



# CLASS PETS

#2: Fuzzy  
Takes  
Charge

Bruce  
Hale

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# CHAPTER 1



## Stranger Danger

It was a Monday mystery. When Fuzzy returned to Room 5-B after a weekend with student-of-the-week Maya, he just knew that something was wrong. True, his sniffer was still in shock from the tropical mango shampoo Maya had used on him that morning.

Even so, Fuzzy smelled danger.

As Maya gently lifted him from the pet carrier into his cage, his senses went on high alert. Fuzzy scampered over the pine shavings to check out his home. Had someone kidnapped his favorite blue

ball? Nope. There it was in the corner, same as he'd left it.

Was a hungry cat stalking through the classroom? Fuzzy rose onto his hind legs and did a quick scan. Nothing but sleepy fifth graders preparing for their lessons, same as usual.

Sitting back down, he scratched himself. Could he have been imagining things? It was true, Fuzzy had a terrific imagination. That was, after all, what had won him his post as the Class Pets Club's director of adventure. (Well, that and his sense of adventure.)

But the prickly feeling down his spine wasn't mange mites, and it wouldn't go away. Closing his eyes, Fuzzy took a deep, deep whiff. Beyond the usual odors of freshly sharpened pencils, chalk dust, and peanut butter sandwiches lurked an odd new smell.

A stranger.

And just then, Fuzzy realized that a familiar scent was missing: the sweet, fresh-baked bread aroma of Miss Wills, Room 5-B's teacher. His eyes popped open, searching for her.

She was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a man stood by Miss Wills's desk with his arms crossed. Scowling, he surveyed the room.

“Holy haystacks!” chirped Fuzzy.

Of medium height for a human, the man was stiffer than a stale breadstick and just as skinny. His close-cropped hair was dull brown, his clothes were the color of mud, and he looked like he'd been sucking on a lemon so long, the pucker had stuck.

“Who the heck is that?” Fuzzy wondered.

The bell rang. The mysterious man glared at the students until their conversations faltered and died off. Waiting until the room was completely silent, he then cleared his throat.

“My name,” he said in a tight tenor voice, “is . . .”

Gripping a piece of chalk, he pivoted and scratched his name onto the board with a grating squeak.

“Mr. Brittle,” the stiff man concluded. He whipped back around, eyeing the fifth graders as if they'd tried to steal his wallet while his back was turned. “And I do not tolerate any nonsense in my classroom.”

*His* classroom? The students traded puzzled looks.

Fuzzy frowned. Where was Miss Wills? Had this stranger done something to her? His hackles rose. Fuzzy considered himself a guinea pig of peace, but if the situation demanded, he could bite with the best of them.

Loud Brandon raised his hand. It stayed up for a long time as Mr. Brittle finished giving everyone the evil eye. Finally, the stiff man nodded, granting permission for the student to speak.

“Where’s Miss Wills?” asked Brandon.

“In court,” said Mr. Brittle.

Several kids gasped. Fuzzy cocked his head. He’d heard of basketball courts and tennis courts, but he had no idea why Miss Wills would be playing sports instead of teaching class.

“Is she being sued?” Zoey-with-the-braces burst out.

Mr. Brittle snapped, “Children who wish to speak in my class raise their hands first.”

Zoey rolled her eyes, but she lifted her hand as directed. The man pointed a finger at her.

“Is Miss Wills being sued?” she repeated.

“Certainly not.”

“Then, why—?”

“Miss Wills has been called in for jury duty.”

Maya’s forehead crinkled. “What’s that?” At the teacher’s meaningful glare, she hoisted her arm into the air and repeated the question.

Scanning the room, Mr. Brittle asked, “Does anyone know the answer?”

The students shrugged. Raising his hand, Loud Brandon asked, “Is jury duty what happens when a jury has to go to the bathroom?”

A few kids giggled, until the teacher’s scowl shut them up.

“Wrong *and* rude,” said the man. “Anyone else? No? Not a very bright bunch, are we, *hmm?*”

Fuzzy’s eyes widened. How mean! Miss Wills would never speak to her class like that.

“Jury duty is when citizens serve on the jury for a trial,” said Mr. Brittle. “Your teacher will be gone all week, maybe longer. I am her substitute.”

Miss Wills, gone?

“No!” squeaked Fuzzy. “No, no, no!”

The substitute’s close-cropped head swiveled in his direction like a tank turret zeroing in on a target. “And what,” he said, “is *that*?”

Once more, he ignored the students’ answers until they had raised their hands. Finally, he called on Spiky Diego, one of Fuzzy’s favorites.

“Fuzzy is a guinea pig,” said the boy.

Mr. Brittle’s eyes narrowed. “I am not as dim as you are. I *know* what a guinea pig looks like. I want to know *why* that pig is in my classroom.”

Fuzzy bristled. “I’m no pig—I’m a rodent!”

“Noisy little thing,” the teacher sneered.

“He’s our class pet,” said Diego. “Kind of a mascot.”

The substitute’s nostrils twitched as if he’d smelled something funky. “They carry disease. They are the same filthy creatures that caused the bubonic plague.”

“Wasn’t that rats?” asked Maya, ever the history buff.





“Same difference,” said Mr. Brittle.

Connor lifted his hand. “Actually, I think it was the *fleas* on the rats that—”

*Whap!* The substitute thwacked a ruler onto the desktop. The kids jumped, startled.

“If I want history, I will watch PBS!” he said. “That pig is a distraction, and I want it gone.”

An *oooh!* swelled in the classroom. Nearly everyone’s hands shot up.

“Yes, the fat boy.” Mr. Brittle pointed his ruler at Heavy-Handed Jake.

Fuzzy gaped. Nobody in 5-B talked like that. This man had already broken the classroom’s no-bullying policy, and he hadn’t even been around for fifteen minutes!

Jake blushed furiously. “Um, Fuzzy is Miss Wills’s personal pet. I don’t think she’d like you getting rid of him.”

The substitute’s knuckles tightened around the ruler. He glowered at Jake for a moment, then turned and stalked up to Fuzzy’s cage. Wielding the straight-edge like a sword, Mr. Brittle growled, “You had better mind your manners, mister. I hear that in Peru, they *eat* guinea pigs.”

Suffering mange mites! Shocked to the core, Fuzzy shrank behind his igloo. He heard students gasp.

Mr. Brittle wheeled on the class. “Enough time-wasting. We will begin our lessons, and I warn you”—again, he brandished the ruler—“you had better not try any tricks with me, you little snots. Because I. Hate. Tricks.” On each of his last three words, the

sub smacked the straightedge on Fuzzy's table.  
*Whack-whack-whack!*

Nerves frazzled, Fuzzy huddled behind one of his blocks and watched the substitute sneer and bully his way through the morning. One whole week of this? Fuzzy didn't think he could stand it. More important, he didn't think his students could stand it.

Somebody had to do something. The kids were powerless, so that meant *he* had to do something.

But what?

Fuzzy didn't know. Still, as he brooded, gnawing on the corner of his block, one thing became crystal clear.

Whatever the method, whatever it took, this sub must go.