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**ROLO THE
PET EARTHLING**

by David Hundsness

Sample Chapters

Middle Grade Fiction

About 30,000 words

1. ZIRA'S WISH

“Can't I have a pet earthling? Please?”

“Zira, we've been over this a dozen times. You're too young to handle such a big responsibility.”

“But Mom, I promise I'll take real good care of it. I'll feed it every day, and take it on walks, and I'll give it baths.”

Her mom pulled more groceries from the bag and leaned inside the refrigerator to cram more food on the shelves. “Earthlings are a lot of work, more than you think. And they make a big mess.”

“But Mom—”

“Zira!” She cut her off firmly, withdrew her head from the refrigerator and finally looked at her. “I know you really want a pet, but we already have one.”

“That's Lazro's pet!” she whined. “And it just sits there and eats flies. It can't even talk!”

Her mom gave a forced smile. “Well, we can talk about this when you're older.”

Zira had heard that line so many times before; it felt like a lie. She groaned and rolled her eyes as far as they could roll, then trudged back to her bedroom, loud enough for her mom to

hear every frustrated footstep scuffing down the hallway. She tried slamming her door shut to punctuate her dramatic exit, but it got caught on a sock on the carpet. She kicked the sock out of the way and shoved the door closed, not quite as loudly as she had hoped.

She flopped face-down onto her bed and buried her face in her pillow. She admired the blackness, exactly like the bleakness of her life being denied the fundamental right of having her own pet earthling. Like a big green splat, she lay there with her arms, legs, long black hair, and two antennae spread out in every direction.

Why did her mom hate earthlings so much? Why couldn't she see how mature and responsible she was? Was this some secret punishment she forgot to tell her about? Or was she just mean for the sake of being mean? It was so unfair.

Perhaps there was some way she could be *extra good* to show her mom how responsible she was—maybe do some extra chores around the house, or in the yard, or wash the car. Or maybe even clean her room. She looked around at all her toys, clothes, books, art supplies, science kits, games, gadgets, and stuffed animals (mostly earthies, of course)—most of them laying on the floor, especially the dirty laundry. Ugh, that would be *so* much work.

She tried to think...think...but instead her mind wandered to wondering what her earthling would be like. What type should she get? What kind of earthie would be so awesome, it would make all her classmates jealous?

Perhaps her mom would allow her to have a different pet. Blorx is home to countless incredible creatures and critters of different hues, scales, furs, and forms, each with their own unique personalities and special talents.

Her big brother Lazro had a pet slurtle who could sing and imitate sounds. And he trained

it to burp the alphabet. But most of the time, when not eating flies, it just tucked itself inside its blue spiral shell and did nothing.

A boundo likes to roll around in its blabitrail tubes and tunnels, especially late at night when you're trying to sleep. If you have two boundos or more, they crash into each other and laugh hilariously with their little squeaky voices.

A kiffy may curl up in your lap and make a cute chortling sound if they like you. Or poke their claws into you if they don't. Or both—they're funny that way.

And a slipple can coil its fluffy, long, limbless body to hop like a spring. But they like to stare at you with their one giant eye, never blinking, even while they're asleep—which is a little creepy.

But Zira wanted a pet who could talk. There were only a few:

Squawkings understand everything you say. But they'll obey commands only if they're in the right mood. Maybe. And they can't really talk so much as squawk word-like sounds. Really they just think you should speak *their* language.

Gruntlings can speak a little—basic words like yes, no, food, more, why, and toe. But usually they say nothing and judge you with their little, beady eyes. And they might bite your toe if you offend them.

Babblings can speak quite well—loquaciously with a splendiferous vocabulary—but they only want to talk about food, especially while still chewing it. And the only time they stop talking is when they sleep.

Those were all adequate pets, Zira thought, good enough for other kids. But she had her heart set on an earthie. She liked how earthlings walk around on two legs, and have two arms and

two eyes, just like little blorxlings. They're very intelligent and can learn many tricks. And best of all, they can talk. Some even learn to read and write—even though they have no need to, and they cannot understand trans-dimensional verb tenses and quantum spelling. Zira knew five kids her age who already had pet earthlings. It was so unfair.

She decided her pet earthling would be a little young one, while they're still so cute and soft, before they turn big, hairy, and lumpy. She thought maybe she would get a girl earthie with long black hair like hers, and they could wear matching outfits, and she'd name her Mira, like "mirror". Or Zirette. Or maybe a boy earthie with bright head-fur and speckles on his chubby cheeks, and she'd name him Figo. Or Brover. Or Gex. She wasn't sure yet.

But maybe this was all hopeless. After all, she had been begging her mom for *decades*, and the answer was always no.

In case you have never been to Blorx before, you might be wondering what we blorxlings are like, and how Zira could be so old. Let me explain.

Blorxlings are very much like you earthlings, and not at all like you at the same time. You might say we are like giants, since we stand three times taller than you—but we are no monsters. Our faces are friendly, with large, shiny eyes and wide, gleaming smiles. Our skin is a bright green that glistens in the sunlight, and most of us have deep black hair. As you might expect, we have two antennae atop our heads that wiggle, point, and gesticulate our moods. And we age much slower than you and live about seven times longer. This is why a young girl like Zira was only 70 years old.

And obviously we blorxlings are much, *much* smarter than you little earthlings. But I will admit: We are not always wiser.

2. SULKING

Lazro tapped on Zira's door and poked his head in.

“Hey Pea-Pod.”

Zira was still laying on her bed, but now under a big mound of all her plushy stuffed earthies which she had piled on herself, with only her arms and legs sticking out.

“Hey Lazro,” she said, muffled under a plushy.

He stepped into the room and sat on the foot of her bed. “What were you and Mom fighting about?”

She sighed dramatically and pulled the plushy off her face. “She still won't let me have an earthling.”

“Oh, that.”

“Why is she so mean?!” Zira whined.

“She's not mean—well, sometimes. She just doesn't want the house all messy with pet toys or...shedding or whatever. And that earthy smell. You know her.”

“I'll clean up after it, and I'll vacuum. She won't even know!” Zira sighed again. “She still thinks I'm a little kid.”

Lazro snickered.

Then a new strategy hatched in Zira's head. She asked, "Will you talk to her for me?"

He shrugged. "I dunno what I'd say. It's hard to change her mind. Like you." He smiled.

"What if you say you'll help me bathe it and take care of it? She'd say yes to you—she always does."

He thought about this for a moment. "You know what?" He bopped her lightly on the face with a plushy. "I will."

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That weekend on Blaturday morning, Zira was on the floor in her room, reading about the robot wars of 9812, when Lazro leaned through her doorway.

"Come on, Pea-Pod. We have a surprise for youuuu!" He grinned at her, but it was an oddly goofy grin, not his normal grin.

"What is it?"

"You'll see. Get your shoes on and get in the car."

"Where are we going?"

"So many questions!" he teased.

"But what's the surprise? Tell me!" Zira was never good at waiting.

He walked away down the hallway and hollered, "You'll see!"

Zira felt an explosion of excitement. She really didn't need to ask at all, because she already had a good hunch. She slipped her shoes on and sprang to the garage, but no one was in the car yet. She stepped back into the house and hollered, "Hurry up! Let's go!"

"One moment," their mom yelled from the kitchen.

Her big sister Riffa then emerged from her bedroom, not quite as old as Lazro. “Yeah, Zira, hold your horfsies!” Riffa seemed to be in on the secret too, because she was also giving Zira a weird smile.

Lazro hollered across the house, “Mom, where are the car keys?”

“Right where they alwa—”

“Never mind, found them!”

“Oh no!” teased Riffa, “Lazro’s driving?!”

Their mom shuffled toward the garage, organizing her purse. “Shush. He needs to practice for his license.”

Riffa said to Lazro nasally, “Try not to hit any trash cans this time!”

“Ha ha,” he sarcasticated.

They all got in the car, a little too slowly in Zira’s opinion. She climbed in the back seat and wiggled with impatience. “C’mon! Let’s go to the pet store!”

“The *pet store*?” said Lazro, overacting dramatically. “Who said anything about a *pet store*? No, Pea-Pod, we’re taking you to the *dentist*!” He looked back at her with that goofy grin again.

3. ROLO'S NEW HOME

It was dark inside the cardboard box, except for the light through the twelve round air holes near the top. The young earthling boy tried to stand up, but the box was too short. And besides, it was wobbling so much that he kept falling back down.

“Are you ready to see your new home?” Zira cooed into the box with a sugary voice.

The boy could see her large green eyes peering in, sliding from air hole to air hole. She poked her giant finger inside and waggled it about.

Finally, after much bumping, the box was still. Zira had set it on the family room carpet.

“Ready to come out now?” she asked sweetly.

He was excited. Nervous, but excited. He had just met Zira not long ago at the pet store, and she had such a friendly face, he already liked her. But now he was in a strange new place, away from the familiar comfort of the pet pen and all the other earthling kids.

“Okay,” he said bravely. “I’m ready.”

The top of the box opened. From the brightness above, Zira’s hands reached in, scooped him up, and squeezed him against her chest.

“Here we are,” she said with an especially wide smile stretched across her face.

“Hello there,” cooed Riffa as she reached out and ruffled his hair with her finger. “Can I hold him?”

“Let him get settled first,” Lazro said to Riffa.

All three of their giant heads were so close to the boy, all staring with wide eyes, it was a bit intimidating. But still exciting.

Lazro said, “Why don’t you let him walk around and explore?”

Their mom passed by, reorganizing her purse again, and nagged, “Make sure he doesn’t pee on the carpet!”

“Momm,” groaned Zira, “he’s already potty trained!”

“Don’t worry, Mom,” said Lazro. “I’ll watch them.”

She gave them a worried look, then left the room.

Zira gently set him down.

It was so different, he thought, not quite like what he had imagined a home would look like. And it smelled different too, not like the pet store.

“Oh, wait!” Zira jumped up, grabbed a shopping bag, and plopped down again so close to him that he was afraid she might crush him. “Look, here’s your new toys!” She pulled out a bucket of squeaky balls, plastic dinovores, building blocks, and puzzles, and poured them at his feet. Then she pulled out some clothes and held them up to him. “And here’s a new outfit for you. And a blue one. And a green one.” She tossed them on the floor. “And here’s your brush.” She rubbed it on his hair. “And this is your harness. And your leash. And your toothbrush.” She tossed those too. “And here’s your food bowl!”

He never had his own food bowl before.

Lazro asked, “What are you going to name him?”

“How about Bloogy?” suggested Riffa. “Or Mr. Frupples?”

Zira giggled.

The pet store had named him Durgur, which he did *not* like, so he, too, was eager to get a new name.

Zira lifted him up and held him out with both hands to get a good look at him. He looked down at the floor so far below, but he felt secure in her hands. She peered at his little arms and legs, his little belly, his chubby cheeks and black head-fur, and his smiling brown eyes. “I’ll name him...” She thought carefully. “Rolo!”

He liked that. Rolo. It suited him.

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Later, Zira, Riffa, and Lazro led him on an expedition through all the rooms in their house. When it was dinner time, he got to try his new food in his new bowl. Then he got to try his new litter box. (Blorxian homes don’t have pet-sized toilets.)

At the end of the night, Zira brushed his teeth, which he did *not* like. Then she tucked him into a little round pet bed in the corner of her room.

“Can’t I sleep in your bed?” he asked.

“I wish. But Mom was afraid I’d roll over on you, or you’d fall out or something. But I can see you here from my pillow. Okay, g’night.” She kissed him on the head. “Don’t let the earthworms bite.”

“What?!” No one had warned him about this.

“Oh, never mind.” She giggled. “That’s just something we say. I don’t know why.

G'night.”

Then she turned off the light and lay down in her bed.

Rolo tried to sleep, but he just rolled from side to side, onto his belly, and onto his back, over and over. An hour passed. It was too quiet. No yips, squeaks, or squeals of the other animals in the pet store—only a slight whistling noise from Zira’s nose. And for the first time, he wasn’t huddled with other earthling kids sleeping in a pile. He felt lonely. So he got up and climbed the corner of her bed, and curled up against her warm chest. Then she wrapped her arm over him.

4. THE BATTLE OF SLIME

“Commander Rolo, any sign of the enemy?” asked Zira, crouching behind the sofa.

“No, my Empress,” said Rolo, peering over the back of the sofa through toy binoculars way too big for him. “The coast is clear.”

Several years had passed, and Rolo was now ten. But Zira, Riffa, and Lazro had barely grown, since earthlings grow up so much faster than blorxlings (or from your perspective, blorxlings grow so much slower than earthlings).

“Let’s move forward,” she ordered. “Check the grand entry, Commander.”

With his laser rifle in hand (bright green toy slime pistol), Rolo dashed out from behind the sofa and hid behind the corner of the grand entry (hallway). Zira commando-crawled behind him across the grass (carpet) with her sidearm (purple slime pistol). Rolo peered around the corner. No guards. He silently gave her several hand signals, which he probably saw in movies. She signaled back, equally nonsensically, and they crept cautiously down the corridor.

Soon they reached the gates of the Evil Queen’s throne room (Riffa’s bedroom door).

“Check the gate,” Zira ordered.

Rolo pushed, but it would not budge. “It’s barricaded.”

Zira reached up and released the drawbar (turned the doorknob). The gate swung open with an eerie creak. They slid inside.

“The Scepter of Doom has got to be in here,” Zira whispered. “We must steal it and foil the sinister plan of the Evil Queen Rifaffa!”

“As you wish, Empress,” whispered Rolo, advancing further into the chamber.

But suddenly they were pelted with wads of slime from Lazro and Riffa, who had popped up from behind the barricade (bed) with their oozy-blasters!

“It’s a trap!” yelled Rolo.

“You’ll never defeat me!” yelled Riffa. “Mwahahaaaa!”

With a din of motorized pumps and cheap sound effects, the air was thick with glowing slime—red, green, purple, and blue—splattering on their clothes and walls in absolute carnage.

“Ug! I’ve been hit!” groaned Lazro, clutching his chest and falling to the floor, polka-dotted with slime. “I’m sorry I betrayed you...my Empress,” he wheezed to Zira.

“You were a good knight, Sir Lazrolot,” she said, “but you chose the wrong side!”

“Tell...my...family,” wheezed Lazro, convulsing and coughing up imaginary blood, “I... love...them....” He reached up toward the light above, then his arm dropped, his eyes fluttered shut, and his tongue flopped out.

Rolo fell to his knees and yelled to the sky with clenched fists, “Noooooo! Not Lazrolot!”

Riffa growled, “Now you both shall meet an even worse fate!” She slimed them mercilessly.

“Retreat! Retreat!” yelled Zira. They scampered back down the hall, as Rolo fired green slime randomly behind him without looking.

Riffa chased them into the temple (kitchen) and around the great altar (table), exchanging splats of green, purple, and blue.

“We can’t make it, Empress,” said Rolo. “We’re out-slimed! We must escape into the sewers!” He dove under the sofa.

“You can’t desert me!” she yelled, now glazed with slime.

Zira leapt onto the battlement (sofa). “Come back here, Commander Rolo!” She leaned down and swiped her arm side to side under the sofa. Then she caught his leg and dragged him out slowly.

“Nooooo! Noooo!” he giggled.

She lifted him in front of her face, dangling upside down. “Deserters will not be tolerated! And now, Commander, you shall suffer the ultimate punishment: *Juicy kisses!*” She wet her lips, puckered, and wiggled them like big fish lips as she slowly pulled his face closer and closer.

“Nooooo!” he screamed, laughing. “The slobber! Oh, the slobber!”

“I’ll avenge you, Rolo!” yelled Lazro from the hallway, apparently recovered from his tragic death. Then he splatted Zira with red slime.

Suddenly the drawbridge opened (front door).

“Kids!” bellowed the dragon (their mom), holding a large blizza box. “I’ve got dinner!” She surveyed the room, shocked by the sofa cushions strewn about, and the glowing slime dripping off the furniture, walls, and everyone. “What the quasar have you kids been doing all day? Better get this cleaned up!”

“No problem!” chirped Zira.

Soon the robo-vacuum was circulating around the house, cleaning all the slime and putting everything back in order. But Rolo ran from the loud, terrifying contraption and hid under the sofa. He never did like the robo-vacuum.

Next they were all sitting around the kitchen table, laughing and eating warm, gooey, zepperoni blizza. Except for Rolo, who was *under* the table, while Zira slipped him scraps when she thought no one was looking.

Zira hummed cheerfully, enjoying her blizza. It was a wonderful summer day so far. But sadly, what she could not foresee was that this was the last night they would all be together as a family.

5. ANOTHER DAY ALONE

Three more years passed, and much had changed. Rolo was growing taller, hairier, and smellier (an especially gross but endearing quality of you earthlings). Now today, like on most days, he was home alone, waiting for Zira to return from school.

He lay sprawled out flat on his back in the middle of the family room carpet in the afternoon sun. He had found a ball of yarn to entertain himself, and made it a game to see how many times he could toss it from hand to hand without dropping it. But then he forgot to count, so he was just lazily going through the motions.

The house was silent, except for the monotonous ticking of a clock, and the muffled buzz from the fish tank. The seven stubby, round fish stared blankly at the yarn ball, swiveling slightly side to side as it arced from Rolo's left hand to right hand, to left hand, to right hand.

Rolo let out a long sigh to express his boredom, but no one was there to hear. These days seemed to be getting longer, with nothing to do—just the same old games, and same old toys, which he had outgrown long ago. There was a big world of wonder outside, but that did not matter, for the doors and windows were locked and earthling-proofed.

He looked up at the ticking wall clock. It was still squiggly-symbol o'clock. Zira and

Riffa should be home soon.

Quiggles suddenly made a loud snort-gag-snore. He was Rolo's pet, a green quagling with one big yellow eye, two arms, and three legs, about as tall as Rolo's knee. He was curled on top of his perch in the corner—sleeping, mouth open, tongue out, drooling.

The snort had startled Rolo, and he fumbled the yarn. It bounced off his chest and rolled just out of reach. He gently grasped the tail end of the yarn and pulled it back slowly, but the yarn ball only rolled in place. He pulled faster. Same result. He waited briefly...and then... yanked it suddenly as if to catch it off guard. The yarn ball hopped up, spinning rapidly and unraveling, then hit the carpet and rolled away even further. Rolo stared, then strained to reach it, like if he reached hard enough his arm would stretch longer. It was no use. But still, he felt it wasn't worth the effort to just sit up and grab it.

Finally something new happened, a noise coming from the entry. Rolo turned his attention to the front door. It was a key unlocking!

6. FROM BOREDOM TO BEDLAM

Rolo scrambled into the entry and crouched behind a large potted plant near the door. He had a plan.

The door swung open with a whoosh and banged into the wall.

“Rolo, I’m home!” Zira hollered. Her teeth now sparkled with braces, and she wore her hair behind her antennae. She was wearing her favorite purple hoodie and her magenta backpack with cartoonish doodles all over it.

Rolo held his breath and stealthily watched and waited for her to walk past. Left foot... right foot...clear! He sprang up and dashed toward the open door, and this time he made it all the way to the front step. But then Zira’s hands caught him around the chest and scooped him up.

“No, no, no, you little sneaker!” she giggled.

He laughed. “Well, it was worth the try.”

“Oh, you’ll never get away from me, ’cause you’re *just...so...cute!*” She hugged and cradled him too tight, till he groaned and strained to breathe. “*But look at dat cute belly!*” She pressed her mouth on his exposed tummy and blew a big, noisy, wet zerbert. He tried hard not to laugh, but that was impossible, and he laughed and squirmed uncontrollably. He attempted to

wiggle out of her grip as she carried him, but that was impossible too.

“Have you been a good boy? Have you?”

“Mmmaybee,” he said with a wry smile.

“Guess whaaaaat? It’s time for take-off. Ready?”

He tensed up as she swung him back and forth, higher and higher.

“3...2...1...Weeeeeeee!” She flung him forward and high into the air, arcing all the way across the family room. He squeezed his eyes shut and braced himself as he plummeted into the giant beanbag seat with a smush. He never really liked this game, but he liked that Zira loved it.

“Wasn’t that fun?”

He refrained from replying, and instead let out a muffled face-down moan. It was always a rough transition from boredom to bedlam—from too much quiet to too much chaos.

Next Riffa trudged through the front door and slammed it. She was now a full-fledged adolescent. She wore dark eyeliner and a piercing in her antenna, partly because it annoyed her mom. And she wore a puffy bomber jacket covered in patches, and a short white skirt, like she was half cold and half warm. She continued her trudge toward the hallway, chewing gum and looking down at her phone.

Zira skipped toward Rolo while he tried wiggling out of the mushy beanbag.

“Hey, Riffa, watch Rolo fly again!”

Riffa kept trudging, turning her head just enough to give Zira a snarky side-eye. She popped a bubble, turned back to her phone, and disappeared into the hallway.

Zira stopped short and slumped into the sofa. Rolo was relieved to avoid another throwing. Then she patted the sofa cushion. “C’mere, Rolo Polo. Up up up!”

“Wait, gimme a sec,” he said, stalling.

“Oh look, it’s food time! I bet you’re hungry.” She sprang off the sofa and into the kitchen.

He shrugged. “Meh.”

It sounded like Zira was going out of her way to bang every cabinet at least three times and clap all the utensils together. Then he heard the all-too-familiar mechanical sound of the plasmatic can opener.

Meanwhile, Quiggles was waking up on his perch over the beanbag. After a few bleary eye-blinks, he wiped the drool from his chin.

Rolo looked up to see Quiggles looking down at him from directly overhead.

“Quiggles, don’t even think about it,” he warned sternly.

But Quiggles stood at the edge and slowly raised his arms overhead.

“Quiggles, doooooon’t!”

Then he leaped into a triple-half-back-side-down dive directly toward Rolo.

“Nooo!” Rolo screamed as he saw Quiggles’ three-cheek butt rushing toward his face. He rolled out of the way just before Quiggles plopped into the beanbag. Then Quiggles promptly licked Rolo all over his face and mouth.

“Oh!—tphphp—okay—tphphp—that’s enough, Quiggles—tphphp—that’s enou—
tphphp.”

Quiggles abruptly froze mid-lick, looking off in the hall like he heard something. Then, for no obvious reason, he casually hopped off the beanbag and strolled out of the room.

Rolo chuckled and sarcasticated, “Bye!”

“Okay, come and get it!” yelled Zira from the kitchen, banging a spoon on the side of a can.

Rolo extracted himself from the beanbag, shuffled to his little earthling-sized counter, and sat on the stool. She dangled the can upside down high over his bowl. A perfect cylinder of gray-brown goop slowly emerged with a slobbery suction sound. He watched without anticipation. The goopy food stalled, clinging to the can, refusing to drop. She shook the can, causing a rhythmic slurping sound. The goop reluctantly crept out, a little more, a little more, then finally fell in free-fall. It landed with a splat in his bowl and jiggled, still in its cylindrical form.

“There you go. I made it myself!” She giggled.

When it finally stopped jiggling a few moments later, he grabbed his spoon and braced himself. It smelled like...nothing. Exactly how it tasted. He scooped a small sample of goopy food (or “foop” as he liked to call it) and tried to swallow it without chewing.

Riffa tromped back in from the hallway, holding a long, wooly sweater.

“Hey, squid squirt! Your earthling was sleeping on my bed again!” Riffa was not what you would call an “earthling person” anymore.

“I can hear you, you know,” mumbled Rolo with foop in his mouth.

“Well, were you?” Riffa interrogated.

“Mmmaybee?” He tried to stifle a smirk.

“Rolo...” Zira scolded, but not really. “Why didn’t you sleep in your own bed?”

“What, like for *every* nap? What’s the fun in that? I need variety, keep things fresh!” He attempted to win her over with a smile.

(The days on Blorx are 77 hours long, so it’s quite common for you earthlings to sleep at

least three times a day.)

Riffa held out her sweater to show Zira the little pajama bottoms stuck on it. “Look, he left his pants on my sweater!” The pajama pants peeled away from the sweater with a crackle of static, then released their tenuous grasp and flopped to the ground.

“So *that’s* where they went!” he said. “I was looking all over for those.”

Zira rolled her eyes at Riffa. “Oh, you’re *so* dramatic!”

“Whatever, squid squirt.” Riffa turned to go back to her room.

“Hey, Riffa,” said Zira, “you wanna play Blorgan Pong with me?”

“What? Ew.” Riffa was no fun anymore. Once again she disappeared down the hall. Then to top it off, she yelled, “And tell your pet to stay out of my room!”

“I can still hear you!” Rolo hollered back with a wry grin.

He continued ingesting his foop as Zira tossed the empty can in the trash dissolver.

“Hey Riffa?” yelled Zira.

No answer.

“Riffa!”

Long pause.

“Whaaat?!” whined Riffa.

“Rolo has an appointment now at the V-E-T.”

“I can spell, you know! Plus that’s *next* week, not today,” he lied.

Zira smirked at him.

Riffa yelled, “So what?”

“So you need to come with us. You’re supposed to be the responsible one while Mom’s

away this week. Remember?”

“No, I swear,” said Rolo, “the appointment is *next* week.”

Zira chuckled. “You’re not fooling me again with that.”

“Awww!” he moaned. He hated the vet.

“Riffa?” yelled Zira.

Nothing.

“Riffa!”

“Fine....” Riffa trudged toward the front door, face-down in her phone.

“Then I wanna go to the earthling park after.”

Rolo perked up at that.

“Nkay, whatever,” said Riffa as she leaned by the door, crossed her legs, and popped a bubble.

“Come on, Rolo!” called Zira.

He abandoned his unfinished foop and she put on his harness and leash.

“Come on, Quiggles!” he called out.

Quiggles came galloping from the hall and hopped on Rolo’s back, almost knocking him over.

As soon as Riffa opened the door, Rolo ran out as fast as he could.

“*Freeeeedom!*” he yelled, dashing across the lawn. The retractable leash unreeled in Zira’s hand with a whirring, then a sharp click, jerking Rolo backward onto the lawn, spinning Quiggles into the air. They all laughed, Quiggles too, except for Riffa who just snapped her gum.

This day had started so ordinary for Rolo—boring, chaotic, and routine. But what he did

not know yet is how much everything would change, and this day would end so extraordinary.