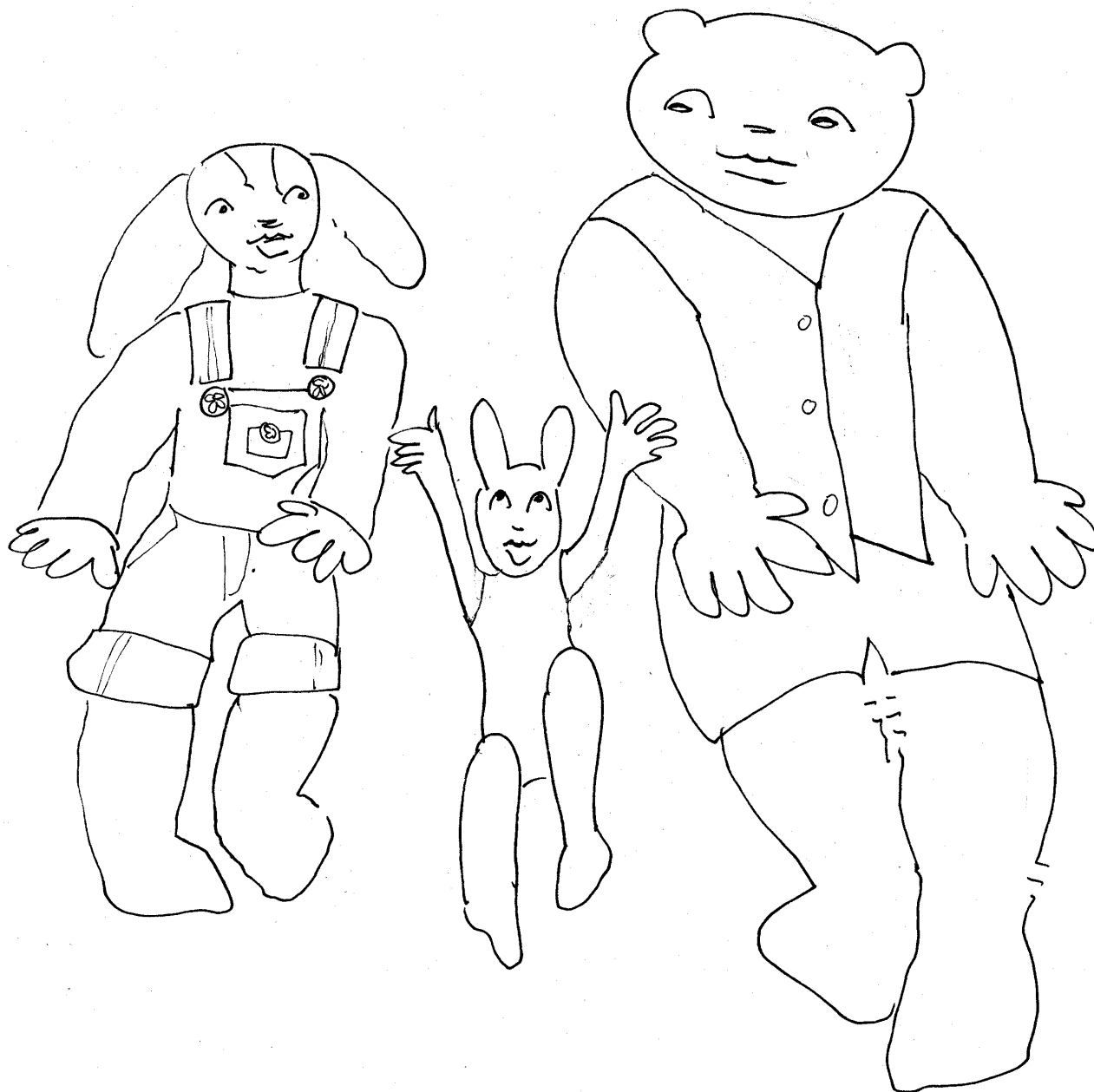


WELLINGTON RABBIT

LOST AND FOUND



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For granddaughter
Lydia Beaulieu Desjardins
A beautiful princess
and
Wellington
The sweetest bunny ever of this realm

We thank our Heavenly Father
Who give us grace and fills us with love

Titles set in Harrington Bold
Text set in Harrington and Goudy Old Style

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Preface

Sprinting for the finish line yet again. This time weaving story writing around Andrew & Jenn's wonderful wedding celebration party. And so many Bayside testers that need our attention this time of year. Oh, sleep, who needs it!

Ah well, the story is finished and much more polished than I would ever make it, thanks as always to my ever faithful editor and love of my life, Donny. Even at that, this special Easter 2004 edition still has a few quirks and flaws. So when you get into the story and find those places, we welcome the extra eyes and look forward to your corrections.

A flick of Wellington's ear to Jasper Fforde whose idea of story hopping I incorporated into the text. Of course, his marvelous plots are much more complex and far more involved than I could begin to imagine. I simply used the basic premise to move the characters around, which worked very well and allowed Wellington the opportunity to pitch some of his favorite classics for everyone's reading pleasure.

This year's book is dedicated to our lovely new Lydia, born July 2, 2003. And a jewel she is. "She has finger and toes...and ears," declared two-year-old big brother, Martin, upon closer inspection. That was after his initial comment, "She's brand new!"

Additionally, the book goes to our beloved Wellington, who has faded to the WEB. We'll all certainly miss him, but don't worry - he left behind many more stories to tell!

His story is worthy of a tale all its own. One spring day just about Easter time we found a rabbit under our house. That part is not too unusual if you know that our house is on stilts. Anyway, he seemed rather tame and we did not want any harm to come to him by way of dogs or other predators, so we found a box and persuaded him to enter it. We really did not know anything about him, but did know rabbits could bite. Thus, we were cautious. We already had two cats at the time, and so pondered what to do with him (we were supposing it was a him). He behaved very politely but we were still careful and kept him in the box.

We decided to call our mail lady, who had lovely pens for her many rabbits, in hopes that she would be able to take him. Joan did indeed come right over. After looking at our bunny, she said he was far too tame to be a wild rabbit and must be one of several rabbits that she had seen around the harbor neighborhood where we live. She figured that their owner had gotten tired of them and had turned them loose, so she had begun feeding them cookies.

Our community is a gated one on a fair sized island. It is composed of many deep-water canals and miles of slow speed limit roads, most ending on cul-de-sacs at the end of small finger like peninsulas. It proved to be the ideal place to raise our five children. At the time, there was no leash law, so dogs roamed freely. For the most part, they were harmless, but not to an unprotected rabbit. Still our lost bunny hopped his way from several streets over and around a nice sized pond, leaving behind his comrades and finding his way to our home, located on one of those dead end cul-de-sacs. Already an amazing bunny!

Joan agreed to take him home with her. Before she left, she asked us what we wanted to name him. We, of course, said 'Wellington' although only the first book had been written at that point.

Joan gave us daily reports and said that Wellington was turning out to be such a sweet rabbit that she and her husband, Walt, could not put him in a pen. They let him live in the house with them, which he did until the day he faded. Joan said she has never, ever seen such a dear sweet lovable bunny as Wellington. He lived up to his name every hop of the way. Joan and Walt have no children so Wellington filled a special space in their lives.

Joan, Walt, and Wellington moved to Idaho a few years back. We had a good-bye party with Wellington before they left. Last Easter a choked up Joan called to say Wellington was very sick and she was so worried about his dignity of life. He had broken his hip and it was not healing very well at all. In addition, the cast he had to wear was very tiring on him. Then just as she reached a heavy decision, he got better. She could not cancel the doctor's appointment fast enough. Wellington gave Joan and Walt three more months of love and devotion before he crossed the Rainbow Bridge July 24, 2003.

Just as I finished this note to you, I received an email from Joan in reply to my questions about Wellington's beginning. Here is what she wrote. "I know that he had been running around the Harbour for at least two years before he made it to your house. I would see Wellington and his three friends around the Shipley's house and give them cookies almost everyday. The four had disappeared shortly before you found Wellington and I heard that someone had caught two of the bunnies. I don't know what happened to the other one....I'm guessing it wasn't good. I sometimes wonder if there are any little Wellington descendents around the Harbour. One spring I saw several baby bunnies in someone's yard that looked gray rather than the usual brown of a wild rabbit. I'd like to think that some of them made it to maturity and have happy little grandbunnies eating people's gardens. Take care and God Bless you all....Joan."

God's peace,

Sandra Ball

Bayside, Colington Island



Chapter 1

New Adventures

It was a dark and stormy night, Wellington typed out rapidly on his trusty typewriter. “There,” he grinned, rubbing his paws together, “that’s a great start to my book.” He leaned back in his chair, a satisfied grin on his face. He and his good friends, Georg and Bethleann, had just finished another successful Easter with all deliveries going off without the slightest hitch. He loved his job as Easter Bunny. Delivering Easter baskets and eggs to all the children was wonderful. With Bethleann’s help and with Georg delivering the special wish flowers to all the children who could not receive Easter baskets, well, the time just flew by and the job was done in a wink.

“Whatcha doing, Wellington?” quizzed Georg as he entered the study where Wellington was working. “Writing a book?” He ambled over to Wellington and peered over his shoulder.

“I just might be,” replied Wellington, a little bit annoyed at being interrupted.

“*It was a dark and stormy night,*” read Georg aloud. “Hmmm...I’ve heard that before it seems,” he muttered.

“I don’t think so,” replied Wellington, miffed at Georg’s implication that his idea might not be original.

“Ah yes, I never forget a phrase,” said Georg. He went over to the bookshelf to the left of the desk. It was one of many that lined the room from top to bottom. Georg ran his paw over several volumes, then shook his head. “It’s not here,” he muttered, a bit flustered.

“And what would that be?” asked Wellington, intent on his typing.

“Bull...” started Georg.

“What did you say?” said Wellington. He stopped typing and pulled his glasses onto his nose from where they had been perched atop his head and peered at his notes.

“Bull...” mumbled Georg, followed by silence, his word cut off just like that. Wellington was studying his notes and did not notice the strange occurrence. Georg tried to speak but only air came out of his mouth.

“Are you swearing, Georg?” chided Wellington as he began typing a passage. “You know it leads to no good.”

“Bull...” repeated Georg, and yet again the balance of his word turned to air.

“Georg!” Wellington turned around to face the big black bear who was frantically mouthing words that only met with silence. “Cat got your tongue?” laughed Wellington. “I told you swearing would lead to no good.”

Georg began to sputter and spittle but still no words would emerge. His jaw flapped up and down, but no words came out of his mouth. “Say, Georg,” said Wellington with concern. “You are having a bit of a problem here, aren’t you? Sit down and let me look you over.”

Wellington took off his glasses, put them down on the desk, and rose from his chair. He ambled over to Georg and felt his forehead. “Nothing wrong here,” he proclaimed. “Let me get you a cup of tea. That’ll do the trick.” He left for the kitchen, leaving poor Georg still in the

throes of total silence.

“What’s up, Mr. Georg?” little bunny hopped into the room. Georg shook his head at him and tried to squeak out an answer. But his voice was still missing. “Cat got your tongue?” asked little bunny. “Guess we’ll have to go get it back!” Little bunny was already envisioning an adventure of huge proportions.

Little bunny was a new member of the Wellington family, recently rescued from the underground den of Black Veil, a truly wicked rabbit out to thwart Easter. Actually, little bunny had originally lured Wellington into the den with thoughts of winning the favor of Black Veil. But then he saw the true nature of that evil rabbit and so helped Wellington and his friends escape. The new friends were only too glad to have little bunny lead the escape and happily accepted him as a member of the family. Bethleann invited him to live with her in Uncle Wells’ big house and he quickly accepted. It was his fervent hope to have a real name some day, and he hoped it would be the same as his new idol, Wellington.

Uncle Wells’ house actually belonged to Wellington, as Uncle Wells had bequeathed it to him when he faded to the land of the WEB. But Wellington had his own humble abode and offered the big house to Bethleann to stay in when she was in Willis Warren. It was the central meeting place of the group more times than not. The size was just right for a group of friends to feel comfortable. It was there that they were this very moment. Bethleann was away on a trip and so Georg and Wellington had temporarily moved in with little bunny to keep him company.

“Ho, Georg, try this one,” suggested Wellington, reentering the room with a tray of tea goodies. He set the tray down, “Hey, little bunny, I thought you were napping.”

“Not any more,” said the tiny bunny. “I’m ready to help Georg find his tongue. Which cat do you suppose took it? I’m thinking it was the Cheshire Cat. It would be just like him,” little bunny rambled on, not waiting for Wellington to reply.

Wellington rolled his eyes in amusement at the chatting bunny and offered Georg a teacup. “Here is my best throat tea, peppermint laced with cinnabits and a dash of orange.” Georg gratefully took the tea and began sipping.

“Ahh,” he said. He took another sip. “Ahhhh, ummmm,” he struggled. He took another sip. “Mmmm,” he cleared his throat. He took one more sip. “Aggghh,” he roared. And then quickly, “Bulwer Lytton!”

“What?” asked Wellington and little bunny together. But Georg was worded out. He opened his mouth but nothing more came forth. No matter how many sips of tea he took, his voice remained silent.

“Told you that Cheshire Cat was messing with Georg,” said little bunny seriously.

“But why?” asked Wellington.

“Dunno,” said little bunny. “But I do know how to find out. We need to slip into Wonderland quickie quickie before that cat takes off for someplace else. He likes to travel, you know. Why not that long ago he went exploring in Antarctica. Can you imagine the Cheshire Cat in Antarctica? Why...”

“Wait a second,” said Wellington. “Slow down and back up four sentences. Slip into Wonderland? Whatever are you talking about? And how do you propose to do such a thing?”

huffed Wellington.

“Well, it’s not that easy,” admitted little bunny, “and a good thing, or everyone would be slipping in and out of books like buzz flies. Can you imagine the mess? What with all the extra people in the stories and such. Nothing would be right. Why I...”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Wellington once again interrupted. “You certainly talk enough for one small rabbit. Just explain the process, and slowly, please. And without any asides added,” he finished.

“Okay,” said little bunny, “I’ll do my best. It is possible to get into a storybook, you see. You can even slip from story to story. Sometimes my friends and I would see who could slip through the most stories in one minute. I usually won. I am very quick, you know.”

“Why can’t just anyone do this?” interjected Wellington.

“It’s all in the inflection, very hard to learn, harder to teach,” replied the little bunny “Why...”

“How did you learn all of this?” Wellington went on before little bunny could launch into another story.

“My grandpappy was good friends with that Miss Havisham from Great Expectations. She’s very smart and a champion slipper, but a right tricky one. I personally have never met her. I hear she is off in Egypt now, helping out that Amelia Peabody detective woman. Her stories are rather involved, you know. And there are so many of them. Why...”

“You’re doing it again,” chided Wellington, not entirely upset as little bunny could see a tiny grin forming at the edges of Wellington’s mouth. But Wellington did tip his head ever so slightly in Georg’s direction to remind little bunny about their focus. Georg was dutifully sipping tea and testing his voice but so far nothing else transpired from his efforts.

“Oh yes,” drew up little bunny feeling suddenly very important. “Let’s to a spot of tea ourselves and I will give you the details about slipping.” Wellington nodded in agreement. With a sigh, he put a dust cover on his typewriter and his glasses in their case. His story would just have to wait.



Chapter 2

The Cheshire Cat

Wellington took two teacups and saucers out of the cupboard. He placed them on the kitchen table. He retrieved the steaming kettle from the stove and poured hot water into each cup. He got down the box of teas and set it on the table. Little bunny selected a mild strawberry and measured a scoop into the infuser, which he placed into his cup. Wellington chose a spring apple blossom and set it to steeping also. Then he headed for the icebox where he found a fresh fruit salad Bethleann had prepared before she left. “Just the ticket,” he declared, bringing the bowl to the table. He went back to the icebox for some thick cream and began whipping a small quantity in a handy bowl. His mouth watered in anticipation of the fresh fruit and whipped cream.

Georg had followed the two rabbits into the kitchen, cup in hand. He sat down at the table, a woeful look on his face. Wellington finished whipping the cream and refreshed Georg’s tea, “Don’t worry, Georg,” he said. “When we hear what little bunny has to say we’ll plan a speedy course of action and find your voice.”

Georg gave a weak smile. He hated losing things. First, his beloved ‘e’ right from the end of his name had gotten lost. It had happened long before he met Wellington, but he still held out hope that one day he would recover it and be George again. He didn’t like folks trying to call him Gay Orge. He was Georg(e), plain and simple. Finding his ‘e’ would certainly help eliminate that confusion. Then, just in their last adventure Georg had lost Wellington, but thankfully, that turned out okay. Although little bunny had caused the mishap, he had also helped the gang get home, and so all was forgiven. And now his voice was gone. Georg sighed. If he didn’t know better he would think that he was a born loser. “That’s a funny thought,” he laughed to himself. He knew he wasn’t that kind of a loser, but he definitely could lose things. “Guess I am a born loser,” he laughed. The more he thought about his joke the more he laughed. He laughed and laughed, but when he tried to stop, he couldn’t. Georg had laughed right out of control. The two rabbits looked at him in wonderment. At that, Georg threw up his hands in surrender and signaled no with his head. This uncontrolled laughing was not his doing!

Little bunny put down his teacup. “This is very serious,” he exclaimed when Georg continued to laugh, tears rolling down his cheeks. His attempts to speak were still in vain, but great peals of laughter were no problem at all. “That cat is really mixing Georg up. We must do something right away.” He hopped off of his stool. “Follow me.”

Wellington wondered why little bunny was so convinced that the Cheshire Cat was to blame for all of this, but he could think of no other explanation or plan. He definitely didn’t want to venture a question knowing what that might entail. “Alright,” he agreed, rising from the table. He took Georg’s paw in his own and together they followed little bunny out the back door. A slight misgiving formed in Wellington’s mind. Little bunny was new to the fold, and while he had rescued everyone, initially he had sabotaged Wellington and taken him to Black Veil’s den. Was being the hero of the rescue enough to vindicate little bunny completely? After

all, he had been a part of Black Veil's entourage. Wellington brushed the thought aside, "Silly rabbit," he fussed at himself. "Everything will be just fine."

The wonderful spring day smelled so delightfully fresh. Daffodils were blooming everywhere in glorious yellow splendor. Trees were budding out with new green leaves and sweetly scented buds. Birds were happily chirping and flitting from tree to tree in complete abandon. The air had that certain snap to it that set some folks shivering but Wellington never minded. He and Georg followed little bunny across the yard to the orchard. Wellington did not yet want to risk a question lest he deter little bunny from his plan. And Georg was still laughing, but in a more subdued manner. He was now giggling instead of outright laughing, but one look at him and it was easy to be reminded that the giggles were not real merriment at all. His eyes showed no mirth, just plain bewilderment, and definite beginnings of anger.

Wellington squeezed his paw. "Don't worry, old friend. We will get this fixed. Just hold onto me." Georg was very glad to do that. They passed through the orchard. It looked like little bunny was headed for the pastureland beyond. It belonged to the MacGregor's, but they didn't mind folks crossing through or even having a picnic as long as they cleaned up nicely afterwards. Wellington rarely came here, however, much preferring to do his roaming in the other direction because the meadows that way were much prettier, even though this one was nice enough.

In fact, it was in one of those meadows that Wellington found Georg. Wellington was on a bound-about when he came upon Georg stuck in a briar patch, victim to a muffed magic spell of his own doing. But, as Uncle Wells found out and explained later to Georg, the spell book Georg was using was rather old and the numbers quite hard to read. This news did make Georg feel better because he was very responsible and careful with his magic work. He was, after all, a level three magician. Much to Uncle Wells' delight the two new friends struck it off splendidly and became inseparable. Georg cloaked himself in invisibility so that he would not scare the local rabbits. And he tended house for Uncle Wells and Wellington while Uncle Wells gave Wellington all his lessons on being the Easter Bunny. Uncle Wells was passing the carefully guarded secrets to Wellington before the time came for him to fade to the land of the WEB, the land where all the former Easter bunnies reside. Wellington was a little unnerved at first to realize that he had been selected to carry on the responsibilities of the Easter Bunny. But Uncle Wells and Georg assured Wellington that he was the rabbit for the job, and so he listened very carefully to all that Uncle Wells had to teach him. He was truly saddened at the thought of losing Uncle Wells to the WEB but he did understand the process of life.

Wellington shook his head. It was always pleasant to reflect on his time with Uncle Wells, but there was a job to do here in the present and he needed to stay alert. They had stopped at the base of a huge tree. "What now?" Wellington risked this short question.

"We climb this tree so that we can slip into the story just above the Cheshire Cat. He is quite mad, you know, and we don't want to offend him. He'll disappear just like that before we can get Georg cured."

"Beg your pardon," Wellington asked. "How are we going to obtain this cure?"

"If you sneak up on the cat and grab it's tail, it has to grant you one service with no strings attached."

"And if you miss," wondered Wellington.

“We cannot,” said little bunny. “Don’t even think about it.” And so the three friends began climbing the tree. Actually little bunny led the way, with giggling Georg next, followed by an anxious Wellington. Finally, they reached a branch that satisfied little bunny. “Okay now we hold paws, close out eyes and think about slipping into the story right at chapter six, *Pig and Pepper*. The part where Alice—*was a little startled by seeing the Cheshire Cat sitting on a bough of a tree a few yards off*. Now concentrate on those exact words!” Everyone thought hard. Wellington closed his eyes. It helped him concentrate.

Wellington felt funny. He opened his eyes. He looked around. They were definitely in a tree, but it wasn’t MacGregor’s tree. He looked down. Way below on a bough sat a cat. “It’s the Cheshire Cat,” Wellington whispered.



Chapter 3

White Rabbit

Wellington looked at little bunny and grinned. They had done it. The three friends sat perched high up in a big tree. Down below they could see the Cheshire Cat sitting quietly. Little bunny let go of Wellington's paw and began creeping down the tree. Georg meanwhile was doing everything he could to stifle his giggles, but even at that, he was shaking the tree alarmingly.

Wellington was horrified. What if the cat looked up? It seemed to be rather content for the moment. Wellington breathed out a little sigh. He squeezed Georg's paw. This just had to work. Little bunny was inching closer and closer. Any moment now and he would be in range of the tail. But wait. Where was the tail? Oh, no! That cat had made his tail disappear. Wellington wondered if little bunny had spotted this twist. He was too far away for Wellington to signal him.

Just then, the cat turned toward little bunny and spoke. "Who are you?" it growled as it calmly washed its whiskers with one paw.

"Why, why, why I'm nobody important," stammered little bunny, too stunned to be more conversant.

The cat looked upwards at Wellington and Georg. It flicked an ear in their direction. "And who are they?"

"They're nobody important, either," whispered little bunny.

"Very well," said the cat. With a wave of his paw little bunny disappeared.

"Oh, no," cried Wellington, forgetting to be quiet.

"Shame on you, entering my story without permission," stated the cat, snarling up at Wellington and Georg.

"Oh stop your snickering," he directed at Georg. "Everyone can hear you for miles. You will upset the Queen."

Instantly Georg's laughing stopped. What's more, he found his voice. "You! You!" he pointed his paw at the cat. "Now I remember. You took my 'e'. I didn't lose it at all. Give it back, I say. Give it back right now."

"Tsk, tsk," said the cat. "Such manners. Are you sure I took your silly old 'e'? Whatever would I want with such a mundane thing as an 'e'?"

"I don't know why you want it, but you definitely took it," replied Georg. "Give it back. I remember now. I was reading the story about Alice when suddenly everything went blank and when I woke up my 'e' was gone."

"Well, now, it's not my fault that you cannot stay awake while reading a good book," returned the cat.

"Give me my 'e'. Right now," commanded Georg, ignoring the jab.

"Now, now, you are in no position to order me around. This is my story. Not yours. Just be glad I that I got rid of that insane giggle and gave you your voice back."

“So it was you,” piped up Wellington. “Little bunny was right. And what have you done with him anyway. Bring him back.”

“What is it with you two demanding this and that as though this were your story? That boring rabbit is out of my hair,” answered the cat. “Never cared much for rabbits. Tedious creatures. Take that white one, for instance, always jabbering on about being late. Never have to happen if he planned better.”

And as if on cue, the White Rabbit came into view. He spotted the cat and stopped short. The feeling was mutual between the two. The White Rabbit did not like the Cheshire Cat any more than the cat liked him. “What are you doing here, rabbit?” asked the cat. “You do not usually come this way.”

“I’m late,” said the White Rabbit, “for the Queen’s party. Aren’t you going? It is a command performance.”

“I suppose,” mused the cat. “At least the Queen is entertaining. But what are we going to do about them?” he nodded toward Wellington and Georg. “I would banish them to another story but I carelessly used my Magic Erase on a foolish little rabbit that was annoying me. And who knows when that Mr. Clean will get back here again. He’s busy tidying up somewhere else, I suppose.” He sighed and yawned.

The White Rabbit looked surprised. It was very unlike the Cheshire Cat to admit to a hasty decision. Maybe the old cat was getting soft after all of these years. Then he looked up at Wellington and Georg. He rubbed his eyes. Could he be seeing things? “Wellington? Is that you?” yelped the White Rabbit. “How on earth did you get here? Who is with you? Come down out of that tree so that I can see you better.”

The cat looked bored. This party was getting too friendly for him. He proceeded to fade away, careful to leave nothing behind. Glad to see the cat go, Wellington and Georg lowered themselves from branch to branch until they were on the ground standing next to the White Rabbit.

“Wellington, my lad,” exclaimed the White Rabbit, grabbing Wellington into a suffocating hug. I never in a million years thought I would see you here! This is just wonderful.”

Wellington looked at the White Rabbit quite puzzled. “Do I know you?”

“Do you know me? Why dear friend, I was scheduled to be the Easter Bunny awhile before your time, but the Queen, you know, summoned me and well, I thought it wise to obey her summons. Ah, if I could turn back time, I would certainly make a different decision today. Time, did I say time? I am late....again. Oh, whatever will I do?”

Wellington’s head was spinning. Was this the same White Rabbit Uncle Wells referred to in his litany of former Easter Bunnies? He did remember Uncle Wells telling about how the White Rabbit was scheduled to be titled, and at the last minute followed the Queen’s summons instead. And how his grandfather Williford graciously stepped in just in the nick of time to avert a major catastrophe.

“It is so good to see you. I have been following your progress every step of the way. Actually, I follow the progress of all the Easter bunnies. Working for the Queen is not exactly how I thought it would be at all. No sir, not at all.” The White Rabbit turned to Georg. “And this must be your good pal, Georg.” He gave Georg a pat on the arm. “Mighty fine work you do

with my Wellington here. He is lucky to have you. Sorry about that 'e' thing. That cat is quite mad, you know."

"What does he want with my 'e'?" asked Georg.

"Who knows?" said the rabbit. "Could be he wants to sell it to one of those upstart new auction companies we keep getting notices about. That one called bay something or other might do much better with an 'e' up front, for example."

"He'll not sell my 'e'," growled Georg. "He stole it. It is not his to sell."

"Now, now," soothed the White Rabbit. "Or course not. We'll think of some way to get it back before that happens."

"What about little bunny?" asked Wellington. "Sorry, Georg, your 'e' really is important but we need to find little bunny and rescue him. Where would the cat have put him?"

"No time for anything now," muttered the White Rabbit. "The Queen is waiting. Are you coming with me?" he looked at first Wellington and then Georg.

They were uncertain what to do. Staying here without little bunny or White Rabbit to help them seemed risky. But going to the Queen's party seemed risky too. Wellington looked at Georg. Georg looked at Wellington. No words were needed between the two. The party it would be. "Lead the way," said Wellington, not too confidently.



Chapter 4

The Queen of Hearts

The White Rabbit rushed down the path and was almost out of sight before Wellington and Georg even started moving. “Hurry, Georg, we’ll lose him,” urged Wellington. They hurried along in silence. Even though Georg was glad to have his voice back, he was in no spirits to talk right now. They were in a pretty strange place. Soon they came to a garden where all the workers were busy painting the roses red.

Wellington and Georg looked at each other and instantly decided to bypass that hotbed of activity. The White Rabbit was nowhere to be seen anyway and so they edged past the busy painters.

“Did you see those guys, Wellington?” Georg whispered when they were out of earshot. “They looked like giant playing cards.”

“They are giant playing cards, Georg,” Wellington reminded him. “Did you sleep through that part of the book, too?” Wellington was trying not to be angry. But here they were in a strange land with no idea how to get home, little bunny was lost, a mad cat was out to get them at the first convenient opportunity, and Georg was being no help at all. Now they were heading into the thick of a party given by the notorious Queen of Hearts. Why, she threatened to cut off people’s heads at the slightest provocation! And where was that White Rabbit?

“I’m hungry, Wellington,” said Georg, rubbing his stomach.

Wellington glared at Georg, “Hungry? Hungry? How can you be hungry when we are up to our ears in trouble?”

“I just am,” said Georg a little defensively.

“Well, we are going to a party, that is, we are if we can manage to locate that White Rabbit. There should be some good food there. Maybe even tarts. Now think, Georg, where would he be?”

“I can’t think. I’m too hungry. Maybe at his house.”

“Hungry, hungry, hungry,” grumbled Wellington. “Wait. At his house, you say? That’s it! You are so clever, Georg. You did read the story. I had almost forgotten about that part of the story where the White Rabbit goes home to get his gloves. Now which way would the house be?”

“Well, if I were you I would go that way?” said a voice. Wellington looked up at the big tree they were passing under. In it sat the Cheshire Cat, his paw pointing toward the way they had just come from. “But then again, that way is rather pleasant.” He pointed in the opposite direction. “Or maybe you prefer more adventure, in which case you could consider that way,” and he pointed straight up.

“You,” declared Wellington. “What did you do with little bunny?”

“I sent him away,” said the cat closing its eyes.

“Well, bring him back.”

“Are you ordering me around again?” asked the cat. “I thought I warned you about that. I could banish you, too, if I had not used my Magic Erase so foolishly. It only takes a little bit but I rubbed out that little rabbit with the whole thing. He’ll never be back.”

“Oh yes he will,” said Wellington, “because you are going to bring him back.”

“Why should I?” asked the cat.

Wellington furled his brow trying to come up with a plan that sounded well thought out. “Because the Queen will be upset if you don’t and she will chop your head off.”

“Excuse me?” the cat looked amused. “Why on earth would the Queen care about a tiny little itty bitty rabbit?”

“Because, because, he is providing the entertainment for her party,” Wellington drew himself up smartly. And Georg did likewise; at least as much as he could, being as hungry as he was. “Why do you think we came here?”

“You came here because I stole that silly bear’s tongue and he wanted it back.”

“No you didn’t. We were just tricking you. Everyone knows you can’t steal a bear’s tongue. There’s no way you could sneak up on a bear.”

The cat looked left and then right. “Oh, who cares. I’ve got his ‘e’ and that’s where the real money is. Keep the tongue.”

“Thank you, we will. And now if you would kindly return the entertainment before the Queen gets suspicious.”

“No,” said the cat. He yawned and stretched and then he disappeared.

Wellington and Georg looked at each other. “That cat is beginning to get on my nerves,” said Georg. “And I am still hungry.” He looked down at the ground and shuffled his feet. “Maybe I’ll just get a few berries from these shrubs. He indicated some pretty bushes growing in a cluster close by the tree. They’re awfully tiny but better than nothing.”

“Oh, Georg, I know how hungry you get, but think about how food is around here. It makes you shrink sometimes and shoot up other times. Neither of which would be helpful right now. Can you hold out a bit longer?” pleaded Wellington. “The Queen is bound to have something good at the party.”

Georg sighed, “I suppose,” he tried not to look too wistfully at the nearly ripe red berries.

“This simply will not do!” a voice screamed nearby. “Can’t you make yourself any smaller White Rabbit?”

“I’m trying, Your Majesty,” said the White Rabbit in his best meek voice. Wellington and Georg could see the two figures headed their way. They quickly stepped behind the bushes and squatted down.

“Of course you will try,” bellowed the Queen. The two figures were quite close now and Wellington could see the Queen turning bright red. Almost as red as her flowing gown. She whacked the White Rabbit on the head with her rolling pin.

“Why is she carrying a rolling pin?” whispered Georg.

“Maybe she thinks she is the Queen of Tarts,” said Wellington.

“The party is due to start in one hour and you had better be small enough to fit in that top hat the Mad Hatter found so I can pull you out and surprise everyone,” the Queen directed.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” replied White Rabbit.

He watched as the Queen brushed past him and swept out of sight. Then he hurried over to the berry bushes and began eating the berries. Well, actually he took off his white gloves first and put them in his pocket. “I certainly hope these berries are ripe enough,” declared the White

Rabbit. After eating for a few minutes he sat down on a boulder and began preening his whiskers. "That Queen is such trouble. And after all the things I do for her. Hmm, I don't seem to be any different." He stood up and examined his arms and legs. "Maybe I am different on the other side." He turned around trying to see his back.

"Can we help, White Rabbit?" asked Wellington popping out from the bushes.

"Oh, hi there," the White Rabbit laughed nervously. "You startled me. I wondered where you had gotten to."

"We could not keep up with you," reminded Wellington.

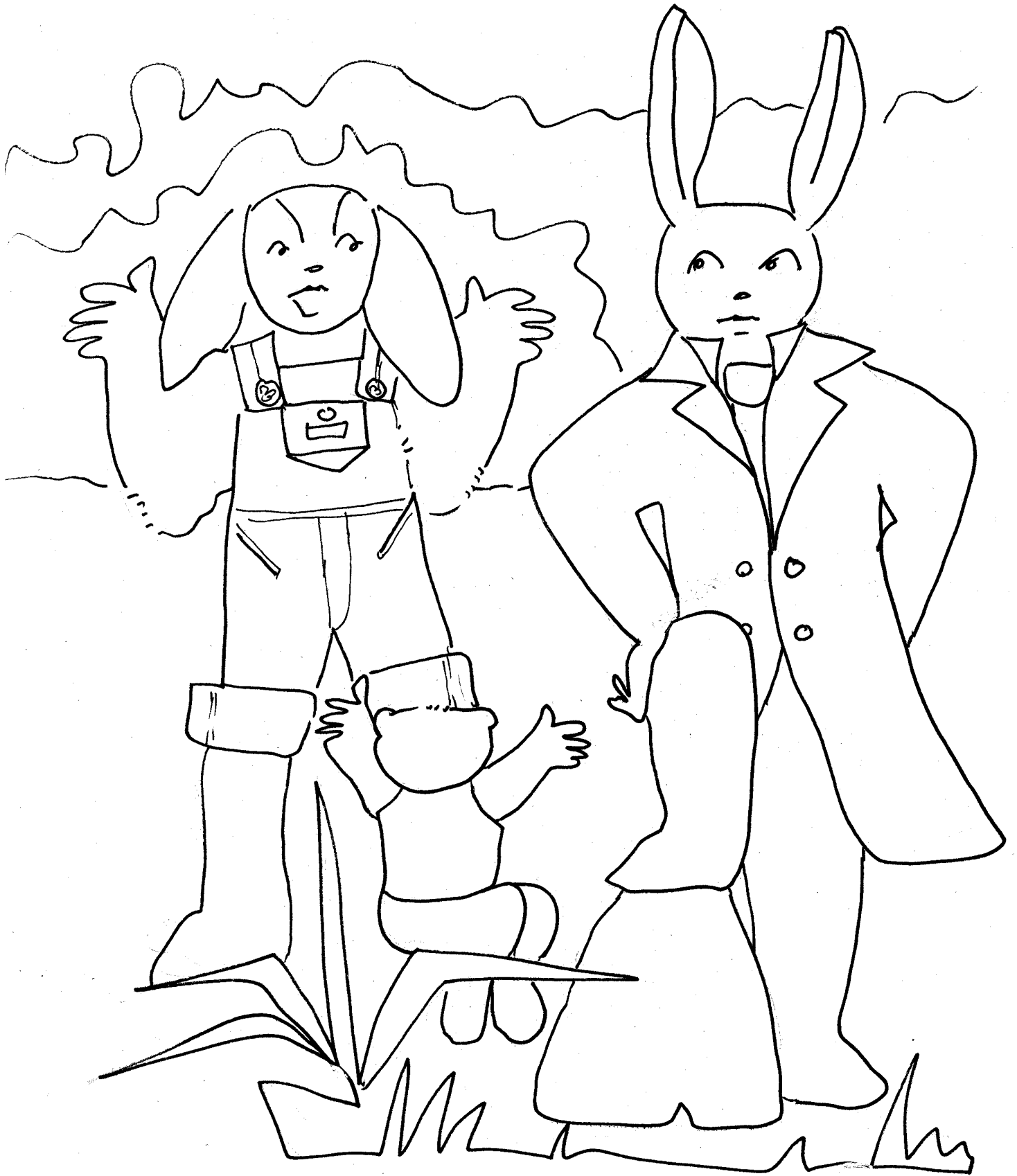
"Well I was late, you know. Very late. Do I look any smaller?"

"Not really," said Wellington. "Should you be?"

"These are shrinking berries but they are just coming into season and they have to be ripe before they work," said the rabbit. "I guess you heard, I need to be smaller by party time. Or the Queen will have my head," sighed the White Rabbit woefully. "Are you sure I don't look just a bit smaller?"

"Maybe," said Wellington, trying to be helpful. "Let me look at your tail. What do you think, Georg?" But Georg did not answer. "Oh no, has that cat got your tongue again?" cried Wellington. He turned toward the bushes where he and Georg had been hiding, thinking maybe Georg had decided to take a little nap until he could get some food, but Georg wasn't there.

"Now that's funny," said Wellington. "He was right here. Where could he be?"



Chapter 5

Berry Funny

“What’s the matter?” asked the White Rabbit, pulling one of his white gloves out of his pocket. He was really hoping his hand would find it too big.

“I can’t find Georg,” said Wellington. “We were hiding right here in the bushes together, listening to the Queen rant and rave on to you and watching her bop you on the head with her rolling pin. Before that, the Cheshire Cat was trying to confuse us with nonsense directions. Oh no, you don’t suppose that cat made Georg vanish, do you? Does your head hurt much?”

“Well, if I were a goose I would have an egg on my head, but since I am not nothing happened,” said the White Rabbit. “The Queen just likes to sling that rolling pin around for effect. It’s actually her tongue that stings more but I just ignore her tantrums as much as I can.”

“The Cheshire Cat would not have vanished Georg,” the White Rabbit continued. “He doesn’t have any more Magic Erase, remember? He used it all up on that little bunny. He hasn’t had time to get any more from Mr. Clean.”

Upon hearing that, Wellington began calling, “Georg! Georg! Where are you?”

“Georg,” the White Rabbit joined in. They both began hopping around calling out Georg’s name.

“Wait a minute,” said Wellington. He stopped hopping and cocked one ear to the side to listen better. He thought he could hear a tiny voice calling out.

“Georg, is that you?” Wellington called out

“Stop! You will squish me,” came a voice from down in the grass.

The White Rabbit stopped hopping around and looked down at his feet. “Oh my,” he cried. “Look!”

Wellington hopped over to the White Rabbit and looked where he was pointing. There on a blade of grass sat a somewhat smaller Georg.

“Georg, what ever have you done?” asked Wellington.

“I was hungry,” said Georg.

“You ate the shrinking berries,” said the White Rabbit. “How many did you eat?”

“A lot,” said Georg. “They tasted so good. And then I began to feel funny so I stopped eating them. I started walking over toward where you and Wellington were talking. But the way began to get longer and longer and the grass taller and taller. I thought it very strange. Then I realized that it was not the path that was getting longer or the grass that was getting bigger but me that was getting smaller. I called out but I guess you didn’t hear me. Then you two starting hopping around and I got really scared that you would step on me. So I hollered as loud as I could. Guess I shouldn’t have eaten the berries, huh?”

Wellington looked at the White Rabbit, “Can you help him?” he snickered, trying to keep a straight face. “You look berry funny, Georg.”

“Ha, ha,” said Georg. “So funny I forgot to laugh.”

“Nothing to do but wait,” said the White Rabbit, “the effect of the berries will wear off eventually. Look how small you are, Georg. You are a berry little bear.”

Georg scowled. "Glad to be so entertaining to you two."

"I wish I had eaten more of those berries," said the White Rabbit. I would be very happy to be smaller." He looked at the bushes, but there were no berries left. "Maybe the Queen could pull a bear out of her top hat."

"No, it must be a rabbit for the trick to look right," said Wellington. "I have seen it done several ways and it just looks fake without a rabbit."

"Hmmm," said the White Rabbit. "Are you sure I don't look any different? I feel a bit smaller."

"No," said Wellington. He had sat down beside Georg.

Georg climbed onto his paw. "How about little bunny? He's small enough to fit into the hat."

"Exactly!" said Wellington excitedly. "He's perfect."

"Tell me about little bunny," said the White Rabbit, also settling down in the grass beside Georg. "I think I missed his story. Or is he the one that rescued you from the clutches of Black Veil not too long ago?"

"Yes!" cried Wellington and Georg together.

"He was fabulous. Even if he did originally bunnynap Wellington. It was a bad mistake and he soon realized that very fact. He was ever so helpful in getting us home. We were really glad he decided to leave the ways of Black Veil and come with us. And now that fool of a cat has made him disappear." Georg was so glad to have his voice back that he talked on in an animated way, for the moment forgetting that he was a bear with very little body.

"Hmmm," said White Rabbit again. "Where could that cat have put him? Tell me exactly what was happening when the little bunny disappeared."

"Well," said Wellington. "Let me start at the beginning." So he told how Georg had lost his voice and little bunny figured that the Cheshire Cat had gotten his tongue. Then Wellington told how little bunny knew about slipping into stories because his grandfather had learned from Miss Havisham. They decided to try it and picked Chapter Six, *Pig and Pepper* to slip into the story at the point when the cat was sitting in the tree. And how they indeed ended up in the tree just where they wanted to be. And how little bunny was trying to catch the Cheshire Cat's tail when everything went wrong.

"Hard to catch that cat's tail," mused the White Rabbit. "Did you say *Pig and Pepper*?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wellington. "Is that important?"

"Could be," replied the White Rabbit. "And I'll tell you exactly who would know."

"Who?" asked Wellington, carefully putting a very drowsy Georg into his pocket so that he could safely take a nap.

"Why, my friend Rabbit, that's who," said the White Rabbit.

"Where does he live?" asked Wellington.

"In another story," replied the White Rabbit.

"Will we go there?" asked Wellington.

"Yes," said the White Rabbit. "You will find Rabbit very helpful. He is quite smart. He knows about, oh, so many things. I just finished taking his latest seminar on *The Ways and Not*

Ways of Red, White and the Quite Rare Blue Queens as Researched by Mole and Hedgehog. Fascinating, utterly fascinating. It has helped me tremendously in dealing with Her Majesty.”

“Now the thing to do,” Rabbit stated, “is keep your paw on Georg and stand right by me.”

Wellington did as White Rabbit told him. “Do a lot of folks slip from story to story?” he asked

“Not too much anymore. Most characters like their own story and are not interested in slipping into someone else’s plot. And the popularity of slipping is on the decline. It is just not the same as it used to be. Come, come now. Let’s go find Rabbit. We are running out of time. Repeat after me, *Rabbits Friends and Raletions.*” Wellington squeezed his eyes shut tight and took hold of White Rabbit’s paw.



Chapter 6

The Hunt is On

Wellington thought about where they could be going. He thought and thought. He thought so hard that his brain felt funny. Suddenly he felt a jerk and he opened his eyes quickly. He could feel Georg nestled in his pocket. He kept his hand on Georg who was slumbering away. He turned to look at White Rabbit who had a quizzical look on his face.

“What’s the matter?” asked Wellington.

“We were supposed to land in the end sheets near Rabbit’s home,” said the White Rabbit, “but we are smack dab in the middle of a story. Did you say the words I told you to say?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Wellington, “exactly like you said.”

“Did you think or do anything else?” asked the White Rabbit.

“Well, I did think about where we might be going and who might be here,” Wellington confessed.

“Oh my,” said the White Rabbit. “That must be why we have landed in the woods and not in the end sheets.”

Suddenly they heard someone coming along the path. “Quick, into the shrubs. We don’t want to confuse the story line,” said the White Rabbit.

They scurried to the bushes just in time to see Rabbit hurrying along muttering to himself, “Now where could he have gotten himself to? This is terrible. It’s time for the story and we cannot tell it without him. Everything will be ruined. Simply ruined. William, William where are you?” he called. Suddenly he spied something in the bushes. “William, is that you hiding in there?” He began poking the shrubs with a stick. “Come out, come out, whatever is wrong with you? You know the bath is not all that bad. It only lasts for a little while.”

“Ouch,” said Wellington when the stick poked him. He had tried to be quiet but it was a very sharp stick.

“Hush,” said the White Rabbit, but it was too late.

“White Rabbit, is that you?” quizzed Rabbit. “What are you doing in the plot. You always slip into a back story.”

“My friend here messed things up,” said the White Rabbit standing up. “Terribly sorry about that but we will stay out of your way until the story is finished.”

“It won’t get finished if we can’t find that piglet,” said Rabbit. “He seems to have run off. He is not very fond of this story because he has to take a bath, but he has never run off before. I just don’t know what to do. We’re almost to the part of the plot where William jumps into the pouch of mama kangaroo. Without William, the plot is ruined. Readers all over the world won’t know what is happening. This is simply awful,” he wrung his paws.

“Who exactly are you looking for?” asked Wellington a confused look on his face.

“Well, most people know him by another name, but really it is just the kind of animal he is. His real name is William. Named after his grandfather, you see.”

“Oh, I see,” said Wellington, following Rabbit’s explanation. “How about if we let Georg take William’s place. He can fit into the pouch. It will buy some time, anyway. Maybe William will show up by the time that Mama Kando discovers the interloper in her pocket. Maybe she won’t notice the difference.”

“It’s worth a try,” said Rabbit, ready to give anything a go that would keep the story running on schedule. “Who is this Georg and where is he?”

“Oh, so sorry,” said the White Rabbit. “This is my dear friend Wellington. You’ve heard me speak of him. And Georg is his bear friend.”

“Bear friend? I am afraid you misunderstood what I said.” Rabbit could not understand how Wellington and White Rabbit thought a bear was small enough to fit into a kangaroo pouch. “I need a small animal.”

“But Georg is small,” said the White Rabbit. “He ate shrinking berries, quite a lot as a matter of fact. He will easily fit into the pouch.”

Wellington pulled the sleepy Georg from his pocket, “See?”

“Well, well,” said Rabbit. “This just might work. Hello friend Georg.”

Georg rubbed his eyes, “Hullo. Where am I? Am I still small?”

“Yes, Georg, you are still small. I just took you out of my pocket. We are in another story with White Rabbit’s friend Rabbit. We came to get his help in finding little bunny, but it seems that he needs our help first.”

“Yes,” said White Rabbit, “specifically your help, Georg.”

“My help?” asked Georg. “What can I do?”

“You can be a very small piglet in the story so the readers reading it won’t be disappointed. All you have to do is snuggle in a kangaroo pouch for a little while.”

“And that’s it?” asked Georg.

“Pretty much,” said Rabbit.

Georg didn’t like the sound of that, but he agreed to the plan. Anything to help little bunny.

“Okay, this is what we do,” said Rabbit. “I will drop Georg into the pouch right when I say, *In you go...* That’s usually where William hops into the pouch,” Rabbit explained. “But the reader does not actually see that, so it will be fine for Georg to fill in. Meanwhile you and Wellington try to find William and bring him to the kangaroos’ house,” Rabbit directed these instructions to his friend, White Rabbit. “And hurry, because there is an illustration coming up with William in it. I think Georg can squeak by the illustration with William’s head sticking out of the pouch, but the next one shows all of our little piglet friend.” Wellington and White Rabbit nodded and rushed off in search of the missing William.

Rabbit took Georg in his paws and at the right moment dropped him into the pouch. Pooh looked puzzled but Rabbit just shook his head. Kando hopped home. When she got there she unbuttoned her pouch and discovered Georg. Since she was used to discovering William, she was not terribly surprised to see a stranger in her pouch. However, she was not sure whether to continue with the story or not, since this stranger was not a small piglet. Then she reasoned that a story was a story and she would just go on with it. “*Now then, Rue dear,....*” Suddenly there was a big noise outside her door. Mama was confused. No one was supposed to knock on the

door just yet. She went to the door anyway and opened it, but nobody was there. She looked left, she looked right, but she could not see anyone. She shook her head, deciding that she had imagined the rapping at the door and deciding that she would need to bring up these strange happenings at the next board meeting. Was someone trying to ruin her story? She shook her head and went back to the story, “*Now then, Rue dear,*” she said as she pulled the small creature out of her pocket. Kando looked amazed. She was holding William. Where had that bear gotten? Hmm, definitely a matter for the next board meeting. But for now, the story was waiting.

Meanwhile, outside the friends were patting each other on the back at the timely rescue of the story. William decided after all that he didn’t mind the bath so much and he rather liked being one of the central characters in the story. And so he had come back on his own, just in the nick of time.

Rabbit took Wellington, White Rabbit, and Georg to his house for tea. Georg was glad to have helped but he was very relieved to be released from the bath part of the story.

Over tea, White Rabbit explained the details of the missing little bunny to Rabbit.

“Well, he could be in Watership Down or The Velveteen Rabbit,” said Rabbit. They would be easy places to send bunnies, but the Cheshire Cat probably would not do that. Those books are too popular. Most likely he sent him to a pig story since he was in the chapter *Pig and Pepper* and that cat has very little imagination.”

“You mean like Pigling Bland?” asked Georg.

“Yes, or the Three Little Pigs,” suggested the White Rabbit.

“Ouch,” said Wellington, “little bunny could be table food among all those pigs in either story! We must hurry.”



Chapter 7

Pig and Pepper

“I’m not so sure either of those stories is the one we are looking for,” said Rabbit. “It seems like, dull as that cat can be, he would pick something more clever than either of those. A bit too obvious, I believe.”

“What then?” asked Wellington.

“I’m thinking one of the Five Little Peppers stories.”

“Really?” asked White Rabbit. “I hear they are rather stilted. No one would ever read them now. Good enough in their prime, I suppose. But nowadays relegated to the back shelf.”

“Exactly,” said Rabbit. “No one will think to look there. I was considering The Five Little Pepper at School. There is such a nice picnic scene where Polly Pepper brings lemon tarts. I have a great hankering for one and hers are the very best.”

Wellington wondered if that wasn’t the main reason they were looking in the Five Little Peppers stories but he said nothing. Rabbit seemed to know quite a lot about so many things. So Wellington decided that he would definitely know the best way to conduct a search, even if it did mean by way of a lemon tart!

“What do we do?” asked Georg. He had slept through the recent slip entirely.

“We hold hands while Rabbit recites us into the story. The friends gathered close.

“Ready?” asked Rabbit. “*Polly, Polly Pepper,*” called a girl opposite, “*give me one of your little lemon tarts. You did bring’em this year, didn’t you?*”

Wellington had again put Georg in his pocket. He kept one paw on Georg and held White Rabbit’s with the other. Wellington felt everything go woozy and then there they were at the edge of a glen where a lovely school picnic was going on. Wellington peered hard. There was a huge white cloth spread out with all sorts of food on it. It was held down at each corner with a stone and was gaily decorated with flowers and sweet smelling vines. Rows of girls sat around the perimeter of the enormous snowy white cloth. The ones at the front passed the food back to the ones behind. They were young girls about teen age, Wellington guessed. Off to the side, but not too far away sat two older ladies on thrones made out of smooth boulders. “Head Mistress and her Assistant,” Wellington reckoned. The girls all wore long flowing skirts and pretty white blouses. And could they chatter! Wellington yearned for the quiet voice of little bunny. Never again would he complain about little bunny’s ramblings.

“The lemon tarts go quickly,” whispered Rabbit. “Stay here. I will be right back.” He scurried off leaving the others behind to wait.

“Don’t tell me they are gone,” cried the girl, leaning over to look for herself.

“I’m afraid they are,” said Polly, “oh I’m so sorry, Agatha!”

Rabbit appeared beside Wellington. “Got there just in time,” he proclaimed, smacking his lips. “Would have brought you all some but we got here a little late. There was only one left.”

“It’s good you got one,” said White Rabbit, looking at the crumbs on Rabbit’s paws longingly. “Maybe we can come again sometime. I so like lemon tarts.”

“Anytime, friend, anytime,” said Rabbit. “Can never get enough lemon tarts.”

“What about little bunny?” asked Wellington.

“How about Wednesday next?” returned White Rabbit.

“Thursday would be better,” said Rabbit.

“Okay Thursday next it is,” smiled White Rabbit already tasting delicious lemon tarts.

“Excuse me,” said Wellington, “but what about little bunny?”

“Oh, yes,” said Rabbit. “The little tyke. I checked with a very cute doe I met on the way to the tarts and she said that they have seen no one like that around here. Guess I was wrong about this story.”

Wellington glared at Rabbit. It was the lemon tarts after all. “What about the Three Little Pigs?” he asked. Suddenly his eyes got bigger. Either his pocket was getting smaller or Georg was growing out of his berry-induced size. He quickly took Georg out of his pocket and sat him on the ground.

“Feeling funny,” said Georg. He looked around the scene. “Whoa, look at all that food! I’m starving.” He began ambling over toward the picnic.

“I don’t think so,” said Wellington, grabbing him by the shoulder. By this time, Georg was about Wellington’s size.

“Why not?” asked a confused Georg. “It’s a picnic made for a hungry bear. And I am the hungriest of bears.”

“Have you lost your mind?” asked Wellington. “You will scare the life out of those girls, not to mention ruin the story.”

“Am I getting big again?” asked Georg.

“Yes,” said Wellington, “and fast. Can you feel it?”

“I guess so,” said Georg. He really could but the idea of all that food so close by tempted him to fib a little about his size change. “Maybe I could make myself invisible,” he suggested.

“Georg,” said Wellington, “you know we can’t use magic safely anywhere but at home, in addition to the fact that you did not bring your wand.”

“But I did,” said Georg. “It’s right here.” He pulled his beloved wand from his vest pocket. “I always keep it with me. Even when I am sleeping, it is under my pillow.”

“Don’t think about using it,” said Wellington. “We have no idea what will happen. I will go get you some food. Stay right here.”

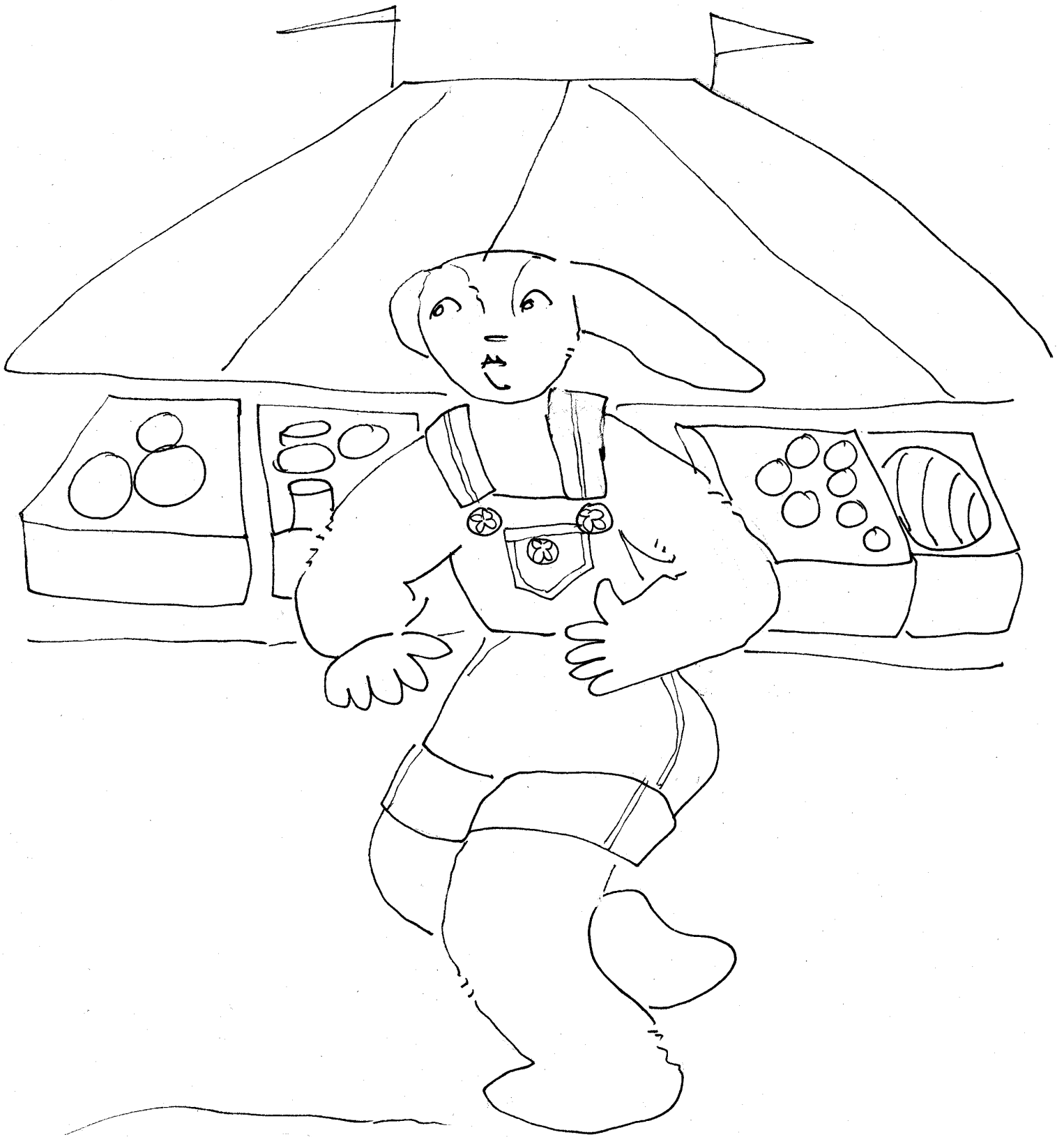
Before anyone could say anything, or Rabbit offer to go himself, Wellington had marched off toward the girls and the picnic, fuming and sputtering the whole way. He came to the far edge of the spread in no time and reached for an egg one of the girls had dropped. Then he realized that he did not have a means of carrying any food. He decided to try and snatch a napkin from one of the girls’ laps and, that decided, gingerly reached for the lap of a girl whose head was turned away. She was discussing the merits of her new boyfriend with her neighbor. Wellington figured that she would be distracted long enough for him to steal the napkin without her noticing anything. It would have worked, too, but as his fingers reached the napkin, Wellington felt a cough that would not be quelled swell in his throat. “It is this stilted story,” he grumbled to himself. Try as he might, the cough would not be deterred, and so he coughed a small polite cough. But it was too much. The girl turned around and saw him.

“Oh, what an adorable rabbit,” she cried, scooping him up in her arms. Wellington squirmed and wiggled. If only he could get his rear legs free he would thump her good. But this girl had clearly handled rabbits before. So much for these quaint old-fashioned school outings thought Wellington. These girls spent too much time in nature in these stories.

Back at the edge of the glen the friends watched in horror as the drama unfolded.

“Okay,” said Rabbit, “enough is enough. White Rabbit, take Georg back to my house in the endsheets. I will rescue Wellington and meet you there.”

By this time Georg had regained his full size and was on the verge of being discovered himself. White Rabbit nodded, and taking Georg’s paw in his, he focused very hard until they were quite where they intended to be, beside Rabbit’s house in the endsheets. Bunnies hopped about, not the least surprised to see strangers in their midst. They were more than used to Rabbit’s ways.



Chapter 8

The Three Little Pigs

Rabbit watched White Rabbit and Georg slip away and then turned his attention to rescuing Wellington. It seemed likely that after their initial interest in him the girls would become bored with Wellington and just might turn him loose. Rabbit definitely hoped so, since chasing after him back at the school would be time consuming. Yes, the girl that had originally nabbed Wellington was walking with him over to the bushes.

“Go on, bunny, go back to your family,” she was saying. Wellington couldn’t get away fast enough. He leapt over to where Rabbit was sequestered and began chipping his teeth excitedly.

“I have never. The nerve of that girl. Holding me like a common rabbit. Upon my word. She almost ruined my tail,” he would have blubbered on like this for who knows how long, but Rabbit swiftly interrupted.

“Get a hold of yourself, lad. They meant you no harm. Now if those boys had gotten you the story might be different. But those girls are just plain silly.”

Wellington stopped blubbering. “I do sound rather put out, don’t I?” he laughed. “She just startled me so.” He looked around. “Where are Georg and White Rabbit?”

“They went to my house. Georg was back to his normal size and I thought it best to get him out of here before we had another incident on our hands.”

“Good idea,” said Wellington. “Do you think we could go check on little bunny in the Three Little Pigs now?” he asked.

“I believe that would be prudent,” replied Rabbit. “Let’s go into the story where the third little pig goes to the fair. There will be a lot of activity there and we will blend right in.”

“Great,” said Wellington.

They held paws and Rabbit began, *“Little Pig,” said the wolf, “there is going to be a Fair in town today, don’t you want to go?”* *“Surely I will!” said the little pig. “What time will you be ready?”* *“I’ll be ready at three and we will go together.”* *But the little pig went before time as usual and had a jolly time riding on the merry-go-round.”*

Again Wellington felt a wooziness but this time he did not close his eyes. Things swirled around him. They were in some type of vortex. Characters drifted by from so many of Wellington’s favorite books. And others he had never seen before. Then floating right beside Wellington, so close he could have touched him, was the Little Prince. And he had his sheep with him! Oh, to visit him sometime. Wellington made a mental note to talk Rabbit about it. Then quite abruptly, before Wellington even had time to sneak one more peek at the Little Prince, they landed on the edge of the fair. It was a rather dusty landing and both Wellington and Rabbit had quite the time smacking dust from their tails and cleaning off their whiskers.

The fair was a small county fair with all sorts of wonderful sights. Wellington was so enchanted by everything that he nudged thoughts of little bunny to the back of his mind. There was so much to explore. He had not been on a spring bound-about in a long time and this fair was just the ticket for a young rabbit looking for a quiet afternoon of exploring.

Meanwhile, Rabbit had already decided to find the home cooking booths and sample the lemon tarts. Next to Polly Pepper's (which were actually her mother's) county fair tarts were exquisitely supreme. Both rabbits looked at each other. "Let's split up," said Rabbit. "You look around the animal exhibits and I will go on over that way." He pointed to the canned and baked goods exhibit tent.

"Do believe that's a smart plan," grinned Wellington. He would be able to explore on his own and look for little bunny at the same time. Yipee!

With a wave of his paw, Rabbit took off for the food displays. Wellington pushed his paws into his pockets and began wandering the fair. He drifted through wonderful exhibits of antique farm machinery. He bought pink cotton candy with a few coins he found in one of his pockets. He watched huge oxen display their tremendous strength by pulling heavy weights around a ring. He clapped excitedly for a little Shetland pony that won a best in show blue ribbon for her trotting. Everywhere he went he kept his eyes peered for little bunny but saw no one in the crowds that even slightly resembled a small rabbit.

He did, however, see plenty of pigs and a few foxes among the many animals wandering the exhibits. He steered clear of them, even if they were at the fair for fun and games.

Pretty soon he came to where the other animals in competition for blue ribbons were housed. Some had already been judged even though the fair was scheduled to run for three more days. But some had not. He slowly walked along the rows of pens and cages. Something kept nagging at the edge of his brain. Wellington tried to concentrate on just what it was, but then it would go away. As he strolled he asked each animal if they had seen a small bunny about. "There are plenty of bunnies, big and small, in the next exhibit over," said a pig with a big blue ribbon over his pen.

Wellington looked at the pig. He started to walk away, then stopped. He turned back to the pig. "You're some pig! What is your name?" he asked.

"Thanks. Name's Orville. What's yours?" the pig returned, but he was talking to no one. Just like that, Wellington's brain clicked in gear and he took off running to find Rabbit. He ran to the food exhibits as fast as he could without causing alarm. He found Rabbit comparing notes with a stout lady about the merits of lemon peel zest to add zip to a tart.

"Be quick," said Wellington, grabbing Rabbit by the elbow and pulling him along.

"Nice talking to you," Rabbit barely had time to offer before Wellington had pulled him clean out of earshot of the bewildered lady.

She shook her head, "Young people, always rushing about."

"What the devil?" Rabbit blustered to Wellington.

"Little bunny is not here," said Wellington. "I'm sure of it. I know exactly where the Cheshire Cat has sent him."

"You do?" asked the amazed Rabbit.

"Yes," said Wellington whispering his idea in Rabbit's ear lest someone hear.

"By golly, that's it!" declared Rabbit. "You are a genius. But I do not know that story well enough to do a slip, sorry to say."

"How about White Rabbit?" asked Wellington.

“He is taking a literature course at University,” said Rabbit. “Let’s hope he has studied that book.” The two rabbits clasped paws. Rabbit began reciting. As usual, the world began to swirl around them.

“Well,” as Wellington thought, “it only seemed like the world is swirling.” He was very sure that none of the fair goers saw anything out of the ordinary at all except maybe two rabbits that were there one moment and not the next. But then rabbits are so swift anyway that a disappearance like theirs would not cause the least bit of concern.

In the vortex, Wellington looked for the Little Prince, but this time saw no one. “Maybe we were in rush hour before,” he decided to himself. Quite smoothly, they floated down right beside Rabbit’s house. No one was about. They began calling for Georg and White Rabbit.



Chapter 9

The Queen's Party

"Hey Wellington," shouted Georg, lopping into the Rabbit's front yard. "Glad to see you back. Did you know a bear lives here? And he loves honey. He has pots and pots of honey. He has been sharing it with me. He's a very excellent bear."

Wellington was happy Georg had found a bear friend with whom to share food stories. "That's great, Georg."

"Did Rabbit have much trouble getting you away from the picnic? Say, where is little bunny? I thought you two were going to get him from the Three Little Pigs," Georg chatted on in an elated manner.

"We did not have any trouble leaving the picnic," said Wellington. "The girls grew tired of me and set me free. Then Rabbit and I went to the fair in the Three Little Pigs. We were expecting to find little bunny. He was not there, but someone who was helped me realize exactly where little bunny is. And we are hoping the White Rabbit can take us there."

"Take you where?" asked White Rabbit, hopping in from his walk with a grumpy donkey who nonetheless was a fun companion.

"Well, it's like this," said Wellington. "I was looking at the fair animals when I came to the swine section. I met a very nice pig there named Orville. It was when he told me his name that it all clicked."

"How did a pig named Orville help you discover the secret?" asked Georg.

"Because everyone knows the story of the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville. They decoded the mystery of flight in heavier than air machines for those human people. When the pig told me his name was Orville, I immediately thought of Wilbur. And that made me think of exactly where little bunny must be."

"And you realized that even though your plan suggests a wildly popular book, the Cheshire Cat, being somewhat crazed, would send little bunny there to contend with the rat in the story," filled in Rabbit. "And the pig."

"Apparently the cat doesn't know that the rat only eats trash," continued Georg.

"And the pig would never eat a rabbit. He is much too gentle," said White Rabbit.

"Well, the cat is mad," offered Rabbit.

"What are we waiting for?" asked Georg.

"Shall we all go?" asked Rabbit.

"Well, that way we can more easily spread out and search if we need to," said White Rabbit.

"Hold paws then," said White Rabbit. He began, "*.... crickets chirped in the grass and the barn grew dark. This was the song she sang....*"

White Rabbit's voice droned in Wellington's ear. The passage continued into a beautiful sweet song. He tried to keep his eyes open but he felt himself nodding off. Then with a jolt they were settling down behind a very tidy pigpen on a small, but well kept farm.

“Psst,” called out White Rabbit. The others hung back.

A spider swung down beside White Rabbit.

“Have you seen a little bunny around here? Looks like he doesn’t really belong.”

The spider pondered the question for only a second, “Oh you mean my new helper. He said he didn’t have a name so I decided to call him Bunnykins. He’s quite the chatty one, you know. He has kept us all entertained. Hey, Bunnykins, look who’s here.”

Little bunny looked up from his sweeping, “Wellington!” he shouted. “You found me. I never ever doubted that you would. I tried to slip away but I guess that cat blocked my slipping or something because I never got anywhere, which I guess is better than getting somewhere I didn’t want to be. But still, as nice as everyone is here, I really wanted to be back with you all.”

Wellington grinned a wide grin. It really was nice to hear that little bunny carry on. He had missed that incessant chatter more than he realized. “Little bunny,” he said, “we hate to be rude, but you are very much needed at a party that is just about to begin.”

“A party,” squealed little bunny “A real party. Who is having a party?”

“We’ll tell you all about it as we go,” said the White Rabbit, “but we must hasten. We are very late. Join paws, everyone. Goodbye, dear,” he called to the spider. “Will I see you at the annual ball?”

She nodded and waved, “I’m on the decorations committee this year. I’ll save a dance for you.”

Rabbit decided to head straight home and so bid farewell to the group. They all thanked him for his help and Georg said to tell his new friend that he would be in touch.

White Rabbit thought it best to go to his house first for a quick freshen up. He began to recite, “*a neat little house, on the door of which was a bright brass plate with the name ‘W Rabbit’ engraved upon it.*”

Swirl, bump, and thump, the slip was very rough this time. Wellington thought he might even be sick. He was very glad to touch down at the White Rabbit’s house. Everyone was a little slip sick.

“Too much slipping in one day,” moaned the White Rabbit.

“I’ll say,” said the little bunny. “Take me home.” His interest in the promised party was waning.

“Soon,” said Wellington, “but first we have to help White Rabbit with the Queen’s party, remember?”

Little bunny sighed but could find no quarrel with that. Without White Rabbit and everyone else, he would still be sweeping the pigpen. “Yes, you are right. What kind of help do you need, White Rabbit? I am very experienced at so many things. I can dance and sing and...”

“White Rabbit, where are you?” screamed a voice coming down his path. My party is just about to start and I NEED you. RIGHT NOW.”

“Just here, Your Majesty,” returned the White Rabbit shoving everyone but little bunny into his front door and slamming it shut.

“WHO is this creature?” asked the Queen coming upon White Rabbit and little bunny.

“My assistant,” replied White Rabbit cautiously.

“He knows ever so much more about popping out of a top hat than I do. He’s a real natural.” At this point, he nudged little bunny to keep his mouth shut tight. “And he is just the right size.”

“I see,” said the Queen peering down her nose at the little bunny.

“How old are you?”

“One hundred and forty seven, Your Majesty,” replied little bunny, bowing low with a very slight sideways glance at White Rabbit. “And if you don’t mind my saying so, you are the very picture of beauty. Your hair has a shine like the moon and stars put together. Your skin is the most beautiful alabaster hue I have ever seen. And your dress, the reddest of reds. Where ever did you get that material?”

He would have gone on, but Rabbit kicked him in the shin.

The Queen, on the other hand, was completely mesmerized. “Why, you darling thing. You are such a bunny of good taste. Please, please be my honored guest at my party. We will entertain everyone with our trick and then dance and be merry.” With a swish of her skirts she turned and proceeded back down the path.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” said little bunny, as he winked at White Rabbit and hopped along behind her.

White Rabbit was furious. “That little bunny does not know anything about the Queen. She will eat him alive. Come on, you all. We have to save him from himself.” He gathered the others from his house. They scurried to catch up with the Queen and little bunny.

The party was being held in the rose garden and there was quite a crowd in attendance. Everyone loved a party. They all had to admit Her Majesty did put out quite a spread. Georg had a sampling of everything from salad to tarts and back again.

“And now time for the entertainment,” announced the royal Page after all the guests had stuffed themselves full. “Please find a seat.” They all settled down on the lawn. The Page brought a small table out and placed it in the center of the garden. A hush fell over the crowd. The Queen always provided great entertainment.

“Today I have a new surprise for you,” said the Queen. “The Mad Hatter has brought me this fine top hat. As you can see it is quite empty.” She showed it all around. She thumped it and shook it to show that it was very empty. “But now with my superior powers, I will bring forth a creature out of this hat.” She tapped the hat with her rolling pin. “Abracadabra,” she said. She reached into the hat and pulled out a rather dazed little bunny.

Everyone clapped and clapped. It was a fine piece of entertainment.

The Queen put little bunny down beside her to take a bow. He was so light headed from being cramped in the hidden compartment of the hat for so long while everyone else was eating that instead of bowing he became entangled in the Queen’s robes. They both fell crashing to the ground.

“How rude!” shrieked the Queen in a rage that even for her was astronomical. “OFF WITH HIS HEAD!”



Chapter 10

Home Again

“Quick, Wellington, do something,” bellowed Georg, running toward little bunny. He snatched little bunny up just as the guards were about to drag him away. Georg bolted to where Wellington stood riveted to the spot and pushed him toward the edge of the party.

“Go, Wellington, go,” he urged as he kept pushing Wellington forward to the path and away from the party. Soon they were lost deep in Wonderland.

“How will we ever get home?” asked Wellington as they stumbled along. “Little bunny has lost his slipping inflections and we dare not try to find the White Rabbit. The Queen probably has him closely guarded for just that very reason.”

Little bunny shivered in Georg’s arms. Almost beheaded. He was in shock and could only chatter his teeth and shake his head in bewilderment.

“Can you take us home, Wellington,” asked Georg.

“I don’t know anything about the finer points of the process,” said Wellington. “We could end up anywhere.”

“Maybe I should use my wand,” said Georg.

“Oh my,” said Wellington. “What if we end up in worse trouble?”

“Worse trouble? I think I hear the guards coming. Any worse trouble and it won’t matter because we will all be without our heads!” said Georg as they heard crashes in the bushes not that far away.

“Okay, give it a go, Georg,” implored Wellington as the crashing came closer.

Georg pulled out his wand and touched it first to Wellington’s head, then little bunny’s, and finally his own. “Esaelp, emoh su ekat,” he said and gave the wand the proper snap and tip to invoke the charm. Just as the guards burst into the thicket where the friends stood, the wand rose out of Georg’s hand and into the air. It began pulling the three chums along with it. The guard in the lead tried to grab Wellington’s foot but this time Wellington got a good thump in and the guard let go with a yelp.

Higher and higher they rose and they began to swirl and twirl faster and faster. They held tight to each other and the next thing they knew they were blazing through the sky with frightening speed. So fast, nothing could be observed. Then they began to slow down.

“Look,” cried little bunny, much recovered from his shock. “I think I see Uncle Wells’ house. Yes, it is Uncle Wells’ house. Just over there.” He pointed to where he was looking.

“You are right,” cried Wellington. “We are home! You did it, Georg.” Slowly they drifted down into the meadow beside the house.

The wand dropped to the ground and Georg picked it up gently. “You are the best wand ever,” he beamed putting it lovingly back into his pocket. The three companions walked happily into the house.

“We’re home!” they shouted to each other.

“Hooray, hooray!”

“Well, I, for one, am going to take a long nap,” said Wellington.

“Me too,” echoed both Georg and little bunny. Wellington headed for the spare bedroom and Georg shuffled off to the second best bedroom. Little bunny’s room was his favorite in the house, the loft on the third floor. He was sure he beat everyone into bed for a fine slumber.

Hours later, Wellington woke from a great sleep. He stretched and headed for the kitchen. There was so much to do! He began drafting telebees and sending them as fast as he could. He had sent the last one when in walked Georg.

“You look very busy,” Georg said to Wellington.

“I am,” replied Wellington, “and I think you will like what I am up to.” Georg looked at him in expectation. “We are going to have a naming party for little bunny.”

“That’s super,” said Georg. “When?”

“Tomorrow,” said Wellington. “I have dispatched telebees to everyone to come and help prepare and celebrate. Do you think little bunny will be happy?”

“Decidedly so,” said Georg. “Will Bethleann be back?”

“Did I hear my name?” asked the pretty girl walking in the back door.

“Yes,” laughed Wellington in answer to both questions. He and Georg began filling her in on all that she had missed. Then Wellington fixed a big pot of raspberry-ming tea and they finished planning the party while they sipped everyone’s all-time favorite tea.

“What’s up?” asked a still sleepy little bunny, wandering into a flurry of activity a few hours later. The kitchen was bustling. Emily Elf was busy making petite fours. Stephen Stork was cutting cute sandwich breads with a bunny shaped cutter. And someone was rapping at the front door. Emily wiped her hands on her apron and went to answer the door.

“Party,” replied Stephen, looking up briefly, then returning to his task at hand.

“Party?” repeated little rabbit. “Where is Wellington?”

“Out back with Georg, I think,” replied Stephen.

Little bunny found Wellington, Bethleann, and Georg in the yard washing down oysters. “Are we having a party?” he asked.

“Yes we are,” said Wellington. “And it is for you.”

“For me?” exclaimed little bunny, jumping up and down.

“We decided that you deserve a name, a real name,” said Bethleann. “Or rather, Wellington did, but Georg and I very much agree.”

“Everyone has been invited, and as it fittingly turns out, they can all be here.”

“A name? For me?” said little bunny in a soft voice. “Oh my,” he sat down on a stump.

“We thought you would be happy,” said Wellington beginning to wonder if he had made a mistake.

“Happy?” asked little bunny. “I am beyond happy. You really want to give me a name? Of my very own?” He began to cry.

“Now, now,” said Georg. “We didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“But I am so happy,” said little bunny. “Thank you so much,” and he hugged all three friends at the same time. At least as best he could being a very small rabbit “Can I help?”

“You are the guest of honor,” said Wellington. “But yes, run along and pick some pretty field flowers for the table. The party will be in the morning, so don’t get any of those quick wilting kinds,” he suggested.

“Yes, sir,” little bunny skipped off humming a happy song.

Long into the night party preparations continued. Finally, the last cookie was baked, the last soufflé prepped for morning baking, the last ham biscuit stuffed, the last lemon squeezed for fresh lemonade, and the last napkin folded around a silver fork and spoon. Everyone found a comfy place to catch a few winks, and before barely any sheep could be counted it was morning.

“Party day!” danced little bunny up and down the halls, tapping on doors, then hurrying to the kitchen to put on the teakettle.

Precisely was already there, removing piping hot soufflés from the oven. “Hello, little bunny,” she said. “I am Precisely Prime. And this is my father, Count Donald.” She indicated a gentleman who was busy calculating how many raisins were in the rice pudding.

“Not little bunny for much longer,” he grinned. “But very glad to meet the both of you.” There was a tap at the front door. Little bunny went to answer it. “Hello,” he said, “I am little bunny but not for much longer. Who are you?”

“I am Sir Andrew,” replied the tall ant who entered the house carefully, all of his arms holding high the huge cake box. “This is from the Ball,” he said, heading for the dining room.

“Mr. E, is that you?” asked little bunny, spying his friend the cricket approaching the front stoop.

“Hi, there, little bunny,” said Mr. E. “Hear you are going to get that name today. What’s it going to be?”

“I don’t know,” said little bunny. “Only Wellington knows.” He wondered if he would share the name of his favorite friend.

Just then, Wellington appeared in the dining room doorway jingling a big silver bell. “Party time, everyone. Please gather round. Thank you all for helping prepare this great feast to celebrate little bunny’s name day. Come here, little bunny.” Here he indicated that little bunny should stand beside him.

“Friends and family, today is the name day of little bunny. He wished to have my name, and I would gladly give it to him, but I am not finished with it yet,” he patted little bunny on the head. “But we have an even finer name selected for our dear bunny.” He paused and looked round the room. Little bunny trembled with excitement. “By the power of the WEB invested in me by my Uncle Wells, I hereby name you Webster Rabbit. So named after my great-great uncle, a truly fine Easter Bunny, as you too might be one day, little bunny. From this day forward you shall be called little bunny no more, but instead shall be called Webby, being as Webster is a big mouthful for such a small rabbit.”

Everyone laughed. Little bunny, or rather, Webby, grinned foolishly. He loved his new name. Maybe even better than Wellington. Bethleann gave him a beautiful jumpsuit that she had made with his new monogram on it. Congratulations were passed round and then the feast began.

Epilogue

“What a great party!” exclaimed Webby later that day after all the guests had left. He lovingly smoothed the fabric of his new jumpsuit. It was blue, his favorite color. “Thank you everybody!”

“You’re welcome,” they grinned. Everyone was in the kitchen, washing up the final set of dirty dishes and putting away the silverware.

“That cake,” declared Bethleann. “I will need to jump rope for weeks to offset all those calories, but oh my, so tasty. And did you ever see such intricate decorations?”

“I liked all those tiny dots and swirls,” said Georg. “I wonder if Count Donald totaled the number?” They all laughed at their favorite number man.

“The Ball really knows how to put a cake together,” mused Wellington. “Say, Georg, before I forget to ask, exactly what were you trying to tell me when you lost your voice?”

“Humph,” said Georg, “I was telling you that your book is not original, dear friend.”

“Really,” said Wellington doubtfully, “And what makes you think that?”

“Because, *It was a dark and stormy night* is the first line in the book by Paul Clifford called Bulwer Lytton,” replied Georg.

“You don’t say,” replied Wellington, still having his doubts.

“Yes, I do say. I was looking for the book when I lost my voice. I’ll just go get it now.” He went to the study and quickly returned, book in hand. “See,” he showed Wellington the passage.

“Well, I’ll be,” said Wellington. “Sorry to have doubted you, bear buddy. Guess I’ll have to have another go at it.”

Later that day, around dinnertime, Wellington found the gang lounging in the backyard. “Listen to this, you all. Another beginning for my book.” He read, “*It was the best of times, it was the worse of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...*”

“Wellington!” they all shouted together.

“What?” he said, looking from one face to the other with a very serious expression. Then he started laughing. “Just checking your book sense. I know that passage opens A Tale of Two Cities. But it is so cool. Maybe we’ll just go there sometime instead.”