

## THE BEST SEAT IN SECOND GRADE

BY KATHARINE KENAH

Hamster Helper

Sam had the best seat in the second grade. He sat at the back of Room 75. He did not sit near the globe, or the dinosaur models, or the paper pioneer fort. Sam sat beside George Washington. George Washington was small and round and the color of honey, and he sneezed. George Washington was a hamster. Sam loved George Washington more than anything else at school. George Washington was Sam's favorite subject. Sam's teacher, Mr. Hopper, asked. "Who knows something about lava?" "It pops out of volcanoes," said Sam, "the same way George Washington pops out of his nest." Someone in the

front row giggled. "Good answer!" said Mr. Hopper. Every Monday Mr. Hopper picked a new Hamster Helper. The Hamster Helper got to feed George Washington. The Hamster Helper got to play with George Washington. "Please, please, oh, please?" Sam groaned, "Pick me!" He crossed his fingers and held his breath. Mr. Hopper reached into the bowl of names. "Miguel!" he said. "You are our new Hamster Helper." "Oh, boy!" said Miguel.

"Oh, *no*," said Sam. "It is never my turn."

Sam was tired of waiting to be Hamster Helper. He was sure George Washington was tired of his cage. Sam wanted to show George Washington the world outside of Room 75. "Don't forget," Mr. Hopper reminded his class. "Tomorrow is our trip to the science museum. Bring your coats, bring your lunches, and bring your permission slips."

Sam decided to bring something *extra*.

### Pocket Rider

The science museum was busy and bright and crowded. "Stay in your groups," called Mr. Hopper. "The animal sticker on your name tag will tell you which group you are in. Grasshoppers stick together. Frogs stick together. Dolphins stick together. We don't want anyone to get lost."

"Sam!" said Nina. "Where is your name tag?"

"In my coat," Sam replied. He reached deep into his pocket... and patted George Washington. Sam looked at the sticker on his name tag, "I'm a Grasshopper." "Good," said Nina. "I am, too." The Grasshoppers and Frogs and Dolphins hung up their coats. "Sam," said Ollie. "It's warm in here. Why don't you take off your coat?" "I can't," Sam said

quickly. "I might catch a cold." George Washington sneezed.

"Harry up!" called Sophie. "We are going to The Star Show at the planetarium!" Sam followed the other Grasshoppers. He walked slowly and kept his hand over his pocket. The planetarium was round and dark. The class wiggled and waited in rows of seats. When the first star twinkled above, Sam took George Washington out of his pocket, "Make a wish," he whispered. George Washington sneezed. No one noticed George Washington.

When the Grasshoppers whirled through the wind tunnel, George Washington's whiskers blew backward. When the Grasshopper made faces in front of the funny mirrors, George Washington looked like a furry beach ball with huge eyes.

No one noticed George Washington.

The Grasshoppers climbed through a Giant Seashell. They peered into Home of the Future. They poked and laughed at Bubbles Are a Blast. George Washington watched and listened and sneezed. Finally Ollie sat on a bench. "I can't walk another step" he said. "I'm hungry," said Nina. "I'm thirsty," said Miguel. "Me, too," grumbled Sophie. Sam did not want to eat lunch. George Washington might smell something yummy And pop right out of his pocket. "I'll catch up with you later," Sam said, as he dashed down the hall. "But Sam!" Nina called "Where are supposed to stick together."

## The Animal Zone

Sam ran upstairs and saw a sign for the Animal Zone. He took a deep breath and said, "Wait until you see what is here."

Sam held up George Washington in front of each display. They looked at baby rabbits and baby chicks. George Washington sneezed.

"Don't look," Sam whispered when they reached a tank of boa constrictors. George Washington trembled. "Now," said Sam, "here is the best place of all!" The Hamster Habitat was a jungle of tubes and tunnels. There were hamster-sized seesaws and ladders and slides. Hamsters were *everywhere*. They were all small. They were all round. They were all the color of honey.

"Look," Sam whispered to George Washington.

“Family!”

Footsteps clattered down the hall as the rest of the Grasshoppers rushed toward Sam.

“There you are, Sam!” they shouted. “Are you all right?” “I’m fine” said Sam. “I was just showing the hamsters to-----” He stopped talking.

George Washington is in his hands. George

Washington was right in front of Ollie, and Miguel,

Sophie, and Nina. *Everyone* noticed George

Washington. “Sam!” cried Nina. “What have you

done?” Before he could answer. George

Washington jumped out of Sam’s hands-----

and into the Hamster Habitat!”

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## Sam's Favorite Subject

Sam screamed. He did not move. "Oh, no!" Sophie groaned. Ollie yelled at Sam. Nina Yelled at Ollie. Miguel shouted, "Help!" Mr. Hopper hurried up the stairs to the Animal Zone.

The Frogs and Dolphins followed right behind him.

"What's wrong?" called Mr. Hopper. The Grasshoppers pointed to Sam. He pointed to the Hamster Habitant. Sam moaned, "He's gone!"

"Who?" asked Mr. Hopper. "George Washington," mumbled Sam. "He's in there."

Everyone stared at the sea of busy hamsters.

"There are too many of them." Said the Frogs.

"We'll never find him," said the Dolphins. "We have to *try!*" said the Grasshoppers. Sam's whole



class spread out around the sides of the Hamster Habitat. "Look for something small," said Ollie.

"And round," said Miguel. "And color honey," said Sophie.

They looked and looked at hamsters climbing and digging, at hamsters and grooming, at hamsters drinking and eating and sleeping. Sam stood still and watched one nest shake and tremble like a volcano.

Suddenly a hamster popped out of the nest..... just like lava. The hamster was small and round and the color of honey, and it sneezed. "George Washington!" cried Sam. He reached down and scooped their hamster into his hand. George Washington is Sam's favorite subject." The next day, Sam carried George Washington's cage to the front of Room 75. "I think he might be safer

near you," he said. Mr. Hopper smiled. "Good idea." Sam walked slowly back to his seat. "Class?" asked Mr. Hopper. "Can you think of anything else we should move upfront?" "Sam!" yelled the Frogs and Dolphins and all of the Grasshoppers. "Good answer," said Mr. Hopper. George Washington sneezed. Sam grinned and pushed his desk to the front of Room 75. For the rest of the year, he sat between his teacher and George Washington.

Sam had the best seat in the second grade.