

SPRINTER'S FOOD FESTIVAL

Written for Hearts United for Animals
by Allison Hunter-Frederick © 2009

Cast of Characters:

Sprinter: a male hamster

Belcher: a male red-legged California frog

Incognito: a male mouse born with a deformed leg

Pedro: a male Chihuahua from a puppy mill

Cracker: an Amazon parrot whose girlfriend Polly lives in the rainforest

Val: a female alley cat

Act I

(Sprinter scurries onto stage carrying a box of cereal. He lays it down, leaves, and returns with his paws full of vegetables.)

BELCHER (hopping beside him): You look like a hamster on a mission. My kind of hamster!

SPRINTER (nodding eagerly): I just tasted the best treat! (Spreads out vegetables.) Now I'm going to make it again.

BELCHER: Do you need help carrying in food?

SPRINTER: Sure! I'm too small to carry everything at once.

INCOGNITO (dragging leg): Ca-an I help?

PEDRO: How about me?

SPRINTER: Sure! The quicker I carry in all the ingredients, the sooner I get to make my treat again. (Others follow.) Hey, would you all like to try my treat too?

ANIMALS: Yes!

(Sprinter and other animals return with various ingredients: Sprinter carries a bag of assorted seeds. Belcher carries a package of crackers. Pedro carries a peanut butter jar. Incognito carries a bag of sliced cheese.)

CRACKER (swooping down and landing in front of animals): What are you all doing? You look like you're having a picnic. Am I invited?

SPRINTER (laying down his bundle): The keepers made the best treat for me! Now I'm going to make more of it. Sure, you can join us. I'm making enough for everyone.

(Other animals lay down their ingredients too. Sprinter scans the items and the group.)

SPRINTER: Hey, this is going to be so much fun! I'm so excited. You'll all get to try the best treat I ever ate. It's going to be my favorite. Maybe it'll be yours too. Oh, I know it will. It's the best treat in the entire world!

(Val comes onto stage. She stretches and then meows with an irritated tone.)

VAL: What's all the confounded noise?

CRACKER (grabbing a vegetable and taunting): Sprinter found a new snack! A tasty sensation! A delight to beat! (Drops a vegetable on Val's head.) Try it! You'll like it!

VAL (flinging vegetable at Cracker): You did that to annoy me, didn't you? Well, it won't work. I'm my own lady. I make my own moods. Anyway, Sprint, what's this great treat that we're all partying about?

SPRINTER (putting hands on hips): Well, V, as soon as a certain lady stops all her confounded yakking and lets me concentrate, I'll start making it.

BELCHER (raising voice and speaking firm): Hey, hamster with a recipe, where do we start?

SPRINTER: First, we all need a cracker.

(Belcher hands a cracker to everyone. As he hands the extras to Sprinter, Cracker grabs one and gobbles it down. Sprinter stares at him.)

CRACKER (looking repentant): Sorry, Sprinter, I've got to live up my name. How do you think I got it? I like to eat crackers. Well, I also like to crack people up. (Dances like a clown.) So, let's eat and laugh. (He quiets as the rest of the animals stare at him too and shake their heads. He bows his head.) Okay, I'll be good. What goes on the crackers?

SPRINTER: Peanut butter. It's the spread. The rest are the toppings.

VAL (looking disdainfully over toppings): No meat! Don't like! Good bye! (Val sticks her tail in air and struts off stage.)

PEDRO (opening the peanut butter): Um, I need a knife.

(Cracker flies off stage and returns with a plastic knife. He hands it to Pedro.)

PEDRO (spreading peanut butter on crackers): I've never eaten peanut butter. It smells strong.

ANIMALS (gathering eagerly around treat): What's next?

SPRINTER (hoisting bag of seeds above head) Seeds! Lots of them! (He sprinkles them on

crackers with flourish.)

CRACKER (impatiently tapping claws): This looks and smells *too* good! I want to eat!

BELCHER (grumbling): Isn't whining and begging beneath you?

CRACKER: When food is at stake? (Shakes head.) No!

INCOGNITO (quivering): I-I am an-an-xious too. Wh-what's next?

SPRINTER (bowing): Vegetables, if you please! (He daintily spreads them over treats.)

PEDRO: Are you sure?

SPRINTER: Oh yes! And to crown the treat, Incognito, would you cover the vegetables with cheese?

(Incognito lays cheese atop the vegetables.)

SPRINTER: Add more! Add more!

(Incognito obliges.)

PEDRO: I can still see the vegetables.

SPRINTER: That's okay! They're good for you and they taste great!

(When Incognito finishes and sits, the animals look at Sprinter and wait.)

SPRINTER: I want to thank all of you— (Cracker starts to nibble his treat. Sprinter gently bats him. Cracker sits and waits too.) Just kidding! I'm not going to give a speech. Everyone eat!

(The animals try their treat. Belcher and Pedro put down half-eaten pieces. Others finish.)

BELCHER (clearing throat): I normally eat bugs and worms, but thanks for sharing your treat.

PEDRO: Yeah, I didn't care for the vegetables, but maybe without them?

INCOGNITO: May-maybe sub-substitute fr-fu-fruit?

PEDRO (shrugging): Sure, that might work.

SPRINTER: Hey, I think in one variation the keeper used dog biscuits instead of crackers.

PEDRO (wagging tail): Now that would be worth a try!

SPRINTER: I could customize everyone's treat! Incognito, would you like fruit?

INCOGNITO: Berries, please!

VAL (jumping between animals): And meat for me!

Act II

(Sprinter is in a kitchen. On the walls are signs with names of animals. Under each sign is a pile of ingredients.)

SPRINTER (yelling): Would everyone join me in the kitchen?

(Sprinter hands each animal a treat as they enter. Animals stand around awkwardly holding treats, chatting quietly, and waiting for instructions.)

SPRINTER: Everyone eat!

(Animals eat. Sprinter leans against the stage wall and shuffles his feet as he awaits reactions.)

BELCHER (stepping forward and shakes Sprinter's paw): That wasn't bad. What was in it?

SPRINTER: Worms. House fly pate. And assorted bug legs.

(Animals stare at each other and then at the remains of treats they hold. Val spits on the ground. Then she leaps on Sprinter.)

VAL: Tell me one reason I should spare your life.

SPRINTER (staying still): Because yours was made of crackers, tuna, and chicken.

VAL (sitting back, but still atop Sprinter): Go ahead, I might listen.

SPRINTER (whispering hopefully): And because I have a recipe for liver cookies.

PEDRO (shoving Val off Sprinter): Out of my way, cat. Did you say liver cookies?

VAL (hauling Sprinter by his tail): I'm not eating dog food. What else you got?

SPRINTER (yelling hopefully): Mackerel stew!

VAL (releasing tail): Okay. I might save your life.

SPRINTER (standing up and brushing himself off): Just to reassure everyone, I made each snack unique. No one except Belcher ate worms and bugs. You all ate what you like. Pedro, you had dog biscuits. Incognito, you had berries. And like I said, Val had almost all meat.

VAL: And you want a medal?

INCOGNITO: How a-about we ju-just say th-thank you?

SPRINTER (bowing): You're welcome! I'm also going to teach each of you how to make a unique meal too. So, Val, how about some respect?

VAL (sticking her butt into his face): As you wish, respect for the hamster with attitude.

ANIMALS: Val!

SPRINTER (handing out recipes): I'll help each one of you make a special meal that you will like. No, you'll *love* it, because it contains your favourite ingredients. I've a spot designated for each one of you. If you go to your spots, I'll help you make your meal.

(All animals go to spots and start looking at their recipe and the ingredients except for Belcher. He hops back and forth the kitchen, peering about, but without stopping at a spot.)

SPRINTER: Belcher, can I talk with you for a minute?

BELCHER (hopping to him): Yes.

SPRINTER: Um, I couldn't find any recipes for frog food. Would you mind just helping out?

BELCHER (saluting): You can count on me!

SPRINTER (hugging): Thank you! Now I'm going to get everyone started.

(Incognito tries to pour one bag of seeds into a bowl. Seeds miss the bag.)

SPRINTER (heading to Incognito): Incognito, I picked out a seed mix for you. You're going to mix oats, barley, corn, sunflowers, nuts, and kibble. And I can see you've already started.

(Belcher jumps beside them and helps Incognito with the bag.)

BELCHER: I just realized I don't know how to make recipes. But, I can help lift and mix and clean and whatever else you need.

(Other animals call for help.)

SPRINTER: Sounds great! Incognito, I got to go help someone else, but I'll be back. Until then, follow the recipe and keep mixing seeds.

(Cracker sits nibbling at his ingredients.)

SPRINTER (running up to him): Your ingredients will taste even better if they're mixed. So, stop eating them! Okay, you're going to make ambrosia. To do that, you're going to mix all kinds of fruits. (Hands an apple to Cracker.) Start slicing your apples.

(Other animals call for help.)

SPRINTER (running up to Val): Val, we're going to need to fry your fish.

VAL (yawning): Isn't that kind of dangerous, given that I'm falling asleep? Really, what cook makes their customer wait for hours? For that matter, why are we making our own meals?

SPRINTER: Belcher will help you fry your fish when it's ready. First, you need to cut it into flakes. So, start chopping!

(As the other animals call for help, Sprinter runs back and forth and finally retreats to a corner and sits. Animals keep calling for him. When they don't get an answer, they start calling instead for Belcher. He hops from animal to animal, but then he quits too and sits with back to animals.)

BELCHER: I don't know how to cook. I'm done. We need Sprinter.

PEDRO: He'll be back, I'm sure. Until his return, how about we dance? (Animals groan.) Hey, isn't having fun better than being mad?

CRACKER: He's right! (Pops another grape into mouth.) Let's eat! (Taps claws.) And dance!

(All animals dance and laugh except Val. She sneaks away and finds Sprinter.)

VAL (pushing Sprinter): Hey, you don't get to be the lazy one here. You've run a marathon. And now you're holding a cooking party. If anyone gets to be lazy, it's me. I'm a cat. But, first I want food. And, apparently, I need to make it. I don't know why you thought that was a brilliant idea, but that does mean you don't get to run away and sit on your rear. So, get up!

SPRINTER (turning away): Go away! I can't help everyone. I can't do this. You're right. It's not a brilliant idea. Are you happy? You get to be right. So, go burn yourself on a hot mackerel.

VAL: I never do anything to get hurt. I am not about to start by getting burned. I am Valerie the Beautiful Cat from California. No, I am not happy. I am hungry. And I want food. And you're going to help me or I will eat *you*. As for the rest, they're your friends. They're happy to dance while they wait. Well, I don't dance.

BELCHER: Hey, is everything all right here? Sprinter, we've been missing you.

SPRINTER (rising to feet): Yeah, I just needed a break. Belcher, would you help Val get her fish fried while I check on everyone else to see what they need?

BELCHER (saluting): Sure, you can count on me!

Act III

(Animals are all on stage. They're sighing contentedly and holding their stomachs.)

VAL (leaping on Sprinter): This is your fault!

SPRINTER (groaning): Val, not the stomach. It hurts.

VAL: Hey, when I'm done, nothing will hurt. Because you won't be alive!

SPRINTER (trying to push Val off): Oh, stop the dramatics, and tell me what I did!

VAL (pointing to her stomach): This is bigger since I started eating your food. You made me fat. And I cannot be fat. I am Valerie the Beautiful Cat from California.

CRACKER: Beautiful! Spectacular! Extraordinaire! (Pretends to weep.) Whatever will we do now that you've lost one of your names?

BELCHER (hopping to one side of Sprinter): Val, let him be. Get off him.

VAL: And you're going to make me?

CRACKER (hopping to the other side): No, but the two of us will.

VAL (glances sideways at each): So, the two of you don't care about your weight, huh?

INCOGNITO: E-even I ga-gained some weight, but hu-hurting Spr-Sprinter wo-won't change me ex-cept make me n-not a nice animal.

VAL: I'm not a nice animal.

INCOGNITO: Y-you could try.

VAL: Um.... No.

SPRINTER (squirming to get loose): We just need to exercise.

VAL (tightening her grip): Yuck.

PEDRO: We could dance.

CRACKER (bobbing): I like to dance.

VAL: Well, I don't.

BELCHER: Me either.

SPRINTER: We could run.

PEDRO: I'd rather dance.

VAL: How about you all go dance? That way none of you will notice when I get rid of the hamster. (Sighs) Of course, I'll still be fat. Thanks, Incognito, for taking the fun out of that plan. (Val jumps off Sprinter and kicks him away from her.)

INCOGNITO: Wh-what are we go-going to do?

SPRINTER (clasping paws timidly): Maybe we just need to exercise until we lose weight? Everyone can do their own thing. Pedro and Cracker can dance. I can run. And everyone else can, I don't know. What do you like to do for exercise?

CRACKER: Thing is, I don't know if I like dancing enough to lose weight. I mean, how long will this take? We're going to need to eat less too. I don't know if I have enough will power. I hate this. Sorry, Sprinter, but this doesn't feel good.

INCOGNITO: We c-can all help ea-each other.

VAL (pacing): I've changed my mind. I want the hamster. It'll make me feel good.

(Sprinter runs in the opposite direction of Val. She takes off after him. Everyone else takes off after her.)

SPRINTER (stopping and panting): Can't breathe.

VAL (tapping him): Well, you're it, and so you better run!

(Animals skid to a stop, tumbling over one another. They look at one another, then at Sprinter, and then at Val who is running in the opposite direction. Then they turn and run the other way too. Sprinter stares after them. He catches his breath a few times. Then he takes after them too.)

SPRINTER: Hey, I've been in a marathon. I can't be it. I'm going to get one of you. And you're going to be it. Not me!

CURRICULUM IDEAS:

1. What is your favourite snack? Find a recipe on how to make it. Try it at home with adult help. Then explain how you would teach your classmates how to make this snack. Do not just provide directions on how to make your chosen recipe. Tell how you would teach more than one person at one time to make a snack.
2. What is your favorite meal? Find out what ingredients you dislike or have allergies to and then create recipes with variations to suit those particular needs.
3. Poll the class to find out what foods their animals like and dislike. Create a Venn diagram to show which foods just some pets like, which foods some pets dislike, which foods all pets like, and which foods all pets dislike.
4. Imagine you are in charge of a weight loss class. How would you help individuals lose weight?

PLAY EXTENSIONS:

1. Research recipes for animals. Pick out alternative recipes for the featured characters.
2. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities of the six featured characters. Rewrite the first act with a different main character.
3. Read the HUA descriptions of the personalities of the characters not featured. Rewrite the first act to feature these characters.
4. In the second act, Sprinter does not find a recipe for Belcher. Find out what food frogs like. Then rewrite the second act so that Sprinter teaches a recipe to Belcher as well as the others.
5. In the third act, Val chases Sprinter in a game of tag. This is the exercise the animals do to get fit. Pick a different exercise they can do. Then rewrite the play to have the animals use this other exercise instead of a game of tag.