



Audiobook Release

Casting Call Information

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Narrator: Male, General American Accent,

Description

Brooklyn, New York, 1943

Wally Lipkin has a gift for the piano and a secret he can't afford to reveal: anxiety makes him faint at the worst possible moments. His eighteenth birthday is approaching, and with it, the draft. Wally is certain he wouldn't survive a battlefield. But if he discloses his condition, he fears he'll be sent to a sanatorium like his uncle.

Wally sees a way out when a radio station announces a jingle contest. The prize is fifty dollars, local fame, and a government job close to home. With help from his brother Max and their friend Frankie, he sets out to win a chance to serve his country safely.

Then Wally meets a captivating singer who looks as though she stepped off a movie screen. His plans unravel, and the jingles he writes could put his life in danger—or help change the course of the war

Audition Part

US War Bonds

Brooklyn, New York, December 1943

Wally Lipkin sat in a rusted deck chair on the rooftop of his Kensington brownstone, knowing it would soon be his time to die. Now that Roosevelt's War Department had lowered the draft age to eighteen, Wally's number would be up in a week. Before long, he'd find himself aboard a battleship like Mel Lieberman from apartment 2-D, flying a fighter plane like Ralphie Feldman from down the hall, or trudging knee-deep through European muck like his pal Johnny Milhouser. All three had enlisted, gone through basic training, and shipped off like the millions of

other brave men of his age. But Wally wasn't like Mel or Ralphie or Johnny. Deployment would mean the end for a guy like him, plain and simple.

He fastened his helmet's chinstrap, buttoned his coat against the stubborn New York cold, and squinted through the air-raid warden binoculars he'd been provided by the civilian defense captain. He aimed the lenses past the belching smokestacks of Brooklyn's riverside factories toward the sunset sparkle that danced across the East River. His gaze followed the winter chop to the giant troopships that cut the frosty white wakes, charging toward ports unknown. For months now, the Brooklyn Navy Yard had teemed with steel vessels heading into and out of the waterway. The yard was the pride of Wally's borough, and arguably the most important place in New York, feeding soldiers to the insatiable war that devoured men like candy.

Wally let the binoculars fall to his chest on the strap around his neck, closed his eyes, and blew a frosty cloud into the air. He listened to the distant cries of seagulls, squealing their irritability in D-sharp. Their cacophony did nothing to ease the anxiety that percolated in his gut like a pot of his mother's rationed coffee. Even the gulls knew he was doomed.

The white leather belt of his new uniform rode up his waist, a reminder of how poorly his air-raid warden role suited him. He was slender, had a weak constitution, and was prone to attacks of "anxiety neurosis," the name for the way his brain regularly betrayed him, the villain with whom he persistently grappled. It was a condition for which there appeared to be no cure, and his fear of it was why he'd worked so hard to keep it secret from everyone.

Since the war began, Germans had been targeting Jews like him all over Europe, giving Wally a particular sense of purpose, a need to do his part to stop the violence, to end the treachery, to defeat the Nazis no matter the personal price. After all, Jewish stories were filled with tales of sacrifice, and Wally's ancestors would expect nothing less of him. Like those men aboard the ships leaving Brooklyn, he, too, would feed the voracious appetite of war, even if that appetite leaned kosher.

He had taken the air-raid warden job to prepare for his inevitable military duty, to help him grapple with his condition, to steel his nerves in the relative safety of his own neighborhood, before he had to put it all on the line for himself, his fellow soldiers, and his country. Now, after six weeks of civilian service training, it was Wally's role to keep a vigilant lookout three nights a week, fill out an evening log, pass fliers around the neighborhood warning of chemical attacks or aerial bombings, instruct Brooklynites to turn off their lights, and to take part in air-raid drills like the one tonight, his first since taking the job. If he could pull this off, maybe he could heed the call of his country and his people, defeat his betraying brain, and avoid passing out on a battlefield when his time came.

The sound of creaking metal drew his attention to the roof's edge, where Audrey Milhouser, Johnny's seventeen-year-old sister, was climbing off the fire escape.

"There you are," she called, and strolled over.

Audrey's hair was nut-brown and cut short, though tonight it appeared to hold more curl than she usually gave it. Her blue eyes were filled with curiosity. Her lavender wool coat was bright and clean, which Wally thought was impractical for climbing fire escapes. He had known

her since before she'd started to curve, and even though Audrey was a month older than him and smarter than he was by a fair measure, he still saw her as Johnny's little sister. In the months since his friend and neighbor Johnny had deployed, Audrey would find Wally whenever she was bored or lonely, even when her timing was terrible. And tonight, it was terrible.