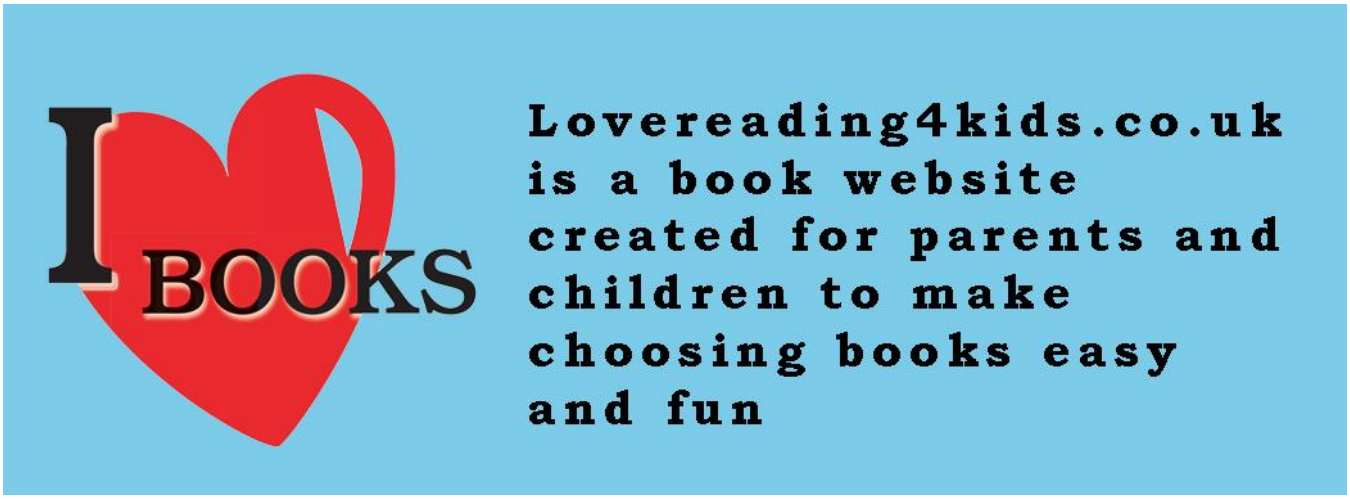

Opening extract from

The Scruffs

Written & Illustrated by

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Chapter One

THE (not so) PERFECT PET

You know the kind of shop you walk past a thousand times and never really notice? The kind of shop that must have been there since your granny was in nappies?

Well, "The Perfect Pet" is that shop. The paint is peeling from the doorframe, the sign is wonky and the posters in the window are faded. If you step a little closer to the entrance, the whiff of musty gerbil poop and damp shavings will tickle your nostrils.

Shall we step inside? *Ting-a-ling!*

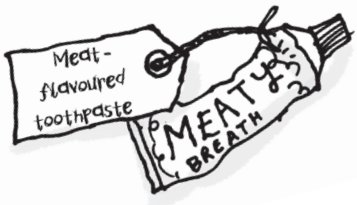
PERFECT PET
PAY HERE
CANINES & FELINES
MEATY BREATH
MEATY
MEATY
MEATY
CORN
Kitty S
BEST BISCUIT
What a mess...!

Did you spot?

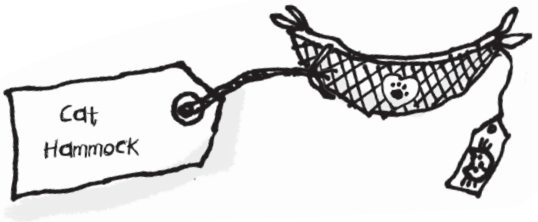
- Fleas (watch your ankles! There's an infestation in the carpet!)
- Rodent bedding
- Dogs' beds
- Birdseed
- Dog biscuits and chews
- Cat scratching posts
- Budgie mirrors
- Grooming brushes
- Collars

Look even harder and you may find the more unusual items such as:

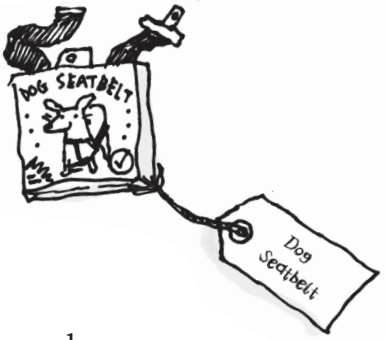
- Meat-flavoured toothpaste (Mmm! Delicious!)



- Cat hammocks – for the cat that likes to chill.



- Dog seatbelts – Buckle up, pooches!



- A miniature shipwreck – an essential for a nautical-themed fishtank.

Somewhere asleep at the back of the pet shop is the owner, Mr Straw. He loves all animals (great and small) and would help anything from a grizzly bear to a woodlouse if it was in need.

He spends most of his days dozing, waking only briefly to serve

customers (fortunately for him there aren't very many of those). His jumpers are usually inside out and because he is always losing his glasses, he can't see very much. But this is probably for the best, because if he knew what his beloved pets were up to, he'd be worried...

Pets? I hear you say. *There are pets in here?! Where?*

You can't see them just at the moment because they are playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Shall we go and find them?

Look, over there in the bin of dried peas and sunflower seeds – some ears are poking out. It's **Gerb!** He's a gerbil ... with HUGE ears.

His giant lugholes are very useful and he can hear someone coming from a mile away. He wants to be the first flying gerbil, but he hasn't quite figured that one out yet.

Is that a feather duster? No, it's **Lost** – the budgie. Lost is even more shortsighted than Mr Straw. She only found out her name when she saw herself on a LOST BUDGIE poster. One day she tumbled into the yard of the Perfect Pet shop and she hasn't found her way home since. Lost is now happily "on holiday", as she likes to think of it (secretly, she can't remember where she used to live anyway).

Give a huge round of applause for **Elvis** – the chameleon. Uh-huh! Elvis is an ancient

exotic desert chameleon with an exciting musical past (he once belonged to a man who made a living impersonating this really old singer your gran used to like). He has the funky ability to change into loads of colours, unfortunately, he usually ends up picking the wrong one and can't merge into the background. "But having a long, sticky tongue is very handy, thankyouverymuch!"

Grr! Woof! Here comes **Itch!** This lovable flea-ridden mutt has been living in the pet shop the longest and is leader of the pack. He is by far the scruffiest, but he's super-streetwise from years of being a wanderer. He has lost an eye, but he totally rocks the pirate dog look, and his sense of

smell is terrific.

And that's all of the pets that live in the shop... Oops, I almost forgot Slug.

"What do you mean? You forgot about the BEST pet here! I'm a medium-sized garden slug of immaculate pedigree. Humph! And I'm the only slug in the world who can read and write."

Slug learned to read after eating his way through the piles of Mr Straw's newspapers. (And he's not REALLY a pet ... but don't tell him that!)

Together they are the **Scruffs** – the scruffiest, smelliest pets in town!

And no, although this is meant to be a pet *shop*, Mr Straw has no intention of selling *any* of them. This is their home and they love it here.