

Rats

by Kim Conklin

She stood by the rescued greyhounds at the outdoor market, petting the dogs and talking to the lovely young woman with the beaming smile standing next to her.

"You have to meet someone." The young woman reached into her jacket. A furry white head with two bright eyes and a pointed nose peeked out. The rat nuzzled against her owner's sweater and dove back into safety and warmth, leaving only hindquarters and a long tail on display.

"You have the most interesting pets!" she said with sincerity, even though rodents were usually one of her least favorite forms of wildlife.

"She's a domestic white rat."

"Two words I've never used in a sentence."

"Domestic and rat?" the young woman laughed.

She liked this young woman. They'd met two weeks earlier, when the young woman had been walking her pet chicken on a pink ribbon leash.

The rat peeked out again. She had to admit, it was cute. And clean. Not what you'd expect.

The young woman told her about the rat's affectionate nature and intelligence, and how easy it was to litter train. Her husband smiled and punctuated her story with supportive comments.

As she listened, she noticed the glow on the young woman's face, how happy she and her husband seemed to be. She thought of all the religions and texts and sermons and self-help books in the world, and she wondered if the real message in them might be just to love everything, even the rats.

