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TEMPEST'S SECRET

Brave kids never give up

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Illustrated by Macha Yao

To Talitha and Tristan,
my beloved Tempest and Wallace in real life.



Chapter 1
The Plea

'Wallace, go and ask Mum for a pet,' I tell my little brother.

It would be so cool to have a pet. Wallace and I would have a little friend to play with—so cute and so much fun. Mum and Dad are always working or travelling for work, so they don't play with us much. We're bored at home, but they always say 'No!' to a pet. Maybe this time Mum will say yes if Wallace asks her.

Wallace is eight, three years younger than me. He's annoying sometimes, but he does everything I ask and follows me everywhere, jumping around and playing games. Wallace only sees the bright side of life and the good in people. He's the opposite of me; I trust animals more than humans;

animals are truthful. I could **CRY of joy** if I had a pet. Especially a cat. I know everything about cats: how they grow, what they eat, what they like and dislike. I know how to behave around them and how to respect their character and independence so that they trust you and come to you. Cats are free and proud, like me.

'Tempest, not again!' my brother grumbles.

Yep, my name is Tempest: like a raging storm, when the wind blows, the sky turns dark before lightning strikes, and the thunder rages like an angry monster. Mum and Dad chose my name before they could know if I would be a quiet girl with long, plaited blond hair and a soft voice. I would have been ridiculous with a name like Tempest and a look like Alice in Wonderland. It turns out they were right: I don't look like Alice in Wonderland. I have thick, brown hair that tangles like crazy when I run. And I run everywhere I go because walking is so slow; it's boring. I'm skinny, and I wear leggings and tiny tee shirts. I look like a broomstick upside down.

'Why me?' insists Wallace.

My brother looks doubtful. He thinks I'm trying

to get him into trouble, but I'm not. At least not this time.

'Because she always says yes to you. You're her favourite.'

'I'm not,' replies Wallace with a frowny face.

He hates it when I call him the favourite, but Wallace IS Mum's favourite, the younger one, the only boy. We have a big sister too, but she lives in New York for her studies. Mum says yes to things for Wallace even though she says no to me. That's because he pretends to cry to avoid getting into trouble. It works every time with Mum. If someone can convince Mum to have a pet, it's Wallace.

'Yes, you are. Go and ask for a cat. *Please*. Wouldn't you be happy to have a little cat to play with, Wallace?' I ask, sure of what he's going to say.

'Yes! Yes!'

'Then go. I will be right behind you. I'll hide,' I add to encourage him.

Wallace walks to the living room. Mum's sitting at the table, working on her computer, even though it's Sunday. Mum's always working on her computer like it's her favourite thing in the world.



'Muuuum?' Wallace always calls Mum by dragging on the 'uuuu.'

'What now?!' Mum snaps, 'Do you realise that you call me every two minutes, Wallace?'

I listen from around the corner. Mum sounds annoyed; now is not a good time.

'Hum… nothing,' says my brother, already racing back to his room as fast as he can on his little legs.

Mum's in a bad mood, and she's scary when she's mad. I should have checked before sending Wallace. Never mind, we'll try some other time. I run upstairs and join my brother in his room: he's sitting on his bed, arms crossed, lips tight. I can see a tear at the corner of his eye.

'I told you I wasn't her favourite,' he says, 'it's all ruined now, and it's all your fault!'

'OK. Now was not the time, but we'll try again,' I reply, ignoring his attack. 'Brave kids never give up.'

'We'll never have a cat.' Wallace is sulking, but he's easy to distract. And I'm hungry.

'How about baking a cake?' I try.

'Yes, yes!' My brother bounces back like a puppy excited by a new game. I may not have a pet, but I have Wallace who is full of energy and joy of life. He's always up for cake, chocolate, or candies.

I lead us to the kitchen, Wallace hopping behind me. He hops every time he can, like a mini kangaroo. Dad was born in Australia, so maybe Wallace inherited a kangaroo gene.

'What are you guys doing?' Mum has heard us. She calls from the living room, turning her head

to check on us, but she doesn't leave her chair.

'Nothing,' I say.

'Baking,' says Wallace at the same time: he's not very good at lying.

'OK, be good,' Mum replies. She clearly did not listen. When Mum's working, a marching band could parade through the living room, and she wouldn't even notice. Dad's the same. I don't know what's so interesting on adults' computers to keep them so occupied. Maybe I'll find out when I grow up. I think it's crazy: a pet is so much more exciting than a computer!

I close the kitchen door behind Wallace and me, so Mum can't hear us anymore anyway.

'OK, let's bake a yummy cake with chocolate and candies. What do you think?' I ask my little brother, sure of the answer. 'But you have to do what I say.'

'Yes, yes!' Wallace hops around the kitchen like a wallaby on a sugar rush, though we haven't eaten anything yet. He pulls out the baking tins and bowls as I ask. Wallace is always happy to help, and he loves cooking. I don't: I like sweets and finger food. I could live only on chocolate

and cereal bars, but Mum makes us eat carrot sticks at every lunch and doesn't allow chocolate before mealtime.

It's nearly lunchtime, but she can't see me. So, I stand on my tippy toes to grab a chocolate pack from the shelf. I can feel my mouth watering at the idea of eating the delicious creamy squares. But just as I break a big piece off the bar, I hear footsteps behind the door. Mum's coming: trouble ahead!

'Wallace, catch!'

I throw the chocolate into Wallace's hands just before Mum opens the door. Wallace is standing in the middle of the kitchen, holding the piece of chocolate with both hands, mouth open, eyes wide, stiff as a statue. Better that he gets into trouble rather than me. He's her soft spot anyway.

'Wallace!' shouts Mum, 'What's that?'

My brother stands still, looks at me, looks at Mum. His mouth is still open, but no sound is coming out. Tears are mounting in his eyes. I start feeling a bit guilty, but he gets me into trouble sometimes, too.



'But we want a caaaaat!' he finally cries.

Mum gasps, then laughs. She puts away the chocolate and sits us around the kitchen table.

'Listen, you two,' she starts. I get ready for another lecture. Mum loves lecturing us. She holds our hands, looks us straight in the eyes, and we'd better listen.

'We have been through this before. I know you want a pet, but Daddy and I disagree. A pet needs care and presence. You are at school all day, and Daddy and I travel a lot for work. Who will take care of this poor pet, huh? Not your grandmother: she can barely look after you two when we're away! Plus, London is a big city, with many cars and other dangers for animals. If you get emotionally attached to a pet and something happens to him, you would be very sad. Daddy and I don't want that.'

'OK…' I say, looking down. I already knew what Mum was going to say. She always says the same thing, but she's wrong. I would be great at taking care of a pet. I know loads about animals, and I understand them. I can tell the species and age of a cat, a dog, or a hamster just by looking at them. I even know what they mean to say by the noise they make. But Mum will never agree, and there's no point arguing with her. It's unfair. She doesn't understand how happy I would be if I had a pet to love.

'Noooooow, can I have some chocolate?' asks Wallace, who never misses an opportunity to turn

a problem into a chance to eat. I wish I could see the world as playfully as he does.

'No sugar before mealtime, you know that,' lectures Mum again. 'Worse, you tried to eat some without my permission. What are the two most important rules in the family?'

'Never lie, and always speak with respect,' Wallace and I answer at the same time. We know. Mum repeats the rules at every chance she gets. Telling the truth is how we build trust in a family, she says, and there is nothing more important than trusting each other. Mum gets furious when we mess up with the rules. And no one wants to be around when Mum is furious.

I run away to my room, hiding my tears. I want to be alone with my soft toys: my sweet Lana from The Lion King, who sleeps in my arms every night; Pingy the giant penguin that I use as a pillow; Tucker, my fury spaniel who looks like Copper in the Fox and the Hound; and Old Bunny, my pink fluffy rabbit from when I was a baby. For a long time, I could pretend they were real. It's harder now: I'm not a little girl anymore. I need a real pet and real

adventures. I don't know that my life is about to change forever.