

WELLINGTON RABBIT ENCHANTED



Written and Illustrated by
Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For grandson Benjamin Thomas Ball
Who enchants us all.

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

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Table of Contents

Preface		4
Chapter 1	Those Coats!	7
Chapter 2	Trouble	11
Chapter 3	A Show	15
Chapter 4	Nothing Ventured	19
Chapter 5	Nothing Gained	23
Chapter 6	Decisions	27
Chapter 7	Gone	31
Chapter 8	Step Lightly	35
Chapter 9	The Bearer of Eternal Hope	39
Chapter 10	Always Friends	43
Epilogue		46

Index to Illustrations

Webby tumbles out of the coat closet	6
Bethleann brings fresh scones	10
Georg(e) and Bethleann take in a show	14
Uncertainty grips Wellington	18
Wellington gingerly steps into the coat closet	22
Webby has doubts about his bound-about	26
Georg(e) helps Bethleann over the fence	30
Wellington sees nothing	34
Bethleann and Georg(e) race to the cottage with the wand	38
Georg puts his 'e' on the ground	42



Chapter 1 Those Coats!

“There must be a way,” mused Wellington. “There simply must be.”

“Wellington!” sputtered Webby, spilling into the room. “Those coats are out of control. Look at my arms.” He held out his bruised and scratched arms.

“Your face looks none too pretty either,” clucked Wellington as he peered at Webby’s bleeding nose and forehead. He pulled open a drawer in his desk and withdrew a familiar looking bottle of reddish liquid and a soft cotton pad. “Here, let me swab you up.” He reached for the wounded rabbit’s face.

“NO! Not that stuff!” yelled Webby. “I would rather not, please,” he back away firmly, just remembering his manners.

“A little Mercurochrome will not hurt you. It will help the healing.”

“You only say that.” Webby held up his paws as a protective measure. “It smells awful and stings and makes me look like I lost a ketchup-mustard fight. Just nevermind my wounds. What about those nasty coats?”

Wellington was not distracted but he was too weary to push the point. Webby could just tend to himself. Wellington handed the equipment to Webby who swiftly put it aside. No Mercurochrome for him or Merthiolate either. Nasty, nasty stuff.

“I really do not know,” sighed Wellington. “I was hoping that you would have good news. Wellington sighed again. “If I had told you how bad the coats are you would have been too wary to do any good. I thought maybe your creative mind would think of some great solution on the spot. You are a very clever rabbit. And we really need to access that passageway without dealing with those bloody coats.”

Webby opened his mouth to speak and then snapped it shut. He turned on his heel and marched off to the kitchen to wash up his arms and face. With plain soap and water. Period. “Good choice of words,” he threw back into the room. He never figured Wellington for a conniving side. He always thought of him as fair, beyond fair. After all he was the Easter Bunny. Webby swallowed a tear, his good friend, ordinary. Tears spilled onto his cheeks. He had been set up. His heart was broken.

“What do you think?” Georg(e) strolled into the kitchen looking very proud. Webby barely gave him a look and returned to his washing up. Georg(e) waited a moment and when he got no response sauntered on into the study. He was on important business and dealing with a bruised ego was the last thing he wanted to think about.

“Hey, Wellington,” he beamed. “What do you think?”

Wellington opened his tired eyes. “Oh hi, Georg. Did you see Webby?”

“Oh hi, Georg? That is all you can say?” Georg(e) turned on his heel and marched out of the room.

“Geez,” Wellington threw his paws up. “Every one took a sensitive pill this morning. Including me.” He clapped his paws together and then pushed himself up from his desk.

“Webby, Georg! Family meeting right now. In the living room.” He slammed the door to the coat closet shut and locked it with a tiny key which he stuffed into his pocket. The door from the study into the coat closet did not used to have a lock, only the small door in the back of the closet that lead to the passageway did. But after his bad encounter with the coats, Wellington had decided a lock on the study side would be a good safety measure. He did not want anyone else getting in trouble with the coats.

In the kitchen Webby sniffed, “There he goes being bossy.” He dried off his paws and found a pad and pencil and headed for the living room. He was secretary.

“Why do you always get to call the meetings?” he demanded of Wellington as he sat down on the sofa. Wellington gave him a look and said nothing. “Acting just as bossy as Black Veil.”

“What did you say?” Wellington eyed him hard.

“Nothing.” Webby looked at his pad intently.

Georg(e) slid into the room as much as a Baltic black bear could slide and took the chair nearest the door. “Why do you always get to call the meetings?”

“That’s it!” fumed Wellington. “Look at us fighting like commoners. As though we had no love for each other. Or respect. You can call a meeting,” this directed to Webby. “You can call a meeting,” he turned to Georg(e), “but neither of you did. And it is clear that we need one. Are you getting all of this, Webby?”

“Yes, your majesty,” sneered Webby.

“What is up with your attitude?” growled Georg(e). “Even if Wellington is being a jerk.”

“He got mauled by the coats,” explained Wellington, “and it is my fault. But then he seemed to think that the Mercurochrome would do more harm than good so the poison still has to be dealt with.”

“Aw shucks, Webby, sometimes the old remedies are the only way to handle a run in with wicked things like those coats. Gingerwort salve would work too but Mercurochrome neutralizes the poison quicker. Let me help you with the nasty stuff.”

“We’re in a meeting,” snipped Webby.

“Got him bad didn’t they?” Georg(e) nodded to Wellington. He got up and left the room. He returned a moment later with the offensive treatment and without even asking began swabbing Webby’s arms. Webby tried to push him away but Georg(e) was bigger. Still there was much flailing and wrestling. Webby was small but strong. Finally there was only the nose left to be treated. Georg(e) could tell that because of all the flailing Webby was going to have a lot more red fur than need be if he had only been cooperative.

“You are really hurting me!” hissed Webby.

“Does he ever give up?” asked Georg(e), dabbing the pad on Webby’s cheeks and nose. But Wellington had gone to the kitchen to make some tea for the balance of the meeting and did not hear Georg(e).

Webby glowered at Georg(e), “No, I NEVER give up.”

“Which is exactly why I sent you into the coat closet,” smiled Wellington, returning with three mugs of tea on a wooden tray.

“But you could have warned me!!” Webby was furious.

“Now Webster, if I had warned you, would you still have gone into the closet?”

“Certainly,” said Webby, with just the slightest pause. Perhaps Wellington did have a point. Webby knew he was stubborn about barreling ahead but he also knew he could have a good case of the excuses when he felt like it. “Okay, maybe not. But you tricked me!”

“Guilty,” agreed Wellington. “But those coats must be controlled and I really trusted your tenacious and clever nature to think of something that would work.”

“Those coats did not give me any time to think,” burst Webby, getting angry again. “How could you put me at risk like that? I might have been permanently damaged!”

“You are overreacting, Webby,” said Georg(e).

“Fine for you to say. You’ve never tackled those coats.” Georg(e) had nothing to say.

“Have some tea.” Wellington took a sip of tea. “My a scone would be nice with this tea.”

“Did I hear someone mention scones?”

The three companions looked up. There in the door stood Bethleann, holding a plate of freshly baked wild blueberry scones. “Precisely, and I baked these with some berries Donald brought home yesterday. Dig in, guys.”

They needed no more encouragement. Georg(e) contained himself long enough to step to the kitchen to get Bethleann a cup of tea but he was back in a flash.

“Thanks, Georg(e). Georg(e)? Georg(e)! I knew there was something different about you. When did you get your ‘e’ reattached? It looks very nice. You look quite handsome.

Georg(e) beamed. “You think so? I did it myself. I had a terrible time with the curvy parts. Does the stitching show?”

“Oh just the tiniest bit. It rather adds character I’d say.”

Wellington was aghast. Here Georg(e) had reattached his ‘e’ and he had been so preoccupied with the coat tangle that he had not even noticed. “Oh, Georg(e) with an ‘e’, how elegant you look!”

“I liked the old Georg better,” pouted Webby.

“What’s up with him?” asked Bethleann, questioning Webby’s sour disposition.

“Coat poisoning,” whispered Georg(e).

“Ouch,” said Bethleann. “That’s difficult to overcome. Did you treat it with Merthiolate?”

“Mercurochrome,” answered Georg(e).

“Essentially the same thing,” said Bethleann. “There are those who would disagree, but they both treat nasty poisons. And both are better than gingerwort although gingerwort is much easier to come by. Does he have a bad case?”

“Well, he would not let me treat him immediately,” replied Wellington. “But I really thought he had it under control.”

“Oh, Webby,” soothed Bethleann, reaching out to pat the youngster’s arm.

“Leave me alone,” cried the young rabbit, stabbing at her wrist with his pencil. “Just. Leave. Me. Alone.”



Chapter 2 Trouble

Bethleann and Georg(e) and Wellington looked at each other.

“We are having a family meeting,” said Wellington.

“That HE called. He always gets to call the meetings,” Webby continued his pout.

Bethleann ignored the comment and rubbed at her wrist. She thought she saw a tiny spot of blood or pencil lead. “Would you like me to take the minutes so you can rest?”

“NO! I’m fine,” Webby began scribbling furiously with his pencil which still worked.

“What are you writing?” asked Georg(e).

“I’m writing down all the snide comments everyone is making about me.”

“Oh, please, Webby, let me do the minutes this time. You can have your job back next time.”

“Why? Do you think I can’t do the minutes right? Do you think I’ll mess them up like I messed up the coats?”

“You did not mess up the coats,” said Wellington. “They were already messed up. But you must stop this silly behavior. We’ll never get anything done.”

“I am NOT acting silly. Everyone else is.”

Georg(e) stood up. “Webby, we have all had enough. Give the pad and pencil to Bethleann. You are in no condition to be taking minutes.” He reached for the pad.

“I am fine!” Webby lifted the pad out of Georg(e)’s reach. Georg(e) sat down. His newly attached ‘e’ felt wobbly.

“Perhaps we should adjourn,” suggested Wellington. “It is obvious that we are not going to get anything done right now.”

“Adjourn. Adjourn. Adjourn! There. Duly recorded,” spewed Webby. “AND, I call for a new family meeting. Right now. I am going to be leader. Someone else can take the minutes.”

“Very well,” Wellington said slowly. He offered the wooden spoon they used as a gavel to Webby. He reached for the pad and pencil, “I’ll take the minutes.”

Webby handed the pad and pencil to Wellington without looking at him. He took the gavel spoon. “Now what do I do?”

“You are in charge,” said Georg(e). “Bring up the order of business.”

“Coats,” said Webby. “Someone must deal with those coats. You with the pad and pencil, you do it.”

Wellington looked at Webby. He looked at Bethleann. He looked at Georg(e). No one spoke. He surely thought Bethleann and Georg(e) would have issued a protest.

“Any objections?” asked Webby. The room was very quiet.

“Fine, Wellington will deal with the coats. If there is no other business I say we adjourn.” Again no one spoke. Bethleann looked at her fingernails. Georg(e) strained to see if his ‘e’ was slipping. “Meeting adjourned.” Webby banged the gavel spoon on the table. Hard.

The few dishes were cleared away in silence. Bethleann wrapped up the rest of the scones and put them in the bread box. “Georg(e), would you like to go to a show?” she whispered. He nodded. They tiptoed out the back door.

Wellington went to his study and shut the door. He locked it with the skeleton key that resided in the transom over the door. He never locked the door, but he was exasperated beyond clear thinking. He needed uninterrupted alone time.

Webby stomped up the stairs. He was going to try and scrub off the nasty stains from the Mercurochrome.

In his study, Wellington sat down and pondered the situation. He had certainly made a mess of things. They were no closer to solving the coat problem. And they really needed the short cut the closet offered, as Easter was very early this year. Webby was furious at Wellington and on top of that, suffering a bad cast of coat poisoning thanks to Wellington’s grand plan that backfired. Georg(e) was trying to adjust to a newish identity and Wellington had not even noticed. Bethleann seemed to be the only one on an even keel but she had gone to a movie with Georg(e) instead of offering to help solve the problems at hand. Could things get any worse? He sighed a very deep sigh. “Maybe if I took a yoga moment.”

He moved a few chairs around until he had a clear space on the rug. He sat down and crossed his legs. He rested his arms on his knees and began steady breathing paying attention to that only, as Bethleann had taught him. She had taken courses in yoga last summer and began teaching classes on a regular basis when she returned to the warren. They were well attended by a fine group of health-minded folk. Wellington could see his mind wandering just like Bethleann had warned against. “Concentrate on your breath,” she would say. “Bring your mind back to the moment.”

Wellington breathed deeply and steadied his mind. “Perhaps a few sun salutations and then a brief Savasana,” he muttered as he stood, arranged his feet and lifted his arms to start his salutations. The stretching and collapsing felt good. He moved his breath throughout his body. A dozen salutations later he sank to child’s pose and then rolled onto his back, preparing for total relaxation. “If I fall asleep, no harm done,” he reminded himself.

Upstairs Webby looked at the red splotches on his arms and face and wailed, “Look at me. I’m a freak.” He tried scrubbing the bigger spots with soap and a cloth. Nothing changed. It was true that the stinging had gone away but not the awful sick yellow red color. “Freak, freak, freak. I hate Wellington. He thinks he is so smart. Just because he is the Easter Bunny he thinks he can boss everyone around.” Webby fumed and scrubbed but nothing helped his fur or his anger. Webby began to cry. “How did this happen? Why did this happen? Nothing is right.”

Webby stomped out of the bathroom and into his bedroom. He didn’t care if it was still daylight. “Maybe I’ll go to bed.” He looked at the bed. “Maybe I’ll go to the movie. Bethleann and Georg(e) went and didn’t even invite me. I don’t need them. I can go by myself.” He looked at his fur in the mirror and imagined all the explaining he would have to do or worse the silent stares and chuckles behind his back. He sat down on the bed. “I want my mom.”

Webby did not know where his mom was anymore. He was a young rabbit but he had left home a long time ago. He had joined the forces of Black Veil and been a trusted soldier in the ranks until he realized the true nature of that misguided rabbit and became a valued member of

Wellington's team. It was his rescue of the entire Wellington team from the snatches of Black Veil that had shown them all how very sincere his change of heart was. "How could I possibly think that I hate Wellington?" wailed Webby. "Maybe I do have coat poisoning. I don't know what I think anymore." He collapsed on his bed and cried until he fell into a restless sleep. It was a sleep full of snarly coats and a mother rabbit with happy children. Mother rabbit warned the children not to play with the coats. But the children did not listen. The coats were nice at first and then they turned into biting animals that tried to eat the bunnies. The bunnies tried to find their mother but she was gone.

Webby woke up in a sweat. His fur was drenched. He was shaking and shivering. He felt very bad. "Wellington, Wellington? Where are you? I need you."

No one came. "Wellington!" Webby called again. "WELLINGTON!"

Webby sat in his bed expecting Wellington to pop into the room at any moment. The house was very quiet. Finally Webby got up and went downstairs. "Wellington?" he called. "Bethleann? Georg?" How long had he been asleep. It seemed like forever. They should be back from the movie. The house was dark.

He went into the kitchen. The room was cold. The stove fire had gone out. The fire that was always ready to heat a pot of tea. Webby was worried now.

He headed for Wellington's study. The door was shut. He knocked timidly. He remembered how rude he had been earlier. No one answered his knock. He knocked louder, "Wellington?" He waited. His head hurt. A lot. He tried the knob. It turned but the door would not open.

"Wellington?" And for yet another time this day, Webby began to cry. "Wellington, I'm sorry. My head hurts. Where are you? Please open the door."



Chapter 3

A Show

Georg(e) and Bethleann decided to take the short cut across the field to the picture show because it was a short cut and thus faster and also they would not be seen from the house as easily. They were certain that Wellington had heard them whispering and probably even step out but they did not want to taken any chances and so the field it was. Both Wellington and Webby were in too much of a mood to be good company for something as trivial as a picture show.

“Georg(e),” giggled Bethelann, “I am sorry but have you ever seen anything funnier than Wellington’s face when Webby took the spoon from him and started his own meeting?”

Georg(e) chuckled. “It was pretty funny.”

“And Webby looked ridiculous with all of that Mercurochrome splotched on his fur. He might have thought he looked dignified enough to run a meeting but he looked anything but.”

“It was hard to take either one of them seriously,” said Georg(e). “They were so bent on being right they could not hear the other side of the story.”

“Maybe Webby’s case of coat poisoning stirred up something in Wellington related to his own coat poisoning,” suggested Bethleann remembering the day that Wellington had received a nasty bite from one of the coats in the closet. “I actually did not even realize that Wellington was poisoned until I got back to my books and read up on enchanted things. I just thought he was badly wounded. But I tell you there was not much reading up to do at that. The only reference I could find came from the Strangely Foreign and No Known Antidote section of my treatments book. It suggested that in those cases to use gingerwort salve unless Mercurochrome or Merthiolate were available. It was lucky you had some gingerwort in your pack that day and that we used it.”

“Well it is good for a number of things. But after my pack was so ransacked it is a wonder anything was left intact.” Georg(e) was referring to the day that Black Veil had knocked him down and ransacked his rumplesack trying to find the fading dust that Uncle Wells had left for Wellington. “But what about the No Known Antidote part? Could Wellington still be infected? And why do you suppose he is so intent on figuring out the coat enchantment now after all these years?” asked Georg(e).

Bethleann turned sideways to face Georg(e). “You have an excellent point. Maybe he is still infected. Or even enchanted by the coats. I thought he was intent on the coats because Easter is extra early this year and he is thinking that we will be behind, which we are, and need the time the closet gives us to get our deliveries finished up.”

“It could be a combination of both,” offered Georg(e). “Should we not be helping him? And anyway what about that charm you put on those coats when we were with Mr E? Did you tell Wellington about it?”

“Of course I did. But it was only a temporary letter change charm that I got from Precisely when she thought that she wanted to switch her name to Priscilla and then changed her mind. It

really is not a solution.” Bethleann spread her hands in a hopeless gesture, “We could offer to help, but Wellington did not ask. I was really thinking that he had a plan of his own.”

“And he did. He used Webby and we saw how well that worked.”

“True. Perhaps we should offer to help.”

“After the show. He will have cooled down by then, and maybe Webby too.”

They had arrived at the movie theater and Georg(e) bought two tickets.

“I’ll get the popcorn,” Bethleann called over her shoulder going ahead into the small theater. She loved this theater with its one man snack bar and once a day movie screening. She had been to movie shows in the bigger cities before she moved to Willis Warren and they were not nearly as inviting. “I’m really a small town gal,” she chatted with Josie the cute bunny selling popcorn and carrots. Josie was an artist and she and Bethleann loved to talk about art. Bethleann painted when she could but Josie was much more dedicated about her work. She had shows and sold a lot of paintings.

“Wellington with you tonight?” asked Josie, shyly.

“Not tonight,” said Bethleann. She looked at Josie. Was she blushing? Did she have a crush on Wellington? Bethleann could not wait to ask Georg(e) what he thought.

“Need help, Bethleann?” asked Georg(e).

“Nope, I’ve got it.” They walked into the semi-darkened room. They stood for a moment letting their eyes adjust to the darkness.

“Let’s take those two seats over there,” said Georg(e). He pointed to a row somewhat in the middle that had several empty seats including one entire end.

They headed toward the seats. “Georg(e),” buzzed Bethleann. “I think Josie is sweet on Wellington.”

“You don’t say.”

“What do you think?”

“I never nosified,” the bear’s mouth was full of popcorn.

“Men,” grouched Bethleann. “Well, take notice, and tell me what you think.”

“Ohsay.” Georg(e) was going to eat all of his popcorn before the movie even started.

The light dimmed completely. The movie started. No previews in this simple setting. Sometimes there was a cartoon but no commercials or previews, just the movie. Bethleann sighed. She definitely was a small town girl.

Before long the final credits were rolling and the friends stretched seat weary muscles. “Transformers are what?” asked Georg.

“Make believe toys for human children,” said Bethleann. “They twist and turn from one form to another.”

“Like magic?”

“Well, yes, but human children cannot do magic like you or I. You know that!” Bethleann looked at the bear.

“I know, but I like to have you explain the movies to me anyway. I like to hear you talk.” This time it was Bethleann’s turn to blush. Was Georg(e) sweet on her? He did have a girlfriend in the taiga, Gloria. Maybe they were not together anymore. She did not press Georg(e) to talk much about his private life.

“Now, Georg(e),” Bethleann moved on. “Keep your eyes and ears open.”

They were approaching the small lobby of the theater. “Bye you all,” called out Josie who was cleaning up her counter. “Tell Wellington I missed seeing him.”

Bethleann jabbed Georg(e) in the side. “Ouch!” yelped the bear.

“Hurt yourself, Georg(e)?” asked Josie.

“Huh? Oh no, Bethleann was just wondering...” another jab hit his side, “..stepped on my toes.”

“You two are so cute,” said Josie.

Bethleann rolled her eyes.

Georg(e) moved quickly out the door.

“Night, Josie,” said Bethleann. “Georg(e) wait up.” Georg(e) was halfway across the parking lot. Most town folks walked to the movies but a few that lived in the forest or next dell drove their vehicles. “What’s up with you?”

“Gotta get back to see how Wellington is,” answered the bear.

“Can you wait for me?”

“Wondering if you were going to stand there all night yamming with Josie.”

“Georg(e),” Bethleann decided to take the bull by the horns. “I like you a lot as a friend, but don’t get in a snit about Josie’s comment. She sees romance everywhere. She’s an artist. Now what do you think about her and Wellington?”

Georg(e) slowed down. “I dunno.”

“Oh, Georg(e), Wellington can have a girl friend and you’ll still be his best buddy. Wellington would never let anything split up the team.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I really do. Now what about Josie?”

“She doe seem sweet on him. Does he talk about her at all?”

“In a roundabout way. Yes, he does. Have you not noticed how we’ve been going to the pictures a lot lately?”

“You’re right, Bethleann. Wellington and Josie. Well, well.”

“Just keep it to yourself. And let’s see what develops.”

“Okay,” the bear rubbed his chin. “You know, Bethleann, we could step out together sometime. That is if you like. I mean,” Georg(e) stammered, “go to dinner or something besides the picture show.”

Bethleann grinned. “Sure, Georg(e). I would like that.”



Chapter 4

Nothing Ventured

Wellington drifted awake. He had fallen asleep and now he felt so refreshed. He lay on his back and reviewed the situation. He didn't know exactly what to do but he knew it was time for action. Webby deserved better than he was getting from Wellington, even if he had been more than disrespectful. "The paths of youngsters are fraught with wrong turns. It's a wonder they find their way at all."

"I wonder if Uncle Wells has any tomes with the history of those coats." He looked around at the many books collected by Uncle Wells, his beloved uncle, who had been the Easter Bunny before him and was now living beyond the fade in the land called WEB with all the other former Easter Bunnies. Wellington had inherited the house and its belongings from Uncle Wells, and as most of the things were gifts from Uncle Wells' world travels, Wellington did not know much about most of them.

He and Georg encountered the coats on their first trip after Uncle Wells had faded. It was not a planned trip at all. Uncle Wells had faded to the WEB quite suddenly one day and left behind a packet of fading dust for Wellington's own fading. The same dust that he would also need to give his successor an endless supply of Easter eggs for all the children of the world. Uncle Wells had lined his haversack with a sprinkling of his own fading dust leaving just enough for his trip to the WEB. But before Wellington could pick up his personal fading dust packet from the rug where only moments before Uncle Wells had waved goodbye, it disappeared.

It had taken Georg(e) and their new friend, Bethleann, and Wellington all together to get the packet back. Back from Black Veil, the ruthless rabbit that was greedily after any opportunity to foil Easter and secure himself a place in the WEB. The daft rabbit was too evil to know that ruining Easter was the worst thing he could do to have a chance at being in the WEB. But who wanted to explain that to such a grumpy rabbit? Webby might have at one time, as he used to work for the nasty rabbit, but that was when he was just young and confused.

Wellington cleverly got his packet back from Black Veil, but it required a visit to the lair of that bad rabbit and the quickest natural way to get there was through the coat closet.

Oh, Wellington remembered that day all too well. He was last into the closet and a coat had bitten him and many had scratched him. Without Georg(e)'s fine ministering Wellington might have had an even worse case of coat poisoning than Webby's. At the time they all thought that he only had bad surface wounds, but when Bethleann read details about enchanted things in her school book, it became clear that Wellington had been victim to something more sinister than surface wounds. Of course it had all been because he had reached for a coat. Maybe if the coats were left alone. He needed to ask Webby what exactly transpired in the closet.

The coats were of such a bad temper that everyone found other natural ways to travel long distances. Yet every year it seemed they felt the pinch of time and Wellington wished for free access to the closet. But it was always too late to do anything and so they figured out clever ways to finish up their Easter deliveries on time. But this year Wellington was determined to start

early enough on solving the puzzle so maybe, just maybe they could use the short cut the closet offered. So this was why he had sent Webby into the thick of enchanted coats? Wellington began to question his motives. He could have gone himself. He had put Webby at high risk instead and at the time it had seemed very logical and actually brilliant. Now reflectively, Wellington saw huge holes in the plan and began to doubt his ability to make good decisions. He really needed to talk to Webby.

He thought he had sent Webby into the closet cold because he wanted to see what tactics that smart bunny would use without any preconceived notions to distract him. But now Wellington was not so sure of his actions. Still, the deed was done. If he could find out exactly what Webby had done and encountered, maybe some good could come of the trial.

He opened his study door to a quiet house, leaving the key resting in the lock. He tiptoed up the stairs, not wanting to disturb the bunny if he was sleeping. Sure enough, Webby was collapsed on his bed, shoes still on. He was sleeping a deep but fretful sleep. Wellington pulled a cover over him and gently tugged off the shoes. Neither action awakened the bunny. "Let sleeping bunnies lay," Wellington tiptoed out of the room, pulling the door shut.

Back downstairs he stopped by the kitchen for a quick snack before returning to his study. "Crackers with a bit of cheese melted on top will be perfect." He lit a tiny fire in the stove and swiftly made a handful of delicious cheese melts. A mug of warm tea and he was ready to take on the coats.

He left a note for Georg(e) and Bethleann and returned to the study. He walked in and shut the door locking it tight. He removed the key and returned it to its place on the transom.

He could sense himself stalling. He told himself to open the closet door. But he just sat there staring at the door. "Now this is just plain silly," he said. He shook his fur and stepped up to the door. He stepped back. He did a few stretches. He tidied his desk. He polished his reading glasses. He ate a piece of chocolate bar he found in a pot on his desk. Finally he could stall no more.

He removed the tiny key from his pocket, put it in the keyhole and turned it. until he heard the tumbler fall. He put his paw on the knob and twisted it. He let go of the knob. He looked back at his desk. He had not straightened the papers very well. He walked over to the papers and began reshuffling them. He sorted them into several piles. One for trash, one for important business, one for interesting stuff, one for Georg(e), one for Bethleann. Okay that was enough. He was still stalling.

He went back to the closet. He took the key out of the lock and put it in his pocket. He turned the knob and let go. He tapped the door slightly. It did not move. He gave the door a slight pull. This time it swung slowly open into the room. He stood there looking into the closet. It was very dark. He needed a light. He went back to his desk. He dug around for a lantern. He found one but it would not light. He wondered where his old bumbershoot was. Probably in the hall. He did not want to leave the room. He looked around some more for a working lantern. Then he found some batteries for the lantern he had. He switched the old batteries for the newer ones and tried the lantern. This time it gave off some feeble light. That would have to do. He returned to the closet doorway. The light helped a little bit. He could see the long rows of coats. There were two, just as he remembered. One on each side of the closet that reached back

far beyond the dimensions that showed in the room. He switched off the lantern to save the weak batteries.

“I can’t do this,” said Wellington. Then he thought about poor Webby and how he had innocently and boldly stepped into the closet and pulled the door shut behind him. Wellington could not decide why he did not advise Webby to leave the door open. But he had not, and so now he had no clue about how that action had developed.

“Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained.” He put a foot into the closet.



Chapter 5

Nothing Gained

Wellington pulled his foot back out of the closet. He shut the door. “What is wrong with me?” He took a deep breath. He opened the door. He could not keep stalling. Georg(e) and Bethleann would be back soon. He must act now.

He stepped into the closet, just far enough to shut the door behind him, which he did. He leaned back against the door and breathed rapidly. His heart was beating wildly. He allowed himself time to let his heart return to normal. It took longer than he expected. His eyes adjusted to the dark. He could just see the shadowy forms of the coats. They looked very eerie. He switched on the lantern. It’s feeble light did help a little to illuminate the interior of the closet. Had he really sent Webby into this den of doubt with no light? Wellington felt even worse about his terrible plan. He stood with his back to the door and gingerly moved the beam around the closet.

He tried to count the coats. He thought that he counted eleven on the left and maybe twenty-two on the right. That was a lot of coats. The ones on the left were heavier looking and furry.

He flashed his light up and down from floor to ceiling. Then he flashed it along the coats studying each one carefully. This one near the front looked friendly. But not that one closer to the back. He wished he could see the smaller ones better. Maybe there was a peaceful one among them. The ones in the very back near the door to the passageway looked settled. Maybe they were kinder. But then he remembered that it was near the passageway that he had reached for a coat and it had bitten him hard and refused to let go. He had had to fight and use all his strength to get away. No, the back of the closet was no good.

His plan was to pick a coat that seemed friendly and try and see if it would talk to him. So far he had not moved from his spot near the door. He had only moved his arms to drive the lantern around the closet.

“Of course I, we, could just walk through the coats anytime using galoshes,” muttered Wellington. “But that is rather risky, the coats might go and get feisty without warning. No, the mystery must be solved.”

He ran the light over the coats again. That pink one looked friendly. He could almost touch it without leaving his safety spot. He leaned forward to tap the coat on the shoulder.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

Wellington stopped his forward motion. “Who spoke?”

All was quiet. Wellington waited a few moments and leaned forward again, reaching his paw out for the pink coat.

“Big mistake.”

Wellington snapped his paw back. He looked around, but did not see anything other than coats and of course, piles of galoshes. Maybe he should step into a pair of galoshes and then try talking to a coat.

“Won’t work.”

“I’m trying to have a chat with these coats,” he spoke to the air.

“Coats don’t chat.”

“Yes, I know. They bite. And scratch. And claw.”

“Then why are you trying to chat with them? Do you want to get bitten? Or scratched? Or clawed?”

“NO! And just show yourself. I’m tired of talking to the air.” Wellington was getting frustrated.

Nothing happened. Wellington leaned against the door. He turned off his lantern, no use in wasting the batteries. He slid down the door until he was squatting. He waited. Nothing happened. It was very quiet in the closet. He decided to wait a bit longer. What was the mystery voice all about? Why wouldn’t it talk to him now? He knew his friends would be back soon and even with the note he left, they would begin to worry if they could not find him. They may even try to find him and the closet would be the first place they would look. He needed to hurry.

“Maybe because I have dealt with the coats before I have some kind of immunity. Maybe I could touch a coat and nothing would happen,” he mused.

“I wouldn’t count on that.” There was that voice again!

“I need help with these coats. How about telling me what I can do, instead of what I cannot do?”

“Finally you are getting the idea,” said the voice. “When in doubt, ask an expert for help.”

“An expert that remains ephemeral is a rather dubious source of comfort,” suggested Wellington.

“I have my reasons,” replied the voice. “Now, that pink coat that you are so focused on. Not a good idea. It looks peaceful but it really is quite mean, in fact, probably the meanest coat in the closet.”

“Why are these coats so mean anyway? I thought coats were supposed to be helpful and useful.”

“They are, usually, but these coats are not. They have been enchanted by you know who and nothing can break the enchantment.”

“Nothing?” cried Wellington.

“Perhaps something, but you are not brave enough.”

Wellington wondered if he was being manipulated. “I am very brave.”

“But just how brave?” the voice sounded closer to his ear than before. That made Wellington somewhat shaky.

“Brave enough,” croaked Wellington. And then clearing his throat he said more strongly, “I am brave enough.”

“Very well.”

Wellington waited. Nothing happened. Patience, he told himself. Remember patience. He counted silently to ten. He counted silently to one hundred. Still nothing happened. He started to count again.

And then, “The journey will be long. The journey will be hard. But if you succeed the coats will be free.” Wellington wanted to cry but he reminded himself that he was brave. He

wanted to shout but he reminded himself that he was brave. He wanted to be anywhere but here but he reminded himself that he was brave. He reminded himself that the children needed their Easter love and the team needed this closet to get things done on time. Time? “How much time will this take?” Wellington wondered.

“Time does not matter here,” replied the voice. “You are beyond and before time. Time is but a small measure for the simple minded.”

Now a tear did trickle down Wellington’s face. What had he gotten himself into? “Where am I going?” he sniffed to himself.

“You are going to the Salt Mines of Misery.”



Chapter 6

Decisions

“Wellington, please open the door,” Webby banged on the door as hard as he could. All was quiet. He banged on the door with both paws. Finally he let his paws slide down the door and leaned his cheek against the door. “I’m...I’m,” he stumbled, “I’m...oh nevermind.” He turned and walked slowly away dragging his toes on the carpet. He looked back at the door. “Wellington,” he whispered, “I’m...I’m really sorry.”

Never in his entire life had he felt so alone. Not even when he lived in the warren of Black Veil and worked for that sneaky rabbit. At the time he thought the job was cool and he the cleverest rabbit to have such a high powered position. But all along he knew it was a sham. Well he didn’t really know, being somewhat naïve, but he never felt totally good about the way Black Veil handled most situations.

Webby still glancing back at the study door reached the stairs. Suddenly he ran back and tried again to rouse Wellington. But all he got was a deep, deep silence.

He went into the kitchen to get something to eat but nothing appealed to him.

He reluctantly climbed the stairs to his room. He sank down on the bed not even bothering to turn on the light. He lay back and started to cry. His crying turned to sobs and he felt like throwing up. He was distraught beyond reason. From somewhere in the depths of his being, Webby knew he was on the edge of a bottomless depression and if he continued this path it would be harder and harder to get out. Digging for a resolve he really did not feel, he sat up and blinked his swollen eyes. “Fuzz” he said to himself. “Get a grip.”

And then, just like that, Webby knew what he had to do. He knew it with every fiber of his blotched fur. And into his bones and nerves. He knew it without reservation.

He had to go on a bound-about. Right this very moment.

He leapt up before the resolve could dissolve. He ran to his closet and pulled out his favorite backpack. He dumped the contents on the bed and brushed them aside. He dug into his dresser drawers for a change of clothing. He moved swiftly to his desk where he added a pad and two pencils to his growing pile. And a torch. He checked to see that it worked and was happy to see the beacon burst forth with light when he pressed the button.

He rushed into the bathroom, doubt already beginning to nudge him. “Stop,” he cried. He yanked open the medicine cabinet and found a small bottle of the nasty Merthiolate. “It actually has made my fur feel better,” he admitted. He reached for a box of band aids and cotton balls. He grabbed his tooth brush and some paste and a roll of toilet paper. This he smashed flat with his foot to make it more compact in his pack.

He returned to the bedroom and began packing everything in his backpack.

“Okay, now I need a good jacket, hat and a few things from the kitchen.”

He was on a roll now. He sped down the stairs worried that someone would come home and interrupt his plans. He dashed into the kitchen and quickly found a box of matches, a small pan and spoon. “The pan can serve for cooking and eating,” he smiled at his clever thought. He

found some tea bags in the back of the tea cabinet. Wellington always liked loose teas preferring to make his own blends. Someone had probably gifted these few tea bags to him. They were perfect, they would be quick and easy on a trip. He would manage food along the way but a chunk of cheese to get him started sounded good. He found just what he needed behind a watermelon in the refrigerator. "Hooray," he almost shouted before remembering to stay stealth in case Georg(e) and Bethleann were in range. That scrap of cheese would save him time cutting off a piece from the huge block that always sat front and center in the icebox. And the time it would take to clean up his mess could be spent on finishing his packing. The cheese was already wrapped in cloth, too. Almost as if it had been waiting for him.

Webby charged up the stairs, his stomach still in pangs of doubt but his mind racing on. He tucked the new items into his backpack and snapped the top shut.

He slung the pack on his back to test the weight. "Not too bad," he thought. "It's a good thing I'm in shape from playing soccer." He paused for the first time since he started on his bound-about packing. "My team," he hesitated, "they'll be missing me. Maybe this plan is no good." He sat down on the bed, the backpack still on his back. "And what about bad weather? How will I cope? I cannot easily carry anything else." One strap slide off of his shoulder. "I'm not too sure about this bound-about plan after all."

He eased the other strap off and leaned back onto the pack.

"If I stay nothing will be any different. They'll still treat me like a baby. I never get to do Easter stuff with them. I never get to do anything."

"Your life with Black Veil was better," offered left brain.

"Who do you think you are kidding?" right brain piped in. "Black Veil was cruel and you know it. We never knew when he would growl and yell and go on a rampage."

"True," thought Webby, "right brain has a point."

"Not so," said left brain. "Black Veil never set a bed time or made us write thank you notes."

"Oh please," chimed in right brain, "we could argue all night and meanwhile Webby is not getting any closer to a decision. You're just too lazy to go on a bound-about."

"I don't see you getting him on his feet."

"Very well. Webby if you do not get up right this moment and get going Georg(e) and Bethleann will definitely be back from the show. In fact I am surprised they are not back already. You still have to get your jacket and hat from the hall tree so you could not even sneak out the window from here."

Webby's eyes popped open wide. "I'm wasting time. I can do this!"

He hoisted the pack and stood up. He looked around the room.

"Get moving lad. Left brain is slowing you down."

Still Webby stalled. He scooped up the stuff from his backpack off of the bed and dumped it all into the closet. He smoothed the covers. "There, they'll think I've gone for a walk maybe. Or over to a friend's house. Never will they think I'm on a bound-about until I am far away." He glanced around the room one last time. He pulled down a picture from his bulletin board taken at his naming party and shoved it into his pocket.

"MOVE!" hissed right brain.

Just then Webby heard a sound. It was Bethleann and Georg(e). He could hear their voices drifting across the meadow. They would be at the house in a few minutes if nothing stopped them.

He stepped out of the room and closed the door. This would buy him some time. They would think he was still asleep.

He scurried down the stairs and got his jacket and cap off of the hall tree. He arranged things so that nothing looked missing. Just before he stepped out the front door he selected a walking stick from the milk can by the door.

He pulled open the door and breathed in the fresh night air. It was a good night for a new beginning. He smelled clover and daisies. He heard crickets chirping. A huge moon was on the rise.

Webby heard Bethelann and Georg(e) arrive at the back door laughing and chatting about the movie. He was going to miss his friends. "You will be back," reminded right brain. "Not a word left brain, not a word," right brain cautioned before left brain could offer yet another stalling notion

"I was only going to say it's a long way to the first crossing and we best get going," sniffed left brain. "You didn't have to jump all over me."

"I bet you were," challenged right brain.

Webby could already tell that with no friends to chatter on except right and left brain this was going to be a most interesting bound-about.

"Look out world here I come!" he shouted in a whisper.



Chapter 7

Gone

Georg(e) and Bethleann strolled to the turn into their lane in total silence each caught up in private thoughts.

“Georg(e),” Bethleann finally broke the silence. “Do you still see Gloria?”

“Nope.”

They reached the big meadow leading to the house. Georg(e) jumped nimbly over the rail fence and reached for Bethleann’s hand to help her over. She really did not need any help but took the offered paw and cleared the fence nimbly. Bethleann waited for Georg(e) to release her hand and lumber off across the meadow. Instead he held firmly and with his free paw suggested that she lead the way, “Find us a way around the thorns. You are much better than I am at spotting them. And you know how they like my fur!”

Bethleann smiled, “Sure Georg(e),” she liked holding his paw. It was warm and secure. She scanned the moonlit meadow and began weaving a path toward the cottage ever so slowly. She did not want this lovely evening to end.

“Georg(e), do you suppose Wellington had any luck with the coats?”

“Naw, they are too mean for anyone or anything.”

“Really? Not even Wellington?”

“Why do you think he sent Webby into the closet? And you know he has had us all avoid that closet for way too long. I don’t think he has any idea how to handle those things.”

“But surely he must be able to think of something.”

“Well sure, but something that will actually work is another thing altogether.” Georg(e)’s paw was getting clammy but he did not want to let go of Bethleann’s beautiful hand. It felt so smooth and heavenly. They reached a big rock in the meadow that marked the midpoint. Bethleann called it Midpoint Rock. She was always naming things. Georg(e) loved this about her.

“Let’s sit on Midpoint Rock,” suggested Bethleann. “The stars are so nice tonight.”

Georg(e) could not agree more. They sat down on the smooth monolith and then lay back side by side so that the view of the sky was stunning.

“This is wonderful,” sighed Bethleann. Georg(e)’s arm was under her neck creating a soft cushion. “I could stay here all night.”

“We should do that sometime,” suggested Georg(e). “We can bring a few pillows and some blankets and a snack or two. It’ll be fun.”

“How about tonight?” Bethleann wanted the evening to go on and on.

“We could do that. We could go check on Wellington and get our stuff and sleep under the stars.”

Bethleann breathed in the fresh night air, “Let’s do it!” She sat up.

Georg(e) pulled her back down, “In a moment. I just saw a shooting star.”

“Where?”

“Over toward the mountains.” Bethleann looked that way. The sky was bright but no shooting stars shot across the brightness. “Are you sure you saw one, Georg(e)?”

“Two. Whoa, there goes one now. See it!”

“I do. I do. So fast like a streaming ribbon of light. How beautiful. Oh wow, there goes another!” The stars were shooting all over the sky now, in every direction it seemed.

Finally after it seemed like there would be no stars left hanging in the sky the show fizzled out.

“Amazing,” sighed Bethleann. She sat up and this time Georg(e) did too.

“Still feel like sleeping out,” he asked.

“Hmm...I am a little tired. But it is a great night for a starry sleep out. Sure!” They stood up and stretched. “Race you to the house!”

“My fur will be thick with thorns.”

“Oh alright. We’ll race when we get to the path.” There was a well worn path closer to the house that pretty much turned to naught not so far into the meadow. That was because they used this meadow to go off in all sorts of directions to see various friends and do various errands and so no definite path could keep up.

Bethleann lead the way around the few thorns growing randomly throughout the meadow and shortly they reached the path. “Beat you!” she cried and took off.

Georg(e) took off too and plowed along his massive feet and legs taking huge strides, but the small girl was swifter. Then she slowed down so that she would not beat her buddy by much.

“I just barely beat you,” she giggled. “Barely, get it?”

“Yes, I get it but barely,” Georg(e) played the game. He nudged Bethleann in the ribs.

“Hey,” she cried loudly and then more softly, “we should be quiet. We might wake sleeping bear, otherwise known as Webby.”

“You’re right,” returned Georg(e). They quietly opened the screen door to the kitchen.

“Funny,” said Georg, “the stove is cold, not even a banked smolder.”

“It’s awfully quiet,” said Bethleann. “Too quiet.”

They looked at each other. They hurried to Wellington’s study. The door was shut. They knocked but heard no familiar, “Enter!” coming from inside. Georg(e) tried the knob. It turned but the door did not open.

“Locked?” he looked puzzled. “Never known Wellington to lock us out. Course he might have locked the door sometime in the past that I never knew about, but this is still pretty strange.”

“Not really,” said Bethleann.

“What do you mean?”

“Well you said yourself that Wellington had no clue how to handle the coats. And Webby was insistent that Wellington take on the job. And Wellington was just as insistent that the job get done. Soooo...he probably locked the door to keep anyone else from getting slammed by those infernal coats.”

Oh,” Georg(e)’s eyes opened wide. “You’re right. He’s taken on those coats all by himself. Foolish rabbit.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Get into the room and rescue Wellington of course.”

“How are we going to get into the room?”

“I’m thinking. All of the reliable magic stuff that I know about is in the room already.”

“Even your wand?”

“Well, no not my wand. But I’m not supposed to use it much here here. Different spirits and all that,” Georg(e) bit his lip.

“This is an emergency!” Bethleann pleaded.

“My wand is back at my cottage,” Georg(e) stalled.

“You don’t keep it with you?” Bethleann was aghast.

“No, I don’t,” Georg(e) was getting just a bit annoyed. Bethleann was acting like he had no sense. “I told you I don’t use it much here because it’s not made for here. It’s made for the taiga. Wands have ranges and when they are out of their range they act completely different and often very unpredictable.”

“Nevertheless, this is vital. We need to help Wellington and your wand is our only chance. Let’s go get it.”

“Do you think we should check on Webby first?”

“I think he is sleeping off his tantrum and will be just fine. We need to concentrate on Wellington.”

“You’re right,” Georg(e) knew she was. “Alright let’s get my wand.” He headed for the front door with Bethleann on his heels.

Suddenly a huge blast vibrated through the cottage. It shook everything and rattled dishes in every cupboard. “What was that!” shouted Bethleann running back toward Wellington’s study. She shook the door but it was still locked tight. “Hurry Georg(e). We need your wand more than ever!”



Chapter 8

Step Lightly

“What do I have to do?” whispered Wellington wishing he were braver than he hoped he sounded.

“Gather your cape about you.”

Wellington started to protest that he had not brought his cape with him into the coat closet, but he was wrong. Here he was about his shoulders. Then he remembered. He had been chilled and had grabbed it off the hall tree near the front door on his way to the kitchen after checking on Webby. He put down the lantern and pulled his cape close, remembering Uncle Wells and wishing for his strength.

Suddenly he began to spiral up and up and around and around at a tremendous rate. Higher and higher, round and round he went. He was getting quite dizzy. He closed his eyes. He was spinning so fast now he felt like he must be turning to butter like those silly tigers in that pancake story. Pancakes! What a time to be thinking about food. He was immediately so hungry, he could think of nothing else. Pancakes. Pancakes. Pancakes.

Bump!

Wellington hit the ground. He hit the ground so hard that his teeth clamped tight together with a loud snap. He was very glad his tongue was in the right place and not between his teeth. It would have gotten a nasty bite. And not one of pancakes.

“You have arrived.”

Wellington thought this was an unnecessary observation. He knew he had arrived, somewhere anyway. His tail felt smashed and sore. He sat stunned for a moment waiting for the voice to give him a new command but when it did not, he pressed his hands behind him, bent his knees and pushed to stand up. He looked around. He could not see anything but white. Everywhere he looked was white, just plain white. There was no horizon, no up, no down. And there was only silence. There was no sound at all. No color, no sound, and no smell. He reached out his arms, palms spread wide and turned in a circle, there was no feel here either. No sight, no sound, no smell, no taste and no feel. It was a place of no sense. “Nonsense,” sniffed Wellington. “Everyplace has some sense.”

“Not the Salt Mines of Misery,” said the voice. “The mines and your coats are under a deep enchantment. The coats are guardians of the enchantment. Black Veil wanted to enchant all the children of the world but the coats would not hear of it. They took it upon themselves to contain the enchantment until the Bearer of Eternal Hope sets them free.”

“The Bearer of Eternal Hope?” asked Wellington.

But the voice was silent. Wellington did not know what to do now. He tried walking but every step seemed to take him no where at all. Still he had no other ideas just at the moment so he continued to step and step and step until he got very tired. “Perhaps I am stepping in the wrong direction.”

Wellington turned a quarter turn and began pacing left foot, right foot until again he got so tired he had to stop. He began to get hungry and thirsty.

"I am so thirsty," Wellington moaned, "if only I had brought my canteen." Wellington longed for his favorite blue Klean Kanteen. But he had not brought it and so he turned another quarter turn and started walking again foot step after foot step. Until yet once more he could not take another step. He sank into a heap scooping his beloved cape up under his head to form a pillow of sorts and started to drift off to sleep dreaming about pancakes and canteens of water.

"You cannot stop now," the voice woke him from his troubled slumber.

"But I am so tired and hungry and thirsty."

"The coats need you. The Salt Mines of Misery need you."

"Am I the Bearer of Eternal Hope?" asked Wellington. But the voice spoke no more.

Wellington sighed and stood up. He turned a fourth quarter turn clockwise, always clockwise. Was this wise perhaps he should have been turning counterclockwise. Did any of this matter anyway? He was turning in circles. And walking in place. He felt a tear struggle to get free. "No crying now," he admonished himself.

He began walking and walking and walking, always walking but never getting anywhere.

And this time before he got tired, he stopped. He gathered his cape close, sat down crossed legged, put his paws together and began to weep. "I am a failure," he sobbed. "I cannot get anywhere and I cannot help my friends and I am so hungry and thirsty." His sobs increased. The tears flowed so freely like he had been storing them up forever. He cried because he missed Uncle Wells so much, he cried because he had unfairly used Webby for his own gain, he cried because Georg(e) had no good way to get to the WEB when his time delivering Easter love was up but he decided to help Wellington anyway, he cried because he knew Bethleann really loved Georg(e) and Georg(e) could not see it. He cried on and on.

And then a strange thing happened. Slowly at first and then more rapidly. Things began to appear. His salty tears were washing away the whiteness. There was ground beneath him. Green grass and field flowers, wish flowers, Georg(e)'s wish flowers. He could smell the flowers. And there just over a small hill a tree appeared and then another. And a path, a path leading upward to a purple hued mountain and down to a sea with a white sandy beach. He heard birds chirping and bees buzzing. And a brook of laughing water close by tumbled down from the mountain chasing itself over pebbles and stones on the way to the sea. Wellington was in awe of such a dramatic change where there had been naught but whiteness only moments ago.

"Excellent, lad, excellent. I could not have done better myself. Your genuine tears of regret and remorse have melted the dried and withered tears of all that came before and loosened the enchantment on the Salt Mines of Misery. Your selflessness has made the path lighter for the Bearer of Eternal Hope. For your reward here is a sip of nectar and a wafer of satisfaction."

Wellington felt in his pocket, there with the key to the coat closet was a thin wafer and a very small flask. He drew them out and inspected each. The wafer looked very thin and unsubstantial. He was very hungry and throwing caution to the wind, he ate it very quickly. It tasted like so many good things he loved to eat. He felt like he had just finished a fine meal. Now he studied the flask. He opened it and smelled. He did not know what he expected to smell

but it seemed like a sensible thing to do. And then because he was so very thirsty, he drank the whole thing. He patted his tummy and burped. He was quite content. He looked around wondering what to do next. Should he follow the path up toward the mountain top or down to the sea. "I shall go up," he decided and then maybe I can see where the sea goes."

He began to climb. He felt stronger than he had before. He wondered if the wafer and nectar had helped his strength.

He climbed and he climbed but the mountain was still far away. His new strength was waning, he was so very tired. This was an extremely tiring place. He sat down under a shady tree and gathered his cape about him. "Perhaps I will rest just for a moment." He fell instantly asleep and began to dream a fretful dream. There were lions and tigers and bears. Oh my! They looked very unfriendly. They growled and circled around Wellington. In his sleep he pulled the cape closer. "I wish Bethleann and Georg(e) were here. Georg(e) would know how to handle these wild bears." Wellington tried to run but his legs were so heavy, he could hardly pick them up. And in his dream he felt so very sleepy. His eyes kept closing, they were impossible to keep open no matter how hard he tried.



Chapter 9

The Bearer of Eternal Hope

“Georg(e) we’re not moving fast enough,” shouted Bethleann as she pounded along her swift legs far ahead of Georg(e) who lumbered farther and farther behind with each footfall. They had retrieved his wand and were rushing back to Uncle Wells’ cottage.

“Bethleann, wait. I...can’t...keep...up,” he forced through his parched lips. He was certainly glad his cottage was not so far from Uncle Wells’ dwelling.

“We’re almost there!”

They arrived at the front door both out of breath, Georg(e) was sure he was going to throw up. He held his side and tried not to gag.

“Are you okay?”

He shook his head yes not daring to answer for fear of covering Bethleann with partially digested popcorn. Why had he eaten so much he wondered.

“Good. We need to move on.” Bethleann could be so focused when she put her mind to a task. Georg(e) supposed that was a good thing.

“Umm..” he managed and tried to straighten up. The nausea was leaving. He reached for the door knob and gave it a turn, flinging open the door. “Coming?” he beckoned to Bethleann suddenly feeling much better. Maybe he was not in such bad shape after all. He just needed more practice. He decided he would start running on a regular basis after this affair was put to rest.

The two reached the study. “Okay, Georg(e) open the door.”

Georg(e) lifted his wand. He wanted to say a spell, an easy door opening spell but he was afraid. True, he had used minor spells in the warren from time to time but this felt, well, different. Maybe it was because Wellington was not with him. Of course Wellington was not always with him when he cast a spell but he was never far away, not like now.

“Hurry Georg(e)!”

Georg(e) cleared his throat. He pointed his wand at the door. “Open Sesame.”

“Open Sesame? What kind of magic spell is that?”

“Well it worked for that guy Aladdin.”

“Georg(e), we’re wasting time.” Bethleann was tapping her foot, a bad impatient habit of hers.

Georg tapped the door with his wand and then stood back.

“Door, door in the wall
Open now for one and all”

Slowly the door opened as if someone were touching it. But neither Georg(e) nor Bethleann were. “Wow, you did it! You’re amazing.”

Georg(e) blushed. He did like to study magic manuals and was always taking courses in preparation for his next levels. “Thanks.”

They hurried inside and shut the door behind them. "Wellington," they both called in vain hope that he had just fallen into a deep slumber in his chair.

"He's not here," sighed Bethleann. "We need to check the coat closet." She stepped toward the door of the closet. She put her hand on the handle and gave it a turn. It opened easily. "Georg(e), look."

Georg(e) came closer. He peered into the closet with Bethleann. "What?"

"Do you see that whitish stuff on the floor here inside the door?"

Georg(e) looked down. "Uh, huh. What does it mean?"

"It means Wellington is not in the closet but he was. To me anyway that is what it means."

"How are we going to follow him?"

"Well we can hold hands and step on the white stuff."

Georg(e) gulped but Wellington was his best friend. He took Bethleann's hand. "Come on let's get this over with."

They stepped onto the powdery stuff. Nothing happened. "Now what?" wondered Bethleann. Just then the door creaked shut and they heard a clicking sound. Bethleann tried to open it but it was locked tight.

"Don't even think about asking me to use my wand in this place," said Georg(e). He held her hand tighter.

"Georg(e) you're squeezing my fingers."

"Welcome travelers." They both gasped and looked at each other as best they could in the extremely dim light. "Fear not. I will not harm you. Now these coats are another matter, therefore I would suggest you not step any farther into the closet. What is your business here!"

"Ummm...we're looking for our friend Wellington Rabbit. We think he might have come this way."

"Ah, the rabbit."

"You've seen Wellington?" Bethleann was hopeful. "Where is he?"

"He has traveled to the Salt Mines of Misery."

Bethleann shuddered, the name sounded so miserable. "How do we get there?"

"It is not for the faint of heart."

"We can handle it," growled Georg(e).

"Your friend is attempting to rescue these coats from their misery."

"He may need us!" cried Bethleann.

"He has made progress, but he lacks."

"Wellington lacks?" Georg(e) could not imagine such a thing.

"His heart is pure but he is not the Bearer of Eternal Hope."

"The what?" queried Georg(e).

All was silent. The coats rustled in a restless manner.

"Bethleann, we need to help Wellington. Maybe galoshes would still work?" he added hopefully. Georg(e) was referring to their very first encounter with the coats and how galoshes had kept them at bay, although just barely.

“Galoshes are another band aid. Not a real solution. You do remember how feisty the coats can be and that voice warned us against having anything to do with them. Maybe they’ve gotten even worse than they used to be.”

“Well, we cannot just stand here and Wellington needs us!” Georg(e) felt brave.

“You are right,” sighed the girl, “Maybe if we carefully kneel down and feel along the floor we can find a pair of galoshes without touching any coats.”

“You will not succeed,” said the voice.

“But we must!” cried Georg(e) and Bethleann together.

“Your dedication to your friend is strong.”

“He would do the same for us.”

Very well,” said the voice, “I will help you.” Then they felt the floor of the closet melt away and themselves lifted and twisted as though riding an updraft. It seemed to go on forever and then the lifting and twisting stopped and then began to fall, faster and faster. Bethleann screamed. Georg(e) tried to remain calm but he did not feel calm. Bump! They landed on something lumpy.

“Ouch!” cried the lump.



Chapter 10

Always Friends

“You’re mushing me,” said the lump. “Get off of me. I can’t breath.”

“Wellington?” said Georg(e) rolling off of the lump. Bethleann sat nearby rubbing her head.

“Georg(e)? Bethleann? Is it really you!” Wellington was elated. “How ever did you get here?”

“That voice thing, sent us.”

“Well, well, well. You are a sight for sore eyes. Did Webby come with you?” Wellington looked around for the young rabbit.

“We did not see Webby when we got back from the picture show,” said Bethleann checking her arms and legs for wounds. “And then we heard a loud boom and thought you might be in trouble. Is this the Salt Mines of Misery? It doesn’t look so bad.”

“Not now,” said Wellington, “but you should have seen it when I got here. All white and empty.” He told them everything that had happened.

“What do you suppose we do now?” They all looked at each other.

“I bet that voice would know what to do,” mused Georg(e).

“Use your wand, maybe?” suggested Bethleann.

Georg(e) stared at her, “But we don’t know what we are doing.” He fingered his wand.

“We are trying to break the enchantment on the coats which will break the enchantment on these mines. Once again the mines will be able to use tears of sadness to make this a place of healing and quietness for all that find their way here,” Wellington offered.

“But how shall we break it?” Georg(e) wondered passing his wand from paw to paw. “Maybe I should use my wand.”

“That’s the spirit,” encouraged Bethleann.

“I don’t know about using your wand,” countered Wellington. “This is not the taiga.”

“It’s not Willis Warren either,” said Georg(e). “Have you got a better idea?” Wellington did not.

Georg(e) lifted his wand. He began.

“Wand of strength
Wand of might
Help us find
The path that’s right.”

Suddenly everything went black, black as black could be. Bethleann shrieked. Wellington felt queasy. Georg(e) quivered all over. “What’s happening? Where are you Bethleann?” But before he could step in any direction to find either of his friends, he felt himself sliding, sliding, sliding down a very slippery slope with blackness all around. This time when he landed there was no soft lump of fur to ease the crash. He hit hard. It was still very dark, too dark to see anything.

Georg(e) had not heard any other thump or the voices of his friends. Still he called out, “Wellington, Bethleann are you here?”

“Georg(e) is that you?” a voice called out. It was not Bethleann, nor Wellington.

“Webby?” asked Georg(e) incredulously. “How did you get here? And where are we anyway?”

“I don’t know where we are. I was just walking along minding my own business when I felt myself yanked off my feet and I landed here.”

“Walking along? Minding your own business? I thought you were asleep at home.”

“Well I decided to go on a bound-about and had just gotten started when things began to go wrong. I got tangled in briars, something a rabbit never does. I got a sore shoulder from my pack. I finally decided that maybe I was not prepared enough just yet for a bound-about and was headed home when bam, I landed here.”

Georg(e) and Webby had been inching toward each other’s voices as they talked. “I was in the Salt Mines of Misery with Wellington and Bethleann trying to unenchant the coats. I tried a spell with my wand and got separated from them,” Georg(e) got the whole story out in one breath.

“Try your wand again, Georg(e). It does not seem things could get much worse.”

Georg(e) was worried but Webby had a point.

“Wand of taiga

Wand of bear

Take we two

From here to there.”

This time Georg(e) felt himself floating up and up. The darkness got lighter and lighter. Then with a terrific spin in which he could see nothing but swirls and then for a third time he was plopped down with a thump. “Got to stop traveling like this.”

“Georg(e)! Where did you go?” Bethleann was hugging him fiercely. Georg(e) looked around, he was back with Bethleann and Wellington and it was not dark anymore.

“Had to go get somebody,” he pointed behind Bethleann. She looked puzzled but turned in the direction he pointed. There was Webby already being embraced by Wellington all forgiven on both sides.

“Wow,” was all she could say and then, “Come on guys, let’s undo this enchantment. and go home. It’s almost Easter!”

“What do we do first?”

Use the wand again?”

“I don’t think that’s the answer,” said Georg(e). “The wand brought us all together and so it seems we are to solve this mystery ourselves on our own.”

“Georg(e) the bear you are right,” spoke the voice. “The answer has always been within this circle of always friends.”

“Always friends?” wondered Bethleann. “These are my best friends. What is an always friend?”

“Better than a best friend. Best friends come and best friends go, but always friends are always friends forever and ever. It is a very special bond that can never be broken.”

“Always friends. I like that,” said Wellington fondly looking at his pals in a new light. “Yes, we are always friends, always and always.”

“And now to the task at hand,” gently reminded the voice.

“What do we do?” they looked at each other and wondered.

“It has always been in your power to find the answer together.” The words of the voice were clear but the path was still a puzzle.

“Georg(e),” said Bethleann, “You could be this Bearer of Eternal Hope, after all you are a bear.” Georg(e) thought about Bethleann’s words.

“Maybe if I give up my ‘e’ it would make the Eternal part easier to find.”

“But you worked so hard to get it back,” cried Webby.

“It does not fit very well anymore. And I rather got used to being without it.” Everyone knew Georg(e) was fibbing but they respected his decision. He took off the ‘e’ and laid it on the ground. It just sat there looking lonely.

“Maybe it needs help,” said Bethleann. “I do not have any letters but,” inspiration suddenly hit her, “I can offer my hair, that is an ‘h’ word. My braids can be a bed for the ‘e’.”

“Not your beautiful braids,” cried Wellington.

“It’s only hair,” Bethleann swiftly cut each braid with a small pair of scissors she carried in her pocket. The always friends knew she was not telling the entire truth, but they loved her too much to ruin her hard decision. She coiled the braids into a lovely bed for the ‘e’.

Nothing happened.

“Maybe it needs to be bound together in a sort of web,” said Webby. “I Webster offer my W and E and B to make a web for the nest of ‘e’.” Everyone gasped. Webby was giving up the main part of his beloved name. They could not remain silent.

“No, Webby!”

He looked at each, “I love you more than my name. It is a pretty big name for such a small rabbit anyway.” He tugged at the first three letters of his name until they slid off quite suddenly all together. He laid them on top of the nest. And with that the nest began to shimmer and shine. It grew brighter and brighter spreading wide to every part of the surrounding land. What was beautiful was now a gloriously stunning sight full of love and hope and rainbows bridges in every direction.

“Well played, always friends, well played. Your love for each other and the hope of others above your love for things you hold dear has set the coats free. The enchantment is no longer. Now, hold hands and close your eyes. You are going home.”

Epilogue

“Wellington, Georg, Bethleann! I got a pony post package!” Little Rabbit raced into the glen where his always friends were busy polishing up the last of their Easter preparations. He was now an official part of the Easter delivery group and that felt so good.

“What is it?” asked Georg, rubbing the spot where his eye had been reattached and then taken off again in the great coat enchantment escapade. It was still a bit sore.

“I don’t know. I waited to open it with my always friends.” Unexpected pony posts were a rare occurrence and thus usually treated with great ceremony.

“Open it,” urged Bethleann fluffing her new short bob. Her impatience was showing.

Little Rabbit tore into the package. Inside wrapped in tissue paper was a string of eight letters with a note that read, ‘For a very generous bunny. Love, Beatrix Potter.’

“Oh wow,” Bethleann clapped her hands together. “Is that really from THE Beatrix Potter. The lady who wrote stories about rabbits and other animals and even did her own detailed illustrations?”

Little Rabbit was flabbergasted. “How did she find me?”

“Possibly Uncle Wells,” said Wellington. “There are forces beyond the WEB you know.”

No, the other three shook their head, they did not. But this gift was too special to spend much time wondering about how it got here.

Little Rabbit held up the letters for all to see, “Benjamin,” he read. “She sent me the name Benjamin.”

“He was one of her more famous stories,” reminded Georg.

“Try it on,” urged Bethleann. Little Rabbit needed no more encouragement. He was glad to have sacrificed his letters to break the enchantment but he really did not like Little Rabbit all that much. He steadied his new name just so and then turned for the others to see.

“How do I look?”

“Wonderful.”

“Perfect.”

“Like a rabbit that has some deliveries to make. Now we had best finish up the last of these Easter preparations, Benjamin Bunny.” Wellington’s comment made them all dig into the last of their work. The big day was just around the corner.

