



CLASS PETS

#4: Fuzzy
Fights
Back



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CHAPTER 1



The Great Defender

Fuzzy awoke to the sound of clacking. For a moment, he felt disoriented. His sensitive guinea pig nose didn't detect the usual odors of Miss Wills's classroom: glue, dry-erase markers, and sweaty kids.

Where was he?

Blinking the sleep from his eyes, Fuzzy checked out his surroundings. Tan sofa, poofy burgundy armchairs, widescreen TV. *Oh yeah.* He chuckled, nodding to himself. He'd come home for the weekend with Malik Summers, Room 5-B's top student from last week.

With a yawn and a stretch, Fuzzy rose from the footstool he'd been napping on and hopped to the floor. As the clacking continued, angry voices rose in the next room. Fuzzy's ears perked up. It sounded like an argument.

Was Malik in trouble?

All classroom pets took an oath to comfort and protect their students, anywhere, anytime, anyhow. Fuzzy shook himself. No more Nap Rodent. It was time for him to become Action Rodent!

Following the noises, he trotted out of the den and into the Summerses' living room. As he rounded the corner, Fuzzy gasped and stopped short.

The furniture had been pushed back, and in the cleared space, a bigger boy was attacking Malik with a stick! Malik swung his own stick to block it—*clack!*

“How dare you threaten my brother, Spartan dog!” cried Malik. He counterattacked with a *whunk-whunk-whack*. But the taller boy easily fought him off.

Fuzzy frowned. Why was Malik calling the other boy a dog when he was so clearly human? Why were they fighting? He watched, wide-eyed, as the two traded a series of blows.

Click-clack-clunk!

The fight ranged up onto the sofa and back down to the floor.

“Your brother is a stinker!” yelled the bigger boy, his golden hair flopping into his eyes.

“And you’re a bigger one!”

“He stole my king’s wife, and now he’s gonna pay.”

“Over my dead body,” growled Malik.

Fuzzy looked from one of them to the other, thoroughly mystified. He felt like he’d wandered into the middle of one of those foreign movies Miss Wills watched sometimes. Nothing made sense. Malik didn’t have a brother; he had an older sister. And what was all this about stealing wives?

“King Menelaus is a doo-doo head!” cried Malik. “Take that!” He aimed a blow at Floppy Hair’s belly.

The taller boy spun aside, whacking Malik on the arm, then the shoulder.

Fuzzy bristled. This overgrown bully was hurting his student. Nobody messed with Room 5-B’s kids while Fuzzy was on duty.

No matter how tall, no matter how tough, Floppy Hair was going down!

Snarling, “Leave him alone!” Fuzzy hurled himself straight at the stranger. His eyes were wide. His teeth were bared. Heck, he might even bite the blockhead.

Floppy Hair brandished his stick. “Die, Trojan pond scum!” He chased Malik around the table, and Fuzzy had to gallop extra hard to keep up.

Then he saw his chance. They were coming around again.



Switching directions and rebounding off the sofa, Fuzzy launched himself at the bigger boy's legs. As he flew, he heard Malik shout, "Watch out for Fuzzy!"

The next seconds seemed to unspool in slow motion.

Floppy Hair dodged. Fuzzy sailed past him, tumbling onto the floor.

The boy caught his foot on the table and tripped, stick still raised.

He toppled forward.

Malik turned.

The stick descended, straight at Malik's head.

Fuzzy gasped. "No!"

Ka-tonk!

It struck Malik right between the eyes. With a grunt, the boy crumpled onto the carpet.

Holy haystacks!

Fuzzy's heart caught in his throat. Neither boy moved.

Was Malik . . . ?

Rising onto his hands and knees, Floppy Hair looked over at his fallen enemy. "Dude? Are you okay?"

Guilt wrestled with anger in Fuzzy's gut. On the one hand, if this noodlehead had killed Malik, Fuzzy swore he'd find out how to catch rabies, then bite the bully until he caught it too.

On the other hand, Fuzzy was supposed to protect his students, but his actions led to Malik getting hurt. *Bad class pet.* He crept forward, gaze fixed on Malik.

The boy's eyes were closed. His dark lashes rested on his cheeks. He lay so still.

"What's going on in there?" a woman's voice called from the next room.

Before Fuzzy knew it, Mrs. Summers strode into view. At the sight of her son, the curly-haired woman stiffened. "Malik!" she cried, rushing to his side.

As she kneeled beside him, her son began to stir. Fuzzy let out a long breath. The boy was still alive. He wanted to rush forward and comfort Malik, but the weight of guilt anchored him behind the table leg.

"Careful, don't sit up yet," said Malik's mother. "What happened? Are you all right?" Her hands patted her son all over, searching for an injury.

“It’s my fault.” Floppy Hair joined them. “I tripped and hit him with my sword.”

“You *tripped*?” Mrs. Summers squawked.

The blond boy flinched. “It was an accident. I was trying to avoid the guinea pig, and I caught my foot on the table.”

“The *guinea pig*?” Frowning, Malik’s mother scanned the room.

“Is Fuzzy okay?” Malik pushed up onto his elbows to see.

“Is *Fuzzy* okay?” his mom echoed.

For some reason, Fuzzy noticed, she kept repeating everything the boys said, only louder and more intensely.

“Yeah,” said Malik, rubbing his forehead. “He got all excited because we were rehearsing our scene, and he ran into the middle of things. Where is he?”

“Rehearsing a *scene*?” Now Fuzzy was repeating things. He smacked his own forehead. Of course. The boys weren’t trying to kill each other. They were practicing their parts for the fifth-grade play about the Trojan War.

Oops. Fuzzy’s ears tingled with embarrassment.

“Don’t worry about that rodent,” said Malik’s mom. She brushed aside her son’s hand and probed the reddened area on his forehead. “How does this feel?”

“It’s no big de—ow!” said Malik. “Just a little sore.”

The curly-haired woman bit her lip. “You were out cold.”

“Only for a few seconds,” said Floppy Hair.

“You’re going to the emergency room for a quick check, just to be sure,” said Mrs. Summers.

“But I’m fine,” said the blond boy.

“Not you, Brayden. Run along home, now; you’ve done enough.”

“I’m fine too,” Malik insisted.

Helping her son to his feet, Malik’s mother said, “Let’s let the doctor decide, okay, lamb chop?”

As blond Brayden waved good-bye and shuffled off, Malik scanned the room. “Where’s Fuzzy? Gotta make sure he’s okay.”

Fuzzy stepped out from behind the table leg, head bowed.

Mrs. Summers scowled. “That creature has caused enough trouble. Put it in its cage and call your teacher.”

“But, Mom—”

“Soon as we get back from the ER, she’s going to take that thing away for good.”

“But Fuzzy’s my reward.”

Arching an eyebrow, Mrs. Summers said, “Some reward. Real rewards don’t endanger students.”

“Mom, you’ve got it all wrong.” Malik picked up Fuzzy in the gentle grip—one hand around the chest and one under the hindquarters. “Fuzzy’s like our class mascot. The best student each week gets to take him home. It’s a tradition.”

“Is it?” said Mrs. Summers, her lips a grim line. “Then it’s about time for this tradition to change.”