Hamsters Go To Heaven

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She was a soft tan with curious eyes. Exactly like her sister. There was no way I could have separated them – that was just too cruel. Even if they couldn’t speak to me and were small, I knew they would blame me somehow for being lonely and breaking up their family.

So, I decided to let the little guys stay together and spend the few extra dollars for two hamsters instead of one. I figured they seemed to like each other so they would be fine in a cage meant for one. These hamsters were my first real pets that I bought and was responsible for. I had one before named Orio, but I got it from my sister’s friend who decided to retire as a fifth grade pet owner. So I nobly saved the old black-and-white rodent from ruin. She was already old when I got her so when she passed, my hamster craze was only beginning. This time, I got to pick out my hamsters and pay for them with my own babysitting money. My parents decided that as a sixth-almost-seventh grader, I could be trusted with a living mammal as long as it didn’t reproduce.

I named them Snickers and Nutter Butter because I felt I had to honor their fallen kin, Orio, by giving them junk food names. For the next two years, they were exceptional pets. They ate and drank when they were supposed to, they got their daily exercise on the wheel, and they never complained if I hadn’t cleaned the cage for a few weeks. I was proud that they had accepted me as their owner by not biting me or fighting with each other or running on the squeaky, plastic wheel in the middle of the night. I would even give them the hamster equivalent of the Medal of Honor for not attacking my brother when he death-gripped them. One time, my brother literally squeezed the pee out of Snickers. My brother also knew how to open the cage, so I would occasionally come into my room with him double-fisting my hamsters. He loved how silky and small they were and that they didn’t argue against him holding them like stress balls.
Sadly, they were small, domesticated pets and did not have the longevity of beta fish. As the two year mark rolled closer, I could tell they were less mobile and slept more. The way they would crawl around the cage reminded me of two old best friends shuffling with canes in the park of their childhood, chatting about the golden days when they could move better and eat anything they wanted. Two old best friends knowing it was the last of their days together, walking along the cardboardy bedding, passing their purple igloo and the green wire fence surrounding their only home.

It was near the end of my eighth grade year when the day came for the first one to pass. Snickers hadn’t eaten for a few days and hadn’t moved from her spot just outside the purple igloo since I had left for school that day. Sensing she would die in the middle of the night, I gently picked her up, feeling the rapid flutter of her heart, and brought her to my cheek. I remember her fur had stayed just as fuzzy as the day I got her, her little claws grasped my fingers like a final handshake between long time partners. I whispered, “Goodbye, sleep tight” in her tear-shaped ear. The purple igloo seemed like the best resting place I could give her – the soft purple light filtering through the plastic seemed soothing, and it was the closest thing to a bed she had. There was no way of telling how Nutter Butter would react to finding her sister resting in peace, but I would see in the morning. I went to bed, resting myself for the inevitable morning.

I woke up the next day and decided I couldn’t bear seeing my dead hamster until just before I was going to school; that way I would have a convincing reason not to cry. I hated crying and found ways to avoid it at all costs. I did what anyone else would do when they knew they’d receive bad news: went on with my routine in the hopes that it would stay normal. Bathroom, eat, brush, contacts, deodorant, hair. Then I had to enter my room to get dressed. It was like going into the basement when all the lights are off and the washing machine blinks and makes unearthly noises. My heart beat faster, I could feel the sweat on my palms, and I held my breath. As slowly as I could, I painfully pulled my school uniform from my closet – purposefully flip-flopping between pants or skort, sweatshirt or no sweatshirt. At last, I couldn’t avoid the dreaded coffin where my Snickers lay.
The pin was out and the door crashed down. Nutter Butter wandered around the water feeder, not seeming to notice the bulging eyes searching for Snickers nor the giant hand reaching for the top of the purple igloo. The giant suddenly sucked out all the air in the cage as it saw Snickers.

Goose bumps scurried from my hand to my entire body. I gasped, and then in disbelief I squeaked out, “Omgod!” My little sister, Lili, came over to see what was happening and why I was frozen. Processing Lili’s approach took me too long. I couldn’t snap out of it fast enough to push her away, shield her eyes, anything to stop her from seeing too much. But it was too late. She had seen. And she screamed bloody murder.

*Half my hamster’s face was gone.*

I can still see the pink ragged flesh lining the center of the skull. The skull was an egg white. The eye socket was gaping at me. The sharp teeth were all visible, with the tendons lining them. I could see part of the brain and a bit of muscle still clinging to the lifeless head. I knew only one thing could have done it: Snickers’ own sister. Nutter Butter.

I quickly covered the body up with the igloo and raced to find a suitable casket for my half-eaten hamster. The best I could do was an old cellphone box. I put some bedding in it and stuffed Snickers in, gnawed face down. Finding some Scotch tape, I wrapped the box round and round until I was sure there was no way for my partly consumed hamster to fall out.

I only told my best friend and mom that day about my cannibal hamster and the grisly death or cruel autopsy she had performed on her sister. I still hadn’t decided if I should feed the cannibal or not, but decided she would die soon anyway, hopefully from guilt, or the ghost of Snickers would emerge from the flesh in Nutter Butter’s stomach and devour her from the inside. I was enraged that I had placed Nutter Butter as the one to watch over Snickers’ last minutes on earth. I purposefully didn’t pay attention to Nutter Butter after that and have no recollection when she died because I couldn’t have cared less.
I did give Snickers a solemn, beautiful burial wedged between my neighbor’s fence and our rhododendrons. I used an old 9/11 cross as her headstone, now hidden by the overgrown grass that has crept under the fence.

A few years back, I found a single white flower growing over Snickers’ grave. I had buried Nutter Butter next to Snickers, but it was an unceremonious body dump. I think the white flower was Snickers’ symbol of forgiveness, that I should respect Nutter Butter too. After all, they were sisters. Maybe it was just a big toothy goodbye kiss.