

Penguin



Readers

How High The MOON

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Contents

People in the story	4
New words	5
Note about the story	6
Before-reading questions	6
Chapter One – A letter from Mama	7
Chapter Two – Zebra	13
Chapter Three – The picnic	19
Chapter Four – Journey to Boston	24
Chapter Five – The water fountain	30
Chapter Six – Happy New Year	36
Chapter Seven – Looking for the girls	42
Chapter Eight – Back home	43
Chapter Nine – Ella's daddy	47
Chapter Ten – A letter for George	52
Chapter Eleven – Meeting J.P.	56
Chapter Twelve – The truth	61
Chapter Thirteen – Family time	66
During-reading questions	70
After-reading questions	72
Exercises	72
Project work	78
Glossary	78

CHAPTER ONE

A letter from Mama

Ella

I was running down the street as fast as I could.

“Ella!” my **granny** shouted after me. “Your shoes! You forgot to put on shoes!”

I was too excited to care. I was finally going to live in Boston with **Mama**.

I held on to my hat as I ran through the woods. My hat was very important to me, and I did not want to lose it. I found the hat in the woods last summer. I took it home and cleaned it until it looked new. It was a special black-and-**gold** hat called a Stetson Cavalry. No one in my town had one like it.

I kept running until I reached the creek. My cousin Henry was standing in the water trying to catch a fish.

“Henry!” I called. I had a letter in my hand, and I waved it in the air. “Henry, look!”

Henry looked up at me. “What is it?”

It was a letter from my mama. The letter said, “Come stay with me in Boston.” Mama lived in Boston for work. She was a **jazz** singer. I lived in a small town named Alcolu in South Carolina with my grandparents, Granny and Poppy, and my cousins, Henry and Myrna. I wanted to live in Boston with Mama, but she always said, “You’re too young.” Boston was a big city that

was filled with lots of different people. Life in Boston for black people was completely different from life in South Carolina.

But now Mama was finally asking me to stay with her.

I smiled at Henry and said, "I'm going to Boston!"

"What?" said Henry. He climbed out of the water and came to sit with me on the grass. "What do you mean you're going to Boston?"

"Can you believe it?" I asked Henry. Then, I remembered that I had some good news for Henry, too. I pulled another letter out of my **pocket** and handed it to him. "I almost forgot. This is for you."

Henry took the letter and smiled widely. The letter was from his daddy, who was fighting in the war. He left home two years before, in 1941. Henry loved getting letters from his daddy. Some men from our town died fighting in the war. It made Henry happy to know that his daddy was safe.

"Thanks," said Henry. He put the letter in his pocket. "I'll read it later." Henry always did that. He did not want me to be sad because he knew that I did not have a daddy to send me letters. I smiled. Maybe that was all going to change.

"I think that, when I get to Boston, Mama will finally tell me about my daddy." I looked at Henry carefully. "Actually, I think that I know who he is."

"Who?" asked Henry.

“I think that my daddy is Cab Calloway.”

“*The* Cab Calloway?” Henry held his stomach and started to laugh loudly. “Ella, you’re crazy.”

Cab Calloway was a famous jazz singer. It was strange, but I really thought that he could be my daddy. Cab Calloway was a singer, like my mama, and I thought that he looked like me, too. We both had the same light skin color.

“Stop laughing, and listen,” I told Henry. “That’s why nobody wants to tell me who my daddy really is. They’re afraid that I’ll tell everyone. But I’m older now. When Mama sees that I’m not a little girl any more, she’ll tell me the truth.”

Henry **shrugged** his **shoulders** and asked me a question. “When are you going to Boston?”

“Just before Christmas,” I said.

“How long will you stay?” Henry asked.

Mama did not say in her letter, but I was sure that I could stay for years. I just needed to show her that I was an adult now.

“Well,” I began, but then I stopped. What about Henry? I was really excited to go live with Mama in Boston, and I was not thinking about Henry. Henry was my cousin, and he was also my best friend. I knew that talking about moving to Boston would **upset** him. “I don’t know how long I’ll stay, but I’ll come back to visit sometimes.”

“I can’t believe that you’re really going to go to

Boston,” said Henry. He shook his head. “What about school? What about us here? Who will feed the chickens and help out around the house?”

“I know you want me to stay, Henry. But why can’t you be happy for me?” I asked.

“I *am* happy for you,” said Henry.

I took a step closer to Henry and pushed him lightly. “Are you going to miss me?” I asked. He did not answer immediately, so I pushed him again and again until he started laughing.

“Stop!” cried Henry. “Of course I’ll miss you. I think it’s great, Ella. What do you think that Boston will be like?”

“I don’t know. I’m sure Mama will think of lots of fun things for us to do. Maybe we’ll go to a restaurant!”

“Do you know where she lives in Boston?” asked Henry. “Do you think that her house is big?”

“I’m not sure. Big or small, it doesn’t matter to me. I’m just excited to be able to stay with her. But think about it, Henry. After I’ve been there with Mama for a few weeks, you can come up and visit!”

Henry smiled. “I’d like to see Boston.”

We stayed by the creek for a little longer. Henry caught a huge fish, and, after he pulled it in, we were ready to go home. We ran through the woods together. I was ahead of Henry, so I was the first to notice the white boy.



He was sitting in front of a large oak tree. He was about 14 years old, and he had an unfriendly look on his face. I was **nervous** because I did not know who he was. It was not normal to see a white boy sitting in the woods alone. Henry followed me and saw the boy, too. We kept our heads down and walked past him. But, suddenly, the boy jumped up and began to follow us.

“Where did you get that hat, girl?” the white boy asked. He hit the back of my hat.

“I found it,” I answered. I was too **scared** to stop walking.

“You mean that you stole it!” the boy shouted. He hit the back of my hat again.

“No, sir,” I said. Henry was ahead of me now. I tried to walk faster, but the white boy walked faster, too.

“How old are you?” asked the boy. He hit my hat again.

“I’m eleven, sir,” I said, quietly.

Suddenly, I saw the road in front of us. I ran as fast as I could down the road and back to our home. Henry followed me.

“Hey!” the boy called after us.

I do not think that he followed us, but I was not sure. I was too scared to look back.