

Hamsterchondriacs

Mrs. Drummond came across three or four hamsters tucked up in bed under the stairs. It was almost midnight, and all was quiet. Too quiet. There was something not right.

She poked the nearest hamster, a fat deeply-breathing ball of light-brown fur.

“Ow!” said the ball before burying its nose deeper into the sawdust and cotton-wool.

She poked it again. The ball uncurled itself and a beady black eye peered crossly up at her.

“Oh,” said Broccoli Bill, for it was he, “it skinny human. What you want, then?”

“I was just a bit worried about you,” said Mrs. Drummond, now regretting her decision to disturb them.

“Worried?” said Bill in a worried tone. “What? I look pale, thin, drawn - that sort thing?” He peered anxiously at his broad back and broader bottom.

“No, nothing like that,” said Mrs. Drummond reassuringly. “It’s just that you don’t normally do much sleeping at night, and I thought maybe you were feeling a bit under the weather?”

“What all that noise?” demanded Haricot Bert, who had just woken up. He sniffed the air without opening his eyes. “Can’t hamsters get bit of shut-eye once in while?”

“Sorry,” said Mrs. Drummond, “I didn’t mean -”

“Skinny human worried about our health,” said Bill.

“Quite right, quite right,” sighed Bert. “We not feeling at all well.”

“No, not well, not well,” said another voice. Teddy Parker’s bottom emerged from the bedding and presently Teddy himself, hauling a large piece of cabbage. “We been to see doctor,” he explained.

“Which doctor was that?” asked Mrs. Drummond. “Do you mean the vet?”

There was a muffled scream and a disturbance in the bed

Broccoli Bill glared at the human. “What you say that for?” he demanded, chittering his teeth. “Patty Perkins there had very nasty experience at the - at that place you said. You never say that word again!”

“Anyway,” said Teddy, “I said doctor, not - not that other word.”

“He a proper doctor,” explained Bert proudly. “Trained at HamLabs™ Medical School.”

“Oh, nice!” said Mrs. Drummond, doing her best to sound impressed.

“You met him once,” said Bert smugly.

“I did?”

“Yes, he the world-famous Dr. P.H. Dee,” explained Patty, who had recovered from his nasty fright. “He know all there is to know about illness, tiredness, run-downness, drowsiness, hungriness and - and - “

“And grumpiness and lot of other nesses,” added Teddy triumphantly. “He know more nesses than any human doctor.”

“Is right,” agreed all the other hamsters.

“But,” said Mrs. Drummond cautiously, “I thought Dr. P.H. Dee was a physicist or something? Not a medical doctor?”

The four hamsters erupted into wheezy laughter. “Oh,” giggled Bert, “that human so stupid, it kill me!”

“If wasn’t so unhealthy,” laughed Bill, “I’d die of laughter!”

“You don’t want do that, Bill,” hooted Teddy Parker, “you upset Dr. Dee!”

“Tee-hee,” tittered Patty Perkins, “human don’t know difference between physicist and physician!”

The laughter was re-doubled.

This went on for some time. Mrs. Drummond went off, offended. When she came back five minutes later, she found the hamsters had returned to their bedding.

“Well, I still don’t think he’s a proper doctor,” she said loudly. “What has he said is wrong with you lot?”

Broccoli Bill dried his tears, sat up and explained.

“It quite simple when you been trained,” he said. “Dr. Dee been trained for years.”

“Years and years,” said Teddy.

“Years and years and years,” confirmed Bert, nodding sagely.

“Dr. Dee studied with Dr. Lockie,” announced Patty Perkins.

“Now, of course I’ve heard of *him*,” said Mrs. Drummond.

“Oh, course you have,” muttered Bert. “Know-it-all humans always heard of everyone. Even if they haven’t.” He wrestled with a carrot-top, punishing it for the sins of others.

“Dr. Dee says we lethargic and grumpy,” said Patty Perkins proudly.

“Well,” said Mrs. Drummond encouragingly, “I must say he’s got that one right..”

“He said we run-down. Not sleeping enough. Need more sleep.”

“He said we looking thin, not eating enough. Need more food.”

“I see,” said Mrs. Drummond, doubtfully. “So this is why you’re sleeping at night?”

“Sleeping at night always best. We need our beauty sleep. Sleeping during day not enough for healthy growing hamsters.”

“So you’ll be sleeping all day, then” asked Mrs. Drummond, “and all night as well?”

Broccoli Bill nodded enthusiastically. “But only till we get better,” he added. “Then we return to old ways.”

“And we need to keep eating lots,” added Patty Perkins.

“Lots and lots,” confirmed Bert.

“Lots and lots and lots,” said Teddy. “Dr. Dee say we be twice the hamsters we used to be if we follow treatment.”

“I should think you’ll be three or four times the hamsters, if you go on like that,” observed Mrs. Drummond archly.

“There!” said Bill proudly, “Dr. Dee the very bestest doctor in the world. Told you so.”

“Has he not recommended any exercise, then?” asked Mrs. Drummond.

A long silence greeted this remark. Bill and Bert looked balefully up at the impertinent human. Patty and Teddy shook their heads at each other and crunched on some sunflower seeds.

“You no doctor,” stated Bill. “That very clear.”

“Oh, maybe not,” said Mrs. Drummond. “But I was just wondering about another course of treatment I heard about. From Dr. Lockie, you know?”

“What that, then?” asked Bert with no hint of interest at all.

“Oh, it was just that you could get a lot better by taking yoghurt drops and not sleeping so much.”

Broccoli Bill sucked in his breath. “That sound bit dangerous,” he said doubtfully. “You sure you read this in Dr. Lockie.”

Mrs. Drummond nodded.

“How many yoghurt-drops that be?” asked Patty Perkins.

“Recommended dose is four drops, twice a day.”

“For each hamster?” Teddy wanted to know.

“Four, twice a day for each hamster. And no sleeping at night - only healthy exercise.”

At this, the hamsters dived into the bedding and went into a huddle. There was considerable and noisy argument. A tail was bitten. Some squealing resulted. At last Broccoli Bill put his head out of the nest.

“Hamsters going to do medical trial. Bill and Patty continue Dr. Dee’s treatment, me and Teddy try yoghurt-drops.”

“Yoghurt-drops *and* exercise,” Mrs. Drummond reminded him.

“Yoghurt-drops and - yeah, whatever,” confirmed Bill airily. “But better start now,” he added, cocking a beady eye.

Mrs. Drummond handed over the first dose of medicine. Two sets of hamster-cheeks were soon bulging. Teddy Parker looked very pleased with himself, Haricot Bert much less so.

“You go sleep now, Bert and Patty,” mumbled Bill through his pouches. “We see who get better first.”