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Hampstead the Hamster



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Chapter One

More than anything else in the world, Leo wanted a hamster. He knew that a hamster would make him happier than a fried egg. What? Fried eggs aren't happy! Ah, but Leo always thought that fried eggs *are* happy. He loved to hear the sound of an egg frying in the pan. *Zizzle zizzle zizzle*, went the egg, and to him that sounded like the happiest sound in the world.



So, Leo wanted a hamster so that he could be as happy as a fried egg. Not long ago, he wasn't very happy. He had been sad. But if he got a hamster, he would be happy. He knew he would. He knew that for certain.



Now the big question was whether he would get one. Christmas was coming and Dad said it was time to draw up his wishlist.

"Yes," said Leo, "I'll do that, but how will Father Christmas see the list?"

"Well," said Dad, "we have ways of letting Father Christmas know." And he winked.



Hmmm, thought Leo to himself, did that wink mean that Dad *did* know how to get in touch with Father Christmas, or he didn't and was just making it up? It was always hard to know with Dad.

"I could write to him," said Leo. "I'm getting good at writing."

"Or you could text him on my phone," said Dad.

"Wow! Have you got his number?" said Leo.



"Let me see," Dad said. "Hmm, contacts . . . A, B, C, D, E, F . . . hmm, Famous Five . . ."

"What?! You know the Famous Five – the children in The Famous Five books by Enid Blyton???!!!"



"Yep," said Dad, still clicking through his contacts list. ". . . Fantastic Mr Fox . . . hmm . . ."

"What?!" said Leo. "You know Fantastic Mr Fox from Roald Dahl's book?"



"Yep," said Dad, "I know a lot more people than you know about, Lee-wee."

Lee-wee is what Dad had called Leo ever since he was very small and Leo was OK about him calling him that at home, but he was forbidden – absolutely forbidden – from calling him that in front of his friends.

". . . Ah yes, here we are, Father Christmas. Right, what you need to do is tap in your list, and I'll text him."



This was exciting stuff. Leo had written out a list on a piece of paper so when Dad handed him his phone he could copy it in.

Leo hadn't spelled everything exactly right, but "spellcheck" sorted out most of these.

"Sox" came out as "socks" – that was good.



"Spider-Man outfeet" came out as "Spider-Man outfit" – that was good.



"Chocklits" didn't come out as "chocolates" which is what Leo meant, but came out as "choke bits", so they had to sort that one out.



Then Leo tapped in “Hampster” and it came out as “Hampstead” which is a place in London.

“Hampstead?” said Dad. “you mean you want to go on a trip to Hampstead Heath, that huge park?”



“No, no, no,” said Leo. “I want a hamster.”



“Right, hmmm,” Dad said. “I’m not absolutely sure that Father Christmas does hamsters. I mean, usually he does stuff that he and his helpers make. And then, there’s the sleigh whizzing through the sky. Would a hamster be happy up there? Not sure.”



"Yes, yes," said Leo, getting a bit worried, "but I can try." He didn't want to get that sad feeling again.

"Sure, sure," Dad said, spotting that sad look on Leo's face. "I'm just warning you in case you get disappointed."



But Leo wasn't going to be put off. As he tapped in "hamster" with Dad's help, and sent the text off to Father Christmas, he started feeling all fluttery inside and he heard his own voice deep inside his head saying, "I'm going to get a hamster, I'm going to get a hamster . . . "

