

### ***Old People, Frogs, and Albert* by Nancy Hope Wilson**

A few weeks later, in the middle of November, Ms. Dali announced, “Good news!” She waited till everyone was paying attention. Then she said, “Mr. Spear is out of the hospital.”

Albert felt something jump inside his chest. “When’s he coming back? Today?”

Ms. Dali didn’t hear him, because everyone was asking questions all at once.

“One at a time,” she said, and called on Safa.

“Can he talk now?” Safa asked.

“A little, but he isn’t walking much yet. He’s using a wheelchair.”

Albert had put his hand up, but now he took it down. He held his breath and let other kids ask the questions.

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Ms. Dali explained that Mr. Spear wouldn’t be coming to school—not right away. He was much better, but he still needed lots of help and care. He couldn’t live alone anymore. “At least he’ll be living nearby,” she said, “right up the street at the Pine Manor Nursing Home.”

“Great!” Tiffany burst out. “Can we go visit?”

Albert looked out the window. He could still hear Ms. Dali’s voice, but something louder was rushing in his head. Pine Manor. Mr. Spear was in Pine Manor. Albert squeezed his eyes shut. He hoped Ms. Dali would stop talking soon. He hoped kids would stop asking questions. He wanted to do a hard math paper or something. He didn’t want to think about Mr. Spear in Pine Manor.

“Albert?”

Ms. Dali was looking at him as if waiting for an answer.

“What?”

“Would you like to see Mr. Spear?”

Albert’s mouth felt dry. He could see Tiffany smiling from the front of the room. “Sure,” he said. Of *course* he wanted to see Mr. Spear. He wanted to see Mr. Spear walk into the room right now, his hair combed slick and his glasses pushing up into his eyebrows.

“Well,” Ms. Dali said. “If you both want to, I guess we could do that.”

Do what? Albert wondered, but Ms. Dali went right on.

“I’ll call your parents during recess,” she said.

She was calling kids’ parents?

Ms. Dali handed out a math paper. “This one’s tricky,” she said, “so pay attention.”

Albert had to wait till recess to ask someone what was going on. Safa was standing alone by the school wall, hunched over against the cold wind. Albert went up to him.

“Hi,” Safa said.

“Hi.”

“Cold.”

“Yeah.”

“Too bad about Mr. Spear.”

“Yeah.”

“He was kind of your friend, right?”

“Yeah.”

Safa was quiet for a minute. Albert took a breath, then came right out with his question.

“Why’s Ms. Dali calling our parents?”

“Not *our* parents,” Safa said. “*Your* parents. Yours and Tiffany’s. You were the only ones who said you wanted to go.”

“Go where?”

Safa looked at him. “Weren’t you listening?”

“Not exactly.”

“You’re going to visit Mr. Spear.”

“But he’s in...” Albert didn’t finish.

“Yeah. That Pine Grove place, or whatever. You walk by it, right? So does Tiffany. Ms. Dali said she’d walk up there with you.”

Albert looked hard at the ground. “When?”

“Right after school—today.” Albert kept looking at the ground. “That’s why she’s calling now,” Safa said. He was silent for a minute. Then he gave Albert a soft punch on the arm. “Hey, you want to get into that kickball game?”

Albert hardly heard him. “Sure,” he said. “Why not?”