

## REKINDLE YOUR ROMANCE WITH A HAMSTER?

After a couple decades of marriage and three kids, it's not every day you look at your husband with the same love and passion of that first year- okay, week - of marital bliss. But once in a while something happens to rekindle that spark and you find yourself falling in love all over again.

A hamster in a sump pump fanned the flame for me. Now before you call PETA let me explain. It was an accident. No one intentionally meant to hurt Cheddar. But the way I see it, if you've got a hamster its days are numbered anyway.

Hamsters have an extremely short lifespan in captivity, even shorter in my house. It seems every hamster believes he or she is Clint Eastwood and its mission - to escape from Alcatraz, or in this case, a \$50 Habitrail jail. They long to break out and get as far away from their jailers -a bunch of kids who keep sticking carrots up their noses- as quickly as possible.

We knew something was up when Cheddar started clinking her dish on the wire cage to the beat of Jailhouse Rock and David Copperfield's TV special kept mysteriously playing in the VCR. So, we moved Cheddar to the basement. Then one day she carved a bar of soap into a look-a-like and clawed her way out of the cage into the wilds of a concrete world. When our daughter discovered the imposter, she screamed, "Cheddar's Loose!"

Naturally, we just sat there, because Cheddar was always loose. Our dog, Champ, always sniffed her out. Of course, then he wanted to eat her, but we'd scream, "Drop it Champ! Drop it!" And Champ would reluctantly unclench his teeth and the terrified hamster would fall to the ground, scamper off and the game would begin all over again.

Except this time, Champ did not sniff out Cheddar, even in the darkest depths and recesses of the basement. Our daughter came upstairs dejected.

"Where did she go?" my daughter cried.

My husband had an idea. Something about a small opening on the lid of the sump pump.

It's one of those times when you're really glad you're a woman and you're really glad you have a man. A real man, like John Wayne, who will walk down into the basement, without a moments hesitation, swagger over to the sump pump, take a peek inside and say, "Well, it looks like it's all over for you little fella."

My brave man returned, gently carrying a light bulb box. Our eyes locked for a brief moment, before our daughter put two and two together and began to wail.

As I cradled my daughter, I looked at my husband as if I hadn't seen him in a while. I'm pretty sure the muscles in his arms rippled and his shirt suddenly opened to his waist. His chest hair taunted me. All one of them. He looked as if he'd just popped off the cover of one of those romance novels, only he was mine, all mine.

If my daughter hadn't been slobbering all over me and crying, "Cheddar! Cheddar!" I would've begged him to kiss me right then and there. I wanted him to sweep me into his arms and hold me close -after he disposed of the hamster, of course.

But it wasn't to be. He put the box in the garage and came back inside to comfort our daughter.

I looked at his large, strong arms as he embraced her. I tried to shove, I mean, nudge, my daughter out of the way and kind of move into his arms, but he just looked at me as if I'd lost my mind.

We buried Cheddar in the backyard. A grouping of white stones marks the spot where he lays. Our daughter stares at the spot, yearning for Cheddar. I stare at the white stones too, and then I go look for my husband.

I'm starting a romance novel. My working title is, "The Hunk and the Hamster."