

The wind howled and branches shook as an endless flurry of ice and hail raced through the air. Step by step, a rotund figure was making his way through the frozen hell; accompanied only by the crunching of snow beneath his feet. Although silhouetted by the surrounding white, what appeared to be a dark and mysterious figure was actually a lone Munchlax, panting as he shielded his eyes from the elements. While his eyes were vulnerable, the rest of his body was well protected by his thick fat which rippled slightly as small chunks of hail pelted his flesh.

Disappointment was all that that could be found smeared across his face, a faint cloud of fog radiating from his mouth with each raspy grunt. His last hunting session of the year had reaped no rewards, the freak blizzard having forced him to return home empty handed. An agitated growl seeped through his lips at the thought of having to ration his food even more so than before.

While on his trek back home, Munchlax had succumbed to a bit of bewilderment as his vision and hearing were both reduced to nothing by the icy winds. His remaining senses were next to useless, providing no help as he stumbled onward, trying to follow the tracks he had left previously the best he could. Snow covered bushes and the bare branches of trees were all that seemed to surround him in what appeared to be a lifeless eternity.

In his delirious state, the sounds of voices had begun to silently whisper in his head. Unseen shadows flashed in the corners of his eyes, sending his head into a spiral as he tried to follow them, scanning the area frantically.

Nothing revealed itself to him. Munchlax shook his head and smacked himself gently on the face, aware of the mind tricks that could only be caused by the devastating effects of an empty belly. With a deep breath to regain his composure, Munchlax continued on. Only for him to trip over a previously unnoticed bump in the road. Munchlax fell with a shattering smack; his body sprawled out as he landed face first into the blistering ice. He shakily pushed himself up, spitting out bits of snow in the process. Turning his body around, Munchlax stared wide eyed at the long, thin, snow covered lump that sat before him. The figure was drenched in white, with two brown tufts of fur poking out from where he had tripped over it. Standing up all the way, Munchlax cautiously began to huddle closer to the unknown mound. While hard to spot through the inch or two of snow that shrouded it, a closer inspection revealed that it was actually shivering, which sent Munchlax into a speedy waddle at the thought of an actual living thing having to brace this storm unprotected.

Appearing over the body, Munchlax hastily brushed off the snow, revealing more brown fur until finally uncovering the head, a green strap tightly secured around the neck. Munchlax looked around, almost expecting to see someone rush over to him so they could claim their child, as if an abandoned baby had been left on his entrance. Whether it was a man, woman, or child, what was certain was that leaving an actual living thing to freeze in the wilderness was out of the question.

Munchlax picked up the newly found Furret and wrapped as much of her body around his neck as possible. Finding his footprints once more, Munchlax preceded forward, a small sigh of relief formed by the discovery of how light her body actually was. The remainder of the hike home went on with few

other distractions. Upon seeing the grey entrance to his cave through squinting eyes, Munchlax smiled wearily, happy to soon be back home.

His foot prints echoed when he stepped onto the rocky floor of the cave. A heavenly orange glow was radiating from the far side of the cave, filling it with awe inspiring warmth. Munchlax waddled closer to the fire, setting down his new acquaintance gently next to him as well as removing the green bag from around her neck and placing it on his other side. He began to raise his arms closer to the flames when a sudden whisper caused his entire body to jump. Munchlax geared his head to the left where he found a Litwick glaring at him with arms crossed. Munchlax scratched his head dimly, trying to piece together the issue of the day. They stared at each other for several intense seconds before Litwick let out a sigh and huddled over to where the Furret was still shivering on the ground. Munchlax's eyes lit up instantly when the light in the attic finally clicked on. Standing himself up, Munchlax began to explain his past predicament and how he had come across the lone Furret and brought her home. Litwick listened silently. When Munchlax had finished, Litwick made his way to her head, grabbed her by the ears, and began pulling feebly. Seeing the struggle, Munchlax went up and pushed him out of the way, taking hold around her neck and looking back at Litwick blankly for further instruction. With a stubby hand, Litwick pointed to the far cave wall where a single stray bed of leaves and branches could be found close to the fire. Munchlax obediently did as he was told, dragging her body and throwing it atop the sticks. Litwick looked over to the bag briefly before moving in closer to the bed. Looking up to Munchlax, he requested that he go fetch a blanket or two from which they had stolen from a nearby town some time ago. With an improper salute, Munchlax turned himself around and walked off to fulfill his newest mission, giving Litwick time to closely examine the Furret's body for any permanent harm.

Her fur had become damp where the remaining bits of snow had melted. The fire must have felt like a godsend for her, seeing as how her shivering had secluded slightly since entering the cave. Looking over her body, Litwick failed to find any signs of frostbite, concluding that she mustn't have been out for very long.

Before any further analysis could be made, the booming steps of Munchlax were quick to interfere with Litwick's concentration. Munchlax waddled forth, as ungraceful as ever, dumping a pile of wool blankets in front of Litwick's feet, a bag of potato chips hanging from the satisfied grin that lined his face. Litwick sighed and took the blankets into his hands, careful as to keep them away from the flame atop his head. Walking towards Furret, he threw the blankets up and over her body, causing it to flutter down on top of her, as if delivered by an angel. Furret instinctively huddled herself tightly in the new found warmth, her previously scrunched up face loosening.

She resembled a small child who had been tucked away snugly in bed, a steady rise and decline appearing over her chest with each soft breath. Litwick watched sternly, scanning over her body time and time again to assure that she was, in fact, recovering splendidly. Munchlax stared at her casually, focusing more on the bag of chips in his hands.

With a sudden clap of his hands, Litwick looked up to Munchlax cheerfully before announcing his departure to bed for a midday nap. Waddling off to the far corner where he slept, Munchlax was left alone to stare at the Furret who had yet to even open her eyes.

There was an interesting peacefulness about her, a surprising tranquility that was uncommon to those who had just been rescued from a snow storm. As his potato chip bag was gradually depleted, Munchlax's focus had unknowingly gravitated closer towards her and her subtle easiness, strengthening to the point where it was a literal struggle to pry his eyes from her. Her body was long and sleek, her face shrouded with an undeniable sweetness that could be seen even through closed eyes. Munchlax soon found himself wishing that those eyes would open, revealing to him the lively stare that would warm his heart more than any bleak cave. The stare that would promise the companionship of a living thing that wouldn't nag or complain about food rations or snoring. The stare that would glitter as she smiled at him and the time they spent together. The sort of stare that the more that he fantasied about it, the more that he realized he was in honest to god love.

Munchlax's train of thought had unsurprisingly lost its way somewhere deep in fantasy land where his day dreams were suddenly torn apart by a very faint whimper. Shaking his head back to reality, Munchlax looked down and felt his heart flutter in his chest at what he saw. Furret, in all her grace and glory, had awakened, revealing to him the almond brown eyes that he had so patiently waited for. Her mouth opened wide to let loose an exhausted yawn. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she groggily looked around the room until finally coming in contact with Munchlax's gaze. Feeling her eyes pierce his, Munchlax quickly turned his head down towards the floor, locking his arms behind his back and kicking his feet at the ground modestly. Furret tilted her head, her brain still trying to warm up after her frosty sleep.

Furret steadily began to stand herself up, only for Munchlax to hastily waddle towards her and sit her down again, insisting that she should stay in bed and rest a little longer. Too tired for any trouble, Furret did as she was told and laid her body all the way down, positioning her head atop her arms. Letting out another yawn, Furret shortly began to doze off once more before being shaken awake by a loud growl.

Munchlax began to rub his stomach, thinking that it was him that made the noise. When the same growl erupted again, both Munchlax and Furret look down at her tummy. Placing her paws over her midsection, Furret was actually able to feel her own stomach rumbling as it let loose one last growl. Looking back up to Munchlax, Furret couldn't help but giggle at the discovery of the culprit.

Munchlax returned the smile. He stood there motionlessly, allowing himself a brief moment for thought, when he suddenly gestured Furret to stay seated before turning around and waddling off once more to the deeper parts of the cave. Leaving before Furret could say anything, she was left alone in the unfamiliar cavern. She twiddled her paws in anticipation, thoughtfully staring at the shadows that danced out from below the fire. There was an undeniable nagging that was itching in the back of her head, the all but familiar sensation that something was amiss. When she went to scratch at her neck, it hit her as if she was in the middle of a boxing ring. Feeling her heart skip a beat, Furret began to frantically search around the nest, desperately looking for the green bag that she swore was around her neck not

long ago. Noticing her heart's sudden increase in speed, Furret took a moment to take in a deep, drawn out breath in an attempt to calm herself. Closing her eyes, she began to rattle her brain to see if she could remember where she last had it. She knew for a fact that she had it before the storm hit, which meant that she must have lost it sometime between her passing out and now. She did consider the possibility of it being stolen by the overly suspicious Munchlax. But that only raised the question of what kind of thief takes their victims back home and gives them a warm bed and fire? While beginning to seem unlikely, she had yet to completely check him off her suspects list.

Her detective work would have to be put on pause, though, as the bulky frame of Munchlax awkwardly stepped in right in front of her. Looking up, Furret saw that he had brought with him a varied assortment of snacks, all bundled up in his arms. He thoughtlessly dropped the goodies right where he stood, causing it to fall like an avalanche that was high in both carbohydrates and sodium. He stood over his mess with an arrogant grin that shone down upon her. Looking over the cluttered collection set before her, Furret meekly looked up to Munchlax and gave him an appreciative smile. With a quick nod, Munchlax helped himself to a seat and sat down. There he stared at her, his eyes gazing at her like they were sending unseen subliminal messages that only said "eat." Picking up a nearby bag of potato chips, Furret eyed it wearily. Pulling the bag open, she placed one of her petit paws into the bag and pulled it back out with a chip between her fingers. Sniffing at the chip cautiously, Furret glanced over at Munchlax who was watching her with an unsettling air of patience about him. Unsure as to why she felt so uncomfortable with something so trivial, she took a small bite from the chip, a surprising sense of relief flowing through her to find that it tasted like a normal chip. With no immediate negative effects, Furret helped herself to the rest of the bag, which was quickly followed by two more quick bags and an apple that was far past its due date.

With a satisfied belch, Furret rolled onto her back, patting at her pleased tummy. It wasn't long, however, before Munchlax had grabbed another bag from the pile and held up close to her face. Furret tried shoving it away, but Munchlax was determined, fiercely pushing the bag at her to eat. Snatching the bag from his fingers, Furret looked at the snacks in her paws and then up at him. She felt an uneasy chill roll down her spine when she saw him staring at her, his glazed eyes almost demanding her to eat more. Any sign of escape was quickly diminished by the roaring snow outside, so with a shaky smile, Furret opened the bag and briefly emptied its contents. Munchlax was not so quick as to stop there as he forced her into eating several more bags along with a stray apple and a can of soda.

She belched loudly, surprised to hear it echo through the cave. Rubbing her tummy and feeling how tight it had become, Furret was certain that she couldn't eat another bite, but Munchlax obviously thought very differently. Scooping up an armful of food, Munchlax huddled over to her and held it all right in front of her. Furret knew that there was no way she could scarf down all that food. She soon grimly realized that if she didn't think of a way out of this, things were sure to get messy.

Ready to take a stand, Furret perked her nose, staring away from the treats with a, "hmph." Munchlax tried holding it closer to her face, but Furret only reclined her head in as far as she could, like a baby would from a spoonful of baked carrots. With a low frustrated growl, Munchlax brought his arms back in and set the snacks down.

Furret felt a slight sting of relief, which was shortly squashed by the suffocating weight of Munchlax as he suddenly started clambering up on top of her. Feeling the sudden mass of his girth flop down on her, Furret began to cough violently, the simple task of breathing becoming a near impossible challenge through the added burden. She could feel her heart rate beginning to speed up as she tried to feebly push him off. He giggled softly, his eyes staring at her seductively while rubbing his hand gently over the noticeable bulge that had started to form over her midsection. Munchlax reached over and grabbed a handful of fruits, berries, and nuts, bringing it over her face and suddenly slamming it all down her throat. Her cheeks immediately puffed out from all the food, small bits of crumbs dribbling from her stuffed mouth. After a few minutes of chewing, Furret finally managed to swallow the entire mass, sending a lump down her throat and into her stomach where it landed with a loud gurgle.

Furret groaned at the growing bump that had formed over her midsection. Munchlax was far from finished though, as he readied another handful and shoved it into her mouth without warning. Her jaws had grown tired from all the chewing, but she eventually managed to swallow another mouthful. The lump in her grew bigger still. The tightness she felt in her gut had become excruciating. The tears in her eyes and how her face scrunched up with discomfort only seemed to feed Munchlax's sick game, as he prepared yet another handful for her to swallow.

Furret wasn't sure how much more she could take, but she did know she wasn't going to last much longer. As Munchlax raised the food in the air, Furret quickly covered her mouth with her paws, clenching her teeth as tightly as she could. Munchlax's eyes widened and he brought the food down calmly. They stared at each other, a smirk sliding out from behind Furret's paws. Munchlax rolled his eyes and countered her tactics by plugging up her nose with his free hand. Furret cursed violently in her head. The sneer that slid over his face was enough to make her want to scream, but she dared not. To scream would be to let him win. But even this she knew was all soon to be in vein. She felt her lungs tightening, a faint hue of purple starting to form across her face. When she had reached her limits, she immediately burst into a violent coughing fit, wheezing as she gasped for air. It was in this fit that Munchlax was able to secure yet another handful of food, shoving it all into her lips and securing them with his hands, saving her the consequences of what would happen if she considered spitting it out. With her mouth sealed shut, Furret was without a choice. She swallowed. The food crawled down her gullet eerily and landed in her creaking stomach which had grown a light pink from the amounting pressure.

This was it; Furret now knew for sure that she had reached her maximum capacity. If anything bigger than a crumb were to find its way into her... she shivered violently at the thought of it. Whether Munchlax had at all become aware of her very visible limitations was unclear, but none of it mattered as he brought up the last handful of food, ready to slam it down her throat and past her limit without a second thought.

Furret shut her eyes tightly, clenching her teeth as her last makeshift attempt. Munchlax subconsciously started to bring the food down, but was soon stopped midway when a shadowy blob shot right through his head, inflicting no immediate harm. While no effects were visible, Munchlax did turn his head to the right to see who had interrupted his personal time. Standing between him and the

fire which had dwindled down notably, was the Litwick from before, the struggle given off from Furret having woken him from his nap. He stared at Munchlax sternly, his eyes piercing into Munchlax's who winced back in surprise.

Looking back and forth between Furret and Litwick, Munchlax preformed a low gravelly growl. Dropping the food he held onto the ground, Munchlax clumsily swung both his legs over Furret's body, where he stood himself up. Litwick remained in the same position, his small body tensing up in preparation for the attack. Swinging his head back to let loose a roar, Munchlax charged at the candle, causing the room to shake with each thunderous step. Litwick closed his eyes tightly. Upon getting closer, Munchlax then leaped at the candle and managed to land a hard bite, his teeth sinking into the wax. Litwick remained still, showing no outward signs of pain. Munchlax held his snapped jaws firmly, tears beginning to form in his eyes. Finally he released his grasp and started jumping in place as he waved at his tongue which was burned by the hot wax. While he fanned his mouth off, Litwick opened his eyes which had both started to glow a deep purple. Still rubbing his burnt tongue, Munchlax caught a glimpse of what was going on before him. With Munchlax's gaze within sight, Litwick released a light orb of energy that floated over towards Munchlax and circled around his head. As the orb disappeared, Munchlax's pupils dilated and he began to stagger back and both, helplessly tripping over his own feet in a confused state. With Munchlax now rendered as hopeless as ever, Litwick walked over to where he was still staggering, a smug smile on his face. When Munchlax looked up to where Litwick was standing, he was greeted with a sudden burst of flame that scared him into staggering away backwards, where he shortly tripped over himself and fell to an earth pounding slam, which sent a few small stalagmites crumbling to the ground. Swinging his arms wildly like a turtle on its shell, Munchlax eventually gave up the endeavor and brought his body to a rest, his only movement now being the heavy rise and fall of his chest.

Wiping away at his brow, Litwick hurriedly walked around to behind the fire and quickly reappeared with a green bag straddled around his body, dragging it fearlessly past Munchlax, and to where Furret had been watching silently, both her eyes being pried open with awe. Staring first at the immobile Munchlax and then down at her bag, Furret took the strap and pulled it atop her extended belly.

With a huff, Litwick sat himself down, rubbing at the bite marks that still lined his head. Cringing at the two indents left by Munchlax, Furret pried open her bag and stuck a paw deep inside it, eventually pulling out a pack of bandages. Hearing her rummaging, Litwick turned his head up to look at her as she brought the box down to him. Staring at it hesitantly, Litwick finally took the box and began turning it in his hands as he examined the never before seen object. Rolling her eyes, Furret took the box from him and proceeded to rip the top off, pulling out a covered sliver from the tare. Unwrapping what looked like a small pink slip, Furret gently placed it over the wound, carefully securing it without making contact with the wax. Poking at the bandage, Litwick looked at her with a small smile, assuming that what she did was some kind of appreciative token.

Returning the smile, Furret soon returned her attention back to her bag and started to dig through it with both paws. While Furret was busy with her expedition, Litwick was left twiddling his hands as he stared about the room awkwardly. Eyeing the intoxicated Munchlax that was left heaving on the floor,

Litwick suddenly jumped hard when a loud gasp peeped up from behind him. Turning around to see the commotion, Litwick was quick to find Furret who was holding a small rock firmly between her two paws; both her eyes locked on to it longingly. With a sigh, Furret placed the rock gently over her chest, slowly closing her eyes in the process.

Unsure as to whether or not she had fallen asleep, Litwick quietly began to reach for the bag, an intense curiosity suddenly sprouting within him. Before he could even make contact with the fabric, a quick paw suddenly caught his hand, securing it sternly against her body. Following the arm with his eyes, Litwick came in contact with the hardened glare that radiated from Furret. Slipping his hand out from under hers, Litwick hastily tried to explain himself, telling her about the curiosity he felt towards her bag. Furret's eyes softened as he told her his situation. Looking at the bag and then her stone, Furret finally handed over the goods, believing that he had earned her trust at this point. Litwick's eyes lit up as he carefully took the bag from her. Gently setting it down at his feet, Litwick slowly separated the opening, leaning over to peer inside it.

The excitement and joy that usually came with the discovery of some dark secret faded fast as Litwick found the packs innards to be less enduring than he had admittedly hoped. A strange collection of items that all appeared to have been picked up by random sat facing him from inside, things like wilted flowers, brown and crusty leaves, and even several twigs could be found. Along with some other common first aid supplies and two nearly empty bags of trail mix, nothing of interest appeared to inhabit the bag. It almost dumbfounded Litwick as to why someone would waste bag space with such petty and useless materials. His curiosity quenched, Litwick closed the bag and looked up at Furret. She rested in the bed quietly with the same stone tightly packed between her paws and body, the only movement being the steady rise in her chest from breathing.

Figuring that she had fallen asleep, Litwick slowly shoved the bag up next to her once more. Once the bag was put back in its place, Furret's eyes both opened slightly. Sitting herself up, she held up the rock and gave it a gentle kiss before putting it back in the bag. Securing the bag tightly against her chest, Furret curled up and closed her eyes, giving no acknowledgment for Litwick. Before letting her fall asleep peacefully, Litwick had one last thing to ask as he poked her gently. With her eyes opened for the last time, she looked at Litwick groggily with her eyelids straining to stay open. "What is all this stuff," he asked, "the leaves, the twigs, the rock, why do you have all of this if you don't mind me asking?"

Furret yawned, her mouth opening wide enough to reveal the bits of crumbs that remained from the previous endeavors. "These are just gifts from someone I once knew. A friend I haven't seen in a long time." Her answer held no signs of interest as she rolled on her side so that her back was facing against him. Without anything more to add, Litwick decided to follow her example and slowly closed his eyes as well.

The morning came as fast and silently as a cheetah on the prowl. With a quick brush from the morning drafts, Litwick's eyes opened with a shudder from his body. The fire from last night had burned itself to ashes which left the room with an all too familiar winter chill. Rubbing his arms against his cooled wax, Litwick looked around the room to see if anyone else had stirred before him. Munchlax laid on the floor

like a passed out drunk, with saliva dripping from his mouth as he grunted out wet snores. With no surprises to be found there, Litwick turned in the other direction to see how his furry friend had fared the night. How she did however, he could not tell. In fact there wasn't anything he could tell about her at the moment because she wasn't anywhere to be found. The bed she had slept had been abandoned completely, with no trace of her being left behind. She had managed to disappear overnight and all her belongings with her. Litwick felt a twinge in his heart to see her go so suddenly, to be left alone with the big oaf that lay slobbering behind him once more. With nowhere else to turn, Litwick silently made his way for the cave entrance, careful as to not wake up Munchlax with any noise. Sure enough, leading from the cave's entrance was a faint trail of paw prints, marching out towards the snow covered woods. He was at least glad to find that she had left under much better weather conditions. The sun had reared its head once more, gleaming over the white mess left from last night's storm. Litwick smiled and held his arms out as he welcomed the sun's much needed rays. Still, while the weather had turned for the better, a nagging sensation still lingered over Litwick regarding Furret. For her to run off on her own, and especially after last night's fiasco, he could only imagine how much more difficult her travels would be thanks to her newly found belly.

While the sun shone down happy as ever, a brisk wind blew in from ahead which still managed to freeze Litwick to his core. With the icy gust behind him, Litwick was bitterly reminded that the current weather conditions weren't going to last. How he expected her to survive the long winter ahead, he wasn't sure. Looking back at the lethargic blob that slept before him, a sudden sense of admiration for Furret came about him. For he realized that no matter how suicidal her journey seemed, looking at Munchlax made Litwick realize how much he wished for a friend that was worth braving the unforgiving winter just to be with.



