

HILWIN, THE BOY WITH WHEELS

When Denton came to live in Pingletown, he was surprised by a lot of the things he saw. The town was so different from his cave in the Bubble Mountains. There were houses and birds and clocks. And there were *people*. Denton had never seen a person before he met Little Rachel.

Denton knew lots of animals in the mountains, and he saw how different all the animals could look. Even ones that were the same kind of animal could look very different. Bingletuck and Flimmer were both rumpets, but Bingletuck had a long tail and black paws, while Flimmer had a tiny tail and white paws.

So it was not too surprising to Denton that all the people he met looked different and had different names. "We may look different," said Little Rachel, "but we're all people."

"Can I be people, too?" Denton asked her, but she said, "No, Denton. You're a dragon, and dragons are not people. Dragons are different from people and other animals. You're much bigger than any people, and you have a tail."

Denton looked at his tail when Little Rachel mentioned it. "It *is* nice having a tail. It helps me not fall down, and it makes me feel good when I switch it back and forth."

As Denton was admiring his tail, Cobby Barnbuckle walked by Little Rachel's front yard. Cobby was not alone. Denton could see only the top of Cobby's head as he walked on the other side of the fence. And there was another head right next to Cobby's head. The second head had hair the same color as the dark brown sand at Bubble Beach. The head seemed to glide smoothly, while Cobby's head bounced up and down a little as he walked. Cobby waved hello to Denton, and Denton waved his little paw.

When the heads got to the gate, Denton could see that the second head was a boy who was sitting in a chair with wheels.

"Why does your friend have wheels?" Denton asked. "Is he a car?"

Cobby laughed, and so did the second head. "I'm not a car!" said the second head, and he laughed again.

"This is Hilwin," said Cobby. "He's six years old like me. He's my friend from pre-school."

Hilwin said, "My legs don't work, so I sit in a wheelchair to get around. I can do everything you can do, except walk and jump."

"Can you play with a boola hoop?"

"Yep. I spin it around on my arm. I can do more than a hundred times."

Denton had his mouth open as he tried to understand about Hilwin. A boy... in a chair... with wheels! He had never imagined such a thing.

"Denton. Close your mouth, Denton," said Little Rachel, who saw the whole thing.

"It's okay," said Hilwin. "Lots of people look at me funny, like Denton is doing. I don't mind, as long as the person isn't mean to me."



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"Oh, Denton is never mean," said Cobby. Denton shook his head side to side. Then he pointed his paw towards Hilwin's legs and said, "Why don't your legs work? Did you hurt them?"

"Not exactly. I had a disease when I was a baby. Then my legs wouldn't move right. I can't control them. Watch out they don't kick you."

Denton stepped back a little, and Hilwin laughed even harder than before. "My legs can't kick you, Denton. They don't work, remember? I was joking."

"Oh, I knew that," said Denton, although he wasn't really sure. "You said you had a disease. What did it taste like?"

Little Rachel said, "A disease isn't food. It's being sick, like when Nelliebecca had a cold last week, and she kept sneezing."

Denton decided that was all he wanted to know about disease for now. He always got nervous when people talked about sneezing, ever since he sneezed the bubblethrush out of the tree. He said, "Do you want to come in our yard and play, Hilwin?"

"That's why I'm here!" the boy in the wheelchair said. He pushed the gate open with his hand and he grabbed the big wheels on the side of his chair. Hilwin's hands grabbed the top of the wheel and pushed both wheels forward. The chair went straight through the gate. "I hear that you and Little Rachel like to do jigsaw puzzles. That's one of my favorite things."

Hilwin saw a table in the yard. It had a jigsaw puzzle on it that was just started. It was going to be a picture of the House of the One-Word Children. Hilwin's chair crossed the lawn faster than anyone, and he pulled right up to the table. As quick as you can say, "Hush baby bubblethrush," Hilwin picked up a piece of the puzzle and put it in the right place.

"Wow! You're good!" said Little Rachel.

Then all four friends started working on the puzzle together, and they had the most fun afternoon.

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I'm glad they were all having fun, aren't you? It sounds like they all got along, doing things they could all do together. Because sometimes, kids play games that Hilwin can't play unless they make some changes. Like they could play hide and seek outside, where there are more places Hilwin could hide... and so he can find someone who's hiding. Do you know anyone who uses a wheelchair? Help that person feel included. They probably like doing the same things you do.