

# Dream Big Henry

## Chapter 1

"Today's the day, Henry. Are you excited?" Momma spider asked while looking out the window for the school bus to arrive. She moved so quickly packing up his lunch and book bag her legs seemed to float about the kitchen. It was a big day. Today her little spider started school.

The family moved to Grassy Meadow one a week ago after the bull dozers mowed over the old shed and farm house and took their home. A summer breeze carried them to a fence post that overlooked all of Grassy Meadow. In that short time, they constructed a new home and were ready to start a new life here in Grassy Meadow.

"Sure, mom.....but I am a little nervous too." Henry hesitated and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose and rolled his wheelchair to the edge of the post so he could almost see the front of Grassy Meadow Elementary. The school sat just inside a hollow log by the stream and was already buzzing with insects.

"Henry, we talked about this." She leaned in and gently lifted his chin. "Remember that you are special. MY special spider. You will make lots of new friends." Momma smiled and did her best to comfort him. He was born different from the other bugs, but that didn't matter to her.

Henry was her special spider.

Just then, Doris the dragonfly swooped down from the sky and perched herself on the fence post. Holding on tight sat a little lady bug and a shimmering beetle. "I heard we have a new bug in town," she buzzed in deep voice. "All aboard, Henry. Grab on and hold tight!"

Henry strapped his chair down and waved to his mom. The dragonfly zoomed straight down in a dizzy blur. Ready or not, his first day of second grade had begun.

Lucy, the little lady bug from the bus, had stared at Henry the whole way to school and was already quizzing him as they entered the building, "What's your name? What kind of bug are you? What happened to your legs? Can I see your glasses?".

"Uh, I was born this way. My glasses help me see and my wheelchair helps me get around," Henry said patiently. He was certainly used to these questions back when he started his old school but the kids had grown up together and the bugs had gotten used to Henry. He looked forward to the day when everyone forgot he was different.

As he entered the classroom, Lucy squealed with delight that he would be in her class. "You're gonna love Ms. Flutters! She is the best teacher EVER!" Lucy beamed.

The classroom immediately became quiet when Henry entered the room. Henry looked down and slowed his wheelchair to a stop at the teacher's desk. "Well hello, you must be Henry. It is so good to finally meet you. Please take a seat right here in the front row. Class, let's take our seats. I want you all to meet Henry. He and his family are new to Grassy Meadows." Ms. Flutters' beautiful, blue wings lifted and spread out as she stood and introduced Henry. While moving to his desk he could already hear the whispers. "What's wrong with him?, Can he walk? He looks funny."

Henry scooted his wheelchair past a stink bug and a fuzzy caterpillar and made his way to a desk right next to a bright green grasshopper that smiled at him when he settled in. "Hi, Henry, my name is Nathan. It's good to meet you."

The whispers and stares seemed to stop as the morning wore on. Henry could not help but think about lunch. He worried where he would sit. Nobody wants to sit next to the new bug.

Ms. Flutters gave the five minute warning instructing them to finish up classwork then asked her bugs to grab their lunch boxes and line up. Henry was slower than everyone else and this left at the back of the line. Henry wheeled his way to the lunchroom with his classmates and was surprised to find Nathan waiting for him. "Hey Henry, come sit with me," the grasshopper motioned to Henry.

Henry hoped he had made his first friend. It was a good start.

## Chapter 2

Momma heard Doris the dragonfly land on the post that afternoon and hurried out to greet her little spider after his first day. "How was your day, Henry!?"

"Not too bad. Some bugs made fun of me but I did meet a nice grasshopper named Nathan. He is cool. We ate lunch together." Henry shrugged his shoulders a bit and changed the subject. "Did you catch any flies today? I am starving!"

On the other side of Grassy Meadow, in a field of daffodils, Nathan the grasshopper hopped home through the tall grass.

"There's my favorite grasshopper. How was your day, Buddy?", his mom asked.

"Great! A new spider named Henry moved to our school. He's different from the other bugs. Some bugs were making fun of him because he uses a wheelchair and wears glasses and braces on his legs but I think he's kinda cool." Nathan let out all in one breath. "Do you think the other bugs will start making fun of me too if I hang out with him?"

"Slow down now. First, I am very proud of you for being nice to the new bug. Nathan, if Henry is a nice spider then you can be his friend if you want. Secondly, you can't worry about what the other bugs think. Just because the new bug looks different doesn't mean others should treat him any different. We are all special in our own way. Do you understand?" She reached out to give Nathan a hug. She was so proud of her little grasshopper.

The next day at school Ms. Flutters announced the second grade would put on Grassy Meadows Elementary's first annual musical. She expected every bug in class to be a part of the show which would take place in just a few short months. Dancers, singers and musicians were needed and tryouts would start soon.

The class began buzzing with excitement but Henry couldn't help but let out a sigh. He was glad to have something that took the attention off him but he dreaded the upcoming musical. He wondered how a bug like him could participate. He could not sing a note and he certainly could not dance.

Nathan could tell Henry was upset so he leaned over and whispered, "Don't worry, Henry. We will find something you are good at. Everybody is good at something."

### Chapter 3

At recess, the two bugs found a shady spot under the blue hydrangea. Henry was never too fond of recess so he was delighted when Nathan suggested they put their heads together and think of something Henry could do in the musical.

"Singing!", Nathan blurted out excitedly. "You wouldn't have to even move on the stage. You could just roll onto the stage in your chair and sing."

"Nathan, I don't know how to sing." Henry shook his head and watched as Nathan glided with ease along the monkey bars and landed on his back legs.

"Just try. Come on, anybody can sing. See? Give it a try." He then jokingly rubbed his cricket legs together in a soothing purr.

"Alright, here goes. Twinkle, twinkle little st.." Henry belted out in a shriek that left Nathan covering his ears in a grimace and cutting him off before he could get out another note.

"Okay, maybe you are right. Singing may not be your talent. No worries."

Both bugs sat quietly for a minute watching Lucy the lady bug and Ollie the rolly polly spin in circles and count out the moves to a dance they were choreographing for the musical try-outs.

Only a shrug was shared between Nathan and Henry. They both knew dancing would not be Henry's special talent. They decided to head back to class and think about other ideas they could try.

As they got back to class Ms. Flutters was smiling as she listened to Lucy explain her tryout dance while spinning back and forth in delight. Ms. Flutters also watched Henry enter the room with his head down.

When the bell rang Henry rolled himself straight outside to wait for the bus with only a mumbled goodbye as he past Nathan gathering his book bag. He wasn't upset with his friend but he wasn't in the mood to talk.

Doris kept her chatter to a minimum taking Henry home from school as she could tell he had a rough day. Henry's mom waited with opened arms and a smile to greet him.

"Come inside. I made your favorite cookies - chocolate chip with fly chunks!". She took his backpack and helped Henry inside.



Over cookies and milk Henry fought through tears telling her why he was upset and jumbling the words together as his words flooded out. She waited patiently for him to finish.

"Henry, your dad and I are proud of you no matter what as long as you try and do your best. Everybody is good at something. You are my very special spider. Why don't you try to play an instrument? I bet you'd be great. Talk to Ms. Flutters and I bet she can have you meet with the music teacher and try out some instruments."

"Alright, Mom, I'll give it a try." Henry brushed away the crumbs from his chin and looked at his math worksheet where he had doodled downtown Grassy Meadow.

## Chapter 4

The next day Nathan and Henry got permission to visit the music teacher during recess to get some musical instruments a try. Certainly one of the instruments Mr. Harp laid out would be the perfect instrument for Henry to play in the show.

"Give these a try Henry. You can even borrow one to take home to practice if you like." The shimmery blue and green beetle hoisted the drum set on his chest and set it down in the middle of the band room next to a flute, a guitar, a trumpet, and a xylophone.

"This is so cool, Henry. You can definitely play one of these. Let's rock out!" Nathan said as he hopped over a chair and started to bang on the shiny, red drum-set that he had his eye on as soon as they entered the music room.

Henry was busy admiring the mural on the wall which displayed a brightly painted orchestra of praying mantis wearing tuxedos. "I would have used black and white tones." He muttered under his breath.

"What did you say? Come on, try something." Nathan shouted at Henry over his own load banging.

"Alright, alright, I'm coming." Henry slowly rolled himself toward the instruments lining the wall. Nothing really spoke to him but he could hear his mother's voice in his head and knew he better try.

Henry started by picking up the guitar and worked his way to the drum set, but with every strum, tap, bang or blow he got more and more discouraged. He winced as each instrument let out a shrill wine or flat thud. Nathan tried to stay positive but even he feared this was just one more idea that was not going to work. They needed more time.

"Now what?" Henry said aloud over the bell signaling the end of recess. Musical tryouts were only one week away.

The two friends headed back to class. Upon entering the room, Nathan shrugged at Ms. Flutters letting her know their visit to the music room was not a success. Ms. Flutters looked down at the stack of papers she had been grading. On the bottom of Henry's spelling test, she saw a beautiful drawing of a mountain skyline Henry had doodled after completing his work. Her eyes brightened a bit with an idea. "Henry, can I speak with you when the bell rings?"

## Chapter 5

Before heading home Ms. Flutters shared her idea with Henry about how he could help out with the musical. Henry was so excited about his part in the upcoming musical he almost wheeled himself right out to catch the bus without grabbing his backpack or lunch box.

The second Doris stopped at the fence post, Henry rolled off to find his momma. Momma spider was hanging clothes on the line to dry when she heard her excited little spider. "Mom! Guess what, guess what, guess what?!"

"Slow down, Henry. What is it?" She could not help but smile seeing Henry so happy. It had been a rough month so she was pleased to see Henry in a good mood for a change. In a burst of excitement Henry shared the events of the day and his part in the school musical. He asked if he could eat his dinner early so he could get to work. After all, Henry had a lot to accomplish between now and opening night.

Momma peaked in on Henry before bed and smiled when she found her little spider hunched over his desk with his desk lamp still shining and a notebook still opened showing pencil sketches inside. She leaned in to kiss his cheek and turned off his lamp. She whispered, "I am so proud of my very special spider."

The auditorium on opening night was packed. Daddy bugs were adjusting video cameras, Mommy bugs were straightening collars and hair bows, and little baby bugs were squealing and kicking the seat backs of Auntie bugs.

Henry sat nervously next to his mom and dad. Even though his part was done, he couldn't seem to relax. The room went quiet when the house lights went down and Ms. Flutters stepped out on stage. She began with a few introductions and the first annual musical at Grassy Meadows Elementary began. With her exit, the curtains were drawn and the silhouette of skyscrapers on the stage glowed with the stage lights as the backdrop of the show. The stage set that Henry had spent all his extra time drawing and painting during the past months while his classmates rehearsed singing and dancing. From the street signs and cabs to the busy storefronts and cafes, he had thought of every detail to add the perfect background for the performers to tell the story.

As the musical came to a close, Ms. Flutters entered the stage again to give a final recognition to everyone involved and she asked Henry to make his way up to the stage too. Henry could see his buddy Nathan exiting the stage and extending a hand to meet him in the aisle and help Henry to the stage. "Let's give our stagehand Henry a special round of applause for helping to design our set. There are no small parts. Everyone here did their part to make this first musical a success!" It was a night to remember.

From the stage, even under the bright spot lights, Henry could see everyone in the audience was now standing and cheering. Front and center, Henry could see and hear his mom and dad the best of all. His dad was giving him a thumbs up and momma had the biggest smile on her face. Henry knew just what she was thinking, "*Henry, you are my very special spider.*"