



### 3 The Two Faces of Mrs Brisbane

That week was **BUSY-BUSY-BUSY**, but I learned a lot. I learned all the capitals of the United States. (I didn't say I remembered them all, but I learned them all.)

I learned about how water changes from solid to liquid to gas.

I learned how to subtract fractions.

I learned something else. Something very weird. There are two Mrs Brisbanes.

And I thought one Mrs Brisbane was one too many.

The first Mrs Brisbane is a good teacher, just like Aldo said. She's

better than Ms Mac was at getting A.J. to lower his voice. She's better at getting Heidi to raise her hand before she blurts something out loud.

Of course, nobody could get Speak-Up-Sayeh to raise her hand or to blurt anything out loud. Sayeh is so quiet and gentle, she never gives an answer. If the teacher calls on her, she stares down at her desk without saying a word.

But when it's Sayeh's turn to clean my cage and feed me, she holds me in her hand so gently, I feel like I'm floating on a cloud. 'Hello, Humphrey,' she whispers. 'Your fur is so beautiful.' I always feel calmer when Sayeh holds me.

She's so nice, I wish Mrs Brisbane would leave her alone. Ms Mac hardly ever called on Sayeh once she realized how shy she was. But Mrs Brisbane calls on her all the time. She won't leave her alone.

**‘Sayeh, speak up, please. I know you know the answer,’ she’d say while Sayeh stared at the top of her desk as if she were watching a TV show there. But I was shocked when Mrs Brisbane got annoyed with Sayeh – sweet, shy Sayeh – and said, ‘You will stay in during break.’ Sayeh still stared down without moving a muscle. But a minute later, I saw something wet drop from Sayeh’s eye to the tabletop. I hated Mrs Brisbane. Of course, I don’t go out to break. In fact, I’m glad, since it’s a great time to catch up on my sleep. So I was there when Mrs Brisbane talked to Sayeh. And I was all ready to squeak up on her behalf, if necessary. Mrs Brisbane brought a stack of papers to the table and sat down across from Sayeh. ‘Sayeh, you think I’m being mean to you, don’t you?’**

**Sayeh slowly shook her head. I heartily nodded my head, but no one was looking at me. ‘But I wouldn’t call on you if I didn’t know that you know the answers,’ the teacher explained. ‘Look at your essays and tests. You get a hundred per cent on everything: spelling, science, geography and arithmetic. Your vocabulary is excellent. But I have never heard you speak. Can you tell me why?’ I checked my notebook and I was quite impressed. I got only 85 per cent on the last vocabulary test. This girl is smart! Sayeh still did not speak. ‘Sayeh, I’m going to have to send a note home to your parents. Maybe they can help me work out what to do,’ said Mrs Brisbane. Sayeh looked up, very frightened. ‘No, please,’ she said. Mrs Brisbane looked surprised. She**



reached over and patted Sayeh's arm.  
'I won't send a note now ... if you'll promise to try.'

Sayeh looked back down at the desk and nodded.

'I'll tell you what. I won't call on you if you promise that some time within the next week you'll raise your hand on your own and answer a question. Is that a deal?'

Sayeh nodded, very slowly this time.  
'You have to say it,' Mrs Brisbane told her.

'Deal,' whispered Sayeh.

'Terrific!' said Mrs Brisbane, smiling.  
'Now, how would you like to erase the board for me?'

Sayeh jumped up and hurried to the board. All the students in Room 26 like to erase the board, for some reason.

Mrs Brisbane was certainly hard to work out. She hadn't been mean to Sayeh at all. She just did what a

teacher is supposed to do. I liked this Mrs Brisbane. I even liked the pink blouse she had on.

But at the end of the day when the students had gone, the second Mrs Brisbane came back. The really scary one.

She straightened up the room and came over to the window to close the blinds. I could only hope that Aldo would open them for me later.

She looked down and saw that the table around me was messy. The bag of shavings used for my bedding had torn and bits of litter were scattered all over the table. Garth had done the cleaning and left the lid off my treats box. The whole table looked untidy.  
'Good grief,' said Mrs Brisbane in a very unhappy voice.

I decided to take a spin on my wheel. Usually, that cheers up people. But not Mrs Brisbane.

She started to clean the table, getting

paper towels and cleaning spray and muttering to herself the whole time. 'Not my job,' she grumbled. 'These children are not responsible. All I need is somebody else to take care of. Some ... rodent!' Nobody says *rodent* quite the way Mrs Brisbane does. Then she looked down at me with angry eyes and said, 'You ... are ... a ... trouble ... maker. And somehow, I'm going to get rid of you!' Then she grabbed her purse and her papers and stormed out of Room 26. For once, I didn't mind being left alone. I didn't even mind the TICK-TICK-TICK of the clock. I was just GLAD-GLAD-GLAD that the second Mrs Brisbane had gone. I was worried about what she'd said, but I kept my mind occupied by practising my vocabulary words until the light was completely gone. (If Sayeh got 100 per cent correct, why

couldn't I?) Then I sat and waited. Suddenly, bright lights blinded my eyes as the door swung open and a familiar voice roared, 'Never fear – Aldo's here!' Aldo rolled his cart over to my cage and put his face right down next to mine. 'How's it going, Humphrey?' he asked. I tried squeaking out my story, but Aldo didn't quite catch what I was saying. 'Whoa, pal! Something's got your tail in a tizzy! Well, this should cheer you up!' Aldo reached into a brown paper bag, pulled something out and dangled it in front of my cage. 'Something to gnaw on, little buddy,' he said, opening the door. JOY-JOY-JOY! A tiny dog biscuit! One of Ms Mac's friends gave me one of those once. You can crunch on it



for ever.

**‘Ha-ha! Suddenly, there’s a smile on your face!’ Aldo beamed with pride. ‘Now I’ll clean this room really fast so we can eat our dinner together.’**



**I never saw anybody move as fast as Aldo. He turned the music up full blast. Then he mopped and polished and swept and scrubbed, while I nibbled and gnawed on my biscuit. When he was finished, Aldo pulled a chair up to my cage and took out his big sandwich.**

**‘You know, Humphrey, some folks might think I’m crazy, talking to a hamster. But you’re better company than a lot of people I know. Here ... have a nice salad. It’s good for you!’ He tore off a tiny piece of lettuce and pushed it through the wires of my cage.**

**‘Thank you,’ I squeaked.**

**‘You’re welcome,’ said Aldo.**

**‘So, what were we talking about last night? Oh, yeah. Loneliness. You know, I have friends, Humphrey. But during the day, when I’d like to do something – go bowling or to a movie or something – they’re at work. And when they want to do something, I’m at work. Of course, there’s the weekend, but I usually see my family, you know. My brother and his family, my nieces and nephews – I’ve got a big family.’**

**Suddenly Aldo bopped the side of his head with the palm of his hand.**

**‘Whoa, Humphrey. I never told you.**

**My nephew ... he’s in your class.**

**Richie Rinaldi. He sits over there.’**

**He pointed to the far side of the room. ‘He always has the neatest desk in the class. He’d better or he’ll hear from his uncle. Do you know him?’**

**‘Of course,’ I squeaked. Repeat-That-Please-Richie. One of the nicest boys**

in the class. But he mumbled a lot and usually had to repeat something two or three times to be understood. Aldo crunched his bag and tossed it into his rubbish bag. 'Well, I'm out of here. You know, they've got a frog in Room 16, but he's not good company like you are. He sings, though.' Sing! I'll sing for you, Aldo, I thought. 'SQUEAK-SQUEAK-SQUEAK!' 'Don't worry. I don't like him nearly as much as you, my friend,' Aldo said. He opened the blinds to let in the light. Just as he was going out of the door, Aldo said, 'See you next week, Humphrey!' Next week! A cold chill came over me. Tomorrow was Friday. When Ms Mac was in Room 26, she took me home for the weekend. But if Mrs Brisbane didn't take me home, I'd have two very long days and nights with no one – not even Aldo – to feed me or chat

with me.

Even worse, what if Mrs Brisbane did take me to her house? What fate would await me there?

I had plenty to keep me busy for the rest of the night: worrying about Mrs Brisbane and how she planned to do away with me. Ms Mac ... please come back!

#### **TIP THREE**

Hamsters enjoy a change in routine. Among their favourite activities are eating, grooming themselves, climbing, running, spinning, taking a nap and being petted.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of  
Hamsters*

**Dr Harvey H. Hammer**

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

1. Why does Humphrey say there are two Mrs. Brisbanes?
2. Why did Sayeh have to stay inside during break?
3. Why does Mrs. Brisbane want to get rid of Humphrey?
4. What tips have you learned so far about caring for hamsters?