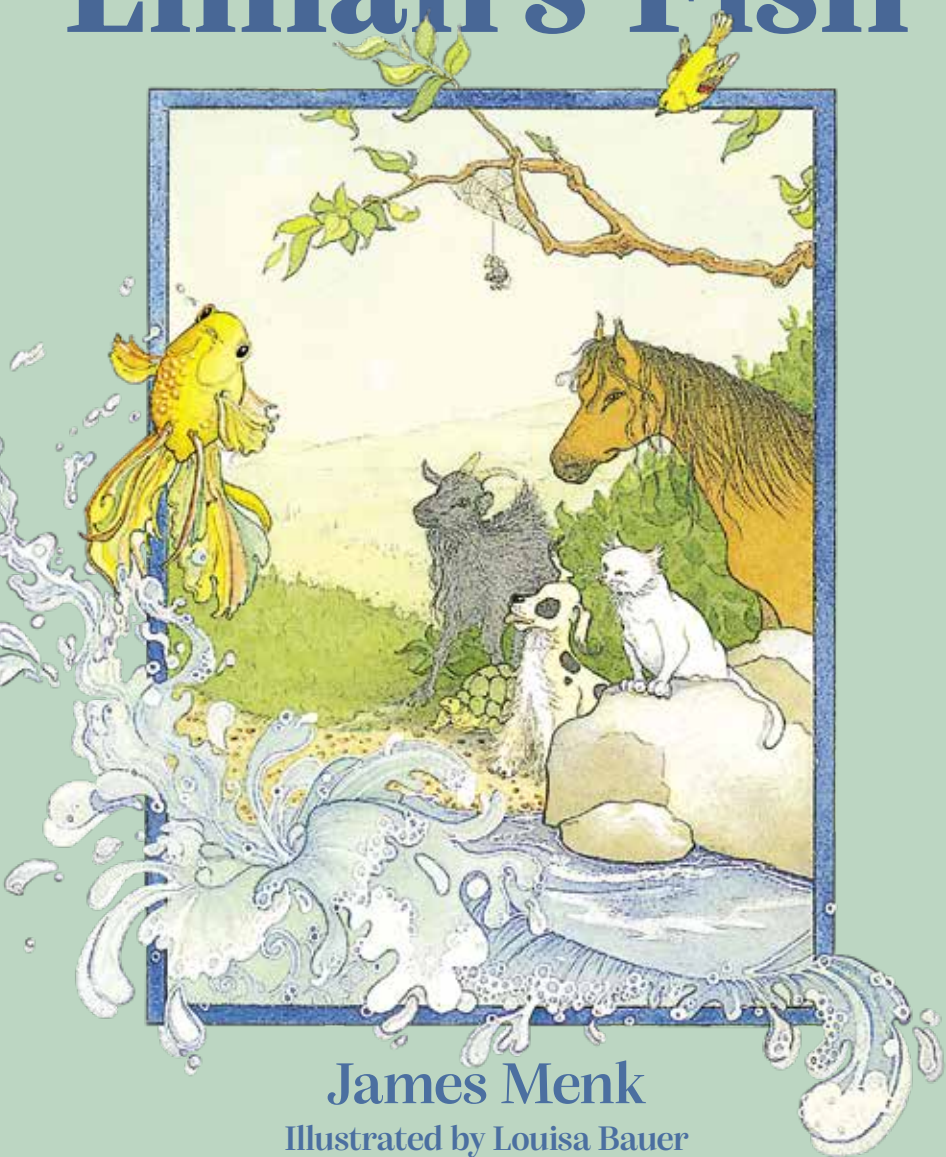


# Lillian's Fish



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## A Birthday Party

**L**ong ago and far away lived a little girl named Lillian. Little Lillian lived in a large house with her mother and father, her aunt and uncle, and her seven brothers. Her aunt's name was Alice, her uncle's name was Nat, and her seven brothers were named Tim, Tom, Tod, Tad, Ted, Troy, and William.

At the time of our story Lillian was about to celebrate her sixth birthday. She had celebrated a third birthday and a fourth birthday and a fifth, and would go on to celebrate a seventh birthday and an eighth birthday and even a thirteenth birthday and beyond, but it is her sixth birthday that concerns us. For it was on Lillian's sixth birthday that she received a fish.

It was a tradition in the large house for each child to receive a pet on his or her sixth birthday, and the tradition began this way. When Tim, the oldest boy, was five years old, he found a stray puppy and wanted to keep it. His parents wouldn't allow him to keep it, however. They thought he was much too young to take care of a pet. Tim cried. And cried. His parents, afraid that he might dry up and blow away from so much crying, promised him a puppy on his sixth birthday. And so when his sixth birthday came they had to get him one, because they promised.

(If you ask Tim about the truth of this story he will probably deny it. He isn't five years old any longer and wouldn't own up to so much crying. But it is the truth.)

When Tom turned six he wanted a pet also, and his parents got him a horse, just to be fair. When Tod turned six he got a cat. Tad got a turtle, Ted a bird, Troy a goat, and William a giant spider.

Now Lillian would soon be six, and it was time for her to have a pet. She shouldn't be denied a pet just because she was a girl, should she? She didn't think so, and fortunately, her parents didn't think so either.

To celebrate her sixth birthday Lillian had a party. Her whole family was there, including her aunt and uncle and her seven brothers. She was served her favorite foods, which were ham and butter sandwiches (with the crusts left on), and marshmallow soup (a recipe of Lillian's own), and crackers and cream.

After dinner, in came the cake, which was six layers high. (Tom and Tim helped carry the cake in because it was so big, and Lillian had to stand on a chair to blow the candles out.) After the cake came dishes of ice cream, with six different flavors in each. Everyone ate as much of the cake and ice cream as they possibly could, and not a crumb more. Uncle Nat fell asleep, Aunt Alice picked up her knitting, and the boys were too full to fight. And then out came the gifts, each wrapped with six ribbons, and each ribbon a different color!

From her mother and father, Lillian received a dress to stay clean in and a pair of rubber boots to get dirty in. From her Aunt Alice, Lillian received a big warm quilt, that had taken Aunt Alice six months to sew. From her Uncle Nat, Lillian received a necklace of seashells that Uncle Nat had collected from the days when he sailed the seven seas.

Lillian was so delighted with her new gifts that she carried them up the stairs to her bedroom right away. She put the new quilt on the bed, and the dress on her body, and the boots on her feet, and the necklace around her neck.

Meanwhile, her seven brothers carried in a box from the kitchen and set it down on the dining room table. It was neither a large box nor a small box, but it was quite heavy, as if there were bricks inside it, or barbells, or perhaps Aunt Alice's fruit-cake. It was the gift from the seven brothers to their little sister.

Then Lillian came downstairs in her dress and boots and necklace and saw the box on the dining room table. She crept up to the box and put her ear to it. A sloshing sound came from inside. The box was filled with water!

"What is this?" asked Lillian.

"It's a present," said Tim.

"For you," said Tom.

"From us," said Tod.

"For your birthday," said Tad.

"For your sixth birthday," said Ted.

“It’s a pet,” said Troy.

“It’s a f—” began William, but Troy managed to shut him up just in time.

“A pet!” said Lillian. “For my sixth birthday! From you! For me! Oh, what kind of pet could this possibly be?”

And with that she tore off the wrappings and the ribbons, lifted up the lid of the box, and looked inside.



## Seven Pets

Lillian was not the only one who wanted to know what kind of pet this could possibly be. There were others, seven others, in fact, who also wished to know, and had been wishing to know for weeks, ever since they found out about Lillian's sixth birthday. These seven others were the seven pets of the seven brothers: the dog, the horse, the cat, the turtle, the bird, the goat, and the spider.

The seven pets of the seven brothers had been very curious about the animal Lillian was going to receive for her sixth birthday. They knew she had a sixth birthday coming up, and they knew she would receive a pet, but what kind of pet could it possibly be?

One day before Lillian's party the seven animals met in the barn. The horse and the goat lived there of course, but all the other animals liked to visit quite often.

The horse began the meeting. Because he was the largest, he was something of a leader among the animals.

"It is very important that we find out about this new pet," said the horse.

"Why?" asked the goat.

"Well," said the horse, who did not really know the answer