

PICK ME
Written for Hearts United For Animals
by Allison Hunter-Frederick © 2008.

Cast of Characters:

Hopper: a rabbit whose feet got injured by a wire cage as a pet

Angela: an angelfish

Val: an alley cat

Midnight: a Black Labrador retriever pup

Cracker: an Amazon parrot whose girlfriend Polly lives in the rainforest

Hatch: a duck sold at Easter in a department store

Act I

HOPPER (calling as he hurries on stage): Are they here yet? Are the visitors here that might adopt us? (Looks out over audience.) Yes, they are! (Bolts offstage.) Angela, how should we act?

ANGELA (swims onto stage, faces audience, speaks confidently): Hi everyone! We'd like to get adopted.

HOPPER (bounces back on stage): I'm Hopper! Please pick me! Please! (Jumps clumsily around stage due to foot problems.) I won't take much room. And I'll love you, love you, love you forever! (Flings arms together to express love.)

VAL (struts past Hopper): Pick you? Who would pick a runt like you? (Sits opposite the others. Looks off stage and preens paw.)

MIDNIGHT (barrels on stage): I want to get picked too! I want a family to love me. I want a family to play with me. (Barks at others.) Come on, let's play!

(Midnight runs about, bowls over Hopper, and bangs into Val. She meows loudly and hisses at Midnight who runs to the others. Cracker flies on stage. He repeatedly mimics Val's meow.)

CRACKER (still using fake voice): Who would pick you? You're just an alley cat. You're one in a hundred. (Lands and puffs up.) Me, I'm an original. I came from the rainforest.

VAL (yawns loudly before she speaks): I have been spayed. THAT makes ME an original. (Saunters past Crackers.) YOU on the other hand shouldn't even be here. YOU belong in the Amazon with your girlfriend.

CRACKER (speaking to self): Cracker wants Polly. Cracker wants Polly. (Starts to sing.) Oh where oh where has my Polly gone? Where oh where can she be?

ANGELA (swims up to Val): Oh Val, why did you have to set him off? He misses the rainforest enough without your reminding him of it.

(Val meows loudly and hisses. Angela doesn't even blink.)

HOPPER (starts to cry): No one is ever going to want me again. I'm going to live and die in an animal shelter.

(Midnight creeps up to him and puts her chin on Hopper. Angela joins them.)

MIDNIGHT: Someone will want us. They'll look into our faces and think we deserve a home. They'll take us with them and then we'll play, play, play!

(Midnight jumps up and knocks over Hopper again. She races around and around, but keeps banging into creatures and into the stage walls. She lies down and mopes.)

MIDNIGHT: I want a family.

ANGELA: I want a home.

HOPPER (starting to wail): I want to be loved!

HATCH (shaking his head): Hopper, you ARE loved. WE love you. Being adopted isn't everything.

HOPPER (sniffs): Yes, it is.

HATCH (shakes Hopper and scolds): How can you say that Hopper? We all had homes and families ... and we've all been dumped here in this shelter, because our families stopped wanting us. YOUR family even put you into a cage with a wire floor instead of a solid one. You'll have bad feet for the rest of your life, thanks to them.

ANGELA: Hatch, I'm sure Hopper's family simply didn't know the difference. Not everyone is knowledgeable as you are.

HATCH (draws self upright): I learned everything I know just from listening to the shelter keepers. They learned from books, computers, and veterinarians. Hopper's family could have made the same effort.

HOPPER (starts to cry again): I loved my family. And I know they loved me. They hand fed me carrots and apples. They just didn't know how to care for my injured feet.

MIDNIGHT (bouncing): My family will love me too! They will be wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!

HATCH (sighs): Perhaps when it comes to dogs and other tame animals, families will know better what to do. When it comes to us wilder and more exotic animals...

VAL (marches up to Hatch and pushes him to the side): Oh stop acting like YOU'RE so special. A family needs to think carefully before adopting ANY of us animals.

(Val sits upright, poised like a statue, and twitches her tail. She looks over the group.)

VAL (bats eyes): I for one will make sure my family provides me with the utmost care. After all, I could live to be 25. I will demand the best attention. And I will receive it. I am Valerie California Extraordinaire and worthy to be honored.

CRACKER (ruffles feathers): In that case, I am Cracker Flapjack Spectacular and deserving of honor. After all, I could live to be 100 years old.

ANGELA: Are the two of you forgetting we have visitors? And that some of them might actually want to adopt us?

HOPPER: Oh, Angela, do you really think they will? (Looks out at audience.) I'm Hopper! Please pick me.

(Other animals line up beside Hopper across the stage. Val and Cracker sit in corners, with heads half-turned to show nonchalance.)

Act II

HOPPER (stares at audience and then whispers to Angela): Now what do we do?

ANGELA (faces audience and speaks confidently): Hi everyone! There are six of us animals here that would like to get adopted. We have all previously been owned, but are now back in a shelter. We hope that if any of you adopts one of us you'll keep us for our entire lives. For that reason, we'd like to tell you something about ourselves.

ANGELA (turns to others): Who wants to start?

MIDNIGHT (throws ball into audience): I want someone who will play with me!

CRACKER (mimics and flies around): Play! Play! Play!

HATCH: Midnight, you need to be quiet!

(Midnight hangs head. The rest of the animals stare at Hatch to rebuff him.)

HATCH (sighs): Midnight, what if everyone here played with you everyday? Would you still want to stay here?

(Midnight shakes her head.)

HATCH (walks over to Midnight and gently asks): Why?

MIDNIGHT (pouts): I don't know.

HOPPER: I know! I know! Hatch, can I help?

(Hatch doesn't say anything. Everyone waits for Midnight to answer.)

MIDNIGHT: Well.... I want a big yard where I can run.

HATCH (prompts): And?

MIDNIGHT (perks up): I want lots of places to jump. And I want water. I want a whole lot more water than Angela will have in her aquarium. (Bounds to feet, starts to wag tail and talk fast.) And I want to explore. I'm a retriever. I should be finding things, all kinds of things, not just what Cracker hides. And, I'm from Canada too and so....

(Val marches over to Midnight and hisses. Midnight hides between Angela and Hopper.)

VAL: Talk about information overload! Keep it simple, stupid!

CRACKER (mimics and flies around): Simple! Simple! Simple!

HATCH (yelling): But it isn't SIMPLE!

ANGELA (hushes everyone): Can we all stick to our goal? We want to get adopted, but we also want to help our visitors know who to pick.

HOPPER: Pick me! Pick me!

VAL (mutters): And there's another one who needs to be quiet.

(Hopper starts to cry. Angela swims over and nudges him.)

ANGELA: Hopper, what do you need?

HOPPER (looks up): For a family to love me?

ANGELA (prods gently): How can they best love you?

HOPPER (puts paws to chin): Well, I need lots of room to run and jump too. I don't need high places, but I do like to dig and gnaw. I liked when my family handfed me vegetables and fruits. I also just like to chew on grass. And.... is that enough, Angela?

ANGELA (nods): How about you, Val? What do you need?

VAL (struts stage): I need places to climb, to scratch, and to sleep. And the places all need to be indoors. I am NOT an outdoor cat. I intend to live out my FULL 25 years.

VAL (flicks tail at others): And that is how it is done. SIMPLE!

HATCH: You also need food.

VAL (rolls eyes): Oh, I also need a smart human—one who knows that every animal needs food!

HATCH (ignores Val's sarcasm): You will do best on a high-protein diet. Cats need more protein than even dogs or humans. Specifically, you must have taurine. When people get food for you, they need to look at the list of ingredients on the wrapper. They need to make sure the food contains specific kinds of meats and includes taurine.

CRACKER (mimics and flies around): Protein! Protein! Protein!

ANGELA: Hatch, our owners don't need to be encyclopedias. You're making it far too complicated. For example, take my needs. I can start out being in a fish bowl with a few other fish like me. I also need to get fed twice daily, just enough for me to eat in about ten minutes. And the temperature of my water should be moderate and constant. Otherwise, my owners can learn everything else when they get me.

HATCH: But will they take that time? My owners wanted to keep me alone with them in the city. I need to have other ducks with me. I also need to live outdoors in a fenced area with nearby water where I can swim. I didn't get any of those things.

(The animals are all quiet.)

CRACKER (softly): Cracker misses Polly. Cracker wants Polly. Cracker should be in the rainforest with her....

(The animals gather around Cracker.)

CRACKER: But, I still want to get adopted. I need a cage large enough to spread my wings. I need to time outside of my cage to fly. I need seed to eat and toys to play with them such as a bell, mirror, wheel, or swing. And I need to be loved.

ANIMALS (echo Cracker): Me too! Me too! Me too! ... (Speak in unison.) We all need to be loved.

Curriculum Ideas

1. Pick a pet. Create a brochure describing how to care for it.
2. Create a poster for an animal in a shelter. Campaign for its adoption.
3. Define tame or domesticated. Pick a pet and create a timeline to explain how it became domesticated.
4. Define wild. Pick a pet. Debate with research the pros and cons of people having domesticated it. Debate.

(Play Extensions)

5. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities for the six portrayed animals. Rewrite and present the first part of the play in your own words.
6. Research the six animals presented in the play. Decide which animal your family could most easily adopt. Create a third act in which you talk to the animals and end up adopting one of them.

HUA Descriptions of Animals

Tabby Cat – “Val”

Val is a “Valley Girl” ...always primping and checking her appearance in the mirror. She talks like a snob, and she thinks she is superior to the others. She is a “Valley-Cat” with real catitude. Val has been spayed. When she learned that 81 cats can be born to an unsprayed cat and her offspring in a one year period, she knew what had to be done...that many pregnancies would be terrible for her figure, not to mention that there are just not enough good homes for that many cats!

Angel Fish – “Angela”

Angela is a beautiful and wise fish. She is kind to her friends, and they respect her very much. Angela is calm and very skilled at giving good advice.

Amazon Parrot – “Cracker”

Cracker is a jokester. He loves to mimic people, and he is always looking for a good time. He is very intelligent, very witty, and full of energy. Cracker had a girlfriend in the rainforest names Polly. Whenever he gets lonely, he says “Cracker wants a Polly”.

Black Lab Puppy – “Midnight”

Midnight is 10 weeks old. She loves EVERYONE. She follows the others around and asks, “Can I play?” She is still a baby, and has needs and actions of a baby.

Duckling – “Hatch”

Hatch was an Easter duckling. A department store in the city was giving away chicks and ducklings for Easter. They only problem was the family that took Hatch had no way to keep him in the city, so Hatch was taken to a farm pond and dumped. Hatch has some pretty strong feelings against making pets out of wildlife or farm animals.

Baby Rabbit – “Hopper”

Hopper is a happy, hyper, honey of a rabbit. He came from a home where the children loved him when they were younger, but then as the children got older they lost interest in him. His cage was all wire, which caused Hopper to have some foot problems. When his foot problems developed, the family took him to the local animal shelter. Hopper is an eternal optimist, and he hopes that someone will adopt him.