

Hamsters is Knackered

It was another day in February. The fourteenth to be exact. Very quiet. It was all a bit disconcerting. Just the steady, regular buzz of some drilling, or sanding, or paint-stripping or something from the house next door, where improvements may have been coming to an end. Or, more likely, not.

Mrs. D sat doing an old crossword, eating the last chocolate in the world, and waiting for the post. Listening to the peace and quiet. And that background hum. Buzz. Silence. Buzz. Silence. Buzz.

The postie clattered a pile of things through the letterbox. Mrs. D went to see what there was. Two letters out of Africa, enclosing a cheap pen and a plea for money, three fliers for a pizza delivery company, and a bank-statement. Oh, and a homeware catalogue. Not what she was hoping for on this fourteenth day of February. Gingerly, she eased open the front door and peered out. No, nothing there. No parcels or flying saucers. She sighed and closed the door.

The catalogue proved distracting. It was from Poopers of Stratford. Full of astonishing gadgets, dreamed up by the limitless creative genius of HamLabs™. Here was just the thing: a combined snow-shovel and barbecue-grill ‘for those days on the slopes’. And there was a carrot-peeler-and-dicer, using state-of-the-art quantum physics: it looked a bit scary. On page 15, Daphne Recommends... ‘Pouch-a-wipe’, a towel-rail that simply clamps to your waistband with two strong plastic hooks. Just the thing when you haven’t enough hands in the bathroom. Daphne was looking a little frazzled these days, thought Mrs. D. And she was just wondering how many towel-rails to order (‘buy two, get the third one free’) when there was a suspicious thump off-stage. Simultaneously, the buzzing noise stopped. Then there was a long silence. Then the background noise started again.

That thump had sounded ominously close. And, when she thought about it, the buzzing noise also sounded ominously close. Mrs. D went to investigate. She peered into the cupboard under the stairs. There was something in the box that held all the waste-paper. When her eyes grew used to the gloom, she saw that it was a pile of furry creatures, all curled up in a heap. Snoring loudly. In unison.

Mrs. D carefully pulled out the box and examined her find by the light of day. There were four hamsters of different colours and shades – no, five. All fast asleep, whiskers vibrating in the breeze of their snores. Gingerly she lifted up the newspaper which formed their mattress, and placed it on her lap. It was warm.

‘Oi!’ came a small grumbly voice. ‘What you doing?’ In the pile of furs, one small beady eye had opened.

‘Oh, sorry,’ whispered Mrs D. ‘I didn’t mean to wake you.’

‘Bet you did,’ growled the hamster. ‘Not nice. And no whispering. It rude.’

‘Sorry,’ repeated Mrs. D. ‘I just thought you were a power-drill or something.’

There was a long pause of disbelief.

‘You hear that, Bill?’ demanded the hamster, poking the pile of fur next to him with his nose. ‘You hear that? Stupid human think hamsters was a drill.’

The neighbouring fur shifted. A mouth emerged, yawning impressively. ‘A grill? Skinny human want to eat us?’

At these words, the furry pile flew apart. Several nervous hamsters stood at the ready, on their hind-legs, poised somewhere between sleep, belligerence and terror.

‘Hamsters not nice to eat,’ whispered Patty Perkins hoarsely. ‘No, not at all.’

‘No,’ agreed Mrs D. hastily. ‘I quite agree. I didn’t say -’

‘What you mean?’ inetruped Melvyn Thickett. ‘Hamsters perfectly nice to eat. Bestest tasting of all small mammals.’ Then he paused, to reflect maturely on his words. ‘But not for skinny humans,’ he ended lamely. Embarrassed, he started on a thorough examination of his fur.

Haricot Bert shook his head. ‘Stupid hamsters,’ he muttered. ‘Not grill.’

‘Not grill?’ asked Patty anxiously. ‘Wot then? Roast? Fry?’ His eyes were bulging in trepidation. ‘Boil?’

‘Drill!’ shouted Bert. ‘Drill, cloth-ears! Skinny human think hamsters a power-drill.’

A puzzled silence followed. Patty shrugged hopelessly and went back to sleep. Broccoli Bill, having shown an interest while the crisis lasted, settled down again, his pink foot planted firmly on the nose of the fifth hamster which had not woken up. Judging from the beret, worn slightly askew, it looked like Gordon Bleu.

Haricot Bert yawned impressively.

‘I can see you’re all tired,’ said Mrs. D sympathetically.

‘Hamsters very tired,’ conceded Bert. ‘Zosted. Most zosted creatures in the whole world. Hamsters is knackered.’

‘What have you been up to, then?’ wondered Mrs. D.

In reply, Bert stared at her. He sniffed the air carefully. ‘Human got chocolates?’

Mrs. D admitted that she had had a chocolate. ‘But there aren’t any left,’ she said clearly. ‘I was sort of waiting for some more to turn up today.’

‘Why?’ demanded Bert, now suspicious.

‘Because it’s Valentine’s Day,’ said Mrs. D.

Bert snorted. ‘Hamsters got better things for Valentine’s Day. Not silly chocolates. Wot hamsters got, Bill?’ He poked Broccoli Bill.

‘Hamsters got washing-machines,’ muttered Bill, without opening an eye.

‘Hamsters got washing-machines,’ explained Bert smugly. ‘Nice work, Bill. Wot else hamsters got, Bill?’

‘Hamsters got microwaves,’ whispered Bill, without opening another eye.

‘Hamsters got microwaves,’ interpreted Bert. ‘Nice one, Bill. Wot else we got, Bill?’

‘Hamsters got dishwashers,’ mumbled Bill, closing both eyes firmly.

‘Hamsters got dishwashers,’ repeated Bert, with every evidence of satisfaction.

‘Very nice,’ said Mrs. D. ‘But –’

‘All powered by OHMi,’ announced Bert proudly.

‘Oh my?’ echoed Mrs. D.

‘OHMi,’ confirmed Bert.

‘Oh my...goodness?’ she wondered. ‘Oh my...word?’

‘Stupid human,’ sighed Bert, shaking his head and rolling his eyes. ‘No wonder humans not rule universe. OHMi – Awesome Hamster-Machine Interface ©. All invented by HamLabs™.’

Mrs D. was about to say something about the spelling of the word ‘awesome’, but thought better of it, just in time. ‘That sounds interesting,’ she said instead. And immediately regretted it

Bert nodded comfortably. ‘All machines designed by hamster geniusises. You heard of Bosch washing-machines?’

Mrs D. said she even had one in the house.

‘Invented by Jerome Bosch. Wot that word? Visionary. Him visionary. Inventor of most brilliant washing-machines ever.’

Mrs D didn’t like to confess that she’d never heard of Jerome the Visionary.

‘And wot about that Hot Harriet, eh?’ winked Bert.

Mrs D. looked severe, wondering what was coming next.

‘Wot they teach in schools for humans?’ complained Haricot Bert. ‘You not heard of Hot Harriet? She only invent Hotpoint machine. Why you think they called it ‘Hot?’

Mrs D admitted that she had never considered that.

‘And Hamsuke Zanussi. Wot he not invented is nobody business.’

‘How does OHMi[©] work, then?’ asked Mrs D, in an attempt to divert attention away from her manifest ignorance.

‘Hamster-wheels,’ explained Bert. ‘Utilise power of hamster-wheels to make electricity to power things in kitchens.’

‘Hamster-wheels?’

‘Keep up, dimwit. It only obvious. Hamsters in wheels all night. Hamsters got to do wot hamsters got to do. That wot wheels there for. Might as well use energy created. Simple. Brilliant. Masterstroke by HamLabsTM.’

‘It certainly is,’ nodded Mrs D. thoughtfully.

‘That why hamsters knackered,’ yawned Bert. ‘We done trade-show all week. We in hamster-wheels from dusk till dawn. Sold hundreds of machines. Thousands. Millions. But very zosting. Oh my. Wosn’t it, Bill? Phew.’

Bill snored loudly in agreement and twitched with his foot.

Gordon Bleu woke up, disturbed by the tap on his nose. He opened one eye. Closed it. Opened the other. ‘Ah, la belle femme!’ he breathed heavily, as best he could. ‘Ou bien je rêve? Ah weesh you ze ‘appy Val...’ He trailed off. Fell asleep.

‘Hamsters is knackered,’ confirmed Bert.

He closed his eyes.

The humming noise started up again.