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LITTLE SHOP OF HAMSTERS
R.L. STINE

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Goosebumps Horrorland™

**LITTLE SHOP
OF HAMSTERS**

R.L. STINE

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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MEET JONATHAN CHILLER . . .

He owns Chiller House, the HorrorLand gift shop. Sometimes he doesn't let kids pay for their souvenirs. Chiller tells them, "You can pay me *next time*."

What does he mean by *next time*? What is Chiller's big plan?

Go ahead — the gates are opening. Enter HorrorLand. This time you might be permitted to leave ... but for how long? Jonathan Chiller is waiting — to make sure you TAKE A LITTLE HORROR HOME WITH YOU!



PART ONE



Let me start out by saying that I love animals. And I'm desperate to have a pet of my own.

I'm so desperate, I even enjoyed petting the werewolves in the Werewolf Petting Zoo at HorrorLand Theme Park.

Yes, there is a big pen outside Werewolf Village. You go inside, and you can pet the werewolves, rub their bellies, and scratch their furry backs.

A big sign says: JUST DON'T PUT YOUR HAND IN THEIR MOUTHS.

Pretty good advice.

Should I back up and tell you who I am and stuff like that? Sometimes, I get so *psyched* about animals I forget to do anything else.

My name is Sam Waters. I'm twelve, and so is my friend Lexi Blake. Lexi and I spent a week at HorrorLand, and we had some good, scary fun. Especially since our parents let us wander off on our own.

Lexi is tall and blond and kind of chirpy and giggly and *very* enthusiastic. I guess she comes on a little strong, but I'm used to her. We've been friends since we were three.

I'm not exactly the quiet type, either. My parents say that sometimes when Lexi and I get together, we're like chattering magpies. I've never seen a magpie, so I don't really know what they are talking about. I keep meaning to Google *magpies*. Maybe they make good pets.

I'm shorter than Lexi. Actually, I'm one of the shortest guys in the sixth grade. But I could still have a growth spurt, right?

I have short black hair and dark eyes, and my two front teeth poke out a little when I smile, just like my little brother, Noah.

Bunny teeth, Dad calls them. And then I always say, "Could I have a bunny for a pet?" He's so sick of me asking, he usually doesn't even answer. Just makes a groaning noise.

Anyway, it was a hot, sunny summer afternoon. Lexi and I walked out of the Werewolf Petting Zoo into the crowded park.

"Those werewolves were totally gross," Lexi said, wiping her hands on the sides of her dark green shorts. "Their fur was sticky, like they were sweating or something."

“I don’t think wolves sweat,” I said. “I think the bristles on their fur feel sticky because — HEY!”

Lexi pulled me out of the way of a rolling food cart. The side of the cart said: FAST FOOD. A green-and-purple Horror was chasing after it.

“They couldn’t be real werewolves,” Lexi said. “But they didn’t look like regular wolves — did they?”

“They had human eyes,” I said. “I mean ... the way those werewolves looked at us. Like they were smarter than animals. And their fangs were longer than wolf fangs.”

Lexi shivered. “You’re creeping me out, Sam.” She crinkled up her face. “They sure *smelled* like animals. Yuck. I can’t get the smell out of my nose. They stunk!”

I pinched my nose. “Are you sure it was the werewolves?”

She grabbed the park map from my hand and smacked me on the shoulder with it. We wrestled around a little.

“Are you hungry?” she asked. “I’m hungry. Hungry enough to bite a werewolf!”

She snapped her teeth at me a few times. I had to push her away. “Down, girl! Down!”

I grabbed the map away from her. “Let’s see where we are. There’s probably a restaurant somewhere....”

I unfolded the map and raised it to my face. The sun was so bright, I needed to squint to read it.

“Let me help,” Lexi said. She tugged at the map — too hard — and ripped it in half. She burst out laughing. “Hey — I don’t know my own strength!”

“Please don’t help me,” I groaned. “You’re always trying to help me.”

“What’s the big deal, Sam?” she said. “You read your half and I’ll read my half.”

“We don’t have to read the map,” I told her. I pointed. “Look. That’s a little restaurant right there.”

We crossed the wide path and peeked into the open door. It was a lunch-counter place. Round stools in front of a long yellow counter.

I read the sign beside the door. THE SPEAR-IT CAFÉ: IF YOU CAN SPEAR IT, YOU CAN EAT IT!

“Huh?” I read the sign again. “What does *that* mean? This doesn’t sound too good.”

“I don’t care,” Lexi said. She grabbed me around the waist and pushed me inside. “I’m starving. We’re eating here.”

I stumbled into the little restaurant. We took seats at the end of the counter.

And that’s when all the trouble began.



“Why are we the only ones here?” I asked Lexi.

She picked up a plastic menu from the counter. “That’s good,” she said. “We’ll get our food faster.”

I picked up the fork in front of me. It had something green and disgusting — like a booger — stuck to it. A greasy, smoky smell came from the kitchen behind the counter.

I could hear someone humming back there. And through the small window, I saw a man in a white chef’s hat waving a metal spatula in the air.

“Weird menu,” Lexi muttered.

The cook stepped out from the kitchen. He pulled off the chef’s hat. He was bald and red-faced and sweaty. His blue eyes rolled around in his head like loose marbles. “Hey,” he said. “Lunchtime, huh?”

He pulled a wad of green bubble gum from his mouth and stuck it behind his ear. Then he wiped his pudgy hands on the front of his grease-stained apron.

“Welcome. Welcome,” he said. He had a gruff, hoarse voice. He brushed a dead fly off the counter. “Welcome, guys. I’m Chef Belcher.”

Belcher? I said to myself.

“And don’t make any jokes about my name,” he said. “I don’t think it’s funny.” He wiped his sweaty bald head with one hand. “Need any help with the menu?”

“Well ...” I glanced over Lexi’s shoulder at her menu. “Do you have —”

“The fried snot sandwich really isn’t as bad as it sounds,” Chef Belcher said. “It’s not really snot — it’s fish mucus.”

“That’s *sick*,” Lexi whispered.

“The soup of the day is Badger Tongue,” Belcher said.

I shifted my weight on the stool. “You’re joking, right?” I said.

Belcher leaned close to me. I could see the big droplets of sweat on his red forehead. “Try the soup,” he rasped. “See if I’m joking.”

“I’ll have a grilled cheese sandwich,” Lexi said.

“Good choice,” Belcher replied. “I made the cheese myself. Between my toes. Ha-ha.”

He turned to me. “Have you ever tried sheep liver served really rare?”

My stomach lurched. I almost gagged. My eyes scanned the menu. “I’ll have the fried shrimp basket.”

Belcher nodded. He pulled the bubble gum from behind his ear and shoved it back into his mouth. Then he disappeared into the kitchen.

“Awesome restaurant,” Lexi said.

We both laughed.

“What do you want to do after lunch?” I asked.

“Some rides,” she said. “Where’s that underground ride? It’s like a roller coaster, only it goes straight down? I think it’s called the R.I.P.P.E.R. Dipper.” I studied the map. “It’s not on my half,” I said. “Do you want to do the Doom Slide again? That was kind of scary.”

“No repeats,” she said. “We have only one more day here.”

“Well, we haven’t done The Bottomless Canoe Ride,” I said, gazing at the torn map.

She shook her head. “I don’t have my bathing suit on. I don’t want to get wet.”

We were still trying to decide what to do next when Chef Belcher returned from the kitchen. He plopped our food down in front of us. “Enjoy,” he said. “And don’t worry. I keep a stomach pump in the back.”

The warm aroma rose up from the basket in front of me. I tried a few French fries. Not bad. The I looked down at the fried shrimp.

“Whoa!” I let out a cry. “These shrimp look weird!”

They were shaped like worms. But they seemed to have fluttery wings at one end.

I picked one up. It wriggled in my hand. I dropped it back into the basket.

“It’s ALIVE!” I cried. “It’s MOVING!”

Lexi set her sandwich down and leaned over my shrimp basket. “Yeah. They’re definitely moving,” she said. “I guess that’s what the sign means, Sam. The Spear-It Café. You’re supposed to *spear* the shrimp!”

“No way!” I cried. “I can’t eat this. I —”

I gasped as a shrimp jumped out of the basket onto the back of my hand. It prickled.

“Hey!” I could feel it digging into my skin.

Another shrimp wriggled over the side of the basket and dropped onto the lunch counter. Then it jumped onto my wrist.

I swung my arm hard. But the weird shrimp dug into my skin and didn’t let go. A third shrimp jumped onto my hand. And they all began to climb up my arm.

I slapped my arm against the counter. I tried to brush the shrimp off with my other hand.

But they clung to my skin. Two more jumped onto me. They climbed my arm. And they started make loud sucking noises.

Like leeches!

My arm itched and tingled and throbbed.

“Help me!” I shouted. “Hey — help me! My food — it’s *eating* me!”

3

“Let me help!” Lexi cried. She grabbed my arm and pulled it toward her.

“OWWWW!” I let out a scream. “You’re breaking my arm! It doesn’t bend that way!”

“Sam! I’m sorry.” She wrapped her fingers around a shrimp and tugged it hard.

I let out another scream.

“Stop! It’s clamped on tight. You’re pulling my *skin* off! Please — stop helping me!”

“Oooh, sick! Sam — your arm — it’s totally covered!” Lexi cried.

“They’re sucking my BLOOD!” I screamed.

Chef Belcher stomped out from the kitchen. “What’s the problem here?” he growled. “You don’t like my shrimp?”

I started to swing my arm frantically back and forth. They were biting ... digging into my skin. My arm tingled and throbbed.

“Get them OFF me!” I screamed. “Get them OFF!”

Belcher squinted at the swarm of wormlike shrimps on my arm. “I know what you need,” he said calmly. “A little hot sauce.”

He grabbed a slender red bottle off the counter. Pulled off the cap and began to pour a thick red liquid over my arm.

SSSSSSSSSS.

It made a sizzling sound.

I gasped again.

Was that my *skin* burning off?

I jumped off the stool. The sizzle grew louder as Belcher poured on more hot sauce. Pumping the bottle up and down, he emptied the sauce over my arm.

As I stared in horror, the wormy creatures began to drop off. They fell in clumps onto the counter and lay on their backs without moving. Then the creatures curled into tiny balls.

Belcher grinned. “That’s good hot sauce!” he exclaimed. He raised the bottle to his lips and drank some.

My chest was heaving. I was panting hard.

I grabbed a bunch of napkins off the counter and frantically wiped off my arm.

Lexi stared down at the tiny balled-up creatures. “Ohhh, gross,” she moaned.

She pulled my other arm. “Hurry, Sam! Let’s get out of here!”

Still wiping the red sauce off my tingling arm, I turned and ran after Lexi to the open door.

“Wait! Come back!” Belcher yelled from behind the counter. “Come back! You’ve won a free dessert!”



We didn't stop. We hurtled out into the sunlight.

“Wait!” Belcher called. “Come back! It was all a joke! *Everything* is a joke in HorrorLand!”

Lexi and I raced through the crowds. I was so desperate to get away, I *leaped* over a baby stroller and kept running. The mother shouted at me angrily.

Lexi and I turned a corner and found ourselves facing a row of small shops. Two little boys stepped out of a mask store, wearing ugly monster masks. People were lined up at a food cart to buy Frozen Chocolate-Covered Chihuahuas on a Stick.

“Those can't be real Chihuahuas,” Lexi said as we finally slowed to a walk. She bent down, grabbed her knees, and struggled to catch her breath. “Maybe those leech creatures weren't real, either.”

I rubbed my arm. *They sure felt real*, I thought. *Or was it all just HorrorLand special effects?*

I turned around. We were standing in front of a souvenir store. The front window was jammed with all kinds of funny, creepy gifts.

I saw a full-size mummy head resting on a wooden box. The eyes glowed bright red. A skeleton marionette danced behind it. A giant egg was cracked open. I saw a green hand reaching out from inside the shell.

I read the sign above the door: CHILLER HOUSE.

“Cool,” I said. The door made a squeaky creaking noise as I pulled it open. Lexi and I stepped inside.

The store was dimly lit. Shelves piled high with souvenirs ran from floor to ceiling. We squeezed down the narrow aisles, checking everything out. I saw a very real-looking squirting rattlesnake ... a drawer of “Human Fingers” ... a monkey-head key chain.

Lexi picked up a sweet-looking baby doll with blue eyes and curly blond hair. When she picked the doll up, the face changed until it looked like an ugly dried-up prune — and it opened its mouth in a deafening screech.

Lexi jumped in surprise — and dropped the doll back onto the shelf.

I turned to the front counter. “Does anyone work here?” I called.

A man stepped out from behind a display case. I blinked a few times. He looked very old-fashioned. Like out of a history book or something.

He was big and nearly bald. He looked a lot like Benjamin Franklin.

He had little square eyeglasses perched low on his long, pointed nose. His bushy white eyebrows hung over his pale blue eyes. His scraggly gray hair was swept straight back on his broad pink forehead.

He wore a stiff-looking dark suit with a vest under the jacket, a ruffly white shirt, and a floppy black bow tie.

“Hello. Welcome to Chiller House,” he said. He had a croaky old man’s voice. I saw a gold tooth gleam in the side of his mouth. “My name is Jonathan Chiller.”

As he rubbed his hands together, I saw a sparkly blue-jeweled ring on one of his long, slender fingers.

Chiller took a few steps toward us. He walked slowly with a slight limp. “Where did you two come from?” he asked.

“The Spear-It Café,” I said.

He grinned. “I hope you didn’t order the shrimp. It’s *terrible!*”

5

Jonathan Chiller began pulling items off the shelves to show to us. “You might like this,” he said. “It looks like a regular deck of playing cards. But when you use the cards, the ink comes off and turns your hands completely black.” He chuckled. “It’s a lot of fun.”

He held up a round clock. “This one makes a great gift,” he said in his croaky voice. “It’s called the Forever Alarm. Your friend sets it. Then when the alarm goes off in the morning, it can’t be shut off. There’s no way to turn it off. You can stomp on it or throw it against the wall or smash it with a hammer. It just keeps buzzing forever.”

“Sweet,” I said.

I saw something I might want to buy. But before I could examine it, Lexi shoved a little package in my face. “Sam, I think this is definitely for you,” she said.

I gazed at the front: INSTA-GRO PETS.

“Check it out,” Lexi said. “They are tiny sponge creatures that you drop into water. And then they grow into HUGE living pets!”

I read the side of the box: “‘AMAZE your friends with a GIANT living, breathing creature!’”

Lexi laughed. “I think you just found the pet you’ve been dying for!”

“Tell you what,” I said. “I’ll buy it for *you*. I just found something cooler.”

I grabbed the box off the shelf and showed it to her. It was called a Phoney-Phone. It looked just like a real cell phone. Only it was a candy dispenser.

You flip it open just like a phone. Squeeze the POWER button, and a little round candy pops out of the screen.

“Perfect for sneaking into school,” I said. “I can eat candy all day, and no one will know.”

Lexi studied the box. “You can’t make calls on it?”

“No. It’s not a phone. It’s filled with candy,” I said.

She turned to Jonathan Chiller. “Does the Insta-Gro Pet really work?”

He pushed his square glasses up on his nose and stared at her with his cold blue eyes. “Everything in my shop works,” he said quietly. “You’ll see. I think you’ll have a lot of fun with these.”

I handed him the two items. “I’ll buy both things,” I said.

His gold tooth flashed as he smiled. “Good choices,” he said.

He carried them to the front counter. He wrapped the two items together in black wrapping paper.

Then he carefully tied red ribbon around the package.

He pulled out a tiny doll — a purple-and-green Horror. It looked just like the big furry Horrors who were the park workers in HorrorLand.

“Take a little Horror home with you,” Jonathan Chiller said. He attached it to the ribbon.

I reached into my jeans pocket for some money. But Chiller waved me away.

“Don’t pay me now,” he said. He narrowed his eyes behind the old-fashioned glasses. “You can pay me back *next time you see me.*”

I took the package. I stared back at him.

NEXT time?

What did he mean by that?

PART TWO



I pressed the POWER button and popped a round orange candy into my mouth. “Want one? They’re really sour.” I raised the phone to Lexi.

She made a disgusted face and shoved my hand away. “You know sour candy makes me puke. One candy and I’ll puke all over your shoes.”

“Thanks for sharing that,” I said. I popped another one into my mouth. Then I tucked the phone into the pocket of my T-shirt.

It was a warm, sunny Saturday afternoon. We’d been back home for a week. I met Lexi after her tennis lesson at City Courts, and we were walking toward my house.

She wore white tennis shorts and a silky gray vest over a white T-shirt. Her hair was still damp from her tennis game.

A blue-and-red neon sign over a little store caught my attention. It was glowing brightly even in the strong sunshine. LITTLE SHOP OF HAMSTERS.

“Is that a new pet store?” I asked.

I didn’t wait for her answer. I tore across the street. Two teenagers on bikes swerved to miss me. They screamed some rude words and shook their fists at me.

I love pet stores. I eagerly peered through the glass door, but I couldn’t see anything inside. I pushed the door open and stepped into the shop. Lexi hurried in right behind me.

The store was dark inside. The air felt hot and steamy. It smelled like a barn. Like straw and dirt and farm animals. A slowly spinning ceiling fan made the deep shadows dance in front of us.

“Whoa!” I let out a startled cry as I nearly bumped into a glass wall. I blinked and let my eyes adjust to the dim light.

An enormous display case filled the center of the shop. It had glass walls on all four sides and a glass top. A narrow sliding wire door was placed in one of the glass walls.

The case was taller than me. It had to be at least eight feet tall. And it was nearly as wide as the store.

From inside the walls of glass, eyes stared out at me. Dozens of tiny black eyes. The case was

actually a cage! It had *hundreds* of hamsters packed inside.

Hamsters poked their noses against the glass, gazing out at Lexi and me. Behind them, hamsters scampered through the wood shavings that covered the cage floor.

What was that strange squeaking sound? Hamster wheels. There were eight or ten of them, with hamsters running hard, making them spin and squeal.

Hamsters were chomping away in the long row of food dishes on the back wall. Others ran through long, twisting plastic tubes. One big guy was trying to climb a side of the glass cage. Two hamsters were wrestling in a food dish.

“Lexi — it’s like a big hamster circus!” I said.

She pressed her hands against the glass and peered in. “You mean like a hamster *city*!” she said. “The cage is bigger than my bedroom!”

“They are totally cute,” I said. “Look how they wrinkle their noses.”

She poked me. “Hey — check out the funny front teeth. That one looks just like you, Sam!”

“Ha-ha,” I said, poking her back. “What a weird store. No dogs or birds or anything. Just hamsters. Hundreds of hamsters.”

“Look. That one found a piece of carrot,” Lexi said, pointing. “And the big brown one is waiting for him to drop it. Ready to pounce. This is a total riot!”

I watched a cute little gray hamster running on a wheel. The squeaking wheels were the only sounds in the shop, except for the hum of the ceiling fan.

“My parents won’t let me get a dog,” I told Lexi. “They say I have to prove I’m responsible first.”

“Like I don’t know that,” Lexi said, staring into the cage. “Sam, you’ve told me that a thousand times!”

“But maybe they’ll let me get a hamster,” I said. “You don’t have to walk a hamster or anything. It doesn’t take much work.”

Lexi started to answer. But her mouth dropped open and no sound came out. Her eyes bulged.

I turned and followed her gaze. And then I gasped as I squinted into the dim light and saw what she was staring at.

An *enormous* hamster — gigantic! — taller than Lexi and me — crept out from behind the cage. It walked on *two legs*, in a strange, shuffling motion.

Its glassy eyes — as big as tennis balls! — gazed straight ahead. Its huge front paws swung low at its bulging sides. Its fur ruffled by the wind from the ceiling fan.

It turned. It SAW us!

And its big paws thudded softly on the floor as it headed right for us!



“No!” A sharp cry escaped my throat.

The creature’s huge eyes didn’t blink. They stared hard at Lexi and me, glowing darkly.

The giant hamster moved in and out of the shadows cast down from the spinning ceiling fan. Lexi and I backed up against the glass cage. And watched it slowly advance, step by step.

And then it reached up with its big white front paws and lifted off its head.

Lexi and I burst out laughing.

A man in a hamster costume! He held the head in front of him. His face was red, and his forehead was dripping with sweat.

“Hot in this thing,” he said.

His curly black-and-gray hair was drenched. He had dark eyes, a big round nose, and a bushy black mustache that looked like a paintbrush.

He set the hamster head down on the front counter. “Like my new store?” he asked. He pulled his arms free and climbed out of the costume.

“I’m Mr. Fitz.” He was short and thin, but he had a deep voice. He put a white apron on and struggled to tie the straps. “Your names?”

We told him.

“Do you wear that costume all day long?” Lexi asked.

He picked up a towel and mopped his face and hair. “No,” he said. “Just sometimes. It’s an attention getter.”

“Sure is,” I said. “You really got *our* attention!” I decided not to tell him he nearly scared us to death!

“I wear it outside the shop to attract customers,” Fitz said. “When you have a new store, you have to work hard to get people to notice you.”

He shoved the costume under the counter.

“I like your store,” I said. “It’s totally cool.”

“Sam is really into animals,” Lexi said.

Fitz nodded. “Is that so?” He slid open the wire door to the glass cage. A few hamsters turned at

the sound. The rest went on with what they were doing.

Fitz reached into the wood shavings and pulled up a hamster in each hand. Then he turned and handed one to Lexi and one to me.

My hamster was white with brown spots down his back. He squirmed in my hand. I almost dropped him. His pink nose twitched, and he gazed up at me with bright black eyes.

Lexi rubbed a finger down the back of her hamster. He was all white, except for a scattering of little brown spots on his face. They kind of looked like freckles.

“I love their fur,” she said. “So soft.” The hamster tried to nibble her finger. She turned it around in her hand.

“Totally awesome,” I told Fitz.

He motioned to the little guy, who was trying to climb up my arm. “Do you want him, Sam? They’re not very expensive.”

“I wish,” I said with a sigh. “I’d love a hamster. But my parents won’t let me have a pet.”

“He has to prove he’s responsible first,” Lexi chimed in.

Fitz eyed me. “You’re not very responsible?”

“Yes, I am,” I said. “It’s just ... they want me to prove I’d take good care of a pet.”

Fitz nodded. “Well, you can come back here anytime and play with them.”

The hamster tickled my hand with his nose. I handed him back to Fitz. “Thanks.”

Lexi petted her hamster a little more, then she carried him to the cage and set him down. We started for the front door.

But Fitz stopped us. “Hey — want to help me give them water? I’ve got a lot of water bottles to fill.”

He pulled two glass bottles from behind the counter.

“Sure,” I said. I took one of them from him. “What’s in this bottle? Just plain water?”

“It’s called Vito-Vigor,” Fitz answered. “It’s vitamin water. You know. Like you buy at the supermarket.”

He handed Lexi the other bottle of Vito-Vigor. Then he led us to the back of the cage. “Pour the water into these tubes,” he said. “It runs into their water bottles.”

I tilted the bottle and poured water into the tube that stuck out of the back of the cage. I could see it flow into the bottle on the other side of the glass.

“You have to go inside the cage to feed them and change the floor shavings,” Fitz said.

“Look at them all staring up at us. They must think we’re *giants* or something,” Lexi said.

“Maybe they think we’re *monsters*,” I said. “Maybe they’ll have nightmares about us.”

Lexi laughed. “Sam, I *already* have nightmares about you!”

We filled all the water bottles, then handed Fitz the empty Vito-Vigor bottles.

“Well, thanks for your help, guys,” he said. “Come back anytime.”

We walked out and started toward my house.

Lexi had a strange smile on her face. She had her arms wrapped tightly around the front of her vest.

We walked a few blocks, then she stopped. Her eyes flashed and her grin grew wider.

“Here, Sam,” she said, “here’s a present for you.” She held out her hand.

And I let out a scream. “Lexi — are you CRAZY?”

8

Lexi dropped a hamster into my hands. She had hidden him under her vest.

“No way!” I cried. “No way!”

She grinned. “It’s the freckly guy. I never put him back in the cage.”

“But — but —” I sputtered.

Lexi shrugged. “What’s the big deal, Sam? Fitz has hundreds of them. He won’t miss one hamster!”

The hamster twitched his little nose at me. I could feel his little heart pounding.

I smoothed a finger down his back to calm him.

“Lexi, this is *stealing!*” I cried. “You *stole* this hamster!”

Her smile faded. She tugged her vest down. “I was only trying to help you,” she said. “I know how desperate you are to have a pet.”

“Not desperate enough to steal,” I said. “Don’t help me, Lexi. That man Fitz is a nice guy. No way I’m going to steal a hamster from his store. That’s just crazy.”

Her cheeks turned red. “Okay. Fine. I’m crazy,” she snapped. She balled her hands into tight fists. Then she spun away and stomped off.

“Hey, wait —” I called.

But she started to run. She tore down the block without looking back.

I raised the trembling hamster to my face and spoke gently to him. “Don’t worry, fella. I’m going to take you back to your home.”

I tucked the little guy into my shirt pocket to keep him safe. Then I hurried back to the hamster shop.

I peered into the front window. The store was pitch-black. Then I saw the little sign on the door: CLOSED.

I let out a groan. The hamster wriggled in my shirt pocket. I tucked my hand over him to make sure he didn’t jump out.

I pounded on the door with my other fist. Maybe Mr. Fitz was somewhere in there.

My mind was spinning. Would he believe me when I told him what happened? Or would he think

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