

# The Train That Went Backwards

*A Fleydo English School Story*

*A2 Level | Teens (11–16) | Reading | Story | 16 Pages*

Kai is a fifteen-year-old boy who dreams every night about an old train station. When the backwards train finally takes him into the past, he discovers that his grandmother Elena Voss was a remarkable woman who saved the town library, protected the marshlands, and fought for her community her whole life — yet nobody remembers her. Kai sets out to change that.

## Learning Objectives

- Read and understand an A2-level adventure story (16 pages)
- Learn 44 new vocabulary words in context
- Practise vocabulary with matching and fill-in-the-blank exercises
- Test reading comprehension with 10 multiple-choice questions
- Discuss themes: family memory, community, courage, and legacy

## 1 Read the Story

### Chapter 1

## The Dream Begins

*Kai discovers something strange in his sleep*

Kai was fifteen years old and he lived in Millbrook, a small town near the coast. Millbrook was the kind of place where everyone knew everyone, where the same families had lived for generations, and where very little ever changed.

Kai lived with his mother in a narrow house on Bridge Street. His father had left when Kai was three, and his grandmother — his mother's mother — had died two years ago. They didn't talk about either of them much.

The only unusual thing about Kai was his dreams. Every night, he dreamed about a train station. Not the modern station in the next town. This was an old station, with a wooden platform, gas lamps, and a big clock with Roman numbers. A sign on the wall said Platform 7.

And every night, a train arrived. It was an old steam train, dark green with brass fittings that shone like gold. When its doors opened, Kai always stepped inside. It was as if the train was calling him.

The strangest part? The train always went backwards.



### Chapter 2

## The First Journey

*Kai visits a Millbrook he has never seen*

On Monday night, the dream was different. Usually Kai woke up as soon as the train started moving. But this time, he stayed asleep. The train rolled backwards through a dark tunnel, and when it came out the other side, everything had changed.

Kai stepped off the train onto a busy platform. People in old-fashioned clothes walked past him — women in long dresses, men in hats. Children ran between the passengers, laughing. The air smelled of coal smoke and fresh bread.

The buildings were the same shapes as the ones in Millbrook, but they were brighter — freshly painted, with flowers in the windows. The harbour was full of fishing boats, and the market square was alive with traders selling fruit, fish, and cloth.

A newspaper boy ran past shouting the date: "October 14th, 1952!" 1952. That was the year his grandmother was born.

He walked through the town, amazed. Everything was so vivid — the colours, the sounds, the smells. Then he saw something. On the wall of the old library, there was a sign: Millbrook Community Library — Free for All. Knowledge is the greatest treasure.

Below the sign, a young woman stood on a ladder, painting the letters in bright blue and gold. She had dark curly hair and determined eyes. Something about her face was familiar.

Before Kai could look more closely, the train whistle blew. He ran to the platform and jumped on board.

### Chapter 3

## The Photograph

*A face from the past appears in the present*

The next morning, Kai couldn't stop thinking about the dream. After school, he went to the town museum — a small, dusty place run by an old man called Mr. Webb.

Kai spent two hours looking through old photographs. And then he found it. A photograph of the town library. Standing on a ladder, painting the sign, was the same young woman from his dream. On the back: Elena Voss, aged 19, painting the new library sign, 1952.

Elena Voss. Kai's grandmother's maiden name had been Voss. Elena was his grandmother's name. She was his grandmother at nineteen — decades before he was born.

"Elena Voss. She was quite a character," said Mr. Webb. "Did a lot for this town. But people forgot."

That night, Kai placed the photograph on his bedside table and fell asleep, waiting for the train.

### Chapter 4

## The Second Journey

*Kai learns what his grandmother really did*

The train came again. This time, when Kai stepped off, the sign said 1958. The library was bigger now. Someone had expanded it. Through the window, children sat on the floor, listening to Elena read a story.

Elena was about twenty-five now. After the children left, she started tidying the shelves. A man in a suit came in with an unpleasant smile.

"The council has made its decision. The library will close at the end of the month. The building is needed for the new council offices."

“You can’t close the library,” Elena said. “This is the only place where children can read for free. Where immigrants can learn English. Where old people can meet their friends.”

Kai watched as his grandmother went door to door collecting signatures. She organised a public meeting. She wrote letters to the newspaper. She gave speeches about why the library mattered.

“Knowledge is the greatest treasure,” she told the crowd. “And a library is where everyone can find it.” The council changed its mind. The library stayed open.

## Chapter 5

### The Third Journey

*The hardest chapter of Elena's life*

The third dream took Kai to 1971. The library was still there, bigger than ever, with a children’s section and a garden. Elena was around thirty-eight now, with grey in her hair.

A younger woman came in carrying a baby. Kai’s breath caught in his throat. The baby had his mother’s eyes. It was his mother. As a baby.

“They want to build a motorway through the valley,” Elena said. “If we don’t raise enough money for the campaign, they’ll destroy the marshlands.” She smiled. “I’m stubborn, remember? Like a mule.”

Kai saw Elena leading a protest march. He saw her speaking at council meetings. He saw her on the local news, passionately explaining why the marshlands needed to be saved. The motorway was rerouted. The marshlands were saved.

But after the celebration, Elena sat alone holding a letter from a hospital. Her hands were shaking. The train whistle blew, and Kai woke up with tears on his face.

## Chapter 6

### The Truth

*Kai talks to his mother*

Kai showed his mother the photograph. “Why did you never tell me about Grandma? The library? The marshlands?”

“It’s complicated, Kai.” She was quiet for a long time. “Your grandmother was an extraordinary woman. She fought for this town her whole life. And she won most of her battles.”

“So why don’t we talk about her?”

“Because she got sick. She kept fighting for everyone else but forgot to fight for herself. She didn’t go to the doctor until it was too late. I was angry that she gave everything to Millbrook and didn’t save enough for us.”

His mother wiped her eyes. “But I was wrong. She sacrificed so much. And nobody remembers.”

“I want to do something,” Kai said. “For Grandma. So people remember.” His mother smiled. “She would have liked you. You have her stubbornness.”

## Chapter 7

# Platform 7

*Kai changes the future*

Over the next two months, Kai researched his grandmother’s story at the museum. He found newspaper articles, letters, council records, and photographs. Elena had saved the library three times, organised the marshlands campaign, started a scholarship fund, and volunteered at the harbour during storms for twenty years.

Then Kai went to the council and asked for permission to create a memorial. “I want to rename the nature reserve: The Elena Voss Marshlands. And I want to put a plaque at the old library site.”

The naming ceremony was held on a Saturday in April. Half the town came. Kai’s mother gave a speech. The mayor unveiled the new sign. At the old library site, a bronze plaque now read: Here stood Millbrook Community Library, saved three times by Elena Voss (1952–1998), who believed that knowledge is the greatest treasure.

That night, Kai dreamed of Platform 7 one last time. His grandmother stood on the platform — young, with dark curly hair and determined eyes.

“Thank you, Kai,” she said. “Will I see you again?” he asked. “You’ll see me everywhere. In the library books. In the marshland birds. In the town that remembers. And in the mirror. You have my eyes.”

The train rolled backwards into the tunnel one final time. When Kai woke up, he was smiling.

*Knowledge is the greatest treasure.*  
— Elena Voss

## 2 Key Vocabulary

These words from the story will help you improve your English.

Word	Type	Definition	Example from Story
<b>generations</b>	noun	groups of people born around the same time	<i>Families had lived there for generations.</i>
<b>unusual</b>	adj	different from what is normal	<i>The only unusual thing was his dreams.</i>
<b>wooden</b>	adj	made of wood	<i>An old station with a wooden platform.</i>
<b>fittings</b>	noun	small metal parts attached to something	<i>Brass fittings that shone like gold.</i>
<b>backwards</b>	adv	towards the past; behind you	<i>The train always went backwards.</i>
<b>tunnel</b>	noun	a long passage under the ground	<i>The train rolled through a dark tunnel.</i>
<b>passengers</b>	noun	people travelling on transport	<i>Children ran between the passengers.</i>
<b>brighter</b>	adj	having more colour and light	<i>The buildings were brighter.</i>
<b>traders</b>	noun	people who buy and sell goods	<i>Traders selling fruit and cloth.</i>
<b>vivid</b>	adj	very bright, strong, and clear	<i>Everything was so vivid.</i>
<b>treasure</b>	noun	something very valuable	<i>Knowledge is the greatest treasure.</i>
<b>determined</b>	adj	having a strong feeling to act	<i>She had determined eyes.</i>
<b>familiar</b>	adj	easy to recognise; seen before	<i>Her face was familiar.</i>
<b>dusty</b>	adj	covered with dry dirt	<i>A small, dusty place.</i>
<b>visitor</b>	noun	a person who comes to see a place	<i>Mr. Webb was surprised to have a visitor.</i>
<b>maiden</b>	adj	a woman's name before marriage	<i>Her maiden name was Voss.</i>
<b>character</b>	noun	a person with an interesting personality	<i>She was quite a character.</i>
<b>expanded</b>	verb	made something larger	<i>Someone had expanded the library.</i>
<b>brave</b>	adj	ready to face danger; courageous	<i>A brave girl who sailed the ocean.</i>
<b>tidying</b>	verb	making something neat	<i>Elena started tidying the shelves.</i>

<b>unpleasant</b>	adj	not enjoyable; causing discomfort	<i>He had an unpleasant smile.</i>
<b>immigrants</b>	noun	people who come to a new country	<i>Where immigrants can learn English.</i>
<b>signatures</b>	noun	names written by their owners	<i>Collecting signatures door to door.</i>
<b>speeches</b>	noun	formal talks to a group	<i>She gave speeches about the library.</i>
<b>section</b>	noun	a separate part of something	<i>A children's section in the library.</i>
<b>fundraiser</b>	noun	an event to collect money	<i>The fundraiser can wait.</i>
<b>motorway</b>	noun	a wide road for fast traffic	<i>They want to build a motorway.</i>
<b>campaign</b>	noun	planned actions to achieve a goal	<i>She organised the campaign.</i>
<b>stubborn</b>	adj	refusing to change your mind	<i>I'm stubborn, like a mule.</i>
<b>protest</b>	noun	public expression of disagreement	<i>Elena led a protest march.</i>
<b>passionately</b>	adv	with strong, deep feelings	<i>Passionately explaining her cause.</i>
<b>rerouted</b>	verb	sent on a different path	<i>The motorway was rerouted.</i>
<b>complicated</b>	adj	difficult to understand	<i>It's complicated, Kai.</i>
<b>extraordinary</b>	adj	very unusual and impressive	<i>An extraordinary woman.</i>
<b>sacrificed</b>	verb	gave up something for others	<i>She sacrificed so much.</i>
<b>believe</b>	verb	think something is true	<i>She wouldn't believe him.</i>
<b>stubbornness</b>	noun	refusing to give up	<i>You have her stubbornness.</i>
<b>researched</b>	verb	studied to discover facts	<i>Kai researched her story.</i>
<b>records</b>	noun	written information about events	<i>Council records and photographs.</i>
<b>volunteered</b>	verb	offered to help without pay	<i>She volunteered at the harbour.</i>
<b>memorial</b>	noun	something to remember a person	<i>He asked to create a memorial.</i>

<b>plaque</b>	noun	a flat piece with writing on it	<i>A bronze plaque at the library site.</i>
<b>ceremony</b>	noun	a formal event to celebrate	<i>The naming ceremony was held in April.</i>
<b>unveiled</b>	verb	showed something new publicly	<i>The mayor unveiled the sign.</i>

### 3 Fill in the Blanks

Choose the correct word to complete each sentence.

Word Bank: backwards | vivid | determined | familiar | immigrants | campaign | stubborn | extraordinary | sacrificed | unveiled

1. The train always went \_\_\_\_\_ through a dark tunnel.
2. The colours in the dream were so \_\_\_\_\_ that Kai could remember every detail.
3. Elena was a \_\_\_\_\_ woman who never gave up.
4. The young woman on the ladder looked \_\_\_\_\_ to Kai.
5. Elena helped \_\_\_\_\_ who came to live in Millbrook learn English.
6. She organised a \_\_\_\_\_ to save the marshlands from the motorway.
7. Elena was \_\_\_\_\_ and refused to change her mind.
8. Kai's grandmother was an \_\_\_\_\_ person who did amazing things.
9. She \_\_\_\_\_ so much for the town but forgot about herself.
10. The mayor \_\_\_\_\_ the new sign at the nature reserve.

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#### Answer Key

1. backwards
2. vivid
3. determined
4. familiar
5. immigrants
6. campaign
7. stubborn
8. extraordinary
9. sacrificed
10. unveiled

## 4 Comprehension Quiz

Choose the correct answer for each question.

**Question 1. What is unusual about Kai's dreams?**

- A) He dreams about flying
- B) He dreams about an old train station with a backwards train
- C) He never dreams at all
- D) He dreams about the future

**Question 2. What year does Kai visit on his first train journey?**

- A) 1920
- B) 1970
- C) 1952
- D) 2001

**Question 3. What was Elena Voss doing when Kai first saw her?**

- A) Reading a book
- B) Painting the library sign
- C) Teaching children
- D) Cooking food

**Question 4. How is Elena related to Kai?**

- A) She is his aunt
- B) She is his teacher
- C) She is his grandmother
- D) She is his neighbour

**Question 5. Why did the council want to close the library?**

- A) It was too old
- B) Nobody used it
- C) They needed the building for council offices
- D) It was dangerous

**Question 6. What did Elena do to save the marshlands?**

- A) She paid for them herself
- B) She moved away
- C) She organised a campaign with protests and speeches
- D) She asked the prime minister

**Question 7. Why didn't Kai's mother talk about Elena?**

- A) She never met her
- B) She was angry that Elena gave everything to the town
- C) She didn't like her
- D) She had forgotten about her

**Question 8. What did Kai find at the museum?**

- A) An old train ticket
- B) A photograph of Elena painting the library sign
- C) A letter from his father
- D) A map of the marshlands

**Question 9. What did Kai ask the town council to do?**

- A) Build a new library
- B) Name the nature reserve after Elena and add a plaque
- C) Create a holiday
- D) Paint a mural

**Question 10. What is the main message of the story?**

- A) Dreams are always meaningless
- B) Small towns are boring places
- C) Remembering and honouring people who made a difference matters
- D) Libraries are more important than nature

## 5 Quiz Answer Key

Q	Correct Answer
1	B) He dreams about an old train station with a backwards train
2	C) 1952
3	B) Painting the library sign
4	C) She is his grandmother
5	C) They needed the building for council offices
6	C) She organised a campaign with protests and speeches
7	B) She was angry that Elena gave everything to the town
8	B) A photograph of Elena painting the library sign
9	B) Name the nature reserve after Elena and add a plaque
10	C) Remembering and honouring people who made a difference matters

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*“Knowledge is the greatest treasure.”*

— Elena Voss