

Alexander was lying in bed one morning, thinking. Several interesting thoughts had passed through his head in the space of what seemed to be about three hours; but, when he looked at his watch, it had only been ten minutes since he had last looked at it. He turned over and had one or two more interesting thoughts. And then he thought he heard a squeaking noise at the window.

He jumped out of bed and tip-toed to the window. The sun was up; and there, balanced dangerously on the window-ledge outside, was the saucer of the hamsters again.

"help" he could just hear the hamsters shout from inside their saucer. "help help"

"What's wrong?" asked Alexander, crouching down with his nose pressed to the glass.

"hamsters have crashed!" squeaked one of the occupants of the saucer. "help help help!"

With great and commendable caution, Alexander eased open the window and grabbed the saucer just as it began to slip over the edge.

"Phew!" he said, as he brought it inside and set it down gently on the carpet.

The lid of the saucer flew open and three grumpy hamsters clambered out.

"Took your time," said one.

"Hamsters have time," said another.

The third hamster was hiccuping with annoyance, and began some furious cleaning of fur and paws and whiskers and ears.

"Well, I didn't hear you," explained Alexander.

"No ears," said Haricot Bert disdainfully. "Hamsters have ears. Hamsters listen all time. Good ears. Fine ears."

"You right, Bert," said Patty Perkins. "Humans too skinny, no ears."

"No pouches. Hic!" observed the third occupant of the saucer. "Like you said, hic-Patty."

Alexander looked at the new hamster; he had gleaming white teeth and seemed very well groomed. Not to mention very well fed. "Who's this, then," he asked.

"This Teddy Parker," said Patty, "Teddy, this Alexander. Nice boy, but dim. Alexander, this Teddy. New hamster in team."

Teddy looked at Alexander, hiccuped twice and then continued with his cleaning. Bert had found some old biscuit crumbs and was pouching them for future reference.

"So, what's new, Patty?" asked Alexander, trying to strike up a conversation.

"What new? H'm, tricky question."

"Hamsters have tricky questions," Bert was quite sure. "How long piece string? That tricky question. Chicken or egg - that tricky question. Sound of one paw clapping. That tricky question too. Hamsters have four paws," he hastened to add, in case anyone thought hamsters were short of anything.

Patty Perkins ignored Haricot Bert. "Hamsters have New Hour's Resolutions," he announced proudly.

Alexander thought he had mis-heard. "Ah, New Year's Resolutions. Good things, those," he agreed.

"Humans no ears," re-iterated Teddy Parker. "Patty say New Hour's Resolutions, not New Year's." Teddy tutted and hiccuped and polished his rather short tail.

"New Hour's Resolutions?" asked Alexander. "But you really mean New Year's Resolutions, don't you, Patty?"

Patty Perkins stood up on his hind legs and shouted, as he had been taught to deal with deaf people.

"New Hour's Resolutions!!" he shouted, very loudly. "Cloth-ears!" he

added. "Granny," he mumbled. "What point of a resolution for whole year? Soon break that." "Hamsters soon break everything," agreed Bert. "Saucer broke," he said mournfully. "Better fix after crash." He scampered off to the open saucer and began fiddling with various controls and levers and piles of sawdust. Bits of carrot and broccoli flew everywhere, and there was a considerable squeaking as the repairs proceeded.

Teddy Parker explained patiently. "Hamsters wake up and think be good for a while. Make resolution be good. After hour, fall asleep again, and usually forget resolution. Wake up, new hour, new resolution. Works well. Good invention. What this?" he asked, sniffing at Alexander's plant. He had forgotten to hiccup for a couple of minutes.

"That's a Desert Cactus," explained Alexander proudly. "My mum gave it to me."

"Resolutions good invention," said Patty, "Call it FORGET - Firm Obligation and Resolve to be Good for an Extra-long Time. We are good for very long time. That why we call it an Hour Resolution."

Alexander couldn't think what to say. After all, most of his New Year's Resolutions rarely lasted much longer than a day, let alone an hour, so maybe the hamsters had the right idea.

"Mm, humans have tasty dessert," said Teddy, polishing off the last of the cactus.

Alexander quietly removed the now-empty pot of earth and asked Patty what his New Hour's Resolution was.

"Patty has Resolution eat more," said Patty, and proceeded to carry out his obligation and resolve.

"Bert says will fix broken saucer or will eat hat," muttered Haricot Bert from inside the saucer.

Teddy Parker said nothing at this point, engaged as he was in demolishing a plant Alexander had grown from an apple-seed. After a while he announced that his Resolution was not to eat any more desserts.

While Patty had a sleep, Alexander knelt down beside the saucer to talk to Bert.

"What's the matter with your saucer?" he asked.

"Hamsters have no matter," announced Bert confidently, poking his nose out of a pile of sawdust and apple-cores. "All done with Resolutions. Resolution first thing this morning - make saucer faster. Told Teddy. Teddy's resolution was build bigger bed. Teddy took all cottonwool away. Saucer needs cottonwool."

"I see," said Alexander. "The saucer is powered by cottonwool, and you've run out because Teddy took it all away."

"Mm," said Haricot Bert sadly. "But good application of FORGET. Good Hour's Resolution by Teddy. Gooder than mine."

"Perhaps I can give you some more cottonwool, then?" asked Alexander.

"Oh no," said Bert, shaking his head vigorously, "Hamsters have -"

At this point he was given a firm bite on the ear by Patty Perkins who had woken up again for another hour of resolve. "Hamsters want cottonwool," said Patty, "Hamsters have problem saucer, what Bert wanted say."

While Alexander went in search of cottonwool, Teddy Parker kept his resolution by eating a spider-plant, a pile of stamps from Alexander's collection, and the best bits from a cushion cover: but not a single dessert.

Bert ate his hat. "Hamsters have nice hats," he said contentedly.

When the saucer was refuelled, the three hamsters climbed aboard. Saluting smartly, they closed the lid and sped off, using DUSTER control (Definitely Uni-directional Speed Transmission for Extra-fast Resolutions). When they had disappeared into the blue yonder,

Alexander made a New Hour's Resolution to set the breakfast-table and eat breakfast. And kept it.