**BRITISH COUNCIL**

Learn**English** Teens

**Easy reading: Where's Roxy? (level 3) – text**

**Chloe has an unusual pet which isn't popular with all the members of her family. In this story it gets her into a bit of trouble.**

Chloe arrived home from school, made herself a cup of coffee and took it up to her bedroom. She had some homework to do, but that could wait for later. She wanted to enjoy the quiet hour before her parents arrived home and the house filled up with the evening sounds of chatter, television or her dad listening to his beloved jazz while he cooked dinner.

She liked this time of day too because she could play with her pet rats. Yes, that's right, pet rats! Chloe has got two of them, Zena and Roxy. Chloe knows they're not typical pets and she has lost count of the times she's patiently tried to explain to people that rats aren't dirty and they make fantastic pets if you look after them correctly. But she understands why people react badly. She didn't like rats either until her friend Martin showed her his pet rats and she saw how affectionate and intelligent they were. Last year, when one of Martin's rats had babies, Chloe decided she'd like to have two of them.

It wasn't easy to persuade Mum and Dad, of course. But fortunately, a good school report arrived a few days before Chloe's birthday and put her parents in a good mood. When Mum asked her what she wanted for her birthday, Chloe took a deep breath and told her mum she'd like a pair of rats. 'Rats? Are you serious?' asked Mum, and then Chloe had told her about Martin and the baby rats. 'Give me five minutes,' said Chloe's mum, looking doubtful. 'I'm going to phone Martin's parents and see what they say.'

It had been the longest five minutes of Chloe's life but finally, Mum came back into the kitchen, smiled and said, 'Yes, all right. You can have two rats, but ...' (with mothers, there's always a 'but'!) '... they must live in your room and never go to other parts of the house, especially not the kitchen'. 'Don't worry,' said Chloe, smiling. 'They won't go anywhere near the kitchen. Rats hate jazz!' Mum laughed, and two days later they went to Martin's house to collect Roxy and Zena.

In her room, Chloe opened the cage. First she picked up Roxy and put her on the floor. Then she picked up Zena and put her on her shoulder. Roxy loved to explore. She climbed up Chloe's bookcases and drawers and went under her bed. Zena was quieter and was usually content to sit on Chloe's shoulder while Chloe messaged her friends or read a book. After a while, there was a knock at the door. 'Hi, Chloe,' called Mum. 'Are you there?'
'Yes, Mum,' said Chloe. 'Come in.'
Mum came in and then took a step back as she noticed Zena. 'I'm going to my aerobics class. I'll be back about seven o'clock. Dad's on his way home. He's making pasta tonight.'
'OK, Mum. See you later,' Chloe replied.

Mum closed the door and Chloe put Zena back in her cage and called for Roxy. 'Roxy?' said Chloe. 'Roxy, where are you?' Roxy always came when Chloe said her name. Chloe waited a moment and then started to look around her room. Where could Roxy be? She had to be in Chloe's room somewhere. Then Chloe remembered that Mum had come in and opened the door. Roxy might have gone out of the room then and now she could be anywhere.

Chloe searched the top floor of the house first. She looked in her parents' room and the bathroom, but she couldn't see Roxy anywhere. Then she headed downstairs to the kitchen, hoping she'd find Roxy

munching on a carrot or snacking on crumbs. Then she had a sudden panic. What if Roxy had climbed into the washing machine? And what if Mum had turned it on before she went out? Chloe ran the last few steps to the kitchen and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the washing machine door was open with no sign of Roxy inside. Chloe then searched the rest of the kitchen, looking in drawers and opening cupboards, calling Roxy's name as she did so.

'Hi, Chloe!' said Dad's voice and she turned around to see him coming into the kitchen with a bag of food from the Italian delicatessen. 'Are you OK?' he asked.
'Yes, I'm ... I'm ...' Chloe had to make a decision fast. Was she going to tell Dad about Roxy or was she going to pretend that everything was fine? Different voices spoke inside her head. 'He'll be furious!' said one voice. 'He might help!' said another, so Chloe decided to take a chance.
'Dad, I've ... well, I've lost Roxy,' said Chloe, trying not to look Dad in the eye.
'I see,' said Dad, putting down the shopping bag, and already beginning to scan the kitchen for the sight of a nose and whiskers or a long pink tail. 'Don't worry, we'll find her. She can't be far away!'

Chloe and her dad spent a frantic half hour looking all over the house for Roxy. When she was searching her room for the third time, Chloe heard a key in the door and Mum calling, 'It's me, I'm home.'
'Oh, no!' thought Chloe. Mum wasn't going to be happy about having a rat loose in the house. She decided to stay in her room and let Dad tell Mum about Roxy. Then she heard Dad laughing and Mum called out, 'Chloe, come downstairs.'

Chloe took a deep breath. She went downstairs and there was Mum with a smile on her face and Roxy on her shoulder.
'Oh, Mum, you found her!' said Chloe, reaching out to stroke Roxy. 'But where was she?'
'Well, when I got to the gym,' said Mum, 'I opened my bag and found Roxy asleep in one of my trainers. I'm surprised you didn't hear the scream from here!'
'Sorry, Mum. Are you angry?' asked Chloe.
'No, it was a shock but I touched her and picked her up for the first time and you know what? I think I like rats now too!'

*Robin Newton*