

Igor Bondar

HAMSTER

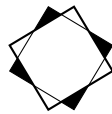


Igor Bondar

HAMSTER

A fairy tale

Illustrated by Alyona Garbuz



“Zolotoye sechenie”
private publishers
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This book is about a cute hamster Bob and his search for Wisdom.

Illustrated by Alyona Garbuz.

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Book of Life

nce upon a time there was a hamster who was a kind soul. His name was Bob. He lived in a spacious burrow right in the middle of a big, beautiful field. At the entrance of Bob's house hung his favorite motto:

*“A HAMSTER WHO COULDN'T KEEP
THE FLUFINESS OF HIS TAIL IS NOT
A HAMSTER BUT A SHAMEFUL GOPHER”*

To be honest, Bob didn't know why all gophers were shameful, but he was told that by his father and his father was told by his grandfather and his grandfather by his great-grandfather. It seemed that his ancestors knew quite a lot about gophers and had their reasons to dislike them. Bob accepted that and wasn't interested in looking into it any further.

Bob was also the custodian of the most important book of all hamsters — The Book of Hamster

Life. The wisest hamsters recorded their clever thoughts in it. Bob liked to read it often to gain some wisdom. He really liked some quotes which helped him understand the meaning of life. Like for example:

*“A HAMSTER WITHOUT A BURROW
FULL OF SEEDS LOSES THEREFORE
HIS HAMSTER’S FACE”*

Many hamsters had visited his burrow to read the book. Bob himself hadn’t written anything in the book because he thought that he wasn’t wise enough. Anyway, there were plenty of notes in there, some for every occasion.

Bob settled himself at the table, poured out a big pile of grain and picked up his favorite book. He liked to open it at random and read the first thing that he saw. The first thing he saw today was:

*“THE MEANING OF LIFE
IS TO ALWAYS LIVE
IN THE DIRECTION OF YOUR FUR”*

The depth of this thought gave Bob goosebumps in his tail. Indeed, his wise hamster-forefathers

understood the true meaning of life! Well, one day he would also gain wisdom.

The hamster turned a page and read the following:

*“THE UNITY OF HAMSTERS
LIES IN THE SEPARATION
OF THEIR GRAIN”*

Here Bob’s tail began to vibrate with delight. Such height! To deal with the rush of emotion, Bob stuffed his mouth with a big handful of grain.

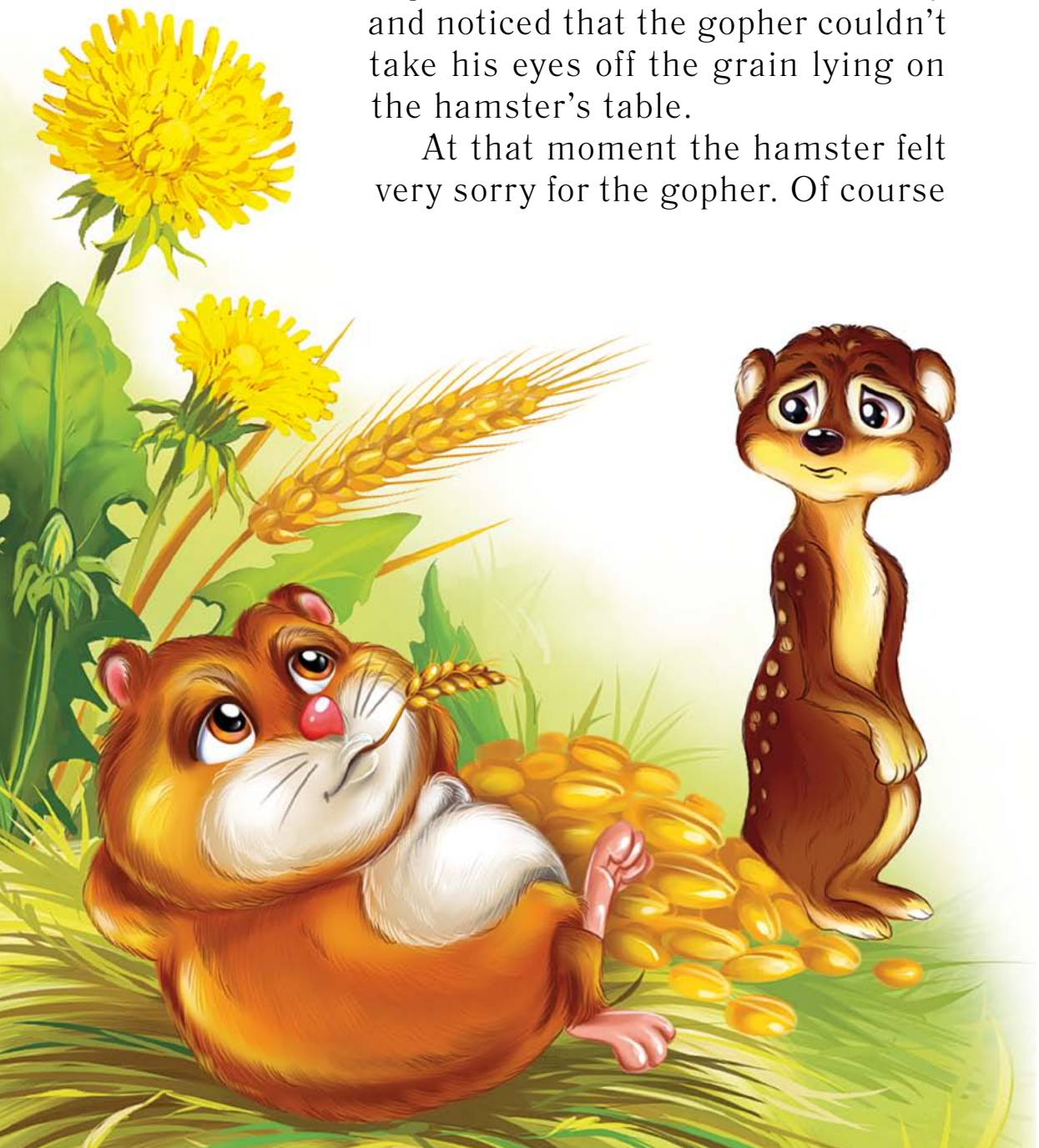
“I guess that’s enough wisdom for today.” — he thought, closed the book and put it back in its place of honor in his burrow. Coming back to the table, Bob’s took more seriously for grains.



The hamster ate as much as he could, but there was too much grain for his modest effort. After some time, he lay down on the grass leaving some of his grain untouched. He was lying there for a long time, when suddenly he heard some footsteps on the path near his burrow. The hamster turned his head towards the noise.

A gopher was walking down the path near the Hamster's house. He was so thin and skinny that Bob even hiccupped in surprise. At that very moment for some reason the gopher slackened his pace. Bob watched him attentively and noticed that the gopher couldn't take his eyes off the grain lying on the hamster's table.

At that moment the hamster felt very sorry for the gopher. Of course



he remembered the quote from his wise book very well:

*“A HAMSTER WHO GIVES HIS
GRAIN TO A GOPHER IS WORSE
THAN A GOPHER HIMSELF”*

But he couldn't help it. He felt so sorry for him.

“Well, you can...” he finally mumbled, “If you want to, you can eat up the grain which is left over there.”

The gopher poured out his thanks and darted like a flash to the grain. Soon there was a loud sound of crunching across the field. Bob looked at the gopher and suddenly felt joy in his heart — a joy that he never felt before.

“What a strange and pleasant feeling!” — he thought in amusement. “Why haven't I felt this before?”

Meanwhile the gopher ate up all the grain and thanked the hamster profusely. Bob felt very good again.

“That's strange!” Bob thought. “There is nothing written in the book of wisdom about this. I'd better look through it more carefully.”

The gopher thanked the hamster for the last time and continued on his way. Bob finally found

the strength to get up and sit on a chair. He looked across the empty table but he didn't feel bad even though there was no grain left. He was surprised by the same feeling again. After that he went to take his afternoon nap. He always accurately followed the book of wisdom's rule:

*“A HAMSTER WHO DOESN'T TAKE
A REST AFTER HIS MEAL IS NONE
THE WISER ABOUT LIFE”*



The next day Bob the hamster sat with his book near his burrow. This time he came across the following quote:

*“A GOOD FLUFFY TAIL ALWAYS
LEADS TO GRAIN, AND GRAIN
LEADS TO A FLUFFY TAIL”*

Bob sat lost in thought and gave a sigh. Indeed, wise hamsters were hard to find today! Bob was just about to turn a page when he heard some footsteps on the path again. Shortly the same

gopher who he saw yesterday appeared. He gave the hamster a friendly smile and even waved his hand. Today he seemed less skinny than he did the day before. The gopher was just about to pass by when to his own surprise the hamster suddenly called out him.

“Gopher! You can have some of my grain if you want.”

In a flash the gopher came over. He thanked Bob so warmly that the hamster’s heart melted with joy.

“Oh, don’t worry about that!” humbly muttered the hamster in response. “Go on, keep eating.”

Soon the gopher ate his fill and departed. The hamster fell deep into thought. It seemed that he had really came across something that wasn’t described in the book of wisdom. Every time he felt sorry for and fed the poor gopher he felt pleasure in his heart. It was even better than dining alone.

Every day thereafter Bob would intentionally leave some grain on the table after his meal. The gopher also stubbornly wouldn’t change his road and every day passed by at the same time. The hamster felt very good each time he gave the gopher some grain.

This continued for about a week and Bob then picked up the book of wisdom again. But this time he had also had brought a quill for making notes. Now he was absolutely sure that he had gained some wisdom to share with other hamsters.

Bob opened the book on a blank page, dipped his quill in the ink and wrote with a steady hand:

*“A HAMSTER WHO SHARES HIS GRAIN
WITH NOT THE MOST DISGRACEFUL
GOPHER IS NOT A BAD HAMSTER”*

After that he blew on the drying ink and put the quill aside.



One day Bob entered the grain storage area of his burrow. He carefully examined the room and realized that this year his resources were melting away faster than usual. Bob began to worry. He clearly remembered the quote from the wise book which was even written in red ink:

*“THE GREATEST DISASTER FOR
A HAMSTER IS THE ABSENCE
OF GRAIN IN HIS BURROW”*

Thoughtfully the hamster crawled to the surface and sat down at the table. He had suddenly lost

his appetite and this was considered as a serious problem for hamsters. Just then he saw the gopher on his way. Bob didn't know what to do and began scratching his side. But this time the gopher came up to him and spoke first:

"Dear hamster!" he addressed him with respect. "May I invite you to come to dine with us today. My family really wants to meet you."

Bob's appetite immediately returned.

"Of course, I would be delighted dear gopher!" He replied trying to maintain the polite tone. "I'll definitely visit you this evening."

The gopher looked pleased and continued on his way. Bob started to brush his tail — you always need to look handsome when you go to visit.

In the evening Bob strolled down the road. Pretty quickly he reached the place where the gophers lived. At the entry to their field there was a big poster with a slogan: "A gopher who couldn't keep the slimness of his body is not a gopher but a fat hamster."

"Oh, they also have rules!" Bob thought in surprise, "But there are too many strange words for us, hamsters. I will definitely have to ask the gopher later what "slimness" and "fat" mean.

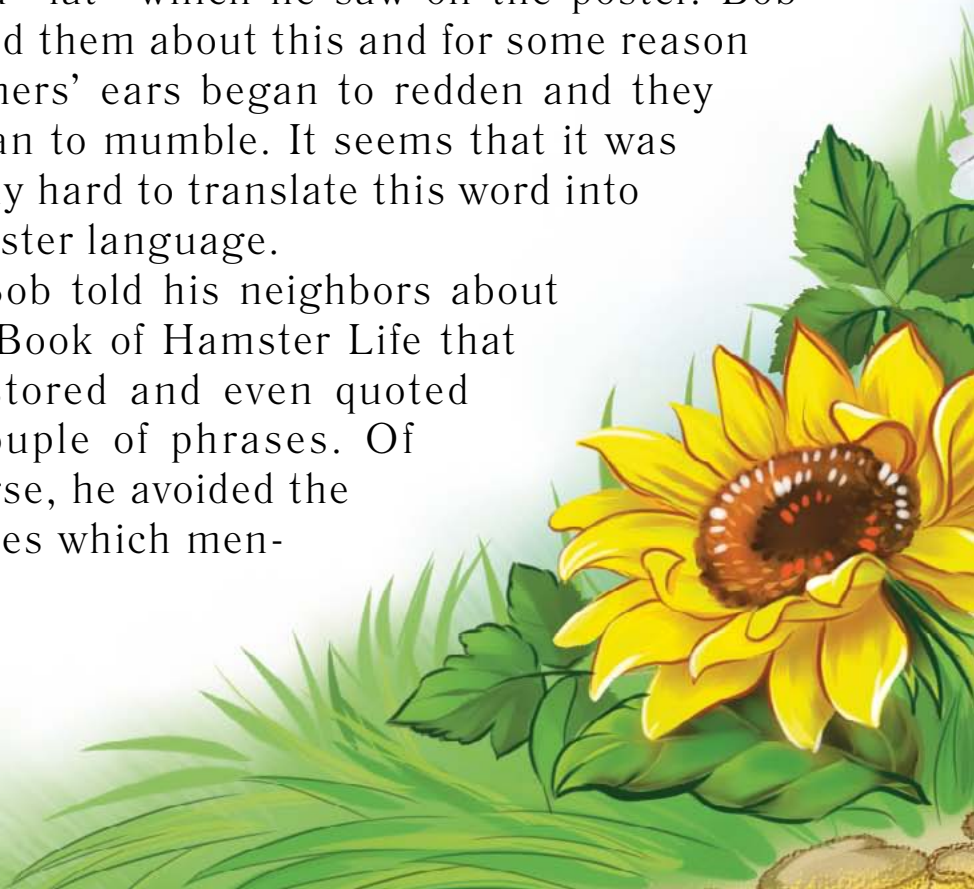
The hamster then made his way to the gopher's home.

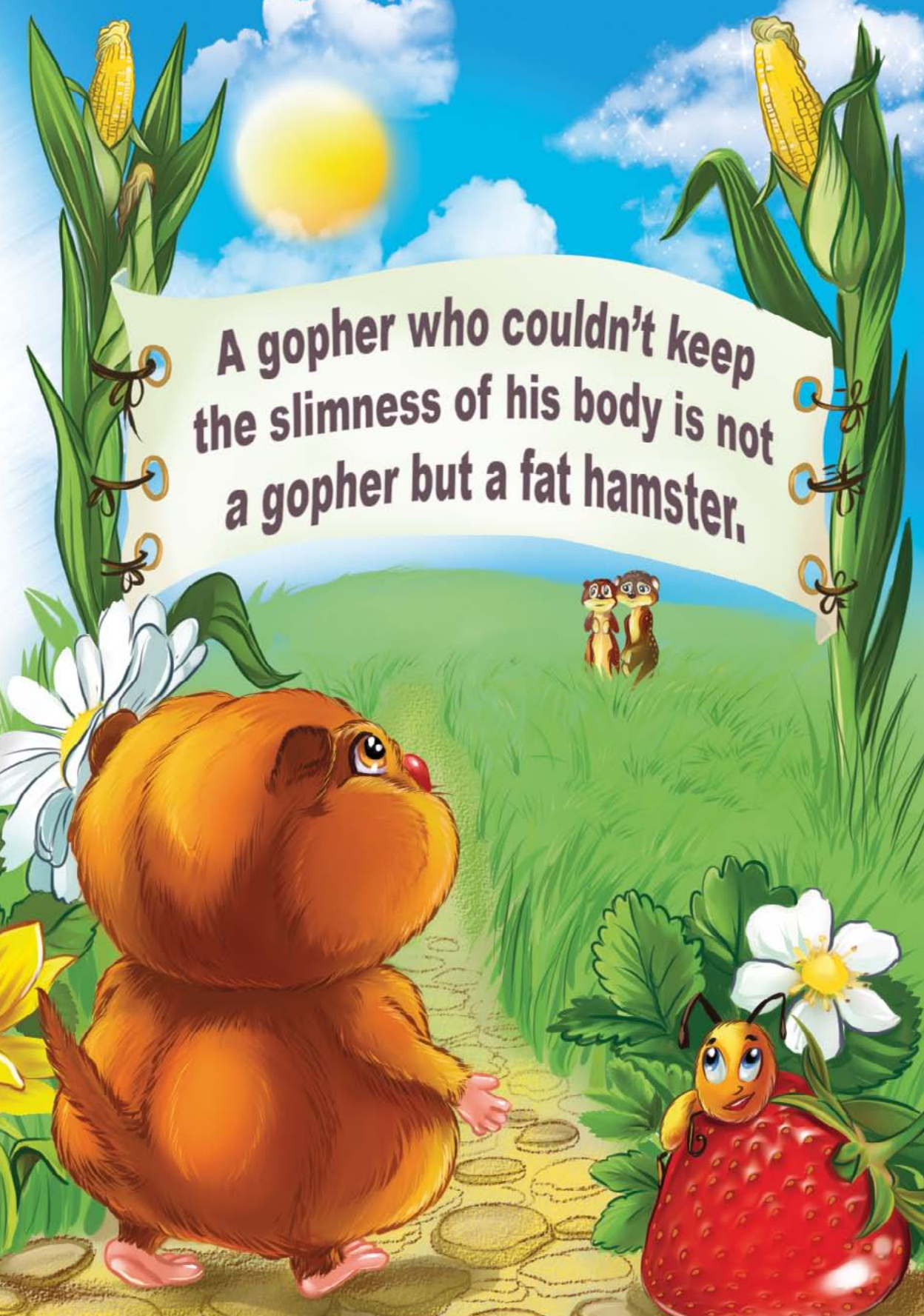


The whole family of gophers welcomed the hamster that day. Bob greeted all of them politely, starting from the oldest ones and ending with the youngest ones. Then they sat him at the table with a big pile of green pods on it. Bob tasted one of them and was pleased with a flavor that was new for him.

Little by little, Bob struck up a conversation with the older gophers and began to learn much about his neighbors. The only thing that he couldn't understand was the meaning of the word "fat" which he saw on the poster. Bob asked them about this and for some reason gophers' ears began to redden and they began to mumble. It seems that it was really hard to translate this word into hamster language.

Bob told his neighbors about the Book of Hamster Life that he stored and even quoted a couple of phrases. Of course, he avoided the quotes which men-





A gopher who couldn't keep
the slimness of his body is not
a gopher but a fat hamster.

tioned gophers. The hosts replied that they didn't have the Book of Gopher Life but they taught their children the main rules of gophers' behavior. Bob listened to some of them and found them quite reasonable. But one of the rules seemed strange for the hamster:


“LEGS FEED GOPHERS”

“What does it mean — legs feed?” he pondered. But thought over all it was an excellent evening! It seemed the gophers also liked the hamster because they gave him a big bag of those delicious green pods as a present for his journey back home.

The hamster was very happy on his way home and wondered what made his ancestors consider gophers disgraceful. They seemed very nice and hospitable to him. “Maybe there are some other kind of gophers” — he thought and finally put the question out of his mind.

In the burrow the hamster poured out the green pods near the grain in his storage. His resources were topped off and back to normal. Bob went out, sat at the table and opened his Book of Hamster Life. He read over his last entry in the book, thought for a little and then picked up his quill and put an exclamation mark at the end. Now he was absolutely sure that this thought was true.

A Long Journey

he hamster sat reading a letter from his distant relatives who lived in far off Australia — wombats. Wombats were the biggest hamsters in the world. In their letter they asked Bob to bring the Book of Hamster Life to Australia so they could read aloud the wisest thoughts of their ancestors.

Bob was lost in thought. Of course, he didn't have even the slightest desire to travel — the hamster didn't even cross the road without need. At the same time, he was the keeper of the book of all hamsters' wisdom and this imposed certain duties upon him.

The hamster gave a sigh and tried to eat some more grain just in case that would help. But it didn't help at all. His conscience prompted him to go on this long journey.

He took the letter in his paws again. The wombats wrote that they had already made an arrangement with the ship rats about his trip and they promised to carry Bob safely and soundly to Australia. The hamster only had to make his way to the closest river where the ships sailed. The ship rats promised to take care of the rest. Bob could only guess how much grain the wombats had to pay for such a service.



The hamster groaned and ate for a little bit and came to the only feasible conclusion — he had to set off on the journey. Next week the whole hamster field saw Bob off to the ship. He took a big bag of grain and the precious Book.

After three months, skinny Bob the Hamster came off the ship in the Australian city of Sydney where

some happy wombats welcomed him. He had made two new entries in the Book of Wisdom during his long trip. The first was:

*“A HAMSTER AND THE SEA
ARE NOT COMPATIBLE”*

and the second:

*“IF A HAMSTER THINKS
THAT HE CAN WIN GRAIN
FROM SHIP RATS, HE IS NOT
THE SMARTEST HAMSTER”*



Wombats were even bigger than Bob expected. When they happily began to greet him in a loud Australian manner, the fur on his snout stiffened a little. However, these giant hamsters turned out to be so kind and hospitable, that very soon Bob didn't pay any attention to their size. In fact, there were some advantages — for example, they allowed him to live in a burrow that looked like a great palace.

Every evening Bob read aloud to them from the Book of Hamster Life and added some modest comments.

The scene looked like this: Bob climbed on a big stone in the middle of a field and his giant relatives sat around. There were so many of them that the last rows couldn't even hear little Bob shouting.

That's why the hosts asked young Taggy the wombat with a ringing voice to help the hamster. Bob would then in his normal voice tell Taggy every-



thing that he wanted to say and Taggy repeated it very loudly. Sometimes he was so loud that Bob believed that many other dwellers of this field were listening to the Book — maybe, even if they didn't want to.

During the daytime the wombats took Bob for various tours to show him their country and its inhabitants. Bob's least favorite was walking with a kangaroo. Bob was a polite hamster and he liked to look into the eyes of those he was talking to. However, the kangaroo always jumped up and down and Bob's neck ached because of constant nodding.

However, he liked koalas very much. Even though they lived in trees and not in burrows Bob felt that they were his soulmates. They could compete with hamsters in relation to their appetite and slothfulness and even teach them a thing or two. A little later, Bob got to know them better and found out that they also had their own book of wisdom.

Bob flipped through a few pages of it and was impressed with the depth of thoughts entered and the unusual style of their narration. He really liked some of the quotes. For example:

*“THERE’S NO NEED TO RUSH —
WHAT CAN HAPPEN
TO ALL THE LEAVES?”*



and

*“THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND
THE MEANING OF LIFE
DO NOT HURRY”*





One day the wombats decided to take Bob on a tour around Sydney Zoo. Just for this they hired for the whole day a talkative kangaroo with a big pouch at the front for the hamster and his grain. The kangaroo was named Patty and she knew all of the inhabitants of the zoo very well.

That morning Bob woke up early and decided to take some exercise in order to get in shape. The first exercise was for the fluffiness of his tail. The hamster lay on his belly, quickly raised his tail and shook it. Bob did that exercise ten times and then sat on a chair. During his second exercise he blew his cheeks out intensely. This would help him keep a lot of grain in his mouth in the future. He did that ten times and finished. He couldn't think up a third exercise though he gave some serious thought to tail bows.

Soon Patty the Kangaroo hopped in. The wombats put the hamster inside her pouch and gave him lots of tasty food to last the whole day. In general, Bob liked to ride in the kangaroo's cozy pouch. Patty jumped quite softly so there was almost no bouncing in the pouch. At the same time, it was very convenient and interesting for him to look around. The kangaroo was telling Bob about the places

that he saw and the hamster enjoyed listening to the information while he munched on some grain from time to time. That's how they gradually made their way to the zoo.

There were so many animals in the zoo that Bob got confused. However, he remembered one cute kangaroo very well – it was a quokka from another part of Australia. Quokka's and hamster's snouts looked so alike that Bob waved his hand for a long time. Quokka looked very surprised when she saw her obvious relative in a kangaroo's pouch and waved back to him in reply.

Bob also gazed at the dreadful crocodiles which they saw through a glass fence. Not for anything in the world would the hamster read the “wisdom” in their Book of Crocodile Life.

Besides the quokka and crocodiles, a couple of ostriches and a big cockatoo and a parrot also made an impression on Bob. He tried to talk to the parrot but the parrot only repeated his words and changed them in a funny way.

All in all, it was a very interesting and informative day. Patty brought Bob home full of many different and pleasant impressions.

* * *

Little by little the wombats copied the Book of Hamster Life and after some time Bob was free to come back home. It didn't take him long to find a ship sailing in the right direction.



Almost all of Bob's new friends came to see him off. He said a warm goodbye to them, especially to Taggy because he had really become attached to him. They gave Bob several bags with tasty Australian yum-mies so he had everything ready for his trip. After some time, the ship gave a farewell honk and pulled out. The hamster saw a sea of fluffy paws all waving to him and so the long journey home began.




Even though Bob's return journey home took a bit longer, this time he emerged from the ship well-fed and with a very fluffy tail. Bob lost count of how many times the ship rats tried to persuade Bob to gamble his grain! But the hamster remembered very well his last entry in the Book of Hamster Life and never fell for their tricks.

He didn't get much wisdom from the sea rats during this trip either. Their only one clever rule was that "you should be the first to run from a sinking ship". Basically, the hamster didn't mind that rule but he replaced the word "run" to "leave very quickly" because he didn't like to run.

All the inhabitants of his home field came to the pier to greet the hamster, including his gopher friend. Bob came ashore with two bags of Australian yummys and happily looked around — at last, he was the same height as everyone else. It was so great that no one would constantly hop around or climb up trees in search of food.

Wisdom under the Shell

ob the Hamster again opened the letter that he had received from his old friend from the southern fields. Among other things that his friend had written was that he had recently become friends with his neighbors, who were turtles. As it turned out, they had their own book of wisdom which was many thousands of years old.

His friend had once managed to have a look in it and he wrote down what he had seen from memory. It sounded like this:

*“IF YOU THINK THIS IS THE TOP
AND THERE IS THE BOTTOM —
JUST TURN AROUND AND LOOK AGAIN”*

Bob couldn't think of anything else for days. Words with such insight and clarity were very rare. So the week went by but he couldn't get rid of his thoughts about the turtle's book containing such wise words.

Although Bob had a strong dislike of long journeys, his desire for true wisdom turned out to be stronger. So the hamster groaned a little and had a good meal before beginning to pack his things. He then set off for a long journey to visit the turtles.



The hamster reached the southern fields surprisingly quickly. By the end of the second day he was knocking on his friend's door. Bob had a rest after the trip, then a good night's sleep followed by a substantial breakfast before heading out to the turtles. His friend had explained to him in detail where they lived, how to get there and how to recognize the chief turtle who was the keeper of the Book of Turtle Wisdom.

When Bob reached the riverside he saw several turtles lying on the sand. He guessed at once who was the wisest of them — it was the turtle in the distance who was much bigger than his peers. Bob walked up close but not too close to him and sat down on the sand.

The turtle's flippers were sticking outside his shell but his head was inside. Bob wanted to attract his attention and coughed politely. Then once again and once more. But he could have been coughing next

to a stone with the same result. The turtle didn't react to his polite coughs. Finally, Bob raised his paw above the shell to give a knock when he heard a raspy, calm voice from within.

"Did you catch a cold on the way, dear hamster? I am a bit worried about your cough."

Bob put his tail on the sand and had no idea how he should reply to the one who was inside. A second later a turtle head with intelligent and happy eyes appeared from the shell.

"My name is Olos," the merry turtle introduced himself, "and yours?"

"Ah...my name is Bob, dear turtle," the hamster said politely. "Actually, I came to see you."

"No way!" Olos' eyes flashed cheerfully, "and what does a cute and well-fed hamster want from an old turtle?"

"Wisdom..." Bob started to speak, but he saw that the turtle had slowly pulled his head back into his shell.

"Hey, where are you going?"

"Well, just acquiring a little wisdom." Olos replied sluggishly, yawned and said, "If someone asks you about wisdom, the wisest thing you can do is to take a little nap."

Bob was stunned with surprise. Slowly and little by little he began to understand the meaning of the words that he heard and his tail started

to tremble in excitement. Wow! He had never heard such an unusual and interesting reply.

“Dear Olos!” Bob finally found something to say. “How can I learn your wisdom if you fall asleep?”

The turtle stopped pulling his head inside.

“Why do you need wisdom, dear hamster?”

The hamster answered the question immediately.



“Well, that’s simple. Because I want to be clever and wise.”

The turtle’s eyes flashed cheerfully.

“And what, dear hamster, will this wisdom do for your own happiness and joy?”

Bob opened his mouth but suddenly realized with horror that he had nothing to say in reply. The hamster sat down on the sand again. Indeed, what could he get from this wisdom besides the trembling of his tail and some feeling of importance? Importance which needed for... Bob could not finish this sentence. He thought about all sorts of different alternatives but deep in his heart he had already understood that he couldn’t answer this question.

“Dear hamster!” he heard the raspy and calm voice again. “Go home, have a rest and if you still think that you need this wisdom, then come back tomorrow morning. I will read to you everything that is written in the book by my ancestors.”

Bob looked carefully at this unusual turtle and then at the calm water of the river. He then nodded thoughtfully and walked slowly home towards his friend’s burrow.

In the morning he didn’t come back to the riverside.

That evening old Olos the turtle pulled his head out of his shell and stared at the fading sunset for a long time. Then he coughed several times in a funny

way trying to imitate the cough of his guest the day before. In his last effort the cough sounded very similar. The turtle laughed for quite a long time and said quietly addressing no one in particular:

“He was a nice hamster and a really wise one...” and pulled his head back into his shell.

Epilogue

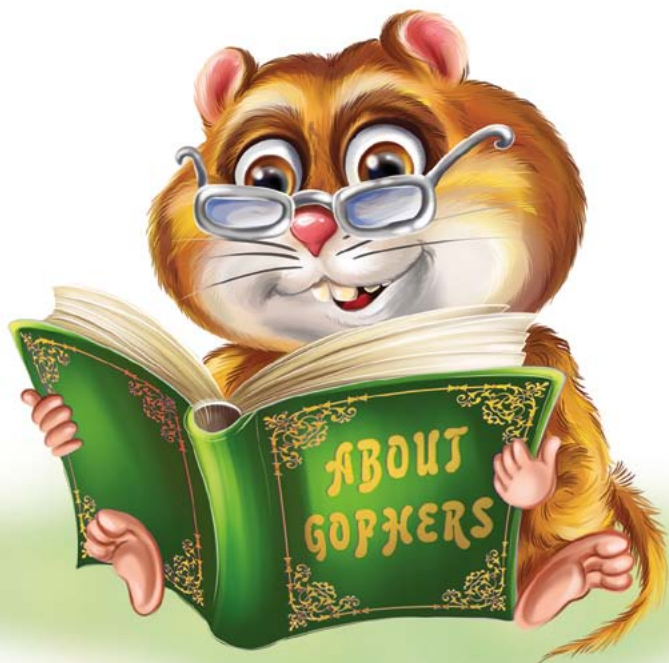
Bob the hamster was sitting at the table near his cozy burrow and eating his grain. It felt so good to be home. He had learned about so many different kinds of wisdom recently! Everywhere it was in a different form.

Bob had even become a little bit tired of it. He now sat on the grass, looked at the sun and waited for his gopher friend. He had saved several large pieces of grain for him.

The hamster didn't take the Book of Hamster Life into his hands for several days. He suddenly realized that there is not only wisdom in this world but there was also just a simple life. You could become the cleverest one in this world thanks

to wisdom, you could be very smart but all such wisdom did not lead to happiness. Now Bob knew that for sure. Only a simple and kind life leads to happiness.

Bob heard a slight noise, looked over his shoulder and saw the gopher on the road. Bob happily waved his paw and the gopher jumped with joy when he saw that his hamster friend was home. They both smiled happily.





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