

WELLINGTON RABBIT

THE TRUE STORY OF HOW WELLINGTON
BECAME THE EASTER BUNNY



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For Clara Leigh Ball
beautiful granddaughter and namesake

And For Lewis Chapin Ball
who had to wait a very long time for his place in the story

Titles set in Harrington Bold
Text set in Goudy Old Style

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Table of Contents

Foreword and Preface		4, 5
Chapter 1	A Revelation	7
Chapter 2	We Meet Georg	11
Chapter 3	A Late Night Introduction	15
Chapter 4	A Surprise for Georg	19
Chapter 5	Wellington Becomes Distraught	23
Chapter 6	Uncle Wells Explains	27
Chapter 7	Wellington Learns His Lessons	31
Chapter 8	Putting Things on Trial	35
Chapter 9	Things Take an Odd Turn	39
Chapter 10	The Fading	43
Epilogue		46

Index to Illustrations

Wellington and his Wellies	1
Wellington looks almost owlish	6
Georg tangled in the brambles	10
The new friends execute a twirling pancake exchange	14
Wellington shares the wonderful news	18
Uncle Wells consoles Wellington	22
Uncle Wells brings on the baked apples	26
Wellington learns his lessons	30
Uncle Wells hears Wellington's idea	34
Lewis the legendary wizard and the golden egg	38
Godspeed Uncle Wells	42
The Wishflower	45
Hopscotch with Wellington, Uncle Wells and Georg	46
Wellington has exciting news for Georg	47
Raspberry-ming tea after Georg's splendid meal	48

Foreword

Because a loving and gifted mother wanted to do something special for her children at Easter, Wellington and his friends came into existence. Other books for children have been created for similar reasons and have lived on to become classics and masterpieces, enriching the literature of the world. *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wind in the Willows* especially come to mind. This little book is ageless and has the same kind of magic.

Miriam Haynie
Reedville, Virginia

Preface

The story of Wellington Rabbit began as an Easter project for our five children. I decided to make a stuffed rabbit, complete with clothes and accessories, as a gift for each of them. Thus Wellington, his magical cape and haversack, with its never ending supply of colored eggs was born. As an explanation, I wrote a short note telling the origin of Wellington's name and of his talents. One paragraph became a page, and then two, and soon there was a book in progress. But, as good things sometimes do, it got left by the wayside and didn't get picked up again until the following Easter.

That Easter I made everyone an Uncle Wells rabbit for their collection, but as yet no one had seen the book or knew much at all about the story, myself included. Now you may find my ignorance strange, but remember, even though my name appears on the title page, everyone knows that Wellington is the real author.

Another Easter came with Georg, the bear with magical powers, arriving on the scene. By now we were all getting anxious to know the whole story. It was time to finish the book. I worked on it now and again all that following year, and in a great blitz of creative energy finished in time to make personal copies for each Easter basket. There were even photos of Wellington, Uncle Wells and Georg.

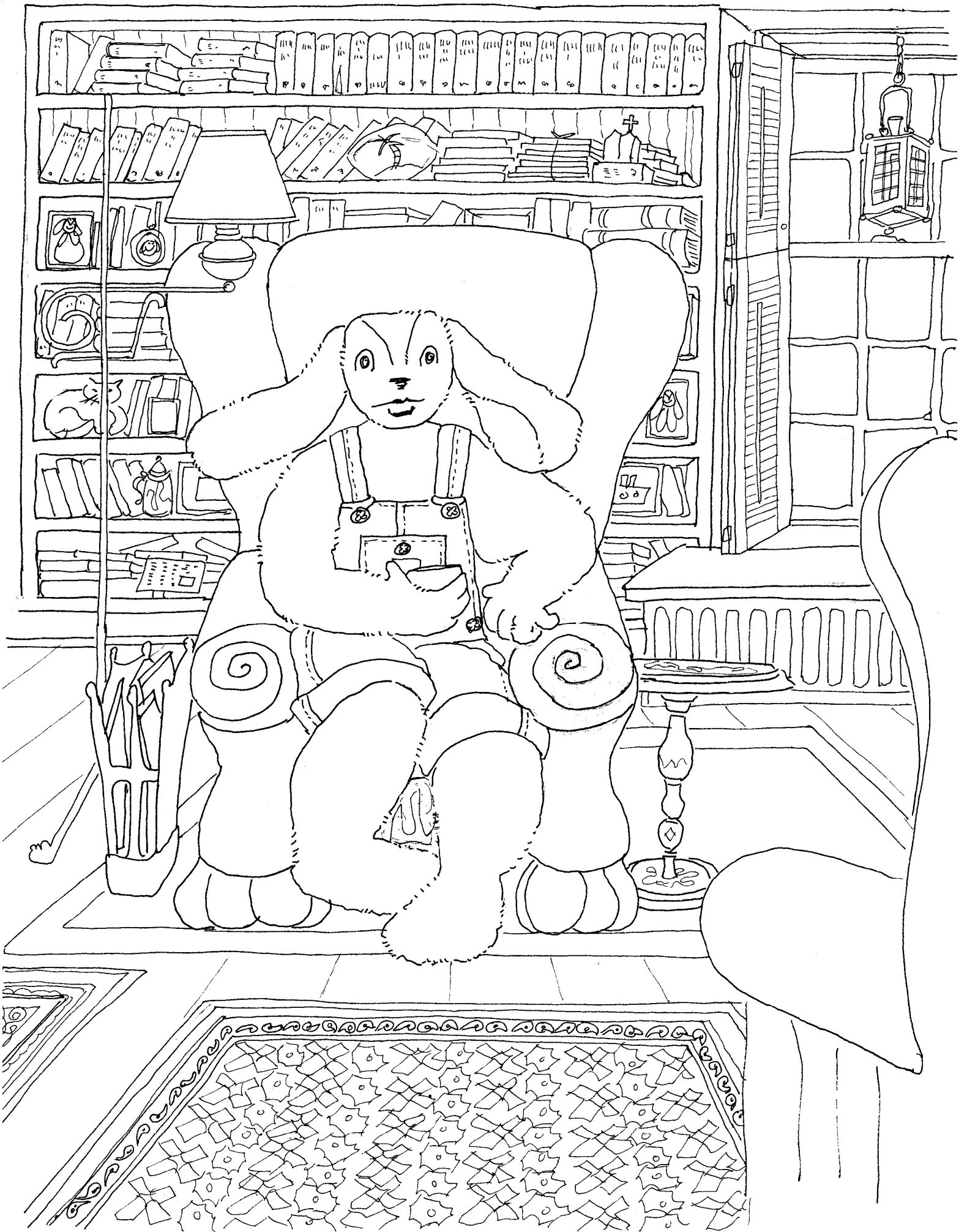
Everyone loved the story, but being somewhat greedy, they all wanted more - illustrations they begged. The reason I had not done any drawings was because I needed just the right setting for Wellington, and nothing seemed to fit. Then one day we were visiting my cousin, Miriam Haynie, a published author herself, and it dawned on me that her house was the missing piece. It was perfect for Wellington and Uncle Wells. She had an incredible collection of gifts and treasures accumulated through a lifetime of being creative and loved by family and friends. When I told her my idea she laughed and said that her house did have a sort of rabbitish feel to it.

All the art has Easter eggs of their own. Family mementos, from Wellington's Oshkosh overalls that all the kids wore to Donny's favorite chair he brought from home when we married. Wellington sits in it as he learns his destiny.

Every book needs a good editor and this is where my soul mate and creative partner Donny shines. He sorted that first book into chapters and created a format for the books that followed. He polishes and shines and then lets me have all the limelight. He is my kindred spirit and love of my life.

This year sees a big revision to that first book. In fitting it to the format of the twelve books that followed, I realized that I needed more chapters. As I threaded words into the story I realized that they were there all along, patiently waiting for the right time. The basic story is still evident but much needed changes have occurred.

And so you have it. Finally, the true story of Wellington Easter Bunny.



Chapter 1

A Revelation

Wellington Rabbit was in a hurry, an immense hurry. He was in so much of a hurry that he dropped his carrots. The very ones he had just pulled from his spring garden, wet earth hugging their tiny root hairs like so many clinging magnets. Their feathery bright green tops dusted the air with smells of dew and daffodils. Wellington made the steamiest soufflé with his prize carrots, a mouthwatering dish topped with tiny pearl onions and baby lettuce leaves.

Well, absolutely no time for that now. A very late night with Uncle Wells had caused him to oversleep this morning. Consequently he was way behind. And now, with Uncle Wells due here at noon, time was fleeting. Salad would have to do. He dropped the carrots right there, smack on the doorstep. Wellington would have rushed right on through the door, but habit made him pause to struggle out of his Wellies and slip off his cape.

As he untied the cord securing the beloved cape, Wellington's thoughts flashed to his bunnyhood. He saw a wee bunny happily hopping about his burrow, fancying the adventures he would have in his great cape. It was a grand gift from Uncle Wells to celebrate his third birthday.

Of course, then it had been much too big for him. He tripped endlessly and got all tangled up in the cloth. But the cape was patient and he, more quickly than one would have imagined, grew into its swirling cut. And those two had gone on many adventures, really glorious ones. Now here he was about to start on his greatest adventure and he was not ready at all.

It had all started just yesterday, to be exact. Wellington had stopped by Uncle Wells' home for their weekly game of hopscotch. Hopscotch is a game in which all rabbits excel and Uncle Wells was a three-time warren champion. Wellington himself had won twice, under his Uncle excellent tutelage. The game is played exactly as humans do with one important addition. Each time all players complete a full round, the grid is rubbed out and redrawn larger. This is necessary because rabbits are so adept at the sport that no lapin would ever win unless the challenge was made greater.

The grid Wellington and his uncle played on was laid out on a plot of smoothed out dirt in the dell beside the older rabbit's cottage.

To reach this glade, Wellington had to travel a narrow path trailing off to one side of Uncle Wells' spacious backyard. The edge of the yard directly behind the cottage sported rows and rows of Uncle Wells' favorite flowers—tulips, dahlias and violets. Beside these were the lines of amazing herbs that provided Uncle Wells with a wealth of delights to add subtle but exotic flavors to the many culinary creations he cooked up for his guests. Beyond the edge and through an arch of low hanging persimmon trees ran the path.

In the fall, cleverly scented orange pellets from the trees spread all over the path. These missiles of persimmon procreation covered the ground, as so many broken sunsets, and created a slippery mess for any unaware traveler. Wellington's fur and pride suffered tremendously from the persimmon peril, and he was always just a bit leery of the path. Fortunately, the way was short and only so hindered for a little while each year. Today the trip was uneventful and Wellington quickly popped into the dell calling out, "Match time, Uncle Wells."

“Greetings of the day, my dear nephew Wellington. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Wellington stopped abruptly. This was not a normal hail from his fun loving uncle. Something was afoot. Wellington could always tell his uncle’s moods and practically read his thoughts. This connection most likely was due to the double bond that linked these two rabbits. First, they were blood bound. And second, they shared the name Wellington.

The younger rabbit was pleased with his name. It, you see, originated with the outdoor wear that belongs on any foot if the ground is the least wettish. It was a very commonsense name. Wellington liked having a commonsense name because he was a no nonsense rabbit. And he liked sharing this appellation with his uncle.

Actually, Wellington thought that his sixth cousin once removed on his father’s side should have adopted the name, as many rabbits humorously suggested, after he fell into that gardener’s galosh. Human legend had it to be a watering can, but all rabbits knew it really was a boot. But that young rascal liked his name of Peter and would not listen to such fiddle faddle. At any rate, Wellington stood patiently waiting for his uncle to speak.

“Wellington, let’s go inside the bungalow. We’ve got something to discuss.”

“I knew it,” muttered Wellington, turning back toward the path. “Something big is up. Uncle Wells never acts this unrabbitlike.”

“Yes sir, I’m right behind you,” called Wellington, hopping quickly to catch up with his uncle. The two rabbits negotiated the rest of the path to the cottage in silence and entered the house through the back door. Wellington loved this door. Very simple in design, it was made of many types of wood married together to form one smooth panel. A gift, Uncle Wells had told Wellington. Inside the cottage were more unusual items, also gifts from Uncle Wells’ bank of mysterious friends. Wellington had met a few of them over the years when he was called upon to help out with a dinner soiree Uncle Wells was hosting, but being a shy lad, he had never chatted them up. And later, when he would ask Uncle Wells about a particular guest, Uncle Wells would mutter something vague and move the conversation forward to a more benign topic.

“Sit down, Wellington. Let me get you a cup of raspberry-ming tea.”

Now Wellington knew for sure something big was happening. Uncle Wells only brewed raspberry-ming tea for very special events. Wellington could count on one paw the number of times when Uncle Wells had offered him the beverage.

Raspberry-ming tea was a specialty of Uncle Wells. He grew the shrubs himself and cured the leaves and fruits according to traditions he had acquired during his travels. All of Uncle Wells’ teas were exceptional, but raspberry-ming was the most difficult and time consuming to cure to perfection. Thus it was offered on only the most auspicious occasions.

“Thank you, Uncle Wells,” said Wellington. “Can I help you with the cups?”

“Yes, Wellington, that would be lovely,” replied Uncle Wells, putting the kettle on the stove. He reached for the raspberry-ming tea canister. Wellington took two cups and saucers from the cabinet close by. Normally he loved a hearty mug but not for this special tea they were about to enjoy.

“Let’s have our tea in the parlour,” said Uncle Wells. “You take the cups and saucers along and I’ll bring the tea and pimento finger sandwiches I made earlier,” he said as he popped open the icebox and removed the tasty treats. Wellington moved in a trance. Raspberry-ming tea in the

parlour, pimento finger sandwiches. This was something very serious.

Wellington placed the porcelain on Uncle Wells' teacart and returned to the kitchen for sugar and cream. Uncle Wells liked his raspberry-ming without any enhancements but Wellington preferred a touch of sugar and a splash of cream in his tea, just as his mother had.

Uncle Wells had settled the sandwiches on the butler's table between two easy chairs and begun pouring each of them a cup. "Now, Wellington," he started as he sat down, teacup in hand.

Wellington, already seated, reached for his tea and began sipping the aromatic treat. He was in such turmoil that he completely forgot to add sugar or cream. Perhaps it was that, or perhaps it was the whole mystery of the afternoon. At any rate, Wellington was shortly caught up in a fantasy of Chinese nature. He could see junks bobbing in a harbour, and hear rickshaws clacking along over cobblestones. The cry of vendors selling their goods sounded all around. It was enchanting.

"Wellington, Wellington...."

"Who could possibly know my name here?" Wellington wondered.

"Wellington, Wellington...."

Wellington shook himself and sat upright. "Oh my, Uncle Wells, it's you calling me. I am so sorry. Your wonderful tea took me on a marvelous adventure. Its powers are enticing. However do you do it? Brew it so cleverly, I mean?"

"I am about to get to that, and more, my boy, if you are quite comfortable."

"Yes sir, I am," replied Wellington sheepishly, a tad vexed at being caught daydreaming.

And so the two rabbits talked well into the evening. Or more precisely, Uncle Wells talked and Wellington listened. And with each revelation, Wellington's eyes got bigger and bigger until they were positively owlsh.



Chapter 2

We Meet Georg

Wellington still could not believe all the things his Uncle Wells had told him, but there was no time to dwell on those mysteries now. “So many things to do,” he muttered, “and where is Georg? He said he would be back today.” Georg was a Baltic black bear Wellington found late last spring when he was on a bound-about.

Bound-about is a rite of spring performed by young bunnies upon reaching their teen years. Each spring the youngsters prepare a haversack of essentials and take off for a week or two alone to explore the delightful surprises of the countryside awakening from winter. Every teen bunny usually goes on three or four annual bound-about before arriving at the esteemed state of adulthood and settling down. However, Wellington never seemed to tire of bound-about and still took off annually for a jaunt through the verdant countryside.

It was a bit more than a year ago to date, while on his yearly excursion, that Wellington had found Georg. Wellington had just finished his evening meal and was easing back to view a spectacular sunset when across the meadow came a mournful howl.

Wellington was used to the various animal sounds often heard on bound-about, but this one was new and strange and did not seem peaceful. He reached for his walking stick where it was resting in the crook of a gnarled tree, and started in the direction of the sound. Again the call rolled across the windflower tops, this time very low and sounding somewhat wild.

Wellington was a bit alarmed. Still, a little fear could not stop him, and he continued forward. He did take the precaution of stooping down and inching ahead on his forepaws. As he proceeded through the brush, the noise continued to rumble forth periodically. Finally he came to the place that seemed to hold the sound. By now, though, the cries sounded more like moans than anything else.

The spot was a mass of thorn and bramble bushes piled on top of each other as only years of unchecked growth could produce. “Humph,” grumbled Wellington. “Never let it be said that a thorn bush stopped a rabbit. Why, rabbits are quite at home in such places,” he proclaimed, remembering the very famous story of his eleventh cousin, Bre’r, whose family had emigrated to Africa so many years ago. Bre’r had gone on to make quite a name for himself by outsmarting a clever fox on countless occasions.

Nevertheless, this thorn bush held something making unfamiliar sounds. Wellington crept onward slowly. What with the tangles and impending dusk, Wellington could barely see anything. He did not hear any sounds now either, and that made him very nervous. Reviewing all of this in his mind, Wellington was about to give up the hunt when he heard a voice murmur, “Please don’t go.”

Wellington tumbled back on his haunches in amazement. “I’m in a fix,” continued the voice, “ever since I muffed a magic spell I was practicing.”

“Who are you?” queried Wellington, peering into the brambles. He thought he could see a vague shape. “And what’s this about a magic spell?”

“My name is Georg, really George, but I lost the ‘e’. I still prefer my original name,

though. One day I'll get my 'e' back. I'm a Baltic black bear from the northern taiga. I was practicing a Transportation spell for my Level IV magician exam. It was supposed to be a short trip, just across the forest. But the next thing I knew, I was here, all caught up in these brambles. I tried reciting the spell to get back, but nothing happened. I am very good with a few incantations, but without any knowledge of where I am, I'm afraid to try them. There are spirits that don't take kindly to white magic, you know. I guess you heard me bemoaning my plight. I do believe I am in a bit of a dilemma."

"Let me think," said Wellington as he pondered this most amazing development in his life. Here he was in a bramble thicket with a magic bear. Uncle Wells would never believe it. "Why, Uncle Wells, of course," shouted Wellington gleefully. "He'll know exactly what to do."

Georg stared at the rabbit cautiously.

"Come on, Georg with no 'e', let's vacate this thicket!"

Now this was easier said than done because the immense black bear was quite caught in the thorns and brambles. Soon, however, with much tugging from Wellington and huffing from Georg, the two new friends finally had Georg free from the thicket. Unfortunately, though, poor Georg received a few scratches from the process.

"My," said Wellington as they removed the last few thorns holding Georg fast, "that's some cut you have on your arm." Even in the dwindling light, Wellington could see blood seeping down Georg's arm. "We'll wrap it up when we get back to my camp."

They scurried back across the field that Wellington had crossed not so long ago. Along the way, Wellington's mind raced again at this incredible turn in his life. Here he was on an ordinary bound-about earlier this evening and now he was friends with a Baltic black bear.

Upon reaching camp, Wellington procured his haversack and began digging around inside it. In a moment, his head popped out. He held a bit of red cloth in his paw, "This ought to do the trick." He poured some water from his canteen over the wound and tied the red cloth securely around Georg's arm. "How does that feel?"

"Better," muttered Georg. He was so hungry. He looked at Wellington's haversack longingly. "Do you have a bit of bread in there?" he asked tentatively. He did not want to sound ungrateful for the help Wellington had extended to him, but he was really hungry and a bit of bread would be so welcome.

"Oh my, you must be starving," exclaimed Wellington. "It is best we do not stay here, you being a bear and all in rabbit country, but here," he pulled a hunk of bread and square of cheese from inside his haversack. Both were separately wrapped in wax paper.

Georg wolfed down the proffered food in a gulp. Wellington stared at such a display of hunger. Bears certainly liked their food, it seemed. He gingerly held forth his canteen, not wanting to lose a paw. "Water?"

Georg saw the caution in Wellington's eye. He took the canteen and laughed a big bear laugh. "I won't eat you. I like my food cooked."

"Hush," advised Wellington. "We don't want to scare any rabbits hopping about." But he was much relieved to see Georg intuit his concern and put it at ease smoothly.

"Sorry," said Georg humbly.

"It's okay," said Wellington. "I just want you to get home safely and not wind up in some

rabbit court or worse.”

They quickly packed up Wellington’s camp and snuffed the fire he had banked before he went investigating what turned out to be Georg’s plight. Georg was very impressed with how careful Wellington was to leave everything just so, with no messes whatsoever. “You are a responsible camper, Wellington.”

“Yes,” said Wellington. “It is important to me.”

“It is important to me too,” said Georg. He could tell that he and Wellington would be friends for a long time.

With a bit of slithering and peering around trees, all aided by the fading evening light, the rabbit and the bear made their way to Uncle Wells’ bungalow.

“Uncle Wells,” cried Wellington, rapidly tapping on the door. “Open quickly! Hurry please.”



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Chapter 3

A Latz Night Introduction

“Whatever is it, Wellington?” muttered the older rabbit, opening the door. He had dozed off early that evening and was a bit befuddled to be awakened so abruptly.

“This,” whispered Wellington as he shoved Georg through the door, nimbly following before he slammed it shut.

“This is Georg, Uncle Wells. I found him up by Colleton Creek. He’s in trouble and needs your help,” the words tumbled over each other as they rushed out of Wellington’s mouth.

“Well, well, do come on in lads,” spoke Uncle Wells, fully awake now and in command of the situation. Even though the lads were now in the safety of the bungalow, manners always came first and Uncle Wells needed to extend his invitation formally. “Do sit down and explain yourselves,” he said as he peered from one to the other. His nephew Wellington, with a black bear, a Baltic black bear at that. How providential. And how had this come to be? “Come, come, don’t be shy. This has the makings of a fine story.” As he spoke, he smiled his warmest smile.

Wellington loved Uncle Wells so much. That smile was just what he needed to put his racing heart at ease. He began. Georg joined in. And between the two, the tale was soon told, beginning to end.

“My stars,” Uncle Wells exclaimed as they finished their story. “Quite an adventure you’re having. Transportation is a tricky spell. It needs to be done just so.” Wellington looked surprised. Uncle Wells knew about magic and transporting? It seems there was even more to his uncle than just mystery trips and odd treasures about the cottage. “But surely you must be exhausted. Tomorrow will be soon enough for serious talk. Still, I suppose that I should worry that some nosy rabbit might discover your presence here in Willis Warren, but...”

“You should worry!” exclaimed Wellington. “Rufus Rabbit gave us quite a scare.” Wellington made his best impression of the town drunk. “Is that a b’ar with you Wullington?” Georg chuckled at Wellington’s attempt to imitate Rufus, although the incident had not been funny at the time. “I put on my best innocent face and said, ‘Whatever do you mean, Rufus? Been hitting Bertie’s brew a bit too hard again?’” Wellington continued the dialogue. “All the while I’m shoving Georg into the shrubs. Have you ever tried to hide a bear?”

Uncle Wells hee hawed. “I’ll bet ole Rufus will be desperate to have someone believe him.”

“Yeah,” laughed Wellington, recalling the bewilderment on Rufus’ face. “The one time he’s right and no one will believe him.”

Georg joined the conversation. “It was a close call. I can do an invisibility incantation on myself easy enough. I just did not want to chance that until I knew more about the spirits here. Unfriendly ones can make things pretty nasty if they’ve a mind to.”

“True enough, my lad.” Uncle Wells was liking the looks of this Georg bear more and more. “For the most part, the spirits here are unconcerned with us and should leave you alone. Your simple invisibility spell should not present a problem.”

Wellington looked from Georg to Uncle Wells and back again. Spirits? Here in Willis

Warren? He had learned a bit about spirits in school, but the teacher had emphasized that spirits were nothing more than products of the clever minds of fantasy writers. “Whatever do you mean, Uncle Wells?” he blurted out. “Spirits are real? Not just fancy imaginings?”

“In good time, Wellington, in good time,” Uncle Wells brushed the questions aside. Giving Georg a slight nod to indicate they would talk more later about spirits in Willis Warren, he quickly stood up. “Come, come, boys, you must be starving. Let’s go to the kitchen and rustle up some food. Say, a stack of flapjacks with molasses and creamery butter. And, naturally, mugs of steaming hot cocoa with a cinnamon stick to stir in the marshmallow meltings.”

George was immediately on top of that idea. “That sounds perfect, sir. I am most starved,” he added, already out of his chair and headed for the kitchen.

“That’s an excellent plan, Uncle Wells,” agreed Wellington.

Off to the kitchen the three went. Instantly they were merrily mixing, and stirring and cooking as though they had been friends forever. Wellington had never seen Uncle Wells so jolly.

For certain, Uncle Wells was a good-natured rabbit and rarely reached a bad mood, but tonight he was downright jovial. He dug and rumbled for what seemed like an eternity before he found the exact blend of chocolate to go with the molasses.

“Not just any chocolate on this occasion,” he announced.

Wellington wondered what occasion. He opened his mouth to ask just that question when his eye caught Georg, who was stationed at the griddle. The flapjacks were ready for turning and Georg began flipping them faster than anything Wellington had ever seen. As he watched with his mouth hanging open, Georg made the cakes do double flips in the air before landing squarely in the middle of the waiting platter.

“Wow,” said Wellington, “that’s some magic trick.”

“That’s not magic,” said Georg. “Magic is something to be used very carefully. A responsible magician respects the art and only uses magic very prudently. And I am very responsible, at least I thought I...” his voice trailed off.

“Of course you are responsible, Georg,” Wellington jumped in, seeking to console his new friend. “Now please show me how to do that trick. You’re quite a flapjack master.”

Georg grinned, “Thanks, Wellington. I do like to cook.” He then showed Wellington how to do the double loops and even a triple.

“We’re quite a team,” cried Wellington with glee as they completed a twirling pancake exchange. “Say Georg, I just had an idea.” He flipped the last pancake onto the platter. These he covered with a cotton warming cloth and put the steaming dish onto the table. “But first let’s eat.”

No more encouragement was needed. Plates were passed around and each in turn loaded with the hot flapjacks. Molasses and creamery butter came next. All together, the three dug into their late night meal and silence was the rule for many minutes as they made short order of the delicious cakes.

Finally, Wellington pushed back his chair and groaned. “I am quite stuffed. I barely have room for the final sips of my chocolate. Our meal hit the spot exactly. Now Georg, my idea is for you to stay at my cottage tonight. I have room and it just won’t do for you to sleep in the woods, even under an invisibility shield.”

“Really, Wellington?” gushed Georg. He was quite overwhelmed by the invitation. He had not wanted to ask. Truth be told, he was not looking forward to a night outdoors without his accouterments. He liked bound-about, or as bears called them, roam-about, himself, but he very much liked to have his gear with him. Wellington’s invitation was quite welcome.

Although by now it was very late, the three new friends hastily cleaned up the dishes and pans, right down to the last mug. A messy kitchen was not a sight to start a successful day. Uncle Wells gave a final wipe to the kitchen table and then the light was snuffed. Through the swinging kitchen door stepped the three satisfactorily stuffed friends. At the back door, the two boys bid Uncle Wells a good night. Georg recited his invisibility charm. Then he and Wellington scurried off to Wellington’s cottage, just down the lane and around the bend.



Chapter 4

A Surprise for Georg

The next morning Uncle Wells popped around to have breakfast with the boys. “Georg,” he started over a second cup of tea, “come around to my study this afternoon and let’s chat.”

Georg and Wellington looked at each other. “Sure, sir,” replied Georg.

“Just you, Georg” continued Uncle Wells, giving Wellington a don’t ask look. Wellington tried not to be put off. “In good time Wellington,” Uncle Wells said to fend off possible butts or questions. He went on. “Continued use of the invisibility spell should not be a problem. It is a rather mundane spell and won’t bother the spirits. And I do have a task for you, Wellington. I anticipate Georg being with us for quite awhile.”

Georg looked stricken. “Be here awhile?” His beloved taiga was so far away. Why had he muffed that spell?

Uncle Wells ignored Georg. “He will need an abode of his own. We’ll build a small dwelling behind your kitchen for Georg. We’ll say it is a shed for your tools. You can get started and I’ll help you when I can.” Wellington nodded, more mystified than ever. Turning to Georg, Uncle Wells continued, “see you this afternoon then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Perfect, now let’s tidy up this kitchen and get to our tasks.” Uncle Wells would entertain no questions about his pronouncements. He did offer some good ideas about getting the cottage for Georg built quickly, however. “Get the neighbors to help out. They will be thrilled.”

As soon as he left for home, Wellington and Georg peppered each other with questions.

“What ever is this secrecy all about?” demanded Wellington.

“Beats me. But why can’t I go home? I mean I like you and your uncle but I miss my taiga.”

“I guess you’ll just have to see what Uncle Wells wants this afternoon. Maybe it will clear some things up.”

“They couldn’t get much muddier,” Georg grouched. He helped Wellington make a building supply list. What with stopping for tea and to ponder yet again what could be on Uncle Wells’ mind, it was lunch time before they finished the list.

“Let’s eat light and get you on the way to your mystery appointment,” suggested Wellington. Georg agreed. A sliced cheese sandwich and crisp apple with celery sticks worked nicely to satiate their hunger.

A quick cleanup and then there was no more stalling. “Guess I’ll wander on over. By myself. Just me alone.” Georg did not much like this plan.

“I could walk with you,” said Wellington, “and then head to town for supplies.”

“Would you?” asked Georg.

“Of course,” grinned Wellington, glad to be so needed.

The two set off across the meadow. To any random rabbit eye there was but one figure, since Georg was cloaked. It was a good thing no one could hear them chatting. They would surely consider Wellington daft, seeming to talk back and forth to himself out loud. The boys

decided that Uncle Wells did not need to know that they had walked over together. Wellington waved goodbye at the backdoor and headed for town.

“Uncle Wells, sir,” Georg called out, tapping on the screen door.

“Just in here, Georg. Come on into the study.” Uncle Wells meant to get down to business at once. Georg gingerly entered the house and headed toward the study.

“Come in, come in, lad, don’t be shy,” Uncle Wells practically pulled Georg into the room. “Have a seat,” he indicated a cozy chair next to his desk. Georg lowered himself into the chair and waited.

“I know you are beyond curious about why I excluded Wellington from this meeting. But for now, I am not going to ease your curiosity.”

Georg was aghast, “You mean you are not going to help me get home?”

“Yes, I am going to help you. And yes, you can go home. But,” and here Uncle Wells paused, hoping that he had not misjudged Georg. “I need you to live here. Go home as often as you like, but live here as Wellington’s friend in the new house we are building for you.”

Georg started to protest. “But...”

“There is more, but I cannot tell you that now. You will have to trust me. In time it will make perfect sense.”

Georg looked at his paws. He looked at Uncle Wells. He drew in his breath. “I do trust you. I will do as you say. I will not ask why. But I really want to.”

Uncle Wells breathed a sigh. “I knew you were perfect for the job.”

“The job?”

“There. I’ve already said too much.” Uncle Wells chided himself.

“Never mind. I know. In good time you will reveal all.”

Uncle Wells took both of Georg’s paws in his. “Thank you, my boy, thank you from the bottom of my heart. And now let me tell you how you mixed up the Transportation spell. Very easy to do. Don’t be too hard on yourself.”

In less time than imagined and without any magic, Georg’s new home was finished. The neighbors went on their merry way, glad to have helped out. Georg settled in and tried not to miss his taiga too much. Sometimes it overcame him and he took off on a roam-about, the more bear-like version of a bound-about. He had wandered off on his most recent one three days ago.

Wellington wondered what could be keeping Georg. He was always one to keep his word. “And he did say this morning, I am sure of that,” said Wellington to himself. “Or maybe not. Oh, dear me, I shall now be second guessing myself until that bear shows up.” Next he stirred up the fire and hurried back to the stoop to retrieve the carrots. “It’ll be a quick scrub for you today,” he told the golden jewels. He put them on the counter and opened a drawer to get the vegetable brush. He noticed a burr in his fur and plucked it deftly out with his teeth. “Of all mornings for Georg to be late,” he fumed, almost attacking the carrots.

“Hullo, Wellington,” sang out a familiar voice.

“At last, Georg, here you are.” Wellington almost cried with relief.

“Are you okay, Wellington?” asked Georg, noting the anxious tone in Wellington’s voice.

“Yes, yes, now I am. It’s just this has turned out to be a very important day, and I was most anxious for you to be on time.”

“I am always on time,” reminded Georg.

“Well, yes, but truly on time, oh, never mind. I thought you might have decided to extend your travels without letting me know. That simply would not do just now. I am so glad you are here. Uncle Wells is due any minute. Put away your gear and help me with the salad. No, set the table. Or perhaps you should finish picking up. Oh, I cannot seem to get anything straight.”

“Why, Wellington, I’ve never seen you in such a state.” Georg was stunned at the flustered nature of his naturally calm friend. “Whatever is up?”

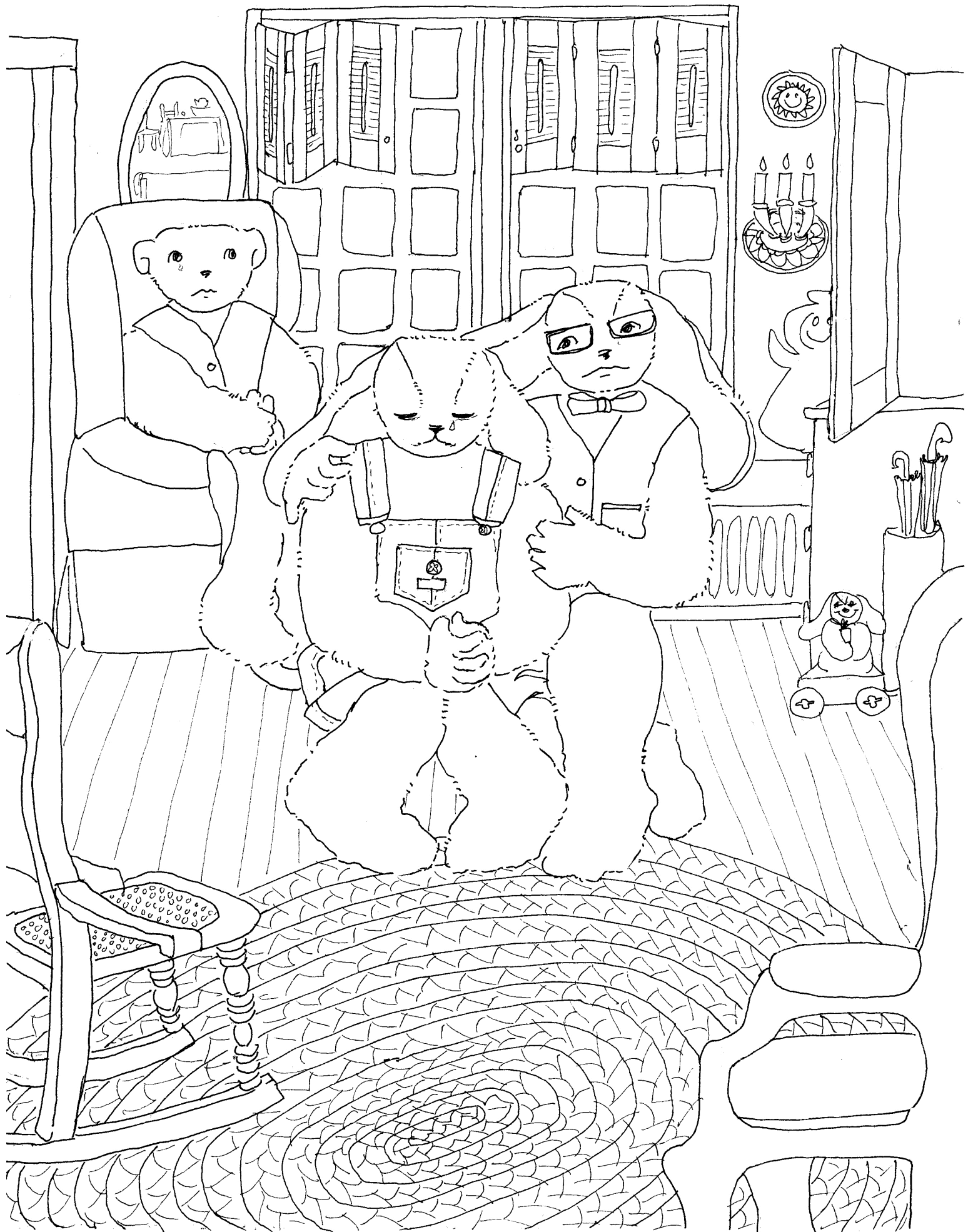
“Oh, Georg,” babbled Wellington, “Uncle Wells has told me the most wonderful news. It’s just too amazing to be true.” He began tossing salad choppings into a big bowl. Georg looked at the salad. The carrots were practically whole and the lettuces looked unwashed.

“Wellington, sit down and let me finish up here,” suggested Georg. He shoved Wellington into a chair and began repairing the salad. “Now what’s the big news that has you so twisted around?” A few chops with the knife and Georg had the carrots looking much better. He ran some water over the lettuces and shook them out before returning them to the bowl. “There, that looks like a Wellington salad.” He plucked an apple from the fruit basket and turned to Wellington, “Cat got your tongue?”

“Umm, no, I just still cannot believe what Uncle Wells told me.”

“Just spit it out, Wellington,” said Georg, biting into the apple. He was getting a tad frustrated with this befuddled Wellington.

“Oh, Georg,” cried Wellington, leaping up from the chair. We are to deliver Easter love to all the children of the world!”



Chapter 5

Wellington Becomes Distraught

Georg sank into a nearby chair. “Are you sure, Wellington? That’s a very big job.”

“I know, I know. Believe me, I know. Uncle Wells told me all about it last night. He’ll be over any minute now to go over even more of the details. He issued the formal invitation to me last evening.”

“Why us, Wellington?” mused Georg as he took another bite out of the apple.

“Well, Uncle Wells said that he had always intended to title me when the time was right,” said Wellington. Now that Georg was actually here, Wellington seemed much more like himself. He rose from his chair and began setting the table. He put the kettle on for tea. He reached into the cabinet and pulled out three plates which he put on the table; a blue one, a green one and a yellow one, his favorite color. As he dug in the drawer for napkins, he continued, “Uncle Wells was so excited when you arrived last year. Of course he couldn’t tell us then what he had up his sleeve. He certainly is one for keeping a secret,” chuckled Wellington. “Anyway, it seems that Uncle Wells has been concerned for quite some time about my journeying alone, as there are ever so many more children in the world than when he was titled.” He set a matching colored mug next to each plate.

“What is titled?” quizzed Georg, still munching on the apple, seemingly quite glued to the chair by Wellington’s astounding news. Normally he would have been up and in the thick of the meal preparations.

“Titled is the official term rabbits give to the one carrying the name of Easter Bunny. No rabbit knows for sure who the actual Easter Bunny is, but every rabbit worth his or her lucky foot knows that each spring one special rabbit always cares for all the children of the world by delivering Easter love.” Wellington turned to making an herb dressing for the salad. He pulled a few freshly clipped herbs from a basketful he kept in the icebox and began chopping them into a fine mix.

“How perfect!” cried Georg. “I love human children.” He had finished the apple, core and all, except for the stem, which made a fine toothpick.

“It’s a big responsibility, Georg. Every child must be attended to. That’s probably why Uncle Wells was so happy when you came along. You will be a tremendous help.”

“But I’m not a rabbit,” murmured Georg, tugging at his fur as though trying to make himself smaller, “or even close to rabbit size.”

“I’m sure Uncle Wells and the WEB feel that the titled rabbit can have help,” said Wellington practically. “Why, look at Santa with his elves and reindeer.” He put the dressing cruet on the sideboard along with the salad.

“He’s perfectly right,” boomed a familiar voice. “Is that strawberry tea I smell?”

“Exactly, Uncle Wells,” grinned Wellington. “Come in, come in. I thought you had changed your mind. The day is waning and there’s so much to do and I have so many questions.”

“Well now, boys,” began Uncle Wells, “first things first. I knew from the moment you were born that you were the rabbit to assume the title. That’s why I was so pleased when your

mother gave you the name Wellington. Every Easter bunny needs to have a name that begins with W. Of course, no one knows that except those of us in the secret society.”

“What secret society?” Wellington interrupted. He poured everyone tea and then sat down on the footstool.

Uncle Wells slowly sipped his tea. “Titled rabbits do not die like ordinary rabbits. They pass their title and then fade to a marvelous place where all former WEBs are. There they pass their days reading, painting, and, of course, playing hopscotch. They keep a watchful eye on the current WEB but are rather powerless to aid in the event of a crisis, although it’s not entirely impossible. Still, I’ve never heard of a WEB powerhelp being implemented.

“Uncle Wells, whatever are you talking about?” cried Wellington in anguish, a stricken look on his face. “You can’t be leaving.” He put down his teacup and buried his head in his lap.

“Now, now, Wellington,” soothed Uncle Wells. “I expected you to take this revelation with some difficulty. That’s why I was so elated when Georg appeared on the scene.”

The older rabbit went to the sideboard and began placing a lovely baked apple on each of the three plates. He reasoned that Wellington was so enthralled by his new status that he probably had not eaten all day. He remembered all too well his first day as titled rabbit.

During all of this exchange, Georg sat silently in his chair, nibbling on the apple stem he had retrieved, trying to make himself look more rabbit-like. He did not know exactly what to say. But he knew Wellington was going to need him more than ever. If only he could just look a bit more bunnyish, perhaps he would fit in better.

“Stop that, Georg,” ordered Uncle Wells. “Wellington needs you just as you are. He doesn’t need a bear that resembles a rabbit.”

Georg was so startled that he swallowed his apple stem. He forgot that Uncle Wells could decipher concentrated thoughts. “I was only trying to help, sir,” he stammered.

“I know you were, dear boy. Now don’t fret, but Wellington does indeed need you exactly as you are, so no more rabbit nonsense,” soothed Uncle Wells. He laid out the forks placing them next to the colorful napkins and plates. Just then a poorly stifled sob escaped Wellington. He looked up at his beloved uncle and huge tears welled from his eyes and flowed down his cheeks. “Hush, now laddie,” Uncle Wells embraced his nephew. “The neighbors will hear you and wonder what’s going on. We certainly can’t have them around at this moment. I’ll be fine.”

“No, Uncle Wells, no! You’re not fine if you’re going away. I won’t let you!”

“Wellington, he must,” calmed Georg, who had finally found his senses, and too, had gone to sit beside Wellington. “It’s his karma.”

“His what?” asked Wellington, peering up at his friend through tear filled eyes.

“His karma. It’s part of a soul’s journey. I learned about it while I was visiting India. Each body has a specific task to do and all the circumstances surrounding his life are part of that karma. It’s rather like destiny.”

“By George, Georg is right,” declared Uncle Wells. “I also learned about karma in my travels. That explains everything exactly.”

“But I don’t want you to go, Uncle Wells. You can keep the title.”

“Now Wellington, the title is your destiny. You were chosen to care for the children. They need you.” He gave the inconsolable rabbit a tremendous hug. “You’re the only rabbit for the job. I’m counting on you.”

Gradually Wellington stopped crying. He looked first at Uncle Wells and then at Georg. “I do feel honored, Uncle Wells. I won’t let you or the children down. But I’m going to miss you so much.” His eyes misted again. “Thank you for finding Georg for me.”

“I rather feel that Georg found us, Wellington. His karma, you see. Now let’s dry those eyes and eat our lunch. Then we’ll have the baked apples to top off this scrumptious looking salad. And I’ll answer all of your questions.”



Chapter 6

Uncle Wells Explains

As they ate, and Wellington was quite surprised at how hungry he really was, the youngsters asked Uncle Wells about the fading and the WEB. Uncle Wells explained that he, of course, had learned about the WEB from his titer, Grandfather Williford.

Then he began telling the wonderful and mysterious story of the WEB. He recited several lengthy and melodic chants that set the boys on the edge of their seats. They looked at each other in astonishment. Uncle Wells finally took a deep breath and eased back in his chair.

“Uncle Wells,” began Wellington, his sadness considerably abated by now and his curiosity running rampant, “about the fading. And how...well, when...ummm...just how did you know it was time to titer me?”

“Well, my boy, they told me, you see,” revealed Uncle Wells, speaking in a soft low voice and pressing his forepaws together. He almost seemed to be in a trance.

Georg shuffled in his chair. He still wished that he were more like a rabbit.

“They’ve never spoken to me before,” Uncle Wells continuing to speak in the low voice. It made Wellington uncomfortable.

“As for...” Uncle Wells stopped. He cleared his throat and shivered all over. “As for the...” he paused. Wellington and Georg looked at each other nervously. Wellington began chewing on his whiskers.

Then Uncle Wells straightened up and blinked. He appeared to be shaking off the trance. “Let’s see, where was I? Ah yes, the fading. It will come soon, but I will have time to teach you your skills and give you a proper WEB education.”

Wellington breathed a sigh of relief. Uncle Wells was looking right at him and smiling as he continued in his normal voice. “However, two titled bunnies in the human dimension for very long is a bit risky. This leads to an uneven balance and the dark magic forces could become agitated. Therefore we must complete our lessons as quickly as possible.”

“But Uncle Wells,” Wellington interjected, “lots of rabbits have the first initial W. Are they part of the WEB? How about fourth cousin White, for example?”

“Only former Easter Bunnies belong to the WEB, Wellington. So, you see, even a W name, freely given out of pure love at birth, is just the start of the equation. Cousin White did have a W name, and was, in fact, due to be titled. But the Queen of Hearts summoned him right before his titling and he felt duty bound to go. He was rather torn up about the whole situation. He so wanted to take care of the children. He never quite got over it, and was apt to ramble on confusedly for the rest of his days,” Uncle Wells sighed. “He is listed in the WEB golden book of those who were and those who were not, or so I was told.”

“Grandfather was hastily selected as the replacement and had to go through his training in record time. He just did get his final lesson finished as Easter approached and the WEB summoned great, great uncle Webster.”

Taking up the empty salad bowls, he carried them to the sink. “Of course, it goes without saying that no one must know you are now Wellington Easter Bunny. Dark forces will find you easily enough without waving a flag.”

Wellington shivered. Dark forces. And just when he was getting used to the idea of so many happy times ahead. He looked at Georg, thankful for his friend to share the load. A sudden thought popped into his head. “Uncle Well, how is Georg going to fade when his time comes, if he isn’t a WEB?”

Uncle Wells looked skyward for a moment. “This has given me some concern, lads. But I will be going to the WEB long before you, and fervently hope to persuade the group to come up with a plan to bring Georg into the fold.”

“Wait, the WEB doesn’t know about Georg?” Wellington felt anger welling up inside. How dare Uncle Wells treat his friend so cavalierly.

“They sort of do,” stammered Uncle Wells.

“What exactly do you mean?” pressed Wellington.

Uncle Wells paused, “I asked if you could have help.”

“And what did they say?”

“They didn’t say one way or the other. I have not heard from the WEB on the matter.”

“And so you ploughed ahead regardless of what the consequences are to Georg?”

Wellington was shouting now. Georg looked stunned.

“Calm down, Wellington.” Now it was Uncle Wells’ turn to look miserable.

“I am CALM!” shrieked Wellington.

“The neighbors...” Uncle Wells started.

“They are the LEAST of my concerns right now,” Wellington spit through gritted teeth.

Georg pushed Wellington into a chair. “Sit,” he ordered. “Don’t say another word.”

Wellington was so stunned he did just that. Georg never acted so bearlike.

“Would they mind having me, sir?” Georg directed toward Uncle Wells.

Relieved to be on safer ground, Uncle Wells took a deep breath and threw up his paws. “This is the WEB, by nature the most gentle and loving rabbits ever assembled. Of course, they would want you. But the magic of the WEB is very old and might be beyond their ability to alter. We simply must hope that a plan can be devised between now and your fading day, which, I might add, is far down the road. Please don’t fret. It will be my paramount concern each and every day until the problem is solved.”

Georg looked at Wellington and spoke just one word. “Karma.”

“Karma, scharma,” growled Wellington.

“I do not think that is very Easter Bunny like,” observed Georg. “Maybe Uncle Wells has got the wrong rabbit for the job.”

“I am perfect for the job!” Wellington hopped up. He looked at Uncle Wells. He looked at Georg. “I love you both so very much. I guess I have been acting rather poorly. I am sorry, Uncle Wells. I know you mean only the best for us and for the children.”

Uncle Wells hugged his nephew. “There, there, lad, it’s a lot to take in all at once. Let me tell you how foolish I acted on my titling day.”

Uncle Wells started in on his own story. Soon laughter and tears both were freely flowing. Wellington and Georg could not believe how truly silly Uncle Wells had behaved.

“Stop, Uncle Wells, you’re giving me a side ache. I will never think of you as reasonable and responsible again. You win the irksome rabbit award.”

All three laughed until they could not stand up. Finally ,Uncle Wells stood up and brushed himself off. “Now let’s get to work. Time is slipping away.”



Chapter 7

Wellington Learns His Lessons

“Oh, Uncle Wells, to work with the children is going to be marvelous. I am so pleased,” gushed Wellington.

“You have always been the bunny for the job,” said Uncle Wells with a smile. “As I said, from the moment you opened your wee little bunny eyes, I could see benevolent kindness radiating forth. You glowed with happiness and inner peace. You were born to be a WEB. The children are fortunate to have you. Now we had best get to work.”

The next weeks were so full of instructions and information that Wellington’s head felt like a spinning top. Often Uncle Wells worked with both the boys. Occasionally he took Wellington into his study for private WEB lessons. Georg didn’t mind a bit and during these times became chief cook and saw to it that Uncles Wells and Wellington ate well and were not disturbed. “He’s a fine friend,” stated Uncle Wells. “Be kind to him and cherish his friendship, Wellington.”

“Yes, sir, I certainly do and will,” said Wellington. “He is my dearest friend, besides you.”

“Now, now,” sputtered Uncle Wells, misting a bit about his eyes. “Let’s proceed with this lesson. Explain the Transportation sequence.”

“Well, first I start with...no, no that’s wrong...I take one...oh my, that’s not it. Uncle Wells, how do you remember all of this?” wailed Wellington. “What if I can’t remember the flying sequence and land in the ocean? What if I skip over some of the small islands, or tiny mountain villages by mistake? This is impossible!” Wellington threw up his paws in defeat and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Uncle Wells sighed, “Maybe this is not going to be as easy as I thought.”

“Something the matter?” Georg popped his head inside the closed door. “Thought I heard shouting.”

“You did,” Uncle Wells sighed again. “Wellington had a meltdown, over nothing, really. He is a rather sensitive lad, is he not? Usually such a good quality,” muttered Uncle Wells.

“Let me talk to him, sir,” offered Georg.

“Would you? Your words might go farther than mine right now.”

“Of course, sir. Now have a spot of tea and prop up your feet for a spell. You’ve both been working mighty hard. There’s some fresh brewed under the cozy. I put it there this morning before you two started. Thought it might come in handy for a quick pick-me-up before tea time.”

Uncle Wells sighed a third time and nodded his assent, once more thanking his lucky stars that Georg had come along when he did. Maybe the WEB knew more about that bear than they were letting on. Uncle Wells pondered that possibility as he poured his tea.

Georg found Wellington sitting in the garden, looking dejected. “Nobody said that this was going to be easy,” started Georg.

“Bug off, Georg. I don’t need your words of wisdom.”

Georg pressed on. “You’re not being fair. Your uncle needs you to be well-schooled so that he can do that fading thing in peace. He’s put a heavy burden on you, but it’s not anything

you cannot handle. And you know I'm with you even if that daft WEB doesn't have a plan for me when, well, you know, when it's time for you or me or us to move on."

"I'm just worried I'll mess up." Wellington put his head in his paws. "It's too much. It's impossible."

"Trust your uncle."

"You make it sound so easy."

"It is easy with trust. Come on, he'll drink up all that raspberry-ming tea if you don't hurry. And it is a really good pot. He can't have it all for himself."

Wellington laughed, "You sure know how to humor a guy. Okay, I'll return to the torture chamber."

"That's the spirit. Go forth and conquer and I'll go forth and finish up tea preparations." The boys reentered the house humming a nonsense ditty they both liked.

Wellington tapped on the study door and then entered without waiting for a reply. He knew Uncle Wells was waiting for him. "I'm sorry I blew up, Uncle Wells. I'm just so worried about making a mess of things. Or forgetting something important."

"Oh, my dear Wellington, you won't forget a thing, I promise. And you won't confuse your spells, for look, as we have been studying and talking, your magic cape has woven every spell into its cloth. They are all there for you to see, but, of course, to the untrained eye they simply look like a marvelous pattern."

Wellington was dumbfounded. He really had blown his top over nothing. Trust, Georg advised him, advice he wouldn't soon forget. He was soon reciting his sequences perfectly. After that, progress was swift and there were no more meltdowns.

"Splendid, Wellington," beamed Uncle Wells one afternoon after Wellington expertly listed the steps in a difficult spell. "Now here is your haversack, freshly lined with green grasses and powdered with WEB dust." They were reviewing in Uncle Wells' study. Pillows and throws were spread out on the floor in a delightful clutter. In the midst of all this stretched the two rabbits, looking lazily comfortable.

"WEB dust?" quizzed Georg who had just stepped through the door pushing a cart loaded with tea goodies.

"Yes. It's a very fine powder given to me by Grandfather Williford just before he faded. Step over here, Georg. You need to know this too. There's just enough to dust your haversack, Wellington, with the smallest bit left over to send me into my fading. This packet, you see, will only work for me. I will give you yours just before I go. Guard it carefully, as it is your only earthly connection with the WEB.

"Why do you line my haversack, Uncle Wells?"

"Because with the WEB lining, your haversack will have an endless supply of Easter love for all the children. Usually this love comes in the form of a beautiful egg. But sometimes it will be formed like a wish flower instead."

"What is a wish flower?" wondered both Wellington and Georg out loud together. This made them all laugh and Uncle Wells smiled lovingly at his two protégés.

“A wish flower is often called a dandelion by those who don’t know of its true power,” said Uncle Wells. “Many times a child will not be able to receive your elegant egg. In those instances you can bestow a wish flower as your love token.

“Why are they called wish flowers then?”

“Because, as every child know, these wonderful magical flowers bring wishes when the time is right. The flower must turn completely white and then be plucked by a child. With a swish of the hand or puff of the cheek, this child sends hundreds of wishes soaring through the air. If the wish reaches a fairy, it will come true.”

“Oh, Uncle Wells, what a beautiful story.”

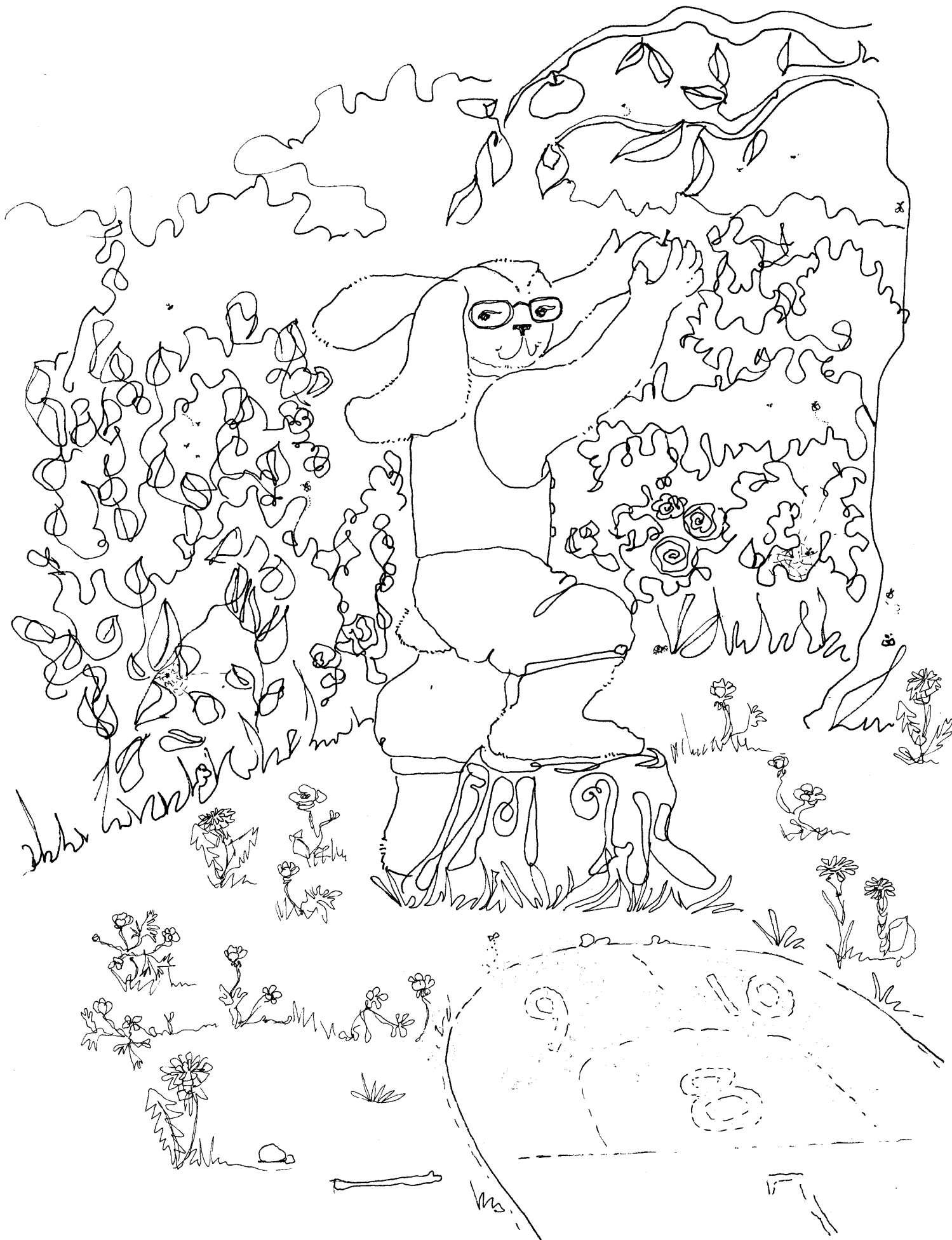
“It is no story, lad. It is the simple truth.”

“So every child is attended to, even if sick in bed or lacking a pretty basket to put an egg in?”

“That’s right, Wellington, every child.”

“I love you, Uncle Wells,” exclaimed Wellington. “You do a wonderful deed.”

“Nay, my lad, neither of us does. We are merely the means to deliver the message of love. The children of the world keep the spirit of this love alive by believing in our magic.”



Chapter 8

Putting Things on Trial

“Uncle Wells, I have a question,” Wellington had sucked in his breath. It took all of his courage to continue with what he was about to ask. They were all in the dell enjoying a relaxing moment now that Wellington’s studies were almost finished up.

“Whatever is it?” Uncle Wells could tell Wellington was uneasy with the conversation he was starting. He pulled an apple off of a low hanging branch.

“I, oh, never mind. It was a silly idea.” Wellington talked himself out of broaching his thought any more.

“No idea is silly, silly rabbit. Out with it now,” Uncle Wells tried not to be impatient.

“Well, I know that all my spells, or the big ones, anyway, are woven into my cape and I feel like I have really learned my lessons well as well. But,” Wellington paused again.

“Oh, sir,” blurted out Georg, who was listening to this struggling conversation and trying not to interfere. “What Wellington is trying to say is that he, we, both of us would very much like to have a go at this delivery thing before you, you know, go.” Neither boy liked much to talk on that topic.

“What!” boomed Uncle Wells. “You know that’s impossible. The WEB will never stand for it. They will have me peeling potatoes for centuries. There will be no hopscotch for me, that is certain.”

“It was a bad idea, Georg,” Wellington looked at his friend.

“I liked it,” protested Georg. “We were only thinking of wishflowers, sir. Not eggs, no, surely not real Easter eggs. Only a trial delivery of wishflowers. Just so you know we have everything straight.”

“Wishflowers,” Uncle Wells calmed down a bit. He did want the lads to succeed, of course. And the number of children in the world was many more now than even when he had started his mission. “I suppose...” he began

“Yes?” both lads leaned toward him eagerly.

“I suppose delivering a few wishflower seeds would do no harm. And having them sprout early would only mean they are ready for wishing at Easter with no waiting. That’s a bonus.” Uncle Wells rubbed his chin, “You really have done an excellent job with your studies. A small reward might be in order,” he seemed to be thinking out loud. “I do have one more spell to teach but it can wait. However,” he suddenly thought ahead, “do not even think about sowing seeds early on a regular basis. The time continuum will be off kilter in no time.”

“Really, Uncle Wells? We really can have a trial run? When?”

“Let’s sleep on it, lads. If the WEB has any objections they will have notified me in some way by morning. If...”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” The two trainees jumped up and down, Wellington more so than Georg. Georg’s jumping was best done outside lest he shake the house off its foundation. “Can we sleep over?” Wellington wanted to waste no time getting an answer in the morning.

“I said if...” continued Uncle Wells “...there is no word from the WEB I’ll allow it. Of course you may sleep over, silly rabbit,” Uncle Wells ruffled Wellington’s ears.

Dinner that night was quick and simple. Roasted acorn pie and carrot salad. Both boys wanted to be done, cleaned up and in bed. Early morning couldn’t come soon enough.

Uncle Wells silently watched the two boys as they put away the last of the clean dishes in record time and headed off to bed, calling over their shoulders, “Night Uncle Wells. Thanks for letting us stay over.”

“No trouble at all,” he called out to the already out of sight lads. He shook his head. Never would he have had the courage to approach Grandfather Williford with such a bold plan! Not that he didn’t want to. He certainly had his own doubts about how he would carry out all his duties and work all of the spells. But still, the brashness. “Youngsters these days,” he mumbled, wondering if the WEB was going to go along with this boldness. He knew that his sleep that night would be as restless as that of Wellington and Georg.

Morning eventually came for all three. “Uncle Wells. Uncle Wells,” sang out Wellington’s voice in the hallway. “Can we go? Did you hear from the WEB? What did they say?”

“Easy there, laddie, let’s have a solid breakfast first and then I’ll tell you how my night went.”

Wellington grumbled his acknowledgment of the proposed delay but then decided to take the bull by the horns. “Perfect! C’mon, Georg, we’ve got breakfast to make.” The two friends sped down the stairs and rushed into the kitchen before Uncle Wells could even brush his teeth.

“Hurry, Georg, just a tad of magic ought to do it,” Wellington was waving his wand about, setting dishes on the table, brewing tea on the stove and mixing pancake batter in the bowl.

Georg looked alarmed. “Wellington, we’re going to get in a lot of trouble.”

“Not if you help me finish up,” Wellington popped the griddle on the stove and started flipping pancakes. “Magic up some fruit juice and sit down,” commanded Wellington.

Georg reluctantly followed the order. Just as Wellington flipped the last pancake onto the platter and sat down himself, Uncle Wells entered the kitchen. He looked from one to the other. He looked at the breakfast waiting on the table. Then he pulled out his chair and sat down. “Smells delightful. All my favorites.” Wellington and Georg waited for quizzing on how they managed to put together breakfast so quickly, but Uncle Wells only began loading his plate and pouring his morning tea. “Aren’t you two going to eat?” was the only quiz they got out of Uncle Wells. “Morning’s wasting and you have a mission to perform.”

“You mean we can go?” breathed Wellington carefully.

“Yes, you can go. The WEB must be either completely satisfied with your plan or so divided they cannot take the time to contact me. Either way, let’s put the trial to the test.”

“Thank you. Thank you, Uncle Wells. You won’t regret this. We promise to be quick and careful. Just take a few trial flights and sow a few seeds, that’s all,” Wellington hugged his uncle fiercely.

Georg and Wellington grabbed their packs that were already loaded with wishflower seeds and raced out the door. “Where to first?” beamed Wellington.

“Let’s not invoke Transportation right here in the middle of Willis Warren!” shouted Georg, worried that Wellington would just start the spell without waiting.

“We’re not in the middle of Willis Warren exactly,” returned Wellington, as Uncle Wells’ cottage was located more on the outskirts than in the middle. But he knew what Georg meant. “Let’s go to the dell and invoke the spell there.” He headed in that direction, very glad again that it was spring and not fall with those pesky ripe persimmons all over the place.

“Good idea,” Georg was as excited as Wellington to get started.

“You go first, Georg. You’ve used this spell for real. I’ve only practiced in the lesson room.”

“We could hold paws and go together.”

“Would that work?”

“Why not? We both recite the spell out loud to each other and bam, we’re there.”

“Okay then,” Wellington was much relieved. Traveling through space with Georg by his side would be so much better. “Where shall we go first?”

“How about my taiga? The flowers will grow slowly there and be completely ready at Easter.”

“Perfect!” Georg and Wellington held paws and began to slowly recite the spell.



Chapter 9

Things Take an Odd Turn

“Where are we?” Wellington stumbled over his own feet. They appeared to be in some sort of desert. Twilight was approaching. Lizards skittered from rock to rock.

“This doesn’t look like the taiga,” Georg rubbed his elbow. “Or Willis Warren,” he added.

“I thought you were an expert at this spell.” Wellington was getting nervous.

“Don’t you remember how I muffed it and landed in Willis Warren by mistake?” Georg shuddered at the memory of all those brambles and thorns.

“OF COURSE I remember,” Wellington fumed. “But I thought Uncle Wells showed you the mistake.”

“Of course he did. But I’m only a Level III magician. I’m still perfecting Transportation. And a lot of other spells, too,” he added under his breath.

“Why on earth and all beyond didn’t you tell Uncle Wells this? Or me? Or both of us? You know I have never ever used it at all except to move from one room to another. What were you thinking?”

“I made a mistake.”

“I’ll say you did.”

“I didn’t think it would be any problem. Uncle Wells is so confident in your skills. And didn’t you say the spells are all woven into your cape anyway?”

“Yes, they are, but I have barely looked at how the words are integrated into the fibers. And I don’t think now is a good time to start.”

“I’m sorry, Wellington. I just thought that with two of us chanting it would be simple.”

“Two of us,” mused Wellington. “Two of us chanting,” he repeated. “Maybe that’s the error. Maybe two together makes things work differently.”

“By George, I think you’ve got it!” shouted Georg.

“Let’s hope so,” Wellington was feeling a little better. Maybe this magic stuff was going to work out well after all. “Since we’re here, let’s sow a few seeds before we move on.”

Georg had his doubts about the seeds sprouting in such an arid climate, but he didn’t say as much. He started casting seeds sparingly. “There, that’s enough. Let’s go.”

Wellington had barely opened his haversack. “I…” he began and then stopped. He felt badly about being so hard on Georg. Everybody makes mistakes. “Okay, let’s move on.”

This time the lads stood facing each other, and on the count of three began reciting the spell. Wellington saw Georg start to shimmer and waver. Everything began to fade. This was more like it. He had experienced the same sensation when practicing with Uncle Wells. His head swirled. Then darkness. Then light and a blurry view came into focus. Georg was shaking his fur and grinning, “We did it!”

“That was easy!” They were in the mountains, just like they had planned. They sowed a few seeds and decided to go for one more trip before returning to the warren, just to make certain they had everything well in paw.

This time they were aiming for the outskirts of a small village. They wanted to be sure some children found their wishflowers. A soft rain welcomed them. Neither minded. They both know how to invoke a shielding spell that would keep the rain from soaking them. It really was an elementary spell, very easy to work.

“And this rain will make the seeds grow even better,” Wellington was a happy bunny. “Oh, look at that pretty garden over there,” they were nearing the village houses. “It could use some wishflowers.” Wellington hopped toward the arched trellis.

“Wellington,” Georg hissed. “Someone might see us.”

“Let’s use our invisibility. That garden needs some wishflowers.”

Georg wasn’t so sure. Fine, if it were actual Easter delivery time, but this was a trial run. Wellington had bounded on ahead, and just as he reached the trellis, he disappeared.

“Oh snap, he’s invoked invisibility,” muttered Georg, reluctantly following as he invoked his own invisibility. At least when they both were cloaked they could see each other, a very handy attribute of the spell.

Wellington was hopping about scattering seeds with wild abandon. He was so involved with his task that he didn’t realize how close to the house he was getting.

“Wellington,” hissed Georg, but the rabbit either ignored his call or couldn’t hear him.

“Wellington,” Georg hissed a tiny bit louder.

“Shhhh...” Wellington admonished his friend, holding up his paw and signaling for Georg to come closer. Georg tiptoed closer, more reluctant than ever. Invisibility be hanged. He felt very visible.

Wellington grabbed Georg’s arm. “We’ve got to do something,” he whispered. “Listen.”

George cocked his ear forward. The words that floated out the open window made him very sad. “I know I must leave soon, Mother, but if I could only get a golden Easter egg before I go I would be so happy. You can remember me and how happy I was whenever you look at it.”

“The lad must be very sick,” Georg looked at Wellington, waiting for his comment.

“I know,” Wellington wrung his paws, “and he’s trying to help his mother feel a bit better.”

“What can we do?”

“Uncle Wells would understand if we leave an egg early, but I know nothing of a golden egg. It must be very special.”

“It is probably the lesson he saved for last.”

“Ah,” Wellington nodded. “But we cannot leave this child unattended. And if we go back to Willis Warren for the lesson, Uncle Wells will never let us return because of the time continuum and all that. Even for such a worthy cause.”

“Looks like we’re stuck with no good solution.” Georg had pulled Wellington to the edge of the garden where they could talk a bit more freely.

“There’s always a good solution,” said a voice. “That is, if you look hard enough and sometimes even go so far as to refocus your lens.”

Wellington and Georg looked alarmed. They were still cloaked. True, their voices were audible, but they had been whispering in undertones the entire time.

“Who are you?” asked Georg.

“Where are you?” demanded Wellington, turning this way and that. “And if you’re magically cloaked, like us, why can’t we see you?”

“Ha-ha,” chuckled the voice. “My cloaking is much more sophisticated than yours. But very well, if you want to see me, I’ll dial it down to your level.”

A tall and imposing figure appeared. “Lewis the Wizard, at your service.”

Georg’s mouth flew open. He fell all over himself bowing down and scraping the ground with all the humility he could muster. “Your greatness. So honored,” he babbled. This was Lewis, the wizard of legendary fame. So very elusive no one ever saw him. They only heard of his deeds.

Wellington looked at his friend. Then he looked at the wizard. “So you’re some kind of big deal, it looks like.”

Lewis returned the look. “Not as big a deal as you, Easter Bunny, but big enough. Sounds like you could use some help.”

“Can you help us?” Wellington felt relief flow all over his fur. Maybe there was hope for a final gift for the sweet boy.

“I usually don’t meddle in matters that are not my making, but it seems that you have found a child seeking a gift of pure love for his mother.” As he spoke a beautiful golden egg appeared in his hands. It shimmered and glowed. He handed it gently to Wellington. “Bestow your gift,” and just like that he was gone.

“He’s so magical!” exclaimed Wellington.

Georg, still in awe, looked at Wellington. “Don’t you know who that is?” Wellington shook his head. “That’s Lewis the Legendary. No one ever sees him. He must really like you, Wellington.”

“I like him,” grinned Wellington. “C’mon, let’s deliver this beautiful egg and get back to Willis Warren. Uncle Wells needs to hear all about this golden adventure.”



Chapter 10

The Fading

“Lewis the Legendary, eh?” chuckled Uncle Wells. “Haven’t heard from that lad in a while.” Wellington and Georg were filling in Uncle Wells about the entire trial outing.

“Uncle Wells,” said Wellington as they finished their tale and a thought suddenly occurred to him. “Am I responsible for selecting the next WEB?”

“Why, yes, but don’t worry. That is a long time in the future.”

“But how will I know when it is time?”

“You will just know, my dear boy. And the WEB will help you. Their guiding paw is ever present. That reminds me,” Uncle Wells went on, “all my treasures and this cottage, too, will be officially yours when I fade. I inherited it from grandfather and he from Great Uncle Webster and on back through the WEB lineage to the first. In turn you will leave it to the incoming WEB.”

“Wow,” breathed Wellington.

“I am WEB number twelve. Naturally you will be WEB number thirteen. There are many treasures around the house that belonged to various WEB’s. There is a discrete number on each that notes which WEB was the owner. A journal in my study tells the history of every piece. Some are very magical and may prove useful to you. The book will tell you all you need to know about their powers and limitations.”

“Wow,” Wellington was getting a little giddy. So much to take in.

“Let’s have a grand supper tonight, Georg,” suggested Uncle Wells. “While you prepare the meal, I’ll show Wellington the journal. And take your time, the journal is a hefty tome.”

“And give me that golden egg lesson,” reminded Wellington. “I am pretty sure Lewis will not always be around to conjure up one for me.”

Georg headed to the kitchen to begin a fabulous meal. This was going to be fun. “Sweet potato fritters, corn on the cob, yeast rolls...” he recited out loud, his own mouth watering with anticipation.

He set the table with high china and silver flatware. This would be a banquet like no other. He planned chocolate mousse for dessert. Much as he would have liked to, he used no magic to create this masterpiece dinner. He didn’t really need magic. He was a cooking champion back in the taiga. Magic just made things go so much quicker.

Finally, he came to the point he loved. Ringing the dinner bell. Clang. Clang. Clang went the chimes. Moments later Uncle Wells and Wellington emerged from the study, both proclaiming their need for food.

“Smells so good,” Uncle Wells’ stomach growled in agreement.

“I’m famished,” Wellington admitted. “That book is heavy, literally and figuratively. I never knew there could be magic involved with so many things.”

“Well, they are all very specialized items of some magic worth,” said Uncle Wells. “Nothing you really need for Easter deliveries, but they still might just come in handy sometime.”

Later, after the meal, three satiated souls sat drifting by the fire Georg had put down in the sitting room fireplace. Wellington munched on a roasted marshmallow. "Still hungry after that huge and wonderful meal?" laughed Uncle Wells.

"I will always have room for a roasted marshmallow," Wellington said, licking the sticky goo from his paw.

"I'm beat," said Georg.

"I could go for a good night's sleep too," yawned Uncle Wells. "It's so late. Stay here if you like. You know I love the company."

Wellington cleaned off his roasting wire and banked the fire. "Thanks, Uncle Wells," he said, gladly accepting the invitation. He was so stuffed the idea of even a slow walk home was too much to think about.

Georg was already heading for the stairs. "Don't think I could have made it home," he yawned widely.

Teeth brushed and pajamas on, all three drifted off to sleep, a satisfying meal in their bellies and a fine evening of great idle chatter filling their thoughts. Pleasant dreams for everyone was the final course of the evening.

Next morning, Georg rumbled awake, and stretching his massive paws, declared, "I'm as hungry as a bear!"

From across the room Wellington rubbed his eyes and laughed. "That's not hard to believe. The kitchen sounds very quiet. Let's cook up some breakfast and surprise Uncle Wells. He must be sleeping in." Then a sudden thought roused him from bed. "Run, Georg, see if Uncle Wells is still in his room!"

The two took off in a dash and rounded the corner to find Uncle Wells bending over a huge chest in the hallway. "Hold on, lads, you almost ran me down!"

"Oh, Uncle Wells, we were afraid...I was afraid that...well, we were worried, Georg and I..." Wellington tripped all over his words, "...you're still here, aren't you?"

"For the moment, yes, Wellington, but then I would not leave without telling you goodbye. I'm just here preparing my catchesack, for I will be leaving this day. The WEB has summoned me. They have completed my mantle of fading."

"Mantle of fading?" puzzled Georg.

"A special cloak the WEB has been working on since Uncle Wells became Easter Bunny," proudly explained Wellington. He was pleased to be able to show off his new knowledge. "From the time of a fading, the WEB begins work on a mantle of fading for the next WEB. It is composed of bits of fur taken from their coats and carefully twisted into threads. These are woven into a cloak that will receive the new member of the WEB. At the moment of summoning, this rabbit sprinkles fading dust upon his earthly coat. The mantle is carefully laid out with all the WEB gathered around it. And the newest member of the WEB powerforce slowly fades from this dimension into the next." Wellington paused briefly, then continued.

"The mantle is the official receptor. In its weave are the names of all the children he has cared for and loved. These names are so small as to be illegible but the important thing is that they are there. A WEB cannot fade until each child's name is in the mantle. A mantle takes many human years to complete. It is finally finished when not one more name will fit into the

design. Then it is time for that WEB to fade and the new WEB to begin the mission of caring for the children.”

Uncle Wells had stopped his packing to listen to this speech. “Bravo, Wellington, you have learned your lesson superbly. I am so very proud of you.” He smiled broadly at his nephew, then returned to his task. He plucked a slender book from a shelf and took off in the direction of his study.

“I fear I will never fade then,” declared Georg, very sadly padding after Uncle Wells. “A mantle for me would take much longer than one for Wellington, and besides, there are no bears in the land of the WEB.”

“Now, Georg, I promised to solve this problem and I will. I am certain the WEB would never have let me join you up with Wellington if we could not overcome this,” assured Uncle Wells, stuffing yet one more item into his catchesack. “There. I can get no more in,” he said and snapped the sack shut. “Well, lads, time to depart.”

“No, Uncle Wells, please don’t go,” cried Wellington.

“Wellington, the children have need of you. They have no way to send the fairies their wishes without your generous spirit. And every child needs the chance to wish.”

“Uncle Wells, I will miss you so much. I will take very, very good care of the children,” Wellington firmly proclaimed, giving his uncle a tight hug.

“I too, sir, will find this world less full with you gone. I will help Wellington with the children and give them all my care.” Georg gave Uncle Wells a bear hug.

“Boys,” smiled Uncle Wells, “the children of the world are very blessed indeed.” With that he kissed each lad, took up his catchesack and stepped into the middle of the parlour where they had migrated as he gathered special items to take on his journey. He sprinkled the remaining fading dust over his head. Suddenly he began to shimmer and shine. His image started to sparkle and waver and slowly rise from the floor. He raised his paw in a final salute.

“Goodbye, Uncle Wells,” whispered Wellington. “We love you.”



Epiloguz

And so we come to the end of the first book in the Wellington series. But the end really is only the beginning. The beginning of so many adventures for Wellington, Georg and the friends they find along the way. There are twelve more volumes, each with its own twists and turns. You will be intrigued, enthralled and entertained.

Meanwhile, Wellington and Georg and Uncle Wells wish you peace and love. And they are very hopeful that you will find your magic wishflower.

