

## The Wish

“Let it rip, Eric!”

Ooing and ahing, five guys from my freshman class huddled around me as I pulled from a box my latest invention—a homemade, launchable, 12-inch space shuttle. Thanks to Dad’s power tools it was ready to go, and we were T-minus thirty seconds to liftoff.

“Why did we have to come here?” one of the guys asked.

“You’ll see,” I said, as we stood by our high school swimming pool. My launch platform was an old Boogie board that I’d found in the attic, and had cut down to a 10-inch square piece. I carefully placed the space shuttle on it and gently pushed the Boogie board out into the deep end. I nodded, signaling everyone to start the countdown.

“Three . . . two . . . one . . . blastoff!” everyone shouted as I hit the button on my handheld remote. The space shuttle shook, hummed, and rattled, then released a cloud of white smoke from its boosters.

---

The blastoff was so powerful that it doused us with water, just like a twenty-foot, ten-ton whale at Sea World that slam dunks into the water from a fifteen-foot drop. All the guys cheered, excited by the spray.

Up into the cloudless sky my space shuttle soared. I showed off my astronaut flight skills and performed a few tricky loop-the-loops. I grinned from ear to ear. I couldn't help but marvel at my accomplishment.

"Guys, if you think that was cool, watch this!" I beamed with anticipation. I maneuvered my shuttle into a nosedive and cut the engines.

"Eric, it's gonna crash!" my friend yelled.

I hit a button on the remote, and two heartbeats later, a four-foot red-white-and-blue parachute blossomed from the tail of the shuttle. Instantly, in a controlled descent, the space shuttle floated to earth, just missed the diving board, and went SPLAT into the pool. All the guys went crazy, cheering, shaking me as if I had scored the winning touchdown at our homecoming game.

The school bell rang, and playtime was over. I reached out with the ten-foot pool hook and I pulled my shuttle and the Boogie board to the side. I quickly boxed them up and dashed to my gym locker to store them. When I looked up at the clock, I saw that I was late for my speech class and I charged out from the locker room and zipped down the hall.

I had just stepped inside my classroom when

---

my teacher, Mrs. Freederman, called on me to deliver my final speech of the year. I was unprepared. I had to think fast. I walked to the front of the class and cleared my throat, ready to let my imagination get me out of this predicament. The wheels in my head cranked full-on under the pressure, and presto—my brain found a story. I looked at the class and began:

"After baseball practice I rode my bike home and went to the fridge. Mom left me a note to microwave my dinner and then clean my room. I wasn't hungry so I decided to clean my room first.

"I started with my messy closet, tossing out a pile of old Halloween costumes I had worn over the years. When I pulled them out, a horrible smell almost knocked me out. It was the worst odor on this planet. I sniffed my costumes, but the awful stench wasn't in any of them. I chucked the costumes onto my bed and kept searching deeper in my closet, determined to find out what smelled so bad.

"While I was pulling out some dirty clothes that failed to land in my hamper, I came across my old baseball cleats from when I was six years old. To my surprise, I discovered a crusty old sock that was in my left shoe for seven years. The sock was once white, but now yellow, and mold was all over it.

"The smell was so terrible I decided to put it in the trash outside right away. I was about to walk out of the room, with my arm fully extended, holding the

---

sock with my right hand, and plugging my nose with the other hand.

“When I reached the door, I heard a faint moan. I jerked around, and my mouth fell open with fright! Something out of this world happened. One of my costumes mysteriously came to life. A five-foot-tall mummy was reaching out to grab me. A huge scream leaped from my throat. I darted from my room shouting, ‘HHHHHHHEELP!’

“The mummy chased after me. It moaned, and got closer, even though it limped. I sprinted outside and I headed straight to my tree house to hide.

“WHAM! I slammed the door shut, shaking from head to toe. ‘Oh no! What a dumb move that was, Eric! Now you’re trapped!’ I said to myself, trembling. I could hear the mummy groaning, getting closer and closer.

“What should I do? What could I do? I was frantic!

“All of a sudden, it hit me. It was the only thing I could do to save my life. Once the mummy ripped open the door, it came directly toward me with outstretched arms. Just when it was inches away from my shaking body, the only thing I could do for self-defense was rub the stinky sock in its nose. The mummy took in a whiff and its eyes shot wide open. It stumbled backward and fell out of the tree house to the ground, then got up wailing and hobbled down the street. I owe it all to my Pee Wee baseball sock that saved the day.

---

“The End.”

All the kids in my class laughed their heads off. One girl laughed so hard she got the hiccups. I looked to the back of the class at Mrs. Freederman, who had her arms crossed. She was not laughing or smiling. “Very funny, Eric Thomas. The speech assignment was to tell a *true*, three-minute story, about your worst chore at home.”

I paused and said, “Well, cleaning my room is my worst chore.”

“Take your seat. After school, go to the principal’s office,” Mrs. Freederman snapped.

Slumping into my chair, I had a sinking feeling that I was headed for big trouble. I figured things were slightly in my favor since it was the last day of school. But then I had a terrible thought: Mrs. Freederman might fail me. Things weren’t looking good for my final report card.

All day I was scared about what was going to happen. The bell rang, school was over, and I walked to the principal’s office with a weight in my stomach. Before I sat down Mr. Jordan said, “I saw your shuttle launch from the pool. Impressive!”

He then settled back into his leather chair and looked directly at me. “You’re a very gifted boy, Eric. Where do you get your bright imagination—from your mom or your dad?”

“Neither,” I replied. “I think it’s from the cereal I’m eating.”

---

Mr. Jordan cracked a cool smile and let a little laugh slip from his lips. He then picked up a file and pulled out a manila folder. "I reviewed your school records today and I didn't know you skipped the seventh grade. You went straight from the sixth grade to the eighth grade."

"My teacher said I was ready and academically capable to advance a year," I said.

Mr. Jordan then picked up my report card and nodded. "Four A's and three B's. That's a successful freshman year. The only trouble was being late so many times to Mrs. Freederman's speech class. Why?"

"Well, every morning before school, I'm always tinkering with some gadget in the garage and lose track of time. I promise never to be late next year. Not one day!"

"Mrs. Freederman told me that you need to develop more self-discipline with regards to school assignments and recommended that you attend summer school."

*Summer school . . . oh no*, I thought, shaking my head.

"Eric, you're a good student, and you promised not to be late next year. Do you keep your promises?"

"I do," I said quickly and firmly.

"Honesty is a great quality. You show me a person who's honest, and I'll show you a person with self-discipline. Do you know who said that?"

I paused, thinking of great presidents. "Abraham Lincoln?" I guessed.

---

"No, my mother," Mr. Jordan countered as he chuckled, revealing his funny side. I laughed with him and he continued. "In my fifty-two years of living, I've discovered she's right. Now, Eric, next year I'm counting on you not to have tardy marks. I will convince Mrs. Freederman you do not need summer school. But if you are consistently late next year—you will attend."

I sighed in great relief, and I put my hand out and shook Mr. Jordan's. "Deal."

Mr. Jordan got up, opened the door, and gave me my report card. "You're very clever. I wouldn't be surprised if on your summer vacation your imagination gets you into some big adventure."

"Cool." I grinned.

"Have any trips planned?" Mr. Jordan asked.

"My uncle is a marine biologist, and he travels all over the world in his triple-decker yacht, studying underwater life. He's taking me and my older brother on his boat on the Pacific Ocean to some remote islands to help him perform some experiments. It's going to be a blast," I said.

"Sounds exciting," Mr. Jordan said.

I then flashed him two thumbs up and charged out the door. Rushing to my locker, I gathered the box holding my space shuttle and the Boogie board and began my trip home. Along the way, I kept thinking about what Mr. Jordan had said about my clever imagination. *So where do I get it from?*

---

I felt a lot of it had to do with the dinky town where I lived—San Andreas. It was in Northern California. The population was a freckle over a thousand people. It had one barber shop, two banks, a doughnut shop, a gas station, two grocery stores, and a post office. Life in San Andreas was pretty much boringville. To survive, a kid like me had to use his creative ability. I guess that was where I got my fully developed imagination. I was always thinking up something to make in the garage to keep myself entertained. But even though life in San Andreas was on the dull side, it was home, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world.

As I approached my house, I came to a sudden halt when a Frisbee bonked me in the forehead.

"Hey, Eric. Way to use your head for a backstop," a voice teased. I looked around and spotted my fifteen-year-old brother, Buzz, behind a tree in a park. He was doubled over laughing at his joke.

"Very funny," I shouted rubbing my head. "Why'd you do that?"

"Easy target."

I shook my head, wondering how we could be brothers. We were such complete opposites. I was tall and skinny with blond wavy hair. A handful of freckles dotted my nose and cheeks. But Buzz was short and chubby with brown hair. Being clever, I gave him the family nickname Buzz—because every time he went to the barber, he would get a buzz cut. Buzz had

---

zero imagination and he failed miserably in attempting to be clever at giving me a nickname—Techno-brain. Too long, too boring, too dull.

Buzz met up with me, and we walked home together. I didn't say a word, giving him the cold shoulder. After a few minutes, Buzz said, "Hey, look." He pointed at one of our neighbors, Mr. Anderson, who was hammering a yard sale sign onto a telephone pole. "Let's go see what kind of junk he's selling."

We went through the gate to Mr. Anderson's yard and I put my boxed-up space shuttle and the Boogie board on a table.

"Tomorrow's the big sale. See anything you want, boys?" Mr. Anderson asked.

We fumbled through a box that had a worn-out iron, a lampshade, a pair of size-ten bowling shoes, and a stinky baseball glove. Buzz rolled his eyes and mumbled, "Ho-hum, let's go."

As we turned to leave, I saw something sparkle and spotted a jar of coins. One of the coins was shining more brightly than the rest—it had been the one to catch my attention. I picked up the jar, which contained three old foreign coins—one I recognized was from Mexico.

"Hey, what's the story with these coins, Mr. Anderson?" I asked.

"Found the jar in the attic. Have no idea where it came from. Pick one for free. More than that, you'll have to pay."

---

I fished out the coin I wanted, the sparkling yellow coin, and examined it. There was a picture of an open treasure chest full of gold. Inscribed under the treasure chest were three words: *Make a wish*.

I showed it to Buzz. He shrugged and muttered, "Big deal. It's just a coin from some cheap carnival. Besides, I don't believe in wishes. They're just fairy tales that don't come true."

"I agree, but if wishes did come true, know what I'd wish for?"

"What?"

"One million dollars."

"One million bucks. You'd split it with me, right?" Buzz said, putting his arm around my shoulder.

"Fat chance. You bonked me in the head with a Frisbee."

"Hey, that's what little brothers are for—to pick on."

I put the coin in my pocket, grabbed the boxed-up space shuttle, and out the gate we went to go home.

In our backyard Mom and Dad were preparing a barbecue. Just as I put everything on the table next to a bowl of potato chips, I heard a soft bark. I looked down and it was Pugsly, our playful Labrador. I gave him a chip and went over to Dad, who was lighting the coals.

"School's out. Bet you feel like a million bucks," Dad said.

*Million bucks . . . funny that Buzz and I were just*

---

*talking money*, I thought, looking at the fire flickering on the coals. "Yep, a million bucks all right."

Dad settled in a lawn chair and picked up the sports page. I pulled the sparkling yellow coin from my pocket. Reading the words *Make a wish*, I let my imagination wander. *A million bucks . . . that's a lot of homemade inventions*, I thought as I stared into the yellow flames.

"Eric, back up, you're too close to the fire," Mom said as she set a plate of hamburgers on the table. Moving one step backward, I continued thinking about a million dollars. *That's some serious cash*. Then my brain shifted gears and I thought of birthday wishes. Ever since I could remember, before I would huff and puff and blow out the candles on my cake, I'd make a wish. It was some tradition that started somewhere, and it happened on birthdays, young or old.

This was not my birthday, but it was the perfect occasion to celebrate: School was out for ninety-five glorious days, and that made me want to make a wish with my new coin. I glanced up to see if anyone was watching. Nope. Buzz was stuffing his face with potato chips, Dad was still reading the sports page, and Mom was slicing tomatoes for the hamburgers. I lifted my fist, squeezed my eyes shut, and made my wish. *I want one million bucks . . . I'll accept a check or a lump sum of cash, but no credit cards*. I snickered to myself, enjoying my goofy sense of humor.

I opened my eyes, satisfied with my wish, and

---

flipped the coin in the air. When I reached out to snag it, my finger hit the coin and it landed in the barbecue.

“My cool coin!” I gasped, looking at it on top of the hot coals. Right then, a wild blaze shot straight up, roaring six feet high.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” I screamed, leaping backward. The fire blazed like I had poured a bucket of gasoline on the coals.

“WHAT IN THE WORLD!” Dad shouted, throwing the sports page down. He rushed for the garden hose. Frightened, Mom flung tomatoes into the air, and darted towards me exclaiming, “OH MY GOSH!”

In the commotion, Pugsly was barking continuously while Buzz was the only one to remain calm. He sat there grinning, licking potato chips from his fingers. “Cool!”

I was stunned, not knowing how all this had happened, except that it was from the coin. *Amazing*, I thought, taking it all in with raised eyebrows that had narrowly escaped being singed off. I looked at the billowing flames, and at that moment a spine-tingling chill went down my back. A huge grin then inched across my face. I felt that something extraordinary was about to happen! Was my million-dollar wish going to come true?