



6 Moonlight Madness

I waited until the school was completely quiet. No students, no teachers, no Mr Morales.

Then I got busy because I had a lot of work to do. Big work for a small hamster.

First, I took the Moonlighters Club clipping out of my notebook. Holding it in my mouth, I opened the lock-that-doesn't-lock and scurried across the table.

Getting down off that table was still a problem. I grabbed hold of the leg and slid down, as I've done before. It makes me feel a little queasy in my tummy. But it would be worthwhile if

I could get Aldo a girlfriend.

I hurried over to the big machine, which was very, very high off the ground. It seemed impossible for me to get up there, but I had it all planned out in my mind. Crawl up the waste-paper basket – oooh, I didn't know it would sway like that!

Leap over to the seat of Mrs Brisbane's chair. Whoa – slippery! Crawl up the rungs to the blackboard tray behind it. Along the blackboard tray to the bookcase. Then the hardest part: the dive from the bookcase to the overhead projector trolley. If you ever try it yourself, don't look down!

I was practically home free, but I still had to get up to the lit part. Still holding the newspaper clipping in my mouth, I grabbed on to a big screw sticking out of the side and hauled myself up. Then I reached up as high as I could and just barely managed to

touch the top. Good thing I've got big muscles, because I was able to P-U-L-L myself up.

I was there! It was like climbing Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain peak in the United States! (Ask Mrs Brisbane.)

I quickly pushed the switch. I wished I had some sunglasses, because I was suddenly surrounded by blinding light. It was like being inside a light bulb.

I took the newspaper clipping out of my mouth and carefully laid it on the flat glass. Then I looked up at the wall and ... NO-NO-NO! Up on the screen was a picture of a car and behind it there was jumbled up backward writing! I realized I must have laid the clipping on the glass upside down. I quickly turned it over and there it was: all the information about the Moonlighters Club right there on the wall with the outline of

the car behind it.

Aldo would be coming soon, so I hurried back to the cage. It was faster getting back, because it was mostly downhill until the very end, when I had to swing my way up the cord to the blinds and back to the table.

I was panting pretty hard by the time I closed the cage door behind me. I didn't even have time to catch my breath before Aldo swung open the door.

'Whoa! Who left that on?' he exclaimed as he entered. 'That thing could overheat.'

He hurried over to the overhead projector.

'Look at the wall! Look up at the wall!' I squeaked, but the words only sounded like hamster peeps.

Aldo didn't waste a second. He flicked off the machine. All that work for nothing!

But then a funny thing happened.

Aldo turned the machine back on and looked at the wall. 'What's this?' he muttered. 'Why did Mrs Brisbane have this up here? Hey, nice car!' He squinted up at the screen. 'Look, Humphrey. The Moonlighters Club. For people who work at night, like me.'

And me, I thought. I was still quite exhausted from all that effort.

Aldo stared at the big ad on the wall for a while. Then he turned off the projector and went to work and never mentioned it again.



Yes, I was annoyed. I had failed, but at least I had tried, which was more than I can say for one of my classmates. Yes, Sayeh Nasiri. With my own furry ears, I had heard her promise Mrs Brisbane that she would raise her hand in class. But so far, she'd been as silent as a statue. Her week was almost up. Even though I'd

scolded her the day she fed me, she paid no more attention to me than she had to her teacher. You should really listen to your teacher. Even Mrs Brisbane.

And you should always listen to your hamster.

I was worried about Aldo and about Sayeh. But I have to admit, my journey had been so tiring that – nocturnal or not – I slept soundly for the rest of the night. The next day began in a very surprising way.

'I have something to share with you all,' Mrs Brisbane announced. She held up a postcard with a picture of colourful parrots perched in lush green trees. 'A postcard from Ms McNamara.' (Mrs Brisbane would never call her Ms Mac.) 'It says: "Greetings to my favourite class in the world, Room 26! I am now working in a school here in Brazil. This country is beautiful and

friendly. I really enjoyed talking with the parrots in the rain forest. I miss you all, especially my pal Humphrey. Lots of love, Ms Mac.”

(Mrs Brisbane had to say Ms Mac since that’s the way the card was signed.)

HAPPY-HAPPY-HAPPY! Not only did Ms Mac remember me, she missed me most of all. Oh, and I missed her most of all, too. Especially every time I looked at Mrs Brisbane and she glared back at me.

Mrs Brisbane showed us Brazil on the map and it’s far away. I’d like to be that far away from Mrs Brisbane. My head was so filled with memories of Ms Mac that I got only 75 per cent on my vocabulary test.

After we marked the tests in class, Mrs Brisbane said, ‘If you got one hundred per cent on the test, please raise your hand.’

That woke me up. What a clever way

to get Sayeh to raise her hand.

Because she always got 100 per cent.

A.J. raised his hand. Art raised his hand.

Sayeh just stared down at her desktop.

I was starting to get really angry with her.

When it was time for map work, Mrs Brisbane clicked on the overhead projector and there it was: the Moonlighters Club ad right on the wall. Mrs Brisbane wrinkled her nose, picked up the paper and looked at both sides. Then she held it up to the light and I think maybe she noticed those tiny holes my teeth had made when I carried it over there.

Mrs Brisbane looked over at my cage and wrinkled her nose again. Then she crumpled the paper and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

She’s smart, but she is also *mean*.

She’s not the only one. While she

went on with her map work, Wait-for-the-Bell-Garth Tugwell started making some *very rude* noises. Mrs Brisbane didn't even turn round. When someone started giggling, she just said, 'Stop-Giggling-Gail.' So Garth's rude noises got louder and even ruder. And a lot of other kids giggled along with Gail. Suddenly, the teacher spun round to face them. 'Very well. The whole class will stay in during break for extra vocabulary words,' she announced. Everybody groaned. 'It's Garth's fault,' said Heidi. 'Raise your hand,' Mrs Brisbane snapped back. 'You will all stay in during break. *Unless* the person making those noises wants to step forward and admit it.' Nobody said a word, but everybody glared at Garth, including me. 'Okay, I did it,' he said.

'Raise your hand,' Heidi whispered loudly. 'Very well, Garth. You, Heidi and Gail will stay in during break,' the teacher said firmly. Heidi and Gail protested until the bell rang, but all three of them stayed in during break. Instead of making them do extra vocabulary words, though, Mrs Brisbane let them rest their heads on their desks. *After* she had lectured them about their behaviour, of course. All this commotion had made me a little hungry, and, for some reason, I hadn't been fed yet. So I decided to squeak up for myself. Mrs Brisbane turned and pointed at me angrily. 'I don't need any trouble out of you, either,' she said. Heidi raised her hand. 'I don't think he's been fed today,' she said. Mrs Brisbane told Garth to feed me. Then she dismissed the girls and told

them to go outside and play for the rest of break.

So she wasn't completely mean to them, anyway. She even trusted Garth to be alone in the room while she took some papers down to the office.

I'd always liked Wait-for-the-Bell-Garth, so I was surprised when he started grumbling at me as he filled the water bottle and put some fresh mealworms in my cage.

'One of these days, you'll get in trouble, too,' he said. 'I'll see to that.'
'Huh?' I squeaked.

'Everybody hates me. Everybody loves you. You're just a rat in disguise.'

The words hurt me a lot. Why would Garth say that? I mean, yes, almost everybody does love me, but I don't make rude noises and get other people into trouble.

I was still pondering Garth's

behaviour when my classmates returned to Room 26. Mrs Brisbane must have calmed down during the break, because she greeted them with a smile. 'I have a surprise for you,' she told the kids.

Surprises always get the class's attention. They think surprises are always good. However, I know that surprises can sometimes be bad, like the day Ms Mac left me for ever.

'We're going to pick who gets to take Humphrey home for the weekend,' she explained. 'Now, you all know whether your parents gave permission for you to bring him home. So, if you'd like Humphrey this weekend, raise your hand now.'

HEY-HEY-HEY. You should have seen all the hands that went up. I could hardly believe my eyes.

Miranda and Heidi and A.J. and ... Every single hand in the class, except Garth's. Even Sayeh Nasiri raised her

hand.

Mrs Brisbane noticed.

‘Sayeh, do you think it will be all right with your parents?’ she asked.

Sayeh nodded her head.

‘I can’t hear you,’ said Mrs Brisbane.

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Sayeh.

It was strange to hear her voice in the classroom. Mrs Brisbane gave her a note to bring back from her family on Friday.

I napped for the rest of the afternoon, but whenever I woke up and glanced over at Sayeh’s desk, I saw her doing something I’d never seen before.

Smiling.

TIP SIX

You can leave your hamster alone for a day or two. Otherwise, find a suitable caretaker, or, if possible, take your hamster with you. In its own cage, a hamster can be very portable.

Guide to the Care and Feeding of Hamsters

Dr Harvey H. Hammer

Task-please answer the following questions.

1. Describe what Humphrey did to get Aldo to notice the newspaper clipping.
2. What was Mrs. Brisbane’s surprise for the class?
3. Who got to take Humphrey home for the weekend?
4. Prediction: What do you think Garth has planned to get Humphrey in trouble?

