



ONE

The Best Things Take Time

Tammy's watch was broken. It *had* to be. "It's not three-twenty," Tammy muttered, adjusting the knob on her watch. "It can't be."

She was sitting atop a desk in science class. Aside from Tammy, the only other person in the room was her best friend, Kyle, who sat behind her. Whereas Tammy was fixated on the time, Kyle was drawing in a sketchbook.

Kyle loved to draw, but when people asked him what he liked to illustrate, he'd shrug and say, "Interesting things," as if that explained everything. (It never did.)

It appeared, however, that today's Interesting Thing was a logo for the Marine Science Club. Admittedly, Kyle didn't care much for marine science, but Tammy did. And if something mattered to Tammy, then it mattered to Kyle. (Mostly, anyway.)

"The flyer definitely said three, right? Not three-thirty?" Tammy asked hopefully.

Kyle shook his head.

"The best things take time," he replied. "Maybe no one is interested in joining Marine Science Club *now*, but this time next month, they'll be clamoring outside just to get in. There'll be so many kids we'll have to move

weekly meetings to the auditorium. We'll be the coolest club at school."

Tammy smiled at her friend. "I hope so," she replied, then lowered her voice. "Marine science is just so *cool*."

Kyle smiled back. He wanted to cheer up Tammy. "Hey, take a peek at the logo I've been drawing. Maybe this'll convince some kids to join."

Tammy looked down at Kyle's sketchbook. He had hand-lettered the words MARINE SCIENCE CLUB in neat curved letters. Underneath those words he had drawn a shark that looked as if it were about to jump off the page. It had one big eye, a pointed fin, and lots of razor-sharp teeth.

"Kyle!" Tammy said. "Where was this two days ago?"

“What’d I say? The best things take time. You can’t rush *art!*” Kyle replied.

The two friends laughed. Kyle could always make Tammy laugh. He could make anyone laugh, actually. That was what Tammy admired most about him.

Just then, there was a loud voice at the door. Tammy jumped. She was so invested in their conversation that she had completely forgotten they were still at school—even if it *was* a Friday afternoon.

“Oh *no!*” the voice hollered. It was coming from a black-haired boy who rushed into the room. He was short and scrawny, and he was wearing a black T-shirt with a rock band logo on it. “Is the meeting already over? Did I miss the MSC?”

“The Music Sound Club meets in Ms. Ricci’s room,” Tammy replied. “My friend Kyle and I are just about to leave anyway. We can walk over with you if you’d like.”

The boy looked very confused. “Music Sound Club?” he repeated. “No, not *that* MSC. The Marine Science Club! Fish, ocean, yeah? That’s here, right?”

Tammy’s eyes widened. She exchanged a quick glance with Kyle, as if to say, *Is this really happening?*

“Oh! Yes!” Tammy nearly shouted. “You’re looking right at it! And if you’re interested, you’re our third official member. What’s your name?”

The kid fist-pumped excitedly in the air. “My name’s Alexander de la Cruz. But

everyone calls me Alex. I just moved here. There wasn't a Marine Science Club at my old school, but I think it's an awesome idea. The best idea, actually. I really wish I'd thought of it first, but I'm glad I didn't have to. Hey! Is that a shark?"

Alex spoke very quickly, but he paused and pointed to Kyle's drawing.

"No, that's my grandfather," Kyle said very seriously. Then he laughed. "I'm just kidding. Of course, it's a shark!"

"I was about to say . . . that sounded *fishy*," Alex replied, not missing a beat. Tammy chuckled. "What kind of shark is it?"

"It's a porbeagle," Kyle replied. "I was looking up cool sharks to draw and this one popped up. It's a medium-sized shark mostly found in the Atlantic Ocean, and its name is

a combo of ‘porpoise’ and ‘beagle,’ because it kind of looks like a porpoise and kind of hunts like a beagle.”

“Isn’t that just a theory, though?” Alex said, as quickly as before. “I’ve read that ‘porbeagle’ is a combination of the Cornish word for harbor—*porth*—and *bugel*, which means shepherd.”

“Possibly. But then wouldn’t that just be a theory too?” Kyle replied, smiling.

“My dad thinks this necklace is from a porbeagle shark, but I’m not convinced,” said Alex, taking a shark-tooth necklace on a chain out from underneath his T-shirt. “But the tooth is not as pointy as a porbeagle’s tooth, see? And it’s longer. It’s my good luck charm. I picked it up on the beach when I first moved here a few weeks ago, and I’d really like to figure out what kind of shark it’s from.”

Tammy's head zoomed back and forth between Alex and Kyle. She always knew that Kyle did a *lot* of research on his Interesting Things, but where had this new kid been hiding? He knew even more about sharks than she did, and she'd studied marine animals with her grandfather last summer in Japan!

“Okay, nerds.” Tammy smiled affectionately. “As much as I love this chitchat, we’re off-topic. Now that we’re a group of three, we can be an official organization represented by the school. So first things first, we have to vote on a president, and then I can get this organization application over to Principal Sutker.”

“Well, I think that answer’s obvious,” Kyle said, “but Waverly Middle School *is* a

democracy, so let's vote. Who thinks Tammy Aiko, founder of this club, should be president?"

Kyle and Alex both raised their hands high.

"Thanks, guys. And who wants to be my VP?" Tammy asked.

"You should," Kyle said, gesturing to Alex.

Alex nodded, accepting his role dutifully.

"And do you want a position, Kyle? Maybe secretary? Or treasurer?"

Kyle thought for a moment. "Nah," he said, shaking his head. "I'm here to support you, Tammy. And, uh, all of marine science!"

Tammy shot him a curious look, but then decided against saying anything. "Well, it looks like Marine Science Club is a go!" she announced, finishing up the organization paperwork.

“I feel like we need a secret handshake or something,” Kyle said.

“How about we pump our fists together and say, ‘*Science!*?’” Alex suggested. Then he demonstrated the motion.

“Hmm. Maybe something a little . . . cooler,” Tammy replied. She was thinking about the rest of the school joining in. She couldn’t really imagine kids like Leo McCormack chanting “Science.”

“The best things take time,” Tammy said, repeating her friend’s advice. “A handshake will come. Besides, it’s getting late. Let’s all meet this weekend at the beach to do some hands-on marine science stuff and really get things going. Alex, here’s my phone. Text yourself so that you get my number, and I’ll save yours.”

Tammy took her phone out of her back pocket and handed it to Alex, who did as instructed. Then, she saved his contact information in her phone as Alex 🐟🐟, making sure to put not one but *two* emojis, because that was what she did for all her favorite people.