

CHRISTMAS BLEND

JOEL MEGGS

Daryl started off his morning of last exams the way he always started his mornings, with two bags of M&Ms and three cups of Folgers Dark Roast. His exam had been at 9:00 a.m., same as mine. We – Daryl, Mike, and I – all hooked up at noon in the campus centre for a post-semester get together. Daryl showed up looking pretty wired. I asked him how his exam went.

“There’s never enough time. Three hours goes by like a half hour in those exams.”

“Did you finish all the questions?” I asked.

“Oh yeah. Though it was tight toward the end there. Luckily Dr. Warren gave me a few minutes to finish up.”

We wound our way through the line-up to the Burger King kiosk. Most of the time when we ate at the campus centre we ate light. Today we all king-sized our orders. Seats were scarce, as this was most students’ last day of exams, and a steady progression of the exam-fatigued staggered in weary eyed and took seats wherever they could find them.

“Shit, I forgot I had these with me,” Daryl said, drawing a bottle of Vivarin out of his knapsack. “I could have used one this morning.”

Mike was pretty astounded that Daryl would actually take stimulants. He examined the bottle up close, reading the label:

Vivarin: Do It All. Do It Right.

Directions: Adults and Children 12 years of age and older: take one tablet (200 mg.) not more often than every three to four hours.

Active Ingredient: Caffeine (200 mg.)

Warning: The recommended dose of this product contains about as much caffeine as two cups of coffee. Too much caffeine can nervousness, irritability, sleeplessness, and occasionally, rapid heartbeat.

The warnings went on in tiny font down the label.

“Twelve years of age!” Mike exclaimed. “What twelve year old is going to take this stuff? I can’t believe they think this is safe for twelve year olds! I can’t believe you take this stuff, Daryl!”

Mike was new, relatively speaking. He was from out west, and lived in the dorms here. Daryl and I had gone through high school together. We’ve known each other a long time, and it certainly doesn’t surprise me that he’d take those pills, especially not during exams. Daryl is the very definition of driven. Most of high school he was a goof, but in our final year he just turned it on – all nighters, cram sessions, studying on Saturdays. It was the most remarkable turn-around I’d ever seen, and it’s what got him into the Biology program. Now, of course, he has his eye on Med school.

I notice that Daryl’s foot is fidgeting rapidly beneath our table. He takes a huge bite of his Whopper with cheese and immediately washes it down with Coke.

“Believe me,” Daryl muttered, his mouth still full. “Those things have made a five percent difference in my average. At least! You don’t know. You guys are in Humanities. Science students have to memorize entire textbooks’ worth of knowledge. You guys just have to get the gist of it. In order to stay in the upper eighties, you have to sacrifice sleep; it’s that simple. They expect you to.”

“They expect you to jeopardize your health?” Mike asked.

Daryl took a minute to choke down more of his Whopper, cramming fries in directly after it. After a large and loud gulp, he spoke through the remnants in his mouth, “What jeopardize? It’s safe. It’s FDA approved. You drink coffee don’t you?”

“No, as a ...”

Daryl spoke right over him, “Well it’s just the same as drinking a cup of coffee, except all the time I would waste on brewing the coffee or running out to buy it, I save by swallowing these with water! They’re great. In fact, I think I’ll take a few right now.” Daryl emptied a few, I didn’t really see how many, and washed them down with a big gulp of his coke. Daryl never counted them either; he just did it to get a