

Mochi in My Palm

“Joseph, look, they are so cute!”

Lavender stopped outside a pet shop as we were meandering in Wan Chai after we had the last exam of the semester. She was tickling the glass. On the other side of the glass were a dozen furry little rodents stacking on each other to sleep, one or two swung their noses parallel to her finger movement.

“Do you want one?” I asked as gently as I could, but deep down I couldn’t stand the winter breeze and wanted to go.

“Can I have one?” she asked eagerly.

“My dear,” I held her hand, “my family had raised hamsters before.”

“Do they have names?” her eyes fixed on the display glass.

“One is called Skippy, because when we first bought her she just did a lot of somersaults. The other is called Dash, he loves running from one side of the cage to another.” She was still gazing at the hamsters.

“Unfortunately they didn’t live long.” Lavender shifted her gaze to me. I love those stunning watery black iris, flickering like black pearls in the dark. “Lavender,” I looked at her, “hamsters, animals, they are not toys. They are vivid living beings. They have feelings. Once we decide to keep one we shall take good care.”

“I know Joe, I know,” she leaned on me, “Joseph Cheung, I want to have a hamster. This will be the first Christmas we spend together. You have promised me to stay in the dormitory for the holiday. I want to have something we can find special joy in. I want to have a pet.”

“Then after Christmas?”

“Hamster is going to stick with us as long as she is alive. Joe, I am keeping one.”

I stared at the pint sized fur balls, “sure, sure. As you wish,” I swept my hand over her silk-like hair, “as long as you are happy.” She giggled.

“Now, Joseph,” she turned to the furry things, “how do I pick my hamsters?”

“How about that one,” I pretend to be excited, pointing at a light brown hamster “it has been following your finger all the time.”

“Oh yes she is. Let’s take her home! How shall we name her?”

“How’bout we name it Lavender? Like you, alluring without make-up, smells good without perfume, elegant but not haughty. Exactly the flower I desire.”

“You naughty...she is a hamster.”

“Let’s see. Brown...”

“How about we call her Mochi!” she suggested.

“Name after that sticky rice dessert covered with peanut crumbs? Fitting,” I said.

“Mochi...can we get her a sibling?”

“Nah, I tried, they would fight. One is good enough for now.”

“Make sense. My Mochi...”

“Lavender, are you sure you will take Mochi around to dinner and watch the Christmas Illuminations?”

“Oh right, today is the 24th, almost forgot I am here for the light shows.”

“Come, we will see Mochi later.”

Once we returned to the dormitory, Lavender placed the cage in a corner of my room, and prepare the cage, water and nuts. Finally she placed Mochi in her new home. My roommate Thomas came and looked at the new pet.

“Oh wow. What is this?” he asked.

“Thomas, meet Mochi,” Lavender pointed at the cage.

“Mochi is going to stay here,” I told Thomas, “hope you don’t mind.”

“Is this legal?”

“The security didn’t intercept us.”

“Then,” said Thomas, “if it doesn’t stink, bite, or squeak all night, I am fine.”

“She, Thomas,” said Lavender, “Mochi is a girl.”

In the middle of the night, we heard some high-pitched squeaks coming from the cage. Upon detection, Lavender slowly let go of my hug, got out of the warm bed, and stepped down the bed. She hushed the hamster but it didn’t work. She turned on the lamp on my desk, made a phone call, dressed up, and left without a word.

“Pssp, Joseph,” it’s Thomas. “Pssp, Joseph.”

“What,” I mumbled wearily.

“How does it feel?”

“Feel what?”

“Wife abandoned you for daughter.”

“Shut up Tom.”

Early in the next morning, I woke up and saw Lavender kneeling in front of the cage. No squeaking, but the sound of spinning plastic.

“You...bought a running wheel for Mochi.”

“Cute, right?”

“Yea cute,” I answered dryly out of tiredness, “what’s the trick to make her quiet?”

“This is the answer Joseph,” she pointed at the wheel, “hamsters need a lot of exercise or else they will feel anxious. Look, I also bought her different kinds of seeds too!”

“Wow. I...I guess I'll go and make breakfast.”

“Awe thanks Joseph. I will feed Mochi first. Come Mochi, Mama give you some seeds.”

Mama? This won’t end well.

For whatever reason Mochi stayed in my room instead of Lavender’s. Most of the time this little thing was just a living object in my room, occasionally attended by Lavender and sometimes me. If both of us were outside, Thomas would reluctantly be the caretaker. Any other time when Lavender wasn’t here, when I did some reading, Mochi functioned as a decoration. Days passed and it was the end of the year.

On the 29th, Lavender went to a pajama party with her friends. Originally they planned for a staycation to farewell a friend who was about to migrate. But the virus was too strong. It’s good chance to pack the things in the corner when Lavender isn’t here. I lifted the hamster cage, and placed the cage on my table. I accidentally gave Mochi a glance, it was eating a seed. As the table and the cage contacted, the sunflower seed in its hands dropped out onto the table. It gazed at me. I picked up the seed, and it was still gazing. Oh, those glimmering dark eyes, staring innocently at me. Gently I gave the seed back to Mochi, and she received it with a wild grab and chew. Suddenly, I felt a soft stir in my heart, like the first time I saw Lavender.

This would be a lonely night. Lavender was away, Thomas was away. I read my book but couldn’t. I moved my sight to Mochi. I rose from my chair and walked to her house. I opened the cage hatch, slowly moving my hand to Mochi. At first she was quite afraid.

“It’s okay Mochi, it’s me.”

She slowly approached me, one leg after another she crawled on my palm. Slowly I lifted her up, and cautiously moved back to my seat. I placed her on the table. She did not run around, she did not chew things. She just sat there, doing hamster things.

“Mochi?” I summoned her.

She stopped and glanced up to me, with that flashing eyes and naive face. I patted her head softly with my index finger.

“Who's a good girl?”

She was just idle. I brought a seed in front of her, she grabbed it and started eating.

“Mochi, your mama is away. Daddy is so lonely. Mochi, daddy recently read a book called *Ecological Studies: Theories and Application*. Daddy don't understand.”

She glanced at me again.

“Yes, you don't either. Hey, your mother is not here, let's talk about your mother! You know what, she once...”

Since then, I have had monologues with Mochi almost every night, sometimes with Lavender.

Lavender returned the next day in the afternoon. The first scene she saw once she opened the door must have been a shock to her.

“Oh hi Lavender, look,” I showed her Mochi in my palm, “are you able to do this?”

“What the fuck Joe put Mochi down!”

“Look how still she is sitting here! You trust daddy right?” I then placed her on the table, “good girl. Here, have a try on this, daddy love this.” I handed her a pistachio.

This was a new nut for her. She tried to hold it right but failed. Oh stupid me, pistachio nuts are too large for hamsters. I took it, unshelled it, and gave the green nut to her. She sniffed it, took a bite, and left it.

“Right, you don't like it.”

“Darn Joseph, hamsters cannot feed on human food, they need to eat the unsalted ones.”

“La-ven, do you know Mochi loves sunflower seeds the most?”

“Jo-”

“And look what I made her this morning,” I pulled out a card box and opened it, “it's a hamster maze. Come girl, have a run,” and I placed her inside.

“Where did you get these anyway?”

“DIY.”

Mochi reached the exit of the maze and sat there. “Mochi Mochi.” I grabbed her, opened the cage hatch and placed her back.

“Please do not play too many tricks Joe.”

Soon this was the last day of the year. Only Lavender, Mochi and I were in the room. I used the entire night to make a maze, and numbered the turn-abouts.

“Ready?”

“Ready!”

We put Mochi at the entrance of the maze, and watched her take turns on each number as she ran around the turns of the one-direction maze.

“10”

“9”

“8”

“7”

“6”

“5”

“4”

“3”

“2”

“1”

As Mochi reached the exit, Lavender placed a hand in front of her. She crawled onto it. She slowly lifted her up. I put my hand under Lavender’s. We hugged each other and said “Happy New Year!” We agreed not to scream, trying not to scare Mochi.

Time flies and it was the 19th of January. I had just finished my lesson and planned to put down some books before having dinner with Lavender. As I reached my room, I was shocked to see the door opened. Four men wrapped in blue plastic protective suits in the room, one of them carrying the cage covered with white cloth where Mochi was in.

“Who are you guys? What are you doing?”

“Calm down mister. Is it yours?” He shook the cage for a bit.

“Mochi! What do you want with my girl?”

“It’s his. Sir,” he showed a notice, “it is a regret to notify that all hamsters in Hong Kong might be infected with the Delta Virus. We need to do animal euthanasia on it.”

“What? No! You cannot kill her!” I screamed.

Thomas happened to appear behind me, just finished his lesson as well.

“Tom!” I pushed Thomas onto a wall, “What have you told them! You are the only one who knows I have a hamster in dorm!”

“Joe, I don’t know what are you talking about. Why are these men here?”

“Sir I am sorry,” said one of the men, “it has been announced that all hamsters might be infected with the virus. We need to take care of them.”

“Wait a second,” said Thomas, “have you checked this one? Or are you just overgeneralizing the data based on several cases? I am studying Statistics.”

“We...”

“Give me back Mochi!” I roared and dashed to the men, stroke one man’s hand and the cage fell off to the ground. That man quickly grabbed me and another man restrained me. Thomas tried to help but he too was restrained by the others.

“Sorry sir, we are just following orders.”

And they quickly retreated with my hamster.

“I’ll go after them,” suggested Thomas running to the lift lobby, “you call Lavender!”

“Lavender, La-ven, they have Mochi, the wrapped men have Mochi! They are taking her away! Lavender do you hear!”

We chased those men to the entrance of the dormitory building. Lavender happened to be by the entrance.

“Lavender, get them, they are taking away Mochi to kill,” I shouted at the top of my lungs.

“Mochi!” Lavender dropped her books and laptop.

The men moved swiftly to a van parked at the entrance. Lavender managed to reach those men and grabbed one’s arm, desperately pleading to the men. One swung her off. Thomas caught up with the last guy getting on the van but he was late. Tom only managed to pull away the maze the man was holding. Upon a screech of tires the van drove away leaving one angry two weeping three hopeless teens standing. I hugged Lavender tight, knowing that we are not seeing Mochi again.

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By The Sapient Sabre