

A for Effort

“It’ll never work, Joey... You’re wasting your time,” she shouted, watching him from inside the window of their backyard.

“Trust me mom, it will. Just watch,” he softly replied.

She let out a sigh, feeling sorrow for her kid, and went back into the living room. She walked around the new box TV that she bought mainly for her son, but he never batted an eye. Finally landing at the coffee table, she inserted her finger into their rotary telecommunicator and dialed her husband, who was usually busy at work, but picked up this time.

“Honey, I’m getting worried about Joey.”

“What’s the matter Marsha? He do sum’n dumb one more ‘gen?” Bill said back to her.

She looked outside at her son, frantically running all over the place, shouting to himself, passing ideas from his left ear to his right... “I’m scared for his sanity, and his well being. He’s been completely submersed in this new project of his... I don’t know when---if he’s going to stop.”

“Listen here. You let that boy do what he damn pleases. If he wants to jump off the roof, then let him break his leg. If that’s the way he has to learn, it is how it is,” his voice was as stern as a tree stump.

Marsha opened the backdoor to join him in the yard, “Joey dear---”

“Mom! Thank god you showed up now. Listen, I really, really, *really, really* need a hydro-particle accelerator. If we go to Abe and Stro’s, I bet I could find a humidity ventilator. It’s the final piece, I ran the numbers... If I put it together correctly, it’ll work.”

His mom just stared in disbelief, “Sweetie... this isn’t what other 9 year olds do in their free time.”

“This isn’t free time Mom! I’m extremely busy, can’t you tell,” Joey was working on blueprints as they spoke, “Please?”

He looked away from the blueprints deep inside his mother’s eyes. She couldn’t find the strength to deny his request, “Fine. But if I see the smallest papercut on your precious body I have executive decision to end this project of yours, this--- what even is it.”

“A jetpack mom,” Joey laughed as he ran to the car. He already had his seat buckled by the time Marsha left the backyard.

Joey assembled all the parts when he got home, tomorrow was the big day.

He stood on a launch pad right outside of his front porch, in the middle of the street. In front of him were both of his parents, arms wrapped around each other, unsure of what to expect. To his left were his school friends. 2 total, Jimmy and Tom. They cheered him on. And to his right was the local news broadcasting squad, with a full crowd of spectators behind them.

Joey acted as if the camera that was twice his height wasn’t there, looking and talking only to his friends and family.

“Be careful honey!” his mom shouted from a distance. The most she got back was a white-shining smile that touched both earlobes.

“What’s your goal?” Bill said slyly, “20 feet?”

“Don’t be silly dad. I’ll touch the moon and be back in time for dinner.” The reply resulted in a frown from his dad.

He swung his jetpack onto his back. The crowd (his 2 school friends) were yelling at the top of their lungs, “Go Joey!” said Jimmy, and from Tom, “You got this!”

Joey flicked 4 different switches that were on the strap of his pack, then it started growling like an actual engine. His parents were fascinated. It was time. All his *hard work* would build up to this moment.

The crowd behind the news telecaster began cheering the kid on. They started a countdown for him, “5! 4! 3..!”

Joey became a little nervous, but backing out never crossed his mind. When he heard the crowd begin counting down, he decided lift-off would commence at 1. His feet were overly-eager to leave the ground.

“2! 1!” Joey leapt as high in the air as he practiced continuously, then pushed down on both of the red buttons below his thumbs, attached to the arm of the jetpack.

Evaporated water blasted from the bottom of the jetpack, shooting downwards, accelerating Joey upwards. He started with a hover, then began gaining speed as he went higher and higher.

Joey forgot that he was scared of heights. He became nauseous and closed his eyes when he got around 10 feet high.

At the 15 foot mark his jetpack ran out of fuel, but Joey never realized because his eyes were shut and the crowd was too loud for him to notice the propulsion had extinguished.

Everyone was silent, but their mouths were wide open. The jetpack stopped making noise, but the boy just kept going up.

Then he *really* started going, faster and faster. He was reaching unimaginable heights, the boy seemed like a miniscule lily pad in the ocean blue sky. The moon almost seemed to be arms’ reach.

The crowd gasped as they noticed his bodies grow bigger. He was falling! All they heard was the ephemeral “*Ah!*” until a murmuration swarmed by and swooped the boy by his clothing.

“How ya doin,” the leading bird said to Joey.

“Did I make it to the moon?” he said back to the beakfaced stranger.

“No kiddo, you fell a couple hundred thousand miles short. Good shot though, better luck next time.”

The flock dropped the boy off on a cloud, where he rested peacefully until a helicopter came to his rescue to pick him up and take him home.

The people on the ground couldn’t believe what they had just witnessed: the distance from the ground he covered, how in Heaven’s sake he even got that far, and the birds that dropped him off on a man-holding cloud! They were baffled, it was a night to remember.

And as for Joey; he was convinced that his next jetpack would reach the moon.