

Gila Monsters Meet You at the Airport

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I live at 165 East 95th Street, New York City, and I'm going to stay here forever. My mother and father are moving, out West. They say I have to go, too. They say I can't stay here forever. Out West nobody plays baseball because they're too busy chasing buffaloes. And there's cactus everywhere you look. But if you don't look, you have to stand up just as soon as you sit down. Out West it takes fifteen minutes just to say hello. Like this: H-O-W-W-W-D-Y, P-A-A-A-R-D-N-E-R. Out West I'll look silly all the time. I'll have to wear chaps and spurs and a bandanna and a hat so big nobody can find me underneath

it. And I'll have to ride a horse to school every day and I don't know how. Out West everybody grows up to be a sheriff. I want to be a subway driver. My best friend is Seymour, and we like to eat salami sandwiches together. Out West I probably won't have any friends, but if I do, they'll be named Tex or Slim, and we'll eat chili and beans for breakfast, and lunch, and dinner. I will miss Seymour and salami.

I'm on my way, out West. It's cool in the airplane. The desert so hot you can collapse, and then buzzards circle overhead, but no one rescues you because it's real life and not the movies. There are clouds out the window. No buzzards yet! I'm looking at a map. Before, whenever I looked at a map, I always knew my house was on the right, but no more. Now I'm in the middle of

that map, and I'm going left, left, out West.

Seymour says there are Gila monsters and horned toads out West, and I read it in a book so I know it's so. But Seymour says they meet you at the airport.

We're here, out West. I don't know what a Gila monster or horned toad looks like but I don't think I see any at the airport. I see a boy in a cowboy hat. He looks like Seymour, but I know his name is Tex. "Hi," I say. "Hi," he says. "I'm moving East." "Great!" I say. "Great?" he says. "What's so great about it? Don't you know that the streets are full of gangsters? They all wear flowers in their lapels so they look honest, but they zoom around in big cars with screeching brakes. You have to jump out of their way. "In the East it snows and blows all the time, except

for five minutes when it's spring and summer. And you have to live on the 50th floor. Airplanes fly through your room, and you've got to duck fast." They ran out of extra space in the East a long time ago. It's so crowded people sit on top of each other while they ride to work. And alligators live in the sewers. I read it in a book so I know it's so." Then the mother and father of the boy who looks like Seymour but isn't grab his hand, an he goes off. "Sometimes the alligators get out," he yells to me. "And they wait for you at the airport.

It's warm, but there's a nice breeze. We're in a taxi riding to our new house. No horses yet. I don't see any buffalo stampedes either. I see a restaurant just like the one in my old neighborhood. I see some kids playing baseball. I

see a horse. Hey, that's a great looking horse!
I'm going to ask my mother and father for one like
it. Here's our house. Some kids are riding their
bikes in front of it. I hope one of them is named
Slim. Tomorrow, I'm writing a long letter to
Seymour. I'll tell him I'm sending it by pony
express. Seymour will believe me. Back East
they don't know much about us Westerners.