”

“That is no excuse.”

“I know, but —”

“I can’t believe you’ve done it again, Jesse. You’ve got to smarten up!”

“I know, Mom. I will. Really. But in the meantime can’t you at least tell me when they came? And where they came from?”

She frowned at him, shaking her head. “They came from Russia. Around the end of the nineteenth century.”



"Around?" Jesse repeated, dismayed.
"Don't you even know the year?"

"Not the exact year."

"Why not?"

"Because nobody kept any records."

"Why not?"

His mom ran a brush through her hair.
"They were poor Jews, Jesse. They escaped at a time when many Jews were leaving Russia. Things were crazy. People were dying. Everyone was in a hurry to get out. There was no time to keep proper records."

"Some help that is!" Jesse snapped.

"Look, young man, this is your own fault. If you hadn't let it slide —"

"OK, OK. But how did they come? Do you at least know that?"

The doorbell rang. His mom opened it. "Oh, hi, Sally," she said, ushering in the babysitter. "Just in time. Dinner's in the oven. I'll be back around nine." She grabbed her briefcase, gave Jesse a quick hug. "Be good."

"Mom!" Jesse wailed.

She turned back, giving him an exasperated look. "Try looking up in the attic. Your great-great-grandfather — Yossi Mendelsohn, his name was — was about your age when the family left Russia. There's an old traveling case that used to belong to him up there somewhere."

"What's in it?"

"I don't remember."

Jesse groaned.

"There might be some passports or diaries or other documents that can help you."

"Fat chance."

His mom gave him a sharp look. "Well, do you have any other ideas?"

"No," Jesse said miserably.

Her voice softened. "Go ahead, give it a try, Jesse. You never know what you might find."

Blowing him a kiss, she left.