

Nell was sitting in the library with her friends. It was lunchtime. Nell was reading. She was *always* reading! She had found a book about cats and was happy.

But she was the only one with a book. Her friends had gadgets in their hands. Sunita had a phone; Saffron had a tablet.

‘Why don’t you look at books?’ she said. ‘We are in a library!’

‘Books are old-fashioned,’ said Sunita. ‘I don’t know why you like them!’

‘I love everything about them,’ said Nell. ‘I love the feel of the paper... the shiny cover... the pictures. I love the *smell* of a new book! I like turning the pages to see what comes next. Look at this - it’s gorgeous.’ She held up the cat book to show them. ‘The photos are lovely.’

‘But they never change,’ said Saffron. ‘If you open that book tomorrow, all the photos will be the same as today. That’s boring! I like things to be different.’

Sunita nodded. ‘Me too.’

‘Look at this,’ said Saffron. She moved closer to Nell to show something on her tablet. ‘You like cats, right?’

Nell nodded. ‘And I *love* kittens.’

‘OK, kittens.’ Saffron tapped at her screen. ‘So look - kittens. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them! More than you could ever look at.’

‘I know,’ said Nell, ‘and they are very pretty. But I still like my book more!’

She laughed, and hugged it to her like a teddy bear.

‘That book is just cats,’ said Saffron. ‘Look, I can *change* this. You like dogs? Here are dogs! You want rabbits? Here they are! What pet do you want? Ponies, guinea pigs, parrots, unicorns...’

‘Unicorns? *Real* unicorns?’

‘Yes, real unicorns. Look! You can buy them online. They sing and dance too.’

Nell grinned. ‘Can they make ice cream?’

‘Sure!’ said Saffron. ‘They can do anything. They only cost a million dollars.’

‘Then buy me one.’

‘I will - for your 20th birthday!’ said Saffron, and the girls all laughed.

Later that night, Nell was alone in her bedroom. She thought about what her friends had said.

‘I know books stay the same,’ she said. ‘That is why I like them!’

She opened her favourite book. It was about pets. Nell had no pets of her own, though she dearly wanted one. The photos in the book were beautiful. She especially liked one of a cat with golden eyes and very long fur. The fur was smoky grey.

‘Books are better than gadgets,’ she told herself, ‘though nothing is better than the real thing.’ She sighed deeply and ran her finger across the photo of the cat.

A magical thing happened. She could feel the fur! It was soft and silky under her fingers. Then she heard a purring sound, and the smoky cat blinked its golden eyes.

‘No!’ she squealed, as she pulled her hand away. ‘This is unreal!’

But it was very much real - because the smoky cat suddenly stepped right out of the book and sat on Nell's knees.

It was tiny, the same size it had been in the photo. But not for long. It began to grow, bigger and bigger. Soon it was the size of a proper cat.

'Miaow.'

'Oh...! You are just lovely,' said Nell. She picked the cat up and cuddled him close. The cat purred, really loud now. 'What shall I call you? Something magical... Arabia! That's it! Perfect.'

Then the cat wriggled free and did a curious thing. He turned the page of the book with his paw, then tapped on a photo of a white cat.

The white cat stepped out of the book, just as he had, and grew up to real size.

'Oh!' said Nell. 'Can I bring *anything* out?'

She turned the pages of the book and stopped at one of her favourite photos: six Dalmation puppies. She tapped the photo - and out they came! Soon they were full size and on her bedroom floor. One began eating her sandal. One chewed her school bag. Two went under the bed. Two played chase, round and round the room.

Nell clapped her hands in delight. This was so much fun! She tapped photo after photo. Four grey rabbits... a red parrot... twelve guinea pigs... ten kittens... a tortoise... a family of mice... a baby alpaca... All came to life. Soon the room was like a zoo! But there was no fighting. The baby mice climbed all over Arabia the cat and he simply purred.

Then Nell heard something. Footsteps, coming up the stairs, and a voice: 'Are you ready to go to sleep, Nell?'

'Mum!'

'Back in the book!' said Nell, and clapped her hands. 'Quick!'

The pets turned to smoke and whizzed back into the book.

‘Well,’ giggled Nell. ‘I was right. Books are *definitely* better than gadgets!’