

WELLINGTON RABBIT DOUBLE TAKE



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For grandson Zachary Saunders Ball
Who is a jolly lad

And

For Ruth Ann Quinlan O'Neill
Who loves Wellington

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

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Preface

Tenth book in the series! The arc is coming to a close. There will be more stories but this particular one ends at book XIII. I was telling Donny as I completed the last chapter in the book that in the beginning I always have a plan but all the details about how the characters will get there is not apparent. For example in this book I knew that Wellington would travel in time to try and stop Black Veil. That's all I had. I knew a time travel machine needed to be designed so Mr E was brought in to take care of that. Getting the houses straight seemed logical so that Mr E would have a place to work and there I had my beginning. But just a beginning. I needed the rest and it comes in strange ways. A fair amount of the subplots reveal themselves on my runs. Running is the perfect time to work on a story line.

Sometimes a piece of plot will come as I am writing. For example in Chapter Five as Wellington is leaving it suddenly becomes apparent to me that Benji should follow him, which he does. And that tiny spontaneous act takes an entire chapter on its own to resolve.

Our fifth child, son Lewis, and his actual real life new baking business have entered the story line. The entire series threads seem to have found a good fit for just about everyone. A little tongue in cheek for some of the characters but that is the fun of writing a book, Private Easter eggs.

It certainly is a pleasure to get back to drawing Wellington and the gang after a rush job of illustrating Santa and all of his reindeer as well as his Snow Queen and Little Elf for a History Press publication, *Santaland: A Miller & Rhoads Christmas*, this past summer. More challenging than new to me characters, was the setting which was a real store that people fondly remembered. Accuracy was paramount, no imaginary settings that are easy to draw. Donny gallantly took me to Paris to help bring the job in on schedule. His plan worked. I drew. We played. And the deadline was met.

Connie Willis' superior duet of books "Blackout" & "All Clear" and their prequel "Doomsday Book" help set the stage for Wellington and Mr E. The Dutch door at Mr E's entry is a nod to the one Dad built for my teen basement room. We lived in a basic 1950's suburban ranch house. Three bedrooms across the back, living/dining area and kitchen across the front. When my brother was born I moved into the basement rec room. It was basically at the bottom of the stairs that led up to an outside door or the rest of the house, but situated to the left just a bit so there was an entry way of sorts. My closet, a nasty metal thing, was there. The rest of the basement was unfinished. The Dutch door was perfect for letting light in but defining my living space as off limits.

The table Wellington is sitting at pondering his plan is similar to one of several Donny bought for our pub. They are colorfully crafted works of functioning art by Luon StPierre. The bentwood chair Wellington is sitting in at Bayside Bakery is just like the twenty-one Donny found on Craig's list, perfect for our expandable dining room table. The fan in Mr E's cottage is just like one I had at school in the days before air conditioning. My blog, SandyBeachGirl on BlogSpot, has a funny post I wrote featuring a letter I sent home begging for the fan.

My good friend Paula Corbin's mom is a huge fan of the Wellington series. She loves to color the pictures and underline favorite passages. She takes great delight that the characters all have tea chats and use uncommon words like haversack. She may be number one fan. She has a few health issues and I did not think Zachery would mind sharing his dedication with her. Especially since Modern Family is such a big hit right now. Yes, that O'Neill family. Paula flew to Los Angeles the first part of April for Ed's 65th birthday bash. She had hopes of getting to meet Christian Bale who lives down the street. And she almost did. Ed was going out for coffee Saturday morning and asked Paula if she wanted to come along. She told him she was still in recovery from her cross continent flight to please bring her some. He came back with coffee and a report of running into Christian, whom he invited to the party. But he couldn't make it. He was taking his wife to Mexico to celebrate her birthday. I told Paula she'd just have to go back for another visit soon.

As always this book would not be in your hands without my amazing guy, an editor like none other, one that writers can only dream of having. You will find mistakes because we both run this down to the wire. But that's the beauty of an on demand piece, your copy is a collectors' item made especially for you.



Chapter 1

A Marvellous Plan

Wellington put down his pencil and leaned back in his swivel chair smoothing his whiskers a slight smile tracing his face. “That ought to do it,” he said with a satisfied air. He pushed the chair back, stood up, and stretched. He had been busy making a list. It was not a very long list but that was the thing. It had taken Wellington the entire morning to come up with a short list of exactly what he needed with nothing extra. “Food is what I need right now,” he mused out loud as he headed to his kitchen.

There he began rummaging for something quick and simple to curb his gnawing appetite. It was after Bethleann & Georg began making plans for their summer wedding that Wellington came to the realization that everyone would be ever so much more comfortable if he moved back to his beloved cottage and turned Uncle Wells’ bigger house over to the couple. Bethleann & Georg talked about building a house in the windflower meadow where Wellington had first found Georg but Wellington saw no need for that. His perfectly good cottage was standing empty, only pressed into use when they had an out of town guest that did well with a bit more privacy. It, of course, would fit Bethleann & Georg perfectly as a couple but their plans for a big family would see them outgrowing the little cottage before anyone could turn around. So why not make the change right from the start.

Georg was hesitant about taking Uncle Wells’ house from Wellington. But when Wellington explained that he had a long term need for Georg’s shed home that Uncle Wells had built behind Wellington’s cottage. And so if Georg were willing to consider a home trade of sorts then the matter would be settled in his opinion. Georg was curious about Wellington’s plan but Wellington brushed that aside saying the wedding and honeymoon details were the thing to focus on just then. The word honeymoon sent Georg scurrying for brochures and pamphlets to find just the right spot to take his bride.

And so after the magical wedding took place and the couple seen off to their secret honeymoon location, Wellington, Benji, Topsy and Hop had moved all sorts of belongings and personal furnishings from house to cottage to shed and sometimes back again until everything was set. Then they scrubbed the Big House, as everyone liked to call it, from top to bottom. A fresh coat of paint on the walls and all was ready for the return of the honeymooners.

“I’m so happy they want me to stay,” said Benji as the group gathered around the hand water pump in the back yard and began cleaning up the painting supplies. He looked over at Wellington. “But I can come live with you, if you like,” he added hastily.

“Never you mind me,” said Wellington. “I’ve got a plan that will take much of my time and besides Bethleann & Georg are going to need help with these two,” he winked at Topsy and Hop.

“Help with us?” the two bunnies squealed in unison.

“We’re perfect angels,” pouted Topsy.

“Well, I am, anyway,” added Hop. He scrubbed hard at a particularly stubborn brush.

“You two are very lucky rabbits to have Bethleann & Georg offer to adopt you,” admonished Wellington ever so slightly. He would have taken them in if the couple had not. He was rather glad though that the task of raising those two was out of his hands for the most part.

“We know,” said Topsy. She shuddered at the thought of returning to the orphanage where she and Hop used to live. It was not a bad place, but it was not the place for them. It was on one of their many run away escapades from the orphanage that the little bunnies met Wellington and his pals and now thanks to Bethleann & Georg would never have to live there again.

“I’m hungry,” said Benji finishing up his part of the clean up. “Let’s zip down to the Doggone and have a slice of wizard Lewis’ cheesecake.”

Everyone loved that idea and final steps of clean up moved along at lightning speed.

“Ummm cheesecake,” mused Wellington, his rumbling stomach jolting him out of his day dream. “That’s what I need, but you best not mention that wizard part around common folks you know how he is about stealthiness,” Ever since the world traveled wizard decided to hang up his starry hat and partner up with Master Culper and his able assistant, Hilarey, adding his magical cakes to the menu the already popular spot was endlessly bustling with hungry customers wanting one of Chef Lewis’ cakes. He promised he baked from scratch, no magic needed, but his cakes surely tasted magical nonetheless. Wellington was hoping he just might have a slice tucked away in the refrigerator. He began digging.

“Ah ha,” he drooled as he pulled a container with a partial slice of lemon blueberry cheesecake from the bottom shelf. “Now which tea?” He put the cheesecake container on the counter and reached into his well stocked tea cabinet. “Raspberry-ming never fails,” he touched a canister of Uncle Wells’ favorite. “And this is a special occasion,” he stated making his decision. Uncle Wells may have partaken of raspberry-ming tea privately at whim but he only offered it to guests upon very special occasions and so that was the memory Wellington carried with him.

Wellington poured water from the ever ready tea kettle he kept on the back burner of his wood stove. When he was home that is, when away he was always careful to bank the stove fire and move the kettle off to the side. “Fire is nothing to trifle with,” he taught all the bunnies.

“Now this is just perfect,” Wellington took a bite of cheesecake and then a sip of tea. He went over his list in his head, “Just to be absolutely sure I have not forgotten something of consequence.”

“I wonder how Mr E is doing. Surely he would have stopped by if he needed anything,” Wellington entertained the idea of checking in with the cricket who had taken up residence in Georg’s shed, but he really wanted to get started on his list. But then Wellington knew that his list of things even procured would be pointless without Mr E completing his tasks.

“Very well,” Wellington said to himself. “I’ll do a quick pop in to see if everything is on track.” He cleaned up his dishes, banked the fire and slide the tea kettle to a safe spot. He reached for his cape and prepared to begin his errands after a brief stop in at the potting shed turned home.

“Hullo Mr E.” Wellington tapped on the bottom half of the Dutch door. The top half was open. He leaned his head inside. “Mr E. It’s me, Wellington.” Silence was all Wellington heard.

He tried the knob securing the lower half of the door. It was locked. He could hop over the top but a locked door meant privacy, even half a door. "MR E! YooHoo! I only have a minute but wanted to see how you were coming along." No welcoming greeting echoed back. No sound at all.

"That's very strange." pondered Wellington. "Should I go or should I stay."

"Wellington!" Mr E's voice boomed from the far side of the tiny shed. "I thought that was you." The cricket hurried to the door. He looked flustered. "Sorry," he fumbled with the lock. "Didn't mean to...say you're off on errands?" the cricket quickly changed his mind about what he had started to say and focused on Wellington's going out attire.

"I am," Wellington was so relieved to see Mr E materialize that he forgot to be inquisitive about where the cricket had been only moments ago. The shed was not that big for the cricket to miss hearing Wellington calling him, but his curiosity about that had already drifted from Wellington's mind. "I wanted to see if you needed anything."

"Nope, perfectly good," came the quick reply. Mr E was acting quite unlike his chatty self but Wellington was too preoccupied with his quest to notice.

"Excellent then," the rabbit had not even stepped inside. Mr E was still fumbling with the lock. "No bother there," Wellington indicated that Mr E could leave the lock be. "I'll be ready to go when I get back." Wellington was already turning to leave and did not notice the look of alarm on Mr E's face.

"Sure thing, Wellington. Ready to go."



Chapter 2

One Thing After Another

Wellington hummed a little tune. “This is going to be easy,” he grinned. He shouldered, his pack, not his beloved haversack this time, and set off. He semi-retired his haversack a few years back when he noticed it was getting rather threadbare from all the adventures he took it on. And now he only brought it out for Easter deliveries. Heaven knows what he would do if it wore out completely on him. He did not even want to consider such a thing. Uncle Wells had lined it with a magic dust from the WEB that allowed Wellington to have an endless supply of Easter eggs for all the children.

Wellington was not too sure how it worked. The eggs only appeared during his Easter deliveries. And it took quite some doing to figure out ways to get supplies of eggs to Bethleann and Benji who helped him with deliveries. He frowned. There was another unsolved thorn. Neither had been chosen by the WEB, that consortium of former Easter bunnies that resided in the nether world, to make Easter deliveries. The job was supposed to belong to one rabbit at a time only. But the WEB had not minded Georg being a partner with Wellington. In fact that idea had been Uncle Wells before he faded. Georg delivered wish flower seeds to children that could not receive Easter eggs for one reason or another. And so with Georg already on board and ever so many more children in the world, Wellington had asked Bethleann and then a few years later Benji to join the happy group. He reasoned that the WEB would let him know if the plan did not suit them.

It must have been okay because they never heard anything except for a very cryptic message from Uncle Wells after one adventure. He promised to see them soon, but so far nothing had occurred along those lines.

Wellington’s musings had taken him to Donald and Precisely’s tree house and he neatly tapped on the door still humming cheerfully.

“Wellington!” Precisely cried in delight as she popped open the door, a dish towel in one hand. That busy bird was always doing something domestic. “You’re a sight for sore eyes. Where have you been? It’s been ages.” All this was said as she opened the door wider indicating that her favorite rabbit friend should come inside.

“Oh Precisely,” Wellington blushed, “I’ve missed you, and Donald too. Where does the time go! Looks like you’re working hard in the kitchen.” He pointed to the dish towel in her hand.

“Oh, just cleaning up after making some Monkey Bread. “Should be out of the oven shortly, if you can wait.”

Wellington could already smell the fragrance of those delicious sticky buns. He nodded yes, “I need you to do something for me, Precisely. Maybe we can talk while the bread finishes baking.”

“Let’s go in the kitchen so I can keep an eye on things and you tell me what’s on your mind,” Precisely lead the way to the back of the tree house. It was a small abode but just the

right size for the two cardinals. The downstairs had a nice parlor that Wellington and Precisely had just left plus a tiny kitchen with a beautiful view of a wide spreading branch right outside the window. Precisely had a workroom for all her sewing projects on the next level up. Above that were sleeping quarters for the two birds and finally one more level up offered a splendid study for Donald, almost at tree top level, but more importantly away from all the household noises. Precisely was one for lots of company. Donald not so much.

Precisely reached for the tea kettle. "What's on your mind, Wellington?" She dressed the table with two teacups, saucers and dainty spoons. "Sugar or milk?" she asked the rabbit.

"No thank you," the rabbit was a complete purist about his tea. "I need you to make me a waistcoat and some knickers." Precisely looked at Wellington waiting for the finish. She knew him quite well. "And a bow tie."

"I can do that. When do you need them?"

"By tomorrow."

"Well you certainly are one for last minute requests, Mr Wellington. But sure, I can do that," Precisely was already calculating measurements and fabric cuts in her head.

"Oh, and another thing, the fabric has to be period."

"Whatever are you doing?" Precisely, not one to pry, was still most curious.

"Can't say," the rabbit cautioned, "but it's very critical that everything be exactly right. Will you have trouble getting enough old fabric that looks right? I'm thinking a Tattersall for the waistcoat would be smart."

Precisely gave Wellington a hard look. Then she turned her back on him. Or so Wellington thought, but actually she was rescuing the Monkey Bread from the oven before it burned. Still her timing was spot on to show her chagrin at what she knew was a silly question.

Precisely turned back around with the bundt pan full of divine smelling buns. Wellington's mouth watered. "Do you actually think I will have trouble getting the fabric I need for your private project, Mr Wellington!" the bird acted very miffed.

Well, no. No, not really," Wellington stammered, not sure if Precisely was really mad or not. And he certainly did not want to take any chances in offending her. He needed those clothes. "I just thought, I just thought, oh nevermind. Can I please have a bun? They smell so good." His stomach growled in agreement.

"You tend to your part of the project and I'll tend to mine," Precisely had put the pan down on the counter and lifted two hot buns out with a spatula. These she put onto two small plates which she sat on the table. Then she covered the bundt pan with a clean cloth. "There, they'll stay perfectly warm all afternoon for fine munching."

Wellington reasoned that with that delicious smell rising through the house, Donald would be taking a break from whatever he was working on soon enough. Precisely was so thoughtful to keep the buns at the ready. He took a nibble on his still very hot bun.

Precisely poured tea and sat down. "Wellington, you are one for mysteries but that is one reason I like you so much. Never a dull moment with you," she said sipping her tea and shaking her finger at her friend. "I will need some measurements before you go. And what color did you have in mind?"

"Oh nothing flashy. I need to blend in."

“Blend in? Not too Wellington like,” Precisely teased.

Wellington relaxed. A teasing Precisely he knew how to handle. Yup, this project was going to be easy.

“Monkey Bread! I smell Monkey Bread,” Donald walked into the room patting his belly as he reached for a tea cup and saucer. “Hey there, Wellington, didn’t know you were here. Welcome surprise!” The senior bird sat down at the table after first loading a small plate with several knots of Monkey Bread.

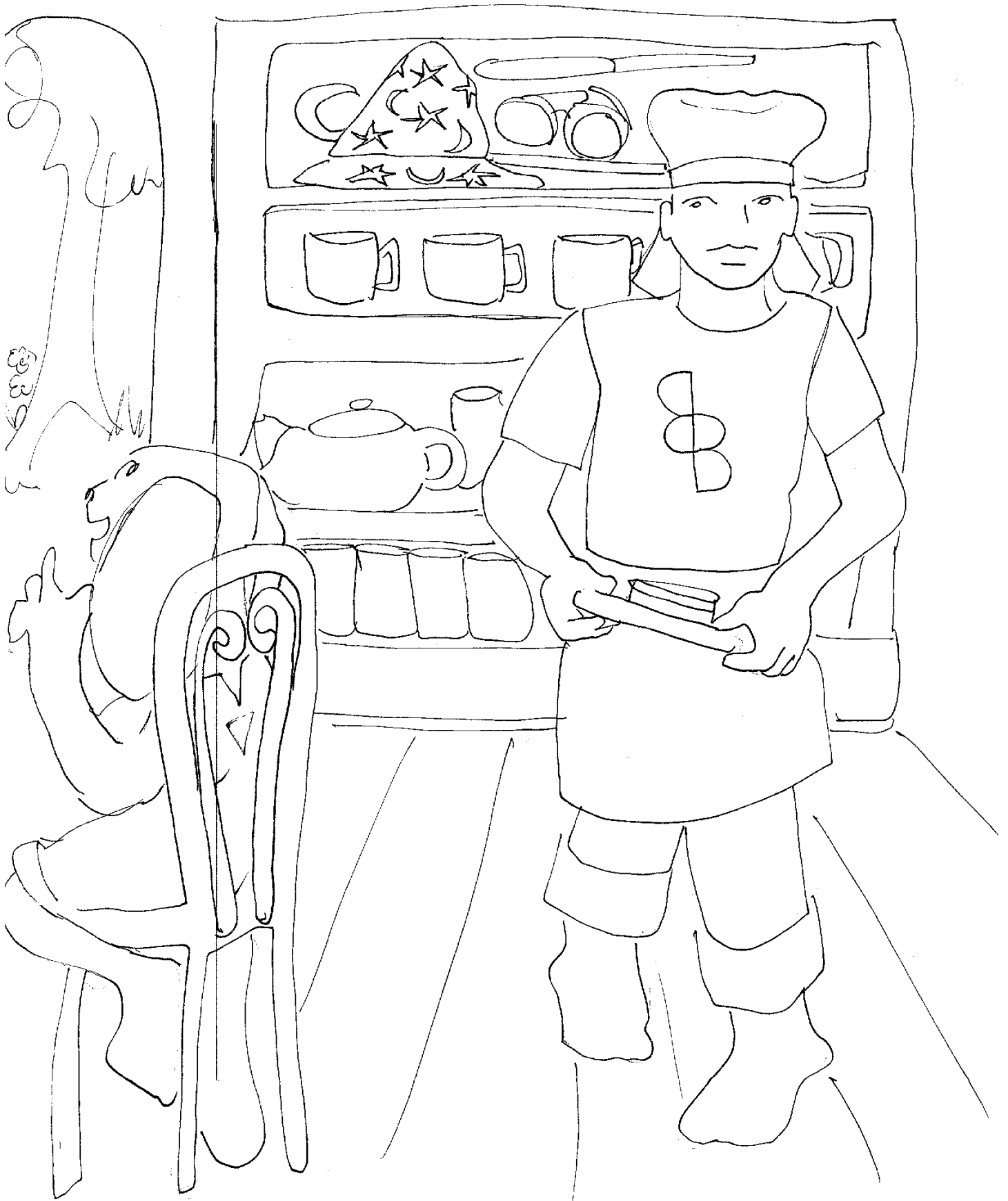
Precisely poured him some tea. “Wellington is on a mission, a secret mission.”

“Don’t say,” Donald munched on a bun. “What’s it about?”

“I just told you it was secret, brother dear.” Precisely shook her head.

“Oh so you did.” Donald could be rather absentminded sometimes.

Wellington sighed, maybe this was not going to be entirely easy, “In good time you both shall know everything, but yes, for now the fewer folks that know all the details the better.”



Chapter 3

Running Around

Wellington always loved visiting with the cardinals but he had so many things yet to do. He thanked Precisely for her gracious hospitality and willingness to get his outfit together speedily. He wished Donald good sleuthing with his latest math quest. He tucked the small package of Monkey Bread Precisely had pressed upon him into his sack and deciding that Stephen Stork would be the next stop on his list.

“Where do you suppose I can find Stephen Stork?” he asked as he reached the front door.

Precisely came running down the stairs from her workroom just then, tape measure in hand. “Measurements, Wellington, measurements.” Wellington put down the parcel of bread and stood perfectly still as Precisely put the tape this way and that all the time calling out numbers to herself, Never once did she write anything down, Donald was not the only one good with numbers, Wellington reasoned.

“Might try Doggone,” suggested Donald. “That stork does love a bit to eat at any opportunity, and now that Chef Lewis is on the premises with his outstanding cakes it’s a wonder any stork deliveries get done at all.”

“Good suggestion!” beamed Wellington as he picked up his package and pulled open the front door. “Oh and yes a pocket square too please,” he called back to Precisely as he scooted down the steps leading to the ground. He turned to wave good-bye. “See you in a few days.” He began humming his little tune again. It was a pleasant walk to the bakery. The spring day was perfect for being outside.

“That’s an easy tune.”

Wellington stopped in his tracks his song forgotten and looked around. He did not see anyone. “Strange,” he shook his head and started walking on.

“Egads, escaping a chat with an equal?” the voice sounded a tad disappointed.

“Emily Elf! Where are you?” Wellington loved the little elf even if she insisted on using a plethora of words starting with the letter e for no good reason that he could discern but to annoy folks.

“Enormous branch above your head!” the tiny girl hopped from a tree branch onto Wellington’s shoulder.

“Where have you been?” asked the rabbit. “We’ve quite thought that you found new friends.”

“Egads, no. I’ve been eons away, across eras, expressly so.”

“You don’t say,” pondered Wellington. Then his eyes brightened, “When are you doing this um, this um traveling again?”

“Exactly what I want to know,” Emily pouted.

“How so?” asked Wellington.

“Every time is different. But no more travel elocution. Let’s go eat.”

Wellington decided now was not the time to press the issue. "I was just headed to The Doggone Tea Room & Inn. Come along." The two set off and Wellington proceeded to catch Emily up on all the happenings to her friends in Willis Warren. There was so much to tell that the rabbit had barely begun before they got to tea room.

"What an elegant establishment!" squealed Emily viewing the sunny establishment with delight. "Let's have English breakfast tea and eight of those rainbow cookies," she spied a beautiful chocolate, green and pink layered cake like cookie topped with a chocolate glaze that had her mouth watering.

Wellington could see there was no easy way out of the delay and agreed, "But just two cookies for me." They chose a table for two on the patio after placing their order at the counter. Chef Lewis personally brought the order of tea and cookies to their table. He was always happy to see Wellington and his friends.

"I'm looking for Stephen Stork," Wellington said to Chef Lewis. "Have you seen him?"

"Can't say that I have recently," said Lewis stroking his beard. "He was in here last week. Said something about a long trip he was not looking forward to."

Wellington's hopes sank. Stephen could be gone for a long time. "I need to borrow a satchel from him."

"You may just be in luck," Chef Lewis hurried away. He came back almost instantly with a beautiful leather satchel in his hands. "Stephen left this here. Said I would know what to do with it when the time was right. Kind of a strange message but no point in questioning the messenger," they all laughed at his joke.

Wellington took the satchel. It looked perfect for his needs. He unbuckled the strap and lifted the flap. It was empty. Not that he expected anything to be inside. But he thought maybe there would be a note or something. He turned it upside down and gave it a shake just to be sure. "Did Stephen Stork say anything else?" Wellington quizzed the chef. "Anything at all?"

"Just what I already told you," Lewis began clearing away the tea dishes.

"I was hopeful that maybe you forgot something."

"What's this I espy?" Emily hopped down from her chair and plucked a round object she noticed on the floor under the table. She held it up.

"It looks like a button," said Wellington. "Maybe someone lost a button."

"Or maybe it escaped from the satchel," suggested Emily.

"It's just a button," Wellington played down the drama Emily was suggesting.

"Even so..." Emily would not let up on her thought.

"May as well take it," said Lewis. "Anyone inquires after a lost button I'll send them to you."

Wellington dropped the button into the satchel and withdrew a few coins and paper money from his pocket. "That was a mighty fine repast, Chef Lewis. And we're all still raving over the outstanding wedding cake you baked for Bethleann & Georg. Top job, top job." He tried to pay the bill but Chef Lewis insisted that the afternoon treat was on him.

"We'll be back soon then," promised Wellington.

"Exactly!" Emily agreed. The two left the bakery and stopped at the crossroads. "Extra penny for your thoughts, Wellington."

“I was trying to decide how best to find Sir Andrew. I have need of his services. Well more directly, the Ball’s services.”

“What do you expect from Sir Andrew and the Ball?”

“I need to acquire some vintage spectacles and a pocket watch.”

“I will excuse myself now and go find him for you.”

Wellington started to protest, but before he could utter a single word, Benji rushed up completely out of breath.

“Welling...,” he panted. “Sheez,” he exhaled, “W...,” he could not catch his breath to get Wellington’s name out.

“Hold on there, laddie,” Wellington patted the rabbit on the shoulder. “Nothing could be this urgent. Take a deep breath and start again.”

Benji grabbed his sides and bent over, taking in several gulps of air. “But, Wellington,” he cried. “It’s TIME!”

Wellington stood up straight as a rod, he eyes huge as saucers. “Time? Make haste lad. No time to lose.”

Emily looked extremely confused. “Time?”

“Yes, time!” Wellington voice rose to a squeaky pitch. “Bethleann is having the baby!”

Emily grinned, “A new baby? Excellent!” She shoved Wellington down the lane. “Go, go, extremely fast go! I will get the Ball to extract your things from the wilds for you.”

Wellington, ever grateful, was already running toward the Big House with Benji fast at his heels.

“The baby is on its way!” they shouted.



Chapter 4

The New Baby

Wellington did not stop until the Big House was in sight. But as the lovely home came into view he pulled up short and slowed to a walk.

Benji almost ploughed into him, "What's the matter, Wellington?"

"Maybe I'll be in the way. I don't know anything about birthing babies."

Benji laughed, "Georg said that you would feel that way. He wants you to take charge of the kitchen and make some good things to eat for everyone that will be stopping by later."

Wellington breathed a sigh of relief. Cooking was a job he could handle easily. "Can you help me?" Benji nodded. "Where are Topsy and Hop?" he suddenly wondered.

"Topsy went to get Precisely. And Hop is getting the kitchen ready for you."

Wellington moved forward with much more confidence. "How long before," he hesitated, "how long before the baby gets here?"

Benji laughed, "Are you sure you're a rabbit? Most rabbits, guy and gal, know lots more about birthing than you seem to know."

"Just answer the question," Wellington snapped and then felt bad. "Oh Benji, I'm just so nervous. I do know that birthing is not easy. It's a lot of work for our Bethleann."

"She'll be fine. Precisely is the best midwife around," Benji gave Wellington a hug. "We are the ones that are going to be in big trouble if there is no food for company."

"You still did not tell me how long we have."

"That's because there is no way to tell, silly rabbit. The baby could be here already, in which case we really are in trouble. Or the birthing could takes hours."

"Hmmm," Wellington began calculating. "So we need food for an uncertain number of guests, to be ready at an uncertain time, and available for an uncertain length of time."

"That pretty much sums it up," said Benji.

"Alrighty then." Wellington was in his element. Cooking he could handle with one arm behind his back. "We'll make a big pot of soup. With some yeast rolls. And perhaps we can persuade Chef Lewis to bake up several cheesecakes."

"Hop can go check with Chef Lewis," suggested Benji.

"Exactly my thought," beamed Wellington. They had reached the house and decided to go in the back way. "Hop can advise Georg that we're here."

"Hey Wellington," Hop pushed open the backdoor when he heard the rabbits approaching. "Georg said to tell you that it looks like it will be awhile, but not to tarry. I gathered vegetables from the garden. I figured that you might need them."

Wellington patted the young rabbit on the head, "Perfect, Hop! We have blended thoughts, you read my mind to the last thought. You are a good member of the team."

Precisely popped in the back door almost on the heels of the two rabbits. "Hello again Wellington. Looks like you two are getting ready to cook up something good. Perfect. Everyone

will be famished before too long.” She headed for the front stairs without stopping. “Don’t worry, Wellington, I’ll still get your sewing done on time,” she threw over her shoulder.

Tipsy was right behind Precisely toting her kit bag for her, “The baby is coming today! Yay!”

“Hop, hop on down to the Doggone and see what cheesecakes are on hand. Or actually any tasty treats baked by Chef Lewis will be well received by our expected and unexpected guests. Bring it all.” Wellington dried his freshly washed paws on a clean towel.

Benji had dug out the big stock pot from the back of the cabinet and was already busy filling it with jars of broth from the pantry before setting it on the wood stove to begin heating up.

Wellington started measuring flour, salt, sugar and shortening into a big yellow bowl. He scooped out a small measure of dry yeast into a small bowl, adding a spoonful of sugar. He poured some water from the tea kettle into a measuring cup and added just a tad of tap water before pouring it over the yeast. While the yeast was foaming, he mixed the other ingredients together by hand. “Just like my grandmother used to do,” he laughed. It had been awhile since he made rolls from scratch.

“Was that Emily Elf you were talking to in the lane Wellington?” asked Benji. He was making good progress with the vegetables.

“It was,” said Wellington.

“What was she talking about? Getting the Ball to find things for you. Did you lose something?”

“Not exactly,” Wellington poured the foamy yeast mixture into the big bowl and began kneading everything together. He added a bit of kettle and tap water mixed together as he went along. Soon he had a nice ball formed. After flouring a surface on the butcher block he began seriously folding the dough ball over and over giving it a good healthy blending.

“What then?” Benji had waited for Wellington to continue, and when he did not pressed the subject.

“It’s a project I’m working on,” Wellington sighed, so many folks being curious about something that he wanted desperately to keep quiet. He guessed he was happy they cared about him and his plans but it still could be inconvenient at times.

“Can I help?” asked Benji. He loved Wellington’s projects. They were always so, interesting, taking twists and turns no one could imagine. It was on one of those that he had been a big help and after that joined forces with Wellington. At that time he was working for Black Veil, that nasty rabbit that was out to thwart Easter. Benji shuddered to think how close he had come to being on the wrong side of things.

“Maybe later,” Wellington had put the dough back into the bowl, covered it with a cloth and put the bowl on the back shelf of the stove. The dough would proof fast there. “Let me help you with those vegetables.”

Benji was disappointed to be shuffled aside for what surely was a project not to be missed but he held his tongue. He began scooping the chopped vegetables into the simmering broth and set to cleaning up his part of the mess. “Wonder how the folks upstairs are doing?” he said changing the subject.

“Almost,” said Topsy bouncing into the room just then as though summoned by his question.

“Almost?” asked Wellington and Benji together.

“Yes, the baby is almost here!” she twirled around and left before they could ask any more questions.

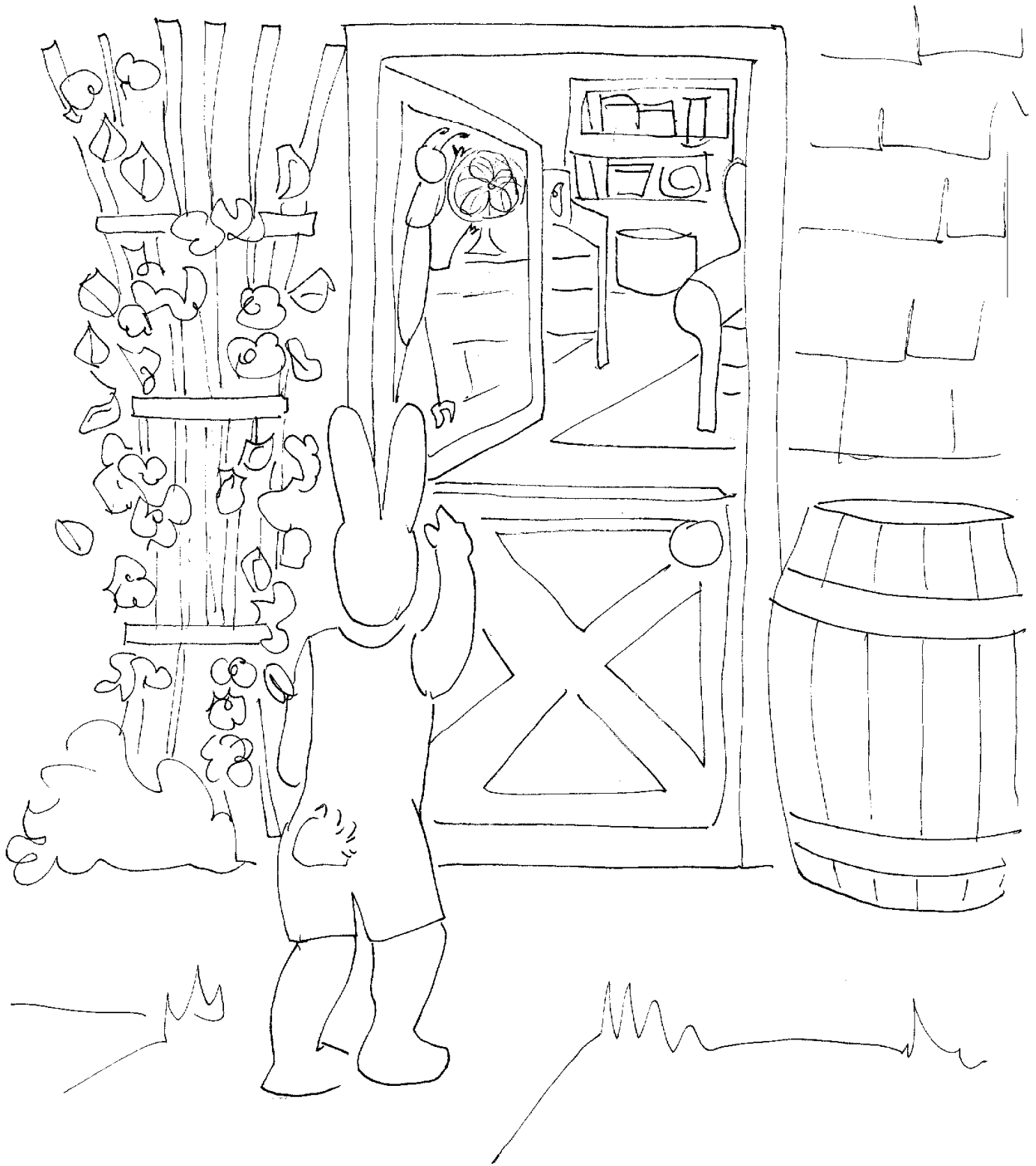
Wellington threw his arms up. “I just knew it. Bethleann is never one to dawdle about.” He snatched the big yellow bowl from the shelf and yanked off a big wad of dough before returning the bowl back to its spot.

“The rest of that dough can proof. I’m making some pita pockets with this chunk. Benji chop some more vegetables and slice some cheese. Pita sandwiches will hold the visitors until the rolls and soup can be finished.” Wellington rolled the dough flat and cut it into easy to handle shapes. These he put on a pan and thrust it into the oven. “Won’t take them long at all to bake.”

Benji had a plate of vegetables and a variety of cheese slices ready to go as Wellington pulled the pitas from the oven a few minutes later. “Okay, we’re ready. Where’s the baby?” he teased out loud.

“Right here,” boomed Georg waltzing into the room with a bundle in his arms.

“Oh my,” yelped Wellington. “Really? Already?”



Chapter 5 Into the Night

He and Benji both rushed over to Georg “Is it a girl or boy? Who does it look like?”

Georg grinned, “Meet Sebastian, everyone!” Georg was beaming.

“He looks like the both of you,” said Wellington peeking into the tiny bundle. “He has your looks and Bethleann’s coloring. His fur is exactly the color of her hair. How is our new mom?”

“She is amazing! She is already pestering Precisely about when she can take a shower.”

“That’s our Bethleann,” beamed Wellington, almost as proud as Georg. “Did I hear the doorbell?”

“I’ll check,” offered Benji heading toward the foyer.

“Cheesecake, and cookies!” called out Hop pushing open the screen door with his foot.

“A little help, please.” Wellington rushed over to relieve Hop.

Georg surveyed the bustling scene with pride. His friends were wonderful. Sebastian began to stir. “Guess I better get this little tyke back up to his mother,” he said trying to stifle a yawn,

“Maybe you could take a nap,” Wellington said. “We’ve got everything down here covered.” Wellington could tell from the look on Georg’s face that the idea was popular. “And send my love to Bethleann. I’ll not bother her just now.”

“Oh you must come up for a moment. She asked me to send you.”

Wellington looked pleased, “Can you guys handle the kitchen for a few minutes?”

Hop nodded still sorting out the treats.

Wellington could see Benji in the foyer greeting the first guests. He hurried up the stairs behind Georg. Bethleann was sitting up in bed. She looked radiant. Wellington quickly crossed the room and gave her a kiss, “He’s absolutely beautiful.”

“Thanks, Wellington,” she sighed. “Birthing is a lot of work. How have you been? Haven’t seen much of you lately.”

“Good, good. I’m working on an interesting project. I’ll be able to tell you more about it soon but for now you need a nap and I need to get back to the kitchen. The guests are beginning to arrive. I just wanted to pop up and give you a quick hug.” He gave her another hug and blew her a kiss as he left the room, but not before taking another peep at the sleeping baby.

And so for the next few hours Wellington, Benji, Hop and Topsy welcomed guests, served pita pockets, soup, rolls and yummy cheesecake along with pots and pots of tea. Between the flow of guests they washed dishes and took turns checking on things upstairs. Mostly the new family slept, but occasionally Georg would venture downstairs and the lucky guests that were visiting at that moment got a peek at the newest member of Willis Warren.

Precisely had left ages ago. Her work here done, she was anxious to get started on Wellington’s mystery project.

Finally the last guest departed. “Just in time,” said Benji, “We’re down to the last of everything. There’s just enough for a late night snack for Georg & Bethleann.”

“Well, I’d say that worked out well,” said Wellington. He gathered up his things and shoved open the back door. “Can you all take care of this last bit of clean-up? I need to go.”

“Sure Wellington. Thanks for taking time from your project to help out,” Benji said with a little snip to his voice.

“Oh Benji, I’ll tell you everything soon. I promise,” Wellington could see that Benji was disappointed. Hop had Tipsy. Bethleann & Georg were going to be busy with Sebastian. Benji was at loose ends. But it couldn’t be helped. Wellington had to do this alone.

Wellington rushed along the lane glad to have been able to help out and be there at the birthing but very vexed to have lost so much time when he had no time to lose.

“Mr E,” he called out as he entered his yard from the back way. “Mr E, I’m so sorry to have been gone for so long. It could not be helped. Bethleann had her ba...” he reached the shed and saw that both parts of the Dutch door were closed tight. “That’s strange,” Wellington worried. He had specifically advised Mr E to go nowhere until he got everything exactly right.

“Mr E,” he rapped on the door harshly. “Mr E,” Wellington began banging on the door. But no matter how hard he tried Mr E did not appear.

“Well that is just dandy,” Wellington grumped as he stumped to his cottage. He was tired. His project was in disarray and he had hurt Benji’s feelings. “I’m going to bed.” Wellington put the satchel from Stephen Stork in his study and slumped up the stairs. He brushed his teeth and washed his face. He fell into bed and was asleep before his head touched the pillow.

Benji knew he shouldn’t sneak behind Wellington, but Wellington always included him in adventures and he was not going to miss this one if he could help it. And so he quietly slipped out the kitchen door when Hop was in the other room and rushed off after the older rabbit. He caught up with him as Wellington was pounding on Mr E’s door. Benji was too far away to hear what Wellington was saying but he could tell Wellington was not happy that Mr E was not answering the door.

Benji sat on his haunches for awhile after Wellington had marched off to his cottage, deciding what to do next. He knew Wellington was not going to tell him anything so no point in following him. Mr E could tell him something and he would if Benji played his cards right. “I need a plan,” mused Benji, He began designing plans and tossing them out just as quickly. Finally he had what he thought would be a good one.

“First, I’ll go tap on Mr E’s door. Maybe he really is there. Maybe he just didn’t want to talk to Wellington.” Benji approached the shed door and tap tap tapped. “Mr E. It’s me Benji. I have important news.”

Benji heard rumblings from inside. “Did Wellington send you?” asked Mr E opening the top of the Dutch door.

“Not exactly,” returned Benji. “I...well I...well he did in a way. He ummm..umm..said that I was to help you.”

“What’s so important about that?” asked Mr E.

“I don’t know. I figured that you would.”

“Actually,” Mr E paused, “I completely agree with the logic of that. I just thought that Wellington was in a big rush.” He opened the bottom half of the door.

“He is sleeping right now,” Benji said confident this time that what he was saying was the absolute truth.

“Very well then,” proceeded Mr E, “Have a seat over there.” He indicated a cozy looking arm chair that invited the tired Benji cozily.

Benji settled into the chair yawning. It had been such a long day. Mr E became very busy fiddling with something Benji could not see. “I’ll close my eyes for just a moment while Mr E is getting whatever he is going to show me ready.”

Benji’s eyes closed, then fluttered open a few times, but Mr E still had his back to Benji. Benji stated to ask Mr E what was taking so long but then he felt the pull of his drowsy lids. “I’ll just close my eyes once more and then I’ll be all rested up.”

“Got a bit of a kink to iron out,” said Mr E turning to Benji finally. “It is probably going to take all night. So sorry,” But all he saw was a sleeping rabbit. “Better still,” smiled Mr E. “Better still.” He turned back to his work and began humming.



Chapter 6

A Long Day

It was not a restful sleep for Wellington tired as he was. He tossed and turned all night fighting his way through a series of disturbing dreams. When he finally woke up he felt more tired than before going to bed.

“This is going to be such a long day,” he yawned. He forced himself to get up, brush his teeth and get dressed and decided that a nice omelet would cheer him up. He headed to the kitchen and opened the icebox. He found a block of cheese and a partial loaf of bread but no eggs or veggies. “This is going to be a long day,” he sighed reaching for the egg basket. But first he stirred up the fire and put the tea kettle onto a burner so that the water could be heating.

The day was blustery and rainy. Wellington slipped into his Wellingtons. They always reminded him of his mother’s extreme fondness for the sturdy no nonsense boots so much that she gave her son the same name. He grabbed an oil slicker from the hook by the door and set forth to collect a few eggs from the hen house and a handful of choice vegetables from his kitchen garden.

The rain blew in his face and the wind whipped at his slicker. The hens were roosting and pecked at him for disturbing them but he managed to gather several eggs without too much blood being drawn. A quick stop at the garden for an early green pepper and some spring onions and he was set. He considered saying a quick good morning to Mr E but his stomach said otherwise and his good sense too. “That cricket is acting mighty strange,” he groused as he sloshed through the puddles back to the kitchen. “But I won’t bother him until I have all my gear at the ready.”

Back in the kitchen Wellington slipped out of his Wellingtons and slicker trying not to get too much water on the floor. The planks were such old wood that most anything failed to make an impact but Wellington still liked to treat it with care.

He set about washing the eggs, pepper and onions. Then before he went any further, he decided that it was past time for a nice mug of hot tea. The kettle had the water ready and he prepared himself a big mug of oriental spice tea. While he sipped his tea, Wellington chopped the vegetables, grated some cheese, and cracked the eggs into a bowl. He sliced off a piece of bread to toast. He whisked the eggs together and poured them into a buttered skillet he had set to heating up.

“Now for you,” he said to the cheese and vegetable. He sprinkled them over the cooking eggs and reached for a spatula. While everything cooked just a moment more, he popped the slice of bread into the triangle toaster. Turning back to his omelet, he carefully folded the partially cooked eggs onto themselves. He turned back to the toaster, flipped the door open and turned the bread over to toast on the opposite side.

The omelet was almost ready. It just needed one final turn and a few more moments in the pan. Wellington removed the toast from the toaster, slid the omelet from the pan onto a

sunny orange Fiesta ware plate. A slash of butter on his toast and his feast was ready. "Mmmm." he declared as he bite into the omelet. "Just the thing!"

Omelet, toast and tea were all gone in a matter of minutes. "I am feeling much better," declared a satiated Wellington. "Much better. Now to the task at hand."

He retrieved the satchel from his study and examined it further. It would do splendidly. The button was a curiosity. It looked ordinary enough and since it did not take up any space he left it tucked away in the bottom of the bag.

"Wellington, Just look what I have expressly for you!" Emily Elf burst into the kitchen.

"Why hello there, Emily," Wellington looked amused, the tiny elf thought nothing of popping into any scene as though she completely belonged there. It was sure to get her in trouble one day.

"It took me an extraordinary effort to find that Sir Andrew. He is a busy one. But just look at this," Emily barely stopped to breath. She held up a splendid pocket watch. "I had to use a bit of magic to help me get it here. Just a bit, nothing to get emotional over. It's so exceedingly heavy, you know, even though I am a spunky girl and not at all exhausted."

Wellington reached for it, "I do say this is ideal."

"Have you ever seen such a fine watch?" gushed Emily proudly.

"I did see a similar one once," said Wellington, "in a moving picture show called Dr. Who that Georg and I saw at the fair," he looked at Emily. Her face was crestfallen. "This actually looks a lot like that very watch," he rushed on. "I always thought it the most splendid watch I had ever seen. To think you might have found it." Emily bounced with glee.

"Did you have trouble with the spectacles?" Wellington moved to the other item on Emily's list.

"The, the, oh my...I am embarrassed. How could I ever forget the spectacles," Emily was mortified. Her happy bubble was burst.

"Oh no worries," Wellington attempted to ease her anguish. "The pocket watch was the tricky part. I am sure I can find an old pair of Uncle Wells spectacles somewhere around here."

"Really," asked Emily feeling a bit better. "I'll help you look." She started for Wellington's study.

"Oh that's not necessary, Emily," Wellington voiced hastily. His study was a mess, but it was his mess. If anyone moved anything he would never find it again, of that he was certain.

"But I don't mind a bit," the little elf explained.

Wellington thought fast. He did not want to upset her again. "You know maybe we should split up. You see if it is just possible to find Sir Andrew and his Ball quickly in the event that I cannot locate any spectacles. And I'll start the search here."

"Hmmm...exactly an extremely good idea," Emily turned toward the door. "Even if we both have exemplary luck you will have an extra pair. I'll be back extremely fast." She was down the lane before Wellington could say a thing.

"That was close," he breathed a sigh of relief. "Now where would Uncle Wells have put a pair of spectacles?" Uncle Wells was famous for leaving spectacles scattered in his wake wherever he went so Wellington was pretty certain he could find a pair in some strange but logical place. He knew he could find a lot of pairs at the Big House but he really did not want to take time to

go over there to look. He hadn't sent Emily over because she could be a chatty one and Bethleann & Georg needed quiet.

"Wellington, are you in the front or back?" Precisely's voice sounded at the front of the house.

"Back here," he called to her. Good, Precisely was finished with his wardrobe.

"Everything is falling into place," he gave a little jump for joy.

"Vintage clothing definitely is heavy," declared Precisely under a load so big Wellington could only see her feet.

"You're right," he said taking the load from her. "You must have worked all night."

"Mostly. Always to pent up after a delivery to do much sleeping. Especially when it's a good one. That little Edward sure is a cutie," she yawned. "Getting tired now though. Put those things on so I can see if I need to make any adjustments." She had set about making herself a cup of tea and waved Wellington toward his study.

Wellington took his new clothes into the study and began dressing. First the knickers, then the finely tailored waistcoat with its watch pocket. Precisely had even put in an extra button hole for the watch bar. Before slipping the watch into the pocket he wound it and set it by his mantel clock. Mr E had emphasized that a reliable working time piece was a necessity. Wellington had decided that a pocket watch was just the thing. Finally he tackled the bow tie and found it not so hard to do up after all.

"So how do I look," he stepped into the kitchen.

Precisely did a double take and gasped. She did not say a word, just stared. "Glasses," she muttered to herself, "he needs glasses. Here." She thrust her sewing glasses into Wellington's hands, "put these on."

Wellington put the glasses on. Everything was blurry but he could still make out forms, "Well?"

"Wells, I'd know you anywhere," breathed Precisely and fainted.



Chapter 7

Twists and Turns

“Precisely!” Wellington rushed over to the fallen bird. “Precisely wake up.” He gently shook her.

“Wha...where am I?” Precisely’s eyes fluttered but did not open.

“Precisely, it’s me Wellington. You fainted.”

“Oh my so I did,” she sat up blinking. “I was so very tired. For a moment I thought you were Wells.”

Precisely stared at Wellington whose mouth was hanging open. “Wells? As in Uncle Wells?”

“Why yes, I thought everyone knew that Wells and I were extremely fond of each other. We planned on marrying as soon as your training was completed. We knew Wells would be summoned by the WEB before long but time was of little consequence to us.”

Wellington’s mind was reeling. Uncle Wells and Precisely. Who would have thought it. And then he quickly realized how disappointed Precisely must have been when Uncle Wells just up and faded so abruptly. He hugged the usually perky little bird.

“We didn’t get to say goodbye,” she sniffed. “The fading happened so fast.”

“We heard from him you know. It was a very cryptic note saying that he would see us soon. But that was ages ago.”

Precisely looked at Wellington, “You will get to see him again. You will be part of the WEB someday.”

“I am sure that he is working on a way to get you there too,” said Wellington confidently. “Maybe that was what his message was all about. Ways to cross the nether or some such. Have confidence Precisely.”

“Oh I do,” smiled the pretty bird, “And I have lovely memories. But enough . You must get on with your project.” She stood up and shook herself off. “See perfectly fine. Now keep those spectacles. They complete the outfit.”

“Thank you Precisely. They were the last component I needed. I am ready. Wish me luck.”

Precisely laughed, “You don’t need luck. You’re Wellington Rabbit. Luck is practically your middle name.” She headed for the back door. “Still pouring like no tomorrow. Glad I just oiled my feathers. See you before long!” She scurried out the door and disappeared around the corner of the cottage.

“Uncle Wells and Precisely,” Wellington mused as he banked the fire and moved the tea kettle to one side. He checked the house to be sure everything was in order. Who knew how long he would be gone.

He shouldered the satchel Stephen Stork had loaned him and stepped out the door and along the walk way to Mr E’s shed. “That cricket best be ready,” Wellington said with determination.

“Mr E,” Wellington tapped on the door to the shed. “I’ve got everything I need.”

Mr E opened the door, “Wellington, whatever are you doing here now?”

“I told you that I would be ready soon. I’ve got everything I need and am most ready.”

“But Benji,” started Mr E stood at the open door making no indication that Wellington should come inside.

“What about Benji?” Wellington pushed his way gently but firmly inside the shed.

“He said you sent him.”

“So.”

“He said that you wanted him to help me.”

Wellington was beginning to get the picture. “And you took him at his word.”

“I did. It made perfect sense,” Mr E was wringing all of his hands.

“Perfect sense!” Wellington was trying very hard to control his anger. “Mr E,” he said through gritted teeth, “I thought that I explained to you the dire need for secrecy in this project.”

“You did,” Mr E was sweating profusely. “But it’s so new. I have had many complications getting everything to work even minimally. It is vastly complex. A test or two would be wise.”

“Who would do this testing? Who would we put at risk?”

“I have already tested it.”

“You WHAT!”

“I tested it,” Mr E could not look Wellington in the eye.

Wellington began pacing the floor to control his outrage, after all Mr E had worked very hard to get them to this point. Wellington could not show the intense disapproval he felt, “Mr E I could not have done more than dream of this project without your help.”

Mr E stopped wringing all but one set of his hands. “The test went very well. Flawless.”

Wellington went out as though Mr E had not spoken. “You took my off the chart crazy idea without question and pressed forward non-stop.”

Mr E looked humble.

“You achieved our goal with dauntless resolution and unconquerable faith.”

“Wellington, I am so sorry that I misunderstood your directive to Benji.”

“I gave Benji no directive.”

Mr E looked at Wellington, “You didn’t?”

“No, apparently he was more disappointed than I realized about being left out of this phase of the project. He must have followed me home and then decided to take matters in his own hands.”

“Where is he? Getting supplies for you?”

“He is on another test run,” Mr E practically whispered. “Just a tiny one. To be absolutely sure the kinks are ironed out.”

Wellington sank into the easy chair. “How sure are you about the outcome?”

“Very sure,” Mr E spoke with much more confidence. “Everything is working better than I could have dreamed.” Mr E’s realized that he had been practically holding his breath. He sighed a big sigh, “You may want to move.”

“Why?” Wellington started to rise from the easy chair.

“Because he’s due back any minute and you are sitting in the transporter seat.”

Wellington hopped up as though the chair were on fire. “It doesn’t look any different.”

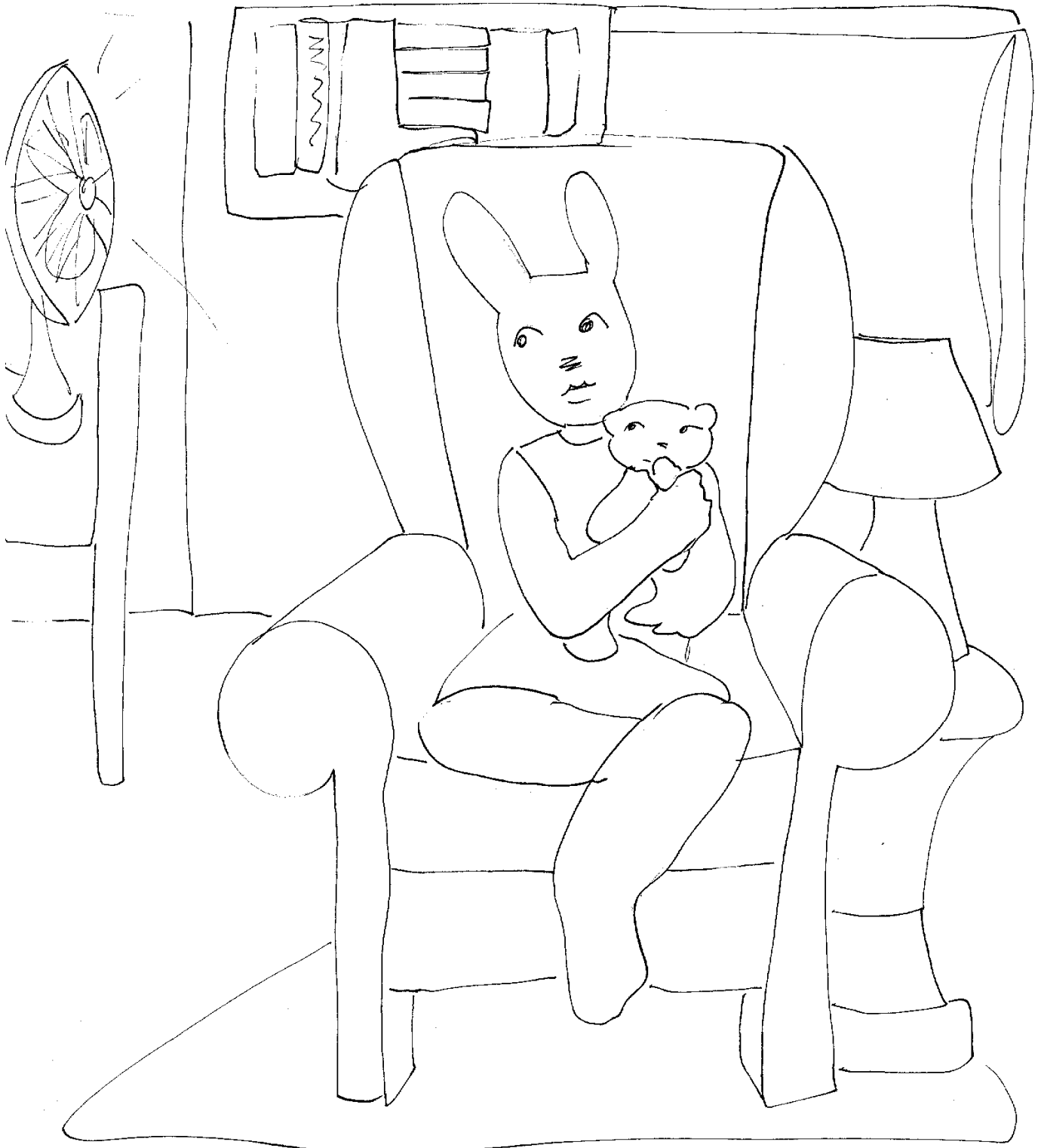
“It’s not the look. It’s the coordinates that are important. Any location will do. I like the chair because it’s too heavy to move and so I can keep the coordinates set. And also it’s coziness helps comfort nerves. After all time travel is not something we do every day.”

Just then the chair began to shimmer and shine. “Oh, one more thing,” Mr E talked fast, the form of Benji was taking shape. “Benji was asleep when I transported him. It was to a benign site and the time frame was short. I saw no need to wake him and answer a lot of questions.”

“How would you know he would be where you needed him for the return?”

“I pinned a note to his chest.”

Wellington just shook his head. For someone so smart Mr E could be very dense. “A note to his chest? What if...” but at that moment all speech was forgotten. Benji appeared fully formed holding a little bear in his arms.



Chapter 8 The Rescue

Wellington was the first one to speak. “Benji, what in the world are you doing with Sebastian? Bethleann & Georg must be half sick with worry.” He turned to the cricket. “Where exactly did you send him Mr E?”

Benji looked as white as a sheet. His worst nightmares were coming true. Wellington was about to light into him even harder, he knew it. For lying. And Mr E was going to have his head. For disobeying. The little bear began to whimper. “It’s not Sebastian,” Benji said softly.

Wellington was so relieved to hear this news that he rushed forward and hugged the bunny and the bear, “Are you completely sure? He looks exactly like Sebastian.”

Benji looked at Mr E. “I’m sure.”

Mr E stared at Benji unable to speak.

“Say something Mr E,” Benji implored. “Please say something. I know I disobeyed you. But it couldn’t be helped.”

Mr E sank into the closest chair. “I don’t know what to say.” He shook his head. “How did this happen?”

“What is the matter?” asked Wellington. “I mean besides the fact that we have a baby bear whose family must be wondering where he is.”

“Why don’t you start at the beginning, Benji.” said Mr E ignoring Wellington.

“I fell asleep in your chair. Then I remember you shaking me awake and telling me not to move. I didn’t understand why but you looked so serious that I did think it time for any questions. There was some sort of paper pinned to my shirt. I was trying to see what it said when everything started to shift. I thought we were having an earthquake. I tried to ask you what was going on but you were busy at your desk twisting dials and turning knobs.”

“I thought that you knew about the project from the way you talked,” Mr E looked over at Wellington as he directed this comment to Benji.

“Don’t feel too badly, Mr E. Benji can be a smooth talker,” acknowledged Wellington. “He had lots of practice when he worked for Black Veil.”

Mr E nodded in agreement. “Go on,” Wellington indicated to the terrified Benji. The baby bear was snuggling into Benji’s shoulder sucking his paw, his whimpering forgotten for the moment.

“I woke up in a forest. I was in some sort of thorny undergrowth. It was very warm and pleasant. I guess I should have been scared but I wasn’t. I knew the whole strange thing had something to do with Wellington and,” he looked at Mr E, “you and that was enough for me.”

“Where did you find this baby bear?” Mr E cut to the chase. “I did not write your program to last that long. You were only supposed to be there mere minutes. It was just a test!” he exploded. “I told you not to move. In the note. You did read the note I pinned on your shirt?”

“Yes, I read the note,” snapped Benji feeling just a bit used. “I did exactly what you, the note, said.” Benji hugged the snuggling cub close. “I promise.”

“What happened then?”

“I was sitting there not moving from the spot, just like you said in the note, which by the way wa’s hard to read. It got all crumpled somehow.”

“Yes, by that cub you’re holding,” admonished Mr E.

“No, before that. It was crumbled when I got there.” Mr E jotted this information down on a pad.

“What could you read?” asked Wellington, rather curious as to what instructions Mr E gave Benji,

“To not move from the spot, that the test would end in just a few moments. And to not touch anything which I guess meant not bring anything back with me.”

“And yet here is this cub. Clearly against your directive. Explain.”

“I was just sitting there looking around waiting for Mr E when it started getting hotter and forest creatures were running all around me. Suddenly this baby landed on top of me and at the same time I started to quiver. I knew Mr E was bringing me back. But I couldn’t push the baby off of me. He was terrified. The forest was on fire.”

“This is not Bambi’s story!” shouted Wellington. “This is my story. How did we get to Bambi?”

“I don’t know,” cried Benji. “I’m sorry. But I couldn’t leave him behind.”

“Well, we’re not calling him Bambi.” Wellington turned on his heel and went to fix a mug of peppermint tea to calm his nerves.

“Wellington, don't be mad. I don’t like Bambi for a name anyway. You can name him.”

“Mr E would you like some tea,” Wellington was beginning to gather himself.

“Yes, please. Actually I think the tyke will be fine here,” he mused. “As far as the balance of things goes,” he added.

“Whatever do you mean?” asked Wellington handing him a mug of tea.

“As we have discussed many times, time travel involves delicate balances which must be maintained at all costs. We may not disturb anything of consequence and who is to say what is of consequence and what is not. Why just popping in is disturbing things to a degree.”

“I thought that we discerned that as long as we did not upset any major things, a few ripples would cause no harm,” Wellington was much calmer now.

“Tis true,” Mr E sipped his tea. “I still believe that to be an accurate assessment from the few reading materials I could find on the source. The noted human researcher, Madam Constance Willis, seems to have the best handle on the way things work.”

“So we can keep him?” Benji was feeling on safer ground. The little cub, still sucking his paw, was looking at Benji adoringly. He seemed quite content to just sit. “Look how comfortable he is right here.”

“We should send him back,” said Wellington hesitantly.

“No!” cried Benji. “The fire was everywhere.”

“But his family will be so worried,” Wellington looked at the pair. “And we don’t know how this ripple is going to affect the future.”

“If we send him back now he’ll die. Even if the fire is over. His family is bound to be far away,” Benji held the cub tighter.

“Perhaps we could send him back when he’s a bit older and able to take care of himself,” offered Mr E.

“Or I could go with him then and help him find his family,” Benji brightened at this thought.

“We’ll see about that later,” said Wellington sensibly. “I do suppose the humane thing to do is keep him here until he is older.”

“Yes!” Benji jumped up from the chair dumping the baby on the floor and rushed over to Wellington. He hugged him so hard his tea spilt everywhere.

“Alright, alright,” laughed Wellington. “Bethleann should be able to handle another baby with your help,” he held Benji at arms length and gave him his most serious stare.

“I will help. I most definitely will.” Benji scooped up the bewildered bear and swung him in a wide circle. “You get to stay!”

“He will need a name,” Mr E looked at the cub as though trying to decide what name would fit. Wellington looked at Mr E. He looked at Benji.

“It seems that Edward would be a fitting name for this little bear after such an awkward arrival because Mr E needs a namesake to keep him out of trouble.” He glared ever so slightly at Mr E.

“And like Christopher Robin’s friend,” added Benji. “Winnie the Pooh stories are my favorites. Well, after the ones by Beatrix Potter.”



Chapter 9

At Last

“Benji, can you be in charge of getting Edward over to Bethleann & Georg’s on your own? He must be getting frightfully hungry,” Wellington patted the cub on the head.

“And he probably needs a real nap,” added Mr E.

“Guys, guys, Edward and I have already been on a huge adventure together. I think that we can manage a short walk through the meadow,” Benji was so happy. “See Wellington I have found a bear friend under unusual circumstances. Just like you did. It was meant to be!”

“Indeed,” laughed Wellington. “Be off with you now. Your new friend needs to get settled in.” It did not escape Wellington that Benji was taking Edward to exactly the same place he had taken Georg so long ago. He smiled at that good memory.

“Mr E,” Wellington addressed his co-conspirator. “I know you must be beyond tired but is it possible for us to implement my plan now. I am so anxious.”

“Patience is a virtue,” Mr E yawned.

“And sleep a reward,” Wellington urged.

“Very well,” yawned Mr E again, “since you insist. Sit in the arm chair.” He crossed to the elaborate array of dials and knobs that were housed in a simple looking wooden box sitting atop his desk. He shoved aside some papers and began turning dials this way and knobs that way.

Wellington watched in fascination. “You have really worked hard on this machine. That is very easy to see. I would never have known where to begin. I am most appreciative Mr E. Really I am. You will be rewarded when we save Easter from that dastardly Black Veil.”

“Black Veil, more like Black Evil, I’d say. Alright now. I have programed you to be gone for twelve hours. That should be plenty of time to reconnoiter. Your portal will open when I set the knobs just so and reopen exactly twelve hours later. Miss the window and you’ll be stuck for who knows how long. Forever maybe. Just don’t be late.”

Wellington took out his pocket watch. “I have 12 noon on the dot.”

Mr E looked at the clock on the machine. “Affirmative. Now” just relax.”

“How do you know a portal will be unobserved?” wondered Wellington.

Mr E sighed. He didn’t mind the question, it’s just that he was so very tired. “Research is the key,” he shortened his answer to the barest detail. “You are stalling. It’s normal to be nervous. Now just be confident.” He touched a few dials. “I’ll see you tonight.”

Wellington was nervous. Once the idea to step back in time and gently tweak Black Veil toward the good side when he was a wee bunny had come to Wellington, he was bent on doing just that.

He had conferred with Mr E at length about how to accomplish the feat and whether it could work. Mr E was skeptical at first. He had done some reading on the subject and knew the many complications involved, but he was never one to shrink from a challenge. If Wellington felt it could be done and that he was the one to do it, then find a way he would.

It had taken longer than anticipated and Mr E sorely wanted to do more testing. As it was he had only been able to squeeze in a few short tests, nothing as extensive as he really wanted. But Wellington would not yield any more time. Another Easter was approaching and he was set on getting his plan in the works.

Mr E watched as Wellington got dimmer and dimmer and then was gone from the chair. "And now for a nap," Mr E could not reach his comfy bed quickly enough.

Wellington felt nothing at all. One minute he was in the chair chatting with Mr E and the next he was sitting on a hard surface, very shiny and bright. It looked like some sort of pedestal just the right height and diameter to sit on. All around in every direction were very pretty flowers and small trees.

"Too pretty," Wellington stood up and walked over to a flower. He bent to smell it. "My goodness," said Wellington looking closer. It was not a real flower at all, it was made of some sort of odd material. It only looked like a flower. Wellington went up to a tree and touched its bark. It was not bark at all, but some type of metal that looked like bark. Everywhere he looked he saw beauty but it was all artificial.

"Where am I?" Wellington was a little unsettled. He stepped on a smooth path that appeared to flow beside the pedestal. "Why it actually is flowing!" exclaimed Wellington as he moved along without picking up one leg or the other.

Soon he came to an archway with an intersection beyond. The path still flowing widened as it passed under the archway that appeared to float just above the path. Wellington looked back. The words Relaxation Park appeared to hover over the archway. Beyond the archway was a bustle of city activity.

Everything was so shiny and bright. And smooth. Everything flowed in flawless accord. Vehicles had no visible doors, windows, or even wheels. They just flowed along. Everyone here wore smooth neutral colored clothing that covered the entire body except for an oval opening around the face. It flowed around the rest of the body in a form fitting but modest way. Everything was neutral colored except for the flowers and foliage. He reasoned the neutral color was to be less distracting to that brilliance. It worked. It was very hypnotic.

"Say there ole chap see you're ready for the big ball. Little early though wouldn't you say? Doesn't start for hours."

Wellington looked at the form that appeared to be talking to him. "Um...the ball?"

"Yes, Black Evil's Easter Ball. It is the hottest ticket in town. This year the theme is vintage mockery. You are a splendid sight. Where ever did you get that waistcoat?" the being fingered Wellington's frock. "You will be the winner for sure."

"Winner?"

"Costume of the Knight, of course. To be tapped a Black Evil Knight is high honor indeed."

Wellington's heart began to sink. He was not back in time. He was forward in time. It was the only explanation. The artificial environment and strange clothing.

"You can come with me if you like since you're all ready. I have a sound check for the band. We're top billed for the event. Name's Marty. My band is Mr Smarty Pants. Hurry. My gals will be waiting."

Wellington had no other choice but to follow Marty. Mr E had somehow mixed up the dates. Wellington would have to bide his time until the portal opened. Maybe he could get a clue about how this Black Evil was such a big Easter promoter. But for all the wrong reasons! Big bashes with costume contests and bands? What about the children? What about Easter Love?

“Mr Marty,” Wellington hurried after Marty, or rather, followed him onto yet another moving walkway. “A friend gave me an invitation and said I should go. I really don’t know much about this Easter Ball thing. What’s it about?”

“Biggest party of the year. Black Evil really knows how to go all out”

“Who is Black Evil?”

“Used to be a rabbit called Black Veil but years ago he ousted a simpleton named Wellington who thought Easter should be for children and goodness. Black Veil saw it for something much more rocking. P-A-R-T-Y till you drop time.”

“What about the children?”

“Oh no children at this party. Only adults. Don’t get me wrong. I like children. But a job’s a job and Black Evil, he changed his name said Black Veil just wasn’t cutting it, likes my style.”

Wellington was floored. Black Veil had beaten him? This had to be stopped. He was even more determined to get back in time and do whatever it took to change things around early on before they got out of hand.

“Here we are now,” said Marty. He pushed on the side of a building and a door opened although Wellington could see no seams. The flowing mass just seemed to make a door and after they passed, it melted back into the wall.

They traveled along a corridor, always on a moving surface, no one ever seemed to walk here, and entered a large room. Marty headed for the stage at the front of the room. Wellington followed.

“Hello gals,” Marty called to three lovelies sitting on the stage apparently waiting for him. They were dressed in what Wellington assumed to be a workout version of the uniform.

“Where have you been?” one asked him flipping her hair this way and that.

“We’ve been waiting and waiting,” another chided checking her nails.

“We need to get our costumes together,” the last admonished as she applied lip gloss.

“Girls, girls. I bumped into this fellow outside the park. Doesn’t he look splendid. Winner wouldn’t you say?”

The girls looked at Wellington then and nodded. “What’s your name cutie? I’m Terri,” said the first hopping down from the stage. “Do you have a date for tonight?”

“He’s mine,” said the second elbowing her way next to Wellington. “I’m Sarah. You’re just my type.”

“Not on your life,” the third winked at Wellington as she slipped her arm into his, “I’m Jenn. We’re gonna have some fun together big boy.”

“Shoo, you three flirts,” Marty laughed. He’ll think you’re serious.”

“But we are,” they cooed in unison as they each gave Wellington a pat and returned to the stage.

“They love a good looker,” Marty said to Wellington. “Oh by the way, I’ll need your ticket now.”



Chapter 10

What Now

Wellington looked at Marty, "My ticket?"

"Yes, everyone needs a ticket. You said that you had one."

Wellington could not think of a thing to say. Stalling for time, he pretended to shuffle through his satchel. Marty did not know that it was empty. Wellington touched the button. "Useless," he whispered. Still he pulled it out.

"A Circle pass," whistled Marty. "Your friend must be someone very special." He took the button, looked it over, and handed it back. "And with four drink punches. No wonder you're here early. Very nice indeed."

Wellington grinned foolishly, and gingerly nodded, afraid to speak. He had no idea what a Circle Pass was or meant. But his button seemed to be just the ticket.

Suddenly Wellington's eyes widened. How in the world could Stephen Stork have known that he would need the button? He was not even supposed to be in this world. It was all an unforeseen mix-up. Or was it? He meant to have a conversation with that stork once he got home.

"You are welcome to browse around while we finish up here," Marty headed for the stage. "The Circle room is through there," he waved to a spot across the big room.

Wellington wandered away. The floor moved him along like the walkway but at a much slower pace. He was actually able to put one foot in front of the other. When he stopped the floor stopped. "Must have some sort of sensor," pondered Wellington. "Mr E will be interested in this technology."

There were no doors that Wellington could see but when he reached the opposite wall and touched it, a doorway opened and he stepped through. He looked back to see that it had blended back into the wall, just as he suspected it would.

The Circle Room was circular in shape and full of party bustle. Round floating tables were being filled with foods of all sorts. There were all manners of creatures here in all sorts of vintage costume. Everyone, even the wait staff, was costumed splendidly. No uniforms for this room. Wellington could see that he fit right in. He removed his pocket watch to check the time.

"Is that Dr Who's watch?" a voice at his side asked. "I would love to have that. Wherever did you get it? It is sure to put you over the top in the competition."

Wellington looked at the creature who was talking to him. He was a very handsome Ring Tailed Lemur dressed in a very elegantly cut tail coat. "Why yes it is," he responded as he tucked the watch back into the pocket of his waistcoat.

"You see that Red River Hog over there," the lemur went on. "He thinks that he is going to win with his lace cuffs and fancy gold stick pin with a genuine emerald, but I am certain that you have him beat."

"Perhaps you shall outdo us both," Wellington nodded and moved on. Every where he looked there was opulence. Baskets full of floral arrangements that spilled over the sides drifted

just out of reach. Sheer fabrics of every color imaginable billowed like clouds near the tall ceiling. In the center of the room was a round stage upon which a table set with crystal and gold sat. "Black Evil has certainly spared not expense on this extravaganza," grumbled Wellington. Too bad it is not for the right purpose. Why every child in the world would have Easter love and delights beyond believing with this kind of energy working on their behalf."

Wellington moved to the nearest circle table and studied the extensive array. "The Ruby Red Hot is out of this world," a lady next to him suggested. "Hot raspberry ice cream," she continued, "floating in cold cherry smash."

Wellington tried a sample and agreed. "How extraordinary," he exclaimed.

"Yes, very showy but actually quite simple to execute," the chatty lady went on. "Here I'll jot down the recipe for you." She pulled a tiny pad from her beaded bag, dashed off a few lines, deftly removed the page and handed it to Wellington.

"This will be a hit at home," Wellington carefully put the recipe into his satchel, smiling at how clever everyone would think him when they tasted this astounding recipe.

"What did you say, my dear?" but before Wellington could reply his sampling companion went on. "Oh look, the contest is about to start. Black Evil likes to select his winners at the beginning of the event so that his new knights can fawn over him longer." She looked at Wellington. "Oh darling, you simply must enter. With your looks and that dashing cut to your waistcoat you're totally top drawer."

"Will no ladies be in the contest?" asked Wellington.

"My goodness, no. You must be new. Everyone knows women do not compete. It is most unladylike. Where did you say you are from?"

But at that moment a big bell rang saving Wellington from an embarrassing situation.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we will now have the competition for Costume of the Knight. Please step forward if you wish to be considered," a rabbit dressed in red satin stood at the edge of the stage. He spoke in a very clipped tone. As he spoke he turned in a slow circle and rotated his gloved hand slowly in the air.

A few contestants began moving toward the stage. The lady pushed Wellington forward. "Here is your winner," she shouted. Wellington had little choice but to join the others. He looked around, for such a crowded room there were few that rose to the occasion.

"Attention," the satin rabbit signaled for silence. "Please welcome our esteemed host, B-l-a-c-k E-v-i-l!" He drew the name out as far as he could.

The roar of the crowd was deafening as Black Veil entered the room, floating down from the center of the ceiling. He was dressed entirely in black. His descent stopped a few feet above the stage thus assuring that his height would be greater than everyone around him.

Black Evil signaled for the contestants to mount the steps to the stage. There were twelve. Wellington and the Red River Hog clearly were the cream of the crop. Wellington did not see the lemur. "Smart monkey," he snorted to himself.

Black Evil floated up and down the row looking over each carefully. He stopped at Wellington. "Is that a pocket watch there?" he pointed to the watch chain.

"Yes," Wellington strove to disguise his voice hoping Black Evil would not recognize it.

“Mine,” he demanded extending his glove. Wellington hesitated. Not his watch! “Is there a problem?” Black Evil commanded. “Ah, I see,” he went on before Wellington could respond. “You want to win and you think that this watch will put you in the winner’s circle.” He turned to the crowd. “What say ye? Be he Black Evil’s Knight of Honor?”

They whistled and shouted their agreement. “Then it is settled.” He turned to Wellington. “See the watch was of no consequence,” and held out his glove wiggling his fingers expectantly. “Come, come do not tarry. My Knight of Honor must set a good example. Do not keep me waiting.”

Wellington reluctantly handed over his pocket watch. He could not even figure out a way to stealthily get one last look at the time.

“Now the remainder of you,” this Black Evil addressed to the remaining contestants, “shall have the honor of trying again next year,” with this he laughed. “You thought I was going to bestow some platitude on you. I see it in your eyes. Fools,” he brushed them away with a flick of his wrist. “Only one winner knight this year.”

Turning to Wellington, he drew his nose close. “There is something familiar about you rabbit, It bothers me. I shall keep you by my side until it comes to me. Sit now. We shall eat.” Black Evil indicated a chair next to his massive one. It was far less opulent and lower to the ground.

Wellington shivered. How was he ever going to get away? He knew the time was drawing close. His revised plan was to slip away from the party and go to the portal and just wait.

Just then a flock of giggling female revelers descended on the stage. Before they could even think of fawning over Wellington, Black Evil drew in their attention by pulling shiny baubles from pocket after pocket of his brocade coat.

Wellington spared no time in slipping down and heading away from the stage. He touched the nearest wall and a door opened. He rushed through, no time to wonder at the marvel of doors that appeared and disappeared wherever needed. He ran down the moving sidewalk, his feet faster than the motion of the walkway. The street was full of happy party goers. They paid no heed to him. The park was in sight.

Suddenly a clock started chiming. “Not midnight please,” begged Wellington. Dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong, dong...Wellington held his breath as he rushed under the archway. ...dong, dong. Twelve dongs. The portal shown brightly, but it was not that close! Could Wellington reach it in time?. He took one huge leap, so very glad that he was a hop scotch champion, and landed on the pedestal just as the portal faded to a close.

“Ah there you are,” a well rested Mr E studied Wellington panting in the chair. “Was beginning to think you would not make it. Any luck?”

“This is not going to be as easy as I thought,” said Wellington.

Epilogue

Easter brought a halt to all thoughts of the time travel project. Georg was able to squeeze out just enough time to deliver wish flower seeds. But Wellington and Benji had to take up Bethleann's slack. They were glad to do so but there were two exhausted rabbits now sitting in the back yard with the rest of the gang.

"I thought I'd never finish," sighed Wellington.

"Me too," agreed Benji, "But weren't the little notes the cutest. Wait, I have one to show you all. It's in my pack. I'll be right back," he said getting his second wind as he dashed into the house.

"How did we ever manage without him?" wondered Wellington.

"Well you did have me," reminded Bethleann as she rearranged a baby bear snuggling in her arms.

Wellington smiled.

"Is that someone knocking on the front door?" asked Georg readjusting the other baby on his shoulder.

"I'll go see," offered Wellington. He lifted his stiff body from the glider and took the short cut through the house to the front.

He pulled open the door to see a young rabbit standing there. He looked puzzled, "Benji, why are you knocking on the door? I thought that you went upstairs to get your pack."

"I'm not Benji, sir," replied the rabbit, "I'm Zachary. I'm Benji's brother. Is he here?"