

VAGABOND WIND

THE ADVENTURES OF ANYA AND CORAX

August 1933

*O*n a hot August afternoon, a little devil breeze comes vagabonding through an old village in upstate New York. Swirling from corner to corner, it hesitates, no particular destination in mind. But it means to make something happen, somehow somewhere. It means to stir things up. Sliding across a row of creaking porches, it sets empty rocking chairs a-rocking and blows somebody's dog-eared novel to the floor. It knocks over a pot of pink geraniums and finally goes on its way, leaving who-knows-what behind, taking who-knows-what away.

The little breeze has fish-scaled the waters of a broad canal that glides through the grittier outskirts of this village. Flowing past workshops, past stables and forges and grain silos, the canal slip-slides under a green iron bridge not far from the railroad tracks. In the heat of the afternoon, the canal's drab-colored waters beckon to all sorts of kids; to those who live in the nearby alley, to the children of bargemen, to footloose boys, and to dogs of every background. Well-brought-up village children, however, are forbidden to go near the canal, warned with stories of drowned cow guts and other items too putrid to name.

One such child is a girl called Anya Netherby. She can often be seen on a warm afternoon, hanging over the bridge railing on her way home from the library. She likes watching the boys leaping into the canal, splashing and roughhousing, and she is charmed by the spaniels paddling alongside, their silky ears floating out like wings. Anya longs for a dog like that, but is forbidden to have one. She is also strictly forbidden to swim in the canal, though it would be a welcome relief from the hot little attic room where she sleeps. It's not as if Anya rails against any of these restrictions. No, she goes along, and she makes the best of things.

But that foxy wind, now, it's done some mischief. When it moves into the north quarter like that, it's a sign. The time is nearly right, and there *is* a something in the air. It's unmistakable. Maybe, maybe someday soon, some things that should happen, will; for it's an ill wind, they say, that blows nobody any good.