

Shelter Pet Squad to the Rescue

Most Saturday mornings when I arrive at the Maplewood Animal Shelter to volunteer, things are calm and peaceful. Ms. Flores is behind the front counter, answering the phone and telling visitors about the animals. Ms. Kim and the rest of the Shelter Pet Squad kids are in the workroom, ready to make things to keep the animals busy and happy.

But not today! When I opened the front door, Ms. Flores was crawling on the floor,

looking under the waiting-room chairs. Ms. Kim was searching through the dog-bed display.

“Quick, Suzannah! Close the door!” Ms. Flores said. “We can’t let Merlin escape!”

She looked worried. I shut the door behind me as fast as I could. “Who’s Merlin?” I asked. A hamster? A rabbit? A cat?

“A ferret!” Ms. Kim pulled the dog beds away from the wall and looked behind them. “His owner brought him to us a few days ago. This morning, he got out of his cage, and now we can’t find him anywhere!”

The shelter takes care of stray and homeless pets until they get a new home. Ms. Kim and Ms. Flores work at the shelter, and there are five kids in Shelter Pet Squad: Jada, Matt,

Levi, Allie, and me. My best friend in the group is Jada. My least favorite kid is Allie, because she likes to get her own way every time.

“Merlin isn’t in the cat room,” Levi said, coming down the hallway with Matt. “We looked everywhere! Even under the cats’ beds.”

“What if one of the cats ate him?” Matt asked.

“Don’t say that!” I heard Jada yell from the small-animal room.

“A cat wouldn’t eat a ferret,” Ms. Flores said. “But Merlin can get himself into places you wouldn’t expect. Yesterday afternoon, I found him sleeping in the trash can near my desk.”

“Good thing you didn’t throw him away!” I peeked under a rack of books about pet care. I wasn’t sure a ferret could even fit under there,

though. I'd never seen a real ferret, only ferrets in pictures.

Under the books was just some dust — no animals.

Allie popped up from behind the front counter. “He’s not in the trash can or the recycling bin.”

“What does Merlin look like?” I asked, looking through a rack of leashes and collars.

“Like a weasel, but with a raccoon face.” Matt made sideways *V*s with his fingers around his eyes, like a mask. “A weaselly thief!”

“You can say that again,” Ms. Kim said. “On Thursday, I let him run around the waiting room so he could have some exercise. My coat was hanging on the back of my chair, and he stole my phone out of the pocket!”