HIGHLY COMMENDED
YEAR 11 AND 12 CATEGORY

A Story in Miniature

The hamster

Serena Han, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School

'Here you go, buddy.'

The hamster eagerly stuffs the peanut into his cheek, waddling away peppily. It'll last him a good two weeks, if he savours it. Maybe he'll break it into pieces. Or maybe he'll nibble at it instead—

Suddenly, he stops.

A flaky crumb lies nearby. The hamster picks it up, sniffs it tentatively. Instantly, glorious scents of apple and cinnamon flood his nose.

Oh, it smells *divine*.

As the hamster stuffs his prize into his right cheek, his eyes land on another crumb. And another. And another. His eyes rake over a dazzling trail of golden nuggets, beckoning his empty cheek. His body moves mechanically.

Soon, his cheek is bulging. Every movement causes him to wince.

But…

There's still so many crumbs…Too many to leave behind.

Suddenly, the peanut lodged in his left cheek feels horridly out of place. One peanut, taking up more space than hundreds of crumbs. One peanut, ugly and bland compared to the taste of the rainbow every crumb promises.

One peanut, preventing him from taking more.

The hamster hurls the peanut to the floor.

His movements are frenzied now, as he stuffs crumb after crumb into his mouth. His left cheek feels stretched like rubber, but he's oblivious to pain.

More, is all he knows.

More.

More.

MORE.

Not a crumb in sight now.

The hamster stumbles back to his enclosure. The crumbs form a mountain.

He sleeps to the addictively sweet scent of victory. When the hamster wakes up, half the food is splotched with green. What can be expected, from scraps long abandoned under the table? He bites into a salvaged crumb. At once, a sickeningly sugary taste bombards him, and he spits it out. He tries another. It's rock-hard, and his teeth tremble.

He tests the crumbs, over and over. Some are sour, some are stale. Frantically, he tries the spoiled food. Most taste poisoned, make him retch. By the time he's gone through the hoard, the crumbs are scattered like ruins, and his stomach churns with hunger.

The peanut, he suddenly remembers.

He scampers back to the table, but no peanut in sight. He twists his head left and right, nose burrowing into the floor, but then he pulls back, squeaking despairingly.

The air reeks of apple and cinnamon.

—

The businessman snaps awake.

Heavens, what kind of abstract dream was that? Today 's the big day, the accumulation of all his work securing this business merger. He can't be distracted.

He glances at his shelf, a neat collection of his every accolade. Gold-plaque symbols of more money, more influence.

Symbols of more.

Then, he frowns.

There isn't much room left on the shelf for the new plaque.

Unless…

A glass peanut butter jar sits at the very centre of the shelf, filled with origami stars. A cute gift from his daughter, the businessman thinks, but he's going to need that centre section.

As he drops the jar into the bin, he smells apple cinnamon pie downstairs.

1/134–136 Cambridge Street,
Collingwood, VIC, 3066
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