

smart, or take his allowance from him, or ask him where he got that great big pumpkin head. People are so stupid sometimes.

70 So I'm strolling down Broadway breathing out and breathing in on counts of seven, which is my lucky number, and here comes Gretchen and her **sidekicks**: Mary Louise, who used to be a friend of mine when she first moved to Harlem from Baltimore and got beat up by everybody till I took up for her on account of her mother and my mother used to sing in the same choir when they were young girls, but people ain't grateful, so now she hangs out with the new girl Gretchen and talks about me like a dog; and Rosie, who is as fat as I am skinny and has a big mouth where Raymond is concerned and is too stupid to know that there is not a big deal of difference between herself and Raymond and that she can't afford to throw stones. So they are steady coming up
80 Broadway and I see right away that it's going to be one of those Dodge City⁶ scenes cause the street ain't that big and they're close to the buildings just as we are. First I think I'll step into the candy store and look over the new comics and let them pass. But that's chicken and I've got a reputation to consider. So then I think I'll just walk straight on through them or even over them if necessary. But as they get to me, they slow down. I'm ready to fight, cause like I said I don't feature a whole lot of chit-chat, I much prefer to just knock you down right from the jump and save everybody a lotta precious time. **C**

90 "You signing up for the May Day races?" smiles Mary Louise, only it's not a smile at all. A dumb question like that doesn't deserve an answer. Besides, there's just me and Gretchen standing there really, so no use wasting my breath talking to shadows.

"I don't think you're going to win this time," says Rosie, trying to signify with her hands on her hips all salty, completely forgetting that I have whipped her behind many times for less salt than that.

"I always win cause I'm the best," I say straight at Gretchen who is, as far as I'm concerned, the only one talking in this ventriloquist-dummy routine. Gretchen smiles, but it's not a smile, and I'm thinking that girls never really smile at each other because they don't know how and don't want to know how and there's probably no one to teach us how, cause grown-up girls don't know
100 either. Then they all look at Raymond who has just brought his mule team to a standstill. And they're about to see what trouble they can get into through him.

"What grade you in now, Raymond?"

"You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me, Mary Louise Williams of Raggedy Town, Baltimore."

"What are you, his mother?" sasses Rosie.

"That's right, Fatso. And the next word out of anybody and I'll be *their* mother too." So they just stand there and Gretchen shifts from one leg to the other and so do they. Then Gretchen puts her hands on her hips and is about to say something with her freckle-face self but doesn't. Then she walks

sidekick (sīd'kīk') *n.*
a close friend

C PLOT: RISING ACTION

What is the conflict between Gretchen and Squeaky?

VISUAL VOCABULARY



ventriloquist-dummy *n.*
A ventriloquist controls his or her voice and moves the mouth of a puppet, or dummy, to make it appear to be talking.

6. **Dodge City**: an Old West town, famous for showdowns between outlaws and lawmen.

110 around me looking me up and down but keeps walking up Broadway, and her sidekicks follow her. So me and Raymond smile at each other and he says, “Gidyap” to his team and I continue with my breathing exercises, strolling down Broadway toward the ice man on 145th with not a care in the world cause I am Miss Quicksilver⁷ herself.

I take my time getting to the park on May Day because the track meet is the last thing on the program. The biggest thing on the program is the May Pole dancing, which I can do without, thank you, even if my mother thinks it’s a shame I don’t take part and act like a girl for a change. You’d think my mother’d be grateful not to have to make me a white organdy dress with a big
120 satin sash and buy me new white baby-doll shoes that can’t be taken out of the box till the big day. You’d think she’d be glad her daughter ain’t out there prancing around a May Pole getting the new clothes all dirty and sweaty and trying to act like a fairy or a flower or whatever you’re supposed to be when you should be trying to be yourself, whatever that is, which is, as far as I am concerned, a poor Black girl who really can’t afford to buy shoes and a new dress you only wear once a lifetime cause it won’t fit next year. **D**

I was once a strawberry in a Hansel and Gretel pageant when I was in nursery school and didn’t have no better sense than to dance on tiptoe with my arms in a circle over my head doing umbrella steps and being a perfect fool just
130 so my mother and father could come dressed up and clap. You’d think they’d know better than to encourage that kind of nonsense. I am not a strawberry. I do not dance on my toes. I run. That is what I am all about. So I always come late to the May Day program, just in time to get my number pinned on and lay in the grass till they announce the fifty-yard dash.

I put Raymond in the little swings, which is a tight squeeze this year and will be impossible next year. Then I look around for Mr. Pearson, who pins the numbers on. I’m really looking for Gretchen, if you want to know the truth, but she’s not around. The park is jam-packed. Parents in hats and corsages and breast-pocket handkerchiefs peeking up. Kids in white dresses
140 and light-blue suits. The parkees⁸ unfolding chairs and chasing the rowdy kids from Lenox⁹ as if they had no right to be there. The big guys with their caps on backwards, leaning against the fence swirling the basketballs on the tips of their fingers, waiting for all these crazy people to clear out the park so they can play. Most of the kids in my class are carrying bass drums and glockenspiels¹⁰ and flutes. You’d think they’d put in a few bongos or something for real like that. **E**

Then here comes Mr. Pearson with his clipboard and his cards and pencils and whistles and safety pins and 50 million other things he’s always dropping all over the place with his clumsy self. He sticks out in a crowd because he’s

D MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 115–126.

What do you think Squeaky’s relationship with her mother is like?

E MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 135–136.

How is Squeaky’s life affected by having to take care of Raymond? Think about how she might deal with Raymond next year.

7. **Miss Quicksilver**: a reference to how fast quicksilver (mercury) flows.

8. **parkees**: people who regularly gather in the park.

9. **Lenox**: street in Harlem in New York City.

10. **glockenspiels** (glɒk'ən-spēlz'): musical instruments with tuned metal bars played with light hammers.