



## 2 Night Life

For the rest of the day, I felt SAD-SAD-SAD.

‘You look sad, Humphrey,’ Golden-Miranda said when she was cleaning my cage right before lunch.

According to the chart Ms Mac had left, it was her turn to take care of me, thank goodness. Miranda was the best cage-cleaner and never said, ‘Yuck!’

She put on throwaway gloves, then cleaned my potty corner, changed my bedding, gave me fresh water and finally – oh, joy! – gave me fresh grain, some lettuce and mealworms. ‘This will make you happy,’ she said

as she slipped me the special treat she’d brought from home: cauliflower. Naturally, Miranda had good taste. I promptly saved it in my cheek pouch until I could store it in my sleeping house. Hamsters like to stash food for the future.

After my cage was taken care of, I felt well enough to observe Mrs Brisbane more carefully.

Now, Ms Mac was tall, wore bright blouses, short skirts and high shoes. She wore bracelets that jingle-jangled. She spoke in a loud voice and waved her arms and walked all around the room when she taught. Mrs Brisbane, on the other hand, was short with short grey hair. She wore dark clothes and flat shoes and she didn’t jingle-jangle at all. She spoke in a voice just loud enough to hear and sat at her desk or stood at the blackboard when she taught.

No wonder I was feeling drowsy after

**lunch. All that nice food and all that soft talking.**

**‘Is that all this hamster does – sleep?’ she asked at one point when she glanced over at my cage.**

**‘Well, he’s ‘turnal,’ replied Raise-Your-Hand-Heidi Hopper.**

**‘Raise-Your-Hand-Heidi,’ said Mrs Brisbane. ‘What’s “turnal?”’**

**‘You know. ‘Turnal. He sleeps during the day,’ said Heidi.**

**I was wide awake now. ‘Nocturnal,’ I squeaked. ‘Hamsters are *nocturnal*.’**

**‘Oh, you mean *nocturnal*,’ said Mrs Brisbane, almost as if she had understood me. She turned and wrote the word on the board. ‘Can anyone name another animal that’s nocturnal?’**

**‘Owl,’ said Heidi.**

**‘Raise-Your-Hand-Heidi,’ said Mrs Brisbane. ‘But that is correct. An owl is nocturnal. Anyone else?’**

**A voice shouted out, ‘My dad!’**

**Mrs Brisbane looked around. ‘Who said that?’**

**‘He did. A.J.’ Garth Tugwell pointed at A.J.**

**Both boys sat at the table nearest to my cage.**

**‘What about your dad?’ Mrs Brisbane asked.**

**A.J. squirmed in his seat. ‘Well, my mum always says my dad is nocturnal ‘cause he stays up so late watching TV.’**

**Stop-Giggling-Gail and a few other students sniggered. Mrs Brisbane didn’t crack a smile.**

**‘Her use of the word is correct,’ she said. ‘Though, technically, humans are not nocturnal. Any others?’**

**Eventually, the class came up with more names of nocturnal animals, like bats and foxes and opossums, and Mrs Brisbane said that the class would be learning more about animal habits later in the year.**



If she'd just look at me, she could learn a lot. But I noticed for the rest of the day that Mrs Brisbane stayed far away from my cage, as if I had a disease or something.

She read a mighty fine story to us in the afternoon, though. In fact, I couldn't get back to my nap afterwards. It was about a scary house and these scratching noises and ... a ghost! THUMP-THUMP-THUMP, the ghost came down the hall! Oh, I had shivers and quivers. I have to say, Mrs Brisbane knows how to read a story. Her voice changed and her eyes got wide and I forgot about her grey hair and her dark suit. To squeak the truth, my fur was on end! The story had a funny ending because it turned out the ghost wasn't a ghost at all. It was an owl!

At the end of the story, everybody laughed. Even Mrs Brisbane.

I was beginning to think that life with this new teacher wouldn't be so bad. But I changed my mind when the bell rang at the end of the day and all my classmates raced out of the room, leaving me alone with her.

She erased the blackboard and gathered up her papers. I could tell that we'd be going home soon.

Suddenly, I began to worry. What if Mrs Brisbane lived in a scary house with spooky noises and a thumping ghost?

Or, even worse, what if Mrs Brisbane had a scary pet, like a dog?

My mind was racing as fast as I was spinning my wheel when she finally approached and looked down at me, frowning.

'Well, you're on your own now,' she said.

With that, she closed the blinds and walked away. But I heard her mutter, 'Rodent,' under her breath.

**She left the classroom and closed the door. She left me alone. All alone in Room 26.**

**I had never been alone before.**



**As the room slowly grew darker and quieter, I thought back to the happy times at Ms Mac's flat. There were always cheery lights on and music and telephone-talking and ... Oh, dear, during the day I never noticed how the clock on the wall ticked off the seconds one by one very loudly. TICK-TICK-TICK. I was feeling SICK-SICK-SICK.**

**I wondered if there were any owls around Room 26. Or ghosts.**

**I tried to pass the time by writing in my notebook about Pet-O-Rama and my days at Ms Mac's flat. Writing took my mind off my jittery nerves. But eventually, my writing paw began to ache and I had to stop my scratchings. If only I could roam free,**

**as I had at Ms Mac's flat!**

**Then I remembered the lock-that-doesn't-lock.**

**It took only a few seconds to jiggle open the door. I skittered across the table. Then, grasping the top of the table leg tightly, I closed my eyes and slid to the ground.**

**Ah, freedom! I dashed along the shiny floor. I darted between the tables and chairs. I stopped to nibble a peanut underneath Stop-Giggling-Gail's chair. It tasted delicious and made the coolest crunching sound. I chewed and chomped and gnawed and nibbled. And when I stopped ... I heard the sound.**

**THUMP-THUMP-THUMP.**

**Just like the story Mrs Brisbane had read to us.**

**THUMP-THUMP-THUMP.**

**Closer and closer down the hall, coming towards Room 26.**

**Then RATTLE-SCRATCH. RATTLE-**



**SCRATCH.**

**THUMP-THUMP-THUMP.**

Suddenly, I longed for the protective comfort of my cage. I dropped what was left of the peanut and scampered back. But when I reached the table, I thought a terrible thought. I had slid down the smooth, shiny leg, straight down. But how was I going to climb up again?

I flung myself against the table leg, grabbed on and pushed UP-UP-UP. But I had made only a little progress when I began to slide DOWN-DOWN-DOWN. I was right back where I'd started.

The rattling grew louder. The sounds weren't coming towards Room 26 any more. They were coming in Room 26.

Just then, I noticed a long cord running down from the blinds.

Without hesitation, I leaped up and grabbed the cord and began swinging

back and forth. My stomach churned and I wished I'd never touched that peanut. But with each swing, I got a little higher off the ground. As soon as I saw the edge of the table, I closed my eyes and dived towards it.

Whoosh! I slid across the table and scampered into the cage. As I pulled the door behind me, I was suddenly blinded by light.

The something had turned on the lights and was clomping across the floor. It was huge and heavy and coming right towards me.

Just then, my eyes adjusted to the light and I saw the thing. It was a man!

'Well, well, who have we here? A new student!' a voice boomed.

The man was smiling down at me.

My, that was a lovely piece of fur across his upper lip. A nice black moustache. He bent down to peer in at me.

**‘I’m Aldo Amato. And who are you?’  
‘I’m Humphrey ... and you scared me  
half to death!’ I told him. But as  
always, all that came out was  
‘Squeak-squeak-squeak.’**

**Aldo squinted at the sign on my cage.  
‘Oh, you’re Humphrey! Hope I didn’t  
scare you half to death!’ he said with  
a laugh. ‘I’ve just come to clean the  
room. I come every night. But where  
have you been?’**

**He rolled up a big cart with a bucket  
and mops and brooms and all kinds  
of bottles and rags on it.**

**‘Oh, that’s right,’ he replied, as if we  
were having a real conversation. ‘Mrs  
Brisbane came back today. She’s a  
good teacher, you know, Humphrey.  
Been teaching here a long time. Wish  
I’d had a good teacher like her. Say ...  
do you like music, Humphrey?’**

**‘SQUEAK-SQUEAK-SQUEAK.’ I tried  
to tell him I love music almost as  
much as I love Ms Mac. Suddenly, a**

**song came blasting out of the radio  
on his cart and he set to work:  
sweeping, mopping, moving desks,  
dusting. But Aldo Amato didn’t just  
dust and mop. He spun and swayed.  
He hopped and leaped. He twisted  
and twirled.**

**‘How do you like the floor show?’  
Aldo asked me as he grasped the mop  
like a dancer holding his partner.  
‘Get it? It’s a floor show! ‘Cause I’m  
cleaning the floor!’**

**Then Aldo roared the biggest roar of  
a laugh I’d ever heard. His big  
moustache shook so much, I thought  
it might fall off.**

**‘You like that? I’ll show you real  
talent, Humphrey!’ Aldo Amato  
picked up his broom and very  
carefully stood it up with the tip  
balancing on one outstretched  
fingertip. It wiggled from side to side,  
but Aldo moved with the broom and  
managed to keep it balanced straight**



in the air for an amazingly long time. When he was finished, he bowed deeply and said, 'What do you think? I'm going to join the circus!' And he roared again.

Then Aldo wiped his forehead with a big bandanna and sat down at the table where A.J. usually sits. 'You know what, Humphrey? You're such good company, I think I'll take my dinner break with you. Do you mind?'

'PLEASE-PLEASE-PLEASE,' I squeaked.

Aldo pulled his chair right up to my cage.

'Hey, you're a handsome guy ... like me. Here ... a little bit of green won't hurt you, will it?' He tore off a piece of lettuce from his sandwich and pushed it through the bars. Of course, I hid it in my cheek pouch.

Aldo chuckled. 'Good for you, Humphrey! Always save something

for a rainy day.'

The two of us shared a very pleasant meal as Aldo told me about how he used to have a regular job where he worked during the day. But then his company closed down and he couldn't find a job for a long time. He couldn't even pay the rent when he was lucky enough to get hired here at Longfellow School. He was glad to get the job, but it's lonely working at night because his friends work during the day. They can never get together like they used to.

I tried to squeak to him about all the creatures, like me, that are also nocturnal and Aldo listened.

'I know you're trying to tell me something, Humphrey, but I can't tell what it is. Maybe you're just saying I'm not alone after all, huh?'

'Squeak.' He understood!

Aldo stood up and threw his rubbish into the plastic bag on his cart.

‘Well, I’ve got a lot of other rooms to clean, my friend. But I’ll be back tomorrow night. Maybe I’ll take my dinner break with you again.’

Aldo pushed his cart towards the door and reached for the light switch. ‘NO-NO-NO!’ I squeaked, dreading the thought of being plunged into darkness again.

Aldo stopped. ‘I hate to leave you in the dark. But if I don’t turn off the lights, I could lose my job.’

He clomped back across the floor to the window. ‘Tell you what. I’ll leave the blinds open a little. There’s a nice light right outside your window.’

After he turned off the lights and left, I chomped on the lettuce I’d saved and basked in the warm glow of the streetlight – and my new friendship with Aldo.

#### **TIP TWO**

Hamsters are not picky about their food and eat very little. Make sure to

feed your pet a wide variety of tasty foods.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of  
Hamsters*

**Dr Harvey H. Hammer**

#### **Task-please answer the following questions.**

1. Name three different things Humphrey ate in this chapter. Do you think he is a picky eater?
2. Why does Humphrey store food in his cheek pouch?
3. Why did Mrs. Brisbane leave Humphrey at school?
4. Why does Aldo Amato work at the school at night?
5. What 3 things made Humphrey happy at the end of this chapter?