

Chaper 31

On Christmas morning, Maniac awoke in the early darkness, aware that the holiday spirit would soon fill the air of Two Mills. He gently shook Grayson awake, restraining him from turning on the light as they bundled up for an outing in the quiet night. Maniac carried a paper bag, and they headed out into a peaceful landscape covered in untouched snow, which still clung to the park, glimpses of wildlife visible in the soft glow of moonlight.

The pair visited their special tree, allowing the enchanting surroundings to envelop them in a moment of silence and magic. Their exploration continued through the woods along the creek and onto the zoo, where they playfully greeted the animals, notably the ducks that seemed particularly happy to see their visitors. As dawn approached, they reached the buffalo pen. Maniac quickly climbed over the fence to reunite with the buffalo. After a warm exchange with Baby, he presented a thoughtful gift — a scarf made from three tied together — to properly celebrate their friendship.

With the town beginning to wake, they returned home for a festive breakfast filled with eggnog, hot tea, cookies, and carols. Under the tree, gifts awaited, and Maniac gifted Grayson gloves, a woolen cap, and a hand-made book titled *The Man Who Struck Out Willie Mays,* which held special meaning to them both.

In an excited exchange of presents, Maniac received gloves, a box of butterscotch Krimpets, and a pristine baseball, which filled him with joy. Grayson, revealing another hidden gift wrapped in newspaper, presented Maniac with a well-loved, worn-out baseball glove from his past that seemed like a piece of history. As Maniac slid his hand into the glove, it transformed the tattered leather into something alive again, as if it remembered its purpose.

The room was filled with a contemplative silence as they shared this profound moment. Tragically, just five days later, the old man passed away, leaving a profound silence in the wake of their poignant Christmas holiday together.