

## The Secret Goldfish

"One time, he winked at me! I swear he did! I thought I was crazy when he moved his pebbles back and forth to help me with my arithmetic but this confirmed it! He's a genius!"

Mrs. DeLuca's fourth grade class sat transfixed as they gathered around Sawyer's small desk at the very back of the room (situated there to prevent this very scenario from happening). Every student in Room 102 had their attention focused on Sawyer as he waved his hands and moved his voice up and down to stress the importance of the moment.

"So Maxwell's a genius and he can fly?" Molly asked with skepticism.

"He can only fly after dark," Sawyer corrected. "He gets too tired in the sunlight."

"How much did you pay again?" she pushed.

"Three full dollars. It was worth it, though."

"What else can he do?" Cooper chimed in.

Sawyer looked wistfully into the model solar system in the middle of the room for a second.

"Well-"

*Bringggggg! Bringggggg!*

"Ok children," Mrs. DeLuca chided, "I'm sure Sawyer can tell you about his magical goldfish another time. Everyone get back to your seats and we can start our science lesson."

Although met with a collective groan, her orders were obeyed.

As soon as school let out, Sawyer was swarmed yet again by crowds of children waiting with baited breath to hear more about his new fish. Mrs. DeLuca suggested that he bring Maxwell in for the class, but Sawyer met that suggestion with a hard refusal. It was his fish, not their fish. He didn't mind the attention, though. It filled him with a sense of pride he had never felt before. Like a celebrity waving away paparazzi, he moved through the crowd, brushing off questions and promising to answer everything tomorrow. Sawyer didn't have anywhere he needed to urgently be, he just wanted to go home and ride his bike. Although he basked in the attention, the only person he really ever wanted to be around was himself.

Slamming open the front door and swinging his backpack onto the couch, Sawyer heard his mom from the other room.

"How was school today, honey?"

"I told everyone about Maxwell! You shoulda seen the looks on their faces! Nothin' but awe and wonder. They never look at me like that! It's incredible!"

"Oh that's nice, honey."

He took a couple of seconds before making a decision.

"Do you wanna see it? Mom?"

"I'm working right now, honey. Maybe later."

"Yeah, alright," Sawyer responded. He knew she wouldn't ever ask to see his goldfish. After his dad died, it seemed like she never stopped working. "That's nice" would be all he would ever get from her.

"I'm going to go feed Maxwell."

"That's nice."

The next day at school was hectic. Sawyer's peers approached him left and right, begging and pleading to just take one look at Maxwell. It was the hottest topic at school. Maxwell the goldfish could bend objects with his mind, change colours at will, and speak 27 different languages fluently (he was picking up Mandarin as well, according to Sam who heard it from Dolly who overheard it from Sawyer talking to Martin). Whenever Mrs. DeLuca could, she shut down talk of the secret goldfish, claiming that children should be focusing on their math and English work. That didn't stop the stories, though. At the end of lunch break, Sawyer was surrounded by Lucas and his goons. He has always managed to go under Lucas's radar as he was almost a full head shorter and didn't really associate with anyone. Yes, Sawyer had always had a big mouth but he never crossed paths with Lucas.

Before today.

"So we heard that ya got yourself a magic fish," Lucas accused.

Sawyer didn't respond. He didn't care that Lucas was a sixth grader, or that he could most likely flick him across the country. He wasn't going to give the boy the satisfaction of tormenting him.

"Hey! I know ya hear me!"

Sawyer was forced to respond because the statement came with a shove.

"Yes! I do! I do and you don't!" He could hear his voice getting higher and higher but he didn't care.

"If you do have a magic fish, bring it to school. I wanna see it."

Sawyer breathed in sharply. He didn't even have to think about his answer.

"No! No way! I bought him. I have him, and you don't. You don't get to see him."

"Bull," muttered one of the goons.

"Yeah, bull. You don't got a magic fish. You just want attention," Lucas shot.

Sawyer could feel his face getting hot. Kids that gathered around them urged someone to throw the first punch.

"If you hit me, Maxwell will avenge me." Sawyer was grasping at straws but he didn't care.

Lucas initially scoffed, but his cocky smirk transformed into a face of consideration. He weighed the possibilities in his head and after what seemed like hours, he took a step back. It was a forfeit. Sawyer bowed away from the crowd, his heart rate skyrocketing at the rate of a speeding train. Still reeling, he stumbled into the school to take a time out in the boy's room but Lucas wasn't done with him.

It was past dinner time when Lucas, his goons, and a few other inquisitive children left their homes and snuck into Sawyer's backyard. Like spies, they crept around the side and crouched underneath the windowsill of his warmly-lit bedroom. Having only planned this far ahead, Lucas made the executive decision to be the one to peek his head up. He raised his head to see Sawyer standing over a drawer in his dresser. He was grinning and dropping small pellets of fish food into whatever lay at the bottom of that drawer. The curiosity killed Lucas. He couldn't take it anymore. He had to see the subject of the past two week's craziness. He watched as Sawyer grabbed his soccer ball off the top of his bookshelf and the left the room. Once the coast was clear, he gestured to the other children to help him pry the window open. His peers, looking at him both with confusion and fear, demanded an explanation.

"The fish is in there! In one of his drawers! He was feeding it! I saw him feeding it!" he excitably whispered back.

That explanation was good enough for his friends. They inserted a stick into the sides of the frame and opened the window. Thankfully there wasn't even a screen to keep them from this fantastic discovery. One by one, Lucas leading, of course, they piled into Sawyer's tiny room. Hand on the dresser drawer's handle, Lucas took a sharp breath but before he could open the drawer, he was interrupted by a scream coming from the doorway. He turned to see Sawyer, frightened, standing at the entrance to his room. He had left his coat on the bed. Before the boy even had time to react, Lucas yanked the dresser open, not caring about being discovered. All this stress, plotting, bragging and fighting was built up to this moment. Lucas looked down.

Maxwell was magnificent.