

Hey! Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Laura Hall here at East Hill Animal Hospital and Pensacola Pet Resort. I'm going to be reading today Chapter 17 and Chapter 18 from the book *A Boy Called Bat* by Elena K. Arnold with pictures by Charles Santoso. So get your book ready and open it up to page 103.

## Chapter 17 At the Clinic

Bat loved going to Mom's veterinary clinic. If it were up to him, he would go with her every time she had to work late instead of staying home with Janie. But Mom said that as much as she loved having Bat at work with her, all his questions sometimes kept the vet techs from doing their jobs.

Bat *tried* not to ask so many questions. But there were so many interesting things to ask questions about.

"Today you can help Laurence with baths," Mom told Bat as she drove him the three miles from the Saw Whet School to the small brick building marked "Valerie Tam, DVM."

Janie was always trying to get Mom to rename her veterinary clinic something else. "Something fun," she'd say. "Something creative."

So far, she had suggested the Furry Friends Clinic, Paws for a Moment Veterinarian, Nose to Tail and Everything In Between, and—her favorite— the PAWSPITAL.

But Bat liked seeing Mom's name on the side of the building. It was like she was a celebrity.

"I'm good at baths," Bat said. "Yes," said Mom. "You are."

When he pulled open the heavy glass door at the front of the brick building, Bat was overwhelmed by smells and sounds. The lavender- peppermint spray they used to clean up pet accidents. The wet-dog scent of shampooing going on in the back room. Barking, barking, barking. A phone ringing. People talking. A cat's yowl.

If there were this much ruckus at school or the playground or anywhere else at all, Bat would definitely need his earmuffs. But here, the sounds and the smells didn't bother him. Even the flickering fluorescent light didn't irritate him very much.

Suzanne stood behind the counter running a lady's credit card through the machine with one hand while she answered the ringing phone with the other. "Dr. Tam's office," she said, waving hello at Bat as he walked by.

He waved back, but he didn't say anything because he didn't want to bother her. It used to be that he didn't notice if people were busy with other things, but he was way better now. At least, he usually was.

An old lady, old like a grandmother, sat on the bench in the waiting room. She held a box on her lap.

Bat stopped in front of her. "What kind of animal do you have in that box?" "It's my cat, Pickles," the lady said. "He's not feeling one hundred percent."

“What are his symptoms?” Bat asked. “Are you the veterinarian?” the lady asked. “No,” said Bat. “Not yet.”

“Ah,” said the lady. “Well, he has indigestion and he hasn’t been very hungry lately.”

There were lots of things that could be. Bat looked up at his mom, who stood next to him, listening. She shrugged. “I’ll have to examine Pickles to know what’s wrong,” she said. Then she turned to the lady. “I’ll see you and Pickles in just a minute or two.”

“I hope Pickles feels better soon,” Bat said. Then he followed Mom through the door that separated the waiting room from the back and watched as she took her white coat from its hook. She put it on, and then Mom was Dr. Tam. A veterinarian. Better than a superhero.

One day, Bat would also have a jacket, just like Mom’s. It would be white, and it would have five buttons, and it would have the words “Dr. Tam, DVM” embroidered just above his heart. Of this, Bat was 99.9 percent sure, because that was as sure as you could be about anything.

“I’ve got to go see patients,” Mom said. “You stay close to Laurence, and be a help, okay?”

“Hey, Bat Boy, what’s up?” Laurence was the only person who called Bat “Bat Boy.”

“Mom rescued a skunk kit and we’re raising it. She says we have to give him to a rescue in a month—well, three weeks now—but I am going to change her mind. We named him Thor,” Bat said.

Laurence laughed. “I know all about the kit,” he said. “Who do you think is taking care of him while you’re at school?”

“You are,” said Bat. “Are you doing a good job?”

Laurence ruffled Bat’s hair, and Bat smoothed it down again.

“Of course I’m doing a good job,” Laurence said. “It’s the only kind of job I know how to do. Look.” He reached into the neck of his shirt and pulled out the strangest necklace Bat had ever seen. It was made of T-shirt material and ended in a little pouch just big enough for cradling a skunk kit.

“Is Thor in there?” Bat asked.

Laurence nodded. “Yep. The little guy seemed kind of lonely in the kennel, so I made a sling for him out of one of my old T-shirts last night. See? Snug as a bug in a rug.” Laurence opened the pouch so Bat could see inside. There was Thor, curled into a little sleeping ball.

“Can I wear him?” Bat asked.

“Of course. We don’t want to get him wet when I’m washing the dogs. Here.” Very carefully, Laurence pulled the sling up over his head and then lowered it over Bat’s. But the sling, which had barely reached Laurence’s chest, sank all the way to Bat’s belly button.

“We can fix that,” said Laurence, and he looped the fabric into a knot behind Bat’s neck to shorten the sling. “There,” he said. “Now you’re a marsupial Bat.”

“There are no marsupial bats,” Bat said. “Marsupial infants need to have strong arms and claws to climb into their mother’s pouch. Bats have wings.” Bat peered into the pouch to see if Thor had been disturbed by the movement, but the kit was still fast asleep. “He’s got

more fur than he had this morning,” Bat said. “I can see the black and white growing in.”

“They grow up so fast,” Laurence said. “You seem bigger than last time I saw you, too.”

“Not you,” said Bat, closing up the pouch and tucking it into his shirt. “You’re already all the way big.”

Laurence grinned. “If I get any bigger, I’ll have to buy special-order shoes. I already wear the biggest size the shoe store sells.”

“Good thing you’re too old to grow,” Bat said.

“Good thing indeed,” said Laurence. Then he said, “Thor is a great name, Bat. Did you come up with it?”

“No,” said Bat. “Janie did.”

“You’re a lucky kid to have such a creative sister,” Laurence said. “Did you thank her?”

“No,” said Bat. “Not yet.”

“Well, there will be time for that later,” Laurence said. “How about assisting me with some baths?”

Usually, Bat would do just about anything to help Laurence with baths. But now, with Thor in the sling, curled up and asleep . . . “I don’t know,” Bat said.

“Don’t worry about the kit,” Laurence said. “You can wear an apron. And I’ll do all the soapy stuff.”

Laurence draped a green apron around Bat’s neck. Bat tried to make sure it wasn’t pressing too tight against the sling as Laurence tied the waist strap.

“All good?” Laurence asked.

“I can’t tell if Thor is still breathing,” Bat said. “Maybe it’s too tight.”

Laurence untied the strap and Bat took off the apron. He pulled open the sling and peered inside. There was Thor, still tightly curled into a little ball, still fast asleep.

“He’s okay,” sighed Bat.

Laurence patted Bat’s shoulder. “Maybe you can just keep me company today. How does that sound, Bat Boy?”

“Better,” said Bat. “I can supervise.”

“Good idea,” Laurence said. “You can tell me when I use too much soap.”

“That’s easy,” said Bat, following Laurence into the holding room, where dogs waited in separate kennels for their bath. “You always use too much soap.”

Bat climbed up on a counter across from the big silver washbasin and watched as Laurence bent down to open the far kennel. He scooped up a shaggy white poodle who didn’t look very happy about what was about to happen.

“You’re okay, Jeff,” Laurence said. He was using his soothing voice— calm and deep.

“Jeff is a funny name for a poodle,” Bat said.

“Well, Bat’s a funny name for a kid,” Laurence answered, setting Jeff into the washbasin before smiling at Bat. Bat smiled back.

Then Laurence got to work, slipping Jeff’s head into a restraint so he couldn’t jump out of the tub, then turning on the faucet and running his hand under the water to check its temperature before he started spraying down the dog.

“That’s a new restraint, isn’t it?” Bat asked.

“Good eye,” said Laurence. He shut off the water and began massaging shampoo into Jeff’s curly pelt. “The other one was getting rusty, so I ordered this new model.”

“Is that a suction cup connecting it to the wall?”

“It sure is,” said Laurence. “And a strong one, too!” He grabbed ahold of the rope and tugged on it to show Bat how well it was connected to the wall . . . but with a loud *pop*, the suction cup came free.

Jeff didn’t waste any time. With an excited *yip*, he scrambled over the lip of the washbasin and leaped to the ground, bubbles everywhere. He slipped and slid when he landed, his nails scraping across the linoleum floor. Laurence reached to grab him, but Jeff was too fast. He scrambled toward the door.

Bat pulled his legs up onto the counter and crossed them, one arm wrapping protectively around Thor in his sling. The air smelled like warm wet dog and strawberry shampoo.

Laurence’s fingers were inches away from Jeff when his heel found a puddle of soapy water. One moment he was standing, and the next moment he was flat on his back.

“Are you okay?” Bat asked, but he didn’t climb down from his perch. His first priority was keeping the kit safe and dry.

“I’ve been better,” Laurence groaned. Jeff, who had discovered that the door was closed tight, returned to peer down at Laurence. He lowered his head and lovingly licked Laurence’s cheek with his long pink tongue.

## Chapter 18 Dinner Date

Maybe the best moment of the whole day was when Bat finally felt Thor rustling in the pouch that hung from around Bat’s neck. Thor woke from his nap just when Laurence was finishing the last bath, which was for an inky spaniel named Webster.

“Laurence!” Bat said. “Thor is waking up!”

Bat pulled open the sling and gently extracted the kit from it, holding Thor’s warm, wiggly body up to his cheek. The kit’s nose twitched as he snuffed around.

“Baby wants his milk,” Laurence said, and together they fed him.

If Bat had his way, he would wear Thor in the sling all the time. But Mom made him take it off at bath time and bedtime. She was willing to compromise at dinner.

“Really, Bat, don’t you think Thor would be more comfortable in his enclosure?” Mom said as she served out three platefuls of spaghetti and meatballs.

“No,” said Bat. “I really don’t.”

Mom squinted her eyes tight. When she opened them she said, “Okay. Thor can join us for dinner. As long as he stays in the sling.”

“I’ll bet when he’s older, though, Thor will love spaghetti and meatballs,” Bat said happily, twirling a messy forkful of noodles. “Skunks eat everything, you know. They’re omnivores. *Omni*, meaning everything, *vore*, meaning one who eats.”

“We *know*, Bat,” said Janie. “You told us already. Like a hundred times.”

“Don’t you think it’s interesting?” asked Bat. “Don’t I think *what* is interesting?”

“Everything,” said Bat. “Everything there is to know about animals.” “Not really,” said Janie. “I think theater is way more interesting than animals.”

“That’s stupid,” said Bat. Because it was.

“Bat,” said Mom in her warning voice. Deep and serious, with her eyebrows pointed toward her nose.

“I’m sorry I said your interest is stupid,” said Bat. He wasn’t actually sorry, because Janie’s interest *was* stupid. Theater was pretend. Animals were real. But Mom had let him bring Thor to the dinner table, so Bat turned his mouth up in a smile and added, “Will you forgive me?” Mom liked it when he remembered to say that.

“Whatever,” Janie said. “Mom, did you make any garlic bread?” “Oh, it’s in the oven. It’s probably done,” Mom said.

Janie pushed back from the table, found an oven mitt in the drawer, and pulled the tray of bread out of the oven. It smelled wonderful.

“Ezra once said that garlic is the best smell in the world, better even than roses,” Janie said, putting the bread slices into a basket and bringing it to the table.

“That Ezra is a character,” Mom said.

“He’s pretty funny,” Janie said. “He even makes our math teacher laugh, and she doesn’t think *anything* is funny.”

“If she doesn’t think anything is funny,” Bat said, reaching across the table for a piece of bread, “then why does she laugh at Ezra? Is it mean laughing?”

“No, Bat,” said Janie. “She thinks Ezra is funny.”

“Then why did you say she doesn’t think *anything* is funny?” “Never mind, Bat,” said Janie.

Bat took bite of the garlic bread. The crust was crusty, and then the inside was hot and squishy. Melted butter glazed his fingers, which he licked, one by one.

They ate for a few minutes without talking, the only sounds the crunch of biting into bread and the scraping noise of forks against plates as they wound bites of spaghetti.

Then, Janie announced, “I’ve decided I’m going to audition for the Queen.”

“I thought you wanted to be Alice,” Mom said.

“That was before I read the script,” Janie said. “Then I realized that Alice is boring. She just wanders around whining about everything.”

“You’d be good at that part,” Bat said. “You’re good at whining.” “Mo-o-m,” whined Janie. “Make him stop!”

“Bat,” said Mom. “That wasn’t nice.”

“But I said she’d make a good Alice,” Bat said. “But not for a good reason,” Mom explained.

“Why does the reason matter? I gave her a compliment.”

“I don’t think it felt like a compliment to Janie,” Mom said. “Janie, did it feel like a compliment to you?”

“No,” said Janie. “It was an insult.”

“You see, Bat?” said Mom. “It wasn’t a compliment to Janie.”

Suddenly Bat wished that he had been wearing his earmuffs and that he hadn't even heard Mom and Janie talking about the play. Sometimes it was just better if Bat kept his thoughts to himself.

Bat ate a few more bites of his spaghetti and had almost finished all his bread when he felt Thor wriggling around in his pouch. "May I be excused?" he asked.

"Yes," said Janie.

"Honey, you know it's up to you to model good behavior," Bat heard Mom say to Janie as he headed to the refrigerator to get out the puppy formula.

"Sometimes, Mom, even I'm not a good enough actress to pretend not to notice when Bat is being weird."

"Oh, Janie," said Mom.

Get out the formula, Bat told himself. Put some in the syringe. Warm it up. Ignore Janie.

Bat knew that sometimes Janie thought he was weird. But he still didn't like to hear her say it out loud.

Actually, Janie could be weird, too. Like when she sang at the top of her lungs in the shower, even though there wasn't an audience. And how she cared if her hair was wavy or straight. Did Ezra ever think that Janie was weird? Maybe that's what makes Ezra her friend, Bat thought. He likes the parts of her that everyone else thinks are weird.

This is Little Edie. She's a precious little Bichon. They do not shed at all, which makes them very desirable. They also have great personalities. They can be sweet little snuggle buddies or be really, really active and go play ball in the yard. Like I said they don't shed at all. They're originally from Spanish descent, and they've been popular since the 13th century. The word "frisé" translates into curly, so they're no... known as the Bichon frisé. They do require a lot of grooming. A lot of people cut them short. They can grow really long, but they just require a lot of grooming. So you just have to be patient, but they make great, sweet little pets.

So, this is Ember. She's a four-month-old dachshund. They're known as the smallest hunting breed. They come in about 15 different colors. Usually you see them, they're black and tan, but she's beautiful... all black. Hence her name, Ember. She's a really sweet puppy. They were also the first Olympic mascot in 1972. They're known as the badger dog.

This is handsome Echo. He's a beautiful... He's just a baby, nine-week-old German Shepherd. Turn sideways a little bit. He's going to be a big boy. They were known as America's first service dog. They're so smart, and they're eager to please. This probably wouldn't be a first-time dog, that I would recommend for a dog owner. They're very intelligent, and they really do... What? They really do require a job and obviously they're originating in Germany as sheep herders. Like I said, they're known for their work ethic, and they really like to have a job. They're really good rescue dogs for rescuing people. They're good drug detection dogs. He's just a baby at nine-weeks old.

So, this is Abraham. He's a 13-week-old bloodhound. You can see him using his nose. That's what they're known for. He can find a smell that's up to 300 hours old. They originated in Europe, and Pluto, from Walt Disney, is modeled after a bloodhound. This breed has been around for over a thousand years.

Loki is a beautiful five-month-old Siberian Husky. They have very, very thick coats. This is also a dog I would not recommend as a first-time pet. They have a lot of energy. They get into a lot of mischief. They're working dogs. During a diphtheria epidemic, they were used to transport medicine and supplies in the arctic areas. Their bodies are perfectly made, so they can withstand long distance running. So, this is not a dog that you want to keep in an apartment or keep in a crate a lot. They are beautiful, but they can be trouble with a capital T, that's for sure.

This is Warden. He's only five months old. He's an African Mastiff. He's going to weigh up to a hundred and seventy-five pounds when he's a big boy. He is known as a farmer's dog. They're very, very protective and can guard against other predators. Let me just show you. You see a big dog like this, you expect him to have big ol' teeth in there. Look at his little bitty baby teeth [ Laughter ] He's going to lose all these teeth. So, he's going to be teething for about 12 months. Yup, and he's slobbering and so you got to... you got to be prepared for that and be able to feed a large, big dog and take care of their veterinary expenses. Sometimes bigger dogs can have more health issues. They don't live as long but... but they're awesome. So, he's going to be used as a guard dog and companion at his home. He's got a really good attitude for such a big dog. When you have a big dog like this, you really have to make sure that they have a good temperament, they're good with other people and other animals, and that they mind and... and do what they need to do.

Sweet little Milton. He is a ten-week-old Pomeranian mix. He is our little rescue of the group. He came from the Hotel for Dogs and Cats and just want to say that you can get an awesome little dog like this as a rescue. He's probably not going to shed too much, so that's going to be a really good thing. We feel like he's probably got a lot of Pomeranian in him, because of his fluffy coat, so he's going to be a true toy breed, probably -- may only be about 7 to 10 pounds.

And last but not least, this is Honey Bug. She's a sweet little six-month-old Shar-Pei. They have all this skin, because they're known as a protecting dog, and so they have to fight sometimes. So, they need all this skin to protect them. These dogs do have some health issues... You see her... her eyes there she's probably going to have to have some of that tissue removed, because it can actually get in their way and cause them to be blind. They can have some allergy issues, but usually the people that get them know this going in, and they're aware of it, and we just help them deal with all those issues, as their veterinarian. That's little Honey Bug.

So, some of those folks you saw coming and bringing the puppies... those are my veterinary technicians, some people call them veterinary nurses, and they do such a good job. They help... a veterinarian can't do their job without them. So I let you know the other kids, those are my kids. It's two of my three kids, so most of everybody that you saw in the blue scrubs are part of our veterinary technician team. Veterinary technicians... they can get a degree and become a Certified Veterinary Technician. I'll have three certified veterinary technicians. They get a two-year college Associate Degree, and then they get another two-year Veterinary Technician Degree. There is actually a very good program at Pensacola State College, and several of our technicians have come from there. And they get lots of hands-on learning and book learning, and so it's a great career... very rewarding.