



8 Tricks and Treats

**Hallow-Een. Or Hollowin'. Or
Howloween.**

**I wasn't sure what it was, but I was
pretty sure I didn't like it.**

**Especially on Monday night, after
Mrs Brisbane turned out the lights.
That's when those skeletons on the
wall took on an eerie glow.**

**The bats hanging from the ceiling
began to whirl and twirl.**

**And the smile on that ghastly orange
pumpkin face looked more like a
wicked smirk.**

WEIRD-WEIRD-WEIRD.

**So I was thrilled when Aldo flicked
on the lights.**

‘Whoa. It looks like Halloween in here,’ he exclaimed as he wheeled in his cleaning trolley. He strolled over to my cage as usual and bent down so we were face-to-face.

‘So, are you going to wear a costume for Halloween? It’s on Wednesday, you know. Halloween is when the ghosts and goblins come out to play,’ he explained.

‘Eeeek!’ I squeaked.

‘No, no, it’s not scary. It’s just fun. All the kids will wear costumes. Richie’s going to be a werewolf. So what are you going to wear? A fur coat?’ He laughed at his own joke, then began his cleaning routine, talking to me as he swept and dusted.

I started thinking about this costume thing. Ms Mac had a costume party once while I was staying with her. People dressed up like kings and pirates and ghosts, and Ms Mac dressed up like a clown with a

sparkly pink wig and a funny face.

Nobody wore a fur coat.

I thought about this costume thing all night and the next day.

When Garth threw a piece of rolled-up paper in my cage, I wondered about the costumes.

When A.J. tripped on his way up to the blackboard and Gail didn’t giggle, I wondered about the costumes.

Even when Mrs Brisbane called on Sayeh and she answered her, I wondered about the costumes.

And I came up with a plan of my own.



On Wednesday, Halloween arrived.

But there were no costumes. I was extremely disappointed until Heidi blurted out, ‘Mrs Brisbane, when are we going to have the party?’

‘Raise-Your-Hand-Heidi,’ the teacher told her.

Heidi obediently raised her hand and Mrs Brisbane called on her. This

time, when Heidi asked her question, Mrs Brisbane said, 'We will have our lessons this morning. After lunch, you may put on your costumes and we'll start the party.'

I felt HAPPY-HAPPY-HAPPY and took a nice nap for the rest of the morning.

But I was wide awake after lunch. My classmates returned from the canteen, then scurried off to the cloakroom and the bathrooms and returned. But I hardly recognized them in their costumes.

Oh, they were wonderful! A dragon, two pirates, a princess, a ninja, two clowns, a ballerina, a bunny, a cat (thank goodness not a real one), a football player, a mad scientist, a skeleton, the Statue of Liberty, an angel and a devil!

Two parent volunteers came to help with the party. They were both dressed as witches. Still, Mrs

Brisbane was the scariest of them all. She didn't wear a costume – just a badge that had the words 'This IS my costume' printed on it.

She gathered everyone in a circle, pushing back all the tables. Then she announced that the class would be having some treats. But in order to get them, they each had to do a trick: tell a joke, sing a song or perform a trick for the rest of the class.

Oh, I wish someone had told me. I had figured out the costume part, but what about this tricking for treats?

Art (the ninja) stood on his head. He stood on his head for so long that Mrs Brisbane finally had to thank him and tell him it was someone else's turn.

Gail (the ballerina) twirled around the room on her toes. Garth (football player) told a joke about a witch.

Miranda (bunny) sang a funny song about your ears hanging low. It was

all very entertaining, except for the fact that I was thinking about something else.

But Mrs Brisbane got my full attention when she called on Sayeh, who was dressed as the Statue of Liberty. She wore a flowing dress and had a crown on her head and a big cardboard torch in one hand. She stared down at the floor as she took her place in the centre of the circle. 'What trick will you do for us, Sayeh?' the teacher asked.

Sayeh still stared at the floor.

'Sing your song, Sayeh! Sing!' I squeaked out as loudly as I could.

'You can do it, Sayeh. Sing!'

Yes, I know all she could hear was

'Squeak-squeak-squeak,' but I did my best.

'I think Humphrey wants to hear from you,' said Mrs Brisbane in a surprisingly friendly voice.

Suddenly, without warning, Sayeh

began to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in her clear, sweet voice. Everyone stood up right away, like you're supposed to when they sing the national anthem. Mrs Brisbane put her hand over her heart and the other kids did, too. Well, Pay-Attention-Art didn't until his mum came over and whispered in his ear. I stood up, too, as proud as a hamster could possibly be.

When it was over, no one clapped or said a word. It seemed as if those sweet notes were still drifting around the room.

'That was lovely, Sayeh. Thank you for sharing your beautiful voice with us,' Mrs Brisbane said.

I wish she'd speak that way to me some day. Nice. Encouraging.

Friendly.

Anyway, the tricks continued. And after A.J. told a few riddles, Mrs Brisbane looked around the circle

and said, ‘Did I miss anyone?’

This was the moment I’d been waiting for. No one had noticed, but the night before, I had sneaked one of Aldo’s white dusting cloths into my sleeping hut. I had to act quickly. I pulled out the cloth and crawled under so it completely covered me. Then I stood up and began to shout like I’d never shouted before.

‘Trick or squeak!’ I cried. ‘Trick or squeak!’

Miranda noticed first. ‘Look!’ she yelled. ‘It’s Humphrey!’

I wish I could have seen the faces of my classmates, but it was DARK-DARK-DARK under the cloth. I could hear them, though. First there were gasps, then giggles, then shouts of ‘Look!’ and ‘Humphrey’s a ghost!’ I continued to squeak my heart out until I heard Mrs Brisbane’s firm footsteps coming towards my cage. ‘Who did this?’ she asked. ‘Who put

that on Humphrey?’

No one answered, of course. Not even me.

‘He could suffocate under that,’ she said.

‘But he looks so cute,’ Heidi called out.

Mrs Brisbane didn’t answer. She just said, ‘Will someone please uncover him?’

Golden-Miranda opened the cage door and whisked away the cloth.

‘Humphrey, you are a riot,’ she said.

Only a riot? Let’s be honest here: I was a smash hit!

Then the two parent volunteers served up cupcakes with orange icing and cups of apple juice, and my classmates played games.

Just before the bell rang, Mrs Brisbane clapped her hands and made an announcement. ‘Mrs Hopper and Mrs Patel and I have consulted with one another. We have

decided to give the prize for Best Trick to Sayeh Nasiri.'

Everyone clapped and cheered as Mrs Brisbane handed Sayeh a blue ribbon. Sayeh looked over at me and smiled a beautiful smile.

Mrs Brisbane continued: 'And we have decided to award the prize for Best Costume to ... Humphrey.'

She walked over to my cage and taped a big blue ribbon to it while my classmates cheered for me.

'Thank you,' I squeaked, but I'm not sure anyone could hear me over all the noise. 'Thank you all.'

The bell rang and the room was soon empty, except for Mrs Brisbane. As she gathered up her papers to take home, Mr Morales came in. He was dressed in a cap and gown like people wear when they are graduating.

'Happy Halloween, Sue. Did you have a good party?' he asked.

'Very,' she answered. 'Somehow your

friend over there got hold of a ghost costume and won the prize.'

'See? I told you he'd add a lot to your classroom,' he said with a smile.

'He *has* livened things up,' said Mrs Brisbane.

JOY-JOY-JOY! I believed she was starting to like me. 'Just as long as he doesn't liven things up too much,' she added.

Poof. My hopes of winning over Mrs Brisbane's heart crashed to the ground.

Mr Morales said his kids kept asking about me and then he quickly left.

Mrs Brisbane headed out of the door after him.

There I was, all alone in Room 26 with a bunch of half-torn bats and tattered skeletons hanging around me.

As I waited for Aldo to arrive, I sat in the darkening room and pondered my job as a classroom pet. Had I

really accomplished anything? Mr Morales's children seemed to settle down when I was there. Sayeh's mother began to learn English. And Sayeh would probably never have sung in front of the class without my encouragement.

Still, Mrs Brisbane was not won over. Neither was Garth Tugwell, although it seemed as if he had liked me well enough in the beginning. Now he always muttered things at me as he passed by my cage.

I noticed that he was the only one in class who didn't cheer when I won the award for Best Costume.

I was still worrying about Garth when the lights temporarily blinded me as Aldo sailed into the classroom, yelling, 'Trick or treat!'

He was wearing his usual work shirt, dark pants and heavy shoes. But on his face he wore huge glasses with a bulbous nose attached. The centre of

the glasses had giant eyeballs painted on with circles of red veins. His floppy moustache drooped out from under the nose.

'Great costume,' I squeaked.

'Hey, what's this?' Aldo rushed forward to examine my blue ribbon.

'Best Costume? For a fur coat? I'll have to ask Richie about that,' he said.

Aldo reached into his lunch box and pulled out a juicy slice of apple.

'I've got a special Halloween treat for you, Humphrey. 'Cause I'm very, very happy tonight,' he said.

I grabbed the apple and began nibbling as Aldo pulled his chair up close to my cage.

'You see, I went to the Moonlighters Club. You remember, the club in that ad I found on the projector?'

I squeaked an excited 'Yes.'

'And I met a really nice girl there, named Maria. She works all night at

the bakery. So tomorrow, we're going out on a date. Lunch and a movie.'

Aldo leaned back in his chair.

'She's a really nice girl. Pretty. Nice.

Did I tell you she works in a bakery?'

Aldo rose and paced back and forth in front of my cage.

'You know what I can't work out? I can't work out how that ad got on that projector. Mrs Brisbane wouldn't show that to the class. And she wouldn't be interested herself. And it was weird how the projector was left on. Mrs Brisbane always leaves her room in shipshape condition.' He paused to rub his chin, then looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

'You know, if you weren't locked up in a cage, I'd think you had something to do with it,' he said. Then he laughed. 'Well, whoever it was, I owe them a big thank-you.' 'You're welcome,' I squeaked.

Too bad Aldo didn't understand me this time.

TIP EIGHT

Hamsters are most active during the evening.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of
Hamsters*

Dr Harvey H. Hammer

Task-please answer the following questions.

1. What did the students have to do in order to receive their treats?
2. What trick did Sayeh do?
3. Who didn't cheer when Humphrey won Best Costume? Why?
4. What good news did Aldo have that night?