



14 Hide-and-Go-Squeak

Apparently, the day after Thanksgiving, humans do two things: eat leftovers from the day before and go shopping.

Mr Brisbane didn't go shopping, of course. But Mrs Brisbane left early in the morning, after telling Mr Brisbane that there were plenty of leftovers for him in the refrigerator. So there I was: stuck with old sourpuss. And all he did was sit in his wheelchair, looking unhappy.

I'd much rather have been hanging out with Headmaster Morales or chatting with Sayeh's family. I could have been tricking Miranda's dog,

playing cards with A.J.'s family or watching Aldo balance a broom on his finger. But no, I was watching a sad and grouchy old man act sad and grouchy.

I could have just settled in for my nap, but I remembered what Mrs Brisbane had said. This man had to get out of his cage. 'Out of your cage!' I squeaked out loud without realizing it.

'Quiet, you little rat,' Mr Brisbane growled at me. Then he wheeled over to the front window and stared out. Okay. If he wasn't going to get out of his cage, then I'd get out of mine. Because I had a new plan.

Mr Brisbane didn't notice me open the lock-that-doesn't-lock. He didn't see me scamper out of the cage, across the table and on to the couch. He wasn't aware that I leaped down to the floor. He didn't even think about me until I stood in the middle

of the living room and said, 'CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!'

I know he only heard me squeaking, but I definitely got his attention. He was as surprised as could be to see me there.

'How did you get out? And how am I ever going to get you back in?' He rolled towards me. 'Come on, whatever-your-name-is. Let's get back in the cage.'

I let him get just close enough to reach me. He bent forward, cupping his hands. But just as he reached out to grab me, I dashed over to the opposite side of the room.

'You little rat,' he said. 'You can't outsmart me.'

He rolled over to the cupboard and took a baseball cap off a hook. Again, he approached and I let him get almost within arm's reach. This time, he raised the baseball cap and said, 'Okay, fella. Let's play ball.'

'We'll see about that,' I squeaked as I hustled off to the living room.

We quickly established the rules of the contest: 1) I would stay out in the open, in places he could reach in his wheelchair; 2) he would use his cap to capture me.

If he could.

Once he reached the dining room, I rushed into the den.

'Oh. Think you're clever? We'll see who's clever,' he challenged.

From the den, I scuttled over to the hallway. By now, Mr Brisbane's cheeks were pink and he was almost smiling. 'You're smart, but you won't win this one!'

This time, I let him get that cap within a whisker of capturing me, just to keep the game interesting. Then I scurried back to the living room. But before he followed me, Mr Brisbane slammed the bathroom, bedroom and guest-room doors. Aha!

He was limiting my range of possibilities. Pretty cunning. In the living room, I decided to make a bold move. I hid under the couch. Then I let Mr Brisbane stew for five minutes.

‘Come here, Humphrey. You’ll have to come out sooner or later,’ he called. And I thought he didn’t know my name.

He shook the curtains and pushed the chairs to see if he could rouse me. Too bad he didn’t think of using sunflower seeds like Mr Morales did. Yum!

I finally got kind of bored, so I made a dash for the dining room. Mr Brisbane followed and this time I let him scoop me up in the cap.

‘I win!’ he shouted triumphantly. He was beaming with pride as he stared down at me. ‘But you were a worthy opponent.’

He put me back in my cage and I

scrambled into my sleeping house. I have to admit, the game had made me a little drowsy.

I don’t think it was very long before Mrs Brisbane returned, carrying several shopping bags full of packages.

‘What happened, Bert?’ she asked when she saw her husband.

‘Nothing,’ he said.

‘But your face is all rosy. You look different. And you’re wearing a baseball cap,’ she said.

‘Sit down, Sue,’ he answered. ‘I’ll tell you all about it.’

He told her every detail of our match, chuckling and swinging his cap back and forth.

‘I guess there are some things I can still do,’ he said. ‘Now, how about a game of gin rummy?’

Mrs Brisbane was almost speechless.

‘Okay,’ she said, starting to get up.

Mr Brisbane waved her away with his

cap. 'I'll get the cards. You just sit.'

As he wheeled into the den, Mrs Brisbane turned to me and quietly said, 'Thank you, Humphrey.'

Mr Brisbane didn't frown for the rest of the day and evening, except when Mrs Brisbane beat him at cards. The next morning, which was Saturday, she couldn't even find her husband. 'Where could he be?' she asked me. 'He hasn't left the house in months!'

A minute later, he came into the house from the garage, his lap full of boards and bricks and things. 'I've got an idea for our friend Humphrey,' he said.

Mr and Mrs Brisbane spent most of the rest of the day building an obstacle course on the coffee-table in the den. They lined up boards along the side (so I couldn't stray too far) and then they set up things for me to climb over and duck under, like bricks with holes to hide in and big

cardboard tubes, and Mr Brisbane constructed a series of ramps for me to climb. Oh, we had a wonderful day. Mr Brisbane got out a stopwatch to time me on my runs and they made bets on how long it would take me to get from start to finish. Mrs Brisbane even added a few treats to the maze: bits of apple and biscuit. I had FUN-FUN-FUN. The Brisbanes did, too. I could tell.

On Sunday afternoon, the Brisbanes invited their neighbours over to watch me run through my maze. Mr and Mrs Robinson brought along their five-year-old twins.

'Glad to see you looking so chipper,' Mr Robinson told Mr Brisbane. 'I think he's finally feeling better,' Mrs Brisbane whispered to Mrs Robinson.

Mr Brisbane looked a little vinegary again on Monday morning, though. 'Why can't we keep him here, Sue?'

he asked.

‘The children would never forgive me,’ she told him. ‘He’s really their hamster. But ...’ She grinned. ‘There’s a two-week Christmas holiday coming up soon. I think Humphrey had better spend it here.’

Could I believe my cute, furry ears? She liked me so much, she actually wanted me to come back? This was a whole new Mrs Brisbane. One who liked me.

By the time Mrs Brisbane and I returned to Room 26, I was pretty tired. But it was a good tired and I knew I could rest after my weekend during morning break.

TIP FOURTEEN

Hamsters should be let out of their cages to run in a closed environment for an hour or two at a time.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of
Hamsters*

Dr Harvey H. Hammer