

Who's the Boss Today

(Excerpt in English)

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How to grow up

It starts like this: first you are as small as an anchovy in your mommy's tummy. When you get as big as a loaf of bread, you're pushed out into the air. Then you grow in taller and longer until you can walk. You feel terrific when you can reach the doorknobs, and even better when you can turn on the light. We talk about girls like this: Nika is little girl now, and her sister Leah is as well. Her sister Willa is a young lady, and her mother is a woman. (Let the boys figure out how this works for them on their own.) One day Nika will also become a young lady and then a woman. She is interested, of course, in how this will happen and how she will know when she is a young lady, and later, that she is a woman.

Willa explains it to her:

"You'll know when it happens. But first you have to learn how to say it right: I GRRREW UP. You don't know how yet. You mess up the R. You say GWEW. You hear me? I GRRREW UP. You hear how my mouth roars?"

Nika understands. She begins to practice.

"WWW. GWEW."

"No, no, Nika, you're not roaring at all. Look: RRRR. Make your mouth growl like a brown bear. GREW."

Nika tries it:

"WWW. BWOWN BEAW. GWEW."

"No, no," says Willa. "You're not getting it today. You're still too little. Maybe tomorrow."

Nika is worried. What if tomorrow is too late and her mouth will never roar and she will never be a young lady and will never become a woman? She practices all day and she struggles and she worries so much. Even that evening, when Mama, who is a woman, says goodnight, Nika is still practicing: "WWW. BWOWN BEAW. GWEW."

She's not getting it. She's not getting it at all! It is completely hopeless. While she's practicing, she falls asleep and dreams of the W that doesn't want to roar, only mumble. When she wakes up the next morning, however, her mouth is rested. She tries to shake it open again. And suddenly: her W suddenly starts to roar -- RRRR! It worked, it worked: "RRRR!" she repeats. "BEAR!" she practices. "I GREW UP!" She is filled with happiness. She jumps up quickly.

She runs barefoot through the house, looking for Willa to tell her about her success. She finds her eating breakfast in the kitchen.

"Rilla, Rilla, I've already grown up!" she shouts. "Ratch. Brown Bear! Hear how well I roar? I roke up a big girl! Rill I be a young lady now soon, rill I be a roman soon?"

When Nika gets bigger

Nika just celebrated her fourth birthday. She already learned how to show that she is four years old on her fingers. This is not so easy. One of her fingers wants to fall down. She has to hold

her pinkie down with her other hand so that her fourth one stays outstretched. Mama says that you can do it another way: that you can just hide your thumb. But that seems quite silly to Nika. The thumb is first in line, and you have to hide the last one because you grow up in a row: first you are one year old, then two, then three... You can't start counting at the end of the line. Ah, it will be much easier when she is five years old. You use all your fingers, easy peasy. Then she will really be a big girl. Soon after, she will start school. She will draw circles and letters in big workbooks and will even be able to say what seven plus one equals. In the evening, she will do her homework and study. When her mama says, "Nika, time for bed," she will say: "Not yet, I don't have time. I have homework."

When Nika gets a little bit bigger, she will ride a big bike. She will have her license in her pocket. If a police officer stops her, she will show him the license with her picture and she will also shake her head under his nose and say, "Look, mister, I have a helmet." Then she will laugh because the officer will be staring and wondering, "Such a big attitude for such a little girl." Ha ha, she'll show him when she rides her bike to the store all by herself.

Soon she will be able to use a knife. She will have a large, sharp knife. She will cut potatoes, bread, cheese, and onions. She will cut stuff all day long, take all the food out of the fridge and from the cabinets and cut and chop it into small pieces, and then cook a large pot of minestrone for the whole family. But she will certainly do something differently than her mother does: when she chops onions, she will not cry or sniffle. It's so silly, really, that her mama, who is already such a big girl, whimpers over sliced onions.

When she grows even bigger, she will wear a bra under her sweater. She will have boots for school. She will wear them over leggings, like Willa. The boots will have a little heel and she will put on lipstick in the morning that makes her lips shine like marbles. She will walk to the school bus with her bag over one shoulder. When she gets home, she will say something about her silly classmates. She will know English, she'll say: "One, two, free, four, tanks and sorry!" When someone asks her how school is going, she will sometimes say: "Totally fine," and sometimes: "Totally awful," so that she can use all the cool words.

Nika the slipper keeper

When one of the children cannot find their slippers in the morning, Mama doesn't say: "The cat stole them," but instead says: "They're probably where they fell off your feet last night."

Good thing Nika always finds everything. As soon as she hears someone say: "Where are my slippers?" and hears Mama, who always says the same thing, she gets to work. She looks everywhere. On the shelves, behind the couch, in the drawers. She is so small that she can crawl under the bed and into the armoire. She rummages through all the nooks and crannies in the house. The others wait barefoot in their beds.

When Nika shows up again, her arms are full of slippers. She carries the red ones to Tina, the blue ones to Willa, the yellow ones to Leah... Her feet are still bare on the cold floor! Where are her pink slippers?

Now Tina, Willa, and Leah, who are already wearing their slippers, are darting around the house. Nika waits on the couch.

The others look in every nook and cranny. They even look in the oven, in the laundry basket, and behind the refrigerator. But they cannot find her pink slippers. Then Willa has an idea. She goes to look in the toybox. Look, look, Nika's pink slippers are right on the paws of her big bear. He must have gotten cold feet last night and put them on. Willa brings the slippers to the living room. Nika is happy. If a bear, who is so hairy, feels cold, then poor Nika, who does not even have one hair on her feet!

