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Cursing Columbus



Synopsis

The dream was always the same: I was back in Russia. My family was sitting around the Sabbath table: Mama, Papa, baby Hannah and my brothers Lemmel and Shloyme. I was telling a story about America "there were gold streets and chickens roosting in trees. Suddenly, Papa and I were on board a ship sailing far away. Ahead I saw the Statue of Liberty towering over the harbor of New York, but she raised her hand high above her head to stop us. I looked around for Papa. I was all alone. Then I woke up and remembered. Papa and I had arrived at Ellis Island. For three years we had been living on the Lower East Side of New York. Papa worked in a sweatshop earning money to bring over the rest of the family, while I worked after school. I dreamed of the day our family would be together again. And tomorrow, it would finally happen. Would they love America like I did or would they say "a curse on Columbus" because the New World brought them nothing but trouble and hard work? Eve Tal was born in the United States, but lives on Kibbutz Hatzor in Israel. Cursing Columbus is her second young adult historical novel and is the sequel to Double Crossing, which is based on her grandfather's emigration story from the Ukraine.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Working to bring one's family to America was the goal of many immigrants in the early twentieth century. "Cursing Columbus" is a follow up to Eve Tal's previous volume, 'Double Crossing', telling the story of Jewish immigrants coming to America. Papa and Raziel have the money to reunite their family, but it won't be as simple as it seems. But the American dream is never as dreamy as people

have believed it to be. "Cursing Columbus" is a touching story of family and overcoming the harsh odds of life.

After reading Eve Tal's first historical fiction, *Double Crossing*, based on her grandfather's journey from Russia to America, I couldn't wait to read the sequel, 'Cursing Columbus' that follows the family's courageous and sometimes painful experiences when they join Raizel and her father in America. The story deals realistically with the heartache, challenges and homesickness felt by Raizel and her family as by many immigrants and refugees who come to a new land filled with dreams for their futures. Each character in 'Cursing Columbus' develops from the earlier novel and is portrayed with great sensitivity. Eve Tal is an author who understands her characters in depth and perfects the historical settings in which the story is placed. Her writing is peppered with beautiful phrasing and flows with ease. I look forward to reading her next work.

Having read *Double Crossing*, I had high expectations for Eve Tal's new book. I was not disappointed. Using both Raizel's and Lemmel's voice gave the reader a broader view--a point and counterpoint to more fully understand the range of experiences that we call the "immigrant experience." As an educator in a school that includes many immigrant families, I am excited to have a book that can help my students feel the hardships and wonders of leaving everything you know behind to carve out a new life in a strange and frightening new land. Perhaps it can help them to understand the universality of the challenges of bridging two cultures. Thank you, Eve.

There are many books out there that focus on immigrant stories, both historic and contemporary. Eve Tal's newest book, a sequel to her acclaimed novel *Double Crossing*, is a worthy addition to that genre. Her story focuses on two characters, a brother and a sister, who alternate as narrators in the novel. Three years have passed since Raizel and her Orthodox father fled the pogroms against the Jews in Czarist Russia for the possibilities of a new life on New York's Lower East Side. Papa has finally saved enough money to send for the rest of the family--Mama, baby Hannah, and Raizel's two brothers, Lemmel and Shloyme. In America, Raizel is thriving at school, learning English and trying to fit in. But adjusting to America is not so easy for her brother Lemmel, who hates school just as much in America as he did in their village. "Reading English was worse than Hebrew. There were letters with straight lines and letter with circles. I couldn't tell them apart and they jumped around on the page," he tells the reader. His younger brother quickly surpasses him in reading English, adding to Lemmel's discomfort with school. Papa's not forgotten about Lemmel's

upcoming bar mitzvah just because they've come to New York, but "no matter how hard I worked," Lemmel despairs, "I wouldn't be able to read a passage from the Torah. Because I couldn't read." It is clear to the contemporary reader that Lemmel is not lazy, like his teachers think, but probably dyslexic, a disability that no one understood in the early 20th century. Raizel, on the other hand, loves learning and school, even participating in a city contest for the best essay in honor of Columbus Day. She dreams of going to university one day and becoming a teacher, and of the possibility of romance with a young man, Reuben, whom she first met on the boat ride to America. The day of Lemmel's bar mitzvah finally arrives, and he is so desperate to avoid the humiliation that he is certain awaits him that he runs away from home, falling into a life of petty crime on the streets of New York. His family is heartbroken, and to top things off Papa has lost his job. When Lemmel is arrested for breaking into a house, he is put on trial. Will the judge be able to see through to Lemmel's good heart? Will Rose have to quit school at age 14 to help support her family or will she be able to pursue her dreams of success in America? Fortunately the novel concludes happily with a new job for Papa, the redemption of Lemmel, and even a new baby for the family. This is a novel that would be greatly enjoyed by anyone who was interested in exploring the immigrant experience in America, and would be an excellent choice for a multicultural unit at school on immigration. One aspect of the book that I especially appreciated was the way Tal portrays the many difficulties encountered in America by the immigrants. Despite the stories that circulated in "the Old Country" about the riches and plenty in America, many immigrants worked long hours in sweatshops, lived in cramped apartments, and even went hungry. The author does not shirk from portraying these harsh realities.

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