

COMPETING FOR LOVE
Written for Hearts United for Animals
by Allison Hunter-Frederick © 2008

Cast of Characters:

Pedro: a male Chihuahua from a puppy mill

Hopper: a female rabbit whose feet got injured by a wire cage as a pet

Sprinter: a male hamster

Val: a female alley cat

Incognito: a male mouse born with a deformed leg

Midnight: a female Black Labrador retriever pup

Act I

(Pedro runs onto stage, whirls around and barks, and then dances in one spot.)

PEDRO: I'm going to get adopted! I'm going to get adopted! I'm going to get adopted!
(Instantly all animals gather to listen except Midnight who will make a later appearance.)

HOPPER (jumping up and down, clumsily due to foot problems): Who's going to adopt you?
When will they adopt you? Will we meet them? (Flops on backside.) How wonderful for you!

SPRINTER: I'm not surprised. The daily healthy meals and walks you've gotten from the shelter keepers have improved your physical shape. (Bows with a flourish of the hands.) Of course, Pedro, I hope that you'll give all of us some credit too. We did help you stick to your diet. We also encouraged you to exercise beyond your daily walks. And you did! We're proud of you!

VAL (leaning into Sprinter's face): Really? Who are your proudest for? Pedro? Or you?

SPRINTER (sighing): Val, why do you even bother to hang around us? You're always so negative and arrogant.

VAL (sauntering): I'm hanging around to find out more about Pedro's adoption. Hey, it's not everyday someone is interested in adopting one of us.

HOPPER (jumping up again): Then let him share! Come on Pedro! Give us details.

(Pedro looks the other way as if hurt, but also glances back regularly to see reaction.)

PEDRO: Oh, I don't know. You all seem more interested in bickering than hearing my news.
(Taps front toes.) Maybe I'll wait to share until I find someone really interested.

VAL: What do you know? The ferocious puppy mill dog has developed a sense of humour.
(Whispers quietly to just Pedro.) I'm not going to beg to hear.

HOPPER (pleading): I want to hear!

INCOGNITO (quietly): Me too.

PEDRO (leaning forward and talking fast): Okay, here's the story. There's this young couple who are looking for a playful dog. They took me out to the fenced play area. They threw toys to fetch. They ran around with me. They even liked my dance. (Pedro gets up on hind legs, swirls, and taps in one place.)

SPRINTER: Ah-ha! See, they liked Pedro because he could play. (Crosses his arms with an air of importance.) We helped in *that* area.

VAL: So? Anyway, there's more to an animal than physical health. There's emotional health too.

SPRINTER: If one is in physical shape, one is likely to have more energy and stamina and therefore be happier and better able to handle adverse situations.

VAL: Then you've failed. I often hear Pedro crying at night.

SPRINTER: Is this true, Pedro? Why are you still so sad?

PEDRO (shrugging): Sometimes I miss my family. (Runs around and barks.) It doesn't matter. I have a couple that loves me! (Sits.) The shelter keepers keep telling me I have improved so much in how I interact with animals and people. (Hangs his head.) You know when I first came here, I growled at all of you. I acted the same with my first visitors too. Like Sprinter said, you've all helped me adjust. Now I'm going to get adopted! (Dances.) Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

(Hopper claps paws. Then he clumsily dances too.)

HOPPER: Whee! We're so happy! You've got owners.

INCOGNITO (stuttering): Wh-en is the b-big day?

PEDRO (shrugging): I don't know.

VAL: Ouch!

HOPPER (growing still): You don't know?

PEDRO: Should I?

(All the other animals look at one another. No one speaks, but instead look at the floor.)

PEDRO (hesitating): Incognito, why should I know?

INCOGNITO (quivering): I-if y-you d-don't k-know, th-they pr-pro-ba-bably do-don't kn-know.

PEDRO: They spent the morning with me. They said they liked me. (Shakes head.) I don't believe anything is wrong! They're going to adopt me.

SPRINTER: They might still adopt you, but first they have to sign paperwork. Until then, they're just considering you, but haven't chosen you. Sorry to give you bad news.

VAL: Yeah, that's *my* job.

(Pedro peers into the distance. Hopper creeps up to Pedro and gently puts paw on his shoulder. Pedro brushes Hopper to side and starts to growl. Hopper starts to cry.)

PEDRO (straining forward): There's a dog with my couple!

MIDNIGHT (bounding onto stage): I met the nicest couple!

PEDRO (lunging): You stole my owners! I hate you!

(Val jumps between the two dogs, turns to face Pedro, and hisses. Both dogs skid to a stop.)

VAL: I'll scratch your eyes out if you attack Midnight.

MIDNIGHT (peeking around Val): I didn't steal your owners. The couple I met don't have any plans to adopt me. They're expecting a baby. They want a little dog. I'm too big. (Pauses) They also want a young dog. Sorry.

(Other animals mutter apologies and disperse.)

MIDNIGHT: Hey, we haven't met. Hi. I'm Midnight. I was born at this animal shelter.

PEDRO: I'm Pedro. I was rescued from a puppy mill. Sorry I attacked you. I have trust issues.

Act II

(Midnight and Pedro race onto stage. They chase one another, throw toys at one another, and bark to get the other to continue play. Then they flop to the ground exhausted, with tongues out and loud pants. Seconds later, they're up again to play.)

SPRINTER (darting into the middle of them): Hey, is this a game just for two or can I join?

MIDNIGHT: All our friends are always welcome to play!

(Sprinter races about dodging their paws. The other animals join in the play too. Then Pedro suddenly stops and runs to the side of the stage. Midnight runs after him.)

MIDNIGHT: Come join us, Pedro!

PEDRO (shakes head): I heard the shelter keepers call my name.

(A voice is heard offstage calling both the names of Pedro and Midnight.)

MIDNIGHT (perks ears): I hear my name too!

(Both dogs wag their bodies and then race off the stage. The other animals gather and chat.)

HOPPER (clapping paws): They have more visitors! Maybe they'll both get adopted!

VAL (taunting): Hopper, how many times have visitors come to see you?

HOPPER: Lots and lots!

VAL (still taunting): And how many times have you gotten adopted?

HOPPER (crying): None.

SPRINTER (pushing Val): What did you have to upset him for?

(Val knocks Sprinter to his back and holds him with her paw.)

VAL: Do not EVER hit me. (Val releases Sprinter.) As for Hopper, he makes me sick. He has so much hope!

INCOGNITO (quietly): Hope is all we have.

SPRINTER (sitting up): I agree.

PEDRO (running back on stage): I hate her! Midnight stole my chances again at getting adopted!

HOPPER (yelling through tears): You're going to get adopted! Someday you will! We all will!

PEDRO (diving under his blanket): No, I won't! No one will ever want me! She is young, playful, and cute! I'm just an aging ferocious puppy mill dog.

SPRINTER (petting blanket): You're not ferocious. You just get upset easily, because you learned at the puppy mill *not* to trust. All of your friends here know that you're caring and fun. Besides, it's not a competition. You'll both someday get adopted.

(Pedro pushes Sprinter who falls off the blanket. Sprinter crawls over to a corner. There, he sits paws on chin and looking dejected. Incognito crawls next to Pedro and sits in silence with him.)

SPRINTER: Pedro, why do you cry at night?

(Pedro crawls to the other side of the blanket and then pops his head out.)

PEDRO: Do you know one of the shelter keepers has talked about adopting me?

(The other animals gather around again.)

PEDRO: But she already has a dog. Will it hate me because she loves me? And how will she be able to love both of us? She's small. I don't think her lap is big enough for two dogs. Besides, I don't want to share her lap! I don't like her other dog. I want the lady all to myself!

SPRINTER: Pedro, it really isn't a competition.

INCOGNITO: D-did you stop li-liking us wh-when you be-became friends with Mid-midnight?

PEDRO: How could I stop liking all of you, just because I meet someone new? (Sits up and clenches paws.) And remember she isn't my friend anymore!

INCOGNITO: Sh-she's a dog li-like you.

PEDRO: So? I can still like you too.

SPRINTER: Don't you think humans can like more than one of us too?

PEDRO (sighing): I suppose. But they don't. I'm still here.

VAL (flicking tail in Pedro's face): And so are we. What makes you so special?

(Pedro laughs. Midnight returns. Everyone looks expectantly at her. She shakes her head. They all gather around to hug her, except for Pedro who buries himself under his blanket again.)

MIDNIGHT (flopping beside Pedro): Pedro, aren't you sad for me?

PEDRO (kicking a toy from underneath his blanket): I didn't have a chance with you around! You betrayed me.

VAL (climbing on top of the blanket): Pedro, we're all in competition against each other for adoption, but we're also friends. This is how it works. Get over it.

MIDNIGHT (pleading): Pedro, I want to be adopted too. But, I'd also just love if you got adopted. Can't you feel the same for me?

PEDRO (nodding): I'm sorry you didn't get adopted.

CURRICULUM IDEAS:

1. Research the six animals presented in the play. Decide which one you want to adopt. Write a letter to that animal telling it the good news.
2. Research the six animals presented in the play. Decide which one you would not want to adopt. Write a letter to that animal telling it the bad news. Remember, animals at shelters are often rejected, which means you need to break the news as gently as you can.
3. Visit or look online at animal shelters. Research the procedures for adopting an animal. With a partner, act out the parts of a keeper and visitor. The keeper will explain adoption procedures, while the visitor will ask questions about it.
4. Survey your classmates to find out what their trust issues are. Write a story about how an animal might overcome that fear. Suggested reading: *The Pinballs*.
5. Write a list of all your good and bad points. Imagine you had to convince your parents to adopt you. What would you say to them?

(PLAY EXTENSIONS)

1. Research the emotional needs of dogs. Then write a third act in which after getting adopted, Pedro has to overcome his trust issues.
2. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities for the two portrayed dogs. Then write a third act about how Pedro handles the news that Midnight gets adopted.
3. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities for the six portrayed animals. Rewrite the play to have Midnight as the star character and Pedro being the supporting character.