



5 Plans Are Hatched

When Mr Morales went into the kitchen to get a glass of water, I carefully opened the lock-that-doesn't-lock and slipped out of my cage. I leaped over to the chair, then scampered down to the floor and hid in the corner, behind the long curtains.

Mr Morales returned and sat down again. The children were still thumping and bumping and were now screaming and screeching as well.

'Say, Humphrey, maybe you need some water, too,' he said and leaned towards my cage.

Mr Morales gasped when he saw that it was empty. 'Humphrey, where did you go? Oh, I should have known you'd escape! I'd run away from those kids if I could, too. But do me a favour, Humphrey. *Please come out!*' In a panic, he darted around the room. 'The kids in Room 26 will hate me if I lose you!' he said.

I felt sorry for Mr Morales, so I scratched around a little.

'There you are!' he said, bending down to look at me. 'Now, let's get you back in your cage.'

Not quite yet, I thought. He reached down to pick me up and I scampered forward, just a few inches past his hand.

'Don't do this to me, Humphrey,' he said. 'Cooperate.'

But I wasn't doing anything *to* him. I was doing something *for* him.

'Work with me,' he said, but this time to himself. 'Maybe ... hey, that's it!'

He looked down at me. ‘With your help, Humphrey.’

Mr Morales really swung into action then.

He raced upstairs. The thumping and bumping stopped. When he raced back downstairs, Willy and Brenda were with him.

‘Close all the doors, Willy,’ he said.

‘But, Dad,’ Willy whined.

‘Close them,’ his father repeated firmly. ‘Now!’ Willy closed all the doors.

‘You two scared poor Humphrey with your screaming and poking and thumping. We may never see him again!’ he told them.

Brenda burst into tears. ‘Humphrey’s dead!’ she sobbed.

‘No. Humphrey’s too smart for that,’ Mr Morales told her. ‘But he will run away if you two aren’t nice to him.’

RIGHT-RIGHT-RIGHT. You have to be pretty smart to be a headmaster.

‘Now, do you want to help me get Humphrey back?’

‘YES!’ the children shouted.

Mr Morales explained the plan. He said the only way they’d get me back in my cage was if they worked together. And they could work together only if they listened to him. Really listened.

They were listening now. And they kept listening, too. Because he told them the most important thing they could do was to be quiet.

So they were quiet.

‘I’m pretty sure he’s still in the room. Our job is to lure him back into his cage,’ Mr Morales whispered.

He put my cage in the middle of the floor. Then he went to the kitchen and got a handful of sunflower seeds. Willy and Brenda helped him make a trail of seeds across the floor leading up to the cage.

‘Good,’ said Mr Morales. ‘Now we

have to be very, very quiet and wait for Humphrey to pick up the seeds. But if you say anything or even move, you might scare him.'

'We'll be quiet, Dad,' said Willy.

Brenda agreed.

They all sat on the sofa.

'Do you think it will work?' Willy whispered.

'Of course,' Brenda answered. 'Dad's smart.'

Well, he's not the only one.

I waited for a while. After all, the Morales children needed all the practice staying quiet they could get.

When Willy got restless, I started skittering along the floor.

'I hear him!' said Brenda.

'Shhh,' said Willy.

I waited a few more seconds, then scrambled out of the corner and grabbed the closest seed. I could hear loud gasps from the children, but I pretended not to notice. I scurried

towards the second seed. This plan Mr Morales and I came up with was TASTY-TASTY-TASTY.

I could almost feel three pairs of eyes fixed on me, but I ignored them. I grabbed up the third and fourth seeds, hid them in my cheek pouch, then stopped right outside the open door of my cage.

Inside, Mr Morales had left a lovely pile of sunflower seeds.

It was nice to be free, but my cage was home, after all. Besides, until the day somebody fixes the lock-that-doesn't-lock, I can get out whenever I want.

The kids were still quiet, so I made a run for the cage. Mr Morales quickly closed the door and the children began to cheer.

'We did it!' said Brenda.

'Dad's the smartest man in the world!' said Willy.

'Hey, you kids helped. When we

cooperate and work together, we make a pretty good team,' Mr Morales told them.

'*Lo mejor!*' Willy agreed. 'The best!' Mr Morales squatted down and winked at me. 'Of course, Humphrey helped, too.' I'll say.



The rest of the weekend with the Morales family was fine. Sometimes the kids started interrupting their dad or mum, but Mr Morales just reminded them that they could be polite if they tried.

Willy and Brenda tried.

Mrs Morales sold a house (it turns out that selling other people's houses is her job), so they celebrated with pizza and ice-cream.

Brenda learned to hold me gently.

Willy even cleaned the poo out of my cage, which I appreciated.

Life is good, I thought as Mr Morales

drove me back to school on Monday morning.

Then I remembered Mrs Brisbane. And how she'd said I was a troublemaker and she was going to get rid of me.

'Humphrey, you are a true friend,' said Mr Morales as he carried my cage back into Room 26. 'I'll never forget what you did for me.'

As soon as class started on Monday, Heidi's mum came into the classroom and explained to everyone about taking me home on weekends.

'How many of you would be interested?' Mrs Hopper asked.

Every single hand in the classroom was raised.

Well, every hand except one: Mrs Brisbane's.

Still, it was a pretty good week.

I got 90 per cent on the vocabulary test. I'll bet Sayeh got 100 per cent.

But she still didn't raise her hand,

even though she'd promised.
And Aldo talked more and more every night. On Tuesday night, he leaned in close and asked, 'Humphrey, don't you ever wish you had a girlfriend?' Like most hamsters, I'm pretty much of a loner, so I really hadn't thought about it before. 'Not sure,' I squeaked. 'I would like one,' said Aldo. 'A really nice girlfriend.' I felt so sorry for Aldo, I squeaked extra loud when he performed his broom-balancing act for me. I was still thinking about him on Wednesday. After everyone had left, while there was still light coming in the window, I meandered outside the cage to help myself to any mealworms that Heidi might have left behind when she fed me earlier in the day. The table was covered with

newspapers and while I nibbled, I browsed through the news. All of life was there on the pages of the newspaper. Births and deaths. Lost pets (SAD-SAD-SAD). Funny jokes. Good news and bad news. Then there were the ads. My, there were so many shops. Not just Pet-O-Rama but Shoes-O-Rama and Food-O-Rama and Books Galore and Wide World of Tools! And there were other ads, too. One in particular caught my eye that afternoon. It read:

WORK NIGHTS? LONELY? WANT TO MEET
OTHERS WHO WORK NIGHTS?
THE MOONLIGHTERS CLUB
For people who work at night.
Meetings are held during the day on weekdays.
Hikes and outings to restaurants, parks, plays,
movies and much more!

There was a name and a phone number at the end.

I could hardly believe it. This was exactly what Aldo needed! I could already see him, smiling and happy, going to parks and plays with the Moonlighters Club and having a girlfriend.

But how could I get Aldo to read this ad? He'd probably just throw it away. Still, if I cut it out and left it in a place where he couldn't miss it, well, maybe.

Hamsters can't use scissors, but we have nifty teeth. It took me a while to nibble the whole ad out neatly, but I did a pretty good job. Then I stood the clipping up against my cage. Aldo couldn't help but see it if he looked at me, which he always did.

That evening, I was more anxious than usual for Aldo to arrive. When he turned on the lights, I squeaked, 'Hello,' right away.

'Greetings to you, my little friend,' said Aldo as he pushed his cart into the room. 'You sound like you have something on your mind.'

'You bet,' I tried to tell him.

He ambled over to my cage and leaned down to look in. 'What's happening, Humphrey?' he asked. I saw his eyes light on the scrap of newspaper.

'Hey, I can hardly see you.' He reached out and pushed aside the clipping.

'Read it!' I squeaked right out. Of course, he didn't understand.

He didn't even look at what the ad said. He just set it down next to the cage and leaned in closer.

I was squeaking a blue streak. 'Look at it now!'

'Calm down, Humphrey. I've got a treat for you,' said Aldo. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny bit of carrot. 'Your pal Aldo would

never forget you.'

My heart sank. You try to help a human and they don't even pay attention. But, as you know, I don't give up easily.

I squeaked happily while he balanced his broom on one finger, as usual.

But my mind was on the Moonlighters Club and how to get Aldo there.

After he left, I scrambled out of my cage, picked up the newspaper clipping and tucked it inside my notebook. Then I hid the notebook behind my mirror. If I didn't, somebody mean (like Mrs Brisbane) might throw it away.

I was still wondering what to do with it the next day when Mrs Brisbane rolled in a trolley with a big machine on it.

'This is the overhead projector,' she told the class. 'I'm going to use it for some map work.'

When Mrs Brisbane turned on the machine, a bright light was projected on to the wall. Then she placed a paper map on the glass and suddenly that map showed up really big on the wall. She could write on it and draw on it and you could see everything she wrote.

A machine like this could come in very handy, I thought.

So when Mrs Brisbane turned off the machine and sent my classmates off to lunch, I thought about that machine.

When A.J. cleaned my cage and changed my water and bedding, I thought about that machine.

I thought about it so hard, I suddenly came up with a REALLY-REALLY-REALLY good plan. But it would be difficult to carry out and dangerous as well.

TIP FIVE

If a hamster manages to escape his

cage, you can sometimes lure him back in with a trail of sunflower seeds.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of
Hamsters*
Dr Harvey H. Hammer

Task-please answer the following questions.

1. How did Humphrey help Mr. Morales?
2. Did Humphrey's plan work?
3. What kind of ad did Humphrey find in the newspaper? What is an ad?
4. Prediction: What do you think Humphrey's next plan is?