

THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING PEANUT BUTTER CUPS

Written by Sheri Radford
Art by Suharu Ogawa



“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.” Frannie frowned. She counted her peanut butter cups again, but she kept getting the same number: nine. Yesterday there were 12. The day before that, there were 15. But Frannie hadn’t yet eaten a single one! “What happened to the rest of them?” she asked Columbo,

her best friend. He also happened to be a basset hound, but that didn’t stop him from taking part in conversations. “Woof!” Columbo replied. He gazed at Frannie with sorrowful eyes, seeming sad that Halloween treats could disappear without a trace. Really, it was just Columbo’s usual expression.

Frannie was baffled. Every single year, in the days and weeks after Halloween, she followed the same method for working through her treat stash.

First, she devoured her top-tier treats: mini chocolate bars, small bags of potato chips. Next were the second-tier goodies: gummies, sour candies, chewing gum. Then came the dreaded raisins, pretzels, candy corn, and black licorice. Finally, having saved the best for last, Frannie ate the champion of all Halloween goodies: peanut butter cups.

She always carefully counted her peanut butter cups and made them

last for as many days as possible. But this year they were disappearing faster than students on the final day of school. She had to solve this mystery before the cup count dropped to zero.



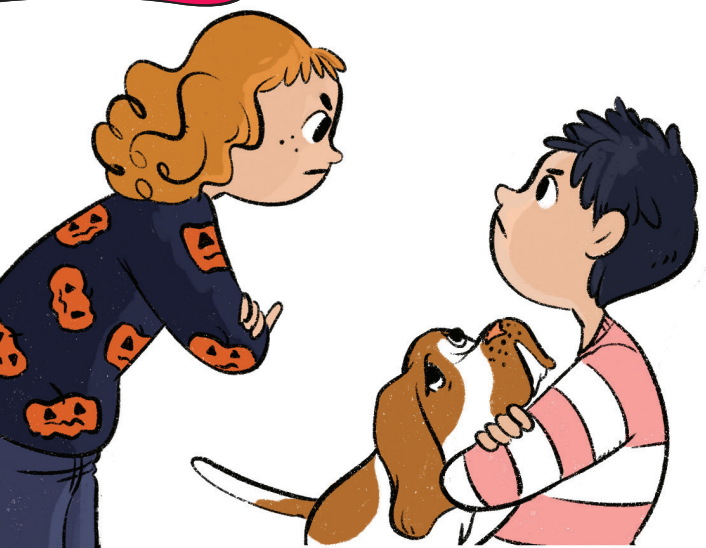
“Attention, please! We need a family meeting,” Frannie announced just before bedtime. Her parents, older brother, and grandmother were all gathered in the living room.

“Woof!” Columbo said.

“My favourite Halloween treats have been disappearing from my bag,” Frannie said. She paced around the room, stopping in front of her older brother, Ethan.

“I didn’t steal your candy,” Ethan said with his arms crossed.





“Seems like the theft might be the work of someone who didn’t go trick-or-treating this year for the first time in his life,” Frannie said.

“I said I didn’t steal your candy,” Ethan insisted, glaring at Frannie.

Her parents squirmed in their seats. Grandma Jen returned to her book, appearing bored by the drama unfolding around her.

“Seems like the kind of thing a guilty person might say,” Frannie replied to her brother.

“But I didn’t do it,” Ethan said.

“I think you did,” Frannie said.

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“I did it!” Frannie’s parents both shouted at the same time. They gaped at each other, then turned to Frannie with sheepish looks.

“I stole some pretzels,” her dad confessed.

“And I stole some raisins,” her mom added.

“You could have just asked me for pretzels and raisins,” Frannie said. “I would have shared them with you.”

“I’m sorry,” her parents said in unison.

“There you go—mystery solved,” Grandma Jen said. “Your parents feel sorry about what they did. Now who’d like some hot tea?”

Frannie watched her grandmother thoughtfully. The mystery of the disappearing peanut butter cups—her actual favourite treats—was still not solved, but an idea had popped into Frannie’s head.

“No, thank you, Grandma Jen,” she said. “I think I’ll go to bed now.” Frannie shuffled out of the room, Columbo trailing behind her.

“Just one more thing,” Frannie said, popping her head back in to the living room. “Do you think the thief might have chocolate on their face right now?”



Her parents and Ethan all looked confused, but Grandma Jen turned away and wiped her mouth discreetly. When she turned back towards the family, everyone was staring at her.

“I don’t have any chocolate or peanut butter on my face,” Grandma Jen said defensively.

“I never told you that the missing treats had peanut butter,” Frannie said. “I only mentioned the chocolate.”

“I thought you left the peanut butter cups for last because you didn’t like them much,” Grandma Jen said.

“Like the pretzels,” Frannie’s dad murmured.

“And the raisins,” Frannie’s mom added.

“I was saving the best for last,” Frannie said.

“I’m sorry I stole your peanut butter cups and fibbed about it,” Grandma Jen said.

“Woof!” Columbo added.

The next morning, two wrapped parcels waited on the breakfast table in the kitchen.

“To Frannie. With love, from Grandma Jen,” Frannie read aloud from the tag on one package. When she ripped it open, she discovered a pile of peanut butter cups from the late-night corner store.



“To Grandma Jen. With love, from Frannie,” Grandma Jen read aloud from the tag on the second package. When she tore it open, she found the nine remaining peanut butter cups from Frannie’s Halloween stash.

Frannie threw her arms around her grandmother. “They really are the best Halloween treats,” Frannie said.

Grandma Jen hugged her back. “I couldn’t agree more.”

