



JIM FUSILLI

# MARLEY Z

and the Bloodstained Violin

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江苏工业学院图书馆  
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Bloodstained  
Violin

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DUTTON CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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*A division of Penguin Young Readers Group*

PUBLISHED BY THE PENGUIN GROUP

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. | Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) | Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England | Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd) | Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) | Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India | Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) | Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa | Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Fusilli, Jim.

Marley Z and the bloodstained violin / Jim Fusilli. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: Fourteen-year-old Marley Zimmerman is convinced that her friend did not steal a valuable violin from the Julliard School, despite surveillance video evidence, and enlists the other members of her would-be band, the Kingston Cowboys, to help her find the truth.

ISBN: 978-0-525-47907-9

[1. Stealing—Fiction. 2. Violin—Fiction. 3. Schools—Fiction. 4. Bands (Music)—Fiction.

5. New York (N.Y.)—Fiction. 6. Mystery and detective stories.] I. Title.

PZ7.F96668Mar 2008 [Fic]—dc22 2007028288

Published in the United States by Dutton Children's Books,

a division of Penguin Young Readers Group

345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014

[www.penguin.com/youngreaders](http://www.penguin.com/youngreaders)

Designed by Heather Wood

Printed in the USA

First Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

*Dedicated to  
the Coolest People in the World:*

Readers!

Marley Z  
and the  
Bloodstained Violin

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and the  
Bloodstained Violin



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## chapter 1

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Marley Z was a diligent student, but her algebra teacher made diligence almost impossible. Mr. Noonan, who looked like a hedgehog in old corduroy, always spoke in a slow dull monotone that concealed how he felt about the day's lesson. Today, only the unexpected arrival of several police cars outside the school building provided Marley with a distraction from his lack of enthusiasm.

"He's the most boringest teacher on the planet," she told her father last week. "Maybe the most boringest person ever."

"You've been at the Beacon School for, what, three days?" He set two wheaty placemats on the kitchen island, meaning Marley's mother would be late again. "Three days and you know this?"



The summer study program and last month's orientation had given her a veteran sense of comfort.

"If there's somebody more boring, I'd like to meet him," she replied.

Zeke Zimmerman drew up, soup bowls in his hands. "Really?" he asked, eyebrow raised, as if Marley actually meant what she said.

Marley turned to her baby sister; oblivious to the conversation, Skeeter rattled a colorful set of plastic rings on her high-chair tray. "And he smells like mothballs," Marley told her, "and he has tufts of gray hair in his ears."

Thinking his daughter was talking about him, not the boring Mr. Noonan, Marley's father put the bowls on the tile-topped island. Frowning, he lifted his old bleached-gray denim shirt to smell his lanky frame, then ran a finger along his outer ear.

"Not you, Dad," Marley sighed. "Mr. Noonan."

Skeeter cooed happily.

A pot of gumbo burbled on the stove, and the pleasing scent of thyme and dark roux filled the brownstone. Marley had brought home crabmeat and catfish fillets from Citarella's on Broadway and 75th. Having eaten her father's cooking for fourteen years, Marley knew he had a lot more energy than skill as a chef, but fresh ingredients sometimes made a difference.

Her father said cooking turned a house into a home. Even if her mother only ate dinner with them on the weekends. Most weekends.

Seated in the last row by the classroom's sun-streaked win-

dows, Marley was awakened from her half-daydream, half-memory trip by the appearance of Vice Principal Otto at the door.

Mr. Noonan put down his chalk and ambled hedgehog-like across the room, all the while continuing the lesson.

"The reservoir in Central Park is one hundred and six acres in diameter," he droned, "and rain is falling at a rate of a quarter-inch per hour. To write an expression for the amount of water, in gallons, in the reservoir after  $m$  hours . . ."

Sixteen sets of eyes followed him. Marley watched as Mr. Noonan stepped into the corridor. White clouds appeared as he dusted his hands together.

He listened attentively to Miss Otto, who was as forceful as he was not, and returned a few seconds later.

"Marisol," he said. "Come here, please."

As tiny Marisol Poveda slid from her desk chair in the front row, Vice Principal Otto jutted her head into the classroom.

"Marley," she said, beckoning with her fingers. "You'd better come along too."

Marley Z gathered her things, dropping her calculator into the pouch of her carpenter's jeans. She slipped her pencil behind her ear, much as her dad would do when she'd stop by his studio for advice or to retrieve Skeeter for their afternoon playdate.

Miss Otto introduced the man in her office as Detective Sergeant Sampson. Broad-shouldered and brawny in a gray



suit, striped tie and a pale-blue shirt, Sgt. Sampson towered over Miss Otto and Marisol, who was the smallest girl in Beacon's freshman class. Marley was tall, soon to be six feet, as both of her parents were, and her sprouting dreadlocks added to her height. But Sgt. Sampson seemed to tower over her too, filling Miss Otto's office, which sat above the school's main entrance on West 61st Street.

"Girls," Miss Otto said, pointing to the chairs in front of her desk as she shut the door. A uniformed police officer stood outside, ready to block anyone from entering.

Marisol sat, and Marley did too. They looked at each other. Marisol was usually as carefree as a butterfly. But now Marley saw concern in her friend's dark eyes.

Sgt. Sampson placed an elbow on the khaki-green filing cabinets, brushing aside the leaves of a spider plant.

"Do you know why you're here, Miss Poveda?" he asked, his face as taut as a clenched fist.

Marisol shook her head. Her black hair shimmered under the overhead lights.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"I'm sorry. I don't—"

"The violin," the policeman said. "Where is it?"

"My violin?" Marisol replied. "It's in my room at home. Why—?"

"Miss Otto," Sgt. Sampson said, nodding toward a TV on the rolling cart.

Standing at the side of her desk, the vice principal reached to press a button on the VCR.

A wave of static on the monitor disappeared and a soundless black-and-white video began to play.

Marley thought she recognized the vast space on the screen. It was somewhere in the Juilliard School, which was only a short walk away at Lincoln Center on 65th Street.

In the center of the fuzzy video was a black base topped by a Lucite cube, the kind that usually held a small sculpture or a bust. Inside the display cube was a violin. The camera angle made it difficult to see its details.

Marley frowned. The policeman's sharp, accusing tone as he mentioned a missing violin; and now a video of a violin on display at the best music conservatory in the nation: No, she thought. This is not good.

On screen, a security guard paced past the cube, his arms folded behind his back.

Sgt. Sampson said, "Miss Poveda . . ."

Marisol looked up at the policeman.

"It's better that you tell me now."

She raised her hands from the thighs of her black jeans. "I don't . . . I don't understand," she said nervously, her native Ecuador in her accent. She turned to the vice principal. "Miss Otto . . ."

On the tape, the security guard continued to pace. Then he stopped, turned and, alarmed, suddenly bolted out of the frame, as if to check on an emergency in another part of the lobby.

Now the instrument, cube and base stood unguarded.

And smoke began to billow from a corner of the room.



As Marley watched, Marisol appeared on the monitor and hurried toward the instrument.

The brown-skinned girl wore a white peasant blouse with puff sleeves, jeans, and huarache sandals that matched her belt. Marley had seen her friend many times in those clothes. Bought at the little Latin American boutique on Columbus Avenue where Marisol's mother worked, the delicate blouse had red threads woven into the sleeves and scoop neckline.

As the smoke cloud in the Juilliard lobby drew nearer, Marisol stopped, raised on her toes, lifted the cube and tossed it to the carpet.

Marley thought, *Why wasn't the cube bolted down?*

Then Marisol snatched the instrument by the neck, tucked it under her arm, and, strings against her ribs and belt, dashed out of the frame.

The policeman gestured, and Miss Otto turned off the monitor.

"Miss Poveda?" he said.

"I—I did not do that," she replied, as tears welled.

Sgt. Sampson shook his head tiredly as he stepped from the filing cabinet to stand above Marisol. "Miss Poveda, we just saw—"

"I did not do it. I wouldn't. I would not steal."

Marisol trembled in the chair. Marley reached for her hand.

"Where is it?" Sgt. Sampson demanded.

"I don't—I don't know," she cried. "I am not a thief!"

Sgt. Sampson turned and wrapped a knuckle against Miss



Otto's door. The policewoman who had been standing guard opened it and peered in.

"Take her down to the precinct," the sergeant said, jabbing a finger toward Marisol.

"No!" Marisol shouted.

"Sergeant," Miss Otto said, "please . . ."

"Tell her parents they can pick her up at the Two-Oh. But not before she returns that violin."

Marisol was terrified. "Miss Otto, my mother is working, and my father—"

"Marisol, please tell them where you took that instrument," the vice principal said.

"But I didn't—I didn't take it."

As the policewoman reached for her elbow, Marisol shook and sobbed. Marley lifted a tissue from the box on Miss Otto's desk and passed it to her distraught friend.

"Marisol," Marley whispered gently, in an attempt to comfort her.

Another uniformed police officer came to the office door. "Detective," he said, "it's not in her locker."

Turning to Marisol, Sgt. Sampson said, "You can save yourself and your family, Miss Poveda. Tell me where you hid the violin."

Miss Otto said, "Sergeant, please."

"Miss Otto, do you have any idea how much that violin is worth?"

Before she could reply, he said, "It's valued in excess of five hundred thousand dollars."



Marisol gasped.

Sgt. Sampson said, "A half-million—"

"Yes, we know, Sergeant." Miss Otto had a reputation for a fiery temper and was known to stand firm with her students. "Let me talk to her. Will ten minutes make a difference?"

"Yes," he said sharply, "it might."

As Marley watched, Sgt. Sampson looked down at Marisol and said, "Miss Poveda, you are under arrest for grand larceny. Which is a felony. Which means you are going to jail."

"Sergeant!" Miss Otto protested.

Tears had spilled onto Marisol's blouse.

"Jackson," Sampson barked to the policewoman. "Get her out of here."

"Marley . . ." Marisol reached desperately for her friend, but the policewoman stepped between them. And then she led Marisol out of the office.

Sgt. Sampson followed.

Short, plump Miss Otto folded her arms across the front of her suit. "The pictures are real," she said plainly.

Marley nodded. "No doubt. But . . ."

The vice principal's mind raced. Sgt. Sampson had requested the school's security tapes, and said the NYPD would search every locker in the building to find the missing violin. She knew the chaos would disrupt the entire school.

Suddenly, Marley said, "She didn't do it. Not like that."



“Marley . . .”

“I know she didn’t.”

“You know it?”

“Absolutely. You know too,” she said.

Miss Otto unfolded her arms and placed her palms on her desk. With fifteen years experience in high school administration, Vivianna Otto wasn’t naive. Young students had deceived her, especially early in her career. But she had come to believe that she had an instinct for recognizing the good in every young person, and she found nothing more satisfying than helping a student she believed in, especially when few others did.

With someone like Marley, it was easy. Marley’s mother was the most influential African-American lawyer on Wall Street, her father a renowned comic-book writer and illustrator and, as she learned during the summer, Marley was bright and curious, outgoing and superconfident. Turned out everyone on the Upper West Side seemed to know the fourteen-year-old with coffee-light skin, cascading dreadlocks, eccentric clothes and natural bounce in her step. Even Miss Otto’s energetic father, who ran an Italian restaurant on 70th Street, admired her.

But Marisol was a different case. Though outwardly friendly and cheerful, she bore the weight of her family’s hopes and aspirations on her little shoulders. The Poveda family had come north to New York City so their children could live the American dream. For Marisol, a talented musician, it meant attend-





ing the Beacon School, studying the violin with private tutors and, four years from now, gaining acceptance into Juilliard. A career in an internationally acclaimed orchestra or as a tutor herself could follow.

Marley said, "Would Marisol risk everything—her reputation, her future, her *freedom*—to steal an instrument guarded by uniformed officers and a video security system? At Juilliard?"

No, Miss Otto thought. Nor were there any signs in Marisol's behavior to suggest she was a lowly thief.

"Marley," she said, "I think I do know it. I don't believe Marisol would steal. But we saw the violin in her hands—"

"Yes, but she insists she didn't do it. Even though we saw that she did."

Miss Otto went to her desk drawer. "I'm going to have to call her parents," she said. "And they're going to have to get a lawyer."

Marley asked, "Can I have a copy of that tape?" The Film department had the kind of equipment that could duplicate the video onto a disk in no time.

Miss Otto said, "Marley, that security tape proves she took—"

"Yes, but there's got to be something there," Marley said. "Something that proves what we saw isn't the whole story. That what Marisol said is true."

Marley wriggled sideways past the vice principal to press a button on the VCR. With a mechanical whir, the tape cassette appeared. Marley snatched it and slid it into the pocket of her carpenter's jeans.

"I'll do my best," she said, superconfidently.