

The All-American

Susie Finkbeiner

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Sisters' lives are upended when their father is accused of being a communist in Susie Finkbeiner's historical novel *The All-American*.

Bertha is a high school student in Michigan. Her mother is British; her father is a talented novelist whose work has been likened to John Steinbeck's. Her sister, Flossie, is a precocious library patron who's eager to grow up and who has few friends. Bertha herself longs to join a girls' baseball league; she practices with the neighborhood boys. Their family's love is apparent in everyday sketches that reveal how each member stands out in their suburban town.

But trouble is brewing: newspaper articles cover the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, which include a neighbor's testimony. Bertha and Flossie's father falls under investigation too, and the family's neighbors begin to ostracize them. They are forced to move to Bear Run and live with a taciturn uncle, Matthew. Despite these circumstances, Bertha and Flossie adapt.

The novel's themes of patriotism and censorship are handled in a light manner. Indeed, the threat to the family recedes as the story progresses. Instead, the book focuses on the positives, as with letters sent to loved ones back home. The sisters continue to pursue their hobbies, and their chatter draws Matthew's personality out; he becomes an unexpected source of encouragement.

Bertha's tryout for the baseball team generates anticipation and results in messages of hope. Christian ideas about enduring trials are sprinkled throughout the book's latter half, though they're somewhat underdeveloped and are made necessary because of a tragedy.

In the vivid, episodic historical novel *The All-American*, a family targeted by McCarthy-era hysteria grows closer while they're awaiting justice; their dreams are kept alive despite the intrigue that ensnares them.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2023)

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