

Iggy



Emilio lived in a small town, where nothing exciting ever happened. That changed when he bought Iggy.

When Emilio entered the pet store in nearby Bigg City that day, he had forty dollars in his pocket and anticipation in his heart. He'd been saving to buy a pet, doing yard work for his neighbors.

"As long as it's something small," his parents had said.

Emilio surveyed the store's collection for something that met that requirement. He spotted a small lizard, no bigger than a pencil, in a fish tank with a screen over the top.



"Wow, what's that?" he asked the clerk.

"It's an iguana," replied the man, who had not made a single sale that week and really needed to.

"Will it stay this little?" said Emilio. "My parents said I could get a pet, as long as it's small."

The pet store clerk looked around to see whether anyone was listening. There wasn't, but he lowered his voice anyway.

"It's a male," he said, slyly. "Male iguanas don't get very big. They're very sensible pets."

Emilio looked at the animal again; the animal looked back. He was charmed.



"How much does he cost?" he asked.

"How much do you have?" asked the clerk.

Even though Emilio couldn't see what possible difference that could make, he told him. "Forty dollars."

"You're in luck," said the clerk. "We're having a reptile closeout sale this week, and that's exactly what he costs!"

"You mean he's affordable?" Emilio said, delighted.

"Nobody ever wants iguanas," the clerk fibbed. "You'd be saving him from abandonment."

After Emilio bought Iggy, he took him down the street to where his mother was shopping.

"Oh, Emilio," said his mother, when she looked into the little cardboard box. "What on earth is *that*?"

"An iguana," Emilio told her. "I'm going to call him Iggy. The man at the pet store said he wouldn't get very big."

"Yeah, right." Emilio's mother rolled her eyes. "He tricked you, honey. Come on, we need to return it and get you a nice snail, or something."

But when they got back to the pet store, there was a closed sign hanging in the window, swinging gently back and forth until it came to rest.

Emilio's mother frowned. "Oh well, I guess we're stuck with that nasty thing."

Emilio made Iggy a home out of an old aquarium that was large, bright, and warm. Iggy loved it so much that he spent all of his time there jumping and playing — when he wasn't happily munching on the fruit salads Emilio made him. It wasn't long before most of Emilio's allowance was going toward apples, bananas, oranges, pears, grapes, and lettuce.

"Iggy sure loves to eat," Emilio commented one day.

"That explains why he's growing so fast," her mom replied, a little crabby.

Emilio's mom had a point. By the time Iggy was two years old, he was four feet long, very strong, fast, and flexible. Emilio built a larger cage and kept him in the basement, but sometimes he'd get loose. When he did, he'd run around and survey his surroundings for food and things to climb on.

Iggy was smart, too, because he came when he was called, and he fetched and sat on command. The bigger he got, the smarter he seemed to become and the more tricks he learned. Soon the whole town knew Iggy; they called him the "Extraordinary Iguana." Emilio was proud to own such an interesting pet.



By his third birthday, Iggy was seven feet long and weighed more than Emilio did. Emilio had trained Iggy to run on his hind legs, and local athletes often challenged him to races. Iggy could run at a strenuous pace for a long time, and he usually won. Television reporters began visiting frequently, wanting to see the celebrity in action. Still, as Iggy's fame outgrew Emilio's town, Iggy himself outgrew Emilio's house.

One Friday night, after Iggy's monthly appearance on the *Those Wacky Animals* TV program, an animal trainer approached Emilio.

"Young man," the trainer said, "I've never seen a lizard with Iggy's screen presence. I'd like to make him a movie star, so if you let him move in with me, I'll give him a home that would exceed any lizard's expectation. I'm a resourceful guy, so I'll feed him and train him to do movie stunts, and you could visit him any time you wanted!"

"I'll have to ask my mom," Emilio told him.

"If she says yes," the trainer said, "bring Iggy over tomorrow." He looked down at Iggy, who was on a leash. "What do you think, Iggy? Wanna move in with me? Iggy wanna?" He chuckled and repeated himself, "Iggy wanna." Then he asked Emilio, "Get it?"

"That's a good one," said Emilio, to be polite.

Both Emilio and his mother thought the trainer's offer was perfect. Emilio was so filled with anticipation that he barely slept that night. He was drowsy but joyful when they went to the trainer's home the next afternoon and dropped Iggy off.

As Emilio said goodbye to Iggy, he promised, "I'll see you tomorrow!" Emilio was pretty sure that Iggy smiled at him, but it might have just been his imagination.