

Where's Cheeky Chops?

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Cheeky Chops the hamster was always hungry. There was nothing he wouldn't do for a belly full of food. His tummy grew bigger and rounder and fuller by the day.

Every morning, he would curl up in his nice warm cage and dream about bits of pizza crust and cheese cake with lashings of cream. Then, when he woke up, he would run up and down his cage looking for a way to escape to find more food.

Hardly a day went by without someone in the house shouting out "Where's Cheeky Chops?" Then Mummy would have to look inside all the kitchen cupboards. Jack would shine his torch under the beds. Hannah would check behind the cushions on the sofa. Even Grand-dad joined in, opening the washing machine door and looking inside the drum. But no! Cheeky Chops wasn't there either. Every time the little hamster found somewhere new to hide.

"Your tummy is going to get you into very big trouble one day," Jack warned his little pet.

And sure enough, one day it did.

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"Cheeky Chops has gone missing AGAIN!" Jack called out to Grand-dad, who was busy in his 'messy room' sweeping up wood shavings. He had just finished making a beautiful model aeroplane that was almost as big as a bicycle. The plane had two long, elegant wings and a motor that made a loud buzzing sound when he switched it on.

"I wonder where he'll turn up this time?" chuckled Grand-dad as he put the plane down and joined the search party. But after a whole hour of looking, there was still no sign of the little hamster.

"Felix has probably eaten him," said Hannah with a silly grin on her face. Felix was the neighbour's cat.

Poor Jack looked into the empty cage and fought back tears. Cheeky Chops had never gone missing this long before.

"Don't worry, Jack," said Grandma. "I'm making apple crumble for tea. He's bound to turn up when he smells that."

"Come on, lad," said Grandad. "Let's get out into the sunshine. It's just the right weather for flying."

Jack loved watching Grandad fly his model planes.

"But what about Cheeky Chops?"

"Ten to one he's sleeping somewhere daft," said Grand-dad. "We'll find him when we get back."

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Soon, Jack and Hannah and Grand-dad were climbing to the top of Sunny Hill Common, carrying the beautiful new plane with them.

"I reckon you're old enough to work the controls now," said Grand-dad.

Jack didn't have to be asked twice. Grand-dad gave him the control box and Jack pulled the shiny joystick forward. As if by magic, the plane started to move along the grass.

"Hold her steady," shouted Grand-dad.

The plane moved faster and faster along the ground until it lifted up its nose and took off into the air.

"It's flying!" shouted Jack, almost dropping the control box with excitement. He gazed up at the gleaming white plane as it climbed higher and higher into the sky above them.

He had completely forgotten about Cheeky Chops.

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"Yikes!" thought the little hamster. "It's jolly cold here."

A blast of fresh air whistled through his fur and he woke up from a lovely dream about ginger-nut biscuits.

"What's that funny noise?" he thought. There was a 'chug chug chug' sound coming from just below him. He rubbed his eyes and looked down.

"Yikes-a-roony! Where am I?" squeaked Cheeky Chops, trying not to panic. Far, far down below, he could see the tiny figures of Grand-dad and Jack and Hannah standing on the common. They were getting smaller and smaller by the second.

Hamsters have very bad memories - except for food, of course. Cheeky Chops couldn't remember anything about that afternoon except the delicious smell of glue in Grand-dad's 'messy room' and how good it had been to fill his tummy with sawdust and sweet-tasting wood paste. He completely forgot that he had curled up in the aeroplane's cockpit for a cosy snooze.

When he looked down, Cheeky Chops saw Sunny Hill Common spread out neatly on the ground like a big green handkerchief. On one side of the common there were rows of small houses with tiny red chimney pots. On the other side there was a grey snaking road dotted with miniature cars and lorries. And beyond all that, he saw a hill like a lumpy green pincushion with church steeples and tower blocks sticking out of it.

"I hope there's some food up here," thought Cheeky Chops. "I'm starving." The sky was full of fluffy white clouds. "Mmm, icecream," he thought, sniffing the air. There was lots of sky in all directions and it smelt very good.

Woooosh! What was that?

The plane swooped down suddenly and nearly hit the ground. "Yikes! What's happening?" thought Cheeky Chops. "My tummy feels very strange, like it's going down a plug hole."

Then the aeroplane shot up again. Up, up, up and nearly bumped into two crows that were flying past.

"Caaaw, caaaaw!" screeched the crows angrily. Their huge black wings gleamed in the sun and cast shadows across the plane. Cheeky Chops didn't like the look of their beady black eyes or their sharp, pointed beaks. Flap, flap, flap went their feathers beating against the cockpit. Poke, poke, poke went their beaks hammering into the plane's wings.

"I don't like this at all," thought Cheeky Chops, wishing he was back in his nice safe cage at home.

Then came the worst sound of all.

CRRRRRRUNCH!!

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Grand-dad's plane had crashed into the top of the tallest tree on Sunny Hill Common. Cheeky Chops didn't dare open his eyes. He didn't dare move. He didn't even dare breathe.

The plane was stuck between two branches of an old oak tree. One of its wings had fallen off, and the cockpit had a big hole in it. Cheeky Chops touched all four of his legs, and then his tummy. Luckily, there wasn't a hole in any of them. In fact, his tummy began to rumble even more loudly than ever.

"This fresh air is giving me an appetite," he thought happily. "Let's see what I can find."

And this time, Cheeky Chops was in luck. Just below him, he could see four or five bracket mushrooms growing up the tree trunk like a row of big yellow steps. They smelt wonderful - like old socks and apple jelly all rolled into one.

He scurried along the branch and reached the first mushroom. "Mmm, scrumptious!"

But before he could finish eating it, he caught sight of something even more exciting on a branch a little further down - a blackbird's nest, with three beautiful blue eggs inside it.

"This tree is a giant larder!" thought Cheeky Chops, rubbing his tummy with glee. "I'll come back for the mushrooms later."

The clever mother blackbird didn't want anyone stealing her precious eggs, so she had built her nest between some very small twigs on a very, very thin branch.

"This isn't going to be easy," thought Cheeky Chops. "I hope I don't weigh too much for this branch. But I do fancy a blue egg. I've never eaten anything blue before. I wonder what blue tastes like."

He began to walk along the thin branch, which swayed dangerously under his weight. It was like walking on a tight-rope.

"Now let me see," thought Cheeky Chops, as he tried to keep his balance. "If I put one egg in my right cheek and one egg in my left cheek, maybe I can tuck the third egg under my chin and go back for the mushrooms. Eggs and mushrooms, delicious!"

He was only an inch or two from the nest when . . .

CRRRRRRACKKKK!!

. . . the branch he was standing on snapped in half.

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Whoooooosh!!

Cheeky Chops fell and fell and fell, past branches and leaves and nests and spiders' webs, past a family of very surprised squirrels, a robin, more mushrooms and a big notice about a lost cat until he landed PLOP right on top of Hannah's head.

"Ouch!" she screamed. "What was that?"

Grand-dad couldn't believe his eyes. "It looks like a hamster." For a moment, he forgot all about his wrecked plane stuck at the top of the tree.

"Whatever it is, get it out of my hair!" screamed Hannah.

Jack picked the little animal up very gently and lifted him off Hannah's head. "Poor little thing. I think it's dead."

Cheeky Chops lay on his back in Jack's hand. His eyes were closed. It had all been too much.

"He looks just like Cheeky Chops," said Jack, suddenly remembering his missing pet and feeling rather sad.

"Don't be stupid," huffed Hannah, smoothing down her hair. "Cheeky Chops can't have walked all this way."

"I really think it is Cheeky Chops. Look, he's got the same markings on his tummy."

"So he has," said Grand-dad, looking at the hamster more closely. "How on earth did he get here?"

"Do you think if I give him a chocolate raisin he'll come round?"

"It's worth a try," said Grand-dad. "If anything'll bring Cheeky Chops back to life, it's a chocolate raisin."

Jack pulled a packet of raisins from his pocket and held one up to the little hamster's nose.

Nothing happened.

Then suddenly, the nose began to twitch, then it sniffed. One eye opened and then the other. What was that delicious chocolatey smell?

“He’s alive!” shouted Jack with joy. “Cheeky Chops is alive!”

Needless to say, the little hamster ate every single chocolate raisin in the packet. He was more than happy to sit in Jack’s pocket until they got home, where he promised to be much better behaved – at least for a few days, until his tummy got the better of him again.

And as for Grand-dad, he never did work out how Cheeky Chops had fallen out of the sky.

THE END

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