



Crickēt
and
Friēnds

A Novel

Priscilla E. Pratt

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Excerpt from *The Narrative of Phineas Pratt*, 1662.
Pilgrim Hall Museum (<http://www.pilgrimhall.org>).

5

“You did *what?*”

The man pulled nervously at his wispy beard, his eyes darting left and right.

“I, I...”

“You did *what?* You *sold* my snake! You little creep! I can’t believe this! How could you? That snake was *not for sale*. I was just boarding it here while I was visiting colleges in New England with my parents—it wasn’t for sale! You must have known that. And it had my name on it.”

The young woman was red in the face, her frizzy blonde hair stuck out in all directions as in a cartoon of an electrified person, and she bent all six feet three inches of her well-padded frame over the terrified man, her hands flexing and working as if she were about to grab him by the throat.

“I, I didn’t know,” he quavered. “I’m...new. That was my first day and, uh, no one told me...” He picked up a large box of gerbil food as if to ward off a blow.

Her face got even redder. She stamped her foot. “You little piece of....”

“Pieces of eight, pieces of eight,” rasped the red and green parrot from its perch.

The man grabbed a paper towel and scurried over to the parrot where he began to wipe up little messes here and there on the floor and the cages and the wall.

“Don’t you walk away from me while I’m talking to you!” the girl screamed.

“You’re gonna get my snake back, that’s what you’re gonna do! It’s the least you can do. AND if you don’t I’m gonna talk to your boss and get you fired, you little piece of...”

“Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly,” added the parrot, enjoying all the noise and excitement. “Gimme a kiss, gimme a kiss. Sweet thing, sweet thing.”

“Now, where does the kid live? Surely you know that, birdbrain. You must have written out a receipt. Go get the office copy. Go on!”

He did as she directed.

“Huh, what’s this, Howerfoople Drive? Where’s that? I never heard of it.”

“That’s Honeysuckle Drive,” he whimpered.

“Okay. Now what does the kid look like? You say you didn’t get his name or phone number. Describe him.”

The girl seemed to be taking over the snake retrieval project herself, and the man was heartily glad of that and tried to cooperate.

“Oh, he was about twelve years old, kinda pudgy, messy brown hair, glasses.”

“Any parent with him?”

“No, he came on a bike, kinda battered, old.”

She snorted. “I’ll find him.”

“We would be glad to refund you the money, all sixty dollars,” he offered.

“Hah!” she spat out. “Try six *thousand*. That’s what my parents paid for my rare Mexican milk snake

which you went and lost. Six thousand! You little piece of...”

“Pieces of eight, God Almighty!” bawled the parrot, in ecstasy.