

**8 Class Pets
+1 Squirrel
÷1 Dog=
CHAOS**





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+1 Squirrel
÷ 1 Dog =
CHAOS**

by **Vivian Vande Velde**

illustrated by
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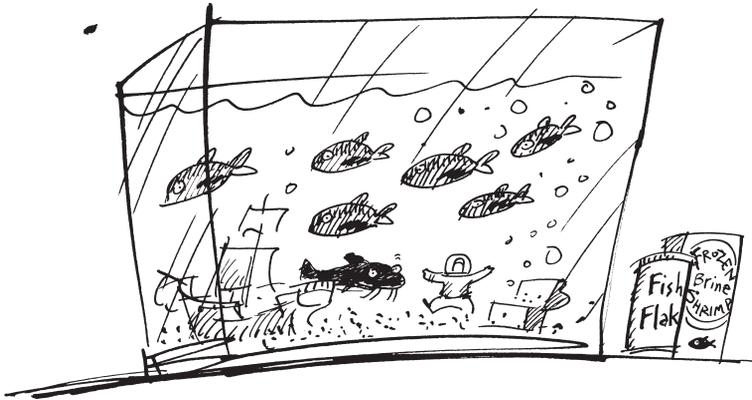
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To those teachers
who are bold enough
to have a class pet
in their rooms





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TWITCH

(school-yard squirrel)



Being a squirrel is the best thing in the world.

The next best thing in the world is living where I live—which is near School. School is where humans send their young to learn things.

I don't know why.

Squirrel mothers teach their own young. These are things my squirrel mother taught me:

- ★ how to climb
- ★ how to land when I jump or fall

- ★ how to find food
- ★ how to bury food
- ★ how to find food after I've buried it
- ★ how to look cute enough that humans will give me food, so I don't have to find it, bury it, or find it again
- ★ how to get along with animals that don't eat squirrels (Not eating squirrels is something I admire in those I meet.)
- ★ how to get away from animals that DO eat squirrels

These are all valuable lessons for a squirrel.

I'm not sure why humans can't teach their own young.

A few of the children are all right at climbing, but most aren't good at finding food, and they're hopeless at burying food.

A squirrel mother teaches her young all they need to know by the end of summer, but human children spend *five years* in School. Five years is long enough for a squirrel to grow very, very old, so it's a good thing we're faster learners.

And the humans aren't even truly finished in five years!

I have heard them talking, and I know. Before they go

to School, they go to Kindergarten. And after they leave School, they will go to someplace that is called Middle School. And after *that*, they will go to High School.

I haven't seen any of these other places. I have no idea what Kindergarten is. But by their names, I'm guessing Middle School is halfway up, and High School must be at the very top of a tall tree. I suppose that's the only way the humans will ever teach some of those young ones to climb.

But School and the yards around it are a good place to live.

It's fun to climb up the School building and to play on the playground equipment when the children aren't using it. There are also trees for climbing, and some of them are nut trees and some of them are fruit trees. That's two of my big interests rolled into one: climbing and eating.

And the people who live here love squirrels.

They're always buying toys and exercise equipment for us, and they set these things up around a feeder to make sure we notice them—it's a mini-playground with a snack bar in the middle. Some of the toys are for twirling on, and there are ropes to shinny up and climb down, and balance beams to walk across. Sometimes, to make things extra-challenging for our benefit, the ropes and poles are greased to make them slippery. Whee!

It's very considerate of people to give us these jungle gyms so we don't become fat and lazy, like, for example, the groundhog.

One day I was exploring a new bird feeder in the yard next door to School. It had a big slippery disk for sliding on, and I was having so much fun, I lost track of the time.

Then I realized that the air had turned cool, and shadows were growing long. Evening is a dangerous time of day because certain creatures who are not squirrels and who are not fat and lazy groundhogs start thinking about dinner. Or breakfast. Some of them start thinking of a meal that involves squirrel.



I looked up. And there was an owl, and she was flying straight at me—as though *I* was the main course on the snack bar!

All I could do was start running in a zigzag pattern to try to confuse that owl.

I didn't even notice the dog who was napping in his front yard.



Now, it's easy to point a finger—or paw—in blame, but I say; if that dog didn't want me running over his nose, he shouldn't have had it resting on the ground between his paws. But, anyway, the next thing I knew, the dog was chasing me, too. He ran so hard, he broke the leash that was supposed to hold him in his yard.

Luckily, one of the humans who works at School had left the door propped open.

I noticed the big banner:

WELCOME!

This is the same banner that tells the children School is open again after the summer.

Someone was obviously telling me School was open for me to escape from the dog.

Didn't I say the people here love squirrels?

So for the first time in my life, I ran into School.

That owl veered away and flew off into the evening.

But the dog followed me in.

GREEN EGGS AND HAMSTER

(first-grade hamster)



I am a hamster, and I live in Mrs. Duran's first-grade classroom. Mrs. Duran named me after a famous book. She says that makes me a literary pet. *Literary* is the biggest word I know, but I don't know what it means.

Mrs. Duran reads a lot of books to the first-graders. The boys and girls talk about what happened in the story and tell if they liked it. Sometimes they write their own stories. I don't have a pencil to write stories, so I run around in my exercise wheel instead. Round,

round, round I go. Sometimes I get so dizzy, I forget things.

Did I mention I'm a hamster?

The children also do art projects. They color, they cut with scissors, they paste. Lately, they've been very excited about some project they're doing out in the hall. I have a project, too, but it's inside my cage. Mrs. Duran gives me tissue and cardboard, and I rip them up with my teeth to make a nice and soft and cozy bed. Every morning Mrs. Duran cleans out the bed I made the day before, along with my litter, and I get to start all over again on a brand-new art project.

Maybe that's what *literary* means.

My favorite part of first grade—after snack time—is that the children and I have been learning about numbers and how to count. There are all sorts of things I can count:

1. I have 4 legs and 1 tail. ($4 + 1 = 5$, even though my tail is shorter than my legs.)
2. There are 2 levels in my cage. Level 1 is the top level, which has my bed and my food bowl and a mirror for me to look into. Level 2 is the bottom level, which has my water bottle and my wheel. I also have a chew toy in the shape of

- an elephant. (2 levels + 1 bed + 1 food bowl + 1 mirror + 1 water bottle + 1 wheel + 1 elephant to chew on = lots of things for Green Eggs and Hamster to do.)
3. The ladder from downstairs to upstairs has 10 rungs. The ladder from upstairs to downstairs also has 10 rungs. This is because it is the same ladder. (1 ladder = 1 ladder.)
 4. The number of Special Hamster Treats I can fit into my cheek pouches at one time is 8. (8 special treats = yummy.)

There is a squirrel named Twitch who lives outside. Twitch sometimes comes and sits on the window ledge to visit. Twitch is good at cramming birdseed into his cheeks, but he says birdseeds are too small to count. I think that Twitch is not very good at counting.

I am too good a friend to tell him so.

One day, after the children had gone home, after Mrs. Duran had gone home, after the custodian had swept the floor and turned off the lights but before it got dark, I was busy counting the numbers on the wall clock. There are usually twelve numbers—unless I count them after I've gone around in my exercise wheel. Then there are a lot more numbers. *And* they move.

This day I had counted seventeen numbers when Twitch came running into the room.

Did I say Twitch is a squirrel?



“Help, help!” Twitch called. “There’s a dog chasing me.”

I didn’t ask why a dog was chasing him. Sometimes details are important, but sometimes they’re not. I got an idea, so I said, “Climb up on the bookshelves behind me. And hide behind the dictionary.” The dictionary is the biggest book in the room.

Twitch was up there before I could say, “Wow! You’re a good climber!”

And then the dog ran into the room. Attached to his collar was a long length of rope, which dragged along behind him. “Where’s that no-good squirrel?” the dog barked at me.

I scratched my ear and asked, “Did you check the room with the snake?” (There are five grades in this school, and Mrs. Shaughnessey’s fifth grade, where the snake lives = the farthest room from Mrs. Duran’s room.)

The dog growled, “I smell that squirrel here.”

“Are you sure you don’t smell me?” I asked. “The squirrel and I are both rodents, and that makes us cousins. 1 squirrel + 1 hamster = 2 rodent cousins.”

The dog sniffed at my cage. “Maybe,” he said.



“Where’s the room with the snake?”

“Fifth grade,” I said. “All the way down the hall.”

The dog left, his rope leash still trailing him. But just when Twitch started to come out from behind

the dictionary, the custodian came in. Twitch ducked down again.

“I thought I heard a dog,” the custodian said.

“He’s gone to the fifth grade,” I said.

But even though animals can understand people, most people aren’t very good at understanding animals.

The custodian looked around, scratched his head, and said, “Must be outside the building. Good. A dog in the school is the last thing I need with that art contest tomorrow.”

As soon as the custodian was gone, Twitch climbed back down the bookshelves. “Thanks, cousin,” he said. “See you tomorrow.”

He ran out of Mrs. Duran’s room but was back before I could climb into my exercise wheel.

“Oh no!” he said. “The human has left School—and he shut the door behind him. That dog and I are both locked in here. What should I do?”

This was too much for me. I had thought of 1 plan, but I couldn’t think of 2. “Go next door and ask the rabbit,” I said. “She likes to order everyone around, but she’s smart. She’ll think of something.”