

fifteen

And the winner Is . . .

TEN YEARS LATER, Nick Allen was a junior in college. And during November of his junior year, two important things happened.

First, Nick turned twenty-one years old, and the frindle trust fund set up by his father became legally Nick's.

Nick was rich. Nick was very rich. Nick was so rich he couldn't even begin to imagine how rich he really was.

Nick wanted to give his parents some of the money, which they said they did *not* need and would *not* accept. But Nick reminded them that they had always wanted to travel, and they should just think of this as a big birthday present or something. So they accepted.

And Nick also wanted to give some money to his big brother, James—who said he did *not* need it and would *not* accept it. But Nick reminded James that his two-year-old daughter would grow up and go to college someday—and besides, hadn't James once given Nick his whole baseball card collection? So James accepted the gift.

After that Nick went out and bought himself a fast new computer. And about ten new games. And a mountain bike. Then he tried to forget about the money, which is a hard thing to do. But he managed pretty well and kept working on his college degree as hard as ever.

The second important thing that fall was the arrival of a package at the door of Nick's apartment one day—a large, heavy package. It was from Mrs. Granger.

There were three things in the package: 1) a brand-new eighth-edition *Webster's College Dictionary*; 2) a short handwritten note taped to the cover of the dictionary; and 3) a fat white envelope. Turning the white envelope over, Nick saw the name—his name. He had written it there one September afternoon in Mrs. Granger's room after school. Ten years ago.

Nick set the envelope down and gently peeled the note off the front of the dictionary.

My dear Nicholas:

Please turn to page 541 of this book.

Nick grabbed the dictionary and leafed to page 541, his heart pounding. And there between *Friml* and *fringe* he read:

frin•dle (frin' dl) n. a device used to write or make marks with ink [arbitrary coinage; originated by Nicholas Allen, American, 1987- (see pen)]

Nick went back to the note from Mrs. Granger.

This is a brand-new dictionary, the one I recommend that my students use for their homework. And now when I teach them how new words are added to the dictionary, I tell each and every one of them to look up the word frindle.

And, of course, I have sent along that letter I promised to give you when our little battle was over.

And now it's over.

Your teacher,

Mrs. Lorelei Granger

Nick's head was spinning. With shaking hands, he opened the fat white envelope. He pulled out the ten-year-old letter and began to read.

Dear Nicholas:

If you are reading this letter, it means that the word frindle has been added to the dictionary. Congratulations.

A person can watch the sunrise, but he cannot slow it down or stop it or make it go backward. And that is what I was trying to do with your word.

At first I was angry. I admit that. I was not happy to see the word pen pushed aside as if it did not matter. But I guess that if the Latin word for feather had been frindilus instead of pinna, then you probably would have invented the word pen instead. Like the sunrise, some things just have to happen—and all you can really do is watch.

The word frindle has existed for less than three weeks. I now see that this is the kind of chance that a teacher hopes for and dreams about—a chance to see bright young students take an idea they have learned in a boring old classroom and put it to a real test in their own world. I confess that I am very excited to see how it all turns out. I am mostly here to watch it happen.

But somehow I think I have a small part to play in this drama, and I have chosen to be the villain. Every good story needs a bad guy, don't you think?

So someday, I will be asking you to forgive me, and I hope you will.

Nick, I know you like to think. Please think about this: When I started teaching, no one had landed on the moon, there were no space shuttles, no CNN, no weather satellites. There were no video cassette recorders, no CDs, no computers.

The world has changed in a million

ways. That is why I have always tried to teach children something that would be useful no matter what.

So many things have gone out of date. But after all these years, words are still important. Words are still needed by everyone. Words are used to think with, to write with, to dream with, to hope and pray with. And that is why I love the dictionary. It endures. It works. And as you now know, it also changes and grows.

Again, congratulations. And I've enclosed a little present for you.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Granger

Nick remembered Mrs. Granger's eyes, and now he understood what some of those special looks had meant. The old fox! She had been rooting for *frindle* the whole time. By fighting against it, she had actually helped it along.

There was a flat, oblong case in the white

envelope, the kind of case you get when you buy a watch. Nick pulled it out and opened the lid. Inside was something else Nick had not seen for ten years. It was Mrs. Granger's favorite pen, her old maroon fountain pen with the blue cap. And under the clip was a little folded piece of paper. It was another note. A very short note. Just one word: Frindle.

About a month later, something happened over in the old part of Westfield, over where the trees are huge and the houses are small. On Christmas morning, Mrs. Granger's doorbell rang. Mrs. Granger opened the door, but no one was there.

Someone had left a package inside her storm door—a box wrapped in green paper with a red bow and a white envelope taped to one end. She smiled as she stooped down to pick it up.

As she picked up the package she noticed a red, white, and blue Express Mail envelope sticking halfway out of her mailbox next to the doorway. It must have been delivered late on Christmas Eve. She opened the storm door plucked the envelope from the mailbox, and



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then shut both doors and went inside with a shiver.

Mrs. Granger went across the living room and sat on the couch. The express envelope was from the Westfield School District office. It looked important, so Mrs. Granger opened it right away.

It was a letter from the superintendent of schools, a letter of congratulations. A permanent trust fund for college scholarships had been established with a donation of one million dollars "from one of your former students."

It would be called The Lorelei Granger Students' Fund.

Mrs. Granger was sure it was a mistake. Or maybe a prank. A million dollars? Nonsense! She had the urge to pick up the telephone and give the superintendent a call and straighten this out right away.

But this was Christmas morning, and even though the superintendent *was* one of her former pupils, Mrs. Granger decided to wait a day. Couldn't hurt.

Besides, the other package was sitting next to her on the couch, waiting impatiently with its red bow. She opened the envelope first.

It was a little Christmas card with a sloppy note—obviously the work of a fifth-grade boy.

Dear Mrs. Granger;

You're one of my favorite teachers.
Here is something I want you to
have.

Sincerely,

A student of yours

Mrs. Granger glared at the spelling mistakes, but then chuckled and shook her head. Kids are always the same, year after year. Here she was in her forty-fifth year of teaching, all set to retire in June. She could hardly remember a Christmas day when she didn't have a present from one of her students.

Mrs. Granger pulled off the red ribbon and tore off the paper and lifted the lid of the box. She expected to find something made of yarn and popsicle sticks, or maybe curly macaroni and glue.

But instead she found an oblong case covered with blue velvet. She opened the case and inside was a beautiful gold fountain pen. She

picked it up, and it was cool and heavy in her hand. Words were engraved along the pen's shiny barrel, and Mrs. Granger had to slide down to the end of the couch and turn on her reading lamp. Then she could read the three thin lines of type:

This object belongs to Mrs. Lorelei Granger, and she may call it any name she chooses.

—With love from Nicholas Allen