

PENNY PICKS THE PERFECT PET

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Illustrated by Jenny Prest

Chapter One: Please! Please! Please!

Penny woke up to the sound of birds singing in the tree outside her window. As she lay in bed, she thought the same thoughts she thought every morning.

"The one thing I want more than anything else in the whole world is to have a pet of my own to take care of and love. My three best friends all have pets and I'm really good at feeding and playing with their animals. I know I'm big enough..." she mused.

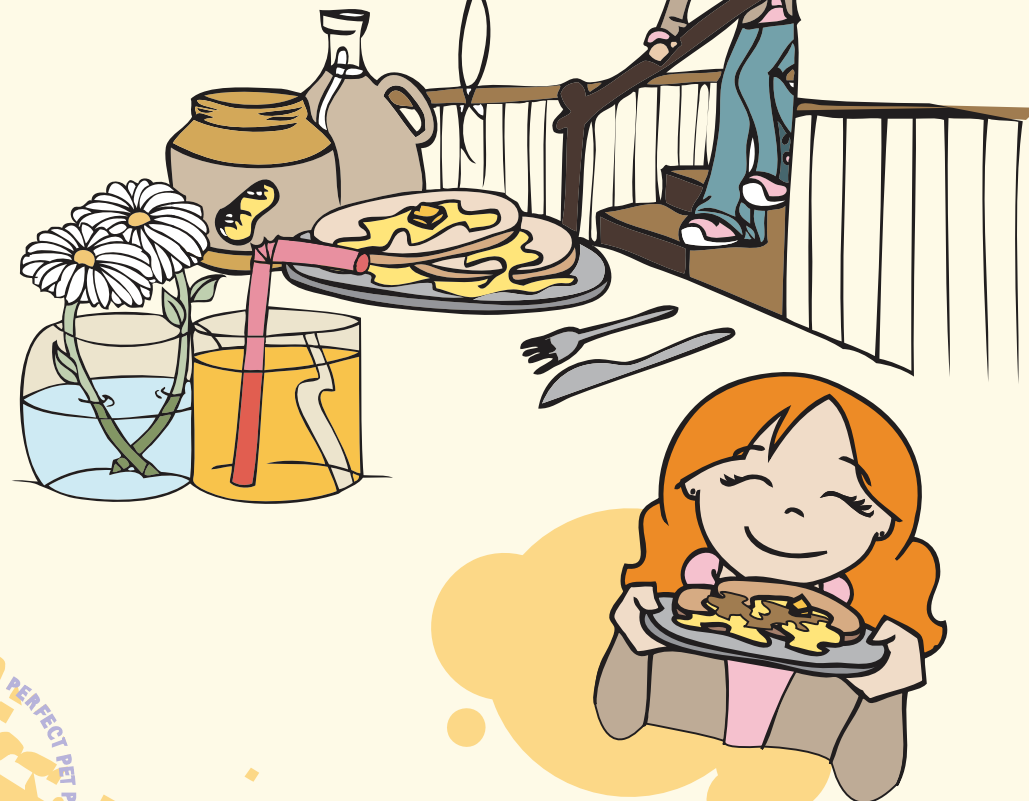
Then Penny whispered to the little bird on the closest branch, "Maybe today will be the day my parents will finally realize that I'm ready to have a pet."



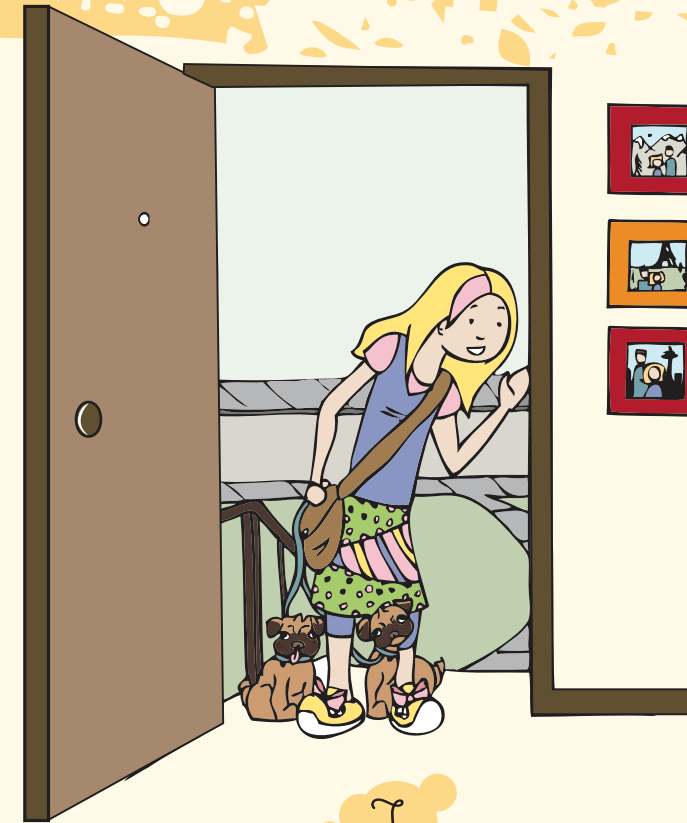
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Penny bounced out of bed and got dressed quickly. She hurried downstairs to her favourite breakfast of pancakes and maple syrup with a little peanut butter on top. She especially liked the way her mom hid a lump of butter between the pancakes so that when she cut into them, the butter poured out like a river of liquid gold.

As she ate her pancakes, Penny was still trying to decide which kind of pet she liked the most.



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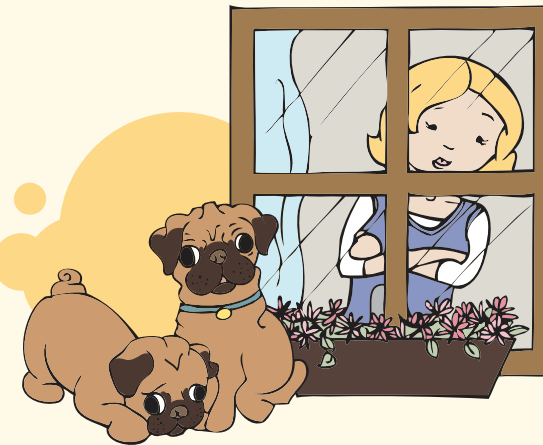
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Just then the doorbell rang. Penny rushed to see who was at the door. It was her very best friend Jamie and her two dogs.

"Hey, Penny", greeted Jamie. "Would you like to help me walk Quincy and Gus?"

"You bet I would!" exclaimed Penny. "Just let me ask my mom."

Penny really loved Gus and Quincy and her mother was happy to let her take some responsibility for Jamie's dogs. As the girls left, her mom watched from the window and was proud to see Penny walking the dogs with great care.



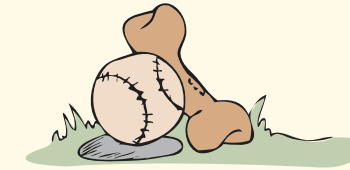


Quincy and Gus were pugs and quite pudgy. On their walks, they waddled along panting, their tongues hanging out. All that walking always made the pugs hot and tired. As soon as they got back to Jamie's house, they would wriggle around in the thick grass to cool off.

Penny had so much fun playing with Gus and Quincy. The dogs always smothered her with wet kisses all over her face. They liked it when Penny used their squeaky toys to play fetch with them.

"Boy, Quincy and Gus are sure getting their exercise today!" laughed Penny.

She knew that it was important for the dogs



to run and play so they would stay healthy and happy. Jamie's mother had told her that the dogs had feelings and their own personalities, just like people. Quincy was always ready for an adventure. Barney, on the other hand, was a bit shy and would wait rather than rushing into the unknown. Both dogs were always friendly and gentle. Penny especially loved the funny expressions on their cute, wrinkled faces. She wondered whether a dog would be the best choice for a pet.

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PENNY PICKS A PERFECT PET PEN



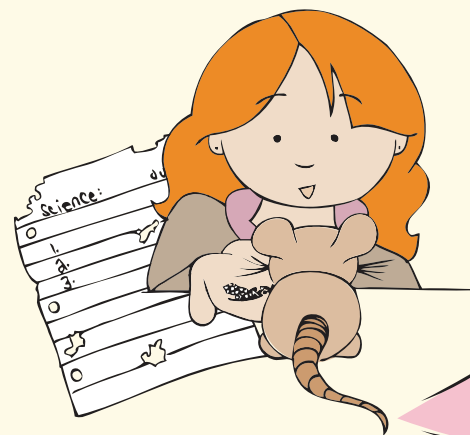
On the way back from Jamie's house, Penny dropped in to visit Justin, another favourite friend. Justin had two pet rats that were very smart and loving. Ralph and Roger would watch quietly while Justin worked on his homework. Doing school work was more fun with a furry friend sitting on his shoulder. Sometimes Roger would take a little nibble out of one of the pages, but he would never eat the whole thing. Penny thought that Roger must have known that having to tell the teacher that the teacher that his rat ate his homework would not help Justin in school one bit!

When Penny got there, Justin was just giving Roger a dog biscuit.

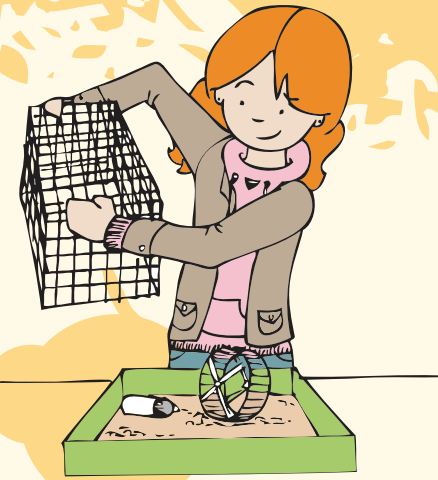
"May I please help feed Ralph?" Penny asked.

"Okay. He's already finished eating his breakfast and his dog biscuit treat, but you can see

if he wants a few seeds or fruit," answered Justin. Penny showed Ralph the food and he ate right out of her hand! She loved the way his little pink tongue tickled as he licked her hand clean. Justin loved Ralph and Roger, but Penny wasn't sure that a rat would be the right pet for her family. She had to give this decision more thought.

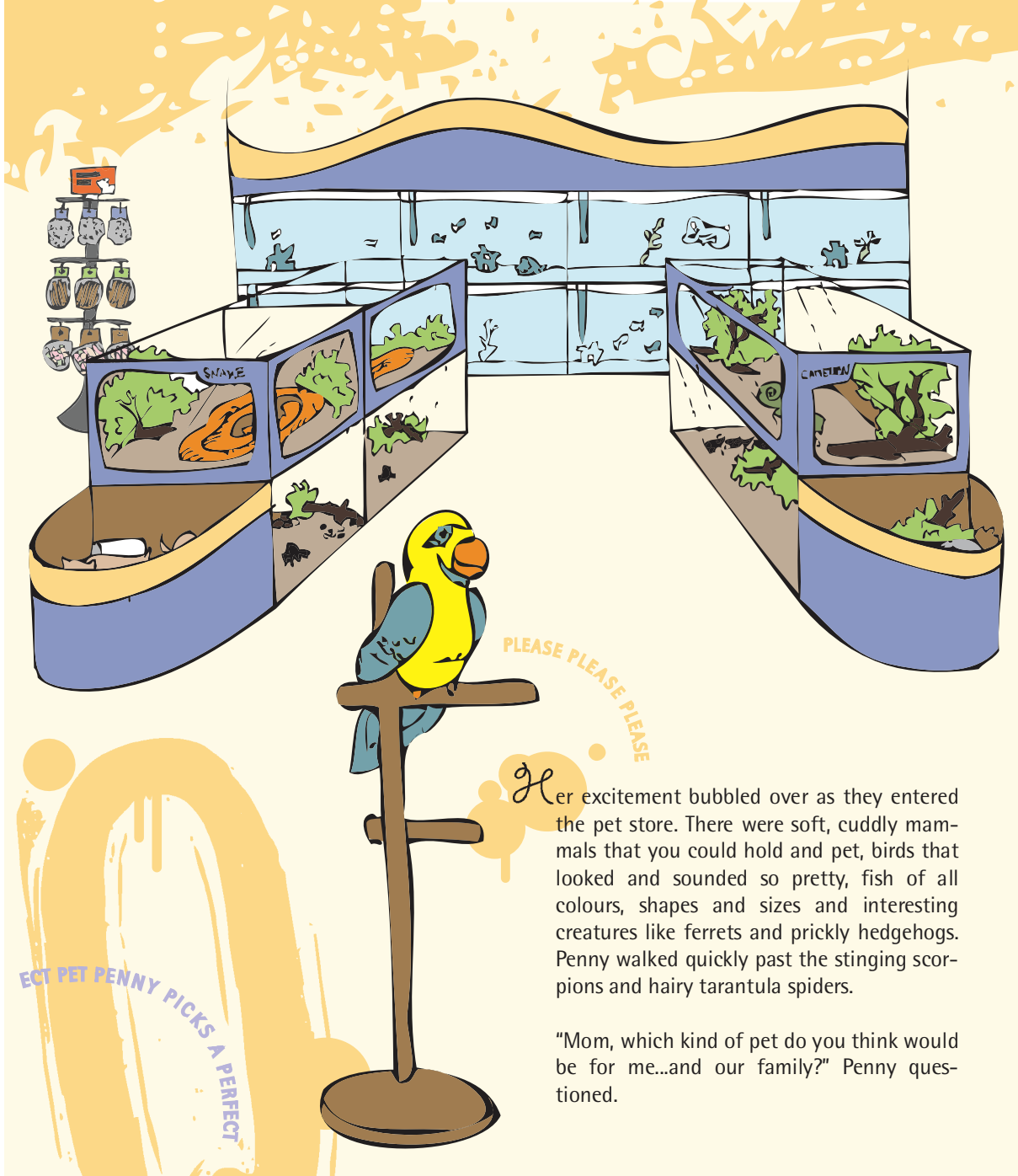


Emily was Penny's other best friend. She had a hamster she called Snowball because his fur was white and his body was roly-poly like a ball. Whenever Penny came over to play, the girls would spread an old quilt on the floor and then make it all lumpy. After that, they would take Snowball out of his cage and watch him climb over the humps and bumps. Penny liked to cradle the fluffy little creature against her body and pet his fur. She didn't even mind cleaning out his cage. She was certain that she would enjoy having a hamster to care for and love.



HEE HEE...
oh...so cute
GIGGLE

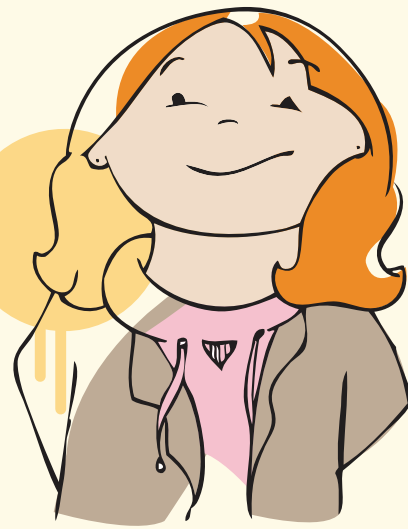




"Well, dear, remember that there's more to having a pet than just loving it. Taking care of an animal can be a lot of work. You must be careful to pick a pet that you know you will enjoy spending time with and never get tired of," answered her mother.

"I think I understand, Mom," replied Penny, "but it's so hard to decide which kind of pet that would be!"

"Just be patient and give it some time. Often the answer comes when you least expect it. You will know which kind of animal is best when the time is right," Penny's mom assured her. "But first your father and I need to be convinced that you are old enough and responsible enough to look after a pet."



PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

Her excitement bubbled over as they entered the pet store. There were soft, cuddly mammals that you could hold and pet, birds that looked and sounded so pretty, fish of all colours, shapes and sizes and interesting creatures like ferrets and prickly hedgehogs. Penny walked quickly past the stinging scorpions and hairy tarantula spiders.

"Mom, which kind of pet do you think would be for me...and our family?" Penny questioned.

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Chapter Two: The Purr-fect Opportunity

One afternoon, Penny was helping her mom pull weeds from their flowerbed. Mrs. French, the neighbour from across the street, came over with her family's new kitten. They had named their kitten Marmalade because her fur was as orange as the tasty marmalade jelly Penny had on her toast when her family ran out of her favourite food - peanut butter.

"Penny, I was hoping that you would be able to take care of Marmalade for a week while our family goes camping", Mrs. French said kindly.

"Oh Mom, may I? Please! Please! Please!" Penny pleaded.

Penny's mom answered with a yes. She had decided that this would be the perfect opportunity for her daughter to show that she was really ready to have a pet.



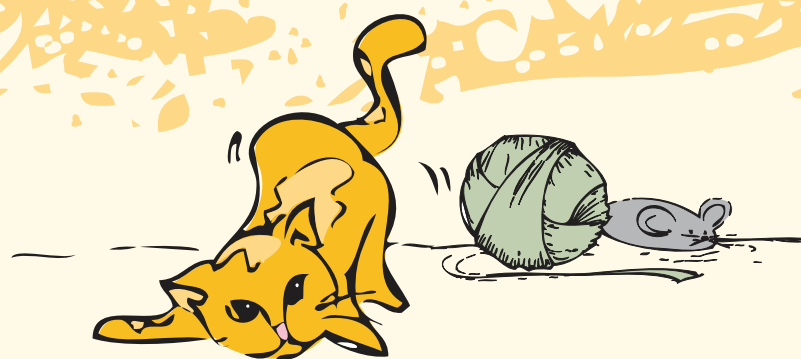
Her parents didn't really mind helping, but wanted to be sure that their daughter would do her share. They waited and watched for signs that Penny was ready to take on the responsibility of caring for an animal.

Days and weeks went by and Penny was beginning to think that she would never get a pet - not even a pretty goldfish that she could watch swim around in its bowl. She was considering getting out her bug box and finding a fuzzy caterpillar.

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THE PURR-FECT OPPORTUNITY



"May I please hold Marmalade?" Penny asked politely.

"Of course, you may," replied Mrs. French, as she carefully placed Marmalade into Penny's arms.

Mrs. French was impressed when Penny told her that she already knew that cats should not be given milk to drink because it could make them sick. Penny had learned that fact

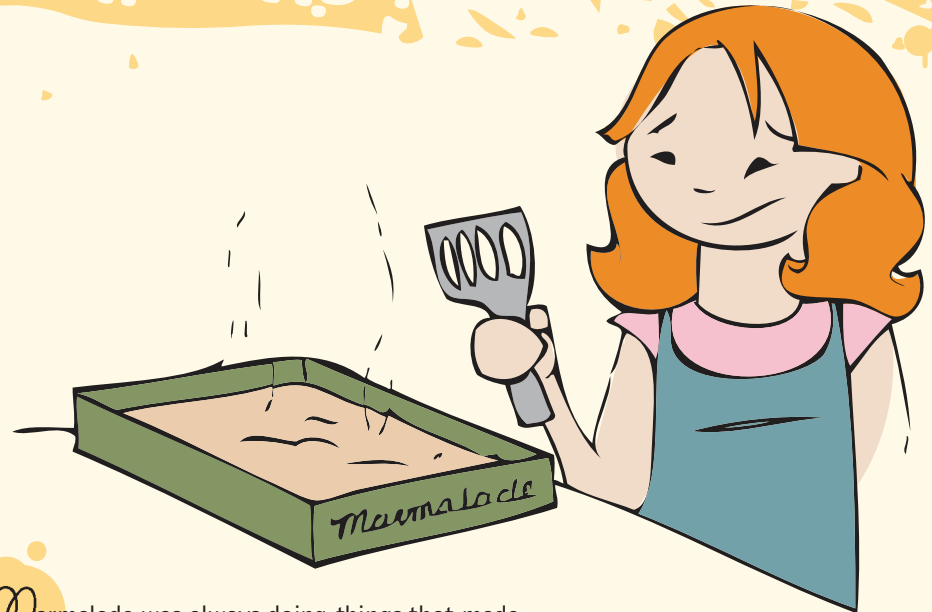
when a volunteer from an animal shelter had spoken to her class about how to be a responsible pet owner.

Penny was so excited! Taking care of Marmalade would be just like having a pet of her very own. They went over to Mrs. French's house so Penny and her mom could find out everything they needed to know about taking care of the kitten. Mrs. French even showed them how to change the litter in Marmalade's litter box. That was when Penny realized that there was at least one thing about having a car that was not fun.

Penny had five whole days before she had the sweet little kitten all to herself.



PURRR
auh...shucks!
KITTY

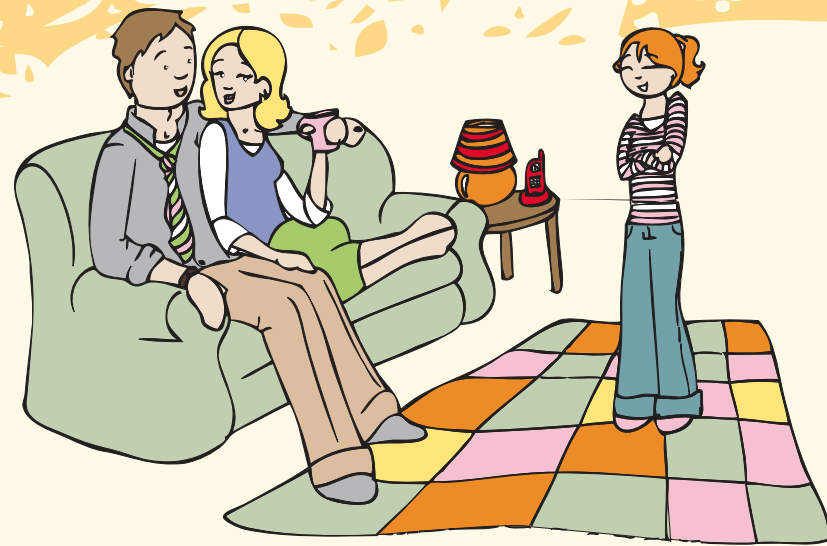


Marmalade was always doing things that made Penny laugh. It was fun to watch the little kitten as she played with a ball of wool or her catnip mouse. Penny would pick the kitten up ever so gently and whisper in her ear, "You're just so cute." Marmalade also liked paper bags. Sometimes she would just crawl in and stay very still, as if she was playing hide-and-seek. Other times, she would pounce on the bag or move around inside and make lots of noise. Penny guessed that Marmalade liked the crinkly sound the paper made.

The week passed and every day Penny remembered to feed Marmalade and make time to play with her. Her parents were pleased with her responsible behavior, especially the way she cleaned the litter box all by herself! They decided that she was now old enough to take care of a pet. The night the kitten went home, Penny was told the good news.



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"Am I allowed to choose any kind of pet I want?" Penny asked her parents politely.

Her father answered. "Well, I've noticed that you seem to like animals that you can hold and that will snuggle up to you. You probably wouldn't want to choose fish or something like a turtle or python," he suggested seriously. "On second thought, that kind of snake might want to snuggle around you," he added with a tease in his voice.

Her mother didn't answer right away. She was thinking back to when she was a child. Then she spoke. "When I was growing up, I enjoyed all my pets. My family had a dog with black curly fur, two little hamsters and a big, fat guinea pig," she said with a smile.

Penny giggled. "That might explain why I like puppies and hamsters so much," she told her mom.

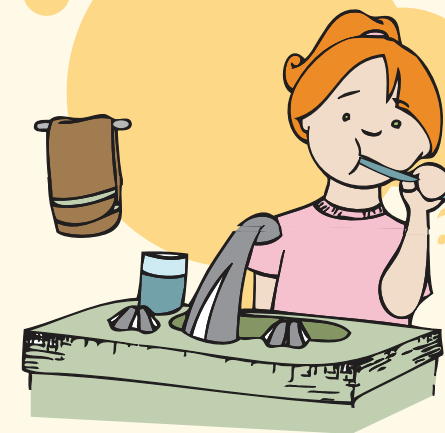


Penny still wasn't sure which kind of animal she wanted most. She needed to spend more time gathering information before making her final decision.

Penny knew that the next day was Saturday. So she asked if they could get up early and go to the pet store before it got too busy.

"Then I could look around really well and ask questions. I want to find out as much as I can about all the possible kinds of pets before I make my choice!" she stated. "I'll even take along a pencil and the shiny notepad that Auntie Barb gave me for my birthday."

Her parents agreed. She got into her pajamas, brushed her teeth and went right to bed. That night, Penny could hardly sleep. All she could think about was that she would soon have her very own pet!



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Chapter Three: Gathering Information

The next morning, Penny was up bright and early. Quick as a bunny, she was all ready to go to the mall. She had decided that she would do some exploring on her own first, so she would know the best questions to ask.

When Penny and her parents arrived at the pet store, she went straight to the rows of glass cases that held the unusual animals. There were rainbow skinks, leopard and crested geckos, bearded dragon lizards and four different kinds of snakes. As Penny studied the interesting creatures in the terrariums, she began to imagine these animals in their tropical rainforest home. Instead of the glass terrarium, Penny could see the rather large panther chameleon sitting on the branch of a giant kapok tree. At first it looked brownish in colour, matching the tree branch. As it crept onto a giant leaf, the chameleon started to turn a deep forest green. Penny whispered in amazement, "Wow! That's what the teacher meant by camouflage. That was totally cool!" Then the chameleon's body seemed to freeze, except for a round, bulgy eye on each side of its head. Both eyes kept rolling around in different directions and Penny couldn't tell where the chameleon was looking. She wondered whether the animal stayed still because it knew it was being watched. Zot! The chameleon shot out its tongue and caught a cricket. "Eek!" squealed Penny.



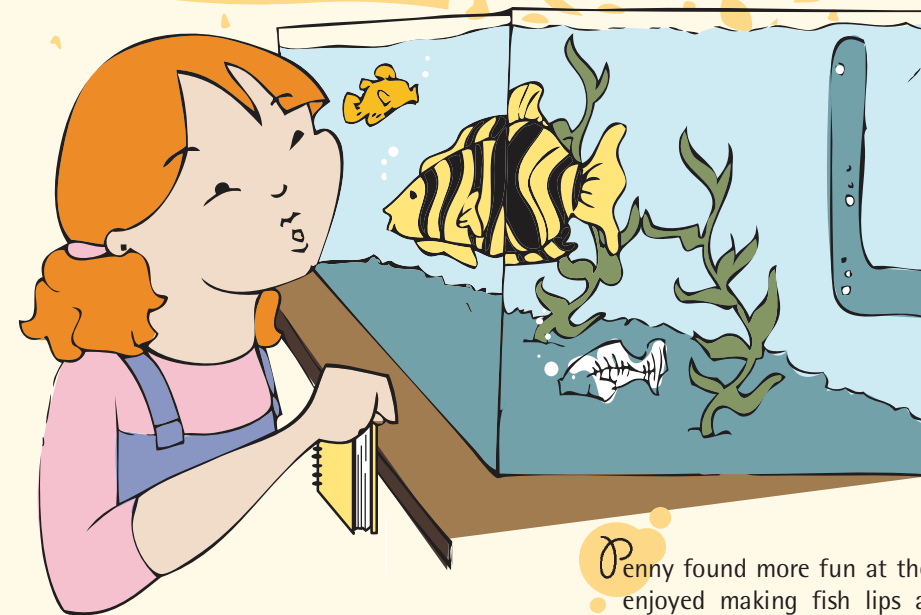


That caused her to come out of her dream world and she realized where she really was - the pet store. Penny moved on to the tarantula terrarium. It appeared to be empty. She peered cautiously through the glass and was careful not to tap on it because she thought the noise might scare the animal. Besides, she didn't want it to jump out and scare her! Penny spied the spider hiding under some leaves. She knew from watching a nature program that for most people, a tarantula bite was no worse than a wasp sting. Still, the thought of a tarantula for a pet gave Penny the shivers.

Penny's attention was drawn next by the noisy chatter of the birds. They were dressed in all the colours of the rainbow. There were budgies, cockatiels, lovebirds and even an African grey parrot!

"I wonder if any of these birds can talk," Penny thought to herself. Her curiosity was satisfied when the parrot suddenly squawked at her, "I can talk. Can you fly?"

Penny laughed. "No, but I wish I could!" she answered.



Penny found more fun at the fish tanks. She enjoyed making fish lips as she imagined talking to the fish in the aquariums. She discovered that tropical fish were different from goldfish. They needed a heater in their tanks to keep the water warm. She thought the glassfish had a perfect name, because she could see the bones of its skeleton!

Just then, Penny noticed a salesclerk taking a lizard-like creature out of a tank. "Whoa, what kind of animal is that?" asked Penny.

"This is a fire-belly newt", answered the salesclerk, as he showed her its bright orange tummy.

"That's the perfect name too!" Penny blurted out. Even though the newt looked like a lizard, Penny knew from science class that it was really an amphibian. That explained why it lived in an aquarium with some water and a big rock.

