

Three Wishes Vending Machine - Excerpt

We walked by the vending machine and nobody was hanging around it today. The gold stars that surrounded the name of the machine tugged at a memory. “Three wishes,” I murmured. The stars on my new coins looked like the gold stars on the machine.

I pulled the coins out of my pocket and took another look at them. Yup, the stars were exactly the same. And running around the edge of the coins in really tiny letters were the words, ‘Three Wishes Vending Machine’. I hadn’t noticed that earlier.

“What are you doing?” Corey asked.

“I found these coins in my locker. I’m going to try one and see if it works in the machine.” I picked out the coin with one star and dropped it in the slot.

It wasn’t pooped back out like all the other coins. A little bell dinged, followed by musical chimes and flashing lights inside the glass windows. One button lit up and glowed red beside a glass window in the middle.

“Hey, it worked!” Nate exclaimed.

“Ya, it sure looks that way.” Still, I hesitated to press the button. There was something strange about the machine. Even more peculiar was how the coins had replaced my tooth in a locked locker. I was too old to believe in the tooth fairy.

Corey elbowed me. “Push it!”

Too curious not to, I reached out a finger and pressed the glowing button. It felt like an electric shock zinged up my arm and down again. About five seconds later, something dropped into the bottom compartment. That long open gutter was too dark to see inside. I had to stick my hand blindly into the blackness and grope around.

“What did you get?” Corey asked impatiently.

I felt something familiar, something ordinary, something disappointing. I lifted out a package of gum. “Gum.”

“Gum?” Both Corey and Nate looked as crestfallen as I was feeling.

“Ya, gum.” I took a closer look at the package. “But I’ve never seen this kind. Big Bubble Gum?” The package was black. There was no picture, no list of ingredients, no company name—nothing but the words ‘Big Bubble Gum’ in the same gold script as the machine’s name.

“I’ve never seen that brand of gum, either. Maybe it’s super old. Maybe it’s a hundred years old, I mean, the machine looks at least that old,” Corey said. He led the way to the same table as the day before. He had an extra sandwich in his lunch bag. “Want it?” he asked, too casually.

“Sure, if you don’t.” It was a perfect sandwich, all fresh and neatly wrapped. My mouth watered. I left my pretend sandwich in the bag and bit into egg salad. It

was as good as it looked, and soft enough that I could chew it. Nate offered his apple again, but I couldn't bite that.

After the meal, we got our coats and went outside into another dreary drizzly day. I pulled out my vending machine gum and opened the package. There was only one lonely piece inside, fitted into a cardboard cradle. It was wrapped in gold foil and at least three times bigger than your average stick of gum. "Hey, there's only one piece," I said, feeling cheated. I had wanted to share with Corey and Nate since they had shared with me, and it wasn't often that I had anything to share.

"What a rip off," Corey said.

"Do you want it?"

"No, you have it. It's your gum."

I offered it to Nate next. He refused as well.

I shrugged and unwrapped the gold foil. The gum inside was red and speckled, not the traditional bubble gum pink. I popped it into my mouth. Lucky for me, it was soft and easy to chew. "Not bad. It doesn't taste super old. It tastes like regular bubble gum, except sort of spicier." It was making my mouth tingle in the oddest way. I tried to blow a bubble.

It was the best bubble blowing gum ever. The bubble grew bigger and bigger. I kept blowing. The bubble expanded until it was bigger than my head.

"Keep blowing!" Corey cried, his eyes almost popping out of their sockets. I did. In no time, the bubble was as big as an elephant's head. Cheering kids crowded around. I kept blowing. When the bubble was bigger than me, I felt my feet leave the ground. Like a hot air balloon, the bubble lifted me into the sky. Cries of disbelief echoed around the schoolyard. I floated higher and higher. At first, it was exciting, then it got scary. If the bubble burst at that height, I would plunge to my death or at least break both my legs, and I needed my legs more than most kids. My mom didn't have a car.