

All aboard  
for the  
adventure of  
a lifetime!



# THE SILVER ARROW

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

LEV GROSSMAN

BLOOMSBURY



Dear Reader,

My new conductors,  
Kate and Tom, need your help.  
Please join us for the adventure of your  
lifetime – one that may just save our world.

We look forward to embarking on this  
unforgettable journey with you.

*The Silver Arrow*





## The Rail Yard

THE TRAIN CHUFFED ALONG; KATE THOUGHT IT chuffed a little faster and more vigorously now that they'd given it more coal. She'd never had a pet, because between them her parents were allergic to every single animal under the sun, but it felt like she imagined feeding a pet would feel. Except that it was a giant metal pet that you rode inside.

Snow drifted down through the trees outside, which was very odd considering that it was supposed to be summer, but not odder than anything else that was going on. The train kept talking to them. It explained how the throttle worked, and it showed

them where the brakes were. Then it told them to look out the window.

Something was happening out there. The track they were on split into two tracks. Then it split again, and again, and those tracks split, too, so that in a minute one track had become dozens of tracks curving away on either side, and soon they were in a huge open clearing completely filled with darkly gleaming rails like a giant plate of steel spaghetti.

Kate and Tom carefully reduced the throttle and applied the brakes, and the *Silver Arrow* chuffed and chuffed slower and slower till it gave out a huge steamy sigh and stopped.

All around them on the tracks were parked dozens and dozens of train cars, maybe hundreds, all different colors and shapes. Some were short and stubby; others were long and lean. Some looked old and dusty and rusty, while others were shiny and new.

It was late, but Kate felt more awake than she ever had in her life.

“This must be the rail yard,” Kate said. “That thing the fox was talking about.”

“He reminded me of Foxy Jones,” Tom said. “What do you think we should do now?”

They looked at the paper where the train posted its messages, but it was blank and silent. Outside nothing moved. Lamps cast a soft, eerie light over everything and lit up the falling snow in a great white dome. Kate suddenly felt nervous being out in the middle of nowhere like this, with no adults around.

But then someone came walking briskly toward them across the snowy tracks. It was Uncle Herbert.

Uncle Herbert! It was so good to see him! They'd only just met him today, but it felt like seeing an old friend. He was carrying a clipboard and wearing a dorky conductor's hat and a bright yellow parka to match his yellow suit.



He stopped and looked up at them.

“Kate. Tom. Good to see you. You made it this far.”

“Uncle Herbert!”

“Uncle Herbert!” Tom said. “We went through the woods and didn’t crash and then we saw a station and it was full of animals and they talked and then the train talked!”

Tom said this as one long continuous word. Uncle Herbert didn’t look particularly surprised at any of it.

“How did you get here ahead of us?” Kate said.

“More magic,” Uncle Herbert said. “Listen, this is all a huge mistake. None of it was supposed to happen, or not yet at least. The train left much too soon. Maybe it had to, maybe it couldn’t wait, I don’t know, but I don’t like it. We’ll be lucky if we don’t all end up in the Roundhouse.

“But it’s too late, you can’t go back, so you’ll just have to go forward and do your best. You’ve got a schedule to keep to now.”

“Wait—we do?” Kate said.

“We need to put together a train for you right away. Fortunately, no one’s come through here for

years, so they've got just about everything in stock. What cars do you want?"

"Cars? You mean like train cars?"

"Yes."

"You're really going to just give us a bunch of train cars."

As with overly round numbers, experience had taught Kate to be suspicious of people offering her free stuff.

"I gave you a steam engine, didn't I?"

"Um. Okay, what are the choices?"

"It doesn't work like that. This isn't a restaurant, you're not ordering off a menu. It's your train—you have to make it up."

Kate and Tom glanced at each other.

"May I suggest," Uncle Herbert said delicately, "that you begin with some passenger cars?"

He did actually sound kind of like a waiter at a fancy restaurant.

"Sure," Kate said. "Sounds good."

"Yeah," said Tom.

"Two passenger cars?"

"Great," Kate said. "Two passenger cars."



“Excellent. What else?”

What other kinds of train cars were there? Her mind went completely blank. She really was not one of those kids who was super into trains.

“A...dining car?”

“Dining car. Good.” Uncle Herbert wrote it down on his clipboard.

Kate couldn’t think of anything else. “Tom, you pick something.”

“Uh. We could have two dining cars?”

“What’s the point of that?”

“Like two different restaurants. If we got bored of one, we could go to the other.”

Kate thought that was ridiculous, but Uncle Herbert wrote it down, too.

“Second...dining...car. Good. Need a kitchen car to go with it.”

“Two kitchen cars!” Tom was getting into it.

“Okay. What else?”

There was a long silence.

“A sleeper car,” Kate said. “That’s a thing, right?”

“Sleeper car.”

“I can’t think of anything else.”

“Yes,” Uncle Herbert said, “you can.”



Kate thought of something. It was silly, but she couldn't come up with anything else.

"I would like a library car," she said. "Like a car that's all full of books, with big leather chairs and things where you can go and just read."

She was a little embarrassed, but Uncle Herbert didn't turn a hair.

"Library car." He wrote it down. "What else?"

"Movie car," Tom said.

"No movie car."

"What?"

"You can watch movies at home."

"But she got a library car!"

"And I'm sure she'll let you use it."

"This is such a rip-off!"

"Fine, I'll give you your money back. Or wait, that's right, you didn't give me any money! You're getting a completely free train!"

"I want a weapons car, then. Two weapons cars. One for swords, one for guns."

"No."

"Video—"

"Nope."

"Inter—"

“Nope.”

“Fine.” Tom folded his arms. “I would like a candy car. That is my final offer.”

“A candy car!” Uncle Herbert looked so shocked that Kate laughed. “That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard!”

“Oh, come on!” Tom said. “It’d be awesome!”

“I’m kidding,” Uncle Herbert said. “You can totally have a candy car. What else?”

“A swimming pool car!” Kate said. It was worth a try. Especially if candy cars were a thing.

“Why not.”

“All right,” she said. “Read that back.”

“Two passenger cars,” Uncle Herbert read. “Two dining cars, two kitchen cars, sleeper car, library car, candy car, swimming pool car.”

Two, four . . . ten cars. That seemed about right. Maybe a tiny bit short.

“Let’s have a flat car,” Tom said. “Like just plain. We can stand on it and pretend we’re surfing. And we should have boxcars, too. Trains always have boxcars.”

Uncle Herbert wrote on his clipboard.

“I think,” Kate said, “we should have a mystery car. Like we don’t know what’s in it, but it’s something cool.”

She thought she was pushing her luck with that one, but he wrote it down with the rest.

“That’s all I got,” Kate said.

“Me too.”

“Needs one more thing,” Uncle Herbert said.

“What?”

“Come on. Every train has one.”

“Oh—a caboose!”

“Now you’re done.” He turned to go.

“Uncle Herbert?” Tom looked like he had a thought that he was trying hard to formulate into a question. “Why are we here?”

“You mean here in the rail yard?”

“No, I mean—like why are we on a train in the middle of nowhere? Where are we going?”

It was a fair question. Kate wondered why she hadn’t thought to ask it herself. She had the dizzy feeling of being caught up in something much larger than she’d realized—like she was a player in an enormous game that she didn’t know the rules of yet, or

like she'd happened to glance out the window of a building and discovered that she was much, much higher up than she'd realized.

"You're going on an adventure," Uncle Herbert said. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Yeah..."

Tom didn't look completely satisfied with that, but Uncle Herbert just waved the clipboard.

"I'll get this up to the dispatcher. Just remember: Keep the water tank full, and never let the fire go out. And keep an eye out for the twilight star."

He turned to go and then stopped again, peering up at them in the darkness. "Wait a second. Something's wrong. You look... floppy. Droopy."

His lack of experience with children was showing again.

"We're tired, Uncle Herbert," Kate said. "It's really late."

As soon as she'd said it, she yawned.

"Oh." He rubbed his chin. "That's right, probably it's past your bedtime. Why don't we hitch up the passenger cars and the sleeper car and you can go to bed."

"Like sleep here? On the train? What about Mom and Dad?"



“I’ll explain it to them.”

“They’re going to go mental,” Tom said. “You realize that. Like, they will literally take leave of their actual senses.”

“Might be good for them,” Uncle Herbert said. “They’re much too sane, those two. Night-night.”

With that he walked away, presumably to go find the dispatcher, whoever that was.

Suddenly Kate could barely keep her eyes open. She had no idea she was so exhausted. It was late, and about two months’ worth of stuff had happened to her in one day, and it was all catching up with her at once. She sat on her little fold-down seat and leaned against the wall and closed her eyes.

She wondered what Uncle Herbert had meant when he’d said that about magic. It was impossible. There was no such thing. But at the same time it didn’t seem like the kind of thing you just *said*. And evidence to the contrary was mounting up like snow in a blizzard.

More wisdom from Grace Hopper floated through her mind: “If they put you down somewhere with nothing to do, go to sleep. You don’t know when you’ll get any more.”

Kate couldn’t have said how much time passed

before she felt a gentle *bump*. *That must be the first passenger car being hitched up*, she thought, without opening her eyes. And then *bump*: passenger car number two.

*I hope the animals will like them*, she thought.

And then *bump*: *That must be the sleeper car*.

As if in a dream, she and Tom climbed down out of the cab. They barely even noticed the click-*bing* of the train saying

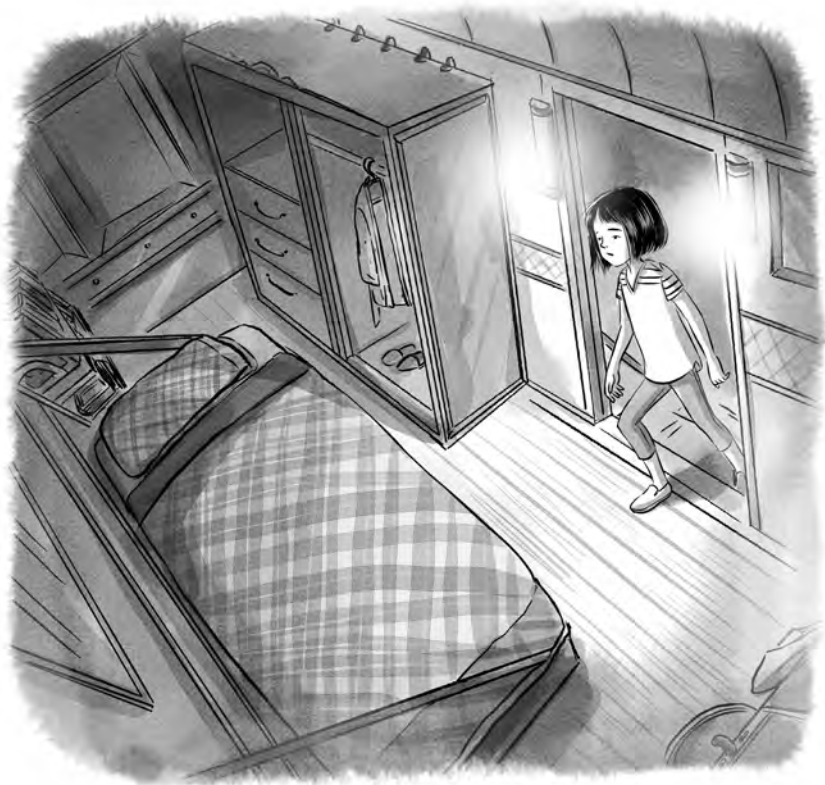
#### GOOD NIGHT

It was beyond strange, being out in the middle of the night in a rail yard that shouldn't have existed, in a winter that should've been summer, but Kate was too tired to care. The night air was freezing, and the ground was covered with a mix of snow and gravel that was extremely painful to walk on in bare feet. Train cars loomed over them, big as houses, casting sharp black shadows in the artificial light. Past the passenger cars they found the sleeper car.

It was painted a comforting cream color, like ivory or very fancy paper, and it had two doors, one at each end. The first door had TOM neatly lettered on it. The second said KATE. When Kate got to her door it opened

automatically and clever little metal steps folded down. Much easier than getting into the engine.

Inside it was warm, and the lights were dim. On one wall was a little sink with a mirror over it. Next to that was a hook with a soft white towel hanging on it and a holder for an enamel cup with a toothbrush and toothpaste in it. Everything was ever-so-slightly miniaturized to fit in a train compartment. It was like being a doll in a very expensive dollhouse.



There was a closet, with a soft Kate-sized robe and slippers already in it and a little drawer for a pair of neatly folded blue-and-white-striped flannel pajamas. Whoever had put all this together was extremely well organized, Kate thought.

She was so tired she just splashed some water on her face and dried it with the towel. The pajamas felt cool and soft and clean. She didn't brush her teeth, because what was even the point of getting to sleep on a magic train if you had to brush your teeth?

There was a little bed that folded down from the wall, with a little bookshelf next to it in case you wanted to read before you went to sleep. Which ordinarily she might have done, but not tonight. She was too tired even to read. She turned out the light, snuggled the blanket up over her, and took a deep contented breath. The sleeper car smelled like clean linen and scented wood. There was a window over the bed so you could look up and see the stars.

A tiny door opened in one wall. Tom's face peered through it from the other half of the sleeper.

"Hey," he said.

"Pretty nice, right?"



“So awesome.” Tom paused for a second. “Hey—is it okay if I leave this open?”

Sometimes she forgot that Tom was two years younger than she was. He’d never even been on a sleepover, except with their grandparents, and now he was going to sleep on a talking train in the middle of a mysterious rail yard.

It might even make her feel better too.

“Definitely okay. Good night, Tom.”

“Good night.”

Kate closed her eyes and slept.