

THE DAVIDSONS



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GRAMPA'S SHRIEK

Emma often watched basketball games on TV with the sound off. She loved pretending that she was the play-by-play announcer.

“Seven seconds left on the clock. Bradley fakes right, dribbles left, steps back, shoots, and...all net! Eeeee-yowza!”

For as long as she could remember, Emma had heard stories about her grandfather—the radio voice of the Springhurst College men’s basketball team. Every now and then, she would listen to a recording of the Yellow Jackets’ nail-biting, championship victory. Grampa used his signature play-call, ‘eeeeee-yowza,’ many times that night. He died before she was born, but Emma was certain her grandpa would have told her that sports announcers have the best job in the world.

This year, the anniversary of Grampa’s death fell on a Friday. On the way to their grandmother’s apartment after school, Emma and her brother stopped by the florist shop with their dad. A short time later, Gramma opened her front door and smiled broadly at her visitors. No matter what mood she was in, or how much her bones may have

ached, she was always cheerful at the sight of her grandchildren, especially if they were holding a colorful, fragrant bouquet.

Gramma went to the kitchen and returned to the living room with a flower-filled vase and a platter of her homemade brownies. After going back for drinks and napkins, she sat down in her favorite chair and asked her grandkids what they had learned in school the past week. Speaking clearly and in a strong voice, Nate told Gramma how to solve problems using mental math.

“I didn’t know about that, dear,” she remarked. “See? A person’s never too old to learn something new.”

Then Emma explained how the students in her science class pieced together copper pennies and aluminum foil to make an electric circuit that turned on a lightbulb.

“Oh!” Gramma exclaimed. “That reminds me of a story your grandfather told me on one of our first dates. I can’t guarantee all the details are true,” she began, “but Grampa swore it really happened this way.”

As Gramma took a sip from her teacup, Emma and Nate settled into their places on the couch. They enjoyed hearing their grandmother talk about the old days.

“Well, when Grampa was a boy—around your age, Emma—his friend, Max, came up with an idea. It went like this: While his father was taking a nap in their apartment, Max took the car keys and snuck downstairs to the street. He started his family’s car, propped open the hood and shared his plan with the neighborhood gang. I remember Grampa called it...an experiment. It began with the six or seven boys forming a human chain. They held their hands from the front of the car and up the sidewalk, with Max the first in line and your grandpa bringing up the rear. When everyone was ready, Max took a piece of copper wire from his pocket with his free hand and pressed it against one of the metal posts of the car battery.”

Gramma noticed a look of concern on her grandson’s face.

“Was the engine still running?” he asked.

“Yes, dear. That was the plan. The wire touched the battery, and a jolt of electricity passed through each of the children in turn. Your grandpa told me that when the shock reached him, he shrieked so loud that a passerby ran up to

him and said he needed to speak to his mother or father right away.”

Nate looked more worried now, but she continued.

“Grampa’s body still stung from the electricity, but back then children automatically obeyed their elders—even strangers if they didn’t seem suspicious. So, he walked with the man to the end of the block, shouted up to an open window of his apartment and asked his mother to please come down. Your grandpa wasn’t certain why he had been singled out, but he was sure of one thing: He was about to get into a whole lot of trouble.”

Grandma drank more tea, while Emma and Nate tried to imagine what happened next.

“When Grampa’s mother came outside, the stranger introduced himself as the manager of the W, I, N, D radio station. He gave her his business card and said her son had a powerful voice that might be perfect for the part of a character in a live, weekly drama the station was going to air. Grampa joked that hearing this was his second shock that day.”

Grandma let the twist in the story sink in for a moment.

“When his father came home from work and found out what happened, he agreed to call the station manager the next morning. After an audition a few days later, he signed Grampa’s first radio contract. It was a small role, but your grandpa told me he loved performing every week—and learning firsthand about radio production—almost as much as he loved playing basketball. From the money he earned, he was able to save enough to buy a tape recorder and a microphone to practice with on his own, and the rest, as people like to say, is history.”

When Gramma finished her tale, she asked Emma and Nate to promise that they would never do two things Grampa did that day—play with electricity and go somewhere with a stranger, no matter how short the distance. As Nate nodded in agreement, she saw that he still looked troubled.

Fixing her eyes on his, she said, “Nate, everyone makes bad decisions at times. Grownups too. But even if you make an awful mistake, it’s possible that something good can come from it. Max burned his hand and put his friends in danger, but he learned a valuable lesson about electricity and the human body. And look how things turned out for Grampa.”

That made sense to Nate, so he quit worrying and turned his attention to the brownies.

As for Emma, Gramma's point reminded her of a painful and embarrassing incident a few years earlier: the day in third grade that she broke her wrist and mistakenly accused Allie, a newcomer to the school, of tripping her on purpose. Unexpectedly, the injury and Emma's decision to blame Allie ended up sparking a close friendship between the two girls. But not playing with electricity and not following a stranger were no-brainers. She didn't need to be reminded about that. And she didn't need an electric shock and a lucky passerby to help her figure out what she wanted to do when she grew up. She had decided long ago to follow in Grampa's footsteps—and take them all the way to a job as a sports broadcaster on national TV.

Nate looked up from what was left of the brownies and turned to Gramma.

“I was wondering,” he said. “Did Grampa tell you what his shriek sounded like? It must have been something special if it impressed that radio man so much!”

Mr. Davidson had been listening in silence until then.

“Yeah, Ma. You weren’t going to leave THAT out, I hope.”

“Of course not, Joey,” she replied, “but I was hoping one of my clever grandchildren might be able to guess.”

She smiled at Nate and Emma.

“Grampa told me his heart was already pounding before Max touched the battery, and then seeing his friends jump up and down from the electricity opened his eyes as wide as Sugar Pond. When the volts finally reached him too, a single word exploded from his mouth.”

There were no players to raise their fists in triumph, no coaches to smile in satisfaction, and no fans to roar in excitement next to their radios. But when Emma grabbed an imaginary microphone and made the thunderous announcement, Grampa would have beamed with pride just like Gramma did now: “Eeeee-yowza!”