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Mars Cats

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On the distant and harsh Mars, a family of brave black cats learns not just to survive, but to truly live among the rusty slopes, icy crevasses, and raging storms. They find water in the ice hidden in the dark, build their own little museum of treasures, where every stone has a story. They discover a quiet, unassuming wonder: Marsin, an artificial protein that grows right from the rovers gas atmosphere and gives them hope for many years to come. Through cold, wind, and the unknown, they walk side by side — because when you have someone to lean on, even the most alien planet can become home. And most importantly, they realize: their adventures are only just beginning!

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Mars Cats

Mars Cats

A Warm Corner and the Smell of Glue

Rund adored his spot behind the radiator. It was always just warm enough for his fur to lie just right, and just quiet enough to hear someone whispering softly on the other side of the wall. He didn't like fuss. He liked things to be clear: his bowl in its place, the litter box clean, and people not slamming doors.

Then they brought Lumina into the lab.

They set her carrier right next to his radiator. At first, Rund didn't even look—just twitched an ear when the latch clicked. But then a voice came from the carrier, calm, as if she already knew everything about this room:

“It smells of glue here. And trouble.”

Rund turned his head at last. Two watchful eyes stared at him from the darkness of the carrier.

“It smells like a workday,” he grumbled. “And coffee. No trouble.”

Lumina stepped out slowly, stretched with a little crackle in her joints, and sat down as if she were the real owner here, not him.

“Trouble doesn't come with a sign,” she said. “It comes with the smell of alcohol and with people starting to talk too much and do too little.”

Rund snorted. He didn't like it when someone figured things out right away. But he liked even less that she was right: the people in white coats really were talking too much today, and a strange tension hung in the air—like before a storm, only without the wind.

He moved over. Just a little. So there'd be space between him and the radiator.

“Sit here if you want,” he muttered. “It's warm.”

Lumina looked at him, as if checking whether he was mocking her. Then she nodded and sat. Not right up against him—cats don't do that. But close enough to feel the other's warmth.

That's how it all began. Not with the launch, not with sirens, not with big words. But with two cats finding one warm corner to share.

Then the packing began. Boxes, wires, screens, and things whose names no one said out loud were loaded into the rover. And someone—Rund never figured out who—said:

“Let the cats stay here. If something goes wrong, they’ll feel the vibration first.”

Rund didn’t understand what that meant then. He only knew the smell of glue had grown stronger, and there were more people around.

Lumina pressed her side against his.

“I don’t like this,” she said quietly.

“Neither do I,” Rund admitted. “But we’re cats. We’ll make ourselves comfortable anywhere. Even if that anywhere suddenly starts shaking.”

And it did start shaking.

The launch wasn’t about stars or dreams. It was about the roar, about the floor slipping away from under their paws, about wanting to dig their claws into anything just to keep hold of themselves. Rund clung to the metal floor. Lumina clung to him.

At some point, the world stopped making sense. It became a long, dark, vibrating tunnel with no radiators, no bowls, no familiar smells. Only metal, cold, and a sound that made you want to hide.

And then Lumina did something Rund never expected. She started licking his ear. Right in the middle of all that shaking, when it felt like the planet had forgotten how to stand still.

“What are you doing?” Rund croaked, trying not to lose his balance.

“I’m giving you back yourself,” Lumina answered calmly, not stopping. “You’re not a piece of cargo. You’re a cat. And cats don’t disappear, even when everything around goes mad.”

And Rund suddenly felt it—yes, he was a cat. And if this metal box was flying through the void, he wasn’t flying there alone.

When the shaking finally stopped, silence fell. But not the cozy silence of the corner behind the radiator. This was a cosmic silence—empty, ringing. Rund moved his whiskers cautiously.

“Are we there yet?” he asked.

Lumina sniffed. Her nose twitched.

“Almost,” she said. “There’s... so much space here. And so few familiar smells.”

“I don’t like too much space,” Rund grumbled.

“Then we’ll make it smaller,” Lumina suggested. “We’ll make it ours.”

They found a corner where the metal still held a trace of Earth’s warmth. They curled up side by side. And while the rover prepared for landing, they just sat and breathed—one breath, then another, then another. Together.

The landing was rough. The rover hit, bounced, hit again—and finally came to a stop. It groaned for a long time, as if exhaling: “Well. We’re here.”

Rund lifted his head. It smelled of iron, dust, and something foreign. Lumina looked at him.

“Well,” she said calmly. “This is our new corner.”

Rund looked around. It was dark, cramped, full of wires and crates. But Lumina’s side was warm. And that was the most important thing.

“Fine,” he muttered. “Let it be a corner. But... we need to make it so we can breathe here.”

He went to the paneling, sniffed the seam, listened to the metal clicking as it cooled. Then he started gnawing at it, carefully. Not out of anger. Out of necessity.

Lumina sighed but didn’t argue. She knew Rund needed to hear how the world breathed. Even if this world was strange and red.

After a while, a small hole appeared in the paneling. Rund stuck his nose through, drew in the air—dry, sharp, foreign. But real.

“Hear that?” he asked, turning to Lumina. “It isn’t silent. It whispers.”

Lumina came over, sat beside him. She looked at the hole, at Rund, at their new home.

“Then we’ll listen,” she said. “And we’ll make sure that whisper doesn’t turn into a scream.”

They sat side by side, shoulder to shoulder. Outside the thin wall of the rover, the wind touched the sand, and dust rose in a gentle cloud, as if the planet had gently stretched out a paw and said: “Hello. Welcome.”

How to Tame an Alien World

The first days on Mars smelled of iron, dust, and a silence that rang in the ears. Not the cozy kind of silence, where someone quietly breathes on the other side of the wall, but an alien silence—empty, like a box from which all living things had been shaken out. Rund didn't like this silence. It felt like it was watching him, waiting for him to give up, to become just a shadow among the crates and wires.

He walked through the rover, brushing his side against the cold panels, muttering under his breath, as if deliberately scratching the silence with words. Let it know, he thought, it's not empty here. There's a cat here, and he doesn't like it when everything is too smooth and too quiet.

“Well, you're the boss around here,” he grumbled, circling the compartment. “I get it. Just don't pretend we're not here. We are. And we're not going to become part of the paneling.”

Lumina watched him, her eyes narrowed slightly, as if trying to figure out whether he was serious or just grumbling to keep from trembling. Then she said quietly, without any pressure:

“Are you making a deal with it?”

Rund snorted but didn't deny it.

“What? It's the master here. You have to say hello, cat style. Not with a paw, but with words. Let it know we're polite. But stubborn.”

Lumina gave a tiny smile, almost invisible—just the tip of her ear twitched.

“Polite but stubborn—that's us.”

They were learning to live by new rules, simple and heavy. They saved water, drinking it sip by sip, slowly, so each gulp had time to become more than just quenching thirst. It held a memory of Earth—of drops on leaves, of puddles after rain, of the joy of wetting your nose and then shaking the droplets off.

They split the food exactly in half. Even when Rund wanted to nudge the bowl toward Lumina—you're tired, you need it—he didn't. Because he knew she wouldn't take it. Instead, she'd say he'd been gnawing at the paneling all day, he needed the strength more. Then they'd start arguing, time would slip away, and the cold would creep closer. So they just split it evenly. It became their small rule that kept them standing.

Sand got everywhere. It crunched on their teeth, settled on their black fur, turning them speckled, as if Mars wanted to paint them. At first, Rund was angry, hissing at the рыжая dust as if it were a living little troublemaker that deliberately got under his paws.

“It's everywhere! No boundaries, no conscience!”

Lumina laughed softly, almost without sound, just her shoulders shaking a little.

“It’s not a troublemaker,” she said. “It’s the planet. It just wants to get to know us better.”

And Rund suddenly realized she was right. The sand didn’t want to hurt. It wanted to be noticed. So Rund stopped being angry. Instead, he started listening to how the sand rustled against the paneling—it sounded different every time. Sometimes like dry rain, sometimes like cautious footsteps, sometimes like a whisper: I’m here. I’m close.

He learned to tell the winds apart. The quiet one, just wandering around, not touching anything important. The middle one, the kind that tugs at your ears and whispers, Time to hide. And the angry one, the one that comes with dust, covers the sky, and makes the world small and gray. Rund would sit by his hole, close his eyes, and listen. If the wind started whining in the gaps, he’d call to Lumina in a short voice:

“Time to close everything we can. He’s not in a good mood today.”

Lumina would nod and start gathering everything that could fly away—rags, bowls, even the old nut she’d found in a corner and now considered her treasure.

Rund watched her carefully tuck the nut into the warmest corner and couldn’t hold back:

“Why do you keep dragging that thing around?”

Lumina shrugged.

“It rings. If I shake it, it makes a sound. And sound isn’t silence. I don’t want it to be just silence here.”

Rund looked at the nut, at Lumina, at their small, dusty, metal home—and suddenly understood. They weren’t just surviving. They were making life here. Grain by grain. Sip by sip. One nut. One conversation with the wind.

One morning, Rund woke to a strange silence. Not the usual one, but a suspicious one—as if the world were holding its breath. He sat up, moved his whiskers, listened. The wind was asleep. And when the wind sleeps on Mars, it’s gathering strength.

He quietly called for Lumina. She lifted her head, sniffed the air, her nose twitching.

“I don’t hear anything,” she said.

“Exactly,” Rund nodded. “It’s quiet. And that’s bad.”

They started getting ready. They closed the gaps Rund had gnawed himself, because now those gaps could turn into enemies. They stowed everything that could fly away into boxes. Lumina tucked her nut under the bedding so it wouldn’t be carried off.

When the storm came, it didn’t shout. It simply draped a heavy blanket over the rover, and the world disappeared. All that remained was a hum, dust, and the feeling that the planet was breathing

right above their heads. Rund pressed against Lumina; she pressed against him. They sat side by side while the storm paced around, knocking on the metal, searching for a crack to slip inside.

“We won’t let you in,” Rund said quietly, as if the storm could hear him. “This is our home.”

Lumina rested her head on his shoulder.

“We’re good keepers,” she said. “We take care of it.”

The storm raged for a long time, then began to quiet down. The wind grew softer, the dust settled, and the familiar whisper returned in the seams. Rund went to the hole, stuck his nose out, and drew in the air.

“All done,” he said. “He just grumbled and left.”

Lumina sighed, not from tiredness, but from relief.

“So we made it,” she said.

Rund nodded and suddenly felt a little more space open up in his chest. Not because the storm was gone, but because they’d outlasted it. Together.

That evening, they sat by the wall where the metal still held the day’s warmth. Lumina took out her nut and gently rattled it—just a little, so the sound wouldn’t fly off into the darkness but would stay right there, with them.

“You know,” she said, “I think Mars isn’t so alien after all.”

Rund slanted a look at her.

“He’s just strict,” he agreed. “And he doesn’t like to rush.”

Lumina smiled.

“But he’s honest. He shows right away what he’s capable of.”

Rund wanted to grumble, Too honest, but he didn’t. He just moved a little closer, so their sides touched.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “But now we know what to expect.”

Outside, the wind touched the sand again, and dust rose in a gentle cloud, as if the planet had sighed and said: All right. Hold on. I won’t be too harsh today.

Sand, Stones, and Freedom

Rund had been eyeing the hatch for a long time. It stood there like a heavy barrier, as if deliberately reminding him: it's safe here, there are walls here, you don't have to make any decisions. But Rund didn't want safety—he wanted to feel the world breathing on its own, without the help of holes in the paneling. He wanted to hear the sand rustle for real, not through metal. He didn't say it out loud, but Lumina saw it all in the way he froze by the seam, as if listening to the very edge of the silence.

One day, she just came and sat down beside him. She didn't try to persuade him, didn't try to talk him out of it—she just sat and said quietly, without any pressure:

“If you're ready, I'm ready too.”

Rund slanted a look at her. In the dim light of the rover, her fur looked almost black, only the reddish specks of dust sparkled when she moved.

“It's cold out there,” he grumbled, as if that were the most serious argument in the world.

Lumina gave a small smile.

“But the wind out there is real. Not the kind that sneaks through the cracks, but the kind that lives on its own.”

Rund sat there a little longer, as if weighing everything down to the last grain of sand. Then he stood up, stretched so hard that every joint cracked, and walked over to the hatch. The mechanism resisted, creaking, as if offended that anyone had remembered it only now. Rund pushed, braced his paws against it, hissed at the stubborn metal. Lumina didn't get in his way, but she was there—and that was enough. When the hatch finally gave way, it swung open with a sound as if the whole rover had exhaled: well, finally.

Outside, the air smelled different. Not of iron, not of old insulation, not of wires—but of something dry and ancient, as if this scent had lain here for millions of years, waiting for someone to finally breathe it in. Rund froze on the threshold, drawing the air in so deeply that even his whiskers trembled.

“Well,” he exhaled. “There it is. The real thing.”

Lumina stood shoulder to shoulder with him. Her nose twitched too, catching the unfamiliar shades.

“It isn't angry,” she said calmly. “It's just big.”

And they stepped outside.

For the first few seconds, they just stood there, getting used to the open space. There was no ceiling here, no walls, no crates to hide behind. Only the sky—low and reddish, as if stretched too tight

—and the sand that stretched in every direction like a sea without water. Rund moved his toes, feeling the sand sift between the pads, warm from the day's sun and prickly, like a hundred tiny needles.

Then, suddenly, Lumina crouched down, hooked a stone with her paw—a gray one with sharp edges—and nudged it forward. The stone rolled, bouncing, and stopped near a small bump. Lumina looked at it, then at Rund, and something mischievous, almost childlike, flickered in her eyes.

“Catch it,” she said softly, but in a way that made Rund understand right away: it was an invitation.

He snorted, as if to show he wasn't impressed, but he was already crouching, ready to leap. The stone rolled again, and Rund darted after it, racing across the sand, kicking up a cloud of reddish dust, and pinned it with his paw. Then he lifted his head, squinting in triumph.

A sound escaped him somewhere between a purr and a satisfied grumble—better than any shout.

Lumina laughed quietly, soundlessly, her shoulders just shaking a little. She immediately grabbed another stone, a bigger one, and tossed it not hard, just enough for it to roll nearby, teasing him. Rund took off again, sand flying from under his paws, and for a second he forgot he was on an alien planet, forgot about their supplies, about the gaps in the paneling, about everything that had forced him to be serious. He was just a cat chasing a stone across the warm sand.

They ran, they tumbled, they buried themselves in the sand until they were almost the same color as the planet. Lumina dived into small hollows, scooped sand away with her paws to make a tiny cave, and peeked out, her eyes shining. Rund rolled stones toward her, and she batted them away with her paw like a ball, laughing her silent laugh. They found strange stones—smooth, as if polished by the wind, with streaks that looked like lightning—and piled them into a small heap like treasures. And for them, they were treasures—not gold or diamonds, but things they had found themselves, with their own paws, on this red land.

When their strength started to fade, they collapsed side by side, breathing heavily, with sand in their fur and on their whiskers. Rund turned his head and looked at Lumina. Her nose was covered in dust, a tiny stone clung to her ear, and her eyes were shining.

“We did it,” he said quietly, not for Mars, not for anyone else, but only for her. “We went out. And we weren't scared.”

Lumina stretched, shook the sand off, and rested her head on his shoulder.

“I wasn't scared,” she admitted. “As long as you're here, it's not frightening. Even if the planet is huge.”

Rund closed his eyes, feeling how the cooling sand still held the day's warmth, how the wind stroked his fur—not angrily, but gently, as if it too were glad they had finally gotten out. He wrapped his front paw around Lumina, pulling her a little closer so there wouldn't be even a millimeter of cold between them.

“It’s just us here,” he whispered. “No one else. Just us, the sand, the stones, and this strange, beautiful world.”

Lumina sighed, comfortably, like at home, and buried her nose in his neck.

“And that’s enough,” she said. “We don’t need anything more.”

The wind touched their fur, the sand whispered softly as it shifted, and there was no threat in that sound. Only space. Only freedom. Only two cats who had found their own little piece of Mars and made it theirs.

A Quiet Whisper Within

The day turned out calm. The storm had left sometime in the night, leaving behind a clear sky and sand settled into smooth waves, as if someone had carefully smoothed out a blanket. Rund sat by his hole, listening to the metal cooling, and thought the wind wouldn't be angry today. He even allowed himself to relax a little—he stretched out his paws, closed his eyes, and was almost dozing off when he felt that something had changed nearby. Not colder, not warmer, but somehow quieter. As if the whole rover had held its breath for a second.

Lumina sat down beside him, but not right up close like she usually did—a little apart, as if she'd wanted to say something first, then changed her mind and decided to just sit there. She didn't move; only her nose twitched slightly, catching scents Rund had long stopped noticing—the smell of dust, old iron, their own fur blending into one familiar aroma.

Rund opened one eye and glanced at her.

“What is it?” he asked softly, not wanting to scare away this strange quiet. “Did the wind offend you somehow?”

Lumina gave a small shake of her head but didn't answer right away. Instead, she rested her paws on the cold metal, as if checking how much it had cooled, and then spoke so quietly that the words didn't seem to fly into the air but settled straight onto their fur, becoming part of their little world.

“I'm not alone anymore,” she whispered. “There's someone inside me. Very tiny. But real.”

Rund froze. Even his whiskers stopped moving. He didn't understand at first what she'd said, because the words were too quiet, too fragile, as if they might shatter at any sharp sound. He slowly turned his head and looked at Lumina—and suddenly noticed something he hadn't seen before: in her eyes there wasn't tension, wasn't fear, but a new kind of softness, as if she was already protecting someone, even though she didn't yet know who it was.

He sat up, drawing his paws in, as if afraid any movement might break something.

“That means...” he began, but his voice caught, turning hoarse, so he tried again. “That means there will be someone else soon. Someone who will run across the sand and chase stones.”

Lumina nodded without lifting her head.

“Yes,” she said. “And they need it to be quiet here. They need the wind not to be angry, the metal not to creak too loudly, and for us to just sit and breathe.”

Rund suddenly felt something tighten in his chest—not from fear, but from a huge, warm weight, as if the most precious thing anyone could ever trust him with had been placed there and he'd been told: take care of it. He looked at his hole in the paneling, at the gap where he always listened to the planet, and for the first time thought maybe he shouldn't listen to the wind today. Today he should listen to the silence.

He moved slowly closer—not right up against her, so as not to startle her, but close enough that Lumina could feel he was there.

“Then let it be quiet,” he said calmly, as if giving an order to Mars itself. “Let the wind walk across the sand on soft paws. Let the metal cool without creaking. Let there be as much quiet as we need.”

Lumina finally lifted her eyes and looked at him. A hint of a smile flickered in her gaze—not in her lips, but all through her body, as if she’d exhaled and realized she didn’t have to hold everything inside anymore.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “It matters to me that you know. Not so you can fix everything, but so you just know. And are here.”

Rund nodded. He didn’t say anything grand. Instead, he gently placed his paw over hers—not hard, just enough to feel the warmth that now held not only her, but someone else too.

“I’ll be here,” he said. “I’ll listen not to the wind, but to how it grows quieter here. I’ll cover the gaps so the cold can’t sneak in. I’ll share the water so you get a little more. And I’ll just sit here. So you feel you’re not alone.”

Lumina closed her eyes, drew in a breath, and suddenly smiled for real—quietly, soundlessly, but Rund saw it in the way her shoulders relaxed.

“You know,” she said very softly, “I’m not scared. Because if there’s going to be a little someone here, they don’t just need a house. They need a world where you are. A world where a grumpy cat teaches the wind to behave.”

Rund snorted, but there was no irritation in it—just an attempt to hide how fast his heart was beating.

“Well, I’m not exactly teaching it,” he muttered. “Just reminding who’s in charge here.”

They sat side by side while outside the sand whispered softly as it shifted, and the metal clicked as it cooled. And in this silence, which Rund was now trying to protect, something new appeared—not emptiness, but fullness. As if their small iron home held a little more life now, a life that didn’t yet know how to make noise but already knew how to be.

Lumina leaned against him carefully, not heavily, but as if she were looking for a support that would never fail. Rund tucked his side around her, shielding her from the draft that kept trying to slip through the old seams.

“We’ll manage,” he said quietly, more to himself than to her. “We’ll make a place here that’s warm and calm. A place where the little someone can grow up and one day run across the sand themselves, chasing stones.”

Lumina sighed, comfortably, like at home, and whispered:

“Yes. We will.”

Outside, the wind touched the sand, but this time not with a roar—gently, as if it had heard too and decided not to make a noise. And in that quiet rustle there was no threat—only a promise: the planet wouldn’t drive them away, the planet would wait, the planet would give them time to make their little corner the safest place in the entire universe.

When the Sky Drops Stones

Rund was used to the silence of Mars—to its dry rustle, to the way it settled on his fur like a warm blanket. He knew every shade of it: the moment when the wind was just starting to get angry, when the sand decided to play and crept across the floor in a thin snake like line, when the metal sighed as it cooled after a long day. But this silence he didn't know. It wasn't calm; it was taut, ringing, as if someone had twisted the air tight and was holding it, not letting it breathe.

He lifted his head, and in that same instant the sky split open. Not with lightning—there was no lightning here. But with something heavy, fiery, tearing downward, as if the universe itself had dropped something too big to hold. A streak of fire cut through the reddish darkness, dragging a tail of sparks and smoke behind it, and for a split second the world became blindingly bright—so bright that Rund was momentarily blinded and felt tiny, almost invisible against the enormity of it all.

Then came the sound. It didn't arrive from above—it was born right in his chest, in his bones, in the very heart of the planet. Low, thick, angry, it rolled across the ground, made the rover shudder as if it were trying to flinch away, and hit his ears so hard that everything inside him clenched. Rund didn't think—he just ran. His paws carried him by themselves, straight to where Lumina was, to where the thing lived that he had to protect, even at the cost of his own fur, his own silence, his own pride.

Lumina stood by the wall. Not curled into a ball, not with her eyes closed—she looked straight at the flash, as if she wanted to memorize it so she could later say: I saw the sky fall. There was no panic in her gaze—only the resolve not to fall apart, not to disappear, not to let fear take away what mattered most right now. Rund leaped, covered her with his body, pressed her to him as tightly as he could, as if with his own form he could shield not only her but also that tiny, quiet world growing inside her.

The ground struck from below—heavy, angry, as if offended that anyone dared to live on its surface. The rover swayed, the metal groaned, a tremor rolled across the floor, and dust rose in a wall—red, hot, furious. It hid the sky, hid the stars, even hid the smell of iron that had always lingered here like an old habit. Rund held Lumina close, feeling her breathing—fast but steady, as if she were deliberately keeping the rhythm so he wouldn't slip into panic.

“Hold on,” he gasped, though the words nearly drowned in the roar. “Hold on. We're here. We won't be swept away.”

When the dust began to settle, the rumble didn't vanish—it just grew quieter, like a beast that had tired of roaring but hadn't yet lain down. Rund cautiously lifted his head. In the distance, a fresh crater stood out in black. Its edges smoked; the stone melted and solidified in strange waves, as if the planet were trying to patch the wound but didn't know how to do it gracefully. A wave of heat and bitterness rose from there—the smell of foreign, unfamiliar destruction that made the fur on his back stand on end.

Lumina exhaled softly. Rund felt how her trembling was slowly changing—not from fear anymore, but from the sheer amount of strength she was holding inside to keep from falling apart.

“It fell,” she whispered. “But not on us.”

Rund nodded, as if this were the most important truth that needed to be spoken aloud to become real.

“Not on us,” he repeated, firmer than he felt. “We held on.”

He looked at her, at her slightly lowered shoulders, at how she was trying to appear calm, and suddenly understood: right now, he couldn’t just sit and wait for the tremors to pass. Right now, he had to do something that would give them back the feeling of a world where they could breathe.

Rund moved away slowly, never letting Lumina out of his sight, and went to the hatch. It was still vibrating from the impact, as if it too were reeling from what had happened. He pushed it, not hard, but with certainty, and looked outside. The sky was torn—not forever, but for this night it had become alien, with dark gaps where smooth bands of stars had been before. Yet the stars still burned—stubborn, tiny, as if they had lit up on purpose to say: we’re here, we didn’t abandon you.

Rund stepped outside without looking back, knowing Lumina was watching him. He stood at the edge of the rover, lifted his head, and suddenly spoke—not in a whisper, not in a grumble, but loudly, so the words wouldn’t get lost in the wind but would fly upward, to those stubborn stars.

“Hey,” he called out, his voice trembling but not breaking. “You up there. You see everything. Let that stone have fallen, let the ground have shaken, let the dust have covered the sky. But let us be all right. Let Lumina and the one growing inside her be safe. Let the wind not turn cruel, let the sand not sting, let this house just stand and not fall apart. I’m not asking for miracles. I’m just asking... let there be quiet. Let there be calm. Let us be able to breathe.”

The words hung in the air, mingling with the cooling wind, and Rund thought the sky listened just a little. The stars seemed to grow brighter, as if nodding: we heard.

He lowered his head, drew in a breath, and suddenly felt the fear that had been gripping his chest loosen its hold—just a little. It didn’t leave; it stayed there, hiding in the shadows, twitching its whiskers, reminding it was present. But now it wasn’t in charge. What mattered more was that they were alive, they were together, and the little one inside Lumina was still quietly living, knowing nothing of meteorites, of fear, or of how thin the thread of their life had stretched.

Rund returned to the hatch, paused at the threshold, and softly called out:

“Come here. Don’t be afraid. This is still our home. And it’s holding on.”

Lumina came out. She moved carefully, as if any sudden motion might wake that roar again. But she came. She stood beside Rund, lifted her head, and looked at the stars. Her nose twitched slightly, catching the scents of cooling sand and the distant crater.

“They heard,” she said quietly, almost in a whisper. “I can feel it. They won’t leave us alone.”

Rund snorted, but there was no mockery in it—only an attempt to hide how fast his heart was beating.

“Well, they’re stars,” he muttered. “It’s their job to watch. The important thing is for them to keep guarding too.”

Lumina gave a small smile—not wide, as if a smile were too fragile for this evening. She leaned against Rund, not heavily, but enough to feel his warmth, his breath, his certainty, which mattered more than any words right now.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “For not pretending nothing happened. For going out and asking. For not leaving me alone with this fear.”

Rund closed his eyes, inhaling the scent of sand, dust, and her fur—the most familiar smell on this alien planet.

“I’ll never leave you,” he said calmly. “Even if the sky falls. Even if the ground shakes. Even if all of Mars decides we don’t belong here. I’ll stand right beside you. And I’ll keep asking the stars not to abandon us. And if they don’t hear—I’ll hold the sky myself, for as long as I can.”

They stood shoulder to shoulder while the sand whispered softly as it shifted and the metal cooled with quiet clicks, as if sighing after what it had endured. The crater in the distance still smoked, but its glow grew dimmer, and the darkness around it was no longer so impenetrable. And in that darkness, the stars burned steadily, as if promising: we’re watching. We remember. We won’t let anything fall on you.

Lumina sighed, and in that sigh there was no despair—only relief, quiet and careful, like the first step after a long stretch of fear.

“You know,” she said very softly, “when everything is crashing and roaring, the most important thing is who’s standing beside you. Who doesn’t run away. Who looks up at the sky and asks for your sake. Who just holds you with their side so you feel: you’re not alone.”

Rund tilted his head slightly, touched her ear with his own for just an instant, as if placing an invisible mark: I’m here.

“Yes,” he whispered. “And even more important is that soon there will be more of us. And that someone should know: there’s a cat here who won’t let the wind be too cruel. And a cat who knows how to make silence feel warm. And together, they can hold an entire world.”

The wind touched their fur, not roughly, but gently, as if apologizing for letting the stone fall. The sand rustled, the stars shone, and in this night’s symphony—where echoes of the impact still rang—another melody was already breaking through: quiet, homelike, full of care and hope.

A Warm Corner

The morning didn't come gently, not in the cozy way of a home, but with a prickly wind that poked at the gaps, as if checking where things had grown thinner now. Rund woke first. He didn't jump up, didn't rush to the hatch—he just opened his eyes and lay there for a long while, listening to the rover sigh. The metal still remembered the impact: it clicked in one place, creaked in another, as if complaining about being shaken. But the most important thing was that it was still standing. It hadn't fallen apart. It still held a roof over their heads.

Lumina slept beside him, pressed against his side, and in her sleep she tucked her paws in slightly, as if trying to make herself smaller—to take up less space and disturb the world a little less. Rund watched her and felt not fear rising inside him, but something stubborn and warm: the desire to make this place more than just a shelter, to turn it into a spot where that tiny someone could grow up safely.

He got up carefully, trying not to make the floor creak, and went to the nearest gap. Cold seeped through it, and the wind whispered something sharp, as if wanting to remind him: I'm here, I haven't left. Rund crouched down and touched the edges of the paneling—the metal was rough, with jagged bits, as if it were trying to grip onto something itself, to keep from coming apart. He looked at the gap, then at the pile of debris in the corner—scraps of iron, edges melted by heat, old panels that had once seemed like nothing but trash. Now they looked different. Now they were shields.

Lumina woke up while he was dragging the first piece over. She sat up, stretched, shook the last bits of yesterday's sand from her fur, and looked at Rund as if she'd understood right away what he had in mind.

"You want to cover everything up," she said calmly, without surprise. "So the cold can't sneak in."

Rund snorted, but there was no irritation in it—just an attempt to hide how serious he was being.

"I don't want it to be the boss in here," he muttered. "Let it wander outside if it likes. But in here, I want it warm."

They started working. Not in a rush, not in a flurry, but as if every movement had to be right, because silence depended on it. Rund dragged over the scraps of paneling, heavy and awkward, while Lumina picked out stones—not any stones, but ones that lay flat, as if they themselves wanted to become part of the wall. They fitted the panels into the gaps, held them in place with stones, tucked rags underneath so the metal wouldn't rattle. Every time they managed to close another hole, Rund seemed to stand a little taller, as if telling the world: see, I know how to hold things together.

Sometimes the metal wouldn't behave, would slip out of place, and then Rund hissed at it like it was a stubborn cat, and Lumina would laugh softly—not at him, but at how seriously he was fighting with the iron.

"It's not its fault," she'd say, picking up another flat stone. "It's just tired."

“Let it be tired outside,” Rund grumbled, though without real anger now. “In here, it needs to hold on.”

By noon, they’d covered the biggest gaps. It grew quieter inside the rover. The wind no longer whistled through the seams; it only murmured somewhere far away, as if realizing it wasn’t welcome here. Rund sat down on the floor, stretched his legs out, and suddenly felt how the warmth that had been gathering inside him spread outward and made this corner almost cozy.

Lumina sat beside him, leaned her side against his, and sighed—not from exhaustion, but calmly, as if for the first time in a while she could finally exhale without tension.

“Now we can breathe here,” she said. “And not worry that the cold will creep up on us.”

Rund nodded, looked at their makeshift wall, and realized it wasn’t just scraps of iron and stones. It was their protection. Their promise: we won’t let the world break what matters to us.

Then they sat in that warm corner and watched the light fall across the floor in slanted stripes. In this silence, which was no longer empty but filled with the weight of their own efforts, Lumina suddenly said quietly:

“We should give him a name. Or her. So that when they appear, we’ll already know what to call them.”

Rund glanced at her out of the corner of his eye.

“A name,” he repeated, as if tasting the word. “What if we get it wrong? What if it doesn’t suit them?”

Lumina gave a small smile.

“Then we’ll think of another. Or we’ll call them whatever they like best. But let there be something. Let them have a sound, a word we can use when we want to call to them.”

And so they started going through names. Not grand ones, not heroic ones, but names that held warmth, and sand, and wind, and the quiet rustle of paws on metal.

“Maybe Sandflake,” Lumina suggested. “Because they’re so small, and everything around them is such a huge world.”

Rund made a face, as if he’d tasted something sour.

“Sandflake... sounds like a gust of wind could blow them away. They should be sturdy. Even if they’re small, they should be strong—like that stone you dragged in yesterday.”

“Then Pebble,” Lumina smiled.

“Too hard,” Rund muttered. “Sounds like they’re all sharp edges. And they... they should be soft. For now, at least.”

“Then Fluff,” Lumina said, and there was so much tenderness in her voice that Rund couldn’t object right away.

“Fluff...” he drawled. “Well, only if they really are fluffy. What if their fur lies flat, like mine?”

“Then they’ll be Fluff who hasn’t fluffed up yet,” Lumina answered calmly. “They’ll still be Fluff.”

Rund wanted to argue, wanted to say the name should be more serious, but then he saw the way Lumina looked at her belly, as if listening to something very quiet, and he realized that seriousness wasn’t the point here. The point was that the name should carry warmth.

“All right,” he muttered. “Let it be Fluff. But if they grow up to be big and fierce, we’ll say it was just a temporary name. For when they were little.”

Lumina laughed softly, soundlessly, her shoulders just shaking a little.

“Agreed. Temporary. Until they tell us what they want to be called.”

But then they came up with a few more names, as if they wanted to have options, as if they wanted the little one to have many doors and be able to choose the one that fit best.

“Wind,” Lumina said. “So they’ll know how to hear the sand whispering.”

“Thunder,” Rund rumbled. “So no one thinks they’re weak.”

“Spark,” Lumina added. “So there’s always something bright inside them.”

“Shadow,” Rund said. “So they know how to hide when they need to.”

They argued, but not angrily—the way people argue when the argument itself is just another way of saying: it matters to me what they become. Rund wanted the little one to be strong, to know how to take a hit, not to be scared by the roar. Lumina wanted them to be sensitive, to notice the small joys—a stone with veins in it, a warm corner, the quiet rustle of sand.

At some point, Rund realized he was smiling. Not a wide smile, not one meant for everyone to see, but a small one, just for himself and for Lumina.

“You know,” he said softly, “let’s just go with Fluff. Just Fluff. Because that’s what they are right now—small and warm, and they need a name that makes them feel like they’re already home.”

Lumina nodded, and there was so much gratitude in her eyes that Rund felt a little awkward and quickly added, as if making excuses:

“But if later they want to be Thunder, I won’t argue. They can be Thunder. Or Spark. Or they can pick a name all on their own.”

“What matters is that they’ll have us,” Lumina said quietly. “And this corner. And the stones you piled up. And the silence you’re guarding so carefully.”

Rund looked at their wall of scraps and stones, at the gaps that no longer let the cold through, at the warm light lying across the floor, and suddenly understood: a home isn't just walls. A home is knowing there's someone beside you who won't let the world break you. And it's also doing everything you can to protect the ones you care about.

They sat a little longer while the sand outside whispered as it shifted, and the metal cooled with quiet clicks, as if telling them its old stories. And in this quiet conversation between iron and sand, Rund suddenly felt that fear hadn't vanished forever, but had crept off somewhere far away—someplace where it couldn't reach their warm corner.

"Tomorrow," he said calmly, "we'll cover another gap. The one by the hatch. So if the wind gets angry, it won't be able to slip inside."

Lumina smiled.

"And I'll find another stone. A flat one, so it lies straight."

"And a rag," Rund added. "To keep it from rattling."

"And another name," Lumina said softly. "Just in case."

Rund snorted, but this time with a smile in it.

"Just not Thunder. Let it stay Fluff for now."

"All right," Lumina agreed. "For now, Fluff."

And in that "for now" there wasn't doubt—it was a promise: they would keep thinking, keep arguing, keep searching for that one word that could hold their whole little world. And as long as they did that, as long as they sat side by side, covering gaps and choosing names, the world outside grew a little less frightening, because inside there was warmth, there was care, there were two hearts beating close together, keeping the cold from slipping in.

The Stone That Glowed from Within

The days passed, and the rover slowly stopped being just a box of iron and started feeling like a home. Every time Rund walked past another gap, he seemed to check it with his gaze: was it holding? Had the cold crept in? Was the wind whispering anything cheeky through the seam? Lumina collected stones—not just any stones, but ones that lay flat, as if they themselves wanted to become part of the wall. They were almost used to this rhythm now: a step, picking up a stone, a quiet conversation where there was no hurry, only the certainty that they were doing things right.

That day, the wind wasn't angry—it was thoughtful. It didn't fling sand around; it shifted it gently, as if sorting through beads. Rund stepped outside, not to escape the silence, but to check how the sand was behaving near the crater—whether it was creeping too close, whether it threatened to bury their cozy corner. Lumina didn't follow; she stayed inside, where it was calm and warm, where the metal no longer creaked without reason. But she watched Rund from the hatch, and there was so much trust in her gaze that he straightened his shoulders a little, as if wanting to show: I'm here, I've got this.

Rund walked slowly, sniffing the air—the bitterness that still lingered from the fallen stone, the dry warmth of the sand, something new and barely noticeable, as if the planet were quietly whispering in his ear. And then he froze. Not from fear, not from a rustle, but from the light.

Among the reddish sand, among the gray and brown stones, lay one that was different. It didn't sparkle in the sun like a shard of glass. It seemed to glow from within—a soft, cool light, as if a tiny star lived inside it, one that didn't want to be loud, just wanted to warm things gently. Rund crouched down, carefully nudged the stone with his paw, and turned it over. The underside was ordinary—rough, warm from the sun, unremarkable. But when he turned it to the right side, it began to glow again, as if whispering: I'm here, take me.

Rund didn't spend long thinking. He picked up the stone, pressed it to his chest so the wind wouldn't knock it from his paws, and walked back, feeling as if that quiet light were lighting his way.

“Look,” he said, rushing inside and nearly brushing the hatch edge with his shoulder. “I found it. It glows—not from outside, but from within. Like someone lit a little flame inside and said: let there be warmth.”

Lumina tilted her head, looked at the stone, then at Rund, as if checking whether he was tired, whether he might be imagining things. But then she reached out, touched the stone—and her eyes grew wider.

“It really glows,” she whispered. “Not brightly, not boldly, but... like it knows it doesn't have to shout to be noticed.”

Rund sat down beside her, placed the stone between them, and it shimmered softly, almost as if it were breathing.

“Blyx,” Lumina suddenly said, not looking at Rund but as if listening to the word itself. “Let's call it Blyx. Because it glimmers, it glows, but it doesn't blind. Because it has light, but no cold.”

Rund grunted, as if trying to pretend the name was too simple, but the word had already settled on his tongue and didn't want to leave.

"Blyx," he repeated, tasting it. "Yes. It fits. It doesn't shout, doesn't demand attention, but if you look closely, it's the most noticeable one. Like someone who sits quietly in the corner and still makes the world a little brighter."

Lumina smiled, and there was so much warmth in that smile that even the stone seemed to shine a little brighter.

"Let it be Blyx," she said quietly. "And let it be our talisman. Let it guard our corner while... while our little one isn't here yet."

And in that moment, something changed—not outside, but inside. Lumina suddenly froze, her eyes widened slightly, and then she slowly lowered her paws to the floor, as if searching for something to hold on to. Rund jumped up, but he didn't rush toward her; he sat down beside her, holding his breath, as if afraid to startle this moment.

"What?" he whispered, his voice so quiet it was almost inaudible. "What's happening?"

Lumina looked at him, and there was no fear in her gaze. There was silence—deep, calm, like the quiet before dawn.

"He's here," she said, so simply, as if she were telling him that sand had started falling outside instead of rain, and that was just how things were. "He's here. He decided it was time."

Rund froze, and it felt as if the whole world froze with him. Even the stone stopped shimmering for a split second, as if listening. And then it glowed again—softly, confidently, as if saying: I'm here, I'm holding the light.

Blyx was born.

He didn't cry out, didn't demand attention, didn't push his way into the world—he simply arrived, quietly and calmly, as if he knew he'd been expected. Lumina breathed steadily, and in that breath was strength—not the kind that breaks things, but the kind that protects. Rund sat beside her, motionless, only his whiskers trembling slightly, as if trying to memorize this scent, this light, this moment, so that later, when everything became ordinary again, he could close his eyes and feel it once more: he's here, he's born, he's ours.

When it was all over, Lumina gave a tired but happy smile and looked at Rund.

"See," she whispered. "He's here. And he's so quiet, as if he understood right away that we need to keep the peace here."

Rund nodded, not trusting his voice, and gently touched the little bundle lying beside Lumina. Blyx moved slightly, as if testing the world with his nose, and then pressed it against her fur, as if saying: it's warm here, this is my home.

The stone shimmered quietly beside them, as if rejoicing. Rund looked at it, then at Lumina, then at Blyx—and suddenly felt his chest grow tight with something huge and warm, something too big to fit into words.

“Now we have Blyx,” he said quietly, as if afraid the word would break if he spoke it too loudly. “And he’s exactly as he should be. Not loud, not bold, but ours. Our own.”

Lumina stretched out and gently touched his paw with hers, and in that touch was everything: gratitude, weariness, happiness, and a promise: we made it.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Our Blyx. And now he has a home. He has us. And this stone that glows, as if it’s saying: I’m here, I’ll keep you safe.”

They sat like that, the three of them, while the sand outside whispered as it shifted, and the metal cooled with quiet clicks, as if telling them its old stories. And in this quiet conversation between iron and sand, in the soft glow of the stone, in this tiny bundle already pressing trustingly against Lumina, there was everything they needed: a home, warmth, and that very light that didn’t dazzle but warmed.

The wind touched their fur, not roughly, but gently, as if apologizing for all its earlier gusts. The sand rustled, the stars burned bright, and in their little corner, one more heart had appeared—quiet, warm, their own.

The World's First Whisper

The silence inside the rover had changed. Before, it had been wary, as if listening to every rustle from outside, waiting for a trick. Now something soft, warm, and alive had taken root in it. It didn't chase sounds away—it wrapped itself around them, hushed them gently so as not to startle what mattered most.

Blyx lay against Lumina's chest, curled into a tiny ball, breathing so evenly it was as if he already knew: it's safe here. His fur wasn't like Rund's—not coarse, not sleek, but fluffy, as if someone had sprinkled a little stardust over him. Lumina sat almost motionless, only occasionally turning her head just a little to look at Rund, and there was so much happiness in her gaze that he looked away, as if afraid it might blind him.

Rund didn't know what to do with this happiness. It was too big for his usual grumpiness, too fragile for his heavy paws. He moved around the rover, checking the gaps, touching the stones, as if needing to make sure everything was holding together, that the world wouldn't fall apart right now, when someone had appeared who couldn't yet hold on by himself.

Then he sat down beside them, carefully, so as not to make the floor sway, and looked at Blyx. The little one opened his eyes—not wide, not like an adult, but as if checking: is there really light here? And there was—the stone glowed softly nearby. Rund noticed it right away: every time Blyx stirred just a little, the light in the stone grew a bit brighter, as if the stone recognized him, as if it were saying: I'm here, I'm keeping watch.

“Look,” Rund said quietly, leaning down so low that his whiskers almost brushed the floor. “See? The stone glows. Not just from the sun. It's like it can feel you. Like it knows you're here and wants you to have light, even if it's dark outside.”

Blyx didn't answer—he couldn't speak yet—but he stretched his nose toward the light, as if trying to memorize the scent: warm stone, quiet dust, the smell of home. Rund smiled—just a little, at the corners of his mouth, so he wouldn't look too silly.

“Not everything here is what it seems,” he went on, as if now he finally had a reason to explain the world. “Take the sand, for example. It doesn't just lie there. It lives. It warms up during the day, cools down at night, and when the wind comes, it starts to whisper. Not words—just sounds, like it's telling old stories. And it's important to listen. Not to understand them, but to know: the world is here, it's breathing, it hasn't forgotten us.”

Lumina gave a soft snort, but there was no mockery in it—only tenderness.

“He doesn't understand words yet,” she whispered. “But he understands voices.”

Rund frowned a little, as if offended at being corrected, but softened right away.

“Then let him understand voices,” he agreed. “Let him know my voice. And yours. And the whisper of the sand. Even the creak of the metal—that's part of home too.”

He reached out a paw and gently touched Blyx's tiny ear—just for an instant, as if placing an invisible mark: I'm here.

“And the wind,” he continued, calmer now, as if talking not to the kitten but to himself, “the wind can be cruel. It throws sand around, scratches the metal, wants us to be afraid. But we won't be. We'll listen to it, but we won't let it break our corner. We'll keep the door closed and the silence warm.”

Blyx shifted a little, pressed his nose into Lumina's fur, and went still again, as if saying: I'm listening. And at that moment, the stone flared a little brighter—not sharply, not dazzlingly, but as if nodding: I'm listening too.

Rund looked at it and suddenly felt his chest grow tight with something huge and calm.

“It's a pity there are no mice here,” he muttered, as if excusing the emptiness of the world. “I'd show you how to track them. How to freeze when the sand barely moves, how to wait for the shadow to tremble. How to understand the world not with your eyes, but with your ears and nose. You'd learn all that here...”

Lumina gently touched his paw with hers.

“But we have sand that whispers,” she said. “And a wind that teaches patience. And metal that remembers every step we take. And a stone that glows when you're near. And we're here. That's enough for him to grow into something real.”

Rund wanted to grumble that “real” meant someone who could hunt, but then he realized she was right. Real was someone who knew how to guard the silence, who felt when the stone began to glow, who heard the whisper of the sand and knew that those beside him wouldn't let the wind grow too fierce.

“All right,” he grumbled, though the grumpiness had left his voice. “Let him be real in his own way. Let him be Blyx. Let him be the one who makes this stone shine brighter.”

Blyx moved again, just a little, as if recognizing the name, as if testing it with his senses. And the stone answered once more—with a soft, warm light, as if saying: yes, that's him.

Lumina smiled—tired, happy, as if all the worries had suddenly shrunk and curled up in a corner, no longer getting in the way of breathing.

“He's already real,” she whispered. “He's here. He's ours.”

Rund nodded, not trusting his voice, and sat close to Lumina so Blyx could feel not just her warmth, but his too—a little rough, dependable, a bit grumpy, but his own.

They sat like that, the three of them, while the sand outside whispered as it shifted, telling its old stories, and the metal cooled with quiet clicks, as if sighing after a long day. And in this quiet conversation between iron and sand, in the gentle glow of the stone, in this tiny bundle already pressing trustingly against Lumina, there was everything they needed: a home, warmth, and that very light that didn't dazzle but warmed.

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