

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

DESA MUCK
MAGGIE THE MAGIC FLEA
AND THE RATS ANNIE
AND KATIE

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ANČKA IN KATKA

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Desa Muck: Maggie the magic flea and the rats Annie and Katie

People are wrong if they think that they choose their pet. In fact, it is our pets that choose us. But finding just the right human for them is the most difficult thing for an animal to do. This is why they are helped by magic fleas (*Siphonaptera magica* in Latin), who also answer to the name Maggie. If one day, while lovingly admiring your pet, you notice something shiny on it, like a tiny pearl or silvery spot, it will be a Maggie the flea. She will bring you the animal that is just right for you.

“We’ve come for a canary!” could be heard from the door. It opened so violently that it nearly knocked down the bell on top of it. There stood a nine-year-old girl, tightly holding on to her father. He was holding in his arms a little boy of about a year old. They all had wide open, shining eyes. In a pet shop such a scene is completely usual. Especially at the start of the summer holidays. But this is also the moment when Maggie needs to listen and watch particularly carefully, so that nothing goes wrong. But this time it did.

The friendly shop assistant showed them the cute yellow canaries singing sweetly in their cage and it sounded like a wonderful summer morning.

“Mum has finally said we can have a pet, since we’ve moved into a larger flat,” explained the girl quickly. “But we’re only allowed a bird, because there’s less work with them. Dad, look at that one, it’s so beautiful!” she gently pointed to the yellowest one.

“Yes, it is, Nicola,” Dad agreed and turned to the assistant: “You know her mum would never let us have a pet before? She’s afraid of almost every animal!”

The girl giggled and the little boy burbled in a satisfied way.

“So we’ve decided on a canary, because they’re not too frightening!” Dad explained to the people in the shop. “Have you ever read in the newspaper that a canary attacked a group of schoolchildren and ripped open their bags?”

They all laughed, even the animals, although the people didn’t realise that, and Maggie laughed with them.

Nicola slowly went over to a large cage in the background and stood there transfixed.

“I want that!” she said.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here,” said Dad, going over to join her. Then he went pale and cried: “Oh Jesus, surely not! You silly thing! The cage is full of rats! Horrible things!!”

The friendly assistant came over and said:

“Aren’t they cute? They’re becoming more and more popular. I think they’re an excellent choice for a pet!”

“Not in our home!” replied dad. “My wife hates rats more than anything in the world!”

“I want a rat!” said Nicola with determination, not taking her eyes off the rats that were swiftly and cutely running about the cage.

“I’m sorry, you heard what your dad said,” replied the assistant in a kind voice, taking Nicola’s hand. “Come on, I’ll show you a beautiful canary. You’ll see how they can put you in a good mood!”

And they went over to the canaries.

Mum was pleased to see them when she looked into the hallway. Dad had a large cage in one hand and a dozing Oscar in the other, while Nicola was carrying a small package. To welcome them home Mum had baked a fruit cake and covered it with canary yellow icing. She had thought about it a lot and read a lot of books about pets before deciding to grant her daughter’s wish. She knew that looking after an animal was not as simple as the rest of the family thought. But now she had decided – and a canary seemed a nice idea and easy to look after. So she had decided that they would celebrate the arrival of the new member of the family.

“That’s a big cage for a little bird! I hope there’ll be enough room for it in the kitchen,” she exclaimed cheerfully.

Oscar tottered over and took her hand.

“Well, show me this cute little bird!” she said in an excited voice.

Nicola lifted the carrying cage towards her in which could be seen only a heap of straw.

“But what...” Mum started to say, but then she stopped. Something moved slightly in the straw. A little white nose and then a pinkish little ear appeared. And then a pair of curious red eyes were looking at Mum.

“What on earth is that?!” she cried in astonishment.

Now the little creature crept out and showed the whole of its famous tail.

“A rat!” shrieked Mum, letting go of Oscar’s hand and?? se nevarno zamajala.

A moment later the straw moved again and this time a little brown head with black eyes peeped out.

“Two rats! Horror of horrors!!!” Mum yelled even louder, starting to climb onto the bench in the hallway.

“Take them away now!!”

“This is Katie and Annie,” said Dad, rather stupidly.

“I don’t care! Get them out of my flat!!” shrieked Mum, dancing on the bench as if an army of disgusting creatures was marching beneath her feet.

“Get down Claudia!” said Dad, offering her his hand. “The rats are in their cage. They can’t harm you.”

“You never know with rats! They say they are very cunning! They are the scariest and most disgusting animals in the world!”

“Oops! This isn’t going to be easy!” ?? je šepnila Maggie at the bottom of the cage. Even in the pet shop it was clear there were going to be problems. As soon as she heard that Mum hated rats she had joined the two young rats in their cage.

Oscar found the sight of his mother dancing on the bench so funny that he sat on the floor with laughter.

“The rats have got to go! How could you do something so horrible to me?!”

Mum jumped down from the bench and threw her arms round Dad’s neck. Although he was still little, Oscar realised that this wasn’t a joke. Tears began to gather in his round blue eyes. And tears were already running down Nicola’s cheeks.

“Sorry, Mum,” she sobbed. “I was sure you’d fall for them as soon as you saw them. They’re so cute.”

“That’s what I thought, too,” said dad in embarrassment. “They are really quite lovable.”

The little rats were peeping out of the cage in such a cute way that they were sure to touch many a heart, but Mum howled louder and louder and didn’t even want to look at them.

“I’m sorry, Claudia, we’ll take the rats back straight away and exchange them for a canary!” said Dad.

“Yes, Mum. We’ll take them back,” bleated Nicola pathetically. “Come on, Annie and Katie, the most beautiful, cutest little rats in the world, they are sure to find you better owners than we are!”

“Oh,” sighed Mum. “Now I feel so mean. But rats have disgusted me for as long as I can remember. I’m so glad you understand! Thank you. Now take them away straight away!”

Dad picked up the big cage, Nicola the small one and they went back to the pet shop.

“So that’s that! »Na, zdaj smo pa tam!” said Maggie with a sigh, as she sat between the rats in the swaying cage. “What a pity, that girl would be just right for you, Katie and Annie.”

The little rats also gave a sad sigh. They were still only a few weeks old and really needed someone to act as a mother to them.

Mum was delighted when Dad and Nicola soon returned with a cute light yellow canary with bright dark eyes. She covered the window sill with a white crocheted cloth that went with the curtains. That was where the bird was going to be. And as soon as they put him there he opened his beak and sang so beautifully that they all exclaimed in wonder.

“I’m so glad that you’re satisfied with a canary, Nicola, and that we’re all happy now,” said Mum, serving up home-made raspberry ice cream and cream. They called the canary Georgie and although Nicola really liked him, the next few days she was quiet and lost in thought.

“When you have your own home you can have as many rats as you like,” said Mum, trying to comfort her and barely concealing her delight at the canary.

When she was on her own she often talked to the bird. He moved his head and chirruped sweetly as if he understood her and was replying in his bird language.

“Those who say that a pet brightens up your life are right!” Mum said increasingly often to anyone who came to visit.

A few days later Dad and Nicola were playing ?? *črnega Petra* at the kitchen table. It was raining outside and Oscar was fast asleep on a cushion on the floor, clasping his favourite toy car in his hand. Then Mum’s blood-curdling scream could be heard through the whole block of flats. Dad and Nicola looked at each other in horror and then rushed out of the flat and down the stairs to the basement.

“Help!!!” screamed Mum. She was standing in front of the storage area, her hands to her mouth and her eyes wide with indescribable horror.

“How could you do this to me?” she gasped.

Beneath the reinforced glass window of the storage area stood a cage and in it proudly sat Annie and Katie. Maggie was still with them and she was hopping around calling out:

“What did I say? What did I say? I knew there would be trouble with this mum. That’s why I didn’t dare go anywhere.”

The little rats gripped the wire of the cage with their little paws, their whiskers twitching, sniffing the air. Dad and Nicola stood there with heads bowed.

“Sorry, Mum,” said Nicola in tears. “I just couldn’t take them back.”

“It’s my fault, Claudia. I should have insisted, but she cried so much...” said dad humbly.

“But Mum, I wanted the rats more than anything in the world... I’m so fond of them! And they of me. They won’t survive without me.”

“You should have thought of that before! They can’t stay here!” said Mum angrily. “Take them away! Right now!!”

“But where? The pet shop won’t take them back now because they’ve grown so much,” said Dad.

“I don’t care!” said Mum and marched decisively up the stairs towards the flat.

“Hm ...” said Maggie thoughtfully, sitting on Annie’s back. “You’d better prepare for the worst. I’ve never ever seen such a determined mum. I really don’t know what we’ll do, because the little girl is your real owner. ?? Naj mi crkne pes, če ni res!”

“What is the worst?” asked Annie.

“For instance, that they give you to a large snake for a snack.”

“Oh no!” squealed the little rats.

“What’s the least worst?” asked Katie.

“That they take you to some laboratory where they stick needles in you.”

“Oh no!” squealed the little rats once more, trembling all over with fear.

“But maybe there’s still hope,” said Maggie thoughtfully, jumping off and disappearing.”

Dad picked up the cage and he and Nicola dejectedly followed Mum upstairs.

When they entered the flat the calm of the rainy afternoon was once more interrupted by Mum’s shriek.

“Jesus, when did Oscar learn to climb onto a chair? And how could you leave him on his own?!”

“He was fast asleep,” said dad in embarrassment, putting the rat cage on the floor. Oscar cheerfully climbed down from the chair next to the bird cage and with arms wide happily waved at Mum. She picked him up and kissed him. Only then did she notice that the door to the bird cage was wide open and that Georgie was nowhere to be seen.

Mum looked upset as she put little Oscar on the floor and started looking round the flat. When she got to the bedroom she saw the curtain flapping. The window was open just wide enough for a small bird to fly through.

“He’s escaped!” she wailed, slumping onto the bed. Oscar tottered over to her and put his head on her knee.

“I was so fond of him,” she sobbed. “So fond! And he really liked me. What will he do now on his own? He won’t survive without me.”

At that moment Mum’s eyes met Nicola’s, which were also full of tears. Mum fell silent. Oscar let go of her knee and went over to the rat cage.

“A-a! K-a!” called Oscar happily as he awkwardly swayed towards the cage containing the two trembling rats, who were nervously awaiting their fate.

“What did he say?” asked Mum in surprise.

“A-ee and Ka-ee! That’s what he says for Annie and Katie!” Dad quickly explained.

Nicola plucked up courage: “Oscar really likes them. Why don’t you like rats, Mum?”

“Because they carry disease!” replied Mum quickly.

“That was about five hundred years ago. And they were quite different rats,” said Dad cautiously.

“Perhaps... But these two are also pretty revolting,” said Mum decisively, with a sniff.

“How can you say that when you’ve never even had a proper look at them!” cried Nicola, opening the cage door. As quick as a flash, the two little rats ran up her arm and sat on her shoulder. Then they both began to carefully clean their snouts.

“Look, they’re washing themselves! Would you believe it!” exclaimed Mum in surprise, her tears no longer flowing.

“Yes, they’re very clean creatures,” said Dad. He pulled some hazel nuts from his pocket and offered one to each rat. Annie and Katie took them in their tiny paws and began nibbling them.

“Unbelievable...” murmured Mum.

“Yes, they really are. They’re so clever! You wouldn’t believe what they can do and how friendly they are. Because I got young ones they think I’m their mum. They follow everywhere. Look!” explained Nicola.

She put them on the floor and wherever she went the two rats kept close behind her heels.

Then something unexpected happened! When Nicola stopped beside Mum ?? je Katka meni nič, tebi nič Katie climbed onto her. Mum froze, her eyes bulged in horror and she squealed: “Get her off me! Get her off! Now!!”

Katie was calmly sitting on Mum's shoulder, sniffing around her. But when Dad tried to catch her she got away and climbed onto Mum's head and then inside her collar. She would not be caught.

The whole time Oscar was laughing and shouting: "Ka-ee! Ka-ee! Ma-ma. Ka-ee!"

Katie pressed herself against Mum's neck and with her tiny paws gently took hold of Mum's ear.

"Oh, it's not that horrible..." stammered Mum. "It's very soft... If only they didn't have that revolting slimy tail!"

"It's not slimy!" exclaimed Nicola. "It's very dry and pleasant to touch. Touch it!"

"Oh no, not that!" Mum insisted. "Get this thing off me, now!"

Nicola stood on tiptoe and put her hand on Mum's shoulder. Katie climbed smoothly down and slipped inside her pullover, and then she peeped out of her collar.

"You see how tame she is? She always comes just to me."

"Okay, perhaps they are really not revolting, perhaps after a hundred years I might get used to them... Now I think I can understand why you like them so much. God knows where Georgie is and if he's still alive..." Mum started sobbing again. "But we really can't keep them in the cellar."

Nicola's shoulders sank and once more her tears started to flow.

Mum looked at the gentle Annie and she looked at Katie, who was regarding her curiously from inside Nicola's pullover. Then she looked at Oscar, who was holding out his little hand towards Annie and burbling in a satisfied way. She looked at remorseful Dad and tearful Nicola. Then she sighed.

"As I said, they can't be in the cellar. But they could be in the flat, in your room – although rats smell, don't they?"

"They don't smell if you clean their cage regularly! At least once a week," said the dejected Nicola.

"Okay, then you'll have to clean them twice a week!" said Mum.

Nicola did not quite understand what Mum was saying. In a trembling voice, she asked:

"Do you mean that..."

"Yes, you can keep them. Although no animal can replace my Georgie..." If they could have heard the magic flea speak, then their ears would have caught a thin call: "Now!"

And immediately the canary fluttered from the top of a cupboard and mischievously began to circle their heads. Oscar reached out his hands, laughing at the top of his voice.

"Georgie! You were hiding on top of the cupboard, you silly boy!" exclaimed Mum in delight.

Nicola looked at her questioningly.

“I’ll keep my word if you keep yours. You can keep the rats,” said Mum seriously.

Nicola ran to tidy her room so that there’d be space for the big cage. So she didn’t see Dad give Mum a big kiss and how Mum finally smiled.

And that’s how it was. Often, when she was alone, Mum popped into Nicola’s room and secretly spoiled Katie and Annie with a little treat. She stroked them, too. She even enjoyed it! But she still didn’t want to touch their tail, even though she had decided she would try.

Maggie could finally call her dog Jack?? Zaka to take her back to the pet shop, which she really missed. There were quite a few new animals there who could without realising it?? ki bi lahko nič hudega sluteč adopt the wrong owner.