

WELLINGTON RABBIT Re-VERSE



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

To grandson PJ
Philip James Ball
A most thoughtful kind of guy

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

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Preface

Here we are at the penultimate book in the series. And yet again, the writing process astounds me. Truly, I was rather unsure how the resolution of this story line would evolve. I knew what was going to happen, just not the how. And literally, on the last page it came to me. I was typing the action for a character when I suddenly realized what she was going to say. And it was the perfect ending. How does that happen? Don't try to force it, stay out of the way, but keep plugging forward all the same is the only answer I have. Readers of the story will possibly say, "Clever ending ol' gal but then wasn't it rather obvious?" Not to me, and not until that last page. I promise.

Did you find all the palindromes? There may be more, but here are the deliberate ones. Hannah and the sentence, 'No lemons, no melon,' in the first chapter, a foreshadowing of sorts. Kayak, Anna, pop, and race car in chapter seven as well as the sentence, 'Was it a car or cat I saw?'

For fun, I thought it might be helpful to recent readers to know the story of the rabbit pictured on the back of each book. His name is Wellington and he was very real. He came to us in a rather unique way, typical Wellington style.

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

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

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

Joan agreed to take him home with her. Before she left, she asked us what we wanted to name him. We, of course, said 'Wellington' although only the first book had been written at that point. Joan gave us daily reports and said that Wellington was turning out to be such a sweet rabbit that she and her husband, Walt, could not put him in a pen. They let him live in the house with them, which he did until the day he faded. Joan said she has never, ever seen such a

dear sweet lovable bunny as Wellington. He lived up to his name every hop of the way. Joan and Walt have no children so Wellington filled a special space in their lives.

Joan, Walt and Wellington moved to Idaho in the late 1990's. We had a good-bye party with Wellington before they left. Several Easters later a choked-up Joan called to say Wellington was very sick and she was so worried about his dignity of life. He had broken his hip and it was not healing very well at all. In addition, the cast he had to wear was very tiring on him. Then just as she reached a heavy decision, he got better. She could not cancel the doctor's appointment fast enough. Wellington gave Joan and Walt a few more months of love and devotion before he crossed the Rainbow Bridge July 24, 2003.

When I asked Joan what she remembered about Wellington's life while he lived here in Colington, this is what she wrote:

I know that he had been running around the Harbour for at least two years before he made it to your house. I would see Wellington and his three friends around the Shipley's house and give them cookies almost every day. The four had disappeared shortly before you found Wellington and I heard that someone had caught two of the bunnies. I don't know what happened to the other one....I'm guessing it wasn't good. I sometimes wonder if there are any little Wellington descendants around the Harbour. One spring I saw several baby bunnies in someone's yard that looked gray rather than the usual brown of a wild rabbit. I'd like to think that some of them made it to maturity and have happy little grand bunnies eating people's gardens.

Take care and God Bless you all....Joan

And to that, I add that I did - I really did! - see a gray domestic-like bunny just the other night darting back and forth across Colington Drive up the hill from our house. I am beyond sure that he is a descendant of the Wellington gang!



Chapter 1

Looking Glass

Marie Kelly loved looking in the mirror. She liked her sun kissed curls so much. She liked her bright blue eyes. She liked her ruby red lips. She was not a vain girl. Not at all. She was just very pleased with what she saw. And as soon as Marie Kelly was satisfied that everything was in order, she forgot all about her curls, her eyes, her lips and waltzed through each day on a ray of happiness.

Today, however, was ever so slightly different. Marie Kelly could not put her finger on it. She was a bit puzzled as she viewed her reflection in the mirror. "Something is not right," she pondered. She peered closer. Everything looked alright. "Whatever," she flipped the worry head over heels and away. "Still," she took one more look. Her reflection patiently looked back. "Silly girl," she told herself and turned away.

Marie Kelly picked up the telebee from Bethleann off her dresser and read it again, "Sewing item now." Telebees were traditionally short because of their nature. Bees used their stingers to prick messages into sturdy leaves for speedy delivery. They were quite tedious to make. Add a 'by the letter' charge and most folks made their notes as short as possible. "This note is very strange and not like Bethleann at all. She wouldn't need help sewing. What is she trying to tell me?" Marie Kelly did love a mystery, however, and so the idea of a good clandestine adventure pleased her very much. "I wonder what's really up?"

After receiving the telebee, Marie Kelly scooped a few essentials into her trusty carpetbag without giving it a lot of thought. She knew that whatever the need was, Bethleann wanted her as quickly as possible, otherwise she would not have spent the money on an expensive telebee. She looked into the carpetbag. "A toothbrush and comb ought to do it," she stepped into the lavatory to retrieve both. A brief glance in the mirror made her stop mid-reach. Marie Kelly leaned forward pressing her hands on the washbasin sides and stared, "Something is different." Marie Kelly rubbed her face. Then she reached out to touch the mirror. Naturally, her reflection did the same thing but then Marie Kelly felt something grab her by the wrist. She jumped backwards losing her balance and was horrified to see a girl just like she tumble out of the mirror and land right on top of her.

Marie Kelly was almost speechless, but not completely. "Who are you? What just happened?" The words poured out of her mouth.

The reflection girl rolled off Marie Kelly and lay beside her on the floor. "Am I really here?" She pinched herself. "Ouch! That hurt. I must be really real." She put her hands to her chest and squeezed her eyes shut. "I'm real!"

"Real? Of course you're real," Marie Kelly sat up and shook her curls in confusion. "Who are you anyway?" she repeated, looking at the girl that exactly resembled her.

"Don't you know about mirror people?"

"Mirror people?"

The girl sighed. "Nobody knows about mirror people. We live on the other side of the

mirror and help you see yourself better. Mirror people are mostly satisfied with their job. It's sort of like being a lady's maid or a butler." Marie Kelly listened, fascinated. "We help folks see the best in themselves. But I got tired."

"Tired of me?" Marie Kelly whispered in a little disbelieving voice.

"Oh no," the girl hastened to assure Marie Kelly. "Not you at all. You are lovely and wonderful and pretty." Marie Kelly grinned. "And besides, we can image more than one person if we like. I have a friend who mirrors thirteen people. I don't see how she does it. Most of us only do one or maybe for fun two. We quite easily morph into one reflection or another. That part of the job can be fun. But I wanted to be me." Marie Kelly nodded. "I worked out a plan." She twirled the end of her hair nervously. "I am breaking so many Mirrorland rules."

"You are?"

"I am. But my best friend agreed to help me anyway. He thinks I'm daft. See, there he is now."

Marie Kelly looked in the mirror. She saw herself and very faintly beside her the reflection of Kelly Marie.

"You're barely there."

"That's because Lars is reflecting both of us at once. It's tricky. But he's very talented."

"So what do we do now?" Kelly Marie was ready for adventure.

"We?"

"Yes, I came here to be with you."

Marie Kelly pondered this turn of events. A companion could be fun. "What's your name?"

"My name is Kelly Marie. You are my favorite mirror person and I liked your name so much I took it too. I hope you don't mind."

"Kelly Marie? My name reversed. I love it!"

Kelly Marie laughed. "I guess it is in reverse. I never thought about it since that's the way we always do things in Mirrorland. Reverse is our normal. Oh that reminds me, your message could be a reverse one."

"What do you mean?"

"Try the letters in reverse, or maybe in another order."

Marie Kelly retrieved the telebee, "Nwo meti gniwes doesn't say anything."

"Maybe keep the words in reverse but rearrange the letters."

"Won time," Marie Kelly tried.

"Good words but what does that mean?"

Marie Kelly tried again, "Own time."

"That sounds better," Kelly Marie was supportive.

Marie Kelly kept concentrating, "Own time sewing."

"You forgot to rearrange the last word."

"Oh bother. Okay. Own time we sing?"

"It's a catchy use of the letters. Does that mean anything to you?"

"It could. I know that Wellington and Mr E have been quietly working on a time machine. Bethleann told me about it because she knows that I have a keen interest in time travel. But she

told me not to breathe a word to anyone. That could explain her mysterious note. Maybe they need help.”

“Time travel? How exciting!”

“We need to go. The train will be along any moment.” Marie Kelly scooped up her comb and toothbrush from the lavatory and tossed them into her carpetbag. She snapped it shut with an authoritative nod that sent her curls bouncing. “Come on.”

Kelly Marie bolted after Marie Kelly, who had charged down the stairs two at a time and was already out the door and down the lane. She wondered about locking up, but just then a girl with a basketful of apples appeared from around the side of the house. “I see Marie Kelly is off on another of her adventures,” she said as she passed Kelly Marie. “I’m Hannah. I live here, too. I’ve been picking apples in the orchard to make applesauce. No lemons, no melon. You know, you’re the spitting image of Marie Kelly. You could be her twin. If you’re going to keep up with her, you’d better hurry! But where are your shoes?”

Hannah’s last question was too late to catch Kelly Marie as she raced to try and catch up with Marie Kelly.



Chapter 2

Time Again

“Hola Mr E,” called Wellington, tapping at the door of his neighbor and good friend the cricket called Mr E. “Can I come in?” Mr E lived in the small cottage behind Wellington’s modest cottage in the quaint town of Willis Warren where Wellington grew up. Wellington was a rabbit of most stellar fortune for through the maneuverings of his beloved Uncle Wells, he had been titled the Easter Bunny. He loved his job but it was hard and he was most fortunate and delighted to have carefully chosen friends to share the load. There was Georg the black bear from the taiga who delivered wishflowers to all the children that could not receive traditional Easter goodies. And Bethleann, the lovely girl, now married to Georg, who waltzed into his life shortly after Uncle Wells faded to the WEB. And lastly, Benji, a snappy young rabbit who loved to help but had no desire to be the Easter Bunny. A good thing too since his latest name did not start with a W, one requirement for the job. They were a great team, successfully spreading Easter love every spring in spite of the efforts of that wicked rabbit, Black Veil, whose plan was to thwart all things Easter.

“Mr E, are you in?” Wellington tapped again. Mr E had been helping Wellington with a plan to go back in time and ever so slightly tweak the baby rabbit Black Veil toward the good. So far, the efforts of Mr E to develop a time machine that would take Wellington into the past had run into numerous problems.

Mr E opened the door a bit. “I am,” he took one look at an anxious Wellington and started to close it, “not.”

“Stop,” implored Wellington putting his paw out. “I really need to talk to you,” he begged.

Mr E hesitated. His head was splitting. He needed a nap. So many trials, so little gain on that tomfool machine of Wellington. Still Wellington meant well. “If you want an update on the machine, I cannot give you anything hopeful.” He opened the door just enough for Wellington to slip inside.

Wellington squinted. “Why is it so dark in here?” He blinked his eyes to adjust them to the darkened room.

“I have a headache.”

“Oh.”

“The machine is just not working no matter what I try. I have ordered more parts but Stephen Stork is so slow bringing parcels, who knows when they will arrive?”

Wellington wrung his paws. “Stephen means well. He is just so affable that he feels the need to stop in every tavern along his route. Not to take a nip, mind you. Well, perhaps a small one, but more to chat with his friends and get the latest gossip.”

“I know,” said Mr E. “What I don’t know is when my parcels will arrive. And at that I don’t know if the parts will even do us any good.”

Wellington heard the weariness in Mr E’s voice. “How about if I try to find our stork friend while you take that nap?”

"I suppose that could speed things up." Mr E rubbed his brow. "Do you really think traveling back in time is the answer?"

"We don't have another plan," confessed Wellington.

"No, I suppose we don't." He glanced over at his fine creation. He was so proud. It had worked perfectly during trials but then when he tried to send Wellington back in time, he went forward to the future instead. And now it was inoperable due to an unfortunate happenstance.

Wellington turned toward the door, "Well then, I'll be off to locate Stephen Stork."

Mr E looked up. "We'll get it working, Wellington. Surely we will."

Now it was Wellington's turn to be skeptical. "The whole plan is a scatterbrained one at best."

"But, like you say, it's the only one we've got, so we best make it work." Mr E yawned and walked with Wellington to the door. "A nap will be nice, and it definitely will help clear my brain." Wellington nodded and gave Mr E a hug and a thumbs up.

Mr E could not latch the door fast enough, and dashed to his cozy bed to begin a fine slumber.

Wellington decided to have a snack before leaving on his quest. "Who knows how long finding Stephen Stork will take?" he muttered as he entered his kitchen through the back door, pausing first to slip out of his Wellingtons.

He thought back to another day when he slipped out of his Wellies in a rush to be ready for Uncle Wells' visit, which, as it turned out, had catapulted Wellington's life into such a new direction that he sometimes felt his head was still spinning. "Imagine me, Easter Bunny," he spoke the title with awe. "Wellington Easter Bunny," he looked at himself in the mirror that hung by the entry along with various hooks and a handsome hall tree that had belonged to his mother, Meta. "I don't look any different now than I did that day," he smoothed his whiskers. "Well, maybe a bit more white in the fur, but I can still hold my own among those younger whippersnappers." He gave his reflection a nod and turned to the task at hand, his stomach growling at his slowness.

Soon a tidy snack was sitting on the table. A bit of warmed over mac & cheese made with his favorite cheese from Bertie's goats. A side of sliced carrots and garlic stuffed olives. Finished up with a frozen slice of Saucy Sue's World Famous Rum Cake decked out with a scoop of his own homemade chocolate chunk ice cream. "Ah," sighed Wellington when naught was left but a few crumbs. He sipped the final draught of his raspberry-ming tea. "I feel much replenished and ready to find that rascal Stephen."

Wellington tidied up and grabbed his haversack. He latched his cottage and set off whistling. "Almost like a boundabout," he beamed. Wellington did love a good boundabout and it had been far too long since he had indulged in one.

It was not long before Wellington reached the outskirts of Willis Warren. He had first made a quick check at the few spots Stephen could have stopped at in town. And they proved as fruitless as Wellington figured they would. "Now where?" he sighed, sitting down on a smooth rock nestled near a shade tree that grew by the pathway.

"If you've got any brains, you'll go this way," said a familiar voice. "Of course, that way could work too."

“Not you!” declared Wellington, jumping up as he looked up to indeed see the Cheshire Cat sitting proudly in the tree.

“What did you say?” grinned the cat maliciously.

“You are such a troublemaker,” grumbled Wellington. “And your directions are no help at all.”

“I take great pride in my directions. They are very liberating,” said the cat, examined his claws. “They will take you anywhere.”

“I don’t need to go anywhere,” grouched Wellington. “I need to go find Stephen Stork.”

“You are so picky,” the cat looked bored. “Don’t say I didn’t try to help you.”

“What help? Go this way? Go that way? That’s no help.”

“Have it your way, but your cricket friend is going to be very disappointed that you did not take my help when it was offered.” The cat flicked its tail and disappeared.

“Great. Just great. I’ve wasted precious time arguing with that cat.” Wellington stood up. “Guess I’ll go this way.”

“I would go the other way if I were you.”

“Not that cat again.” Wellington looked up into the tree, but the branch where the cat had been sitting was empty.



Chapter 3

Near Misses

“Over here,” the voice called to Wellington.

Wellington turned in the direction of the voice. It seemed to be coming from a field across the way from his sitting rock. He shifted his haversack and headed in that direction. “Where?”

“Down here.”

Wellington followed the voice to a pile of dusty looking clothes that definitely had seen better days. “Maybe a friend of Mr E’s is hiding among the folds.” Wellington knew that crickets loved to nibble on cloth every chance they got.

“Help me up.”

Wellington looked at the pile. He poked it with his foot. “Ouch.”

“Ummm. Sorry.” Wellington was confused. A talking pile of clothes?

He reached out and touched the pile. “Put your hands under there. Just so.”

Wellington had no idea what he was doing, exactly, but he followed the vague instructions. He put both paws under the pile. “Now lift.”

Wellington lifted the wobbly pile expecting it to fall apart at any moment. To his surprise, the pile remained intact and as he held on it began to take the shape of a person. “That’s so much better,” said the form, which seemed to be made of straw. It began brushing off the sleeves of what Wellington could now see was a shirt tucked inside a pair of trousers, which were also being tidied up by what appeared to be gloved hands.

“What happened?” Wellington asked. He let go of the straw form, eased out of his haversack and began helping the man arrange himself.

“I don’t know,” the man shook his head, causing bits of straw to fly everywhere. “Tin Man, Lion and I decided to try and leave Oz. So we could find Dorothy, you see.” Wellington did not see, but he kept that to himself. “We were going to meet in Kansas where Dorothy was going with her magical ruby red slippers.”

“Oh, like the ones that Martin and Lydia used to travel home through time?” This thread was one to which Wellington could relate.

“Others travel with magic shoes?” pondered the straw man.

“It seems so,” said Wellington.

“Nevertheless, I used all my wits to get out of Oz and now I have lost my senses. Again.”

Wellington looked puzzled. “Pardon?”

“I used to have no brain, but the wizard gave me one. It says so on this piece of paper,” the straw man reached inside his pocket. “Oh my, it’s not there. No wonder I feel senseless.”

“A piece of paper cannot make you smart,” said Wellington.

“It can’t?” Now it was the straw man’s turn to look puzzled. “The wizard said it would.”

“He was giving you confidence,” suggested Wellington. “A common tactic to help with insecurities.”

“But I was not insecure. That was the lion. No confidence at all.”

“What did the wizard give him?”

“A big bravery medal, of course.”

“That wizard seems to be a very clever man. What happened to him?”

“He drifted off in a flying balloon. Dorothy was supposed to go with him but he left too soon.”

“And so he told her to use the ruby red slippers.”

“Why, yes. How did you know?”

“Lucky guess,” mused Wellington. “What’s your name?”

“My friends call me Scarecrow,” said the straw man. He and Wellington had moved to the smooth rock and were having a snack of apple slices that Wellington pulled from the depths of his haversack.

“Fits.” Wellington offered Scarecrow a sip of water from his canteen. “I need to find Stephen Stork. Might you have seen a tall stork with a brown leather satchel go by this way?”

“I could not see much lying on the ground as I was. That trip from Oz was quite harrowing. Are you sure it didn’t knock the sense out of me?”

“Completely sure. That’s not how it works. Actually, sometimes a body can take a sharp blow to the head and get befuddled, but you are too clear-headed for that to have happened.”

“That’s a relief.” Scarecrow scratched his head. “Maybe I heard your friend pass by. Does he like to sing?”

“Indeed he does. And he is quite talented, too.”

“Then he went that way. Not so long ago either.”

Wellington looked surprised. He had not expected Scarecrow to have any useful information. “Most excellent. I must be off at once. He has a valuable package.” Wellington began repacking his haversack with great haste.

“Can I come with you?”

Wellington paused. He had not counted on a companion. But he was in a hurry and he reasoned that it would be quicker to say yes than offer excuses that surely the Scarecrow would counter. “Your company will be most welcome.”

They started off in the direction Scarecrow suggested. “I do hope Tin Man and Lion did not run into any trouble. We found a spell in one of the books the wizard left behind and decided to try it. Whatever could have happened to them?”

Wellington had no good answer and said as much.

Before long they came to a small tavern. They went inside. There was nobody around except the proprietor. “Hello there,” said Wellington in a friendly manner. “We are looking for a delivery carrier, name’s Stephen Stork. He carries a big satchel. Have you seen him?”

“Wish I could say so,” said the proprietor. “Things around The High Note couldn’t be any flatter. I’d give a golly gee sharp for a paying customer.”

Wellington looked hard at Scarecrow. “I thought you said he came this way. Stephen does not pass by any taverns. Never.”

“You don’t say,” stammered Scarecrow. “I thought he came this way.”

“You thought nothing of the sort. You tricked me.”

“I need to find my friends. How could I get you to help me if I did not sound convincing about your buddy’s whereabouts?”

“Help you? I am beyond distraught to find Stephen in a hurry. You’re right I do not have time to help you. What was I thinking, trusting you?” He turned to leave.

“Wait!” cried Scarecrow.

“Wait,” urged the proprietor seeing his chance for paying customers. He swiftly poured two draughts and set them on the bar counter. “Have a sip while you sort this out.”

Wellington did not want to be rude, and he was thirsty. He put his haversack on a hook and sat down. Scarecrow eased onto the stool beside him. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” said Wellington, not convincing even himself. “You’ve got problems of your own to solve. But I would never say you had no wits. You are very clever.”

Scarecrow puffed up a bit. “Really?”

“Really,” said Wellington. “Let’s go find Sir Andrew Ant. He may be able to help us narrow both our searches.” He drained his mug and paid the proprietor. “Nice place you have here. When we do find Stephen Stork, we’ll suggest he stop in. With Stephen spreading the word about The High Note, you won’t be singing the blues for long. You’ll be turning them away at the door in no time.”



Chapter 4

Tossing and Turning

Mr E could not get in his bed fast enough. “Ah, this feels nice,” he said, snuggling down into the covers. He was asleep before he could say Jiminy Cricket.

But it was not to be a restful sleep for Mr E. Not restful at all. No sooner had he drifted into a deep dream state than Mr E began to experience dreadful twists and turns to every peaceful plot his tired mind created. It was so bad that Mr E dreamed that he was dreaming and needed to wake himself up. He worked so hard trying to wake his dreaming body up that he actually woke up.

“This will never do,” he lamented. He threw off the covers and headed to the kitchen. “Maybe a warm glass of milk will settle me down.” His head was not aching any longer but he was still extremely tired.

“I need a plan,” he said. “I know. I shall get in the bed with only thoughts of the machine problems in my head. Then maybe I can come up with a good solution. One that does not depend solely on new parts.”

With determination anew to get some rest and also solve his problem, Mr E headed back to the coziness of his bed. This time as he settled in he reminded himself to think about the machine, only the machine. “Time machine, time machine, time mach...” he muttered as he once again drifted off to the land of slumber.

“Mach time? Did you say Mach time?” a voice drifted into Mr E’s head.

“I didn’t say mach time. I said time mach...oh, I see. I must have drifted off mid word.” Mr E addressed the voice, “Who are you?”

“Albert. You were mumbling on about Mach time. I know something about that.”

“Not mach time, time mach-ine. I fell asleep before I finished my word.”

“Time mach-ine? Interesting. Quite involved you know.”

“Yes. Quite. I have made some progress. Who did you say you are?”

“Albert. But most folks know me as Einstein.”

“The Albert Einstein? In my dream?” Mr E was speechless. This was much better than he had hoped for.

“Why do you want to time travel?”

Mr E hesitated. He knew that, aside from the sheer enormity of the task of devising a working time machine, was the fear of tampering with the past, or future, in any way, and what that might cause. Should he tell Mr Einstein that his work had already sent travelers through time, albeit for short periods? He still worried about the baby bear that Benji had rescued from the raging fire during his very brief time travel. “Who doesn’t?” came out of his mouth.

“It’s a very complicated issue. Are you sure you know what you are doing?”

“Absolutely. Mostly. No.” The plan had been Wellington’s from the start. Mr E was a draftee. But Wellington was a good friend. And his intentions were only the best.

“Yes, I mean yes I do! Definitely!”

“Your plan is not without peril.” And with that, Einstein faded.

Mr E stared after the fading figure. “A lot of good that did. And here I thought he was a genius.” Mr E settled back into his dream cloud. “Now where was I? Time machine, time machine, time mach...”

“Did you say Mach time?”

Mr E sat up. Not again. “No, I said, ‘Time machine.’” I must have drifted off again before I finished. Who are you?”

“I’m Ernest Mach. Mach principle. Surely you’re familiar with the popular illustration. Stand in the field with your arms by your side and look up at the stationary stars. Now start spinning. Your arms fling away from your side and the stars begin whirling. The only thing that has changed is motion. Of course the stars are not actually spinning. It has to do with perception and centrifugal forces. Einstein tried to tie it in with relativity but I do not entirely agree. What are you doing? Building a time machine? Not a good plan.” He faded into the mist.

Mr E sighed. Maybe dreaming was not the answer. He was getting more questions than answers. He drifted off.

“Wake up. Wake up. It’s time for some music. What instrument do you play?”

“Who are you? I don’t play any instrument.”

“Yes, yes I have heard you.”

“I can knock out an okay tune with my legs.”

“Good enough. Stop this silly time machine nonsense and let’s jam.”

“Who did you say you are?”

“Richard Feynman, physicist and musician. Time travel is too contradictory. Easy enough to solve but too, too many philosophical problems. Come on, let’s jive.”

Mr E rolled over, “No thanks.” He slumbered on.

“Ah, it’s me you’ve been looking for,” a new voice spoke in Mr E’s dream consciousness.

“Who might you be?” He yawned. So much for restful sleep.

“John Stewart Bell at your service.”

“No, no, not you. Your theory is too complicated. Even if you were to explain it to me yourself. I’ll do better on my own, thank you.” Mr E squeezed his eyes shut tighter.

“Suit yourself. I do have the answers.” But Mr E was not listening.

“Time travel you say?” yet another voice floated into Mr E’s dreams.

“So tired.” Mr E could hardly mouth the words.

“It’s easy. All you need is a cylinder. One that rotates very fast. At the speed of light, say.” This got Mr E’s attention.

“Rotate the cylinder you say?”

“Yes.”

“How could I have misread those notes? Are you W J Van Stockum by chance?”

“I am very much so. You read my notes? You created a machine?”

“I have created a machine that works on the theory of rotating the air around the object to be transported.”

“Did it work?”

“Yes, but it was rather unstable.”

“Ah. Rotating the cylinder itself should solve that issue.” Mr E was elated. Here was a solution. In his dreams. Like he envisioned. “Rotate in one direction you go forward in time. Rotate in the other and you go back. Here, let me write the equations down for you.” Van Stockum began to sketch lines of symbols and numbers on a chalk board.

Mr E was uneasy that he would not be able to remember it all. He thought of all sorts of tricks to remember everything. But the more Van Stockum wrote the more complicated Mr E’s plans to memorize it all became. Then a few parting words from Einstein popped into his head and he relaxed. “Keep it as simple as possible. But no simpler.”



Chapter 5

Girls

"Wait," called Kelly Marie. "Oh, ow, ouch," she stopped running. The rocks on the lane hurt her feet.

Marie Kelly looked back when she heard Kelly Marie moaning. Kelly Marie was sitting on the ground rubbing her feet. Marie Kelly rushed back to where Kelly Marie was sitting. "Where are your shoes?"

"I did not see any shoes in your reflection. We can only reflect what we see."

"Here," she pulled a pair of Toms comfy cloth shoes from her carpetbag, "put these on. And hurry. There's the train whistle."

Kelly Marie was up in a flash. "Thanks! Sorry to be such a bother. Oh, this is what your land looks like?"

"Have you never seen the countryside?"

"No. We only see what is shown to us. I could see parts of your house from the mirrors you have in different rooms."

"Wait. You have never seen beyond my house?"

"Well of course I have. You look in mirrors everywhere."

"I do not."

"It seems that way."

"But your view is limited to what the mirrors reflect."

"Yes," Kelly Marie was getting a little defensive. She did not want Marie Kelly to think her dumb. "But we communicate among ourselves. When we're off duty. I know things."

"Still, it must be a very skewed view that you have," mused Marie Kelly.

"I suppose," said Kelly Marie. She looked around. They continued toward the train station walking at a brisk rate. "This is so beautiful. How lucky you are."

"What is your world like?"

"Nothing. Just vapors. It takes so much energy to create forms that no one bothers."

"That sounds very interesting. How do you know where to go for your jobs?"

"We don't go anywhere. You appear before us when you step in front of a mirror. That's all. It's really very simple." They had arrived at the train station.

Marie Kelly dashed up to the ticket window to pay Kelly Marie's fare. "This way," she grabbed Kelly Marie by the arm and pulled her through the doorway and on to the platform. "Wait!" Marie Kelly called to the conductor who had boarded the train and was in the process of folding up the steps. Her carpetbag was weighing down her arm. Kelly Marie was gawking at everything. To Marie Kelly's horror, the train began to pull away.

"I'd stop the train, but we're running behind," the conductor called to her over the noise of the heavy cars as they began rolling forward.

Marie Kelly sank onto a nearby bench, tickets still in hand. "Now what? The next train is not until tomorrow."

“What’s that over there?” Kelly Marie felt bad. They were in this fix because of her. She was trying to be helpful.

“Where?” asked Marie Kelly, listlessly.

“Over there,” said Kelly Marie, pointing to a handcar sitting on a side rail just beyond the station.

“It’s a car that train workmen use.”

“So let’s take it.”

“We can’t do that.”

“Why not? Come on. Show me how it works.” Kelly Marie picked up the carpetbag and took a step in the direction of the car.

“It doesn’t belong to us. We can’t just take it.”

“We’re borrowing it.”

“You’re very cheeky for a newcomer.”

“Well, if we get in trouble you can blame it on me. So come on.”

Marie Kelly reluctantly agreed. “Okay.” It was a good plan. The weather was nice and there was not another train due on these rails until tomorrow. So there was no safety risk.

Kelly Marie started walking towards the car. “This will be fun!”

“Not so fast.” Marie Kelly pulled her back onto the bench. “We cannot let anyone see us.”

“See us? Oh right, in your world everybody can see everything.”

“Well not exactly but I guess compared to your world that could be one way of looking at things.”

“So what do we do?”

“We wait until the ticket master is busy with a task. And we need to be sure no one else is around. Since there is not another train until tomorrow, the station should be empty.”

Kelly Marie stole a glance at the ticket master. He was sorting papers. “The coast is clear,” she whispered. It was one of her favorite terms she had come to associate with Marie Kelly. She used it a lot.

Marie Kelly sneaked a peek and could see that the ticket master was busy with a mound of papers. “Alright. Now tiptoe quietly and quickly to the car and then we’ll need to push it by hand until we are far down the track.”

Getting to the car was easy. And there was plenty of room for the carpetbag. But getting the car to budge was another matter. “Push,” urged Marie Kelly.

Kelly Marie was not used to physical work. She pushed as hard as she could. Still the car would not move. “Maybe it’s broken.”

“You’re barely pushing.”

“I’m trying. I’ve never done anything like this before. It’s hard.”

Marie Kelly bit her tongue lest she say something she would later regret. She got her shoulder under the car bed and gave a mighty shove. The car moved. A little. She tried again. Without the slight downgrade the track took just beyond where the car was parked, the girls’ plans would have been at as much of a stand still as the handcar, but fortunately for them the slope and their pushing was enough to get the car moving forward. Then it caught the grade and began slowly rolling on its own.

“Hey you, stop!” It was the ticket master. Even if the girls had wanted to stop, which they did not, they could not have stopped the car now that it was rolling steadily along.

“Quick, hop on!” Marie Kelly had clambered onto the car only to see that Kelly Marie was still running beside it.

“I don’t know how.” Kelly Marie gasped.

“Here, grab my hand.” Marie Kelly swore that if she ever got out of this situation it would be a long time before she did anything so stupid again. She looped one arm around a sturdy brace where the pumping apparatus was attached and reached the other out to Kelly Marie. Miraculously, Kelly Marie thought to put one foot up as she grasped Marie Kelly’s hand. Just like that, she was up and on the moving platform. And none too soon, because for being on such a nothing grade, the car picked up speed at an alarming rate.

“That was close,” breathed Kelly Marie. “But we did it! Now where?”



Chapter 6

Off Track

Marie Kelly lay back, exhausted. She wanted to say something snide such as “Wherever the car is going” but she did not. Kelly Marie meant well. Instead, she took a deep breath and sat up. “We need to start pumping before the car slows down too much.”

She showed Kelly Marie how to hold onto one side of the pumping arm while she maneuvered her way around the center pole to the other. Her side was up. She took hold of the handle and pulled. “Hold tight, Kelly Marie. And pull down when your arms are straight up.”

Kelly Marie caught on immediately. She was a quick study. Soon they were whipping along, the breeze providing a nice change to the still hot air that was all around. “This is fun!”

Marie Kelly had to admit that being in the open air unfettered by obligations or schedules, just cruising along was a nice change from the usual hustle and bustle of her life. “We have two towns to go through before we get to Willis Warren. We will need to play it carefully so that no one sees us.”

Kelly Marie nodded. “Your world is so interesting. I am amazed at how big it all is. Do you ever get lost?”

“Sometimes we do,” Marie Kelly laughed, “in more ways than one. Are you pumping as hard as you can?”

“Yes. Are you?”

Yes, but we’re slowing down.” The girls had been so busy pumping they did not notice that the car was approaching a small rise, barely noticeable but enough to slow the heavy car down.

“We’re going to have to push,” sighed Marie Kelly.

“Both of us?”

“If we want the car to get going anytime soon.” With that Marie Kelly hopped off and began pushing. Kelly Marie followed her. “Now when we get to the top, hop back on because it will take off downhill on its own.”

“I know that. Just because I come from a sheltered world doesn’t mean I don’t know anything.” Kelly Marie stomped off into the meadow. Unfortunately, the car had also just reached the top of the rise and began picking up speed.

Marie Kelly stared after the fleeing girl in astonishment. But she had no time to think. She hopped on the car, fervently hoping that she could stop it with the foot brake. And then catch Kelly Marie before she got too far away. But try as she might, Marie Kelly could not get the brake to respond. The car was rapidly putting distance between her and Kelly Marie. She grabbed her carpetbag and jumped off.

“Ouch!” she cried as her left ankle took the full impact of her jump, causing both of her legs to crumple under her. She tried to stand up but the ankle was having none of that. “Oh my goodness gracious me. I don’t see how this day can get any more complicated.” She inched her way over to some shrubs and began digging in her carpetbag for anything to help her ankle. She

regretted packing so hastily. "If only I had my first aid kit."

"I have an oil can. Will that help?"

Marie Kelly turned her head. There, coming through the grass, was a strange sight indeed. An object shaped like a man but made entirely of metal. He was making a dreadful racket.

"Maybe you could use a bit of that on yourself. You're very noisy."

"Name's Tin Man." He squirted a bit of oil here and there on his joints and sat down beside her. "Is that better?"

"Much. I've never seen a man made of metal. Do you live around here?"

"I'm from Oz. I came here looking for my friend Dorothy. Is this Kansas? Have you seen her?"

"No, this is not Kansas. What does she look like?"

"Very pretty. As pretty as you. Actually she looks a lot like you. Are you Dorothy?"

"No. I'm Marie Kelly, but I know a girl who looks a lot like me. She calls herself Kelly Marie."

"Could she be Dorothy?"

"I don't think so. She comes from a place called Mirrorland."

"My Dorothy comes from a place called Kansas. I met her when she arrived in the land of Oz, where I live. We all wanted her to stay in Oz but she was very homesick for Kansas. Do you know it?"

"Cannot say that I know either Kansas or Oz."

"Lion, Scarecrow and I missed Dorothy so much after the wizard helped her go back to Kansas that we decided to go to Kansas, too, and find her. We searched through the wizard's books until we found a spell that sounded right. We tried it and I ended up here. It's all such a mess. I do not know where Lion and Scarecrow are. And I am no closer to finding Dorothy. Are you sure this is not Kansas?" He began to weep.

"Don't do that, you'll rust yourself."

"You sound just like Dorothy," he sniffed. "Would you help me?"

Marie Kelly looked at the woeful Tin Man. "Maybe Mr E's time machine could help you. I could take you to his workshop, but first I need to find Kelly Marie." Marie Kelly tried to stand up. Her ankle was still too sore.

"Here," the Tin Man rubbed some of his oil on it. Marie Kelly did not know how that would help but she was too polite to say as much. She put a little weight on her bad ankle. It felt fine.

She put all of her weight on it. It did not hurt a bit. "Wow. You have very strong oil."

"It's got a lot of vitamin E in it," winked the Tin Man. "I like the smell. What's a time machine?"

Marie Kelly picked up her carpetbag, "It's a machine that moves you around space and time in a flash."

"I could really use that kind of help," declared the Tin Man. "When can we go there?"

"As soon as we find Kelly Marie. She ran off and must be very frightened by now."

"Where shall we look first?" asked the Tin Man, anxious to get started.

Marie Kelly pointed across the field. "Kelly Marie headed in that direction. It's as good a

place to start as any.”

The two started off across the field. It was hot and endless. “A breeze would be so nice,” sighed Marie Kelly. “Even a small one. Any breeze at all.” At her words a small breeze began to ruffle the air. Marie Kelly closed her eyes and took in the welcome coolness. She walked on for a bit, eyes still closed. Suddenly her feet began to feel a wetness. She opened her eyes and looked down. She was standing in a puddle. She looked up. The field had disappeared. She and Tin Man were on a peninsula in the middle of a wet marsh. To her horror, the dry peninsula was getting smaller before her very eyes.

“What is this madness?” creaked the Tin Man as his joints began to rust tight.

Marie Kelly could only stare in horror. “I was wrong. This day just got far more complicated.”



Chapter 7

Forward & Backward

"I cannot swim," muttered the Tin Man through clenched jaws. He could barely move them or any other part of his body.

"I can. But I cannot carry you." Marie Kelly was aghast. She was trying to keep the Tin Man from completely rusting by squirting the contents of the quickly emptying oil can onto various parts of the his body. Whatever were they to do?

"Pop in here, and quickly." Marie Kelly looked up to see a figure paddling a kayak toward them. She did not need to be told twice. As the kayak pulled alongside the tiny peninsula, now more an island than anything else, Marie Kelly shoved the Tin Man into the boat and followed.

"Don't rock the boat," the figure admonished. "Or we'll all be in trouble."

"Who are you?"

"Either way you look at it, I'm Anna, a good friend of Andrew Ant. Do you know him? He knows of you. Or at least he knows your friend Bethleann's friend Wellington."

Marie Kelly was beyond confused. Andrew Ant? Wellington? Friends of Bethleann? Whatever. She was glad to be out of the strange marsh. Actually, they were not out of it. But being in the dry kayak was a good start.

"What happened?" she asked Anna, who seemed to know everything.

"You are in a Flash Forward Sinkhole."

"A what?"

"A Flash Forward Sinkhole. Very common."

"I've never heard of such a thing." Marie Kelly was rather skeptical.

Anna looked at her. "Really? Are you sure you live around here?" She was attempting to paddle the kayak away from the tiny island, but with the added weight onboard, was finding it hard going. "Occasionally they appear all on their own, but more often they are summoned."

"Summoned?"

"Did you wish really hard for something?"

"I did want a breath of fresh air. It was so very hot."

"There you go. That must have brought on the Flash Forward Sinkhole you found yourselves in."

"But I wanted a breeze, not a gushy marsh."

"Sometimes you get more than you ask for. But the water was cooling too, no?"

Marie Kelly nodded. "I suppose."

"Now to shut it down we need to flash backwards, so to speak. So I Anna brought you a kayak. Get it?"

"No, not really."

"Anna, Kayak. Forward or backwards, it's the same. That's why I told you to pop in the boat. The more forward backward things we offer the sooner the sinkhole will settle back into nothingness." She was still having trouble getting the kayak to budge. The Tin Man was no help.

He had rusted almost completely solid, even with Marie Kelly's constant use of the oil can.

"This kayak is not moving at all. Could we use a racecar? Is that what you mean?" asked Marie Kelly.

"Why, yes, a racecar. Why did I not think of that?" Anna clapped her two legs and four arms together. The kayak turned into a racecar and they zoomed off across the marsh which was quickly turning into a mudflat.

"What just happened?" Marie Kelly was mystified beyond all thinking.

"Your suggestion was perfect," yelled Anna above the noise of the race car.

Marie Kelly gave up and proceeded to use the last of the oil can drops on the frozen Tin Man. With each squeeze of the can, he was able to move a bit more of his body. Finally he was able to sit up. At just that moment, Anna slowed the car to a stop. "There, that ought to do it."

Marie Kelly looked around. They were at the edge of the meadow which only moments ago had been a sloshy bog. "It's gone? The Flash Forward Sinkhole?"

"It would seem so. They are actually very easy to deal with if you know what to do."

The Tin Man blinked. "You reverse the polarity of actions, so to speak." Even though he had been frozen in place, the Tin Man was able to hear quite well, and even though unable to help, had easily grasped the situation. "Anything that can be the same forward or backward is a perfect counter. We have something similar in Oz. We call them Polarity Pops. Quite annoying but easy to handle once you get the hang of it."

"Yes, that is it exactly." Anna the ant girl was very impressed. "Where did you say you are from?" She parked the car beside the road that ran alongside the meadow and hopped out. The others did the same.

"Oz, have you heard of it?" asked the Tin Man.

"Cannot say that I have." Anna offered her new friends a cool sip of water from her canteen and a pear. "No lemons, no melon," she winked, thumbing her hand in the direction of the Flash Forward Sinkhole. "In case it's listening," she whispered.

Both the Tin Man and Marie Kelly shuddered.

Anna looked at the handsome Tin Man. "What's Oz?"

"It is where I am from. I left there with my friends Scarecrow and Lion looking for Dorothy. Now I have lost them and have not yet found Dorothy."

"And I am looking for a girl that looks like me. Her name is Kelly Marie. She is not from here either. She is from Mirrorland."

"I'd say you both could use Andrew Ant's help." Anna looked from one to the other.

"Where is he?" asked Marie Kelly, seeing her chance to find Kelly Marie quickly slipping through her fingers.

"He could be any number of places. The Ball keeps him very busy."

"The Ball?" questioned the Tin Man.

"Don't ask. A gaggle of girls that can be very helpful and also very annoying. Let's take the racecar and chase him down. It'll be quicker than walking."

"But we might miss something if we are speeding along." Marie Kelly could not believe what twists and turns her simple day had taken.

"If you want to walk, the Tin Man and I can go on ahead in the car. We can come back

for you if we find your missing friend.”

Marie Kelly thought splitting up to be a bad idea, but the offer of returning for her with any good news was hopeful. “Very well,” she said reluctantly. She could see that they were keen to get going.

The Tin Man thought the plan was excellent. Marie Kelly handed him his oil can she had tucked into her carpetbag for safe keeping. The Tin Man and Anna hopped into the open top roadster. Anna put on a pair of goggles she found in the glove compartment and started the engine. Marie Kelly waved goodbye and wished them luck.

“Was it a car or a cat I saw?” Marie Kelly whirled around.

There stood Kelly Marie. “Where did you come from?” asked a delighted but baffled Marie Kelly.

“I was stuck in this damp place that just appeared out of nowhere. And then suddenly I felt myself rising up and out into the meadow of flowers again. I saw you riding in a car, or maybe a catbus. It was too far away to tell for sure. Then it took off before I could get to this spot, and I was so sure you had left with it.”

Marie Kelly hugged Kelly Marie. “I am right here. A catbus, you say? Whatever is a catbus?”

Kelly Marie began, “It is a long story. I’ll tell you all about it while we continue on to our destination.”



Chapter 8

So Many Directions

Mr E leaped up out of bed. He was so very excited. "I just knew my dreams would come to fruition." He could not decide where to begin. There was so very much to do. "Perhaps a bit of lunch. I am suddenly ravenous!" He headed to the kitchen to prepare a much needed bit of nourishment. He had just sat down to enjoy a steaming bowl of chowder with garlic knot chips when there was a tap at the door. "Whoever can that be?" Mr E was slightly annoyed. Now his chowder was going to get cold.

He stepped through his cozy living room to the door and opened the top part. "Can I help you?"

"Are you Mr E?"

"The one and the same." Mr E began tapping his foot. His chowder was getting colder by the moment.

"We are here to help you."

"I do not recall advertising for any help," he started to shut the door.

"Oh, we know that your mission is far too secretive for that."

Mr E paused. His mission? "Of what mission do you speak?" He had quite given up on his chowder.

"The important one."

"That does not tell me much. Now be off with you." Again he started to close the door.

"But sir."

"I am not interested in any assistance. Good day." And this time he was successful in getting the top of his lovely Dutch door shut before any fingers got in the way. He returned to the kitchen to make the most of his neglected chowder.

"Marie Kelly, what shall we do? He just slammed the door top in our faces."

"He needs us. He just doesn't realize it. Come on. I have a plan." Kelly Marie followed Marie Kelly around the side of the shed.

"Should we be here?" asked Kelly Marie.

"Of course we should be here. How else are we going to help him?" Marie Kelly was hungry and annoyed at Mr E's arrogance.

"Sir, sir. We are so sorry we caused your soup to be ruined. Let us help you." Mr E could not believe his ears. Here he thought he had packed those girls off and now they were tapping on his back door. Had they no decency?

"I told you that I did not need any help."

"We just want to make your lunch right for you." They had opened the screen door and inched their way into the room. Marie Kelly looked at Kelly Marie. Each nodded. Kelly Marie took the cold chowder and popped it into a sauce pan, set it on the stove and started stirring. Marie Kelly rummaged in the ice box for some buttermilk and began mixing up a batch of biscuits with the dry ingredients she found in various containers at the back of the counter.

Mr E was silent. He could be mad. He could enjoy the attention. He was hungry. They seemed sincere. He decided to wait. He watched, completely mesmerized by the flurry of movements around him.

Marie Kelly slipped the tray of biscuits into the oven, put the preparation dishes into the sink to be washed up later and sat down with Mr E. Kelly Marie joined them after pouring everyone a mug of freshly brewed tea.

“So, it’s like this, Mr E,” began Marie Kelly.

Mr E held up his hands, all four of them, “No need for explanations. I was wrong.”

Kelly Marie looked at Marie Kelly. Marie Kelly looked at Kelly Marie. Together they said, “He gets it!”

“Yes, I get it,” laughed Mr E. “You two are yin and yang complements to help reverse the direction of the time machine.” Mr E had come to this conclusion while he watched the mirror image girls bustle about the kitchen.

Marie Kelly hopped up to retrieve the ready biscuits from the oven. She swiftly moved them to a waiting dish that she set in the center of the table next to the creamery butter and delicious looking *dulce le leche* she found in the ice box.

“*Dulce de leche!*” exclaimed Kelly Marie. “I’ve always wanted to try some.”

“I prefer to call it *confiture de lait*,” mumbled Mr E through bites of biscuit slathered with the gooey spread.

“Either way, this recipe is delicious. Did you make it?” asked Marie Kelly.

Mr E nodded, now chowing down on his to perfection belly warming chowder.

Kelly Marie finished first and began gathering dishes to wash up. “I’ve never had the chance,” she explained when the other two offered to help. They quite willingly settled back to enjoy the remains of their tea.

“How did you two know I needed help with my machine?”

“We didn’t. Well, I did,” said Marie Kelly, “but I got Bethleann’s note before I met Kelly Marie.” She did not feel like going into that whole story just now and so left it at that.

“Bethleann’s note?”

“Yes, here it is,” Marie Kelly showed Mr E the cryptic note.

“What does that have to do with me?”

“I figured she was sending me some sort of code because she does not need sewing help. Precisely sews everything for Bethleann and the babies. Bethleann knows that I have a keen interest in time travel. You do need help, right? You just said so. Kelly Marie thought she figured the message out to mean that.”

“I have been having some difficulties. But Bethleann took a big chance sending you this note. Even in code.”

“Bethleann is careful, and you just said it meant nothing to you.”

“But Black Veil might have gotten wind of this and put two and two together. He must not know we are trying to thwart him in any way, but especially not this way.”

“Black Veil?” asked Kelly Marie.

“A vile rabbit that is out to take over Easter for his own purposes,” said Marie Kelly. “So

far Wellington and the gang have been able to keep him at bay, but his powers grow stronger.”

Mr E decided not to mention that Wellington had met the future Black Veil. He could see no usefulness coming out of revealing that Black Veil had indeed grown stronger and changed his name to Black Evil. No, he could see not good coming of sharing that depressing news.

“Let’s have a look at the machine,” he said instead, getting up from his chair. Kelly Marie had just finished the last dish and so the three exited to Mr E’s studio living room. Mr E briefly told about the revelation that had come about in his dreams and how he was very anxious to try the plan out.

“I am good with mechanics,” said Marie Kelly. “Kelly Marie can help. We’ll work on the chair while you make the necessary adjustments to the machine.”

“I am missing some parts. Wellington is trying to locate Stephen Stork with the replacements but maybe we can bypass using those components and make a go of the new plan with what I have on hand.” Mr E began to tinker with the machine.

The girls got started on a rotating base for the chair. “Perchance, do you have a lazy Susan, Mr E?”

“Not even a lazy Sarah.” Mr E laughed at his joke. “But I have a grinding stone around here somewhere.”

The girls looked at each other. “Inventors have the weirdest stuff,” said Kelly Marie. They began digging into dark corners of the room. Under a huge pile of papers and books, they found a lovely grinding stone, just the right size for the chair. They lugged it over to where the chair sat.

“A stationary pedestal and we should be all set,” declared Marie Kelly.

“Use the bird bath base,” suggested Mr E.

“Perfect,” exclaimed Marie Kelly. It was quite a struggle getting the base into the living room and the grinding stone nestled down over it. “All ready,” announced Kelly Marie as they adjusted the chair on its new stand.

Mr E peered over the rim of his glasses. “And I have just made the last adjustment. Let’s give this thing a try.”



Chapter 9

The Winding Road

Wellington and Scarecrow had not long left the High Note when they saw a car speeding toward them on the dusty road. “That vehicle is going to run us over!” Wellington grabbed the Scarecrow by the collar and pulled him off the road.

But the car driver proved more skilled than predicted by Wellington. The vehicle came to a screeching halt several yards away from the cowering pair. A tall creature hopped out followed by “Tin Man!” yelled the Scarecrow. He yanked himself away from the astonished Wellington and rushed over to greet his friend.

“Scarecrow!” returned the Tin Man. The two hugged and danced about while Anna and Wellington looked on.

“Seems they know each other,” Wellington drawled to Anna.

“Appears that way. Where are you two headed?”

“He just found what he’s looking for, or part of the equation, anyway. I’m still on a search, trying to locate Stephen Stork, and thought Andrew Ant might be able to help.”

“Andrew’s a friend of mine. You’re welcome to ride along. We were looking for Andrew to help my new friend find his lost friends.”

“Ride? In that thing? Are you sure you know how to drive it?”

“It’s a race car. It’s supposed to go fast.”

“Have you got room for all of us?”

“If we squeeze. You sit up front with me. Those two can sit in the back and catch up.”

“Good enough. I really need to find Stephen soon.”

“Come on, guys,” Anna called to the chatting Tin Man and Scarecrow. “Let’s go find that Lion.”

“And Dorothy!” the two declared in unison.

“One at a time, guys. One at a time.” Everyone piled into the race car. Anna offered to let Wellington drive.

“No thanks,” he declined. “I’d rather give you a hard time about your driving skills.” Anna laughed. She thought he was teasing. Wellington lowered his head and rolled his eyes. He was dead serious. And he hoped that was all the dead he was for a long time yet. He was not nearly ready to join the WEB, the place where all former Easter bunnies go to rest on their laurels for jobs well done.

“Where is Andrew?” he shouted to Anna as she gunned the car and they shot down the road. Wellington held onto his ears for dear life.

“Not sure,” she replied. Or so he thought. He could barely hear her about the noise. Wellington was miserable. He hoped Mr E would be sufficiently grateful for all the trouble he was going through to get the machine back on track. And then Wellington felt bad about his bad thoughts. The machine was his idea. And at every setback Mr E refused to give up. Wellington had no cause to complain. Wellington closed his eyes and fell asleep.

“Wake up, Wellington.” Anna shook him out of his slumbers.

“What, what, where are we?” Wellington was in a slight state of confusion. Then he remembered all that had transpired earlier in the day. “Did we find Andrew?”

“Better. We found Andrew, and Stephen.”

Wellington was awake in an instant. “Thank the stars!” He sat up. He looked around. He saw no one but Anna. “Where is everyone? Where is Stephen?”

“They all went on a search for Lion and Dorothy.”

“What! I need that package that Stephen is supposed to have in his pouch for Mr E.” Wellington was livid. “Why didn’t anyone wake me up?”

“Relax, rabbit.” Anna was enjoying her moment. After all, Wellington had been harsh about her driving. “I have the package right here,” she held it up just out of Wellington’s reach.

Wellington glared at her. “This is no time for joking. That package is very critical to everything.”

Anna could see that the rabbit was getting more and more flustered. She gave in, “you are no fun at all. I might have let that stork leave with your package still in his pouch, you know.”

“You wouldn’t dare have.”

“The way you are behaving, you don’t deserve anyone’s help.”

“Oh, my.” In a flash Wellington realized how gruff he sounded. This was not like him at all. Wellington wondered if Black Veil had amped up his game. “Has that rabbit tampered with my mind?”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing.” Wellington chewed a whisker. “I’m sorry for being so cross with you. I’m just extremely worried. None of this is your fault. You have been more than helpful.” There. That was more like it. Wellington felt much more like his normal self. Maybe the anger had been a result of his worries and had nothing to do with Black Veil. “Fat chance,” he muttered.

“You are talking so low I cannot hear what you are saying.”

“It’s nothing really. I am so grateful that you got this package from Stephen. I must get it to Mr E immediately.”

“Would you like me to drive you there?”

“I would, and I promise not to say one word against your driving.”

Soon they were nearing Wellington’s modest cottage, behind which rested Mr E’s even more modest and decidedly much smaller cottage. “What in the world?” Wellington could see some of his closest friends milling about in the garden. They appeared distraught.

“Wellington. Wellington. We’re so glad you are here.” Benji and Zach rushed up to the slowing car.

Anna pulled the car to a stop. “How was that ride, rabbit?”

“Very smooth. Thank you so much. Please come in and have some refreshments.”

Wellington spoke the words out in a very hurried voice. He turned to the young rabbits. “What’s up, boys? Say hello to Anna. She has been most helpful in getting the package for Mr E from Stephen.”

“Hello, Anna,” they both acknowledged the girl ant’s presence. “Welcome to Willis Warren.” The grabbed Wellington by both arms and pulled him from the car. “Hurry,

Wellington. Hurry!”

“Whatever is up?”

“Bethleann said not to say anything. Just come with us,” they were dragging him along as they spoke. Anna followed, her curiosity exploding. They rushed Wellington past Martin & Lydia and Georg and the babies without stopping for even so much as a hello. Benji and Zach shoved Wellington through the doorway of Mr E’s shed. “Here he is, Bethleann. We found Wellington.”

“Wellington.” Bethleann rushed over to Wellington grabbing his paws in her hands, “I found him like this. Whatever shall we do?” Mr E lay in a heap on the floor. He was covered with blankets and a pillow was stuffed under his still head. He was mumbling streams of inaudible words. His head tossed back and forth. His eyes were extremely active, rolling from side to side under the tightly closed lids.

Wellington gasped. “Whatever does this mean?”

“I don’t know. I was hoping you could tell us.”



Chapter 10

Disappearing Act

Marie Kelly groaned. She hurt all over. What had happened? She remembered sitting in the time travel chair with Kelly Marie, just like Mr E told them to, and then things started spinning very fast. She held tight to the arm on her side of the chair and yelled for Kelly Marie to do the same thing. She saw how white Kelly Marie's face was and knew that she was frightened too. What had they been thinking, volunteering for Mr E's experiment?

"No worries at all," he had reassured them. "I've done this so many times already. Well, not exactly like this, but close enough. You'll be back here before you stop spinning."

And now, where was she? Where was Kelly Marie? Where was Mr E? Marie Kelly sat up. She looked around. There were strange looking flowers and plants. "They are so pretty. But they don't look real," she reached out to touch one. "Ouch. They're very sharp. They feel like some sort of metal."

"Ohhh. What happened to my head? It feels like my neck twisted around and around and then back again. I wish I was back in Mirrorland."

"Kelly Marie!" Marie Kelly was elated. Her new friend was here, wherever here was.

"Marie Kelly? Is that you? I cannot see a thing."

"Get the hair out of your eyes, silly."

"Oh," Kelly Marie pulled back her tangled hair into a pony tail with a twister she found in her pocket, "that's better. I am so disoriented after all that spinning. Mr E has to do something about that feature. No one will want to time travel." She smoothed her dress. "Where are we? What are those weird plants?"

"Did I hear my name?"

"Mr E!" the girls cried together. "You are here, too?"

"What are you talking about? I am in my studio."

"No you're not. I see you standing under that tree. Your machine is right beside you. And the time travel chair. We must have spun right out of the chair. But why are you here?"

"I'm not there, I tell you. I am in my studio. Everything is right here with me as it should be. Where are you?"

Marie Kelly pressed her question, "How can we see you and you not be here? What does that mean?"

Mr E did not have an answer for Marie Kelly's question. He reached out to adjust the dial on the time machine. His arm disappeared right into the machine as though it were not there. He withdrew his arm and tried touching his face. He met thin air. "What do you see?" Mr E would worry about his own predicament later. He needed to figure out where the girls were, and what, yet again, had gone wrong. Terribly wrong this time.

"I see metal-like plants and flower. We are in a park of some sort."

"Are there pedestals and walkways?"

"There are. However did you know?"

"I fear you have landed in the future favorite lair of Black Veil, or Black Evil as he calls himself in that time."

"What!" Marie Kelly was very upset. "We were supposed to go back in time. And only for a short trial trip. What did you do, Mr E?"

"I. I. I thought I had everything just as my dream instructed me."

"Well, you did not. Or your dream was wrong."

"Fix it!" Kelly Marie stormed over to the apparition of Mr E. The closer she got the more vaporous he became. When she got to the spot where he should have been standing, nothing was there. She reached out her arms, swiping the air right and left. "Where are you? You cannot hide from us like that. This is your fault. Fix it now."

"Kelly Marie," hissed Marie Kelly, "come back here. We don't know what or who might be around." Marie Kelly was cowering behind a shrub, trying not to be seen by anyone who might come into the park.

"Kelly?" a short green man shot out of a nearby bush and stood glaring at Kelly Marie. "You don't look like a Kelly to me. Kelly's are supposed to be green."

"I'm Kelly Marie, I'll have you know, and of course I'm not green. But you sure are, and an ugly green at that. Look at your coat. It's all tattered and torn. You're a mess."

"It's not my fault. It was that dastardly Wellington who left me here. Or more precisely, his assistant, Mr E."

"You got left here? By Mr E?" Marie Kelly had come over to where the two arguers stood rooted to the spot in their heated exchange. "Are you that leprechaun, Lance?"

"Maybe. Just who might you be? Another fake Kelly like this one. You look like her enough."

"I am Kelly. Marie Kelly, for your information. And we have nothing to do with greenness, you nincompoop. I thought leprechauns were only interested in gold, anyway. What do you care about green one way or the other?"

"I'm homesick. I miss me grassy hillsides and green valleys. There's no real greenness here. It's all metal and fake."

"Mr E's been trying to get you back. The machine broke. He thought he had fixed it and sent us on a test run. But we were supposed to go back in time."

"I see he's no better now than he ever was at dealing with that confounded machine."

"You're not being very fair. Bethleann told me that Mr E sent you here on a rescue mission. That sounds precise enough."

Lance felt the justified sting. "We had a deal," he lowered his head. "This place is just not what I expected. There's no gold, only trouble at every turn with that rabbit, Black Evil. I'm tired of evading his minions. These metal bushes are awful on my clothes."

Kelly Marie had become very silent. "I think I've got it," she said slowly.

"Got what?"

"Got a plan to get us back."

"Now you're talking," Lance danced a little jig.

"Explain yourself, and hurry. This place gives me the creeps." Marie Kelly shuddered and hugged herself.

"First, we need to shine one of these tree trunks to be as mirror like as possible." Kelly Marie walked up to a nearby tree and started rubbing, "This one ought to do. Come on, with all of us working we'll be ready in no time."

"No time. Good joke. So good I forgot to laugh." Lance was feeling like his old self again. He was getting out of this place. He started rubbing the tree trunk at a furious pace.

"Now what?" Marie Kelly's arm was getting tired of rubbing.

"Stand behind me and wait." Kelly Marie peered into the mirror trunk. She began carrying on a whispered conversation with the wavy reflection she saw. "Alright then," she turned to the waiting two. "This will work, but there is one thing."

"Yes?" Lance was anxious to get going. Those rabbit guards could come along at any moment.

"My friend Lars will help us, but you have to agree to take him with you when we get back," she said to Lance, "and teach him the ways of the leprechauns. He cannot stay in Mirrorland."

Lance bit his cheek. Teach another the secrets of leprechauns? Unthinkable. Just then, he heard a dreaded voice, "Hey Bummy, I think I see something over there."

"Alright, alright. I'll do it, just hurry."

"As soon as I disappear, step up close to the trunk side-by-side and don't move a muscle," she admonished. Then she turned and melted into the tree trunk. Together Marie Kelly and Lance stepped closer to the trunk and stared. Staring back was their reflections.

"Now what?" said Lance. "Those rabbit guards will be along any..." But before he could finish his words, he felt himself yanked into the tree trunk. He felt himself tumbling and rolling through mists and vapors. He closed his eyes. He was getting nauseous. And then he felt a big bump. And then someone landed on top of him. And then someone else. "Jumping Jehoshaphat. Get off of me," he shouted.

"Lance my boy, is that really you?" Mr E sat up, fully awake. Bethleann and Wellington did not know what surprised them the most. The sudden awareness of Mr E, or the fact that a leprechaun - no, two leprechauns, had just popped out of Mr E's standing mirror and landed in the middle of the room. And beside them, two girls.

"Marie Kelly?" Bethleann was astonished to realize that she recognized the girls. "Whatever is going on?"

Marie Kelly shook her head. She did not know where to begin.

Wellington took one look around the scene and turned to Mr E. "This is beyond us. We need Lewis the Legendary!"

Epilogue

"I cannot believe that you actually wanted me to help with sewing," grinned Marie Kelly. "I mean, I don't mind a bit, but Clara Leigh and I were sure your message was a secret signal." The girls and Bethleann were sitting in the backyard working on the beautiful christening gowns for Edward and Sebastian who were busy crawling about the yard, inspecting rocks and dirt with great intensity.

"I have no idea where Precisely is off to and I really need to get these gowns finished up. The ceremony is around the corner," Bethleann snapped off a finished thread and reached for the spool to start again. "Wait, did you say, Clara Leigh? Bethleann looked at both girls wide eyed.

"It's Kelly Marie's, I mean Clara Leigh's idea," Marie Kelly glanced at her mirror twin.

"I hop it's okay that I just changed my name without asking anyone. Anyone besides Marie Kelly, that is." Clara Leigh said shyly. "It's just that now that I'm a real girl I want my own name."

"Of course it's fine and I like your choice," Bethleann beamed.

"Actually we think that Marie and Clara are names enough for us," both girls spouted their words tumbling on top of each other. "We'll use our full names only for formal occasions."

"Agreed, Miss Marie and Miss Clara," Bethleann winked at the mirror girls. "But it's still going to be tricky telling you two apart, different names or not. I can, so don't try to fool me, but most are not so observant." Bethleann winked at the two girls.

"You can tell us apart?" Marie and Clara looked crestfallen.

"Your hair is parted on different sides. Very subtle, but very distinct. I'm a girl remember. Those things are higher on our radar than on a guys. They'd never notice. But fear not your secret is safe with me if you decide to play the switch the twin game. But I'd suggest only in fun. Anything serious could backfire on you."

"Okay," the girls giggled. Bethleann had her doubts but kept them to herself, she had a christening to get ready for.

"I wonder how Wellington is going to convince Lewis the Legendary to help out," Bethleann changed the subject. "He can really dig his heels in when he wants to be stubborn."

"Did I hear my name?" Lewis and Hilarey rounded the corner.

"Maybe," said Bethleann, "what have you got there?"

"*Dulce de Leche* ice cream we're testing for the Doggone. Interested?"

"Say no more! Marie and Clara round up the gang dessert is here."