

DAD
CAME HOME

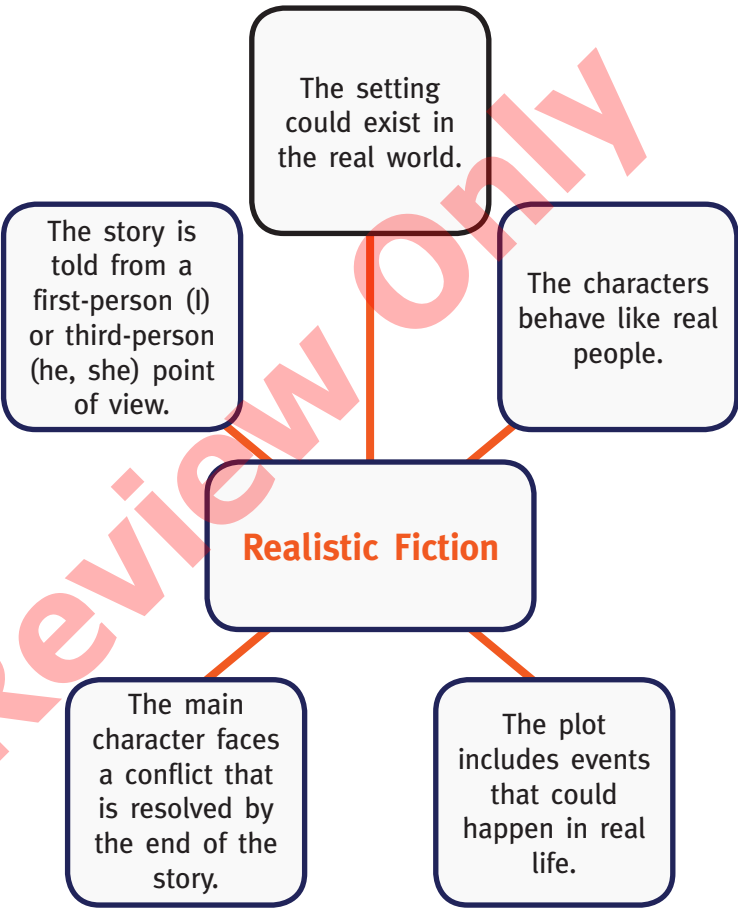


REALISTIC FICTION
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A Veterans Day Surprise

“Mom! Mom!” Chloe Smith shouted excitedly as she entered the house and threw her backpack on the floor of the living room. “Guess what?”

“The sky is falling?” her mother joked. Her mother moved over to make space on the sofa, where she sat reading a book to Emory, Chloe’s younger brother.

“Ha ha,” Chloe said, shaking her head. “Actually, we talked about Veterans Day in history class today. And I was thinking, with Daddy coming home—”

When he heard the word *Daddy*, Emory pointed to a picture of their father in his U.S. Navy uniform on the coffee table and started chanting, “Daddy’s home! Daddy’s home!”

“Yes, he is,” Mom said, and smiled at Emory. “Dad is coming home in a week. Finally!”

“Yes,” Chloe continued, “and Veterans Day is coming soon, so how about we do something extra special for Daddy to celebrate his homecoming?”

Mom raised her eyebrows. “And what do you have in mind, Chloe?”



“We could give Dad a Veterans Day surprise party!” Chloe said. “We can invite Grandma Gigi, Granddad, Aunt Natalie, some of Dad’s navy friends and ...”

Mom laughed. “Slow down, slow down. I love your enthusiasm, but I’m not sure if we can pull it off so soon. Dad will be home in a week, and Veterans Day is only two weeks away.”

Chloe’s shoulders slumped. Mom looked at the photograph on the coffee table.

“I know it’s been hard having Dad gone for nine months,” Mom said. “Especially since communication with him has been so limited. He’s been so busy. A small celebration seems like a nice way for him to see his family and friends again. Chloe?” Mom put her arm around her. “It’s a good idea.”

Chloe jumped up. “I can’t wait! I’m going to start planning now!” She ran upstairs to do her homework and begin her party planning.

Later that evening, Chloe video-chatted with Grandma Gigi and shared her idea. “I want it to be a surprise. Do you have any ideas for the party, Gigi?”

“Coco, a party would be a wonderful way to welcome your father back after being away so long,” said Gigi, cupping her hands.

“Can you make your world-famous sweet potato pie?” Chloe said, begging.

“How about this?” Gigi chuckled. “We’ll make two pies. I’ll make one and you make the other—a special pie! Your dad will love it! Even though he is grown-up, if I mention my sweet potato pie, it turns his frown upside down.”

Chloe carefully wrote “Menu” at the top of a piece of paper. Then she wrote “Grandma Gigi’s Sweet Potato Pie.”



Homecoming Day

One week later, Chloe jumped out of bed. “I have to get the banner done!” she said out loud, grabbing her art supplies from her desk. She spread out everything on the floor. It was Saturday, 6 a.m., and today was the day!

In a while, she stood back from her banner. It said, “Welcome Back, Dad!” While she drew gold stars around the words, Chloe thought about the nine months her father had been away.

A lot had changed since then. She was an inch and a half taller than when he left. And she was more grown-up now. She took over chores around the house to help her mother out. And what about Emory? Her brother had been just a year old when their dad was deployed.

Will I still be his favorite? Chloe thought. Or will he pay more attention to Emory?

Chloe got dressed and rushed downstairs to the kitchen. Her mother and Emory were already eating breakfast. She kissed Emory on the cheek and sat down at the table, but she was too excited to eat. She twirled her spoon in the bowl of oatmeal and looked at the clock.

Mom smiled. "You have to put something in that stomach of yours."

"I know, Mom," Chloe said. "I guess I'm just nervous about seeing Daddy."

"I understand," Mom said. "I'm a bit nervous, too. But when your dad gets home, all he will want is a big hug from his favorite girl."

"I hope you're right, Mom," Chloe said.

At that moment, the sound of the doorbell echoed through the kitchen.

"I'll get it," Chloe said, jumping up from her seat. She hurried to the front door.

Chloe gasped when she saw her father on the other side of the door. He had a gigantic smile that looked just like hers, and his blue U.S. Navy uniform was neat and crisp.

"Daddy!" Chloe shouted.

"Chloe!" Dad yelled back. "How is my little girl?"

Chloe was already hugging him before he could finish his sentence.

“Dad, I’m not a little girl, I’m almost 12 years old,” Chloe said with a giggle. Then she heard footsteps.

“Harold, you’re home! How did you get here?” Mom asked. She ran to her husband and they all hugged.

“You haven’t changed one bit,” her dad said to her mom. “I wanted to surprise you guys, so I took a cab from the airport.”



“And who do we have here?” he asked, turning to Emory. The little boy had grabbed Chloe’s hand and was hiding behind her.

“Come on, Emory, don’t be scared. It’s Daddy,” Chloe said, leading the shy little boy to their father.

Emory smiled as Dad picked him up and wrapped him in a hug.

“Blocks?” Emory asked.

Chloe smiled. Emory played blocks only with people he really liked.

“I always love playing with blocks,” her dad said. “What should we make?”

As they made their way inside the house, Chloe was bursting with news to tell her father. They only had a few video-chats over the last nine months, because her dad had very little time. There was so much to tell him.

“Dad ... Dad, my coach made me the captain of my soccer team! And in the last game, I scored the winning goal! I can’t wait for you to see me play.”