



CLASS PETS

#1: Fuzzy's
Great
Escape



Bruce
Hale

Scholastic Inc.





To Sharon Hearn and her cool compatriots at Children's Book World

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CHAPTER 1



First Day, Fresh Hay

“Look, a guinea pig!”

“Cool!”

On this first day of the new school year, Fuzzy had to hand it to the first two students through the door. These girls had their priorities in order. Pausing only to stuff their book bags into the cubbyholes, they made a beeline for his cage.

“Welcome, girls,” said Miss Wills. The sweet-faced teacher had just finished setting up Room 5-B and was writing the class schedule on the blackboard. Fuzzy loved the smell of chalk almost as much as he loved the smell of fresh hay.

“Can I pick her up?” asked the first kid, who wore her dark hair in a bunch of skinny braids.

“Him,” said Miss Wills. She brushed chalk dust from her palms. “And yes, you may. Gently, please.”

Fuzzy tensed. For some of the newbies, *gently* meant *like a cranky sumo wrestler*. Then, two soft hands lifted him out of his cage—one wrapped around his chest, one supporting his hind legs. He relaxed. This kid knew her way around guinea pigs.

“What’s his name?” asked the second girl. Her huge, blue-framed glasses gave her an owl-like look.

“Fuzzy!” said Fuzzy.

The girls laughed. “He chirped,” said Skinny Braids. Fuzzy had long ago gotten used to the fact that he could understand humans’ language, but they couldn’t understand his.

“He does that,” said Miss Wills. “His name is Fuzzy.”

Owl Glasses giggled. “That’s a funny name.”

“Tell me about it,” squeaked Fuzzy. He would’ve preferred something more macho, like Rex, Rocky, or Hulk. But the class that named him had really admired

his fur—and that class had a particularly pink-and-frilly ringleader, a girl named Shakira, who nominated the name. And so he was Fuzzy forevermore.

“He sure talks a lot,” said Skinny Braids.

Miss Wills smiled. “Fuzzy likes being part of the conversation.”

This was true. Fuzzy had *lots* of ideas, and he was eager to share them. In fact, he considered himself an Idea Rodent. Unfortunately, not everyone wanted to hear his ideas—the other class pets, for example.

But all that was about to change.

As the girls fussed over him and more students wandered in, Fuzzy thought about how this new school year would be different. For two whole years, he’d longed to be president of the Class Pets Club, but twice over, the other pets had elected Geronimo the rat.

Not anymore.

Sly old Geronimo had retired to a farm over the summer, and Fuzzy knew what that meant. Tonight, at the year’s first Class Pets Club meeting, he would finally achieve his dream. President Fuzzy! It had a nice ring to it.

Then the other pets would listen to his great ideas. Oh, the adventures they'd have!

Wheek! An eager whistle squeaked out of him. Owl Glasses nearly dropped Fuzzy in surprise.

"Okay, girls," said Miss Wills, coming to the rescue. "Fuzzy's had enough excitement for now, and it's time to start class."

But even back in his cage, Fuzzy couldn't contain himself. He raced up and down, hopping in the air. *Wheek, wheek!*

The new students laughed and applauded. As well they might. For this, he knew, would be his year. The Year of Fuzzy. He couldn't wait for tonight.

So, of course, he had to wait.

Through the introductions of all the new students, shy and brassy, eager and reluctant. Through the vote on the classroom rules for the year. Through his own introduction to this fresh crop of fifth graders.

But Fuzzy didn't resent the wait. He took his job as class pet seriously. The way Fuzzy saw it, his duty was to inspire and encourage his new friends. How else would they learn, but from an experienced pet like himself?

That meant tamping down his excitement to reassure Nervous Lily, and enduring Heavy-Handed Jake's clumsiness. It also meant keeping quiet when Miss Wills read from one of Fuzzy's favorite books, *Stuart Little*.

Still, Fuzzy breathed a sigh of relief at the end of the day. Finally, Miss Wills gave him his farewell snuggles. Then she turned off the lights, said "Good night, sweet Fuzzy," and locked the door.

At last, his evening could begin!

As the *tok-tok-tok* of Miss Wills's heels faded down the hallway, Fuzzy went to work on escaping his cage. Leaning his full weight against the plastic platform, he dug in his hind legs and push-push-pushed until it bumped up against the wire wall.

Next, he retrieved his ball from the corner and nosed it over until it nudged the platform. Finally, Fuzzy shoved a wooden block beside the ball. He stepped back to check it out. Perfect!

"After all, I may not be the world's best fence climber," he told himself, "but any old rodent can climb stairs."

He scrambled on top of the block. Easy peasy. Fuzzy braced his front paws on the ball. So far, so good. But when he brought his back paws up . . .

Yikes! The ball rolled sideways!

Fuzzy scabbled the opposite way with all four feet, barely keeping his balance. The ball slowed . . .

Then it reversed direction. “Who-o-o-oah!”

And just at that moment, a key clattered in the lock, and the classroom door swung open.

Fuzzy teetered. Fuzzy tottered. Then . . .

Whoomph! Down he fell onto the pine shavings.

A tall man in brown coveralls stepped into the room. Flicking on the lights, he strode across to the open-topped cage and peered in. The rich smell of butter-scotch drifted on his breath. “Hey, you okay, little buddy?” he asked.

“Just fine.” Fuzzy scrambled back onto his feet.

Wiggling whiskers, that was close! He’d completely forgotten about Darius Poole. Every afternoon like clockwork, the janitor tidied up the classrooms. What if he’d caught Fuzzy running around outside the cage? That could’ve meant the end of Fuzzy’s big plans.



“Trying to balance on your ball?” asked Mr. Darius. His long face hovered over the cage like a blimp with stubble. “Not as easy as it looks. Hey, you know how you get to Carnegie Hall?”

“Um, walk?” said Fuzzy.

“Practice, practice, practice.” The janitor gave a low chuckle at his own joke.

Fuzzy liked how Mr. Darius talked to him, man to rodent. Though he knew it wasn’t possible, sometimes he’d almost swear that the janitor understood his chirps and squeaks.

“Here, this’ll keep up your strength,” said Mr. Darius. He dug into one of his pockets, producing an apple slice. Was it any wonder that the janitor ranked as one of the class pets’ all-time favorite humans? The man knew what a pet needed.

Fuzzy munched on the fruit while Mr. Darius swept the room and emptied the wastebaskets. It didn’t take long. After the janitor turned out the lights and said, “Good night, little buddy,” Fuzzy waited.

And waited.

Guinea pigs aren’t championship waiters.

Finally, when he couldn't stand it anymore, Fuzzy made his move. Back into position went the ball—braced by a second block this time. Then, *bimp-bomp-bump*, up and over the wall he went.

A free guinea pig at last!