

Karl the Komodo Dragon

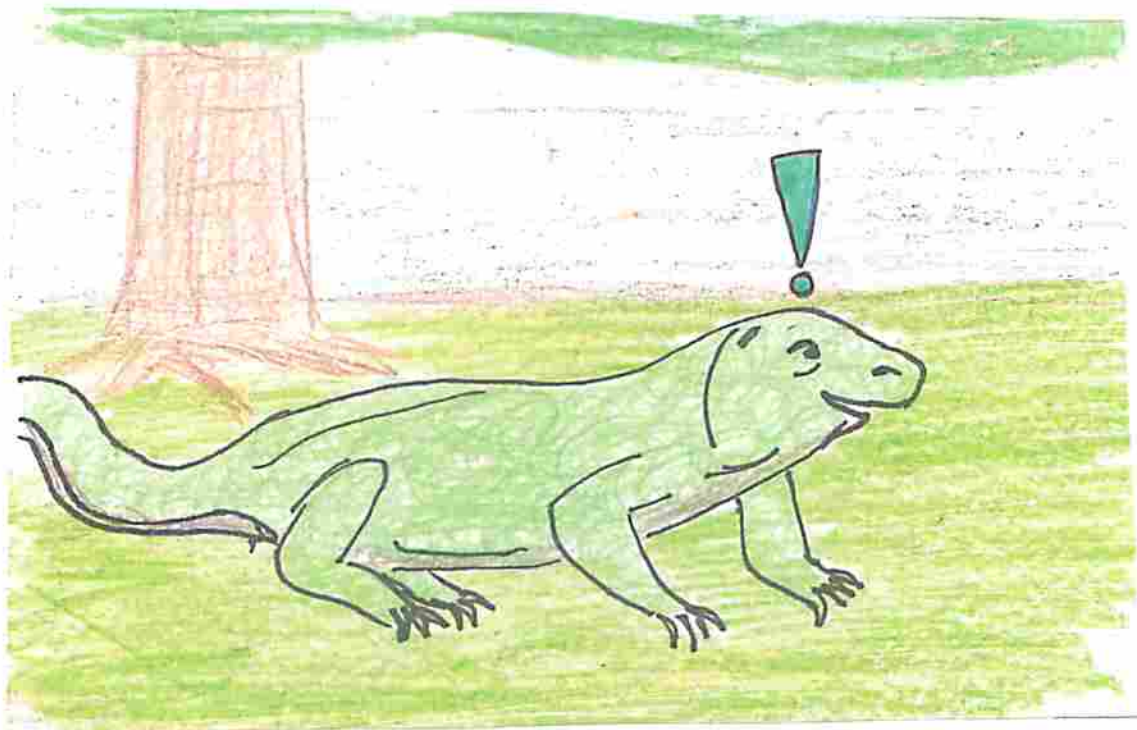
In a tropical rainforest on an island in Indonesia lived Karl the komodo dragon. Karl loved doing things most other kids like to do, like running around outside, climbing trees and playing with his friends. But Karl was sad. He didn't like being a komodo dragon.

One day, Karl was feeling particularly upset. *Komodo dragon's aren't special*, he thought to himself. *All I really am is a big lizard.*

"I hate being a komodo dragon," Karl muttered.

Then suddenly, he had an idea. "I want to be a real dragon!" said Karl. "And that's what I will become."

So he set off on a mission: to become a real, scaly, fire-breathing dragon! When he became a real dragon, he could show it off to the whole jungle.

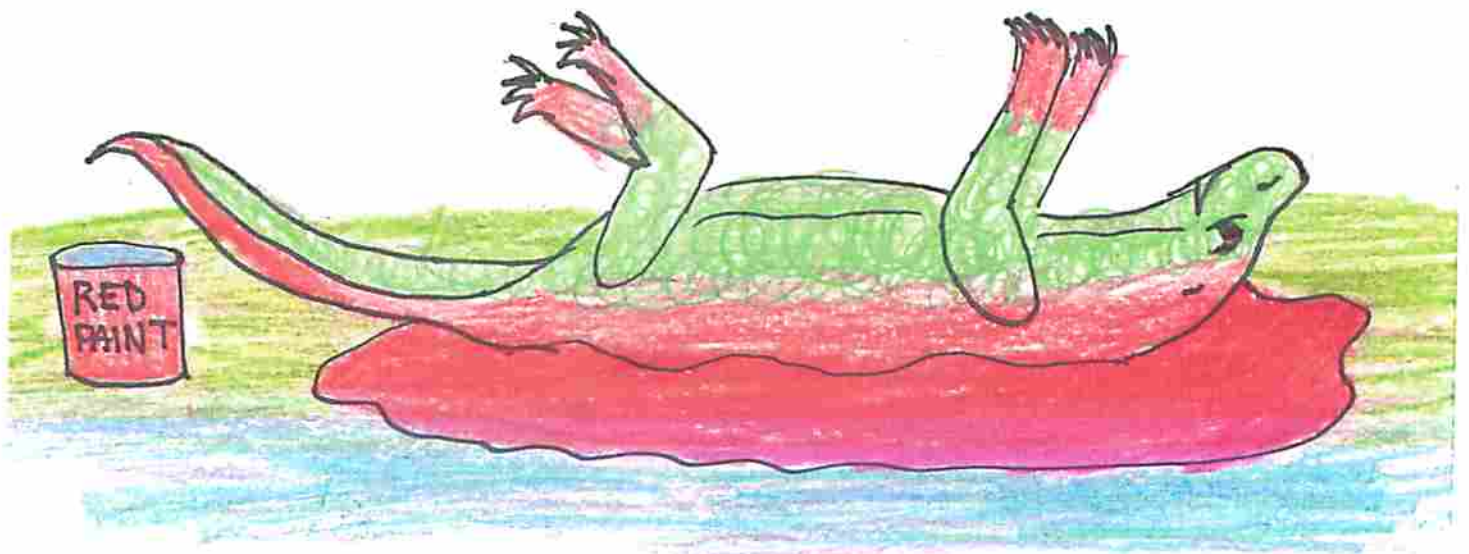


Karl thought about all the dragons he had read about in books or seen pictures of. They were usually bright, fiery red in color. Karl wasn't. He was dark green.

I know! he thought. *I can paint myself red! Then I can look like what dragons are supposed to look like.*

"I want to be a real dragon!" said Karl. "And that's what I will become."

Karl walked all the way home through the rainforest to get some red paint. He took out a paint can and—Splat! Karl poured all of it onto the ground. Then, he rolled all around in it. Karl didn't stop rolling until every little bit of his skin was bright red, from the very top of his head to the claws on the end of his feet.



When he was done rolling around, he stood up. He was all red.

Wow! thought Karl, admiring his painted skin. *But something is missing. I don't look like a real dragon yet.*

"Hmmm..." he said aloud. And suddenly he had an idea. "Scales!" he exclaimed. "All dragons have shiny scales!"

"I want to be a real dragon," said Karl. "And that's what I will become."

Karl took a long, long walk all the way through the jungle, through all the shady trees, all the way until he reached the beaches on the edge of the island. There, he found some shiny fish scales in the sand. He collected so many scales—maybe even one hundred—and laid them carefully on the ground.

"Perfect!" exclaimed Karl. "Now I can become scaly!"

Crunch! Karl collapsed onto the ground, cracking some of the scales in the process. The red paint on his skin was still nice and sticky, so Karl started to roll, covering his skin with the scales. He rolled, and then he rolled, and then he rolled even more, until the scales were all over his body, even the very tip of his tail.

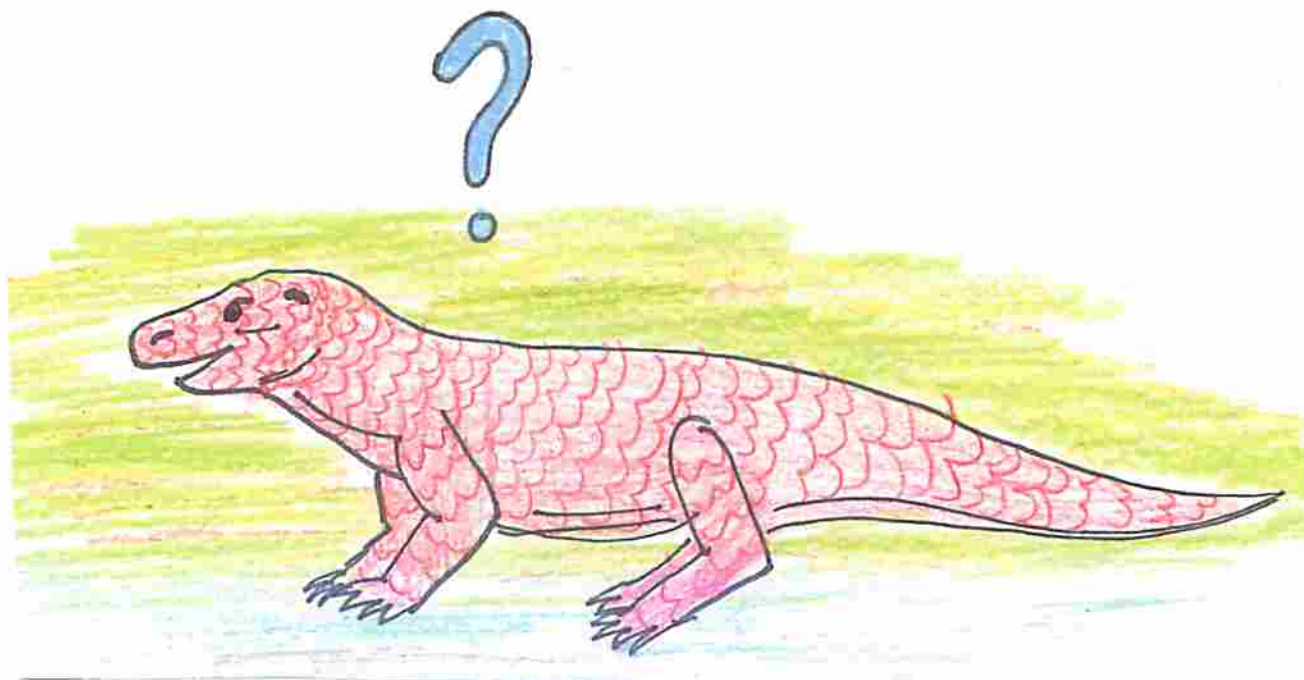
“Wow, I sure look different!” said Karl, looking at his skin, which was now not just red, but also scaly!

“But I *still* don’t look like a real dragon!”

Something is missing, Karl thought to himself. He thought about all the real dragons he had ever heard of or read about in books. *What do they have that I don’t?*

“Aha!” he declared. “Wings!”

“I want to be a real dragon,” said Karl. “And that’s what I will become.”

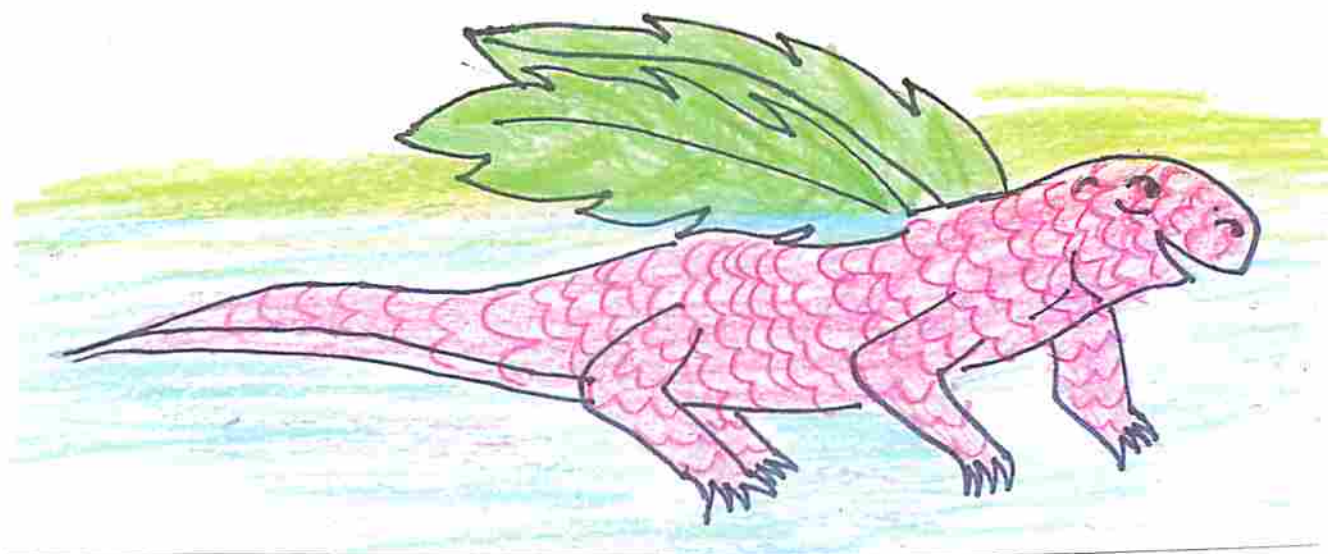


Karl walked all the way from the sandy beach back into the middle of the jungle. On the ground, he saw two big leaves that had fallen off of a palm tree.

“Hmm...” said Karl. “They do sort of look like wings.”

Squish! Karl wedged one of the palm leaves between two of the scales on one side of his back. The leaf flopped around a little, but it stayed attached. So then, he added another one to the other side of his body.

“Great!” said Karl excitedly, looking at the two big leaves on his back. “Now I have real dragon wings!”



Now, Karl was painted red, covered in sparkling fish scales, and had two palm leaves attached to him. “No one will be able to recognize me—I don’t look like Karl the komodo dragon any more,” he said to himself.

I have wings, scales and red skin. But there is something else that real dragons have that I don’t, thought Karl.

He thought for a moment. “I know!” he shouted suddenly. “Dragons can breathe fire!”

“I want to be a real dragon,” said Karl. “And that’s what I will become.”

Karl’s parents had told him not to play with fire, but he didn’t care.

“I need to become a dragon!” he said. “And all dragons breathe fire.”

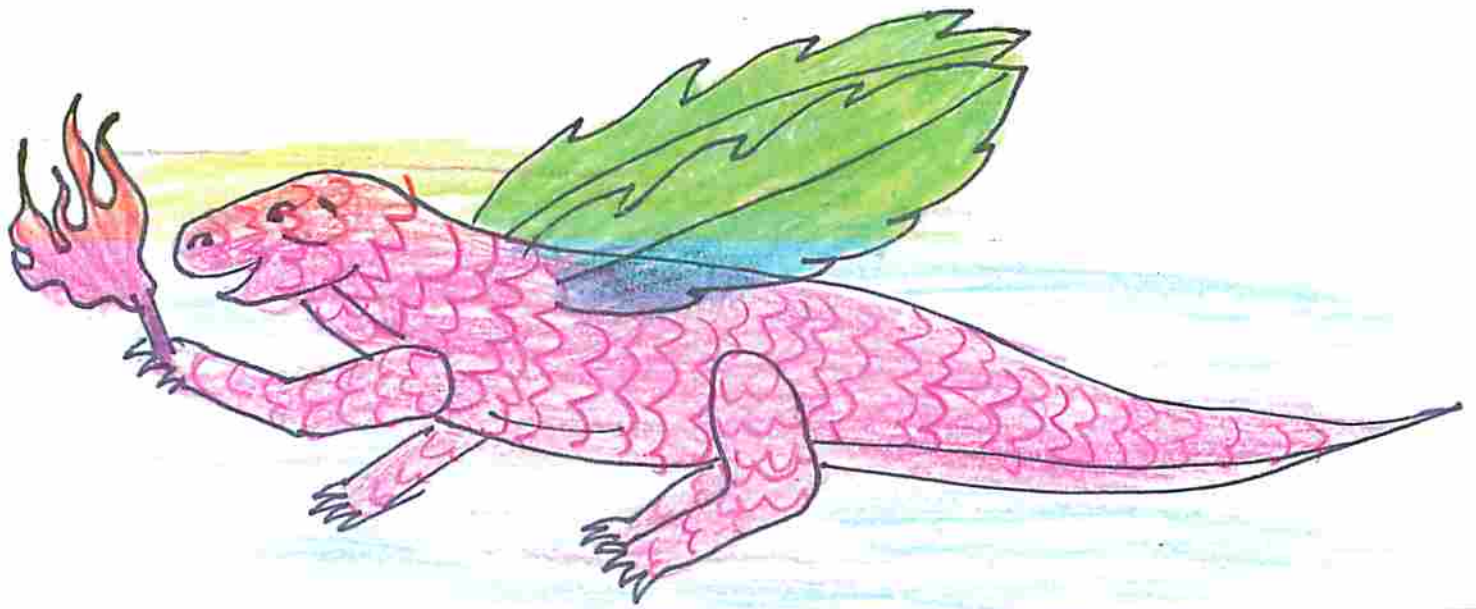
Karl found two sticks on the mossy forest floor. Then, he started to rub them together. And he rubbed them some more. And some more. He hoped if he rubbed them enough, they would catch on fire.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, Karl noticed an orange spark growing on one of the sticks. Sizzle! A flickering flame rose from the sticks.

“Perfect!” exclaimed Karl. “Now I can breathe fire.”

He grabbed the end of one of the sticks with his red, scaly foot. Then, he put the fire near his mouth and started to breathe on it.

Wow! he thought to himself. *I’m really doing it! I’m really breathing fire!*



Now, Karl was red, scaly, winged, and fire-breathing! *Finally!* he thought. *I’ve become a real dragon!*

Karl wanted to show it off to the whole jungle. “Everyone! Look at me! I’m a real dragon!” he started to say.

Uh oh! Suddenly, the fiery stick slipped out of Karl’s claws and landed on his tail!

“OUCH OWIE OW OW OW!” yelled Karl at the top of his lungs. “I’VE BURNT MY TAIL!”

But it wasn't just Karl's tail that bothered him. Suddenly, the red paint covering his skin felt sticky and yucky.

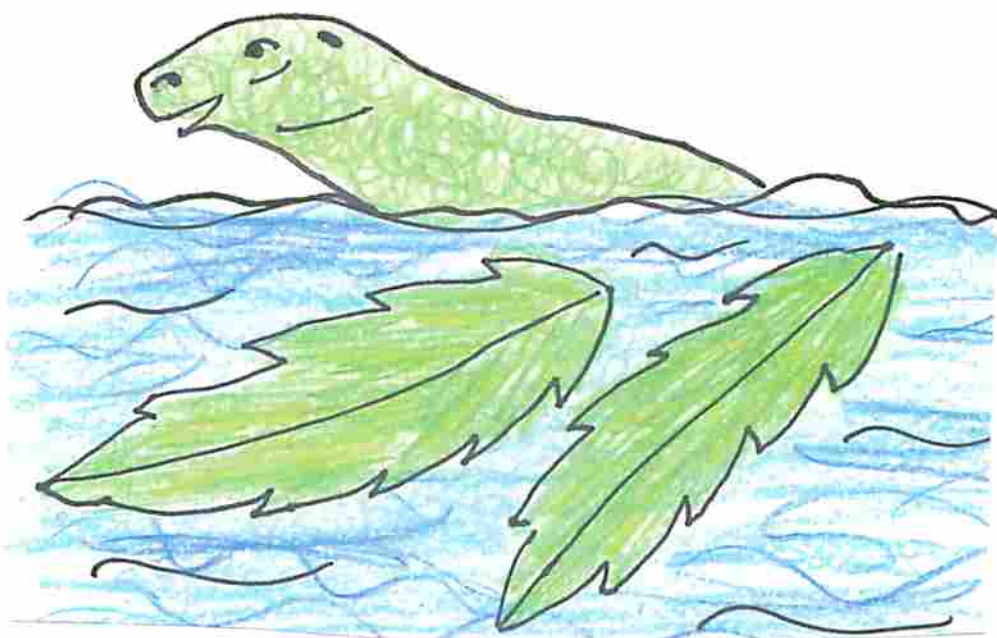
And the scales on his back felt itchy.

And his leafy wings felt too heavy.

"I want to take it all off!" he said.

So Karl ran all the way through the jungle, past the tall palm trees, all the way to the beach. He ran across the sand and—Splash! He was in the ocean. He dunked his head under water and swam around.

"Ah, that feels much better," said Karl with a sigh of relief. The paint, scales, and wings had washed off in the water, and his burn felt better, too



Karl swam out of the water and lay down on the beach. It had been a very long day.

“I’m so glad to be a komodo dragon again!” said Karl. “I guess being a real dragon wasn’t what I expected it would be.”

I like being myself, he thought happily.

THE END