

## My Pet Quaddlebon

by Sarah Sayed

Grandma smiled as she placed the quaddlebon on the table.

"Awww," I whispered. "He's. So. Cute." I took him off the table and held him in my hands. His soft, white fur tickled my nose as I held him close to my face. His curious, dark-black eyes stared up at me as I looked into them. He had little scars around his eyes, and his light orange beak was a little too small for an average quaddlebon, but he was perfect. He was mine.

"Can I start practicing tomorrow?" I asked Grandma.

"Of course!" She clapped her hands. "But now it's bedtime." She took the little white quaddlebon out of my hands and shooed me off to bed. As I got ready to sleep, I thought all about my preparations for the quaddlebon the next day. I would have to train him really hard if I wanted to win that gold medal at the Animal Tricks Competition next month. He'd have to be able to do tricks of all sorts: jumps, gallops, maybe even gymnastics! Then that gold medal would be mine . . . I rubbed my hands together mischievously.

I held my toothbrush to my mouth and announced in a speaker voice, "And the winner is . . . Andrea Green with the quaddlebon!" I giggled uncontrollably as I put my toothbrush down and headed to bed. Tomorrow was going to be a day full of preparation, practicing, and lots and lots of time with the quaddlebon.

That night, my dreams were full of the dancing quaddlebon with its snow-white fur and light orange beak. In my dreams, it did jumps and cartwheels. Sometimes it even jumped-rope! I added that to my list of quaddlebon tricks.

The next morning, sunlight streamed in through my window, sending rays of light all over my room. I woke up and stretched as a sweet bird's song found its way to my ears. *I should think about teaching the quaddlebon how to sing*, I thought. With that, I raced down the stairs, excited for what today would bring me. As I jumped down the last step, I saw Grandma walking about the kitchen, scrambling eggs on the stovetop while making pancake batter in a separate bowl on the counter.

"Good morning, Andreal!" Grandma said to me.

I smiled up at her as I responded, "Good morning to you too! Can I get started with the quaddlebon training yet?" Grandma laughed giddily. "Hold your horses! You need a full stomach before you start your training. I want all your chores done by the time I make breakfast, understand?"

I don't think she saw my head nod because I was already out the door starting my first chore. The bright sunshine and beautiful bird song accompanied me as I did all my chores. By the time I was finished, the sweet smell of pancakes, maple syrup, and eggs led me to the kitchen, where breakfast was. I gobbled it all up before Grandma could tell me to wash my hands. As I looked up at her stern face, I giggled and wiped maple syrup off my chin with a napkin.

When I was finally all done, Grandma said, "Now, are you ready to start, or what?" We both excitedly walked down the kitchen steps outside, where the quaddlebon was happily running about the yard, squeaking and squawking every few feet.

"I think we should name him," I said. "What about . . . Snowball?"

Grandma looked up at me, clearly confused. "Why Snowball?"

"Because, well, he just looks like one!" I said lamely.

"Oh. Then Snowball he will be," Grandma replied.

I ran up to Snowball the quaddlebon and then looked at my list of tricks. First was the jump. I figured it would be the easiest, and therefore a good one to start with. I ran back inside to retrieve the snacks Grandma had purchased a couple of days before.

As I ran back outside, I saw Grandma with the quaddlebon in her lap, stroking his soft, snow-white fur. He was sitting on his haunches, nibbling on the ends of one of his ears. I smiled. Snowball reminded me a lot of Peggy, Dad's brown mutt. How she would scooch around on her bottom on the kitchen floor, scrounging around for pieces of food that had fallen while Dad and I cooked. That thought brought back more memories of Dad. I giggled as I thought of how we would watch reruns of old comedy shows with terrible jokes that we laughed at anyway. Dad would always train Peggy for dog shows where he and she would always blow the judges away. He would teach her tricks and twirls and she would roll and "speak." She would even stand up on her hind legs and give Dad a high five. I wanted to be just like Dad. I wanted my own gold medal just like his many 1st place blue ones. I wanted to train Snowball just like Dad trained Peggy. I wanted something of my own. I suddenly realized that I was crying. Thinking about Dad was too much. I quickly wiped the tears away, hoping Grandma wouldn't notice. I scolded myself for thinking about Dad again as I focused on my more important problems.

Snowball was obviously comfortable with Grandma way more than with me. Would he not respond to me, or worse yet, would he ignore me completely? I pushed the thought out of my head as I walked up to Snowball and took him into my own hands. As I stroked his fur, his mini orange beak nipped at me as I tried to hold him in my hands. He struggled to get out so I let him go, very hurt. I pushed away the feeling as I took out a treat and placed it in front of the quaddlebon.

"Do you want the treat? Do you want the treat, little Snowball?" Snowball happily gobbled up the treat. I took out another one and held it up at arm's length, a little higher up in the air. Snowball tried to reach for it, but instantly gave up as he soon realized the idea of jumping was too tremendous a task for him. I sighed, clearly disappointed. Grandma told me not to give up as I trudged back into the house. While I lay on the couch, reading, I peered out the window, looking at Grandma and Snowball. I gasped. Grandma had taught Snowball how to jump! Every time she put up a treat, he would happily jump and gobble up his prize. As I ran back outside to try it myself, I soon realized that Snowball didn't like me as much as he liked Grandma.

That night, I dreamed of myself at the competition. I had tried to make Snowball jump, but instead of jumping, he had bit my fingers. Nothing I tried to do made him jump, and in the end, he sat on the side and didn't even look at me. As I turned around to the judges' table, I was shocked at what I saw. *Dad* was sitting there, disappointment stirring in his eyes. I had lost, and Dad was there to see it. I woke up with a start, sweat pouring down my face. I couldn't go back to sleep for a long time.

The next few days were no better. Snowball either fully ignored me or ran away whenever I came close. Grandma must have sensed my disappointment because she said, "Andrea, there's no need to be upset. These things take time, and I'm sure you'll nail this someday!" Her words didn't help, they just made me feel more upset.

But finally on the fifth day, Snowball responded to my actions! I had been trying to teach him how to roll by placing mats on the ground with treats in between. If he rolled correctly on the mat, he would be able to get a treat. If not, no treat. On my second try, Snowball correctly rolled over on the mat. While he helped himself to a treat, I jumped up and down while doing a victory dance.

"What did I tell you," Grandma said. "These things take time!" However, even after my first victory, I was starting to get worried. I had only mastered one trick, and there were only two weeks left until competition day. Those next two weeks were full to the brim with lots of practicing. Snowball started to trust me more, and because of that, our relationship was getting stronger. He listened to what I said, and teaching him tricks got easier and easier. However, just thinking about the competition made my heart thump.

I had started waking up super early in the mornings, eating only toast for breakfast before heading outside to teach Snowball. I woke up so early that we could usually get twice the amount of practice done than normal. I taught Snowball jumps, rolls, gallops, and even twists. He was currently learning how to "speak." Whenever I snapped my fingers, he would squawk, which I hoped the judges would pass as "speaking."

As the days passed, my worries grew bigger. What if I got sick on competition day? What if Snowball got sick on competition day? Would they disqualify us? What if they thought our tricks were stupid, and if so, would they disqualify us for that? The worries swirled around in my head until I was basically having vertigo.

"You have to stop this worrying!" Grandma told me one day. "Focus on the actual competition instead of worrying! You only have four more days!"

I took Grandma's advice. Instead of pondering possible problems that could occur, I focused even more on Snowball. I woke up early in the mornings, and sometimes didn't come inside until it was so dark I couldn't see my own hands in front of my face. When it was the day before the competition, I practiced all the tricks Snowball and I had been working on. We practiced trick after trick after trick, soon performing a silly skit that seemed good enough to impress the judges, just like Dad always did with Peggy.

"You'll do great," Grandma told me at dinner that night. "I'm sure the judges will be impressed at all the amazing things you'll show them." I nodded as I tried to ignore the butterflies that were fluttering in my stomach.

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning and waking up every few hours. Whenever I did manage to fall asleep, though, nightmares kept finding me. In one, Snowball got so sick he couldn't even lift one wing. In the other, the judges disliked our skit so much that they threw tomatoes and rotten vegetables at us!

After a terrible beauty rest, I woke up early the next morning, determined to practice a little bit more with Snowball before the competition began.

As I walked outside, Snowball was awake, as happy as can be, chasing some baby bluebirds that were drinking from a nearby pond. *At least someone had a nice rest.* I thought. I raced over to him and picked him up. We practiced our skit a few more times before going back inside for breakfast. As I walked inside, I said the skit in my head. *First the two jumps, then the galloping across the yard, the skipping back, the rolling around and the twists, and lastly the talking.* We had a quick breakfast with lots of appreciative comments from Grandma. The main reason I didn't speak was so I didn't accidentally barf out all my food.

From our house to the place the competition was being held was a short walk, and because of that we got there a few minutes early. I held Snowball in my hands and absentmindedly stroked his feathers while I thought of all the dreams I'd been having. *Would*

*they actually come true? Would I be disqualified just because the judges didn't like my tricks?* I shook my head to clear the thoughts.

Suddenly, Grandma sat down on the chair beside me. "Hey," she soothed while patting my head. "It's going to be alright. There's no need to worry. This is just for fun, remember?" I nodded my head, not really listening to what she was saying. I *had* to win! She probably noticed I wasn't listening because she took my face in her hands and looked right into my dark brown eyes. It felt like her green emerald ones were looking right into my soul.

"You'll do great," she said confidently. "I know you will. And if you do, we'll get ice cream afterwards at that favorite shop of yours." I smiled. Grandma always knew how to make me feel better.

"And what if I don't win?" I asked.

She smiled a mischievous smile. "We'll still go out for ice cream," she said. "But I'm sure you will win."

Right then, a blond man dressed in a plain gray shirt with black shorts announced, "If you are part of the Animal Tricks Competition, make your way to the stage!"

I hugged Grandma one last time, and then shakily stood up. I took Snowball in my sweaty hands and walked slowly but steadily to the back of the stage, where the other contestants were also standing. There were seven other kids, each of them holding an animal of some sort. Most of them chose bunnies or puppies for their animal. As I looked down at Snowball, I felt a little bit special. However, one of the contestants, a brunette with eyes as black as obsidian sneered, "Nice *duck!*" She then stepped away and admired her own little bunny, who adorably nibbled on a small carrot. I slouched away, my sweaty hands shaking furiously as I grasped Snowball. I stood on the other side of the stage, as far away from the girl as I could get.

The blond man from before called each contestant to the front of the stage to perform their animal tricks. Most of them were pretty good, especially the brunette with the cute bunny. More worry swelled up in me as I waited and waited. After what felt like hours, I was finally called up to the stage. Grandma's face smiled at me from the crowd, and I managed a weak smile back. The judges' stern faces looked up at me, expectant of something amazing. I gulped as beads of sweat ran down my face. I placed Snowball on the floor, and began my skit. We went through it smoothly, and the only thing I regret was the way I looked through the whole thing. I mean, I never smiled or looked confidently at the judges!

When our silly skit was finally over, the judges gave us a polite clap and the blond man led us off the stage. When we reached the waiting room that I was in before, he knelt next to me and said, "That was such a great performance!" I looked at him, confused and surprised.

"Really?" was all I could manage.

"Yes! Even if the judges don't pick you as the winner, don't get discouraged," he handed me a card with a name and phone number on it. The name was Steven Bungebergler. "I highly recommend you to start your own channel, make it all about your quaddlebon and his amazing tricks! And, if you want, you can upload a few to my website. It's on the card, along with my name and phone number. I'm hoping to hear from you soon!" With that, he patted my shoulder, and swiftly walked away, unaware of the joy he had brought me. I resisted the urge to jump up and down as I walked back to my seat.

Before I knew it, the judges called everybody back to the stage to announce the winner. But as I walked to the stage, I realized I didn't care so much about winning anymore. If I won, that was great! But if I didn't, it didn't matter to me as much as before. I had people who loved and appreciated me, and I didn't need some silly medal to tell me that I was just like Dad. I had my own talents, my own things that I was great at. I was still learning, and someday, I would do something great. I didn't know what, but something great. I would always be just like Dad. He would always be in my heart. So, as I stood up there with the other contestants, my hands didn't sweat or shake, but my face turned into a smile.

The judges said, "And the winner is . . . Georgia McDonald!" The mean brunette girl walked toward the judges, her face in a smug smile. As much as I didn't want to, I happily clapped along with everybody else.

When the ceremony ended, I found Grandma near the refreshments. As I made my way to her, she handed me a muffin and gave me a hug. "I'm sorry you didn't win, but you still did great!" she said encouragingly.

"Grandma, I don't even care that I didn't win! But, you know what?"

"What?" she asked.

"Can I borrow your phone? I need to call Mr. Bungebergler and tell him that Snowball's first video will be coming tomorrow!" She took my hand, and we laughed all the way to the ice cream shop, excited for of all the new adventures we would face . . . together.