

1. Zira's Wish



“Can’t I have a pet earthling? Please?”

“Zira, we’ve been over this a dozen times. You’re too young to handle such a big responsibility.”

“But Mom, I promise I’ll take real good care of it. I’ll feed it every day, and take it on walks, and I’ll give it baths.”

Zira’s mom pulled more groceries from the bag and leaned inside the refrigerator to cram the food on the shelves. “Earthlings are a lot of work, more than you think. And they make a big mess.”

“But Mom—”

“Zira!” She withdrew her head from the refrigerator and finally looked at her. “I know you really want a pet, but we already have one.”

“That’s Lazro’s pet!” moaned Zira. “And it just sits there and eats flies. It can’t even talk!”

Her mom gave a forced smile. “Well, we can talk about this when you’re older.”

Zira had heard that line so many times before; it felt like a lie. She groaned and rolled her eyes as far as they could roll, then trudged back to her bedroom, loud enough for her mom to hear every frustrated footstep scuffing down the hallway. She tried slamming her door shut to punctuate her dramatic exit, but it got caught on a dirty sock on the carpet. She kicked the sock out of the way and shoved the door closed, not quite as loudly as she had hoped.

She belly-flopped onto her bed and buried her face in her pillow, wallowing in the blackness—exactly like the bleakness of her life, deprived of

the fundamental right of having her own pet earthling. She lay there with her arms, legs, long black hair, and two antennae spread out in every direction, like a big green splat.

It was so unfair. She couldn't understand why her mom hated earthlings so much. She wasn't a little kid anymore, so why didn't her mom see how mature and responsible she was? Was this some punishment for something forgotten long ago? Or was she just mean for the sake of being mean? Parents just don't understand.

Perhaps she could find some way to be extra good to show her mom how responsible she was. Maybe she could do some extra chores around the house, or in the yard, or wash the car. Or maybe even clean her room. She looked around at all her clothes, toys, stuffed animals (mostly earthies, of course), books, art supplies, science kits, games, and gadgets—most of them lying on the floor, especially the dirty laundry. Ugh, that would be so much work.

She tried to think ... think ... but instead, her mind wandered to wondering what her pet earthling would be like. What type should she get? What kind of earthie would be so amazing it would make all her classmates jealous?

Perhaps her mom would let her have a different pet. Blorx is home to countless incredible

creatures and critters of different hues, scales, furs, and forms, each with their own unique personalities and special talents.

Her big brother Lazro had a pet slurtle who could sing and imitate sounds. And he trained it to burp the alphabet. But most of the time, when not eating flies, it just tucked itself inside its blue spiral shell and did nothing.

A boundo likes to roll around its blabitrail tubes and tunnels, especially late at night when you're trying to sleep. If you have two boundos or more, they crash into each other and laugh hilariously with their squeaky little voices.

A kiffy may curl up in your lap and make a cute chortling sound if they like you. Or poke their claws into you if they don't. Or both—they're funny that way.

And a slipple can coil its fluffy, long, limbless body to hop like a spring. However, they do like to stare at you with their one giant eye, never blinking, even while they're asleep—which is a little creepy.

But Zira wanted a pet who could talk. There were only a few:

Squawkings understand everything you say. But they obey commands only if they're in the right mood. Maybe. And they can't actually talk so

much as squawk word-like sounds. Really they think you should just speak *their* language.

Gruntlings can speak a little—basic words like yes, no, food, more, why, and toe. But usually they say nothing and judge you with their beady little eyes. And they might bite your toe if you offend them.

Blabblings can speak quite well—loquaciously with a splendiferous vocabulary—but they only want to talk about food, especially while still chewing it. And the only time they stop talking is when they're asleep.

Those were all adequate pets, Zira thought, good enough for other kids. But she had her heart set on an earthie. She liked how earthlings walk around on two legs and have two arms and two eyes, just like little blorxlings. They're very intelligent and can learn many tricks. And best of all, they can talk. Some even learn to read and write—even though they have no need to, and they cannot understand trans-dimensional verb tenses and quantum spelling. Zira knew five kids her age who already had pet earthlings. It was so unfair.

She decided her pet earthling would be a little young one while they're still so cute and soft—before they turn big, hairy, and lumpy. She thought maybe she would get a girl earthie with long black hair like hers, and they could wear

matching outfits, and she'd name her Mira, like "mirror". Or Zirette. Or maybe a boy earthie with bright head-fur and speckles on his chubby cheeks, and she'd name him Figo. Or Brover. Or Gex. She wasn't sure yet.

But maybe this was all hopeless. After all, she had been begging her mom for *decades*, and the answer was always no.

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If you have never been to Blorx before, you might be wondering what we blorxlings are like and how Zira could be so old. Let me explain.

Blorxlings are very much like you earthlings, and not at all like you at the same time. You might say we are like giants since we stand three times taller than you—but we are no monsters. Our faces are friendly, with large, shiny eyes and wide, gleaming smiles. Our skin is a bright green that glistens in the sunlight, and most of us have deep black hair. As you might expect, we have two antennae atop our heads that wiggle, point, and gesticulate our moods. And we age much slower than you and live about seven times longer. This is why a young girl like Zira was only seventy years old.



And obviously, we blorxlings are much, *much* smarter than you little earthlings. But I will admit: We are not always wiser.

2. Sulking

Lazro tapped on Zira's door and poked his head in.

“Hey Pea-Pod.”

Zira was still lying on her bed, but now under a mound of all her plushy stuffed earthies, which she had piled on herself, with only her arms and legs sticking out.

“Hey Lazro,” she said, muffled under the plushies.

He stepped into her room and sat on the edge of her bed. “What were you and Mom fighting about?”

She sighed dramatically and pushed the plushies off her face. “She still won't let me have an earthling.”

“Oh, that.”

“Why is she so mean?!” Zira whined.

“She's not mean—Well, sometimes. She just doesn't want the house all messy with pet toys or ... shedding or whatever. And that earthy smell. You know her.”

“I'll clean up after it, and I'll vacuum. She won't even know!” Zira sighed again, spilling some of her stuffed toys onto the floor. “She still thinks I'm a little kid.”

Lazro snickered.

Then a new strategy hatched in Zira's head. Her mom always liked Lazro best. "Will you talk to her for me?"

He shrugged. "I dunno what I'd say. It's hard to change her mind. Like you." He smiled.

"What if you say you'll help me bathe it and take care of it? She'd say yes to you ... She always does."

Lazro thought about this for a moment. "You know what?" He bopped her lightly on the face with a plushy. "I will."

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That weekend on Blaturday morning, Zira was on the floor in her room, reading about the robot wars of 9812, when Lazro leaned through her doorway and said in a singsong voice, "Come on, Pea-Pod. We have a surprise for youuuu!"

He grinned at her, but it was an odd, goofy grin, not his normal, warm grin.

"What is it?" she asked.

"You'll see. Get your shoes on and get in the car."

"Where are we going?"

"So many questions!" he teased.

"But what's the surprise? Tell me!" Zira was never good at waiting.

He walked away down the hallway and hollered, “You’ll see!”

Zira felt an explosion of excitement. She really didn’t need to ask at all because she already had a good hunch. She slipped her shoes on and sprang to the garage, but no one was in the car yet. So she stepped back into the house and hollered, “Hurry up! Let’s go!”

“One moment,” their mom yelled from the kitchen.

Her big sister Riffa emerged from her bedroom. She was the middle child, closer to Lazro’s age. “Yeah, Zira, hold your horfsies!” Riffa seemed to be in on the secret, too, because she was also giving Zira a weird smile.

Lazro hollered across the house, “Mom, where are the car keys?”

“Right where they alwa—”

“Never mind, found them!”

“Oh no,” teased Riffa, “Lazro’s driving?!”

Their mom shuffled toward the garage while organizing her purse. “Shush. He needs to practice for his license.”

Riffa said to Lazro nasally, “Try not to hit any trash cans this time!”

“Ha ha,” he sarcasticated.

They finally got in the car—a little too slowly, in Zira’s opinion. She climbed in the back seat and

wiggled with impatience. “C’mon! Let’s go to the pet store!”

“The *pet store*?” said Lazro, overacting dramatically. “Who said anything about a *pet store*? No, Pea-Pod, we’re taking you to the *dentist!*” He looked back at her with that goofy grin again.