

WELLINGTON RABBIT FINDS A NEW FRIEND



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

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For Martin Downing Desjardins
our beautiful grandson with the soul of an angel

We thank our dear Heavenly Father
Who sends the message of love through
this book to children of all ages

Titles set in Harrington Bold
Text set in Goudy Old Style

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Wellington@BaysideSchoolServices.com

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Foreword

Several years ago I tried to write a children's book, assuming it would be a fairly easy task. I often made up stories for my son, and I imagined that I'd be able to introduce characters, describe settings, and develop the plots of my tales on paper just as I did in the car on the way, say, to the grocery store. It was supposed to be fun. I should note here that I'm a nonfiction writer who tends to gravitate toward the most complex of subjects: biology, meteorology, oceanography, that sort of thing. Compared to my typical diet, I thought writing a book for kids would be a cinch.

I was wrong, oh so wrong. For starters, I couldn't strike the right tone. All my attempts to pen an opening scene were either awkward or overly sweet. Even worse, my favorite story, which seemed so convincing when told orally, became dull and contrived on the printed page. I gave up and decided to write a book about astronomy, which suddenly seemed far simpler.

It's often said that children and dogs have a natural capacity for sensing when something's not right. Kids are remarkably careful observers; they can tell from clues like facial expressions and tones of voice when adults are trying to hide something from them. Perhaps that's why I had such a difficult time with my children's book. In order to write for children, you need to understand them at a deep level. And you need to create a world that's honest and true—not factual, but true in the sense of having characters who move through their surroundings in ways that children understand and appreciate.

Sandra Ball has a wonderful talent for building such worlds. Her tales of Wellington Rabbit and friends have a magical quality, but they're also well grounded. Wellington, Georg, and Uncle Wells come alive on the page, because the reader is able to see not only their heroic deeds, but their character flaws. And what a great idea for a series of books! Growing up, I assumed that the Easter Bunny

was an old, capable critter who had been plying his trade for centuries. It never occurred to me that spreading the love of Easter could be entrusted to a youngster like myself who suffered lapses in confidence. Neither did I imagine that I could depend on the help of special friends, should I ever find myself needing to fill in for that venerable rabbit. As an adult I know that passing on the love of Easter is something that needs to be done every day. It can seldom be accomplished alone.

Wellington always manages to get out of close shaves with assistance from his friends (and of course, some magic and divine grace). In this book he, Georg, and his new pal Bethleann outsmart the evil Black Veil by trusting each other, using their wits, and keeping their eyes trained on their final goal—the recovery of Uncle Wells’ fading powder, essential to Wellington’s success as the newly anointed Easter Bunny.

Magic enchantments, underground passageways, evil villains, three fast friends, and a potent message—it’s all here. You are lucky, dear reader, to have discovered Wellington. I hope his stories will bring you much enjoyment, and a desire to spread your own love throughout the world.

J. DeBlieu
Roanoke Island
April 2002

Jan DeBlieu is the author of four books and many essays about people and their connections to the natural world. Her book “Wind” was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for Distinguished Natural History Writing in 1999.

Preface

Wellington, Georg, and now Bethleann are such members of our family that it is agonizing sometimes for their story to be so slow in developing. Thank you, dear readers, for your patience. Each story is a wonderful miracle of happenings and glorious events. This book began as the first book went to press (as book three is doing now) but then got put aside for any number of reasons, none very good.

Then it came time to finish. Our first grandchild, who turned out to be sweet Martin, was due and this was to be a gift for his first Easter from his HoneyGram and GrinPa. The story galloped toward the finish line just as Martin made his arrival on February 28, but the illustrations were still only a vision and Easter was imminent. Time was short but inspiration plentiful. Emily and Marty had graciously begged for my presence during those first weeks for support and overall help. I went, and along with me, went my favorite sketchpad, a wonderful gift from good friends Bill and Becki Rea. It was such fun to do the drawing with little Martin by my side. His precious expressions easily wove their way onto the pages of his book. With his help (and he really did) the illustrations were done and the book assembled in time for Easter.

As in the first book, this book has special inclusions. The most important is Bethleann. When I was six I got a beautiful Madame Alexander doll for Christmas. I love her so. She has golden braids and is about 14" tall. She is a young girl design. Through the years it was great fun to make clothes for her and pretend she was my own little girl. But when she was new, my first need was to name her. I remember being very serious about her name, not wanting to give her just a doll name. I wanted to give her a name associated with Christmas and Jesus, but I also wanted it to be unique and her very own name that

no one else had. Finally after thinking and thinking, I cleverly, or so I thought, respelled Bethlehem into Bethleann.

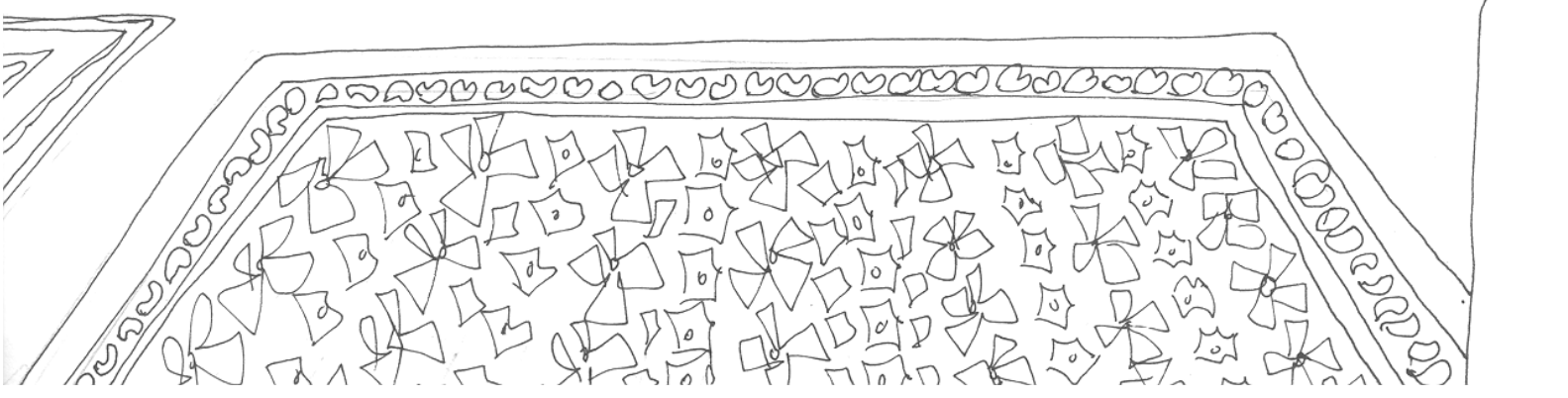
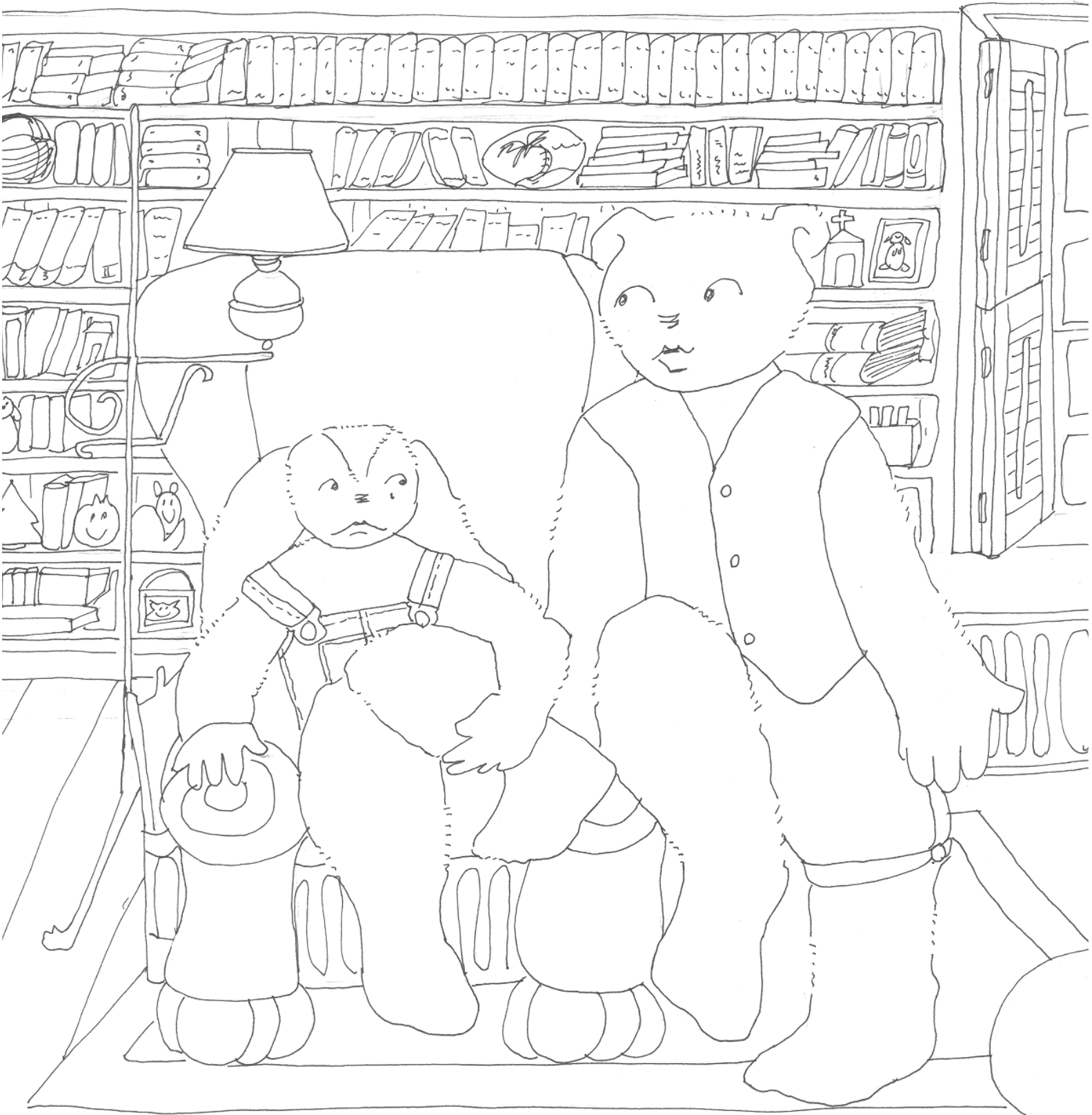
I have always loved that name and sometimes thought of giving it to a daughter, but then I figured she would constantly be asked to explain her name and get tired of that too soon. However, I really wanted the name to shine, so as the second Wellington book was developing it became clear that this is where Bethleann belonged. It was the perfect solution; Wellington and Georg find a new friend and you get to meet Bethleann. She looks like my doll and is every bit as sweet.

In addition, as in the first book, the drawings have a few special pieces. There is Emily's roll top desk she used a child, Grandma Boschen's octagonal cherry table, a clock I won in an art contest, and the cutwork pattern from Mom's tablecloth set she recently gave to me. All have a special place in the Wellington illustrations.

Thank you always to my husband and editor, Donny, for his dedication and tenacious attention to the job at hand of smoothing the rough edges and weak points to let you see what I really had in mind. As with every one of my projects he polishes them to stellar beauty. He is the joy in my soul and the smile in my heart.

Well, that's about it for this book. The third book promises to be along more quickly. Be joyful, smile, find your special wish flower, and spread love throughout the world.

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball
Bayside, Colington Island, North Carolina



Chapter 1

The Curious Packet

“Oh my,” said Wellington softly. “I didn’t suppose he would really go.” He sank into a nearby chair and covered his face with his paws. “Uncle Wells, come back,” he cried plaintively.

Georg looked at his friend with a quizzical eye and then spoke up. “Now Wellington, you know perfectly well that Uncle Wells was set on going. Besides, he didn’t have any choice in the matter. You do remember that his mantle of fading was finished and that meant he HAD to go.” After this rather lengthy speech, Georg, the big Baltic black bear, sank into the largest chair of the room.

“Why do you suppose the WEB wanted Uncle Wells now?” asked Wellington, lifting his head. “I’m not ready, not ready a bit to be the Easter Bunny on my own. Even with you by my side. Whiskers!” Wellington lapsed into his old childhood expression. “Uncle Wells had hardly completed my training,” he continued in an exasperated tone. He sighed deeply and sank further into the chair.

“And,” finished Wellington, lifting up on his elbows in a leaden manner, “how will we ever deliver all the Easter eggs and wish flowers on our own?” He let his head sink into his paws as huge tears welled in his eyes.

“We’ll get it done,” soothed Georg, feeling none too confident himself but definitely not wanting to let Wellington see his uncertainty. Suddenly he sat up with a start. “Wellington, quick. Get the packet,” he fairly bellowed sliding to the edge of his chair. He was referring to the packet of fading dust Wellington would need to join the WEB when his time came. Uncle Wells had promised to give it to Wellington when he faded and there it was, just lying in the middle of the floor shimmering ever so slightly.

Wellington didn’t seem to hear him. Muffled sobs and sniffles came from his direction. Georg looked at the packet again. It was very powerful and important. Anyone could get it, and in the wrong

hands, it could be dangerous indeed. But Georg couldn't pick it up. It belonged to Wellington. If anyone but the rightful owner touched it first, things could be very bad.

Georg rose out of his chair and reached toward Wellington. "Wellington, my friend, get a grip. You simply must claim your packet before the dark forces get hold of it." He shook Wellington firmly by the shoulders.

"Huh?" said Wellington rather dazedly, raising his red eyes to meet Georg's intense ones.

"The packet, Wellington. You must claim your packet that Uncle Wells left you."

"Uncle Wells is here?" squeaked Wellington rather hopefully.

"Wellington, this will never do," said Georg somewhat crossly. "Uncle Wells is gone. He left you the fading dust that you will need to join the WEB when your time comes. But you must claim it yourself, and NOW!"

"Fading dust?" asked Wellington in a confused manner.

"Wellington, don't you remember any of your lessons?" asked Georg, exasperated to the point of pulling his fur out. "Before you can join the WEB you need your very own supply of fading dust. The only way you can get it is from the WEB that fades before you."

"WEB?" Wellington interrupted.

"Are you completely daft, my good friend?" asked Georg, sure that Wellington had somehow taken total leave of his excellent senses. "You are Wellington Easter Bunny. Your Uncle Wells was also so named. Before him came grandfather Wilford. And so on back through twelve generations. You are number thirteen. All of you are titled Easter Bunny. You have to have a name with initials that spell WEB and be chosen by the WEB, the group made up of all the former Easter Bunnies. You are given the job of delivering Easter love to all the children of the world. We were just talking about this, Wellington," said Georg impatiently.

“Ahh,” said Wellington slowly shaking his head as though to get a clearer thought. “The WEB, my destiny, my karma,” he seemed to be coming out of a trance. “By George, we’ll be late, Georg,” he leaped up.

“Not so fast, my dear friend,” said Georg very relieved to see that Wellington was coming back to his normal self. “First things first. Right now, you must lay claim to your fading dust packet and quickly. It has been sitting unattended far too long.” He gestured toward the small packet lying in the middle of the floor. It was no longer shimmering. In fact, it looked paler, smaller, and transparent in a weird sort of way. Georg did not like that one little bit. He just had to get Wellington moving.



Chapter 2

A Strange Jewel

“What’s that you say, Georg? Oh yes, of course,” muttered Wellington seeming to slide back into his confused state, “my fading dust.” He stood up and reached forward to pick up the packet. Then he stopped and sat down again. “No, mustn’t do that,” he said.

“Wellington, for heaven’s sake, why not?” asked Georg, trying to be calm but very much beside himself.

“I dunno,” returned Wellington in a slurred voice. “It just doesn’t seem right.”

“Wellington, someone or something has fixed your brain,” said Georg. “Pick up that packet now or we’ll both be sorry,” he ordered.

Wellington stood up again. He moved toward the packet. Again he sank back into his chair.

“Wellington, this can not go on. You need that packet. Some type of force is stopping you and you must overcome it. I cannot work my magic on you because I have no idea what this force is. And I could make matters worse. Gather yourself, listen only to me, and GET THAT PACKET.” Georg spoke with as much strength as he could while still controlling his voice.

For the third time Wellington stood up and reached for the packet. His paws wavered over the small leather pouch bound with silver thread. His fingers were just grasping the thread when...the entire packet disappeared. “Georg, why did you do that?” asked Wellington in a dazed manner.

“I didn’t,” said Georg equally dazed. “Quick! Search the room. Maybe it has moved to a less visible spot. After all, it is magical.” They moved all the furniture and even looked under the rug. The packet had simply disappeared. Without a trace. Or so it seemed.

“My only link to Uncle Wells,” sobbed Wellington, now in firm control of his senses. “Why was I so slow?”

“Wellington, don’t fret. Something had hold of you. You were not your completely normal self,” said Georg. “You weren’t even listening to me.”

“I wasn’t?” said Wellington astounded. “You are my best friend. I would do anything you say, Georg. Why wouldn’t I listen to you?”

“Because something stronger than me was working on you Wellington,” replied Georg. “And I bet that something took your packet. Say, Wellington, what’s this?” he asked, looking at the rug more closely where the packet had been.

Lying rather tucked into the short pile of the carpet was a jewel of some sort. It blended quite smartly with the pattern surrounding it and might have gone totally unnoticed but for Georg’s sharp eyes.

Wellington bent over and scooped it up with both paws, “Ouch,” he cried quickly dropping the jewel on a nearby table. “It’s hot.” He gingerly turned it over with the tip of his paw. They couldn’t see anything unusual about it. It was clear and rather dingy looking. It had multiple facets but they were not reflecting much light.

Well,” said Georg finally. “Here’s another mystery for us. The whole thing is a mystery, and I think we are going to need some help.”

“What do you mean, Georg?” asked Wellington, looking at his friend.

“This is far too difficult for us to solve, is what I mean,” said Georg. “I propose that we go to see my former magic teacher, Sir Boris. He will know what to do. Say, what are you doing, Wellington? Are you even listening to me?”

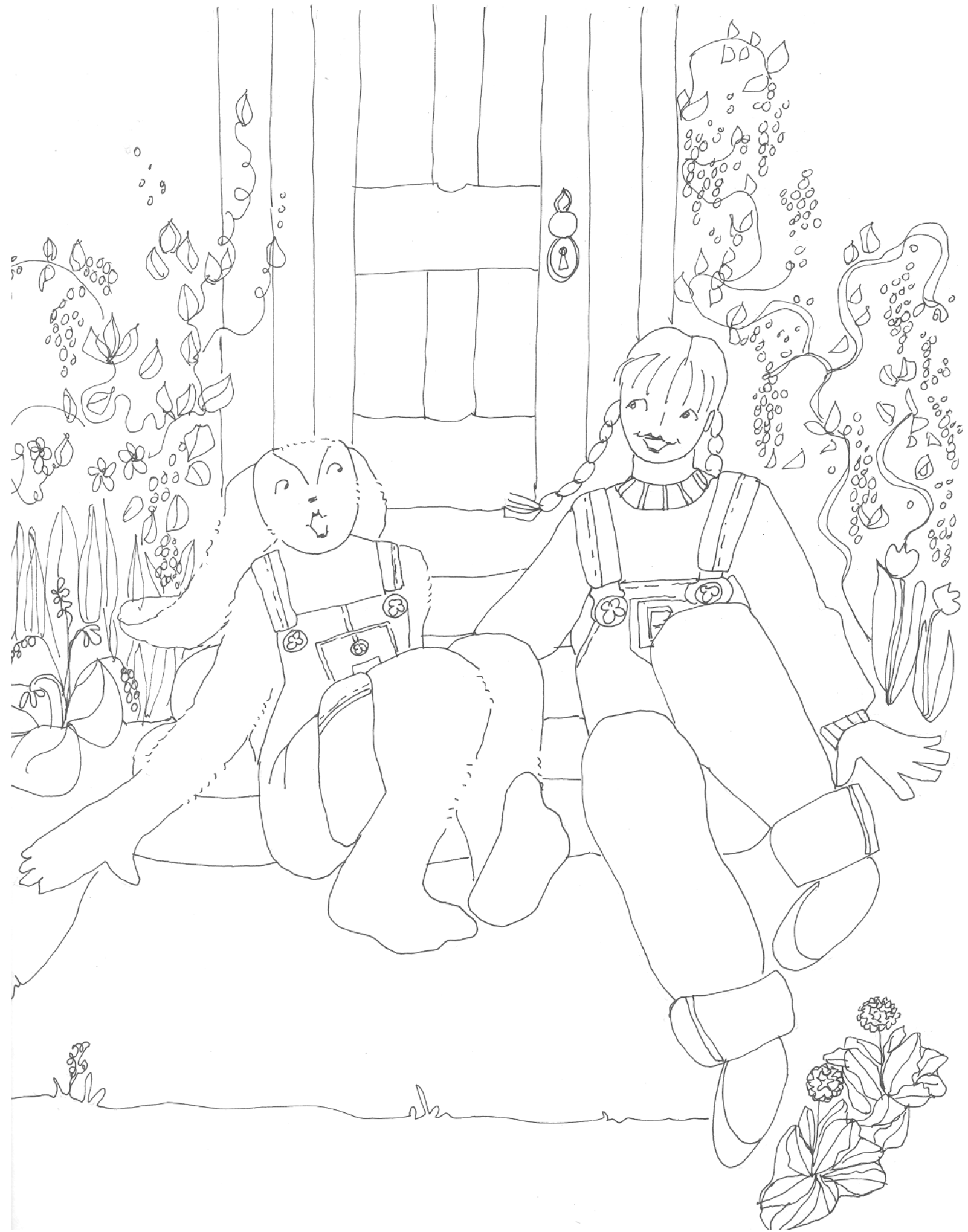
Wellington had sprinted to the roll top desk near the table. He began intently digging around in all of the drawers and inside the cubbyholes that lined the back of the main writing surface of the desk. Suddenly he stood up. “Perfect,” he proclaimed. He held up a gold watch fob with a top that unscrewed to reveal a small compartment. He opened this and returned to the table with the jewel. He cautiously slid the jewel into the fob and screwed the top back in place. Next, he attached the fob to the chain of his pocket watch, grinning

widely. “I remember the day Uncle Wells showed me this beautiful fob. It’s perfect for the job. I’ll not be caught short again.”

Wellington turned to Georg. “Of course I was listening. Heard every word you said. Something about a music teacher. What do we want with a music teacher?”

Georg rolled his eyes, “Sometimes, Wellington, you can be very frustrating. I said magic teacher, my magic teacher, Sir Boris Bear. Maybe, he can help us. It’s not far to the taiga. I’ve been meaning to take you anyway. Course I was thinking about a pleasure trip, not an emergency one.”

Wellington blinked at Georg, chewed his whiskers, and fingered the watch fob. He had to cogitate on this plan.



Chapter 3

We Meet Bethleann

“Well, Georg,” wondered Wellington, “do you really think Sir Boris can help us?” He remembered how he had found Georg in a briar patch after a muffed magic spell. Wellington wasn’t so sure that Sir Boris Bear would be able to cut the mustard. Actually, Wellington was always just a bit jealous of Georg’s life in the taiga before they had met and become fast friends.

“Unless you have an idea,” returned Georg shortly, “I suggest we give it a go.”

“Not at the moment,” admitted Wellington. The two friends decided to collect their gear, tidy up loose ends in case they were gone for awhile, and meet back at Uncle Wells’ in one hour. Actually, they could just as easily have left for the taiga from their own dwellings that were located side by side not too far from Uncle Wells’ bungalow. However, they thought that leaving from the scene of the mystery might help in the resolution.

After Georg’s dramatic rescue from the briar patch, Uncle Wells had helped Wellington make a gardening shed behind his cottage which served as Georg’s home when he wasn’t off on adventures of his own, which was much of the time. When in Willis Warren, he used a low key invisibility charm so he wouldn’t frighten any of the rabbits. Sometimes he put a noseum spell on a rabbit that stared a little too long at the garden that appeared to be weeding itself, or Wellington in an apparent conversation with no one. Such a spell made everything appear normal and George’s secret was safe. Nevertheless, Georg was still hopeful that one day he would get to meet the rabbits of the warren. They seemed very friendly and he was truly a kind and generous bear. But he knew the rabbits were not quite ready for that step yet.

Georg swept out the door, anxious to give the garden a good weeding and watering. And he wanted to whip up some of his famous

quick-as-a-wink orange raisin scones for the trip. He planned to pack them, along with a tin of his velvety smooth walnut butter, some harvest seed cheese and a leather flask of crystal clean spring water. Who knows how long they would be gone and where the adventure would take them? A food supply was always a good idea.

Wellington stayed behind to whisper a final Godspeed to Uncle Wells. After a few moments he stood up and left the bungalow, latching the front door behind him. He turned toward home and suddenly found himself tumbling head over heels down the stoop steps entwined in a mass of feet and arms. Stunned, Wellington found a free paw and pushed himself to a sitting position. He blinked in amazement. Across from him sat the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She had pale skin, rosy cheeks and ruby red lips. Her golden brown hair was plaited into two sensible braids. Her chocolate flecked eyes studied him curiously, "Are you Wellington?" she asked.

"Do I know you?" asked Wellington not answering the question.

"I heard all about you from your Uncle Wells," responded the girl. "My name is Bethleann. I was just going to visit Uncle Wells."

Wellington couldn't believe his ears. Just who was this girl and how did she know Uncle Wells? "You, you know my Uncle Wells?" he stammered.

"Yes, we have been friends for a very long time," the girl smiled. "He's told me so much about you in our correspondence. I'd know you anywhere."

"Well, umm, I was just going to get some things for Uncle Wells," said Wellington standing up and dusting himself off. He offered his paw to what was it, Bethleann? She grinned at him and scampered quickly up by herself smacking the dust off her trousers.

"Need some help?" she offered as she finished restoring her clothing to its neat order.

Wellington accepted her offer, reasoning that it would give him time to formulate a plausible story about the whereabouts of Uncle Wells. Maybe he could say he was at a hopscotch championship

somewhere. Everyone knew Uncle Wells had been warren champion thrice.

Of course, he wouldn't really tell a fib. Lies only got you into trouble. But it sure was tempting to make up something about Uncle Wells rather than face the true story just yet. Maybe this Bethleann girl would even leave before he needed to say anything.

As they walked along toward Wellington's cottage, Bethleann elaborated on how Uncle Wells had helped her out of a difficult situation once and they had become fast friends. She was here to repay the favor and get in a short visit.

Wellington took another look at this girl walking with such energy beside him. He knew that Uncle Wells had many strange and mysterious friends from all of his travels, but he had never seen any of them here in Willis Warren.



Chapter 4

Bethleann's Secret

It was the quiet part of late morning and no rabbits were about, most likely napping. "Good," thought Wellington to himself as he half listened to Bethleann. He could just imagine the scene a human girl would create.

"Oh, don't worry about me being seen," laughed Bethleann.

Wellington's mouth fell open. He stopped walking and squinted at her. Could she read thoughts?

Bethleann stopped and turned to face him, "I'm cloaked just like Georg. As you know, it's very low magic and will cause no harm. All of Uncle Wells' friends cloak when coming for a visit. It keeps things simple. And, of course, you can see me because you have passed your level one magics. Uncle Wells was so proud when you passed without one mistake. He sent telebees to everyone."

Wellington knew that telebees were short messages delivered by busy bees. The bee would scratch the message with its stinger point on a leaf or twig close to the recipient's door and signal with a loud persistent buzz before flying off to its regular job. You paid by the word because the bees were very busy and only had time to deliver very short notes between pollen stops.

She smiled her beautiful sunshine smile, "No, I cannot read your mind. You were just staring at me, so I figured that must be what was on your mind."

Wellington snapped his mouth shut, not buying the no mind reading story a bit. And staring? He, Wellington, staring? Staring was for uncouth rabbits. He would never stare. His mother had given him too many lessons in good manners for that. Just who was this girl, anyway?

"Uncle Wells tells me he is training you to become the new Easter Bunny," continued Bethleann, as though the conversation had never taken a side step. "He has always favored you for the job and

was so in hopes that the WEB would let him title you. He was rather fearful they might pick Woger. Or was it Roger? No that wouldn't fit, it must have been Woger. They were so bent on getting the hip generation involved," she rambled on, practically talking to herself as she sorted out her memory file. "Seems the WEB was very concerned about apathy toward Easter in general and wanted to pep things up with a flashy figure. But Uncle Wells firmly persuaded them that you were the rabbit for the job and you would never let Easter slide." She finished her speech with a flourish and flashed her contagious smile.

They had reached Wellington's cottage and swiftly went inside. Wellington looked at her, flabbergasted. No one knew he was the Easter Bunny, except Georg. Of course, all the rabbits knew that one of them was the Easter Bunny. They just didn't know which one. It prevented overzealous parents from constantly harassing the seated Easter Bunny and kept their children out of what would be a ticklish position. Wellington looked at her in speechless wonderment. Some might have even called it a stare. It was very hard not to do just that.

"Oh, Wellington, I see Uncle Wells hasn't told you as much about me as he has told me about you and your dearest friend Georg." Bethleann's sunny smile traveled all the way past her ruby mouth, across her rosy cheeks, through her beautiful chocolate flecked eyes and landed on Wellington's heart.

Wellington gulped and swallowed hard. His thoughts were whirling, How did this girl know so much? And if she knew, who else knew? Was his secret safe at all?

"All of Uncles Wells' world friends know about you, dear Wellington," offered Bethleann. "We are a very close society and extremely good at keeping a secret. We all have our own stories of intrigue and mystery. Your story was just one of many told around our camp fire on a lazy summer outing and by the warm wintry hearth after a day of vigorous sledding."

He started to offer a feeble protest, but before he could get a word out his eye caught the mantle clock. "Oh my gosh, I'll be late."

He rushed to the kitchen to inspect the larder for supplies. He gathered a tin of cracked sesame toasties and scooped up a wheel of turn-about willow cheese. He pushed these and a thermos of take-a-long lemonade into his haversack.

He briskly scampered around the cottage stirring up a whirlwind. He stuffed this and that into his haversack and quickly snapped it shut. He hurriedly bolted the windows and pulled the shades. He checked the stove to be sure there were no embers still alive and started for the door.

It was Bethleann's turn to look startled. She stood staring at him. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"I've got to meet Georg," he said simply.

"Then let's go," said Bethleann. She had opened the door and was already headed down the stoop.

"Where are you going?" asked Wellington. "This is no mission for a girl. Besides, you don't have any equipment."

"Whatever it is you're doing, you'll need me. I'll just have to borrow from you and Georg," she quipped, grabbing his paw and pulling him along. Wellington couldn't think fast enough. Georg was not going to understand this at all. To take a stranger with them. Utterly impossible. What was he to do? "Uncle Wells is in trouble isn't he?" quizzed Bethleann as they jogged along.

"Ah ha," muttered Wellington, "finally she's wrong about something." Then he realized that Uncle Wells was gone for good and Bethleann's off guess didn't fix that.



Chapter 5

Georg's Dilemma

"Not exactly," replied Wellington running on ahead so he could turn and look Bethleann in the eye while jogging backwards. He gritted his teeth, so dreading the words that were about to pop out. "Uncle Wells has faded." There he said it. He thought saying it would ease the pain but it still hurt a lot, maybe even more than before. A tear escaped down his cheek. Drat. He really didn't mean to cry right now.

"Are you sure, Wellington?" asked Bethleann, slowing to a walk and grasping his paws in her hands.

"Very sure. I was there," said Wellington. "He faded this morning."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Bethleann clapping paws and hands together. "I always knew my good chum would get to his beloved WEB before much more time went by." Wellington looked at her in studied amazement. How could a good friend be glad you were gone forever? "Oh, Wellington, don't you see? It was his dream to get you titled, trained and zip off to the WEB to be with all the friends he hasn't seen in ages. That was one of the reasons I was coming to see him. Uncle Wells asked me to give you one of my special travel lessons. And I'm pretty sure he mentioned something in his telebee to me about a parcel he had for me that he couldn't trust to pony post."

Pony post was a package delivery service that had a drop off point not far outside the warren. Wellington and Georg usually got their travel catalogs via pony post. It was slower than the stork express, but the storks sometimes got confused and delivered you a baby instead of your package. It was a bit risky when an unsuspecting recipient had to host a baby for a day or two until stork central untangled the mix-up. Wellington guessed it was confusing to the expectant parents, too, to get a package of whatever when they fully expected a baby. But it always was straightened out, and the baby was only a few days late getting to its mom and dad.

Wellington could barely take in all Bethleann was saying. She talked so fast and said so much. He would think about it later. There was no time now. They had reached the entrance to Uncle Wells' bungalow. Wellington pressed the latch and pushed the door to open it. Nothing happened. He tried again. The door would not move. "Whiskers," Wellington muttered, "What's this all about?" The door was stuck fast. He banged. Maybe Georg was inside and had locked the door without knowing it. Wellington got no response. He was pretty sure that when he had left, he had only latched the door. Wellington sighed and started to head for the back of the bungalow. Maybe Uncle Wells had forgotten to lock the kitchen last night.

"Odd," mused Bethleann, "let me try." Moving Wellington to one side, she stood in the middle of the stoop, gazing at the door. She ran her fingers over its smooth panels. She stopped near the top left. She pressed gently and a tiny door swung open. She reached inside and found a key that she handed to Wellington. "Try this," she commanded. Wellington shoved the key into the lock, wondering why Bethleann had not done so herself. The door swung open.

"It's an anti-spell key among other things and I am too well trained in magic to use it. It could summon forces we would rather not see right now," she explained. Wellington decided to give up wondering if she could read his mind. He would just be sure not to think any very private thoughts when she was around.

Then all thoughts of Bethleann's mental abilities raced from Wellington's mind as he stepped into the room. He rubbed his eyes at the sight that greeted him. Georg was sitting on the floor shaking his head. He appeared dazed. The contents of his rumplesack spewed everywhere.

"Oh, I feared something like this!" exclaimed Bethleann. "That explains why the door was enchanted shut. This looks like the work of Black Veil. Help," she cried to the stunned rabbit. She began frantically stuffing things back into the sack. Wellington shook himself, wondering what Bethleann meant by Black Veil. He picked up the

last few things, shoved them inside the rumplesack and buckled it shut. Georg just looked at them both, not speaking a word.

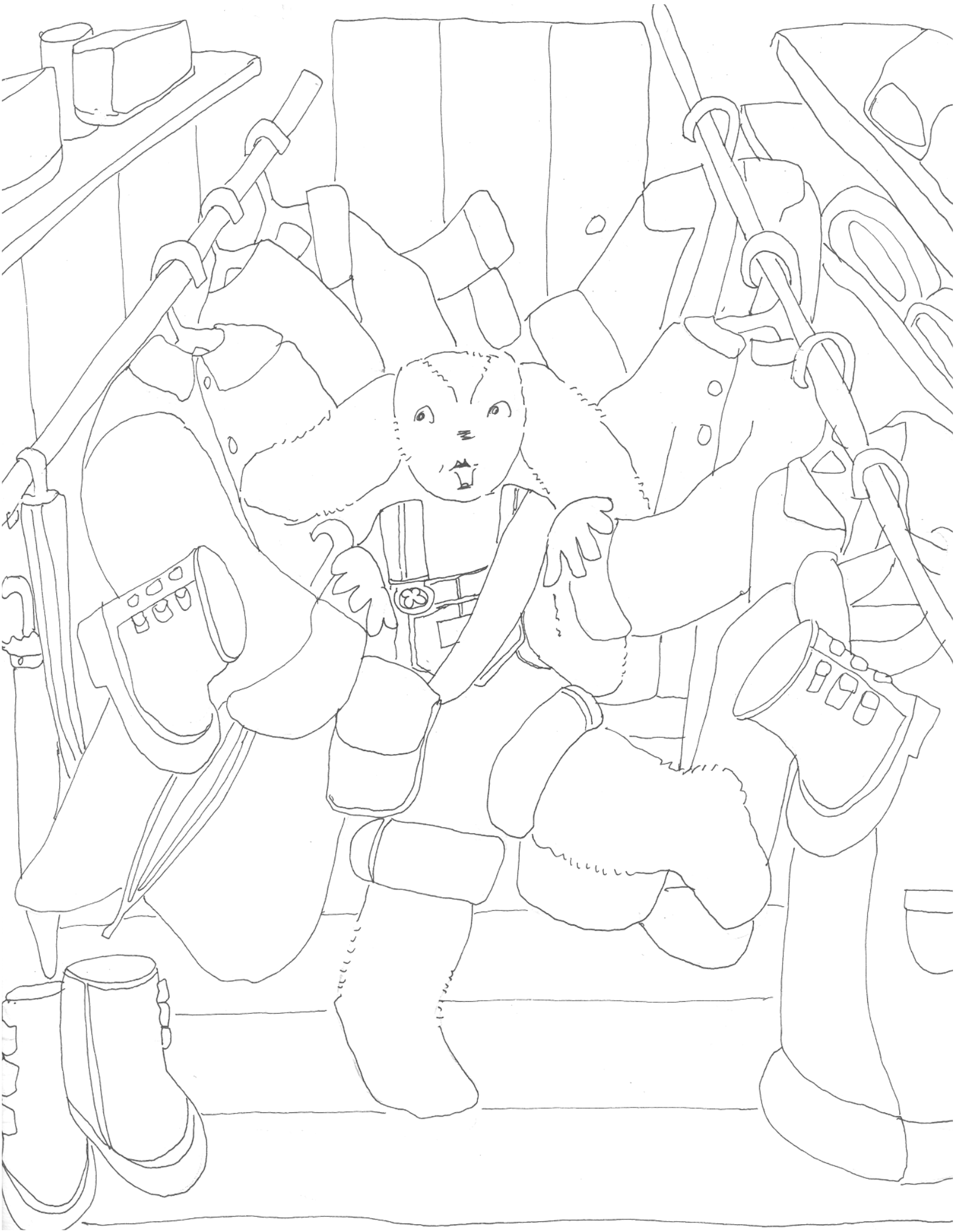
“What’s Black Veil?” asked Wellington.

“A nightmare,” said Bethleann. “Hurry now,” she ordered pulling at Georg with one hand and snatching up his rumplesack with the other. “Wellington, the key,” she called over her shoulder.

Wellington reached into his pocket for the key. It wasn’t there. He searched his other pockets. “I...I don’t seem to have it,” he stammered, reluctant to admit that he had lost such a valuable thing.

“Check your pockets again,” advised Bethleann. “But this time more slowly. The key is yours now because you used it first. You cannot lose it or give it away. Anyone else trying to use it will suffer the consequences. It has a very old and unstable magic, but in the possession of a novice such as yourself it will behave and not cause you any problems.”

Wellington searched each of his pockets again with no luck. Finally he removed the watch from its tiny pocket and ran his finger along the bottom of the small cloth enclosure. There at the bottom was the key. Old and unstable magic? In his paws? And his paws alone. He had an uneasy feeling about all of this. This Black Veil, what or whoever that was, sounded horrifically scary. A nightmare, Bethleann had said. What kind of nightmare? Oh, he wished fervently for his Uncle Wells if even to talk to for just a little while. Everything was getting so very strange.



Chapter 6

A Secret Passageway

Bethleann rushed into the study and flung open the closet door. Inside were seldom-used coats and a variety of bumbershoots along with numerous pairs of galoshes. She stepped into a pair of galoshes and picked up a bumbershoot, indicating that Wellington and Georg should follow suit. Without looking to see if they did, she pushed aside the coats and pressed her hand against the back wall. Instantly it swung open, revealing a small landing followed by a set of stone steps leading downward. Bethleann stepped forward, "Follow me and secure the door behind you using the key."

"You first, Georg," said Wellington.

Georg, still woozy from his mishap, was in no frame of mind to argue or even begin to ask questions, although several were forming in his mind. He stepped into a pair of large galoshes and picked up the nearest bumbershoot. Stooping down, he gingerly squeezed through the small opening and started down the steps. They smelled of slime and damp. He could see nothing and proceeded cautiously. There was no wall or even a rail on which to put his paws.

Wellington was next. He got his galoshes and bumbershoot and started to step forward into the dankness. At the last moment, he reached for a coat. He wasn't sure why. It just seemed like a good idea. "Ouch," he yelped as the coat bit him on the arm. He tried to push away the feisty coat with his bumbershoot. The coat snatched the bumbershoot away from him. Then Wellington kicked at the coat, hopping to retrieve his bumbershoot. The coat seized the galosh on Wellington's foot. Wellington yanked his foot free. At the same time he kicked at the coat with his other foot so hard that his other galosh flew off hitting the coat in the top button. This made the coat collapse in a heap, but then the other coats came to its rescue. They began beating Wellington about the head and ears. They had sharp burrs

hidden in their sleeves and every whack was painful. They hissed, snarled, and made gruesome noises.

Wellington made a hasty retreat into the dark, only taking time to close the door behind him and secure it with the key. With the closet shutting out the light, he couldn't see a thing. He tucked the key back into his watch pocket with one paw and cautiously reached out with the other inching gingerly forward. Before he could discern anything about the situation, he slipped on some moss and began tumbling downward. He could see a small glow of light below him. There was nothing he could grasp to stop his fall. Over and over he rolled and bumped. He was tumbling head over heels down stone steps that seemed to have no end to them.

Thump! Wellington hit the bottom and lay there looking up into two pairs of eyes. "Wellington, are you okay?" asked Georg. Wellington sat up and rubbed his sore arm.

"That coat bit me!" he exclaimed.

"Magic coats can be brutal," said Bethleann. "You should have been more careful. Here, let me have a look."

"I didn't know they were magic," said Wellington.

"Many things in Uncle Wells' house are magic," explained Bethleann, "but most leave you alone if you don't bother them." As she spoke, she carefully examined the wound and then mused aloud, "I wish I had my pack with me. Some gingerwort salve would fix that right up."

"I've got some here," returned Georg, rummaging in his rumplesack and coming up with a small dark green jar wrapped in a bit of cloth.

"Perfect," grinned Bethleann as she reached for the salve. "Are you a healer?" She unscrewed the antique silver lid, silently noting the runes traced in the precious metal. She smoothed some salve on Wellington's cut and used the cloth to wrap around the wound.

"Well," answered Georg, rather shyly. "I like plants a lot and I've picked up bits and pieces of information on my roamabouts."

Wellington was glad that Georg and Bethleann were hitting it off. He quickly explained to Georg how he and Bethleann had bumped into each other on Uncle Wells' stoop. And how Bethleann knew the whole WEB story including Georg's pivotal part as Wellington's partner. Georg was just as astonished as Wellington to learn that someone else knew their secret.

"Relax, guys, your secret is totally safe," voiced Bethleann, all the while eyeing Wellington. "Where are your galoshes and bumber-shoot?" Wellington told her. She shook her head. "This does change things a bit, but perhaps we can manage anyway." She showed Wellington how the bumbershoot turned into a light by rotating the handle just so and then she explained that the galoshes were needed to get past the sinking sand traps.

"What exactly is this place?" asked Wellington. "And what were you afraid of up there? And since you know everything," he continued, just a bit annoyed, "you do realize that we need to start delivering Easter love in just a few days time?"

"This place," said Bethleann as she urged the boys to their feet, "is many things, one being a short cut to the Four Corners of the world. It is very magical and, as with all magic, very dangerous if handled incorrectly. I am an expert in its many pathways. Even with your wonderful cape and transportation spells to move you about quickly, sometimes an old fashioned path can be very useful. This is the travel lesson I was talking about, Wellington. Uncle Wells asked me to train you in the short cut's proper usage. And I cannot explain why he faded before that happened. It is bothering me somewhat, but we cannot fret over that now."



Chapter 7

We Learn About Black Veil

Wellington looked at Bethleann. He wanted to ask about the Black Veil thing. He opened his mouth to say something but decided to let it pass. He slowly got up, rubbing his sore limbs. He shifted his haversack into a more comfortable position and waited for Bethleann to give them some instructions.

Georg had also risen at Bethleann's urging and was trying to light his bumbershoot. He kept twisting the handle but no light responded to his negotiations. He finally shook it in desperation. "Light, I say," he demanded. Suddenly the tip of the bumbershoot lit up in a shimmering glow that was rather faint at first but grew until it was a strong intense light. "Egad," jumped Georg. "What have I done?" He tried twisting the handle to turn the light off. Nothing happened. "Dim," he commanded. The light dimmed. "More," he tested. The light became so faint it was barely there. "Now bright," called Georg, pleased with himself. The light responded instantly. "And off," cried Georg gleefully. The light went dark. "Very well," mused Georg, "This bumbershoot light thing and I will get along just fine."

"Possibly," said Bethleann. "I've never seen a bumbershoot respond to voice commands. But you really seem to have the knack, so I suppose the magic is fair."

"What do you mean, fair?" asked Wellington.

"If it's fair magic," explained Georg, "then it will always be the same no matter what other magic is trying to act on it. If it's unfair, then anything can happen at any time."

"He's exactly right," smiled Bethleann. "Georg has learned his magic lessons well. You must be a level three?" she queried in Georg's direction. He nodded sheepishly. "Good for you. I'm a level five, but soon hope to have my sixes. Now let's get started. We are behind

already. Wellington's right, it's getting closer to Easter and you two have to be ready to take care of the children."

Wellington could not have agreed more.

The three friends started off along the path. It wound downward and there was no light to guide them except that provided by the two bumbershoots. Bethleann took the lead with Wellington in the middle while Georg brought up the rear. Bethleann cautioned the two boys that silence was the best plan and so they plodded along single file, the quiet broken only by the swish of their clothing and soft padding of their feet on the packed earthen ground. Down, down, down they went until Wellington was sure they must be near the very center of the earth. It was getting warm, almost hot. Wellington wiped his paw across his brow that was beginning to drip with perspiration. It was stuffy on the narrow path and there was nothing to see but darkness. How he missed his verdant fields and sunshiny meadows!

On they trudged in silence. Just when Wellington thought he couldn't stand being so cramped and hot another moment, the path widened until the friends could walk side by side. There was a faint glow of light coming from above and an airy breeze wafting through the passageway. Bethleann put out her light and signaled Georg to do the same. She pressed her index finger to her lips indicating that he should be quiet with his command.

Georg responded with a muffled, "Out." His light responded accordingly. And immediately the three friends were bathed in a pink radiance that softly illuminated their way. The passageway continued to widen and the ceiling arched upward. The path stopped its downward thrust and leveled off. Bethleann slowed the pace and Wellington was extremely grateful. His arm was beginning to throb and he was very thirsty. The thought had no sooner formed in his mind, than Bethleann stopped walking and motioned the boys toward a barely perceptible fissure in the rock wall that lined the passageway. She indicated that they should step through. Wellington went first, followed

by Georg, who had to remove his rumplesack to squeeze through the narrow opening. Lastly, Bethleann slipped through the fissure and joined the boys in a small room. The pink glow did not reach into the room. Instead, the room was bathed in a muted yellow that radiated from the walls.

Bethleann propped her bumbershoot against the wall and sat down. Georg did the same.

Wellington took off his haversack and used it as a pillow for his weary body. It felt so good to sit down and stretch out. He removed the lemonade from his haversack and passed it around so everyone could have a refreshing drink. “Boy, this has been some morning workout,” he groaned. Georg laughed and Bethleann nodded with a smile.

“Now,” said Bethleann, “I need to explain some things to you two.”

“What things now?” asked Wellington, a bit wearily.

“We are very near the lair of Black Veil,” continued Bethleann, giving Wellington the tiniest annoyed look. “He is the rabbit who knows only evil. We are here so that we might recover your fading dust, Wellington, which I fear Black Veil has taken. He has always wanted to be a part of the WEB. By getting his hands on your fading dust, he thinks that he might have a chance to work his dark magic into a spell that would get him straight to the WEB.”

Finally, Bethleann was talking about the mysterious Black Veil, who was a rabbit of all things. “How do you know Black Veil took my fading dust? And, actually, how do you know anyone took my fading dust?” asked Wellington, looking at Bethleann intensely. He was tired of her knowing every single little thing about him.



Chapter 8

More Surprises

“Wellington, your fading dust gives off a special tracing to anyone trained to look for it. When you told me Uncle Wells had faded, I scanned you for the dust. I did not perceive it on you and so discerned that you must have given it to Georg for safe keeping. Then when we got back to the bungalow and saw that Georg had been attacked, I just assumed that the attacker was after the dust and had been successful.”

Wellington and Georg both started to talk at once. “But you see...” began Georg.

“That’s not the way it...” Wellington rose on his elbows, eyes animated. They both stopped and looked at each other. “You tell her,” suggested Wellington.

“I think you should,” said Georg.

“Well, somebody tell me,” said Bethleann. “Please.”

“You see,” said Wellington finally when he saw that Georg wanted him to start the tale, “we were not expecting Uncle Wells to fade so soon either. It rather took us by surprise. Actually, Uncle Wells did tell us the fading was imminent. Still, we were so shocked when he actually left that we could only...” Wellington’s voice began to trail off. “We could only stand in disbelief as he rose up to meet the WEB,” Wellington finished in rush as he started to tear up recalling the events that had happened only a few hours earlier.

Georg picked up the story, “So before Wellington could even get his fading dust, it just disappeared. We don’t know where it went, but we don’t have it, that’s for sure.”

Bethleann looked puzzled, “I was certain Black Veil had taken it.”

“Well if he did he was invisible,” declared Georg, “that packet just shimmered and faded. All on its own.”

“Of course,” cried Bethleann, “he would use invisibility, but not just any invisibility. We could detect that. I had forgotten about supreme super invisibility. Brilliant thinking, Georg.”

Georg blushed but looked doubtful, “Do you really think Black Veil super cloaked himself to get the packet? That’s double-magic.”

“He really wanted that fading dust,” responded Bethleann. “Even Black Veil would risk double-magic if he thought it would help his chances of getting it.”

“What’s double-magic?” queried Wellington.

“It’s like this...” began Georg and Bethleann simultaneously and then laughed.

“Go ahead, Bethleann,” urged Georg, “you tell Wellington while I rustle us up a snack. Wellington and I did not get a chance to eat yet this morning and I bet you’re starving as well.”

“You read my mind precisely,” she replied with her winsome smile. “I hope you have some hot chocolate in your sack. It’s my absolute favorite.”

“Uncle Wells’ finest,” came the reply.

So Bethleann filled Wellington in and Georg set about fixing a mouth-watering repast. He pulled a little kettle from his pack and sat it on the portable cook stove he packed along on trips. He poured spring water from the leather flask into the kettle that was rapidly singing a bubbling water song. Meanwhile, he took out the fresh quick-as-a-wink orange raisin scones and placed them on three cloth napkins he had tucked in his pack.

Next, he thinly sliced the turn-about willow cheese from Wellington’s pack and the harvest seed cheese from his own pack onto the sesame toasties Wellington had brought along. These delights he placed in a small pan that he put on the stove in place of the kettle.

He removed three sturdy mugs from his pack and scooped a hardy measure of sweetened cocoa into each. He popped a sugary wild marshmallow into each mug and added the bubbly hot water. He stoppered the heat from the stove so that the toasties could stay warm in

their pan. Then he retrieved the walnut butter from his sack as well as a spreading knife and three spoons for stirring the chocolate and eating the marshmallows. "All done," he declared, pleased with his accomplishments.

"Yum, it smells great," said Bethleann. "I'm famished."

"Me too," said Wellington, still in awe of all that Bethleann had revealed to him but too hungry just then to think much about it. "Let's eat."

And it was a merry meal the three friends dove into, all worries forgotten for the moment.



Chapter 9

The Jewel's Secret

“Say, Bethleann,” wondered Georg, “why can we talk in this room? You’ve been cautioning us all along to be quiet.”

“I was wondering when one of you would ask that question,” Bethleann replied. “This is a sanctuary room. It is one of several spots throughout the world where no magic, fair or dark, can be performed or any creature harmed. The high council of magicians established it long before anyone can remember. There were times in the old wars when things got far out of hand and all sides agreed to set aside truce spaces where negotiations could be conducted in absolute safety for all concerned. Most have forgotten the sanctuaries but my mother knew of their existence as did my grandmother and hers before that.”

“What happens if someone tries anyway,” asked Wellington.

“That’s just it, Wellington,” responded Bethleann. “Nothing happens. Just plain nothing. Knives won’t stab, spells don’t react, angry words aren’t heard. It’s a perfectly neutral room.”

“If only we could get Black Veil here, maybe he could listen to us in a calm manner,” mused Georg. “Maybe he really wants to do the right thing and return Wellington’s fading dust. Maybe we can help him get to the WEB. He is a rabbit after all.”

“We don’t know for absolute sure that he has the dust,” reminded Wellington. “What if it is in the hands of another?”

“Well, we must assume Black Veil has it until we know otherwise,” said Bethleann. “He is the logical one. Now who can think of a plan to get him here?”

Everyone was very thoughtful. While they privately mused and pondered, Georg gathered up the dishes and packed up the few remains of the food. He pulled his brand new handy-dandy Sparkle & Shine dishcloth that turned dirty dishes into clean ones with a swipe from his pack. He put it to work on the mugs and dishes. He was very pleased with the performance of the cloth. He had ordered it from a

catalog put out by the royal order of gray raccoons, renowned for their extreme cleanliness. He had no doubt that it would work well, but all the same, it was gratifying to see it outperform even his expectations. Lastly, he wiped down the kettle and put everything into his rumplesack.

Suddenly Wellington cried out, "Wait, I just remembered something. The jewel, Georg, I almost forgot. We found this in the carpet right where the dust packet had been." He uncapped the watch fob and showed the jewel to Bethleann.

She carefully examined the jewel, rolling it over and over around in her hand. At last she closed her palm over it, making a tight fist. "This just might work," she said. "But it will be dangerous and we cannot execute this plan in the sanctuary because it involves magic."

Wellington rolled his eyes and chewed a whisker. Georg unnecessarily shifted things around in his rumplesack, "What do we have to do?" he asked in an unenthusiastic, mumbly voice. Wellington nodded his head, unable to speak.

"We are going to return this jewel to the wand of Black Veil."

"Are you daft, girl?" gulped Georg. "From what you say he'll eat us alive. I don't mind talking to him here, but out there? No, thank you."

"It's the only way," replied Bethleann coolly. Wellington slowly nodded in agreement. Georg, too, reluctantly acquiesced. "Here's the plan," started Bethleann. "When we get to the sinking sand trap surrounding Black Veil's lair we will carry Wellington across using our arms as a chair. Once on the other side we will put a silencing spell on the guards, take their uniforms and seek out the wand that is probably in the high court room. We will replace the jewel and exit quickly before we are discovered."

"Sure," said Georg none too enthusiastically. "Always wanted to meet a rabbit as big as myself."

"Oh, Georg, Black Veil is big but not that big," laughed Bethleann. "And the plan is to not meet him."

Everyone gathered their gear and smoothed out the soft velvety dirt in the little room reluctantly ready to leave. Bethleann went first, followed by Georg and finally Wellington. Bethleann and Georg set off at once, assuming that Wellington was right behind. But Wellington's haversack snagged on the tight turn. By the time he was free, they were several yards in the distance. He hurried to catch up, thankful that at least he could see in the provided light.

Then quicker than can be written two things happened at once. Bethleann and Georg stopped to make the carrying chair for Wellington, still thinking he was right behind them. Wellington hit a rogue patch of sinking sand and before he could even gasp, began sinking and sinking. Down, down he slid going faster and faster along a super slippery tunnel. It twisted and turned and it was all he could do to keep his wits about him. He couldn't scream, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't close his eyes.

But amazingly enough his mind was crystal clear. "If I can get to my cape," thought Wellington, "it can help check this breakneck descent." He stretched a paw behind him and found he could just reach inside the flap of his haversack. He had to hurry as the ground was in sight. He was glad he had put his cape in last. It would be near the top. Ah ha, his fingers found it! He gave it a tug and out it came. He hastily tied it around his neck and felt himself slow to a kinder pace. And just in time.

For the third time that day, he bumped to a stop. But this time there were no friends to greet him. Instead, he looked up into the eyes of who could be none other than Black Veil!



Chapter 10

Unveiled

“Well, well, well,” boomed a loud voice in Wellington’s good ear. His left ear didn’t hear so well but few knew this. “It looks like a young thing entering my lair through the sinking sand tunnel,” continued the voice. “And just who are you, young thing?” demanded the enormous rabbit body that contained the booming voice.

“My, my name is Wellington, Wellington Easter Bunny,” whispered Wellington. “Are you, are you Black Veil?” inquired Wellington with a squeak.

“Ha, ha, ha,” laughed the voice, “And just who else would I be? Of course, I am the mighty Black Veil. What do you want with me, young Wellington? Dare you come into my lair alone with no weapon? Do you not know that I can extinguish you with one paw?” He raised a giant arm over his head and moved as if to crash it upon Wellington’s head.

Wellington rose to his feet. “But I have brought something that belongs to you, sir.”

Black Veil paused, “What could you have of interest to me, insignificant rabbit?”

Wellington gulped and continued, “If we could retire to your high court room I will explain.” Black Veil gazed at Wellington, not used to such bravery. This young one appeared not to be afraid of him. He lowered his clinched fist and gestured that Wellington should step ahead of him along the corridor. After several twists and turns, they entered an opulently decorated room. There were portraits of Black Veil on the walls and a high pedestal that held Black Veil’s crown and wand.

“I have come to return the jewel that belongs in your wand,” said Wellington after Black Veil had seated himself on his throne.

“Why do you care if I get my jewel back?” asked Black Veil. “With it I can do great damage.”

“It belongs to you,” said Wellington. “Give me your wand, please.” Black Veil reached for the jewel that Wellington had removed from the fob. “No,” said Wellington. “I must replace it.” Black Veil mutely handed Wellington his wand. Instantly Wellington pressed his paw containing the jewel into the place on the wand where the jewel belonged. Suddenly the room began to shake and rumble. Black Veil himself took on a strange look. Wellington removed his paw and to his amazement, his packet containing the fading dust was in it. He quickly gathered his cape around him and whispered, “Home.”

No sooner had he spoken than there he stood in the middle of his own wonderful living room where Bethleann and Georg sat anxiously awaiting his return. In an instant they were beside him. “Did it work?” fairly shouted Bethleann.

Wellington nodded, “I think so. I definitely have the fading dust. But how could you be sure I would succeed?” he started to ask.

“Because,” Bethleann interrupted, “as Georg realized, Black Veil must have used supreme super invisibility to cover his presence in Uncle Wells’ bungalow. But he wasn’t counting on the spell causing you to become befuddled. Remember I said that powerful magic is also unstable. Strange things can and do happen. You kept hesitating and he panicked. Getting the fading dust from you, the rightful owner, would have been no problem for a wizard of his power. However, since his own spell (which, by the way, was wearing off) bewitched you, he had to act quickly. He invoked instantaneous removal even though it meant using double-magic, or two powerful incantations at the same time. Those of us trained in high magic know that double-magic can be reversed any time if the original participants change places. That is why you had to replace the jewel in the wand. Black Veil obviously hoped that you did not know to incant the double-magic reversal spell. At first, I thought Black Veil

plundered Georg thinking he had the packet, but then I reasoned out what Black Veil had really been after. He was merely searching Georg for his jewel.”

“And you knew all along that I had to face Black Veil alone to succeed. You let me fall through the sinking sand. You never planned to go with me,” Wellington fired rapidly at Bethleann.

“Not exactly, I was hoping to execute my original plan, but your sinking in the sand was a well-timed accident. It’s true you needed to face Black Veil alone but I had hoped Georg and I would be nearby in case of trouble. Georg actually could have been with you, since he was originally, even if not as a principal player. However, your facing Black Veil alone was the best chance we had and I knew you had all the knowledge from me that you needed. I had every confidence in you. When you sank, Georg and I hurried back here where we could effect a rescue better if we needed to. Bethleann smiled her winsome smile.

Georg nodded, “She’s right Wellington. I, too, knew you would not fail.”

Wellington thought a moment and then a huge grin spread across his face. “You’re right, you’re absolutely right. It was difficult, but it was the only way and I did it, I actually did it. I faced Black Veil and recovered Uncle Wells’, I mean, my fading dust. We are ready for Easter.” Suddenly he had an inspiration. “Bethleann, can you help? I know Uncle Wells would approve.”

She grinned broadly, “I thought you would never ask.” She hooked an arm through an elbow of each of her new friends. “Let’s get started.”

Epilogue

“Say, Wellington,” said Bethleann later that day, as she and Wellington were putting the finishing touches on an exquisite pile of Easter eggs while Georg carefully packed the last of the love flowers. “You said Black Veil looked strange. What did you mean?”

“Well, he was turning blacker than ever,” replied Wellington, and I’m almost certain that I saw the initial on his crown turn from V to E. Do you think it had anything to do with the reversal spell?”

“Oh, my goodness,” said Bethleann every so slowly. She took a deep breath. “Guys, we may be in for serious trouble...”





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