

1. UP IN THE ATTIC

The sun shone brightly across the grass. Erin was spending the warm summer day outside in the meadow near her home. She went there to play and pick wildflowers for her mother. Erin loved the outdoors. She would dance and run through the flowers, hide behind the trees ninja-like, making sure the squirrels were not up to any funny business, or sometimes just lay and watch the clouds making shapes in the sky. The meadow was full of flowers in the summer. They swayed gently in the breeze like an ocean wave and Erin thought how fun it would be to really be on a ship and imagined herself there as a pirate or royal princess.

“You, there, princess!” She said, in her deepest pirate voice. “You are coming with us as ransom.”

“No! I will not come with you,” she shouted back at the imaginary pirates. “I am a princess and a master with the sword.” She picked up a stick and waved it menacingly. “I will not allow you to make a profit off of me.” She fended off the pirates with expert sword skills and turned and ran into the forest. She hid behind a tall tree, peering around the trunk back towards the meadow. A lone squirrel scampered out into the clearing, its bushy tail waving above the tall grass. He glanced cautiously around, then began to dig. Erin watched the squirrel for a little while until he suddenly pricked up his ears and ran back to the cover of the forest.

“Erin!” her mom called. “You need to

come wash up for dinner!”

“Be right there!” Erin got up. She collected the bluebells and daisies she had picked to adorn the dinner table and headed back to her house. Her home was small but cozy, and Erin loved it a lot. It had once belonged to her grandmother, and Erin remembered visiting her when she was a little girl and then she and her mom moved in when her grandmother got sick to take care of her. Those days kept her mother busy, and Erin helped a lot with the chores and began the ritual of picking flowers to cheer up her mother and grandmother. Now with just the two of them there, Erin continued the tradition.

“Here, mom, some flowers for the table.”

“Oh, these are especially nice!” Her mother smiled at her and pulled down a

vase from the cupboard. Erin filled the vase with water and flowers and set them on the table.

“Erin, I have a special job for you tomorrow,” her mother said as she set out dinner.

Erin sat down at her place, eyeing the tasty salmon in front of her. “What sort of job?”

“Well, I’d like you to go through the attic. I haven’t had a chance to even really see what’s up there. But if you could look through all of the old things, maybe see if there’s something useful.”

Erin grimaced. She had thoroughly explored the attic many times on rainy days. It didn’t really turn out to be as fun as she usually hoped. There were tons of boxes, a few scrapbooks, but mostly it was

dusty broken furniture that her grandmother hadn't been able to get rid of. She would much rather spend her summer days outside than cooped up in a dusty old attic. Her mother chuckled at her expression.

"I'll tell you what. Put in a serious effort in the morning and you can spend the entire time outside after lunch."

Erin's face brightened. "Yes! I can do that."

"Who knows," her mother said. "Maybe you'll find something new you can play with up there."

Erin seriously doubted it.

The next morning dawned with a bright sunny day, promising to be just as warm and beautiful as the day before. Erin smiled at the sunshine drifting in her

window and the cheerful birds she could hear outdoors. She pulled on her jeans and T-shirt and put her long blond hair back into a ponytail.

As she climbed the stairs up to the attic, she could hear her mom ruffling around.

“Okay, dear,” she said. “I’ve got two piles set up for you. Over here, put anything that looks broken. In this corner, move things that look usable still.”

“Sure!” Erin said brightly. “And how much do I need to get through before I’m done?”

“Well, if you can just sort the stuff on the window wall, that would be great for today.”

Erin walked over to the window and opened it. A light warm breeze came

drifting in. Two friendly squirrels wrestled in the flowers for a bit before chasing each other to the forest trees.

“I’d better get started so I can go out and join you,” she said.

She sat down on the floor in the sunshine and pulled over a box. She thumbed through the contents. It was full of pictures and papers. Some looked like they might be important, so she slid the whole box to the "keep" pile. Behind the box was a broken doll.

“Hmm, easy enough,” she said. “I’ll be done before lunch.”

The broken doll was placed in the broken pile along with a teddy bear missing its eyes, an old rocking chair that looked like you’d fall straight on your behind if you tried sitting in it, and some

odds and ends of ribbons, lace, and buttons that were pretty nasty looking. The next box held a bunch of old toys. There was a wooden train, a ball, a pretty dressed-up doll, and a bubble wand with a container of bubbles. These toys were newer. Erin guessed they had been her mom's when she was young. She pulled out the bubble wand and bubbles. There was still solution in the bubble container. She put that aside and put the box over in the keep pile. There were only two more boxes left on the wall. One held old clothes. Some were fancy, others not. She thought they might have been her grandma's. But she wasn't sure, so she put them in the keep pile. The next box was full of seashells. They still smelled of the sea and most were shattered into many pieces. She quickly scooted the box to the bin of broken things. Grabbing the bubbles, she

went downstairs. Her mom was in the kitchen sorting out the cupboards.

“How’d it go?” her mom asked.

“Good. I didn’t know what to do with the clothes I found, so I put them in the keep pile.”

“That’s fine.”

“And there’s a lot of broken stuff.”

“I thought there might be. Glad you sorted it for me. I’ll be running it to the dump later.”

“I found this.” Erin held up the bubble wand and solution. “May I take it outside?”

“Of course, dear,” her mom smiled. “See, I told you there might be something interesting up there.”

Erin shrugged. “It’s just bubbles, Mom.

I'm going out now."

"Okay, come in when you get hungry for lunch."

Erin went back out to the meadow where she had seen the squirrels playing earlier. She traced their tracks to the forest, imagining a wild wolf was peering at her from the trees. She glared at the imaginary wolf. "I'm not afraid of you!" she called. "I am a princess from that castle," gesturing to the house, "and I can protect all my subjects." She looked around for something that could be a weapon. She saw the bubble wand on the doorstep. Grabbing it, she pointed at the trees. "I can do a spell that will make you a friendly wolf!" she shouted and holding up the wand, she said, "No more fear, no more scary face, you will now be good! Aha!" She walked over to the tree and pretended to

pet a now-friendly wolf. She turned around and laid down on the grass. She held up the bubble wand and looked through the hole, up at the clouds.

“I wish I could go on a real adventure,” she said.

As the white fluffy clouds lazily passed overhead, Erin noticed a slight shimmer in the hole of the wand. She held it closer to her face. A hazy film seemed to be over the hole as if the wand had already been dunked into bubble solution. *That’s odd,* she thought. *I never used it. No way could an old wand still have bubbles.* She sat up and gently blew on the hole. To her amazement a large bubble formed and floated out. She got up and chased after the shimmery shiny bubble floating on the breeze. Erin caught the bubble on her



wand. Inside the bubble appeared to be a hazy-looking castle.

“No way, no way, no way,” she said.

She looked closer at the bubble. There definitely looked like there was a castle inside. Not just a castle but also a small village around it. She raised her finger and slowly poked at the bubble. All of a sudden the entire world around her went hazy and started to spin. She fell onto the soft grass and closed her eyes tight.