

Leo stood in front of Mr. Barney's Pet Shop, which was his daily stop on his way home from school. His eyes fixated on the little tan puppy with a black nose that yelped at all the people passing by.

Walking closer to the window, Leo caught the puppy's attention. His tail wagged a mile a minute and he could barely contain himself jumping up and down, as if hoping Leo would come into the store to play with him.

Leo smiled and laughed as he watched the puppy. He had wanted a dog for as long as he could remember, but his mom had always said no.

"Dogs are a lot of work," she'd say. "And it wouldn't be fair to the dog because I work part time." Mom decorates cakes at Ann's Bake Shop.

Leo's faint reflection in the glass caught his eye. He was regular sized for a boy his age, standing just under five feet tall, as he brushed brown curls from his eyes.

The puppy picked up the ball from the floor and tossed it toward the window. He tilted his head, as if wondering why Leo didn't catch it and

throw it back to him, unaware that the glass window stood between them. The ball bounced off the window and rolled back to the puppy. Again, the puppy picked up the ball and tossed it back in Leo's direction. Leo was laughing at the puppy's playfulness, which amused the puppy to continue throwing the ball against the window toward Leo.

Finally, Leo decided to go into the store to get a closer look at the little fella. The puppy's eyes followed him as he walked around the corner and through the front door. The closer Leo moved to the puppy's cage, the more excited the puppy became.

Mr. Barney, the pet shop owner stood about the same height as Leo, only he was balding and had the friendliest smile. He walked over to Leo.

“Would you like to pet the puppy?”

“Oh, can I?” asked Leo with a smile.

“Why certainly. Come on over,” replied Mr. Barney.

Mr. Barney put a leash on the puppy before he took him out of his cage and walked over to Leo. The puppy's tail wagged back and forth with excitement.

Finally, Leo and the puppy were face to face. Mr. Barney showed Leo how to put his hand out, palm side down, to allow the puppy to sniff him first. The puppy put his cold wet nose up to Leo's hand and gave a sniff. Then without warning, the puppy started licking Leo's hand, which made Leo laugh so hard.

“Do you have any pets?” asked Mr. Barney.

“No,” said Leo, “but I've always wanted a dog,” he continued.

Just then, Leo's mom walked into the pet store.

“There you are, young man.” His mother called out in a very stern voice. “Did you forget about your haircut appointment?”

He pushed his curls back again. “Oops. Sorry, Mom. But you've got to come look at this cute puppy,” Leo added with excitement.

Leo's mom was not at all interested in seeing the puppy. The barber had told her that if she could get Leo there within a half hour, he would still be

able to cut his hair, as his next appointment had cancelled. She gave Leo a very disappointed look, escorted him out of the store, and led him down the street to the barber shop.

On the way, Leo told his mom all about the puppy from Mr. Barney's Pet Shop, trying to convince her to buy it for him; but she was not even remotely interested in getting the puppy.

"Mom, I'm twelve years old. Lots of kids I know have pets. Why can't I have one?" Leo whined.

"Leo, you couldn't even remember to meet me at the barber shop. A dog is a lot of work. You have to feed it, bathe it and walk it. I don't have the time to take care of a dog and you are apparently not responsible enough to handle that job. Perhaps someday when you are older, you'll have a dog, but now is not the right time," his mother explained.