

WonderLife

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I looked around quickly, scanning the block for anything out of place. I didn't see anything that seemed like it didn't belong, but to be safe I checked again. Sure enough I saw a glint of something shiny that definitely didn't belong on a dusty deserted street like this one. I walked closer to it carefully and saw that it was an invisible flight power-up. I looked around, worried that the area around it was snared, so whoever goes to the power-up gets caught and disqualified for 10 minutes. I picked up a small stone from the side of the street, tossed it into the land surrounding the artifact and waited, poised to run if the ground started to explode. But nothing happened. I smiled to myself and walked towards the artifact. I was almost there when the world around me dissolved into blackness.

I removed my headset to the sight of Ryder glaring angrily at me with a plug dangling from his hand.

"Seriously? Are you really playing with your friends in WonderLife right now? You are supposed to play in competitive mode to earn notes which we can change into money for our family!" He yelled angrily.

I scowled and my hands balled into fists. "I was about to grab a valuable power-up that I could have sold in the Dark World for lots of money, but I guess that's NOT gonna happen thanks to you pulling the plug on my suit!" I exclaimed, just as angry as he was.

He groaned and said, "Fiona. I have lots of expectations of you now. Ever since Mom and Dad died in that crash, I have had to take care of you and Sophie. The way we have been living is off my small salaries, because you can't seem to hold on to a job and Sophie is too young to be employed. At least, you could try to win in competitive mode in WonderLife because that gets us money. Playing in competitive mode is more productive than playing dumb games with your friends for fun. Fiona, you are supposed to help me here. I can't support all three of us alone, I need your help too."

"Ryder, look, I'm sorry that I can't keep a job I am too young to be doing in the first place, and I can't play in competitive mode yet. That place is for the pros. I am not that good. We are never going to win enough money for rent or food off of me trying to play well. I need to practice with my friends to get good enough to play in competitive mode." I responded heatedly. He expects way too much of me. I'm only 13. I shouldn't have to help keep my family afloat.

"I understand Fiona, I really do. And I'm sorry. But this is the way that it has to be." Ryder said softly. I looked up at him and saw in his eyes that he really did understand. So I nodded and said, "Okay, I'll try my best, I promise."

He nodded and whispered, "Now, you should go to bed my little firecracker." I hugged him and went to bed.

The next day I skipped school to find another job and to play in competitive mode in WonderLife. Even though Ryder had tough expectations for me, he still meant well in his heart, and I knew this. That's why I decided to skip my education to help him out. He's had a tough time ever since my parents died. All of us have, in different ways. I follow his lead because he is successful at keeping Sophie, himself, and me safe even though he is technically too young to watch over minors on his own.

Later that night, when I arrived at home satisfied and hungry, I went to Ryder's room to ask him what I should make for dinner, and I saw him sitting on his bed, in his WonderLife suit playing, even though competitive mode only plays during the day.

Then a thought struck me. What if he was playing with his friends like he scolded me for doing just last night? I decided to check it out, but not by pulling the plug on his WonderLife suit. I'm not that mean. Instead, I decided to hack into his game. I ran back to my room to put on my WonderLife suit and spy on my older brother. I hacked into his game under a false name and got ready to play.

Inside my brother's world, we were playing on a brightly lit, clean, city street, closer to the heart of the city where all the rich people hung out. I was right, this was a scavenger hunt with his friends and not something that helps support our life. This made me fume with anger, but I willed myself to calm down for the time being and play it smart. The best way to do this is to beat my brother at his own game and confront him about it after. I scanned the street and immediately saw three different power-ups on this block. None of them were amazing, but they would all help me win

this game. I proceeded cautiously, getting slightly excited, because there is nothing that I enjoy more than a good competition with people that I care about. I went for the power-up closest to me and saw that it is a speed artifact, one that permits me to go much faster than I normally can. I checked for traps and saw none, so I darted in quickly to grab it. Once I picked it up, it disappeared from my hand and went into my inventory with a small "Ding!" I smiled and ran off toward the next power-up. My radar said that I had to find 20 artifacts to finish the game. Simple. I grabbed the other two on the block without any problems at all, and headed around the corner to a more populated area. Those places normally had double, if not triple the amount of artifacts, due to the fact that they are harder to find with more people.

I arrived on a block that was as crowded as the doctor's office is whenever there is a pandemic of any sort. This was bound to have around 15 power-ups on it, and some of them would be super powerful. I scanned the block as best I could and spotted only one shiny spot. All of the artifact were shiny enough for people to spot them if they knew how to do it. I walked quickly towards the area where I saw the glint of a possible power-up and looked closer. It was a trap, which meant that something good was hidden nearby. I smirked and checked out the trap. It was one that was activated when somebody stepped onto it. I think it's one where arrows or some other sort of small weapon shoots out to kill your avatar. I chose my speed avatar and decided to risk it and go as fast as I could. I knew it was a risky strategy, but I was getting sick of playing this game. I activated my speed artifact and ran as fast as I could past the trap. I passed it by the skin of my teeth, and saw something that made my jaw drop open, both for my avatar, and my real life body. It was a bundle of 20 artifacts. I could win with one grab! The artifacts were okay, not the best, but pretty good, and I grabbed it with a grin as I heard the signature "Ding" from my inventory, saying I had gained more power-ups. Then I heard bells ringing, saying that the hunt was over and there was a winner. I grinned before I realized that this meant that I would have to stand up to my brother now. I left the game, determined to speak my mind for once, instead of just agreeing to whatever he says.

I quickly changed out of my WonderLife suit and walked to Ryder's room. He was still in his WonderLife suit, but he no longer had his headset on. I looked at him and took a deep breath.

"Were you seriously just playing WonderLife for fun?" I asked fiercely.

He looked guiltily at the ground before looking up at me and saying, "I know that I told you not to do it, but that doesn't mean that I can't. I'm older than-"

"Just because you're older than me doesn't mean that you can set high expectations for me and then not follow them yourself, you little hypocrite!" I interrupted fuming. "I'm 13 and you are telling me to get a job, go to school, and win us money in a game against pros. And then you go and break your own rule about not playing WonderLife recreationally after lecturing me about it last night. That doesn't even make any sense."

"I know, and I'm sorry Fiona. I just-"

"You don't get to say you're sorry. You are a hypocrite who can barely manage to take care of us." I said heatedly. I knew immediately after I said it that I had gone too far, but I didn't care at the moment. I just walked away and shut myself in my room, disappointed and shaking with anger.

The next morning, things were tense. I just grabbed my stuff and got ready to go, but Ryder stopped me.

"Hey, Fiona. I know what I did last night was wrong. And I'm so sorry. I just wanted you to know that." he hesitantly said.

I turned around, knowing that I couldn't leave without resolving this. "It's okay. I was wrong too last night. I shouldn't have said those things about you. If we can find a way to work this out, I want to." I responded, swallowing my pride.

"We can work out something." He said with a soft smile. I smiled back and walked towards the couch.

"I think that we should come up with new expectations for now. We should be able to play WonderLife recreationally once a week. Both of us need it. You know that, right?" I asked, a smile breaking out on my face.

"Yeah, and I won't expect as much from you anymore. We should be able to get by without you playing WonderLife competitively. You should grow up like a normal kid. I love you, Firecracker." he said affectionately. I grinned and hugged him back.

The End