

Chapter Two – Gramps to the Rescue

Richard turned.

Beside the curb, his Mom was smiling at him from the shark mobile. He called her truck the *shark mobile* because some of the gray paint was peeling away, and leaving jagged white streaks. All along the truck's side, the streaks reminded him of shark teeth.

He saw his older sister Maddie in the passenger seat. For once, her phone was nowhere in sight. Maddie's arms were crossed and her freckled face had a bored frown.

"Are you going tell me what you're writing?" his Mom asked.

"You'll see." he said.

Like a magician, a young historian did *not* discuss his work.

"I'll see when?"

"When people in the future read it."

Richard's Mom laughed.

"Hop in," she said. "We'll be late for dinner."

Richard opened the door, and climbed into the seat.

When his Mom took her foot off the break, he heard a low squeal. Richard knew it was the break because he recognized the sound. Not that long ago, his parents had let him sit in the driver's seat. With his nose just over the wheel, he'd steered and tapped the break while the shark mobile rolled around the block. Richard remembered the engine's purr, the musty smell of old vinyl seats, the houses moving in the rearview mirror. He'd even imagined he was a *float* driver in the Grand Parade—one of the grown-ups who sat deep inside a float.

When his Mom turned the shark mobile around, the sun passed over them in a thin bright line.

“Is our float finished?” Richard asked.

“It’s getting there,” his Mom said. “The last thing they put on there is the fresh flowers.”

“Perfect,” Richard said, “and after dinner, we’re going to the warehouse so we can see it, right?”

Maddie turned to him. “Really? You’re going to see those things passing by *all* morning.”

“*Maddie*,” their Mom said.

When they reached Gramps and Grandma’s camper, the shark mobile slowed. Richard’s Mom turned and looked at him.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I know you were hoping to seeing the float tonight. Once we get home, we won’t have enough time to drive out here again.”

She smiled. “Can you wait until morning this time?”

“But seeing the float before anyone else is the best part,” Richard said.

“Better than an award?” his Mom said asked.

Outside, a screen door creaked open. When it creaked shut, they watched Gramps step down the camper’s footstool to the street. Richard’s Mom rolled down the window.

“Greetings!” Gramps shouted. In his rough brown jacket, his green earmuffs, and with a red hunter’s hat on his head, Gramps looked like a scrawny Christmas tree. “Where’s everyone off to?”

“Home.”

“And you’re bringing my Grandson back to see the float tonight, right?” Gramps added, throwing Richard a wink. “He’s the expert decorator. They’ve been asking for him all afternoon.”

Richard frowned.

Decorator? Being a *historian* sounded much better.

Still, Richard felt the excitement rising in his stomach.

“Please, Mom?” he asked. “I’d love to help.”

“I don’t know,” she said. “Once we get home, I’m not driving all the way back here.”

“Well,” Gramps replied, “What if Richard and Maddie stayed out here with me? Grandma and I will feed them. Then we’ll go to the warehouse before the judging starts.”

Richard looked longingly at his Mom.

She sighed.

“I suppose,” she said, “If you don’t mind driving him back home after that.”

“It’s deal!” Gramps said.

He turned back to the camper and their Mom rolled up the window.

Maddie folded her arms.

“Do I have to go?” she asked.

Richard held his breath.

He secretly hoped that it would be just him and Gramps.

Since his Dad had taken her phone away, fifteen year-old Maddie had been quite moody. Without *CloseUp*, the phone app that let her record short videos, frame them with flashy filters, and post them for her online followers, she’d had a lot more time to tease and bother him.

Their Mom sighed.

“No, of course not,” she said. “You’re free to stay home and celebrate New Year’s Eve with our favorite tradition.”

“What’s that?” Maddie asked.

“Going to bed early.”

Maddie looked back at Richard, then out at Gramps.

“Guess I’ll go.”

Really? Richard thought, shaking his head.

Maddie didn't even like the parade.

But when Gramps called him over, he felt the excitement again.

“All right,” Richard's Mom said. “Have fun, and be careful—”

Before she finished, Richard was already out the door.

-758 words