

Dream Big

⚡ CHAPTER 3 ⚡



Four days later, when Courtney arrived at school, her classroom looked entirely different. The projects that had decorated the bulletin boards before the holiday break were gone. In their place, Courtney’s teacher, Mr. Garcia, had put up posters of outer space. A series of photos now hung on the wall behind Mr. Garcia’s desk: five men and two women, all smiling, wearing identical blue jumpsuits and holding space helmets.

“Welcome back!” Mr. Garcia greeted students as they took their seats. Mr. Garcia was everyone’s favorite third-grade teacher because he made school fun. He had shaggy dark hair and a mustache and beard, and he liked to wear Hawaiian shirts or suspenders—sometimes both at the same time. Today he was wearing a red shirt with yellow pineapples and rainbow suspenders with a “Save the Whales” button.

As the students got settled, Mr. Garcia closed the classroom door. “I hope everyone had a fun break,” he said. Then he did an effortless moonwalk back to his desk.

“What, you think I’m too old to break-dance?” Mr.

Garcia said when the kids laughed. “I’m trying to get you all psyched for the big event of 1986!”

“What big event?” Sarah asked.

“The *Challenger* launch!” Mr. Garcia said.

“The space shuttle?” another kid asked.

“Yes! The twenty-fifth space shuttle mission,” Mr. Garcia explained. “The *Challenger* is launching on January twenty-third. That means *we* need to get prepared.”

“For what?” Courtney asked. “We’re not getting shot up into outer space.”

“Maybe not,” Mr. Garcia acknowledged, “But Christa McAuliffe *is*.” He pointed to a photo on the wall of a woman with curly brown hair. “She’s a high school

teacher. When she goes into orbit, she’ll become the first teacher *ever* to go into space!” Surprised murmurs rippled through the room. “To honor that achievement,” Mr. Garcia went on, “thousands of kids in schools across the country are going to watch the shuttle launch live on television—including our school!”



Courtney glanced at Kip. They were huge Star Wars fans and had seen the movies together dozens of times.

Kip raised his hand and said, “If a teacher’s going to

space, they should send some students, too. I'll go!"

The class laughed. "Well, no students this time, Kip," Mr. Garcia explained. "But Mrs. McAuliffe will be doing experiments in space, and they'll be taped so that we can watch them." He paused and waggled his eyebrows. "And, on day four, Mrs. McAuliffe will teach from space! We'll watch that live, just like the launch."

"Whoa. That's so cool." Sarah grinned.

"I know!" Mr. Garcia replied, snapping his suspenders. "Now, Christa McAuliffe won't be the first American woman to go into space—that was Sally Ride—but Mrs. McAuliffe will be the first civilian to make it out of the atmosphere." Mr. Garcia paused. "Women are achieving new milestones every day."

"Like your mom!" Sarah said to Courtney. Then she turned to Mr. Garcia. "Courtney's mom is running for mayor."

Mr. Garcia and the whole class turned to look at Courtney, who felt her face turn pink from the attention.

"She is?" Mr. Garcia asked. When Courtney nodded, Mr. Garcia beamed. "That's fantastic!" He snapped his suspenders again. "If she wins, I believe she'd become Orange Valley's first female mayor. That would be a historic accomplishment!"

Courtney looked at Christa McAuliffe's photo. Christa

reminded her of Mom. They both had curly hair and wide smiles, and they were both trying to accomplish big things.

“Your mom doesn’t know how to be mayor,” a kid named Justin Wilson told Courtney abruptly. He smirked, flipping up his shirt collar. “She works at a park.”

Courtney was speechless, but Sarah whirled around in her chair to face Justin.

“Courtney’s mom runs the whole parks *department*,” Sarah snapped, “Besides, you probably don’t even know what the mayor does.”

“Yeah,” Courtney echoed, grateful for her friend. Sarah never had a problem knowing what to say.

“My mom’s worked on tons of political campaigns,” Sarah continued, “and she thinks Courtney’s mom could be the best mayor Orange Valley has ever had!”

“Whatever,” Justin said. “It’s not like—”

“Boys and girls,” Mr. Garcia interrupted, “local politics are important, but let’s get back to our space project. Take out your notebooks, please. I’ve got an assignment for you.”

Justin Wilson is such a pain, Courtney thought as she opened a purple notebook to a clean page and wrote the date on the top line: January 6, 1986.

“The *Challenger* launch is an opportunity for us to think about what exploration and discovery mean in our own lives,” Mr. Garcia said enthusiastically. “You might not

want to travel into space, but I bet that, like the astronauts, each of you has a dream of your own that you want to achieve." Mr. Garcia paused, and everyone looked at him, waiting. "So I want each of you to dream big and prepare a five-minute class presentation explaining your personal passion. You can use any medium you want—words, pictures, even music—but whatever you do, it has to be uniquely *you*."

Kip whipped around in his seat to face Courtney. "I'm gonna make a *movie*!" he whispered.

"Cool!" Courtney replied. As Kip turned back to the front, however, uncertainty formed a knot in her stomach. *What's my big dream?* she wondered. *Do I even have one?*



"My movie's going to be a cross between *Ghostbusters* and *The Goonies*," Kip mused, poking a straw into his juice pouch during lunch in the cafeteria. "I bet my dad will let me use his Betamax video camera if I promise to be careful. I could even get Toby to be in it, too!"

"Toby—your *dog*?" Courtney asked, wrinkling her nose in surprise.

Across the table, Sarah said, "Since my big dream is to travel, I'm going to plan a trip around the world and include every place I want to visit."

"That sounds rad," Kip said.

“I know, right?” Sarah replied eagerly. “What are you going to do, Courtney?”

“I’m still thinking about it,” Courtney said. She bit into her bologna and cheese sandwich, wondering if she was the only one in class who hadn’t come up with an idea yet.

“Make sure you pick something you love,” Sarah suggested. Sarah really enjoyed giving advice.

“But I love too many things,” Courtney replied. “Movies, and music, and video games—” She gasped mid-sentence, hit by a blast of inspiration. “I know—I’ll create my own video game!”

“That sounds super difficult,” Sarah said.

“Yeah,” Kip agreed. “I mean, you’re a total PAC-MAN master, but do you know how to program a computer game?”

“I’m not going to actually *make* a computer game,” Courtney clarified. “I’m going to think up the characters and the world and the rules, and then explain the game in my presentation.”

“Ohhhh,” Kip said. “That makes sense.”

“Make sure you think up great bad guys,” Sarah said importantly. “Something scary, like spiders.”

“Or irritating,” Courtney replied. “Like Justin Wilson.” Courtney pictured a villain with a shirt collar standing up so tall that it blocked his face.