

## The Claw Giant and the Princess

I find her sulking in the courtyard of her castle.

She is alone, as is often the case during revolt. I squeeze through the plastic barbican and sit beside her. Fires rage nearby, and the smell of cupcakes permeate the air.

It's not very big, her castle. Not for a claw giant. In happier times, courts are held here with faded tiaras and the loveliest of tea parties with empty cups. More recently, a drawn-out siege waged by yours truly was all the excitement. It ended in a pillow fight.

Friends, even those of a princess, can be terribly cruel and brutally honest. Especially those in grade two. The sting of their words will hurt worse than any bee. Without a proper guillotine handy, their temporary insolence continues unchecked.

Sometimes saying nothing is better than saying anything. So, we sit, a princess with her dirty socks and a tattered dress, and a claw giant in thrift store rags who is her sworn enemy, but her only friend right now.

I lay my club down. It's a tube from Christmas wrap and is almost as old as she is. It's tarnished with the blood of imaginary dragons, but only the dragons that are truly bad. Someday this club may be hers, as she navigates in and out of battles with her own members of royalty. But for now, it remains mine.

She doesn't acknowledge me as I sit, opting instead to stare at the floor. I lean my head back against the wall, close my eyes, and smile. She likely won't even remember this moment, but I will. Among the greatest memories of my life.

I offer my hand. The claw hand, that often raises Cain on Saturday mornings during boring cartoons.

She doesn't move.

"I hurt my claw hand in the pillow fight when I last attacked," I say. "But I think it will be okay."

Her concern for me overrides her contempt for her friends. She glances at my hand, not seeing my other hand, stealthy as it is, grab a free pillow. Mid swing, I confess it was a trick, then "accidentally" hit myself with the sack.

Despite herself, she smiles.

"You did that on purpose," she points out.

"Certainly not," I assure her. I hold my hand out again. "Please. They want to cut the cake. You're only seven once."

She looks down for a moment and without saying a word gently slaps my hand, giving me five. It's our code and we live by it. The receiver of the slap shows their willingness to take the angst, and the giver must show that there is no longer any angst to give. We decided long ago this was how it should be. As hard as the action may seem at the time.

It's code.

Her face is solemn as she follows me out.

By the time we get to the kitchen, grudges are forgotten, and alliances are being forged again. Mom and I exchange a glance. She thinks I coddle her. In my defense, Mom isn't on the front line, battling cardboard trolls to the poetic death like we do. When we are on the same side, that is.

I decide to not take my costume off quite yet.

The pillows are still out.