

## STUMPY BALLANTYNE'S DAY

“Most unusual,” agreed the white hamster, proudly. “But Hamsters most unusual species,” he explained further. “Most unusual, eh, Bert?”

Haricot Bert was busy and did not answer. He trying his best to plant a kiss on Mrs D, by standing on his hind legs where he could just reach her left ankle. Some way in the distance, a small flying saucer lay tilted on its side, apparently the result of a poor landing. But this was not the case: the rakish angle of the HamLabs™ ship was entirely due to the huge box of chocolates which had previously been suspended underneath the saucer and which Broccoli Bill had entirely forgotten when swooping in from the sky. This unusual landing was the topic of conversation.

“Brr!” exclaimed Mrs D. “It’s snowing again. Why don’t you two boys come in and keep warm. I can probably find a few little somethings for you.”

There was no second asking. Broccoli Bill waggled his bottom and was through the back door like white lightning, and Haricot Bert was not far behind. But, as Bert reached the door, he stopped in his tracks, and scuttled back down the garden to the flying saucer,

where he was soon busy with the task of detaching the chocolates.

Five minutes later, Bill was engaged in distorting his little pointy face with parsnips and sprouts which might arguably have fed a small army, while Bert was proudly explaining how HamLabs™ had developed ALL the technology which now so startled Mrs D: for, on opening the box of chocolates, a tinny tiny medley of ‘Andy William’s Greatest Love Songs’ filled the air.

“Very nice, I’m sure,” said Mrs D. “But do you think we could turn it down while we chat. You know, just you and me?”

Haricot Bert needed no second asking and gnawed through a cunningly concealed wire in the box. This briefly made his ears stand on end, and then there was silence. Apart from Bill’s demolition of the parsnip.

“So, Valentine’s Day, then?” said Mrs D by way of opening the conversation.

“Ballantyne’s Day. Very much so,” agreed Bert.

“Hamsters give kisses,” he added hopefully.

“Do they really?” asked Mrs D, amazed. “Who do they give kisses to?”

“Nice ladies what hand out parsnips and chocolate drops,” replied Bert quickly, scrabbling his way up the chair and on to Mrs D’s lap.

“Oh, like me, then?”

By way of answer, Haricot Bert stretched up his whiskery face, pink nose twitching keenly. Mrs D gave him a quick peck.

“Hamsters also give cards,” said Bert, blushing. He scampered back to the flying-saucer and returned moments later with a huge pink card with a picture of red roses on the front. When you opened it, there was the scent of roses and a verse which said

*Rose-leaves taste sweet,  
Violets taste good,  
I think it's a treat  
When you hand out the food.’*

“How very charming,” said Mrs D. “Did you write this yourself?”

“Very much so,” said Bert.

“Nnng mmmmbb ng!” exclaimed Broccoli Bill, a little obscurely, running about with cheek-pouches and eyes bulging.

“Think Bill want to tell you about **KISS**®,” said Haricot Bert, happily. “Very smart **HamLabs**™ technology.”

“Mmmbbb ngkngk fffff ffweeh!” exclaimed Bill.

“Bill want to tell you that **KISS**® stand for Kupids International Smooching System. Very elegant stuff,” added Bert proudly. “Here, have other chocolate.”

Mrs D was interested. “And this kissing stuff, then, what does it do?”

Bill was so eager to explain that he ran behind an armchair to off-load his pouches. In barely five seconds he bounded back.

“Kissing very good for small hamsters,” he said. “Very much so.”

“And do you think it’s good for those of us who aren’t hamsters?”

Bert and Bill looked at each other doubtfully. Bert cleaned his tail feverishly. Bill sat himself up on his back-legs and considered his front paws. Then the two of them went into a huddle and discussed some point of hamster moral philosophy. Fortunately, this did not take long.

“Hamsters not know,” said Bert perkily.

“Oh dear,” said Mrs D, sadly.

“Hamsters not told whether kissing good for other species,” explained Bill.

“Well, maybe Valentine’s Day is the best day to find out.?”

“Ballantyne’s Day, oh yes,” nodded Bill vigorously.

“Hamsters invent Ballantyne’s Day, you know?”

“No, I didn’t know that,” said Mrs D puzzled. “And isn’t it Valentine’s Day, with a ‘v’?”

Bill, rather impolitely, snickered and then polished his back paws assiduously.

“No, Ballantyne, with a ‘b,’” said Bert. “Named after Stumpy Ballantyne, greatest HamLabs™ inventor what ever ran around in middle of night.”

“Long live Stumpy Ballantyne!” squeaked both hamsters in unison.

“Ballantyne invent kissing,” whispered Bert conspiratorially.

“How very clever of him,” said Mrs D admiringly. “All by himself?”

“Stumpy invent lots of things by self. Specially kissing.”

“And what did he invent it for?”

This question completely threw the two hamsters. They looked at each other for a moment.

“Obvious, silly,” said Broccoli Bill, a little impatiently.

“Chocolate drops was what for.”

“Oh, I see, he got paid in chocolate drops, did he?”

Bill chattered in annoyance and muttered something below his breath about humans being as daft as hamster grannies. Bert coughed.

“Not paid. Invented KISS<sup>©</sup>ing so that the KISS<sup>©</sup>ee would give the KISS<sup>©</sup>er lots of chocolate drops.”

“Lots,” confirmed Bill. “Lots and lots and lots. All the time,” he added.

“I see!” said Mrs D, a light suddenly coming on. “Well, I’m afraid I don’t have any chocolate drops in the house just now. Perhaps a walnut?”

After a full minute in which they looked balefully at Mrs D, the two hamsters declined the offer. Then they each held on to an end of the pink ribbon and tied up the box of Andy Williams chocolates again.

“Stumpy Ballantyne’s Day today,” said Haricot Bert decisively. “Lots other people to visit. Got go now.”

With that, the two hamsters dragged the box off to the back garden, where they re-attached it to their flying saucer, and shot off into the snowstorm. Leaving Mrs D with only a tiny memory of HamLabs™ KISS©ing on Stumpy Ballantyne’s Day.

And that would have to last her until the next 14<sup>th</sup> day of February.