



READ-ALoud STORY • GRADES 3–5

THE SNOW GLOBE

Every time the snow falls, he takes one step closer.

CHAPTER 1: DON'T

"Don't you two go up in that attic," Grandma says.

So of course that's the first place Gus goes.

Gus is my cousin. He's ten, like me, but he acts like he's six.

He shakes things. Presents. Cereal boxes. Grandma's jar of buttons. If it rattles, Gus has to shake it.

Our parents dropped us off this morning. A whole week at Grandma's before Christmas, while they work.

Grandma's house is tall and skinny and old. The stairs creak. The radiator bangs all night like somebody's hitting it with a spoon.

And an attic.

"Come ON, Josie," Gus whispers from the top of the stairs.

"Grandma said no."

"Grandma said don't go up. She didn't say don't look."

That makes no sense. I go up anyway.

The attic is freezing. It smells like dust and old Christmas. There are boxes everywhere. Boxes of ornaments. Boxes of old clothes. A rocking horse with one eye.

Gus is already digging.

"Whoa. Josie. Look at this one."

It's a small cardboard box, all by itself, way in the back under the window. Somebody wrote

on the top in black marker, faded almost gray.

Just one word.

DON'T.

"Don't what?" Gus says.

"Just don't," I say. "Put it back."

Gus opens it.

Inside, wrapped in a yellowed dish towel, there's a snow globe.

It's old. Heavy. The glass is thick and a little bubbly. The base is black wood, with a tiny brass key on the bottom that doesn't turn.

Inside, the water is clear. White snow lies in a little drift at the bottom.

There's a house in there. A little house with yellow windows, like there's a fire going inside. A pine tree. A front gate.

And by the gate, there's a man.

A tiny man in a long dark coat and a tall black hat. He has a sack over his shoulder.

He's standing with his back to the glass, facing the little house. Like he's about to walk up the path and knock.

"Cool," Gus says.

And before I can say anything, he shakes it.

Hard.

Snow explodes inside the glass. It swirls around and around the little house.

"Gus, stop!"

He shakes it again. And again. And again. Five times.

Then he holds it up to the window, grinning, and we watch the snow come down.

Slowly. Slowly.

It settles.

My skin prickles.

The little man isn't by the gate anymore. He's five steps closer. And he's facing us.

CHAPTER 2: TAP

"He was always like that," Gus says.

"He was NOT. He was facing the house."

"You remember wrong."

I don't remember wrong. I'm the one in our family who remembers everything. I can tell you what we had for dinner at Grandma's last Thanksgiving. (Ham. Gus spilled the gravy.)

The little man is standing halfway down the path now, between the gate and the glass. His back is to the house. His face is tipped down under his hat, so I can't see it.

But he's looking at us. I know he is.

"Fine," Gus says. "I'll turn him back around." He starts to shake it.

I grab it out of his hands.

"Don't!"

The snow inside stirs. Just a little. Just a few flakes.

The little man takes one more step.

I see it. I see him do it. His tiny black boot lifts and comes down, closer, right while the flakes are falling.

Then the snow settles, and he's still.

Gus's mouth falls open.

"Did you...?"

"Yeah," I whisper. "I saw."

We don't tell Grandma.

What would we say? Your snow globe walks?

I put it on the dresser in the room Gus and I share, as far from the beds as I can. I set it down so gently. I don't let one single flake move.

That night, the radiator bangs and bangs. I lie in my sleeping bag and stare at the dresser.

I fall asleep.

Something wakes me up.

Not the radiator.

A rattle. A soft, glassy rattle. Like a jar of marbles shaking.

I sit up.

On the dresser, in the dark, the snow globe is rocking. All by itself. Back and forth. Back and forth. Inside it, in the glow from the streetlight, the snow is swirling.

My heart slams.

"Gus," I whisper. "Gus, wake up."

He doesn't wake up. Gus could sleep through a parade.

The rocking stops.

The snow comes down.

In the morning, the little man is closer to the glass. And he's bigger.

Last night, his hat came up to the bottom branches of the pine tree. Now it's past the top.

I get the sheet of gold star stickers out of my backpack. The ones Mom gave me for my reading chart.

I stick one on the outside of the glass, right over the top of his hat.

"What's that for?" Gus asks.

"So we know," I say. "So we know exactly how fast he's coming."

"Josie." Gus's voice is small. "What happens when he gets to the glass?"

I don't answer. I don't know.

I don't want to know.

I hide it in my sock drawer. Under every sock I brought.

All day, nothing happens. Gus and I sit on the floor in front of the dresser and watch the drawer. We play cards. We eat Grandma's cookies. We watch.

Nothing.

"It's a trick," Gus says. "Like a magnet. Somebody's messing with us."

"Who?"

He doesn't have an answer.

That night, I don't sleep at all. I lie there with my flashlight and stare at the drawer.

Around midnight, the drawer starts to rattle.

Tap. Tap. Tap. It's coming from inside the glass.

CHAPTER 3: HALFWAY

In the morning, there's a blizzard.

Snow is coming down so hard you can't see the house across the street. The radio in Grandma's kitchen says the schools are closed, the roads are closed, everything is closed. It says tonight is going to be the coldest night of the year.

"Way below zero, folks," says the radio man. "Bundle up. Stay inside."

Grandma hums and bakes. She has no idea.

After breakfast, Grandma comes upstairs with a basket of laundry.

The snow globe is sitting on the dresser. I took it out of the sock drawer to check on it, and I forgot to put it back.

"Oh, my goodness," Grandma says. She sets down the basket. "My grandmother's snow

globe. I haven't seen this since I was your age. Where did you find it?"

She picks it up.

She turns it in her hands, smiling. And she starts to shake it, the way everybody shakes a snow globe.

"DON'T!"

I lunge. Grandma jumps. She sets it back down on the dresser with a thump.

The snow stirs. A few flakes drift down past the little house.

Inside, a black boot lifts and comes down.

"Josie Marie," Grandma says, with her hand on her heart. "You scared me half to death."

"Sorry," I say. "It's just... it's really old. It might break."

Grandma looks at me for a long second. Then she picks up her basket.

"Then put it somewhere safe, sweetie," she says, and goes back downstairs.

Somewhere safe.

Where is safe from this?

Gus and I sit down in front of the dresser and look at the snow globe very, very closely.

Gus gasps.

My gold star is way down by the little house now. The man's hat is nowhere near it. It's up high and close to the glass, and I have to put the next star almost at the top.

The little man isn't little anymore.

He's halfway to the glass. And he's as tall as the house. His hat is up by the roof. His sack hangs off his shoulder, huge and floppy, and empty.

And for the first time, I can see his face.

It's white. Smooth white, like a candle. He has two small black eyes, shiny like buttons.

And he's smiling.

A long, thin smile, too wide for his face.

I almost drop it.

"Careful!" Gus grabs my hands, and the snow barely moves, and the man doesn't move either. We both breathe out.

"What's the sack for?" Gus whispers.

I look at it. Empty. Big.

Big enough for a kid.

"I don't want to find out," I say.

Gus sits on his bed and doesn't say anything for a long time. Then he says, "Josie?"

"What?"

"I shook it on purpose. The first time. To scare you." His face is red. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"I know you didn't know."

"How many more nights until he gets to the glass?"

I look at the globe. Two gold stars. One night between them, and he went so far.

He's halfway there.

"Two," I say. "Maybe one."

Gus puts his face in his hands.

"Can't we just smash it?"

"If we smash it, he gets out."

"Throw it away?"

"Throwing it is shaking it. The garbage truck would shake it all the way to the dump."

"Then what?"

I look out the window at the blizzard.

All that snow.

And then I look at the snow inside the globe.

"Snow globes are just water," I say slowly. "With fake snow in it."

"So?"

"So he only moves when the snow is falling.

What if the snow can't fall?" I turn around.

"What if the water is frozen solid?"

Gus stares at me. "Put it in the freezer!"

"Grandma's freezer is the size of a lunchbox.

It's full of cookie dough. And she opens it about a hundred times a day."

"Oh. Yeah."

The radio downstairs says it again. Coldest night of the year.

"Tonight," Gus says.

"Tonight."

We look at the globe.

The little man has his hand up. His palm is flat on the inside of the glass, like he's trying to feel how thick it is.

And right under his hand, there's a crack.

CHAPTER 4: FROZEN

It rattles twice after dark. Both times, the snow swirls, and he gets closer.

At midnight, the whole house is asleep except for us.

Gus has the flashlight. I have the snow globe in both hands, held straight out in front of me, flat as a tray of water.

Two flights of stairs.

Every stair creaks.

Every step, I'm sure I'm going to tip it.

The man fills the whole globe now. His hat is squashed against the top of the glass. His face is pressed to the front of it, white and smiling, his black button eyes an inch from my hands. The little house is behind him, tiny, like a toy he's done playing with.

And the crack is longer. It runs from his hand halfway around the glass.

"Slow," Gus whispers. "Slow, slow, slow."

My foot slips on the last stair.

The globe tips.

Just a little. Just enough.

The snow swirls.

The man takes a step.

There's a sound like a tiny piece of ice snapping. The crack gets longer.

I freeze. I don't breathe. The snow settles.

"Go," Gus says. "Go, go."

The back door sticks. Gus has to shove it with his shoulder.

Then we're outside.

The cold hits me like a wall. It's so cold my nose hurts. My eyes water and the tears go stiff on my cheeks. The snow in the backyard is up past my knees.

There's a big snowbank by the back steps where Grandma's driveway got plowed.

I kneel down in the snow and set the globe in the snowbank.

Gently.

So, so gently.

"Pack it," I gasp. "All around it."

Gus scoops snow with both arms and packs it around the globe. Around the base. Around the glass. Up the sides. I pack too, until only the very top is showing.

Under the flashlight, the water inside starts to change.

It goes cloudy at the edges. White. Like a pond in winter.

It's working.

"It's working!" Gus says.

Then the globe starts to rattle.

It rocks in the snowbank. Back and forth. Back and forth. The snow inside, where the water isn't frozen yet, starts to swirl.

The man takes a step.

The crack spreads.

He takes another.

Crack.

Something comes through the glass.

A finger.

A thin white finger, poking out through the crack. Then another. Then a whole hand, squeezing out, and as it comes out it gets bigger. And bigger. Until it's as big as a grown-up's hand.

It grabs my finger.

It's colder than the snow. Colder than anything. It squeezes, hard, and it *pulls*, and my arm goes toward the globe, toward the crack, toward the dark coat and the smiling face and the big empty sack.

I scream.

Gus grabs me around the waist and pulls the other way.

"Josie, PULL!"

The ice is spreading. I can see it in the flashlight. White, creeping in from the edges of the glass toward the middle. Over the little house. Over the tree. Over the man's boots.

But the crack is spreading too.

It's the ice. The ice is pushing on the glass. Getting bigger, the way ice does, the way it breaks the birdbath every winter. I didn't think of that. I didn't know.

The hand pulls. My finger goes numb. My whole hand goes numb.

The ice reaches his knees.

His coat.

His shoulders.

His smile.

The hand stops pulling.

It just holds on. Stiff. Frozen.

I yank my finger out of it.

It comes free with a sound like a popsicle stick snapping off.

I fall backward into Gus, and we both land in the snow, and we lie there, breathing so hard our breath makes clouds.

The globe sits in the snowbank. Frozen solid. White all the way through.

A white hand sticks out of the crack in the glass, reaching for the sky. Not moving.

Inside, through the ice, I can just see the smile.

We bury it.

We pack snow over it until it's gone. Then we pile more on top, a whole mountain, behind Grandma's garage, where the plow pushed the biggest snowbank of all.

My finger is white at the tip for three days. Grandma says it's frostnip and makes me hot cocoa.

On Christmas morning, Gus doesn't shake a single present. Not one.

After New Year's, our parents come and get us, and we drive home, and I don't think about it.

I don't let myself think about it.

In March, the phone rings.

It's Grandma. She calls every Sunday.

"Josie, sweetie, guess what? Spring finally came. All the snow melted. You should see the mud."

My stomach drops.

"And you'll never guess what I found behind the garage," Grandma says. "That old snow globe. The one from the attic. How on earth did it get out there?"

I can't talk.

"Josie? Are you there?"

"I'm here," I whisper.

"Well, I'm sorry to say it's broken. The glass is all cracked." She laughs. "And the funny thing is, it's empty."

"Empty?"

"Just the little house and the tree. The little man is gone."