

## The Dracling and the Kitten

Ellie was in the playroom building a castle with the Cutout Shapes blocks. The center of the castle was complete, and so were the left and right sides, all he needed were the spires. He searched for the tall right triangles to set on top, his tail flicking with his intent focus. "Where are dey?" He had the blocks scattered all across the play rug. He always got dropped off early because his parents have the morning shift, so he had the playroom to himself for a long time before anyone else showed up.

The front door opened and two pairs of feet come up the stairs, one stomping and one taking regular steps. Two DragonSharks entered the Daycare. The mother had radiant purple scales, yellow belly, wearing a red flannel shirt and a white shirt underneath, with two buttons undone. She carried a laptop bag across her shoulder and a gigantic gas station coffee. Her daughter had bright orange scales with yellow belly. A red shirt with a unicorn is what she chose today. Her diaper was a large, purple one that seemed to be made of some material that wasn't the usual. They both had cybernetic markings on their body, the mothers' more evident than on her daughter. Ms. Gracie started talking with the pair. "Mrs. Fitzer, good mornin'."

Ember yawned and replied forcing attention into her voice, "Good morning Ms. Gracie." She sipped her coffee, her eyes half open.

"Lumin, how are you, sweetie?" She bent low to look Lumin in the eyes.

"I'm good!" As usual, Lumin was wide awake in the morning. "Who's hewe today?"

"Ellie is in the playroom as usual. Go see what he's doing." Ms. Gracie scooted her along, pushing her back.

"O'tay!" She took off at a run, arms thrust outward like a plane, booking it for the playroom.

"I don't know where that kid gets her energy in the mornings." Ember sipped her coffee again, looking on as Lumin made her way to the playroom.

"Children are amazing." Ms. Gracie got up from her knees with a groan. "They're positive attitudes are infectious, they see things we can't, and their imagination is unfiltered by reality."

“Yeah.” Ember sighed. “Well, I’m gonna be late. Same time as usual, four p.m.” She started to turn around and walk down the stairs.

“Drive safe.” Ms. Gracie closed the door behind her. Suddenly, the phone on the wall rang. She went to answer it.

Ellie had found the triangles he was after. Standing up now, he had one in each hand. He carefully leaned over, delicately placing the triangles together, forming one big triangle, and was just about to place it on the top of the spire.

“eeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEEELLLLLLLLLLLLIIIIIEEE!” A young voice came running down the hallway and into the playroom. Ellie turned around, but not fast enough. Lumin smashed into Ellie with a flying hug. The castle fell as the two of them crashed into it and on the floor.

Ellie winced as she hit the ground, but he went through this ritual every morning, so he was used to it. Lumin crashed into him with a hug every morning. It wasn’t long before the two were laughing together. The goopy body of Lumin didn’t hurt at all, in fact, he was sinking into it a little bit. Lumin rolled over, still laughing. The two of them were laughing like idiots. They soon arose and checked each other for boobos. This was also a ritual after the flying hug. Ellie spun around, arms out. Then Lumin spun around, arms out, she never had boobos.

“My castle.” Ellie looked at the ruins of the castle he had spent all morning building.

“Oopsie.” She looked at it, feeling sad for Ellie.

“Maybe I can webuild?” He looked at her hopefully.

“Wait,” she grabbed a stuffed bunny from the quiet corner. Quickly grabbing a chair from the kitchen, she put the bunny in the chair. “I’m the dwagon! I destroyed your castle and kidsnapped your pwincess!”

Ellie knew exactly what she was up to. Running to the pretend chest, he grabbed the plastic sword and the shield. “Feawsome dwagon! I shall sway thee!”

“RAAAAAAAAAAAAAWR!”

The two were locked in a fierce battle for the hand of Princess Bunbuns. Sir Ellie swung his sword at the dragon’s flank, but the sword went right through her. This dragon was invincible! No weapon could even make a scratch!

They had played this game before. Months ago, when she and her mom had first enrolled in Grace’s Daycare, Lumin walked into the playroom. There were several kids in the room that day. A joey, a tabby kitten, a puppy, a mouse, a lynx kitten, and a calf, and of course, Ellie, a snow leopard kitten. She was truly unique among them all though. She walked in, stood in the middle of the room, and took a deep breath. “HAI!” Everyone looked at her, stopping their pretend play, dress up, or building. Their looks made her shake a little bit out of fear, but she continued. “My name is Lumin.” She said this precisely and as clear as possible, almost as if she practiced it.

The tabby cat, in a pink and white onesie spoke up, “What are you?” She walked up to her and looked at her, tilting her head.

Her mother told her this would happen. She remembered what she told her. “I am a Dwagon/Shark. I have a dwagon snout,” she pointed to her snout, “wings,” turning around and flapping her wings, “horns,” lowering her head to show them, and cwaws!” She held up her hands and showed off her stubby, growing claws. “I also have a shark tail,” she turned around again to show her tail with a dorsal fin and caudal fins, “gills,” pointing to the gills on her neck, “and these cool ears that look like fins!” She showed her ears that stuck out from her head, in front of her ear holes. “BUT!” she was reaching the big climax now, “I is also made of GOO!”

The room went silent. They didn’t believe her. “You no believe me.” She looked around the room at all the children in diapers and onesies or shirts. She chose the snow leopard with grey fur and purple spots. in a white onesie with blue, red, and green paw prints. “You!” She pointed to him and walked toward him. “What your name?”

The snow leopard looked nervous, he must have been shy. “Uh... Ellie.”

“Otay, Ellie. Poke you hand threw me.” Ellie looked at her, confused. Threw her, what was that supposed to mean? “Otay.” She grabbed his hand gently, and moved toward her torso. She pushed her hand threw her body and out the other side. It slid through her, like she was made of goo!

The whole room exploded with amazement. They all walked up to her and began thrusting their hands into her. She didn't feel a thing. Everyone was immediately on her side, thinking she was pretty darn cool. She could even transform into people, even if it wasn't that convincing.

They continued their battle, Ellie swinging his sword through Lumin, and the sword going right through her. Ellie never knew how to win this game, but they didn't play to win, they played to have fun.

"RAAAAAAWR! Your pwincess is mine! Once I defeat you, I will mawwy her and we will have fweaky childwen!"

"Not on my watch, Dwagon!"

"What's all this talk 'bout freaky children?" Ms. Gracie was standing there in the doorway, watching the two children play. She had her white 'kiss the cook' apron on, so she was making breakfast. It was riding up her cleavage, despite wearing a sweater.

"Ms. Gracie! Ms. Gracie! She the scawy dwagon that destwoyed my castle and kidsnapped the pwincess. I the bwave knight that has to defeat her!"

"That's wonderful." She meant it too, she valued their imagination and creativity. "You're gonna need that creativity today, it's just you two with me."

The two of them stopped their play and looked at Ms. Gracie. "NO WAY!"

"You know that flu is going around, you had it last week, Ellie."

"Oh no. Even Luv?"

"Yes, our little Joey has it too." She sighed. Being a mother long ago, she still had that motherly trait that made her worry about children, even if they weren't her own. "At least you two are ok."

“Yeah,” Lumin spoke up, “I can’t get sick.” She ran over to Ms. Gracie, hugging her leg.

“Yes, but you’re made of goo, sweetheart.” She pat her head, ruffling up her goo-hair.

“And I already got sick, so I can’t get it again, right?” Not wanting to be left out, Ellie ran over to Ms. Gracie and hugged other leg.

“That’s not true, sadly.” She picked him up, hugging him. “You hardly get sick though, because you wash your paws when I ask you too.” She tickled his tummy and made him laugh.

“Now, let’s get some breakfast. It was real easy with just us three.”

“Yay food!” Lumin ran toward the kitchen. Ellie hitched a ride on Ms. Gracie’s shoulders. She made airplane sounds and swooped left and right as they made their way to the kitchen, making Ellie laugh joyfully.

By the time Ms. Grace and Ellie Lumin was already at the sink, making a mess of the sink. Ms. Grace bent low and let Ellie hop down. “Tank you, Ms. Grace.” He skipped to the short stairs in front of the sink. Lumin was splashing water while washing her hands. Reaching for the SoftPaws soap, she took four pumps and lathered up, nice and sudsy. The suds were dripping into the sink and making a mess. “Lumin,” Ellie said politely, “You’re using too much soap.” In a sing-song voice, he said to her, “One pump is enough.” Ms. Gracie had taught them that jingle because some kiddos would use the entire bottle of soap.

“Oh, sowwy.” She handed him the bottle of soap and finished washing her hands. As a Gooborg, she didn’t need to wash her hands, she was immune to all ailments and illnesses. She wanted to be like the other kiddos though, so she pretended to need the other things that they needed to do; wear diapers, eat food, wear clothes, etc. Making sure she scrubbed between her claws, she rinsed all the extra soap off her hands. Shaking her hands dry in the air, all the water flew off. Her goo was hydrophobic, so that was all she needed to do. She sat at her spot at the table.

Ellie on the other hand, she was careful; he took great care washing his hands. Applying only one pump of soap to his paws. Scrubbing thoroughly between his digits, he sang the hand washing song.

“Twinkle, twinkle little star  
Look how clean my two paws are

With soap and water, wash and scrub  
Got those germs off, rub-a-dub-dub  
Twinkle, twinkle little star  
Look how clean my two paws are.”

Drying his hands with the special hand dryer that Ms. Gracie had, his paws were now clean. He climbed into his seat and was ready.

Ms. Grace always had everything ready before the children sat down, she had learned that from years of experience. Having ten kiddos at once ready for food, having some of them get food before others, there were so many things that could cause chaos. She placed a small bowl with vanilla yogurt and small diced strawberries in front of the two. “Tank you, Ms. Gracie.” The two grabbed the spoons from the bowls and began eating. She had also learned to serve food in bigger bowls than necessary, even if it made it look like smaller portions. This helped prevent larger messes if they spilled.

Lumin loved yogurt. It was like her, goopy. She picked up the bowl and shoveled it into her mouth. Ms. Grace’s ‘One Bite of Everything’ rule did not apply to Lumin, she would eat everything with no questions asked. Ellie was a bit more-picky though, but he had a sensitive stomach, so he had an excuse to try only one bite of something and turn it away. Yogurt though, he liked yogurt. He held the spoon in his fist and ate spoon after spoon of it until it was gone.

“More please.” Lumin was, without fail, the first one done and always wanted more. The kid was a bottomless pit.

“Let’s wait until we have our other course, Lumin. If you’re still hungry after that, I’ll give you more.”

She set her spoon down in the bowl, pouting only a bit. “O’tay.”

“Besides, I made scrambled eggs this morning. I know how much Ellie likes these.” She swapped the bowls for another bowl with REAL scrambled eggs, not the powder that you add hot water too. Ms. Grace always made sure her kiddos ate real food, and nothing with too many preservatives or added ingredients.

“Eggies!” Ellie was the one to eat quickly this time. He grabbed his spoon and scooped spoon after spoon until they were gone. Lumin still ate quickly, but not nearly as fast as she did with the yogurt. Ms. Gracie grabbed a bowl for herself and had some eggs as well.

“O’tay, eggies are gone.” Lumin showed Ms. Gracie the bowl. “Can I has more yogurt, pwease?”

“Of course. You said the magic word.” She reached into the fridge and pulled out the tub of yogurt. Grabbing a spoon from the drawer, she spooned four spoonfuls of yogurt into her bowl. Turning around, she also scooped another heaping spoonful of strawberries. “I knew you would want more, so I cut extra.”

“Tank you!” She wasted no time digging into the extra yogurt.

“You know, you two,” she addressed them both, sitting down at the end of the table, “since it’s just us three, I was thinking.” The two of them looked at her, yogurt dripping from Lumin’s maw, “What would you two say if I made pizza for lunch today?”

The two looked at each other, then at Ms. Grace, wide eyed. “No way!”

“How you knows I wike p’zza?” Lumin asked.

“Because I know everything.” Ms. Grace joked; it was a running joke that Ms. Grace knew everything. If you asked her something she didn’t know, you won. What they won, they didn’t know, no one won yet. “We’ll even put our favorite foods on it.”

“Steak?!” Ellie stood on his chair excitedly.

“I’ll see if I have some in the freezer.”

“Pineapple?!” Lumin shouted excitedly.

“Eww.” Ellie looked at her, grossed out.

“We’ll make one for each of us. A personal size pizza.”

“Ooooooh” the two said in unison.

“Ok, if you’re done, you two can go play. I have to clean up.”

“O’tay.” Lumin hopped out of her chair and ran to the playroom.

Ellie carefully climbed out of his chair. “Tank you, Ms. Grace.” He walked out of the kitchen, following Lumin. Ms. Grace tossed the bowls and spoons into the sink, already filled with soapy water.

Lumin was already in the playroom, sitting in the chair where Princess Bunbun once sat. “So, what we gunna do?”

Ellie looked at the ruins of his kingdom. “I wanna webuild my castle.” He dropped to his knees, clearing a space for the foundation.

“I’ll help!” Lumin sat next to him.

Ellie was a master builder. All those hours he spent by himself early in the morning have him plenty of time to practice his building skills. He had worked with these cutout shapes, square wooden blocks, Montessori blocks, Lincoln logs, megablox, legos, and many other things. His favorites were the cutout shapes blocks. Not only because of the various shapes and possibilities they gave, but they were colorful. He laid down a few square blocks, leaving room for the grand entrance. “Now we can go up.”

“Wow, you weally good.” Lumin enjoyed building with blocks too, but she would just pile blocks on top of each other and knock them down. She grabbed the rectangular blocks and piled them on top of Ellie’s foundation, mimicking his building style. “Wike dis?”

“Yeah, wike dat.” He reached for a right triangle and was topping off his spire. The two built, bouncing ideas off each other until the castle was complete. Ellie had to stand on Princess BunBun’s chair to reach the top of it. After an hour, they had used all the blocks in the room, after they ran out of the cutout shapes, they built outbuildings out of letter blocks and little people to live in them with legos.



“And dis famiwy wives in this house.” Lumin placed four lego bricks in a small building she built. “This family has a mommy, another mommy, a kitty and a wittle boy names JAMES!” She liked the name James, she would often name her toys or stuffies James.

“This castle is done.” Ellie stepped back and looked at their handy work. They had built the castle and set two wooden dolls on the top, those were the king and queen. The rest of the buildings was the village. Some of the buildings were businesses and some were houses. The ones that were businesses had the appropriate things inside from the doll houses. The restaurant had all the kitchen appliances and tables. The bathhouse had a strip of blue felt to represent the big tub and a little box filled with the bathing suits that Lumin stripped from the dolls. The regular houses had beds, tables, and other house things that they deemed appropriate.

“This is the biggest castle I evah built!” Lumin thrust her arms out like she was showing someone how long the fish was that she caught the other day. “Too bad we can no keep it dis way.”

“We go get Miss Gracie, she can take a pichtue.”

“YEAH!” Lumin ran out of the room to go get her. Ellie stood there and looked at the result of their teamwork. He had the sudden urge to destroy it, but he didn’t know why. He could Lumin’s voice shouting for Ms. Gracie.

Shortly after, the two came in. “Oh my goodness. You two did all this?” Ms. Gracie looked at the kingdom they had built. The two started explaining everything at the same time. “Whoa, hold it you, two.” She got on her knees and shuffled over to the entrance to the village. Laying on her stomach, she looked at the attention to detail. They had even drawn signs for the buildings and taped it to the blocks. She could tell the restaurant’s name was ‘Fud plas’ and the hotel was named ‘Nites in’. “This is absolutely wonderful, you two.” She got her phone out to take pictures. The two posed in several of them, making goofy faces and serious ones.

“Lumin?” She looked at Ellie. “I wanna destwoy is now.”

Her eyes lit up. “YEAH! Godziwa and Kittyman!”

“ROAR!” The two stomped and roared as they destroyed their kingdom. They even collided and pretended to fight, destroying more buildings in the process. Ellie got to destroy the castle in the end,

because Kittyman tackled Godzilla and won the battle. He let out a real battle cry, "MROW!" He swept his feet through the foundation of the castle and watched the kingdom fall. The king and queen fell to the ground.

Gracie was laughing. The two looked over at her, she was recording. "Your parents are gonna love this."

"Yeah! We're scary monsters!"

"Well, who's ready for snack?" She put the phone away and lowered her hands to them. They ran to her and they walked to the kitchen.

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After their snack, the two returned to the playroom. However, Lumin thought of something. "Hey, Lumin. I has an idea."

"Yeah?"

"This weekend, my wings got bigger, and now I can fly." She demonstrated. She flapped her small wings frantically and she was lifted two feet off the ground.

"WHOA!" Ellie watched as she tried to do laps around the playroom, but fell to the floor after half a lap.

"So, I tink," she got up, taking the stray blocks and dolls out of her gooey body, "I'm faster than you now." They had raced before, whenever they go to the park on nice days they would race along the fence. Ellie had the benefit of being a snow leopard, so he could run on four legs.

"Oh weally?" He looked at her with a competitive smile. "Even aftuh wast week?" He had destroyed her in the race.

"I do." She walked right up to him and looked down on him, she had a few inches on him.

“Let’s ask Ms. Gracie if we can go then. I wanna see if I’m still the bestest.”

They both walked to Ms. Gracie who was taking a moment to herself in the living room, sipping a cup of coffee and reading *Piles of Sand* by Hank Ferbert. The living room was decorating sparingly, with pictures of barns and other country scenery. The carpet and walls were grey, but the carpet was plush and soft, so color didn’t matter. The TV sat in the corner, surrounded by an oak entertainment center. Several VHS tapes and DVDs sat behind the glass doors. A few plants sat on plant stands; she did her research to make sure she kept plants that were non-toxic. She got in trouble one time with licensing by having a beautiful Amaryllis, but unbeknownst to her, it was toxic if consumed.

She sat in a rocking chair in the corner, with a bookshelf to her right, filled with her books she didn’t dare read to the kids. Spicy, too wordy, or had violence that they shouldn’t be exposed to. Those were on the top shelves, all of their books were on the bottom three shelves, ready to be pulled out and read whenever they wanted. “Saul, you are the Quizat Nadarich.”

They both looked at her, confused with what she just said. Lumin walked up to her and placed her hand on her knee. “What’cha weadin’, Ms. Gracie?”

“Oh, hello, you two.” She closed the book. “I was just reading *Piles of Sand*.”

“Sounds boring,” Lumin said quickly. Ellie approached now and reached for the book.

“Oh, I’m sorry sweetheart,” she put the book on the top shelf of the bookcase, “This book is way above your reading level, and not for children your age.”

“Boo.” He crossed his arms, pouting.

“No.” Lumin pat Ellie’s head, scratching behind his ears. “That not why we here. Ms. Gracie, we wan’ go to da park. We have a bet to settle.” She looked at her with a competitive grin. Ellie had a dorky smile on his face, he loved being scratched there.

“Oh, is that so?” She got up from her rocking chair. “You wanna try and beat Ellie in a race again?”

"I CAN!" She shouted excitedly, her arms straight down at her sides. "My wings got bigguh and I can fwy now!"

"I'd love to see that." She reached for her overcoat by the front door. "The pizza dough still has time to rise. Why don't we work up a sweat before lunch?"

"Yes!" Lumin ran to the backdoor where Ms. Gracie kept shoes, coats, and other weather gear. Ellie walked, confident that he would win again. Lumin was ready, she had the hoodie that she kept at the daycare in her arms. "Let's go!"

"Yes, yes, we're coming sweetheart." Gracie and Ellie took their time. They opened the door and went outside. The park was three blocks away, so it would be an easy walk. She wouldn't need the rope today, there was only two of them. They walked down the driveway and started down the sidewalk. The sun was out and it was a beautiful day.

Lumin took off, excited to win. "Lumin!" Ellie was calling from the sidewalk, "don't run too far ahead!" Lumin ran back and the two held hands.

"Good choice, Lumin." Gracie said to her, and pat her head affectionately. It wasn't long before They reached the park. It had recently been renovated, so all the equipment had been renovated or replaced. The play castle that sat dead center of the park could fit 20 children at once now, and was so colorful it would make your eyes bleed if you stared at it for too long. All the slides that jutted from the sides of it, the several types of ladders to get up, and the activity walls made it the biggest attraction at the park. Of course there were others; the new swing set, the monkey bars, the dome climber, a vertical tire swing, a metal zipline, and a rolling pipe slide.

Their main attraction for this visit: the track. The planning committee had also paid for a track to be built along edge of the fence, for the adults that brought their kids. Rather than sitting on the benches, why not exercise while doing so? Very few children were there, some older kids and some moms sitting on a bench with their phones out.

"Meet you at da start, swow poke!" Ellie ran on all fours to the indicated starting marks in the center of the track. Lumin couldn't keep up on foot, but she was gonna use her wings today. Gracie followed at her usual pace.

“O’tay. I bet wings is fastuh den feets.” Lumin pointed to Ellie’s paws. He was already on all fours, waiting to get started.

“We’ll see ‘bout dat.”

“And...” Lumin was thinking about something to compete for. “the woser has to mess their diapee and stay in it for the west of the day.”

Ellie looked at her competitively. “Big bet dis time. You’we on, buttface.” They shook hands.

“Alright, you two.” Gracie caught up and got her phone out. She grabbed Lumin’s hoodie. “You two knows the rules. One time around the track, do your best, and no cheating.”

“Yes, Ms. Gracie.” The two readied themselves at their positions.

Gracie opened her timer app. She raised her arm, “Racers, on your marks. Get set. GO!” She lowered her arm in a chop and started the timer.

The two bolted from the starting line. Ellie sprinted on four legs and Ember started on her feet. Ellie was getting a lead already but Lumin had been practicing over the weekend. She spread her wings and picked up the speed. Flapping her wings she got off the ground, and flapped furiously. “I’m fwying!” She was focused now. She flapped her wings feverishly and was gaining ground on Ellie. “I’m coming for you, Ellie!”

“Yeah, wight!” Ellie looked behind him and was shocked to see that Lumin was catching up. “Oh noes!” He faced forward and focused. They were coming to the first turn. He checked behind him again, Lumin was closer. He stepped on it, drifting around the turn with ease. He looked again to see how she would handle the turn.

“Dis is easy stuff!” She spread her wings wide and casually drifted, the wind pushing her around the turn without losing much speed. She started flapping again, it seemed straightaways were best for flying.

“That was amazing, Lumin!” Gracie shouted from the starting line. She looked at the time, that was the fastest she had ever been. Usually, Ellie would be around the turn and half way to the nest by the time she reached the first turn. “This is gonna be close, I can already tell.” She watched as Lumin gained distance on Ellie, Ellie constantly checking to see how close she was getting. She nearly missed the next turn completely because of it. She went off the track and gained some time, Lumin gaining ground. “Oh goodness.”

“I’m catching up, Ellie.” She didn’t have to shout anymore; she was close enough that she could speak regularly. She flapped her wings feverishly and continued to gain ground. Dirt caked Ellie’s paws as he ran. He panted, he never had to run this hard when racing anyone. Luv certainly never came this close, and neither did Ingostar, but he was Lumin’s self-proclaimed rival.

“No you’we not!” He kicked up the juice again, gaining speed, but not for very long. He couldn’t keep it up and returned to his normal speed.

“This is my chance!” Lumin flapped her wings even more and gained more ground, catching up on him at an even faster rate.

“You can do it Lumin!” Grace shouted across the park. Everyone was watching now; the older kids were cheering for one or the other and the adults looked up from their phones to watch the littles doing their very best. “Run, Ellie, Run!” She didn’t want to be biased.

They reached the third turn and Lumin was a mere five feet behind Ellie. He was panicking now; he had won every race before this with a large margin, but this time his winning streak was being threatened. “You weally have pwacticed!” He shouted as he made the turn.

Lumin also made the turn, spreading her wings and letting the wind steer her. “Yeah! And you gonna wose dis time!” They were neck and neck. They looked at each other as Lumin started pulling ahead. They sneered but they knew it was a game. “See ya!” Lumin did a spin, closed her wings, and gained some speed, opened her wings, and pushed ahead. She was now five feet ahead.

“No!” Ellie pushed himself further and gained speed. He closed the gap as they reached the reached the turn. Neck and neck again, they were on the final straight away. “It’s mine!”

“No mine!”

“Oh goodness!” Gracie minimized the timer and opened the camera app. She squatted by the finish line and started recording. “Come on you two! GO GO GO!” They were both focused; no trash talking, no tricks, just the race. “Oh it’s gonna be close.” A crowd had gathered around the finish line to watch the race, the older kids and adults alike.

“Go Ellie!” “Smoke em, Lumin!” “Run, you two!”

They dashed past the finish line. It was too close to call, good thing she was recording. Ellie skidded to a stop and Lumin veered to the left and crashed into the grass. They were both panting like mad. “I won!” Ellie cheered as he got up on his back legs, but fell on his back, his diaper cushioning the fall. His legs felt like jelly.

“NO, I WON!” Lumin was face down in the grass, and left a large skid mark in the grass, like a crashsite. She pushed herself up from the ground, her red unicorn shirt covered with dirt.

“Holy cow!” One of the older kids came up to them and knelt low. “You two are amazing! How can you fly at your age?”

“Forget that, how can he run that fast?” Another older kid came up to Ellie and reached for his hands, offering to pull him up.

“Hold on, I have the results!” Gracie shot her hand in the air. She had the camera app open and was watching the video back in slow motion. This seemed to give Ellie all the energy he needed. He jumped up and ran to her on unsteady legs. Lumin was already there. “Watch this.” She hit the play button. For a few seconds there was nothing, but then they saw themselves. Ellie was running and Lumin was flying. They all watched the phone in anxious silence. They were neck and neck, but at the last minute, Lumin stuck her hands out and hit the finish line first. Everyone gasped.

“I DID IT!” Lumin jumped up and down, her wings flapped and sent her off the ground, flying above everyone.

“No way!” Ellie looked at the phone. There it was, he had lost for the first time. He didn’t feel shame, he felt hot, but he wasn’t sad. “That was SO CLOSE!” He flung his fists downward and was being over dramatic. “NOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

“YEEEEEEEEES!” Lumin came swooping down and hugged him. “Dat was amazing!” She hugged him as tight as she could. “I tink it was too cwose to weally be fair dough.”

“You wanna wace again?” Ellie looked surprised.

“Next time.” She fell over, exhausted. Ellie joined her. “Oh my gosh, I’m tiedw.” They laid in the grass and relaxed. The crowd faded over the next few minutes after their last few congratulations and compliments.

“You two ready to go?” She had finished sending the video to their parents.

“We exhausted.” Ellie had fallen asleep and Lumin answered for her.

“Well, come here then.” She bent over and picked them up. With one kiddo in each arm, she left the park and started the short trip back to the house. “You two need a nap before lunch by the sounds of it.”

“Maybe.” Lumin started drifting off, her head on Gracie’s shoulder. It wasn’t long before she fell asleep.

“Children.” She started talking to herself. “Always givin’ it their all and not givin’ up.”

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Sunlight was peeking through the curtains, dust particles shining in the limited light. The light shone on the two toddlers sleeping in the playroom. Ellie and Lumin were sharing a blanket on the same mattress. Ellie started opening his eyes, still feeling tired from the race.

He rose from the mattress and looked around. He shook Lumin, “Lumin. Lumin.” She stirred but refused to rise. “Lumin, we fell asleep.”



Her eyes shot open. "Wha?!" She promptly sat up in bed and looked around. "When I fall sleep?" She never fell asleep or took naps, she proudly stood her ground on that fact.

"You was tired, silly." Ellie started to laugh, but then he started to remember the events before. He had lost the race for the first time. Seemed to be a day for first times. "Oh," he poked Lumin's squishy body, "I lost the race."

Lumin turned around and grinned. "You did. You remember our bet?"

Ellie looked down at his diaper through his romper. He hadn't had to use his diaper in a long time. He always ran to the potty before he had to go. He was almost fully trained which made the bet all the more embarrassing. "I do..." His face grew bright red, embarrassed by what he agreed to.

"Qwick, before Ms. Gracie comes in." Lumin grabbed him by the shoulders, spun him around, and pushed him to his hands and knees. "Aw dose times I wost bets to you." She was relishing the moment. "I wanna make suwe you don't cheat it."

"You've being mean, Lumin." Ellie felt sad, his eyes starting to tear up. He didn't cry very often, even if he hurt himself, but this was just plain mean.

Lumin noticed that Ellie was tearing up. "Oh noes." She dove for him and gave him a big hug. "I sowwy Ellie. I was so happy to win that I was being a buttface." She got her knees next to him. "I'll do it to, as punishment for being a buttface."

Ellie looked at her diaper, then back at her. "But you never use your diapee."

"I will today." She smiled at him.

His face grew serious. A bet was a bet. He took that bet and lost. "O'tay. I'll twy." He closed his eyes and pushed with all his might. In no time at all, his diaper was filled, sagging, and beginning to fill the room with odor. "How 'bout you?"

Lumin grinned. "Pwepare to be amazed!" She pushed and they heard a goopy noise. Her diaper began to grow and fill. It was easily as big as her body now, and still growing. Lumin's face was strained with the effort of filling her diaper as she continued. It was now touching the floor and continuing to grow.

"Dat's enough!" Ellie hopped on the diaper trying to stop its growth. It was like sinking into a beanbag, but rather than filled with beans, it was filled with a goo or some kind of squishy slime. "Acktuawy," Ellie thought as he sat on her diaper, keep going."

"O'tay!" She kept pushing and the diaper kept filling. In no time at all the diaper was as large as a beanbag you'd see in a college campus's Rec Center. She was panting now, "Dat's it, I, can't, fill it, anymowe." She flopped onto the floor, her but slightly popping out of her diaper as she did so.

"What's all the hubbub you t- OH MY GOODNESS!" Gracie had walked in once she heard the shouting, wiping her hands dry with a towel. She saw one toddler with a filled diaper and another that looked like she was being absorbed into a giant purple slime. "Ellie, what are you doing?"

"Well," she thought about what she was doing, and how to tell Ms. Gracie. "We made a bet for da wace. I won, wight?"

"Yes?"

"When I was making Ellie do the bet, he got sad, so I offered to do it with him." She smiled meekly, hand behind her head.

"Yeah, Ms. Gracie," Ellie chimed in, "I was gonna cwly because it was embawassing but she said she would do it too!"

"And what exactly was this bet?"

"Woser had to mess their diapee and stay in it all day." The two said in unison.

"Oh lordy." She pressed her temples with her thumb and forefinger. "Well, that was awful nice of you to do that, Lumin." She smiled at Lumin. "However, I can't just let you two stay in messy diapers for the

rest of the day.” She picked up Ellie, supporting the diaper around the waist. “I’ll take care of Ellie. You know what to do Lumin.”

“Yes, Ms. Gracie.”

“What does she have to do?”

“That’s a secret, hun.” She turned and carried him to the changing room. Ellie complained as they went down the hall.

When the two had left, Lumin sighed. “Dis is gunna be a big one.” She closed her eyes and focused. Her diaper began to shrink the goo that she had forced out of her body being absorbed. Bit by bit, the diaper shrunk back to normal size. “Oh boy, I’m not doing dis again.” She complained as she struggled to absorb everything. By the time Ellie had returned, running inside to try and catch her, the diaper had returned to normal size and she was standing up.

“How you fix dat?!” Ellie shouted.

Lumin ran to the doorway of the playroom. She looked left and right, checking for Ms. Gracie. “Wemembuh when I told evewyone I is made of goo?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I can’t do a wot of tings you can do. I nevuh use my diapee because I don’t need it.”

“Then how did you make so much stinky?”

“I made goo and filled it.” She grabbed his hand and made him touch her diaper. “Even the diapee is goo.” She placed her hand over his and squeezed his hand into it. His hand sunk though it.

“Whoa.” He looked at her then the diaper. “So, you’re, wike, an awien?”

“I no know. I is me.”

“Dat’s so cool.”

“Ellie, Lumin, pizza time!”

“YAY!” Ellie pulled his hand out of the diaper and started to run for the kitchen.

“Wait,” she grabbed his arm. “You can’t tell anyone. Pwomise you won’t” She held her pinky out to him.

He held his out to her, they interlocked. “Pwomise.” They hugged and ran for the kitchen.

\* \* \*

Gracie was cleaning the kitchen table from the pizza making session. The kiddos were in the playroom again, probably building another castle. A pizza in the oven, making the kitchen smell like an Italian restaurant again.

There was a knock on the door. “I’m coming.” She could see who it was through the top window, it was unmistakable. “Ember, how was work?”

“Ugh.” She had an energy drink in her hand. She drank what was left and crushed it in her powerful hands. “I don’t know how you can deal with kids, Gracie.” She tossed the crushed can into the recycle bin in the kitchen. Her flannel shirt was completely unbuttoned and the white undershirt showing. “Those little buggers drive me crazy some days. It’s like pulling teeth getting them write a simple paragraph.” She stepped in and stretched, her wings fully extending.

“Well, I think I have something that will cheer you up, darlin’.” The timer on the oven went off and she went to take the pizza out. “We made pizza for lunch today, as we had some extra dough.” She slid on some oven mitts. “I know how much you like pizza, and how hard you’re working lately.” She pulled out a chicken and onion pizza from the oven.

“Gracie, you didn’t have to do that.” She took a deep smell of the pizza, leaning over it. “Oh my goodness, you remembered what I like too!”

“It’s not done yet. Lumin, you’re mom is here! Come finish up the pizza!” The house was filled with what sounded like a herd of elephants approaching at a fast speed.

She came around the corner, running with her arms out. “moooooOOOOOMMMMMMY!” She leapt up in the air and clung to Ember. Her wings flapping with joy as she hugged her.

“Hey, my little flame.” Ember kissed her daughter on the forehead. “You’re certainly excited.”

“Yeah! Because I have a surprise!” She hopped down and ran to the fridge. She pulled it open with some effort.

“Hey, now Lumin. Let’s ask before we,”

“Nah, she wants to do this herself.” Gracie had her arms crossed and was watching with a smug face.

Lumin started flapping her wings and got off the ground. She reached into the fridge and grabbed the jar of pickle chips. She closed the door and held the jar with both hands. Floating carefully with her wings flapping rapidly, she opened the jar and placed pickles all over the pizza. “We remembered your favorite!”

Ember covered her mouth and was hiding a huge smile. “You can fly!” Lumin set the jar of pickles on the table and flew into her arms, laughing her face off. “Since when can you fly, young lady?”

“I won my wace today! And I fwew to do it!” She started spewing all the details about the race, only pausing to take a breath when she absolutely couldn’t go on without one.

“I wanted her to tell you.” Grace pet Lumin’s head with pride. “This is why I work with kiddos.” The phone rang. “Let me get that.” She walked over to the phone on the other end of the kitchen.

"I am SO proud of you." The two dragonsharks spun around, hugging each other. "We're definitely getting ice cream on our way home."

"YAY!"

"Hold on, I think I know someone." Gracie approached Ember with the phone. "I have someone on the phone for you."

"Oh?" She took the phone. "Hello, Ember Fitzer."

"Why don't you go play with Ellie a bit more, sweetie?" She pushed her along to the playroom.

She ran in and saw Ellie back at work with his castle. "Whewe were we?"

"Wincon Wogs." Ellie was shoulders deep in a giant tub of Lincoln Logs, they were going to improve their previous kingdom. Rather than blocks for the houses, they'd make them cabins. They continued where they left off.

They had three cabins built when Gracie and Ember walked in. "Oh, is this the kingdom?" Ember knelt and looked at what they had finished so far. A castle made only of Cutout Shape blocks, A few cabins out of Lincoln Logs, and cars out of Legos.

"Yes, it is." Ellie turned around and looked at the giant dragonshark that was in front of him. "Oh, hi Lumin's mom!" He hugged her leg. She was always nice to the kids; she would play with them in the mornings if she had time, after work when she came for pickup, and even brought treats from time to time.

"Hello, Ellie." She pet his head, scratching behind his ears. He purred instinctively. "Ellie, I have something to tell you." She sat down and invited them both to sit on her legs. They crowded on either side of her. "I just got a call from your Dad, the office is holding him hostage again."

"Oh, not again!" He sighed. Lumin gave him a hug. His father's Insurance office often made him stay late. He was the best agent they had, was most efficient at paperwork, and shoveled extra work on him

all the time. He's been late for picking him up so many times because of it. He always imagined his dad, dressed up in his nice suit, handcuffed to his desk at his ankles, behind a large pile of papers, and his boss yelling at him with a whip in his hands.

"Yeah, again. Those meanies." She knew how to play along. "However, he called Ms. Gracie and told us he was gonna be staying late because he was warned this time."

"Dat's better than normal."

"However, he's not coming back tonight."

"WHAT?!" He was at a loss. "Wha's gunna happen?"

"Well, Ms. Gracie and I talked about it, I spoke to your father, and he agreed that you could stay with me and Lumin tonight."

Lumin and Ellie looked at each other. "Whoa! Weally?" Ellie looked at Ember. "I can sweepover with you and Lumin?"

"Of course, your father said it was ok. We even have it on paper." Gracie showed him the paper that his father had faxed over to the daycare. "What do you think, kiddo? You wanna have a sleep over with Lumin?"

"YEAH!"

"Of course, this probably won't be an everyday thing. I'm more than happy to help."

"Wet's go den!" Lumin jumped out of her mother's lap and grabbed Ellie's hand. They ran for the door, Ellie stumbling to keep up.

"I've got a bag of some diapers and other things for Ellie by the pizza." Gracie said to Ember as she was getting up. "I've boxed the pizza up for ya too."

“You’re a saint, Gracie.” They walked to the door where they already had their coats and were jumping up and down, chanting sleepover over and over. “We’ll see you tomorrow. Say bye, kids.” Her hands were full as she opened the door.

“Bye, Ms. Gracie!” They ran down the stairs and Lumin showed Ellie to the car.

“This is why I work with kids.” She looked out the window as Ember hooked the two kiddos into car seats. She went back to the living room and opened *Piles of Sand*. Her coffee was cold but she didn’t need any this late in the day.