

WELLINGTON RABBIT FINDS HELP ALONG THE WAY



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For Halcy Willow Rea
our lovely and talented goddaughter number two
and her equally lovely and talented sisters
Katelyn Elizabeth and Anna Lee
and
for Adam Grady Reynolds
Samuel Cyrus, Starky VI and Nicholas Gabriel Jett
delightful, bright and caring nephews

We thank our Heavenly Father
Who gave us the Golden Rule:
“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Titles set in Harrington Bold
Text set in Goudy Old Style

Copyright © 2002 by Sandra Leigh Jett Ball
Illustrations © 2002 by Sandra Leigh Jett Ball
All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce
this book or portions thereof in any form.

Published by Donny & Sandy Ball
Post Office Box 3324, Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948
252-441-5351 800-723-3057
jett@sandraball.com

ISBN 0-9709028-3-2

Table of Contents

Preface		4
Chapter 1	New Adventures	7
Chapter 2	Wellington Starts Out	11
Chapter 3	The Bundle's Secret	15
Chapter 4	Time for Lunch	19
Chapter 5	Bethleann's Turn	23
Chapter 6	Emily Elf	27
Chapter 7	A Dinner Twist	31
Chapter 8	Georg's Tale	35
Chapter 9	Sir Andrew Ant	39
Chapter 10	Just Desserts	43
Recipes		46

Index to Illustrations

Wellington, Georg and Bethleann in the kitchen	6
Stephen Storke has an emergency delivery	10
Precisely explains primes to Wellington	14
Georg gets spring water for lunch	18
Emily Elf surprises Bethleann	22
Bethleann confronts Black Veil	26
Georg teaches Bethleann to harvest oysters	30
Sir Andrew treats Georg to a fine repast	34
The Ball hears about the wish flower seed dilemma	38
Dessert time with new friends	42

Preface

Here we are at book three in the Wellington chronicles and again time presses. This Easter version promises completion but editing continues, eternally it sometimes seems.

There are many new characters which Wellington, Georg, and Bethleann find quite exciting, as I do. And most of them have names familiar to the Ball family. Imagine that. The art this time proved quicker, thankfully, as time was critically short. I sketched through Lewis' AAU basketball tournament over Palm Sunday weekend to the last picture.

Once again, a few family objects have found their way into the illustrations. There is Great-grandmother Mills' kitchen pump for getting water. Actually, I believe her daughter, Grandma Boschen, had one, too. There is the soap chip saver that my other grandmother, Mother Leigh, always had around. Thrift was a necessity in the life of a minister's family. The canopy bed is similar to the one Suzanne, my sister, and I had growing up and Emily had one, too. The oyster beds are a reminder of the ones my Uncle Theo had behind the Jett family home, Sunnyside, in Reedville, Virginia. I never helped him harvest oysters though, just eat them.

In the story lines, the Ball refers to a group of girls on Lewis' cross-country team. The original seven, so christened by teammate Kyle Clark, joined as freshmen. I don't know what lead me to include prime numbers in a story except maybe the fact that son, Donald, and son, Andrew, in particular, are great mathematicians. Tibitha is the name of the stop in the road near Reedville where we used to get mail during summer vacations. The tiny one room post office building, although silent of activity is still in its same spot, well maintained by Mr. Barnes, who owns it and the general store next door. Storke is a Jett family name. Probably an earlier version of Starke, my great-great-grandfather's, grandfather's, father's, brother's and now nephew's name.

The recipes are definitely family favorites. The lemon pound cake is an adaptation from Mrs. Morton's Tea Room in Richmond, Virginia. This most popular dining spot was in business from 1952 until 1991. It was in an old house on Franklin Street not too far from the downtown department stores. In those days, though, not too many people had eateries in their homes, so it was unique. She offered wonderful home-cooked meals that were affordable

and the food was legendary, especially her rolls. I don't recall eating lemon pound cake there, but when I found the recipe later along with some others, I knew it would be good. I have adapted it a little but not too much!

The chocolate mousse came out of one of our children's magazines. They decided to make it one Thanksgiving. I got the ingredients for them and they prepared it all on their own. It is now a much anticipated family tradition.

The peppermint brownie recipe is from Helen DeKornfeld, the grandmother of our first lovely goddaughter, Jessica Hiltabidle. She brought these to a St Andrew's foyer dinner that we attended. We begged for the recipe, which, being the delightful lady she is, she immediately shared.

I cannot leave without thanking, as always, my remarkable husband, Donny. He claims to have no creativity, but without his talents these stories would not flow so well or look so good. He puts the right touches in all the right places. He goes without sleep to polish and shine, making me and Wellington look good. He is the true champion of these chronicles.

It has been a wonderful year, and Wellington IV is already forming. One day soon we hope to offer the earlier versions as well as future ones in color. We might even compile an anniversary edition. It has already been ten years since the first book was written. Until then and beyond, enjoy life, spread love, and find your wish flower.

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball
Bayside, Colington Island, North Carolina



Chapter 1

New Adventures

“Wow! Delivering Easter love is amazing. All the little ones are so adorable, sweetly slumbering in their beds. You can just see them dreaming about the Easter egg hunts to come,” grinned Bethleann as she sank into an over stuffed chair in Uncle Wells’ well-appointed living room. The cottage actually belonged to Wellington now, as Uncle Wells bequeathed all of his belongings to Wellington before he faded, but the three friends still thought of the house and its belongings as Uncle Wells’. “Boy, I’m exhausted. Are you guys? Did you get all of the wish flower seeds scattered in all the right places, Georg?”

Bethleann cherished the idea of wish flowers, plain enough looking dandelions but with a special touch. Whenever a child found a mature one, made a wish and blew the seeds to the winds, if a fairy caught the seed the wish would come true. She knew wish flowers were for all the children who didn’t get Easter baskets.

“Every single seed,” answered Georg, “but it was nip and tuck there for a while. How about you, Wellington? Did you find all of your little charges’ Easter baskets and tuck them full of delightful eggs?”

Wellington nodded. “That I did. But I’m really, really glad we’re a team. It would be little fun to be the Easter Bunny by yourself.” Wellington, as the newly titled Easter Bunny, was just getting used to his role. His Uncle Wells had bestowed the title on him right before fading to the land of the WEB, a mystical land beyond life where dwell the twelve former Easter bunnies. Wellington, as the current Easter Bunny, is number thirteen. In time, he too will fade, but not before the WEB has woven a special mantle for him, to include all the names of all the children he helps during his time as Easter Bunny. It will take a very long time to accomplish, as each of the twelve use bits of their own fur to do the weaving. Added to the fact that while they love Wellington very much, they would far rather play than work.

Wellington still could not understand how Georg would be able to fade to the WEB, being a bear, but Uncle Wells said not to worry. The WEB would figure something out. Wellington hoped so. He loved Georg. Ever since they met in the briar patch when Georg muffed a magic spell, the two had been inseparable. Uncle Wells took to Georg, too, and it was his idea to include Georg in the Easter training. Ah well, Wellington would just have to trust Uncle Wells and the WEB to work things out.

And then there was the matter of Bethleann, a very special friend of Uncle

Wells, who had appeared one day looking for Uncle Wells and found Wellington and Georg instead. She knew everything about the WEB and so it seemed logical to include her in the group. But she definitely was not a rabbit. How would she fade? So many problems, but the main problem right now was food. Wellington was famished. “Anyone hungry?” he called over his shoulder, heading for the kitchen.

Georg needed to hear no more. He stirred from the chair he had tumbled into, pancakes foremost in his thoughts. Piping hot ones dripping with butter and oozing maple syrup. Wellington was already opening the icebox, pulling out eggs and milk. Georg reached the kitchen, lifted a blue crockery bowl from an overhead shelf, and sat it on the center table. Into the bowl he scooped flour, a measure of salt, baking soda, cream of tartar and stirred them together. Meanwhile, Wellington poured a mug of milk and cracked two eggs into a smaller bowl. To this he whisked in a small ladle of cooking oil from the container on the stove. He passed the bowl to Georg, who added the liquid mix to his dry one and ever so gently blended the ingredients.

While Georg finished mixing, Wellington turned to the wood box, selected a handful of middling logs, and put them into the big cast iron cookstove. Then he added some small pieces of kindling and a few twisted up paper starters. He retrieved a wooden match from the matchbox and struck it on the front of the stove. It sparked right up and he lit one of the paper starters. He gently blew on the tiny flame until he was sure it was secure and then he put the lid back on the stove. “That’ll take a few minutes to catch good,” he said. “Meanwhile we’ll grind some cocoa beans and whisk some cream for our hot chocolate topping.” He filled a saucepan with fresh milk and sat it in the middle of the stove where it would heat nicely but not burn.

Bethleann peered around the corner, a look of amazement on her face. These guys were efficient. She slipped into the room and began setting three places at the table, easily locating dishes and utensils. She decided that freshly squeezed orange juice would do the trick to make this meal perfect. “Do you have any oranges?” she asked, turning to Wellington. He directed her to the cold cellar. When she got back, Wellington had pulled out the juice press and a sharp knife. Bethleann deftly halved the oranges and expertly squeezed three glasses of juice.

Wellington and Georg were delighted. It was easy to see the kitchen was no stranger to Bethleann. The boys loved to cook and a friend with whom to share culinary delights with would be great fun.

The meal was soon ready for eating. They loaded their plates high with pancakes and slathered on fresh creamy butter. Topped off with spring maple

syrup, the delicacies disappeared as though by magic, but none was needed to enjoy this scrumptious feast. After a few moments of serious eating, uninterrupted by conversation, Georg leaned back in his chair. "Say, y'all," he began, "you'll never believe the story of my wish flower mission. It almost didn't happen."

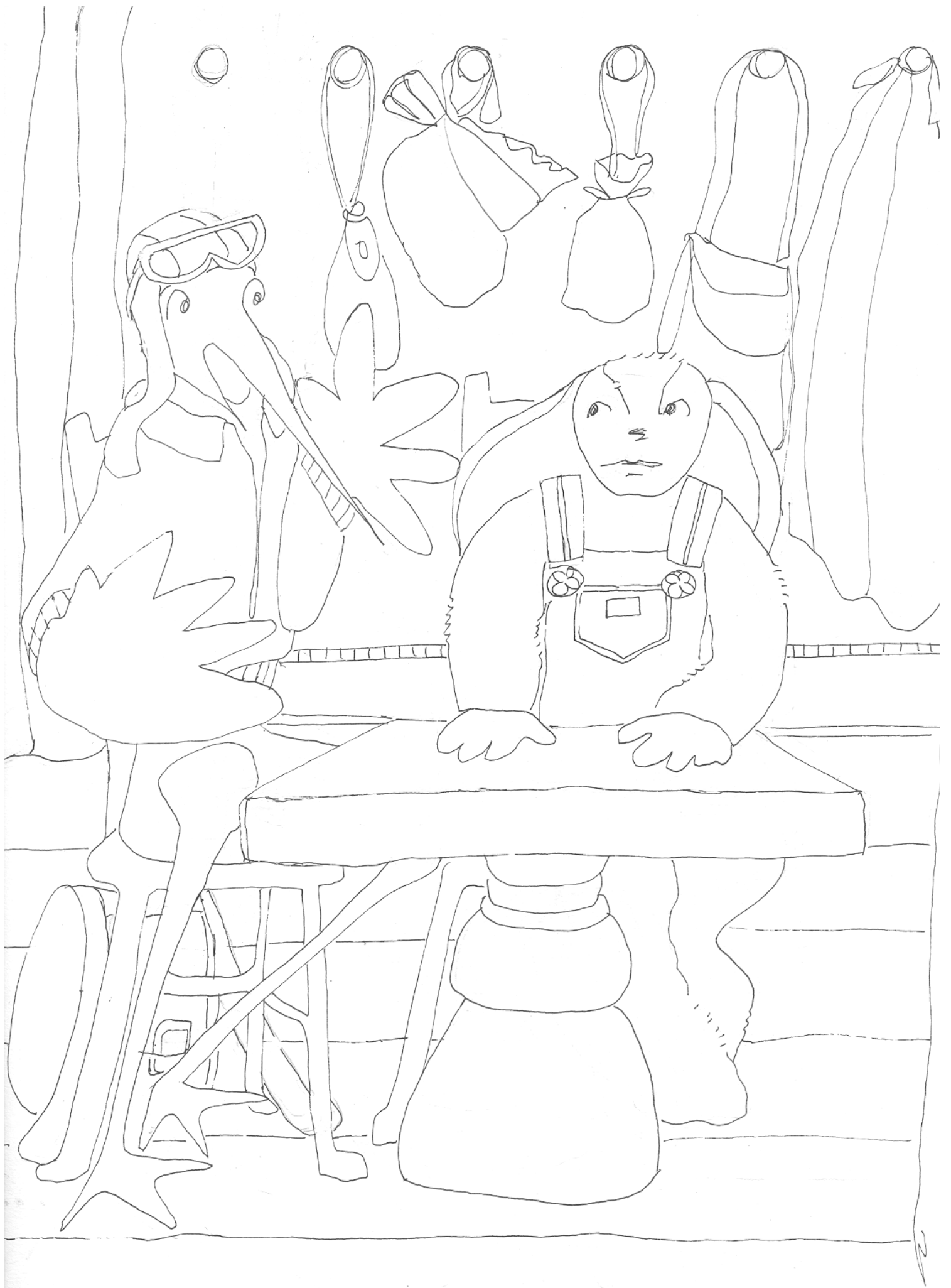
"Well, I had an adventure, too, on my Easter quest," chimed in Bethleann. "How about you, Wellington?" Wellington nodded, his mouth too full to politely speak.

"Say," said Georg, "we'll each tell our tale and then take a vote. The one with the best tale gets their favorite dessert made by the other two this evening."

Wellington and Bethleann laughed. Leave it to Georg to finagle food into the plan! But they agreed that a special dessert prepared for the winner would be fun.

"You first, Wellington," suggested Georg, "then Bethleann, and I'll go last."

Wellington finished his last bite of pancake and leaned forward in his chair. "Very well," his eyes sparkled brightly. "Get ready to make me a lemon pound cake tonight, for my story is quite remarkable!"



Chapter 2

Wellington Starts Out

"I had just started my trip," Wellington began. "And, by the way, your idea to split up was right on target, Georg. Your magic wand is so much faster than my cape that I'm sure it must have been easy for you to cover the entire wish flower circuit while Bethleann and I divided the Easter egg children between us." Bethleann nodded slightly, a twinkle in her eye. She had a few things to add to that observation but they would keep until time for her story.

"Anyway, like I said, I had just begun my journey," started Wellington again.

"Do get on with it," declared Georg, a little annoyed at Wellington's slowness.

"I wanted to give you the full version," snipped Wellington, "but if you want the condensed story..."

"Nevermind, nevermind," soothed Georg, aware that he had ruffled Wellington's fur a bit. "Sensitive artist type," he muttered under his breath with a grin.

"What did you say?" asked Wellington.

"I said, 'Perfect sense, exactly right,' " replied Georg. He rocked back in his chair. "You were just getting started."

"Right," mused Wellington, somewhat pacified. "Well, I had just left the warren, and being a bit nervous about my first Easter, decided to make a quick stop at McGregor's for a sip of picker-upper tea." Georg and Bethleann nodded. Picker-upper tea was just the thing to sooth a rattled nerve.

"The tavern was practically deserted, being late afternoon and all. There were a few lady raccoons having a quiet afternoon tea on the opposite side of the room, but that was it. I hung my cape and haversack on one of the pegs near the doorway and sat down at a small table close by. Flopsy took my order and quickly brought my tea along. I guess she could tell I was in a bit of a swivet. Truth was I was getting nervous about taking the time to stop at all. I began sipping my tea in a hurried fashion, barely enjoying it, although it was doing a good job of soothing my nerves.

"Anyway, I was down to the tea leaves and ready to leave when a stork messenger came in and plopped right down at my table directly across from me. He unbuckled the safety catches that secured his sack to his leather helmet and eased it onto the floor. Of course, I don't mind company ordinarily, but I had to get on with my job. I pushed back my chair and half rose from it to excuse myself. But before I could get a word out of my mouth, he started in with this story about a

special delivery he had to make. Seems he had only stopped, like me, for a quick picker-upper which Mopsy provided almost instantly.” Wellington stopped talking long enough to finish off his orange juice and then he continued.

“He asked where I was going. I mumbled something about heading first to Scooter and finishing up in Primary Number, but that I had a lot of stops in between. Well, when the words Primary Number came out of my mouth, you should have seen the change in his face. The worried look that had been there left and he broke into a huge grin and slapped his wing fingers on his knee. ‘This is my luck day!’ he proclaimed. ‘You’ll do just fine.’ I sank back down into my chair.” Wellington took a sip of his cooling hot chocolate and a nibble of marshmallow.

“ ‘Just fine for what?’ I asked,” Wellington continued after wiping his sticky mouth on the napkin Bethleann handled him. “To my way of thinking this was getting way out of hand, but I didn’t want to be rude. I glanced at my pocket watch and declared, ‘I really don’t have all that much time to spare.’ It was all too true. The time was fleeting. Why had I ever stopped? ‘Drats and whiskers,’ I muttered to myself.

“ ‘Oh, no extra time on your part,’ he offered. ‘Well, maybe a minute or two. But that’s it. It’s like this. I have this huge delivery down south, tentuplets, and I really have to get this package to Primary Number because the sender said it was very important, so I’m going to let you deliver it for me.’ Well, that took my breath away. But before I could protest, he reaches into his sack, pulls out a plain looking brown paper bundle tied with ordinary twine, and presses it into my paws. He quickly jumps up, grabs his sack and rushes for the door calling over his shoulder, ‘Thanks ever so much. Address’s right there on the front. Name’s Stephen Storke if I can ever be of service to you, whoever you are.’

“ ‘Wellington Rabbit to you,’ I called out as he vanished through the door. And he rushed out so fast that he didn’t even pay for his tea. I guess he was worried that I might turn down his request. And he was right! Boy, was I steamed, and boy, was I ever in a pickle. Easter to deliver, and now this package to Primary Number. I was tempted to peek inside but thought better of it. My luck for the day was already sagging. I hastily paid Cottontail for both our orders, and whisked my haversack and cape off the peg. I stuffed the bundle into the bottom of my haversack where I hoped it would not mess up egg production for, as you know, my haversack is lined with Uncle Wells’ magic fading dust. Very special dust that enables it to produce Easter eggs just when I need them. As I was securing the cover, however, I did happen to notice the word Mersenne printed in gold on the outside of the bundle and along side that the numbers four and zero. I didn’t see any delivery information. Maybe it was on the other side. I really did not have any more time to

think about it. I had my Easter deliveries to make. I hastily left for my first stop.

Wellington paused and stood up, leaning into a hamstring stretch.

“Wellington!” proclaimed Bethleann. “Do stop stretching and finish the story.”

“Do you think I might win the prize?” teased Wellington, next giving his triceps a good stretch. His whole body had quite a workout to recover from.

“We’ll never know if you don’t tell us the rest of the story,” grumped Georg.

“Catch me first.” Wellington ran for the living room. Georg and Bethleann chased after him. Wellington snatched up a sofa pillow and threw it at Georg. Bethleann and Georg both grabbed pillows and threw them at Wellington. In an instant, pillows were flying everywhere. Every lamp and picture in the room was in danger of an errant pillow disaster but at that point, no one cared. After the tensions of their Easter deliveries, the pillow fight was a welcome break.

“Stop, stop,” Wellington finally cried, collapsing in a heap of laughter. “I’ll finish the story.”



Chapter 3

The Bundle's Secret

Wellington settled back onto a pile of pillows on the floor. Georg and Bethleann did likewise. "My deliveries went quite smoothly. Fortunately, the bundle did not seem to affect my haversack's egg production in the least. I quickly got a rather efficient system going and everything fell into a routine of sorts. Finally, I was close to being finished and had just completed a rather complex delivery in Slow Hollow. It involved triplets and twins, all in the same family! I told myself a little break wouldn't hurt and I slipped into a nearby meadow and eased down among the violets." Wellington looked at Georg and Bethleann.

"Go on, Wellington," Bethleann urged, "what happened next?" Georg nodded.

"Well, it was very curious, I tell you," replied Wellington. "I pulled out my pocket watch and was surprised to note I was way ahead of my schedule. I decided that I had time to take a closer look at Mr. Storke's mysterious bundle. I reached into my haversack and retrieved the package. The word Mersenne was plain as ever right in the middle of the side where the string knotted together. I flipped it over. Sure enough, there was an address scripted in dark ink on the backside. I read aloud, 'Count Donald Cardinal, 7919 Ordinal Lane.'

" 'That's a prime, you know,' said a chirpy voice. I looked up, so startled that I dropped the packet, but gathered it up again in a flash.

" 'Who are you?' I asked the owner of the voice that happened to be a small brownish looking bird. She wore huge red rimmed eyeglasses.

" 'Precisely Prime,' replied the bird somewhat stiffly, ruffling her feathers and clicking her beak, 'founder of the largest Mersenne prime on record.'

" 'What's a Mersenne prime?' I dared ask, instantly thinking of the name printed on the package. 'Actually, what is a prime?'

" 'Whoa, whoa, one question at a time,' she returned, regaining her composure. 'A prime is any number that can only be divided by itself and one. A Mersenne prime is the number two, which by the way is the only even prime, to the power of any prime number. Take one away from that. If the answer is prime, then it is a Mersenne prime. There are only thirty-nine identified in the entire world. Some say it was a man that discovered number thirty-nine, but it really was me, using his computer machine.'

" 'So what's the big deal about a set of numbers?' I asked.

“ ‘There are *only* thirty-nine Mersennes in existence. To find number forty would be so awesome. They are great for making secret codes that even magic cannot break. The WEB is always anxious to have more to work with,’ she replied.

“ ‘The WEB!’ I gasped before I could help myself. ‘How do you know about the WEB?’

“ ‘Why, everyone knows about the WEB,’ she replied. ‘Are you lost in time?’

“ ‘I riled at this comment, ‘I don’t think so. But no one knows about the WEB. It’s a very secret society,’ I huffed.

“ ‘Secret society? What ever are you talking about? The WEB is the only way to reach the world from your computer machine. It’s short for World Wide Web, you know.’ She looked at me in a challenging way.

“ ‘Oh,’ I replied rather swiftly, beginning to understand that the two WEBs were completely different. I just hoped I had not given anything away! ‘Yes, yes that WEB. I completely forgot about it,’ I continued quickly.

“ ‘Well, I declare,’ laughed Precisely, ‘imagine forgetting about the WEB.’

“ ‘Yes, indeed,’ I laughed with her, wishing I knew something about her WEB, but that would have to come another time. Right now, I needed to get the package to Primary Number and finish my deliveries. ‘Do you know this Count Cardinal gent?’

“ ‘Absolutely I do,’ she replied, ‘he’s my pa. He keeps all of the primes for the WEB. Why do you ask?’

“ ‘I have this package for him,’ I said as something tugged at the back of my mind. What was it? Then it came to me. ‘Precisely, look at the front of this package,’ I motioned to her.

“ ‘She looked to where my paw was pointing and gasped. ‘Could it mean?’ she asked me with hope in her voice.

“ ‘It certainly looks that way,’ I replied with a grin. ‘Let’s get this to your pa and find out.’ We made swift work of getting to Primary Number. We found Count Donald at home high in his giant oak tree and immediately showed him the package.

“ ‘Well, I declare,’ he bristled with obvious delight as he took the package with Mersenne 40 written on it. He beamed at me, ‘Nice work, young rabbit. Let me be the first to shake your paw.’

“ ‘Oh, not me,’ and I explained how I had come to have the bundle and asked if he really thought it was the fortieth Mersenne prime.

“ ‘Well, it will take quite some time to verify,’ he replied. ‘For example, Mercenne thirty-nine took over two years to check and that was using top notch computers.’ I looked at him in astonishment. I had no idea numbers were so

complex and said so. He explained that was why the primes were so valued. They were totally unique and nothing could tamper with any system they guarded.

“The housekeeper arrived with tea then and the spread looked so wonderful. Count Donald invited me to join them. I was sorely tempted, but thought of my remaining deliveries and declined, rather reluctantly I must say.” Georg nodded his agreement; skipping tea was showing true dedication to the job. That was for certain.

“I bid my farewell, thanking Precisely and the Count for their hospitality and invited them to visit us here in Willis Warren. They were very pleased and said they would be delighted to do so the next time they were in the neighborhood. The Count said that he came this way quite often collecting data for his numerology book. The rabbits were always a reliable resource.”



Chapter 4

Time for Lunch

“A prime story, Wellington,” declared Georg. “Imagine secret codes and fancy numbers. It sure will be fun to meet Count Cardinal and Precisely. Wonder if they know any magic number tricks?” They all laughed, even Georg. His magic tricks were a source of amusement for the group. He could perform real magic well enough, actually quite well; he was after all a level three magician. But the fact was that he loved to do parlor magic tricks for fun. If truth be known, he lacked certain important skills like nimble fingers, and really was at most a budding talent. He persevered, though, and never ever used real magic to improve a parlor trick. Bethleann and Wellington knew that, too, and so were very tolerant of Georg’s attempts to impress them with his sleight of hand skills.

“No, Georg, no,” giggled Bethleann, “not on their first visit to see us anyway.”

“Okay,” he agreed, “but maybe the second visit. Are you hungry? I sure am. Let’s take a lunch break.” Without waiting to see if the others agreed, he took off for the kitchen. He quickly filled the dishpan with hot water from the spigot. As the water ran into the pan he picked up the soap chip holder by its long handle and began swishing it through the water. The soap chips too small to be of any use by themselves that filled the little wire basket attached to one end of the wooden handle stirred up quite a froth of bubbles in an instant.

Wellington and Bethleann definitely agreed with Georg’s lunch idea and hastened to the kitchen almost on his heels. It was for certain that story telling and listening proved to be hard work. They needed nourishment. “Let’s make Welsh rarebit,” Wellington said smacking his lips together all the while clearing the dirty dishes off the table. He stacked them into the waiting pan that Georg had prepared and began washing. Georg meanwhile had moved over to the breadbox to retrieve a fresh loaf of buttermilk bake bread.

“You would eat a rabbit!” exclaimed Bethleann.

“Foolish girl, I said rarebit, not rabbit. It is a truly divine melted cheese and toasted bread delight,” said the amused Wellington. “Eat a rabbit, indeed.” The washing done, Wellington carried the pan with the dirty water to the back door and dumped it in the flowerbed beside the stoop. The lilacs loved soapy water. He returned to the sink and began rinsing the dishes. He handed off each freshly rinsed dish to Bethleann for drying. Soon the kitchen was spotless and ready for lunch preparations. While Wellington and Bethleann were working on the dishes, Georg had finished slicing the bread and reset the table for lunch with the sturdy white buffalo china. He loved how it made the food look so delectable.

Now Georg set about pumping a pitcher full of spring water using the hand pump. Spigot water was good enough for dishes but freshly pumped spring water was what they needed for drinking. The pump fed right into the same sink as the spigot so it all worked out just fine. Meanwhile, Wellington went to the springhouse for a new wheel of turn-about willow cheese. He came back with a hefty wheel of cheese plus three Betty Red apples for baking.

“Oh, how yummy they look,” said Bethleann when she saw the apples. “I’m getting

hungrier and hungrier.” She set about scooping the centers out of the apples. After each was cored, she put them in a shallow dish with just enough water to cover the bottom. She placed this in the oven, but first she sprinkled a bit of cinnamon, and grated a tad of nutmeg over each apple. Then she set about whipping up some fresh cream to top off the apples when they were done.

Georg put the rarebit ingredients in the top of the double boiler. In went a tat of butter, a good grating of turn-about willow cheese, a dash of hot pepper, a pinch of dry mustard, as well as salt and one fresh egg. He sat the boiler on the stove and began stirring.

While Georg was blending the rarebit, Wellington lightly toasted the thick slices of bread on the back of the stove, then layered them into the breadbasket. He covered the basket with a nice cloth and sat it on the table. Bethleann carefully removed the apples from the oven, topped each off with a dollop of whipped cream, and served them around. Wellington placed a slice of toasted bread on each plate and Georg followed behind, ladling on the rarebit. “Let’s eat,” he proclaimed.

They needed no further encouragement. The rarebit, the apples with the creamy topping and cool crispy carrots Wellington obtained from the icebox at the last moment made for a welcome lunch break.

There was silence in the room for the longest time while everyone enjoyed their meal. “Oh, are you ever right, Wellington,” sighed Bethleann when she finally found time to speak. “Welsh rarebit is indeed divine. I’m stuffed.”

“Not too stuffed to tell your story, I hope?” asked Georg.

“Never,” she said, “I’m very anxious to hear what you make of it.” She pushed her chair back and shook out her arms and legs. “But first let’s get comfortable.”

“Definitely,” declared Georg, rising from his seat and giving his big bear body a long toe tingling stretch. They decided to leave the kitchen to tend itself again and retired to the sitting room. But first Wellington made a pot of tea to finish off their tummy warming meal.

“Is it a mystery?” he asked as he sat the pot of raspberry-ming tea onto the hearth. He passed mugs around and filled each to the brim.

“Oh, yes,” replied Bethleann. “Umm, raspberry-ming is so wonderful,” she said, inhaling the fragrance. “Now let’s see where to begin.” Georg stoked up the fire and added a new log.

Everyone got comfortable. Bethleann settled down on the floor and gathered a handful of plush pillows all around her. She leaned back against a big hunter green velvet one fringed in gold. “I had just left the warren on foot. I wanted to save my magic for true necessities. In addition to the fact that before I could begin my

journey I had a major task to achieve.”

Wellington and Georg leaned in so as not to miss a word. This was already sounding like it was going to be a good story.



Chapter 5

Bethleann's Turn

"I, too, was somewhat nervous about my first Easter deliveries. After all, I was a tag-a-long team member and definitely did not have a magically lined haversack to help me out," she glanced at Wellington. They had discussed this problem before leaving for their separate missions and Bethleann assured the boys that she could solve the problem of how to get Easter eggs when she needed them. They had certainly colored enough in Uncle Well's dell and she wasn't about to let them go to waste.

Truth was she did not have a clue how to begin. She had simply not wanted to hold Wellington and Georg back. She would figure it out. She just had to; Wellington was depending on her.

"I slipped out of the warren by way of the bridle path that follows Colleton Creek. It was the long way around to my first stop as I was headed for Brier Patch. But naturally, I needed to solve the egg dilemma before I got there. I thought that walking along the apple blossom scented way would improve my thinking skills." She looked over at the worried frown creasing Wellington's brow and winked at him. "Don't fret, I'm here, aren't I, and all the eggs got delivered."

Wellington laughed. He forgot that Bethleann was telling them something that already had a solution. He relaxed and sipped his raspberry-ming tea.

"I really didn't like the idea of transporting each egg by magic. Too, too risky. There were so many eggs to deliver. Dark magic, or worse yet, Black Veil, could catch up with me. But I couldn't see an easy way around the problem. I was talking aloud to myself, weighing each silly idea I came up with, vainly hoping one would be better than it sounded.

" 'Elegantly eluding every element that even somewhat encourages success, aren't you?' snipped a voice. I snapped out of my half-dazed state and looked around. The voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. I couldn't see anyone at all.

"I shook it off as nerves and walked on. 'First talking to yourself and now imagining voices,' I said chiding myself good-naturedly.

" 'Everyone thinks that,' laughed the same lilting voice.

"This time I twisted around and around looking in every possible direction. All I could see was trees, meadows, and the meandering creek. 'Strong imagination you've got there,' I told myself shaking my head to clear it.

" 'Everyone thinks I'm an element of their energetic imagination,' giggled the

voice. 'Engage your eyes upwards.' I looked up, more carefully than before. There in a tree branch almost entirely hidden by the greenery sat an elfish sort of figure dressed in green.

" 'Did you say something and just who are you?' I asked.

" 'Emily Elf, at your service,' declared the figure springing to a stand on the branch. Her long flowing hair was pale green and had tiny flowers entwined in the curls. Her green tunic was belted at the waist and on her feet were soft slippers. She stood akimbo, staring at me with an amused look on her face. 'And just exactly who are you?'

" 'Bethleann,' I replied, 'is what my friends know me by. What brings you to Willis Warren?'

" 'Why you, quite evidently,' she replied. 'You evoked my essence. I eased here as quickly as I could envision your face.'

" 'I did?' I replied incredulously. 'I certainly don't recall that,' I said with just a bit of sarcasm in my voice.

" 'Enough! You expressed an empathetic call for help. I am entitled to be your elf because I was engrossed in the meadow environment close by picking edelweiss for my hair and elevated myself here.'

" 'Do you always talk in e's?' I asked, referring to her preference for e words.

" 'Well I can talk otherwise if you so desire. Your wish is my command. I rather enjoy e's but I will adapt for your benefit,' she responded with a slight bow towards me.

" 'Yes, I would so like,' I said. 'But why do you like e's so much?'

" 'Because I am an elf, very easy to espy. Oops, excuse me. I did not mean to offend,' she answered. 'Odd,' she mused, 'I cannot explain why I like you. You are not an e person. Perhaps you have some other e connection?' She hopped to a closer branch and sat down.

" 'Well,' I said, 'I am an Easter messenger and have many Easter eggs to deliver.'

" 'There you have it, easy enough,' she nodded. 'My feelings were not wrong. You are an e person in disguise.' She tilted her head to one side. 'What is this Easter you speak of?'

"I explained all about Wellington and the gift of Easter love through eggs or wish flowers. I told her about my problem with the egg delivery and how I simply could not come up with a good solution.

" 'Yes, I felt your elpha waves quite strongly,' she replied with glee.

"I looked at her quizzically, 'Elpha waves?'

" 'I will explain as we travel,' she said. 'You have much work to do. We must

get started.' She leapt down from the branch and reached up for my hand, 'Let's go,' she said pulling me along the path at a hasty pace."

Bethleann stopped talking and leaned back on her pillow pile. "No, no, no," demanded Georg. "No stopping. You cannot do that Wellington take-a-break thing. You must keep going. I insist."

Bethleann laughed, "Oh, Georg, I'm glad you like my story."



Chapter 6

Emily Elf

“Emily Elf set quite a brisk pace,” continued Bethleann, “even being so small in size. I was very impressed at her fortitude. ‘You see,’ Emily explained, ‘elpha waves are shortrange distress signals emitted when someone is fretting over a problem. All nearby elves always respond. Most folks ignore our offers of help, thinking that we are but their imagination. But you seem to be more intelligent than most. You chose to see that I was not part of your imagination. I can help you with your problem, if you like.’ She was full of confidence.

“I could not believe my good fortune. I quickly explained about the eggs and their delivery and waited for her reply.

“She stopped walking, mused a moment then snapped her fingers together, ‘Effervescence! To effect an efficient delivery erasing any margin of error one must escape the norm of the magical spectrum and elect an end run plan.’

“ ‘Excuse me,’ I stammered, ‘in common words and please no e’s’

“She cocked her head to one side. ‘Very well, no e’s. I see that I confuse you. Well, it’s enormously easy; we must do exactly that. Eeks, the e’s too easily escape my mouth,’ she laughed.

“ ‘Exactly what?’ I reminded her.

“She stamped her foot, ‘Why, confuse the enemy, of course,’ she quipped. ‘We create chaos right under their noses. I will deliver eggs, too, while you are also doing your deliveries. I will not use real eggs, you see, but elf eggs that look like your Easter eggs. Very elusive, very unstable, only lasting a brief time before evolving into air.’ She skipped in a circle. ‘It’ll work. It’ll work. Total confusion. Now how many deliveries do you have to make?’

“ ‘I pulled my list from my pocket, ‘Eleventy-eleven,’ I slowly counted, ‘and eleven.’

“ ‘Eleventy-eleven and eleven?’ she squealed, ‘That’s a very lucky number. It was meant to be. We will succeed. I will go now and begin scattering elf eggs. Thank you, ever-friend Bethleann, for letting me help you.’ she said.

“ ‘Wait,’ I said. ‘I’m really nervous about all of this, just how many problems have you actually solved?’

“ ‘Well,’ she replied hanging her head a bit. ‘I have tried many times, but I always mess up before I can finish. The other elves told me I could not help with problems any more until I learned my skills better. I was practicing in the meadow when I felt your elpha waves. I know I can do this. I really can. Just give me a

chance.’ She gave me a pleading look.

“ ‘Very well,’ I reluctantly relented, ‘but this is a very, very important job I am doing and we cannot mess up.’

“She jumped with glee and gave me a big hug, ‘I will not let you down.’ Then before I could change my mind she was gone.

“ ‘Well, I declare,’ I muttered and then realized that whether I liked it or not, Emily was already delivering bogus eggs. I had to get going, which is exactly what I did. I engaged my levitation buttonhooks to take me to my first stop.

Wellington and Georg nodded. They knew that Bethleann could fly at low altitudes by pressing the front buttonhooks on her bib overalls. If she pressed the top of both buttons, she rose up a few feet. To lower herself she pressed the bottom of the buttons. To go left she pressed the left side of the left button. To go right she engaged the right side of the right button. She could do two things at once like rising to the right by using one button for steering and one for altitude; it was just a bit slower than using both buttons for straight up or down altitude. The adjacent side of each button was reserved for quick action. If she pressed these at the same time she could transport to whatever place was in her mind. If she pressed the left or right inside by itself she transported rapidly a few feet up, down, to the left or right depending on which way her head was inclined. This was the only action of the buttonhooks that relied on coordination with another part of her body. Wellington laughed and tossed a pillow at Bethleann. “Emily Elf, veteran problem solver to the rescue.”

Bethleann ignored his rib and tossed the pillow back. She took a sip of raspberry-ming tea and continued.

“At each stop I used instant attraction to bring the eggs I needed from the dell. Everything moved along at lightning speed so I could only suppose that Emily’s confusion plan was working.

“In no time it seemed I was at my eleventy-eleven and eleventh stop and feeling very smug with myself. I sang instant attraction and waited for the eggs to appear, but nothing happened. I tried again. Nothing. A third time brought an unimaginable disaster. For none other than Black Veil himself stood in the middle of the room! ‘So, you and that rabbit friend of yours thought you could pull one over on me, eh?’ he sneered at me.

“I gulped. I had never actually seen him up close. He was dark and musty smelling and horribly frightening.” She looked at Wellington. He nodded in agreement. He knew only too well how imposing Black Veil could be. “But I was not about to be thwarted by him. Not at all. ‘Where are my eggs?’ I demanded.

“ ‘Ha,’ he laughed. ‘You’ll never know.’

“Just then a true miracle happened. Emily appeared on a small table in the room. She pointed a finger at Black Veil and spoke, ‘Black Veil be gone!’ He just stared at her in utter disbelief. I, too, stood there with my mouth hanging open. Emily continued in the most authoritative voice I have ever heard. ‘I, Emily Elf, exercise my own unique ethereal elf spell to exile you to everland, from whence no one returns unaided!’ Well, with that he began to shake and break apart. In a puff he turned to smoke and was gone. Totally gone. I turned to thank Emily but she, too, was gone. I looked for her in every direction and then I heard her voice echoing through the air, ‘Bethleann, you will find that the last real Easter eggs have been delivered. Goodbye, it has been a most eudaemonic escapade.’

“Sure enough the baskets were filled. My job was done. I visualized this cottage, pressed my adjacent levitation buttonhooks, and said, ‘To Uncle Wells’, please.’

“And there you have it.” Bethleann sank back into her pillows with a sigh, “I simply love mint brownies, guys.”



Chapter 7

A Dinner Twist

“Oh my goodness,” gasped Georg. “That certainly is a mystery. What do you suppose happened to Emily?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t have a bad feeling about it at all. I just have this hunch that wherever she is, she is in complete control. You should have seen how she handled Black Veil. He was flabbergasted. He could not speak or even scowl. He stood there meek as a lamb. Fear not, Emily is okay. I just know it.”

“And she came through with her promise,” declared Wellington. “She actually solved her very first problem. We have got to find that elf and congratulate her.”

“We will, we will,” said Georg, “but...”

“We know,” laughed Wellington and Bethleann, “and you are right. It definitely is time to eat.” They all three hustled to the kitchen and set about cleaning up just as before. Only this time Bethleann washed and Georg dried while Wellington set the table.

While they worked, Georg kept a running dialogue about ideas for dinner. “My story is next and I need a good hearty meal to keep up my strength,” he affirmed. “My final vote is for fried oysters, spring potatoes and a fresh garden salad. I’ll go to the oyster bed and harvest a basketful.”

“Okay,” agreed Wellington. “I’ll see what Uncle Wells planted in the garden before he departed.”

“I want to help you, Georg,” begged Bethleann. “I have never harvested oysters.”

“Grab a pair of waders and come on then,” said Georg. He was pulling on his own waders that he had left at Uncle Wells’ after a previous oyster excursion. He stepped outside and breathed in the fine spring air. Ah, it smelled so good. Bethleann followed. They headed for the skiff, grabbing an oyster rake for Bethleann along the way. “It’s actually a clam rake, but it’ll do,” said Georg handing her the tined rake. They quickly launched the boat into the little cove that backed up to Uncle Wells’ cottage. It fed off the Old Salt Bay that established the eastern boundary of the warren.

The oyster beds were close by and after a few strong pulls with the oars they were settled on top of one bed. Georg slowed the boat and dropped a light anchor. He showed Bethleann how to use the rake that looked like a bent pitchfork. He would harvest with his claws, no rake necessary. Rather quickly they had a basket

full and returned to shore. They started culling the oysters right there, throwing the little ones back. Even so they still had a fine group for supper.

They hauled the basket of oysters to a nearby wooden table and began shucking them into a pan Wellington had left for them on his way to the garden. Suddenly Bethleann shouted, "A pearl, I found a pearl, a black pearl. It's huge." She danced around holding her pearl up high. It was black, big, and beautiful. Georg was amazed; he had only ever found a few small white pearls. Bethleann couldn't wait to show Wellington. She tucked the pearl in her pocket and helped Georg finish up. They returned to the kitchen, but not before leaving their muddy waders by the back door. Inside they found Wellington humming a ditty and putting the finishing touches on three beautiful salads. The potatoes were merrily boiling. All that was needed were those fresh fried oysters. Supper was looking good.

Georg found a tin of crackers in the pantry and began grinding a handful into a fine meal. Bethleann got two eggs from the icebox and whisked them into a yellowy froth. Wellington put the big frying pan on the back burner and added a hearty scoop of cooking oil. He had stoked up the fire while preparing the salad, so the stove was nice and hot.

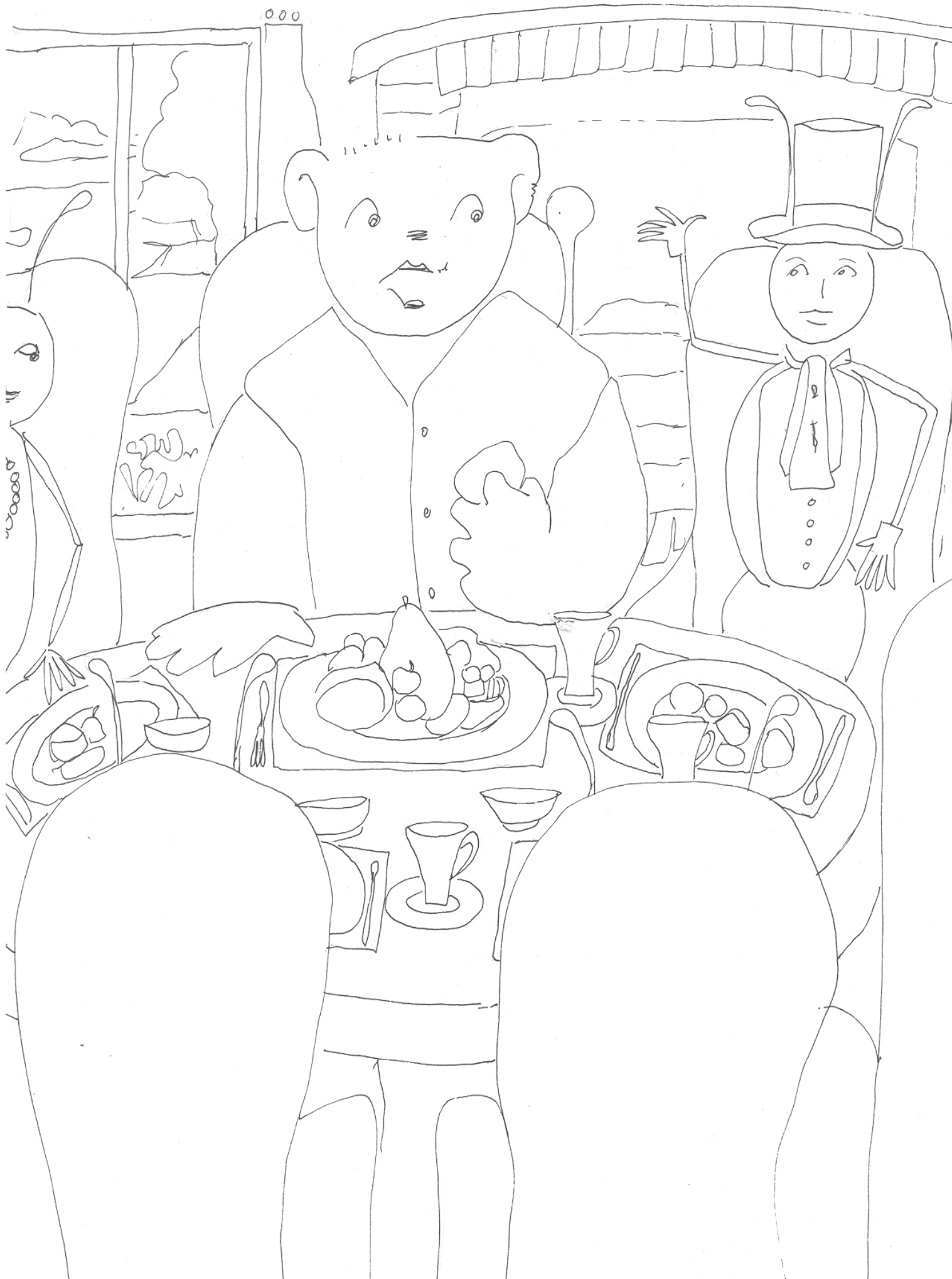
All was ready. Bethleann dipped the first oyster into the egg batter and passed it off to Georg who rolled it into the cracker meal and passed it to Wellington who carefully placed it into the hot oil. This continued in rapid succession until the pan was full and the first oyster ready to come out. Wellington used his wire scoop to lift the finished oysters onto a draining cloth. Two more pans full and they would be done. It was time to eat. Wellington slid the hot pan to a cooler part of the stove and they all hurried to the table. Georg had retrieved the potatoes while Wellington was cooking the last batch of oysters. And Bethleann had mixed a quick batch of lemonade.

Dinner was served. Again, the crew ate in silence savoring every mouthful. At last, Wellington broke the long silence. "Mighty fine oysters, mighty fine indeed. You all harvested a good batch." Georg grinned and stretched his big arms behind his head. It was a good dinner.

"Oh, Wellington," said Bethleann, "I forgot. Just look at what I found when we were shucking the oysters." She reached into her pocket for the pearl. As she pulled it out it took on a luminous glow and began to grow in her hand. Quickly it was the size of a small ball. They all stared at it in surprise.

"That looks like," started Georg. "It really looks like, oh my goodness, look, I see a rabbit tail...and ears. The ball for all the world looked like a curled up black rabbit!"

“Quick,” yelled Wellington, “not a moment to lose.” He sprinted for Uncle Wells’ study and snatched up a beautifully inlaid white egg sitting on the desk. “Here,” he said, “put the pearl in this.” He opened a clasp on one side of the hinged egg and Bethleann dropped the pearl inside. Wellington snapped the clasp shut and secured it with the key that minded the egg’s lock. He gave the key to Bethleann. “I already have one magic key to keep up with, you are in charge of this one. Until we learn more about your pearl, it is best to keep it in this finders-keepers egg of Uncle Wells’. It is magic proof. Wow, that was close. Your pearl certainly looked like it was turning into Black Veil!”



Chapter 8

Georg's Tale

Bethleann gingerly held the egg aloft, turning it this way and that. "Black Veil? Do you suppose I rescued him from Emily's exile? Do you think it is really him?"

"I don't know," replied Wellington, "but until we know more you need to keep this egg safe. He proffered a wooden box lined with light blue velvet, "Put the egg in here. It'll be safe enough in Uncle Wells' study. This place is full of counter spells and good charms."

Bethleann laid the egg in the box and closed the top. She put it on a high shelf next to a group of leather bound books. The three friends wandered back to the kitchen.

"I don't suppose anyone cares to hear my story," began Georg. He was worried that the pearl adventure had worn everyone out for the story challenge in spite of the dessert prize.

"Of course we do," chimed Wellington and Bethleann together, trying not to sound half-hearted. They were tired, but did not want to disappoint Georg, who after all, had suggested the story contest and had politely waited until last to tell his tale. But they all three agreed that it was a good plan to tidy the kitchen while Georg told his tale.

"Let's see," began Georg, "where to begin."

"The beginning," offered Wellington. He looked at Georg, noted the glint in his eye, and realized that Georg was teasing him. "Oh get on with it, you've waited long enough, silly bear."

Georg shook his finger at Wellington and grinned, "I had all of my wish flower seeds safely tucked into my rumplesack and was reviewing my delivery plans when a strong wind blew up out of nowhere. It took me quite by surprise. I was down in the dell where we had been coloring eggs. It scooped my rumplesack right off the ground where it had been sitting beside me and carried it away!

"I grabbed for it but it swirled out of reach and kept on climbing higher and higher until it was completely out of sight. I could not believe what had just happened. What ever was I going to do? I took a deep breath and suddenly had a small idea. I began investigating the buckets and pots I had collected the wish flower seeds in. In my packing I had not completely emptied each vessel, so between them all there was quite a lot of those special seeds. Not enough, mind you, to do my entire job, but definitely enough to get started. Which is precisely what I did.

"I gathered all of the seeds, and I mean this time I scraped every tiny one into a common bucket and carried this to Uncles Wells' gardening shed. I found an old satchel that would work pretty well to replace my rumplesack. I scooped the seeds into the satchel and latched it shut. Then I took off for Wedding Bell, my first stop.

"From Wedding Bell, I shuffled off to Bottoms Up and then Glen Echo. From stop to stop I traveled scattering wish flower seeds. I knew I would run out eventually but I had to keep going until that time. It was in the town of Elbow that I ran out. I had stretched the seeds as far as they would go. I had not skimmed at any stop, but I did not leave any extras either, naturally, since I was running on an emergency supply. Finally, my satchel was totally empty, down to the very last seed.

"I was getting mighty hungry anyway and decided to get a bite to eat. I liked the looks of Donny's Diner, located at Elbow's edge. and decided to give it a try. I stepped inside and found it packed to overflowing with stately ants. 'They must be having a convention,' I said to myself and turned to leave. But just then a gentleman ant wearing a top hat and tails rose from his table and offered me his chair."

"Wait," said Bethleann, "ants are very, very small, aren't they?"

Georg and Wellington laughed. It was clear Bethleann didn't know *everything*.

"Stately ants," explained Wellington, "are a branch of the ant family tree known for their great height, for ants that is. They are a docile race much taken with eating and life's pleasantries. Their pinchers are greatly reduced in size and are used mostly for cracking nuts. Their stinger has evolved into an internal vestige but can be extended and used under extreme stress."

"Really?" said Bethleann. "My, my." She rather disliked being shown up. But she was not going to pout and spoil the story. "Do go on Georg. Tell us what happened next."

"Well, the ant was most insistent that I join his dining party. 'Good sir,' he said to me, 'Please have a seat. You simply cannot pass by this diner without trying the cuisine. It is only the best in the entire world. I am assuming that you have never been here, as I am a regular patron and I have never seen you before.' I nodded an affirmative and took the seat he offered me, very grateful that I would not have to look for another place to eat. I was truly famished.

" 'Please allow me to order for you,' he suggested as he eased a chair beside mine and moved his dinner over. I readily agreed. He summoned the chef whom I assumed to be Master Donny. They held a quiet consultation, occasionally glancing my way, and then Master Donny hurried off to the kitchen. It seemed like before I could even count my blessings, a lithe maiden in spring garb was serving me a

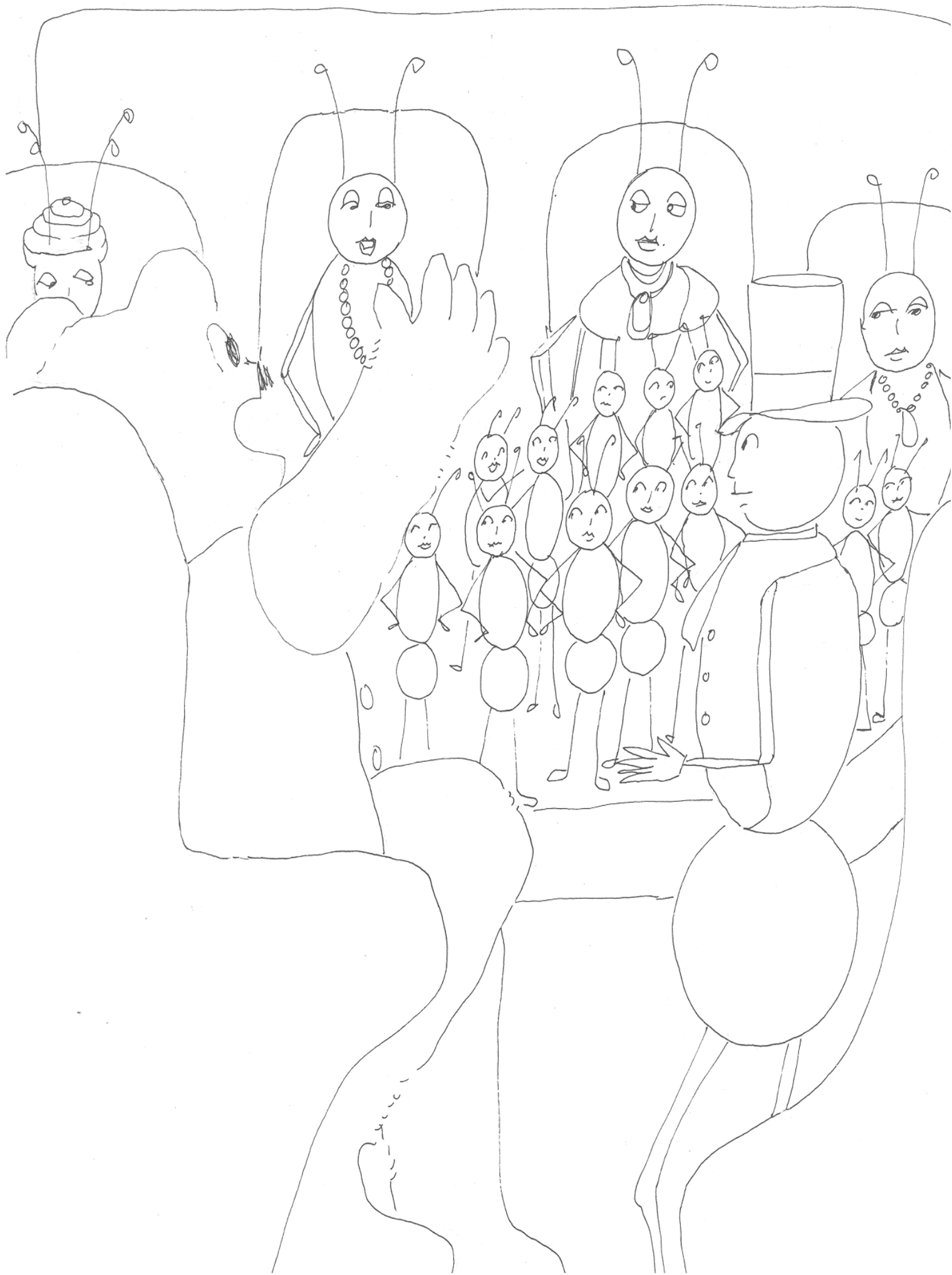
delicious looking hot meal. I did not recognize the foods but dug right in regardless. It was divine, simply divine.

“ ‘What a delectable pleasure,’ I glowed, ‘but do tell, what is this dish?’

“ ‘Ah,” my friend smiled. ‘You are our special guest. For such as you we cook only the best and it really would not do to reveal the chef’s treasured secrets. Do you truly enjoy our selection?’

“I grinned foolishly at him, my mouth full. I confess I continued practically shoveling the food in without even stopping to chat until my plate was empty. At that I leaned back in my chair and let go a tremendous belch. I truly did not mean to, it just slipped, or more accurately, rolled out. With that everyone in the entire place roared with laughter and gathered around me. They began patting me on the back and shaking my hand. It seemed that I had paid the chef the highest compliment one could pay him. It also seemed that I had stumbled into some sort of belch measuring challenge and had beaten the record by quite a distance, or should I say decibel.

“It was then that my top hatted friend showed me a brass decibel indicator hanging on the wall, and next to it a chart with various names and numbers beside each. His name, Sir Andrew Ant, had the most numbers by it, and also the highest number. That is until I happened along and bumped him out of first place. He tipped his hat to me and entered my name at the bottom of the chart and then my decibel rating. Sir Andrew’s best was 99. I had topped out at 130 decibels, right at the threshold of hearing pain!”



Chapter 9

Sir Andrew Ant

"I was the hero of the moment. Every ant wanted to buy me a sassafras beer. I kindly declined, explaining that I had a rather large problem to solve and very little time to solve it. I needed clear thinking and fast action. Sir Andrew was intrigued. He wanted to know everything about my plight, down to the tiniest detail. We ordered a hot cider and I poured forth my story.

" 'Ah,' said Sir Andrew. 'This will be easy to remedy. I will send our very best soldier ants forth to locate your rumplesack and its contents. They should have it solved in a few days time.'

" 'A few days time,' I cried. 'I don't want to sound ungrateful, but that simply won't do. I must have a solution this day or the completion of my mission is doomed.' I went over the part about Easter being a very special day that only comes once a year again, in case he missed the point.

"Just then one of the ladies at our table spoke up, 'Darling Andrew, why don't we contact the Ball?'

" 'The what?' I asked.

" 'The Ball is a group of female ants that solve many problems similar to yours. They are highly organized and very efficient. But they are also very flighty and tend to forget what task they are working on and wander off, leaving it undone,' explained Sir Andrew.

" 'Can they find my wish flower seeds?' I asked.

" 'Nothing is too difficult for the Ball,' answered Sir Andrew. 'If they stay on task,' he added.

" 'Can we contact them?' I asked desperate for any plan.

"He looked at me with the slightest hint of a smile on his face and reached for his left antenna. He pulled it down slightly and began tapping a sequence of taps on it. That done he hurried to the window and peered out. He seemed to find nothing to suit him because he immediately turned back into the room and began pacing up and down muttering to himself. Ever so often, he would try the window again. Finally he spoke with glee, 'Ah ha, here they come.'

"A few moments later the door to the diner opened and in rushed a babbling group of female ants. They were rather small in size. I looked at Sir Andrew questioningly. 'They are petites,' he whispered, 'very lithe on their feet and much smaller than statelays.' They climbed up on the table and gathered close to Sir Andrew, their chatting never stopping. Now I saw why the ladies in Sir Andrew's

party had been so insistent that the diner serving maidens do a thorough job of clearing the dishes. This gaggle of girls filled the table. Then Sir Andrew raised his hand for silence. Surprisingly they immediately ceased talking.

“ ‘Sir Andrew, what can we do for you?’ the leader asked. Sir Andrew told them about my special seeds and the urgency of the situation. ‘But Sir Andrew, how can we tell these seeds apart from other seeds?’ asked one of them.

“At this I spoke up and said, ‘Like most plants, wish flowers are diamagnetic, but for a short while after they are harvested the seeds exhibit a rare phenomenon called super paramagnetism.’

“Well, at that the Ball began to chatter excitedly to each other all at once. I couldn’t tell how anyone could hear another. But I guess it was not confusion to them because finally one of them spoke up and said, ‘We believe we can help you. We can outfit our arms and legs with magnetic mitts and gather in your seeds while they are still in the paramagnetic stage.’

“Needless to say, I was elated at this suggestion. ‘That is great news,’ I replied. ‘How long will it take to get started?’ was my next question.

“The Ball went into a huddle. A great deal of mumbling and gesticulating occurred before they broke the formation and the leader approached me, ‘We will have your seeds collected by third watch. Third watch! This was fantastic. Third watch was just around the corner. Elation! I began to rub my paws together in glee and watched in adoration as my champions marched off the table and out the door.

“ ‘Mind, my son, they are not back yet,’ said Sir Andrew, bringing me back to reality.

“ ‘Is there really cause for worry?’ I asked Sir Andrew. ‘They seem very responsible.’

“ ‘There is always cause for worry when the Ball is on a mission,’ Sir Andrew returned. ‘They are very well intentioned but just a bit scatterbrained.’ This did not give me much comfort, I can tell you that.

“I sat down to a fresh pot of tea Sir Andrew had ordered and tried to relax. He in turn back-peddled a bit in his assessment of the Ball. ‘They are a fine group of girls, dedicated to their job,’ he said. ‘They will not let you down.’ I looked at him, trying to decide if he was serious or merely trying to calm me. ‘Now let’s to tea.’ He poured the tea all around, for the rest of his party was still with us, and we sat sipping and exchanging pleasantries.

“ ‘Tell us about Easter,’ one of the ladies requested. I was only too happy to oblige, and did so quite eloquently, I might add.

“I had just finished the Easter story when suddenly the door banged open and one of the Ball girls rushed in. ‘Look, look,’ she exclaimed excitedly. ‘Just do

look at what I found.' We all looked. I, of course, was expecting a gathering of seeds. It was a cherry stone. 'So rare,' she cried. 'It is the most awesome blusher ever.' She danced away to the powder room.

" 'Where are the seeds?' I asked. Sir Andrew just shook his head.

"And then, before he could speak, another member of the Ball waltzed in, holding a giant puff ball. 'This is so fantastic,' she cried. 'Enough powder for my entire performance at the Drama. I am the leading lady, you know.' And she ran off to the powder room, to experiment with her new make-up I suppose.

"I just looked at Sir Andrew without speaking, my heart sinking lower and lower.

"Then three more members of the group came skipping through the door, arms linked. 'Can you believe it?' they chatted to each other. 'I never would have thought to look there for eye shadow.' 'Me either.' They chatted their way to the powder room to join their companions. I was so depressed. My Easter mission was headed for failure.

"Six more Ball girls scurried in, not even bothering to look our way as they bee-lined for the powder room. They could easily hear their sisters giggling and squealing with delight at their discoveries.

"I sank my head into my paws trying to think of a last minute desperate plan. Quite unexpected, something bounced off my head. 'Ouch,' I cried out looking up and retrieving the missile. It was my delivery list.

" 'Sorry,' sang the leader of the Ball, 'I meant to hit your tea cup,' she bubbled as she headed for the powder room, following the last of the girls.

" 'Wait,' I called to her. 'Where did you get this? Aren't you going to find my seeds?'

" 'Oh,' she replied as she stopped to answer me, and at the same time, preen her antennae while looking in a hand mirror. 'We located those *ages* ago. Then when we found your rumplesack with the list inside we decided it would save a lot of time to make the rounds ourselves. We figured the places you covered could do with a double-dose for good measure. We left your rumplesack out by the door. Hope we did okay.'

"Okay? I could have cried with relief. I looked at Sir Andrew, tears of joy in my eyes.

" 'Never underestimate the Ball,' he laughed heartily."



Chapter 10

Just Desserts

"There," beamed Georg, "Ready to make me chocolate mousse?"

"A ball of girl ants," laughed Bethleann, "I've got to meet them. But you know this contest is too hard to judge. It's surely a three-way tie."

"I don't want to choose between these stories, either," mused Wellington. "Although your Emily elf really intrigues me, Bethleann. Say, how about putting it to our readers?"

"Yes, let the readers decide," agreed Georg. "I cannot choose. And to think all of these adventures actually happened. Do you think Count Donald and Precisely will come for a visit soon, Wellington?" Georg loved new company. And then, "But for now, what about dessert?" Bethleann and Wellington broke up laughing. Georg always had his priorities straight, and food was generally first. "We could all make our favorite dessert," he continued, ignoring their giggles.

"Georg," cried Bethleann, "that is a lot of dessert."

"Well, I'm a lot hungry. My story drained my energy."

Just then, there was a loud knock at the door. They all looked at each other. Who could be calling at this hour? It was well past eight. Wellington stood up and shuffled to the door. His legs were stiff from so much sitting after his long active trip, even with the pillow fight and visit to the garden thrown in. "Hello, speedy delivery," hollered a voice as he cracked the door open a little bit. It was a rather familiar voice.

"Stephen Storke, is that you?" asked Wellington as he pulled the door open wide to reveal his delivery friend.

"Indeed, it is," replied Stephen gleaming with delight.

"How did you ever find me?" asked Wellington.

"I'm a delivery stork," replied Stephen. "It's my job to find folks. Here, I brought you something." He thrust a package into Wellington's arms. "Felt kinda bad about rushing out on you and all."

"Thanks, Stephen," said Wellington. "Come in, come in and meet Georg and Bethleann, my Easter companions and dearest friends." Georg and Bethleann had followed Wellington from the kitchen and were hovering in the sitting room wondering who the company was.

"Well sure, don't mind if I do. Go on now and open your package." Stephen stepped into the cottage leaving his pouch just inside the door.

Wellington made swift work of introductions and tore into his package. He

loved surprises. And this was the perfect one. It was a beautiful lemon pound cake!

"Now this is just the ticket," laughed Wellington, "dessert is served. Thank you very much, Stephen." He offered Stephen a seat and headed for the kitchen to get forks and plates for the cake. Bethleann began telling Stephen the story of Wellington's delivery.

Just then, there came another rap at the door. "Now who can that be?" they wondered for the second time that evening.

Georg went to check this time. "Sir Andrew, what brings you here?" he exclaimed as he opened the door to see his new friend standing there.

"It looks like you left something behind, ol' chap," returned Sir Andrew. He held up Georg's rumplesack. Georg turned red with embarrassment. Imagine leaving behind his beloved rumplesack. He must have been more flustered than he realized at the time.

"We were just about to have dessert. Can you join us?" he urged Sir Andrew.

"A spot of tea would be just right," returned Sir Andrew. "And here is a bit of a treat the girls made for you." Sir Andrew proffered a box.

Georg took the wonderful looking package and quickly untied the twine securing the box flaps and top. Inside were tiny ramekins of chocolate mousse. "Ah, the Ball knows all," cried Georg in glee. "We need spoons, Wellington," he called into the kitchen and scurried off to put the teakettle on.

Bethleann offered Sir Andrew a chair and introduced him to Stephen Storke, all the while explaining about Georg's adventure with the Ball and Sir Andrew's role. She excused herself to take Sir Andrew's hat and cane to the vestibule. As she approached the front door, she thought she heard tapping. "My goodness," she exclaimed, "could it be more company?" She peered through the peephole but could see no one. She hung up the hat and cane and turned to leave when she heard the tapping again. She cracked the door a bit and looked around. She could not see anyone and started to close the door.

"Down here," called a voice. She looked down. There stood two birds, one with enormous red glasses.

"Well, hello. You must be Count Donald and Precisely," Bethleann reasoned. "I would know those glasses anywhere from Wellington's description."

The two birds nodded and chirped, "After Wellington left we remembered that we had a conference on the other side of Tomorrow, which is just beyond Today and a short distance from Here and here," proclaimed the Count, puffing himself up. "And so we decided to take Wellington up on his most generous offer and stop for a visit. "We bring our most favorite dessert, if you care to have a bite." Bethleann was quite certain the dessert would prove to be some type of seed cakes

of which she was not too fond, but not wanting to disappoint the birds, she nodded and took the package tied with bright string. "Do come in," she said, ushering them into the cottage. "We're just about to have tea."

She introduced the Count and Precisely to Stephen and Sir Andrew. Stephen was pleased to meet the recipients of his package and to truly learn that all had gone well with his substitute delivery plan. Bethleann left the group chatting and took the latest box of goodies to the kitchen. She found Wellington and Georg finished with tea preparations. All that was left to do was to bring on the guests.

Bethleann returned to the sitting room to escort the guests to the dining room where the boys had set out the tea fixings. In a wink, everyone was seated round the table chatting gaily, exchanging stories, and delving into the delightful desserts. The treats were being quickly passed around when suddenly Bethleann quipped, "Oh Precisely, we forgot your package." She hurried to the kitchen to get it. Back in the dining room, she stopped at the sideboard to undo the string. As she lifted the lid, she squealed with happiness. "Yippee, Precisely, I may not be of the Aves class but we are birds of a feather, nevertheless!" Precisely's treat was not seed cakes at all, but moist yummy mint brownies. "My favorite," smiled Bethleann as she put the brownies on a plate and placed it on the table near her seat. Precisely beamed.

In short order even crumbs would have been hard to find and the last tea drop had been drained from every cup. Then in friendly agreement, the entire group, with Wellington issuing jobs, made fast work of clean up. As the hour was now very late, the new friends bid farewell and promised to visit again soon.

"This has been some day," declared Wellington. "Absolutely the best Easter ever."

Recipes

Wellington's Lemon Pound Cake

3 cups of flour plus more for dusting
1 cup of softened butter
2½ cups of sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon of baking powder
¼ teaspoon of salt
8 ounces (1 cup) of vanilla yogurt
½ cup of milk
1 teaspoon each of vanilla and almond extracts
2 teaspoons of lemon extract
¼ cup of lemon juice
Small amount of confectioner's sugar

Preheat the oven to 325°.

Spray a 10-inch tube cake pan with vegetable coating. Then dust the pan well with flour, tapping off any excess.

In a large mixer bowl (it is best to use a stand mixer), beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy.

Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.

Add yogurt, milk, extracts, and mix well.

Mix in one cup of flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix well and then add the rest of the flour, one cup at a time.

Pour the batter into a prepared pan and bake in the preheated oven until cake tester comes out clean, about 1¼ to 1½ hours.

Let the cake stand in the pan for 10 minutes.

Gently loosen the cake from the pan sides. Invert onto a wire rack and let cool.

Place the cake onto a serving plate.

Drizzle the cake with lemon juice and sprinkle with confectioner's sugar.

Georg's Best Ever Chocolate Mousse

12 ounces of semi-sweet chocolate chips
2 whole eggs
4 egg yolks
4 egg whites
2 teaspoons of vanilla
2 cups of heavy cream
3 teaspoons of powdered sugar
Strawberries (optional)

Melt the chocolate chips in a double boiler. Remove the melted chocolate from the heat.

Separate the whites from the yolks of four eggs, putting the whites into a copper bowl or other good mixing bowl. Put the yolks into a large bowl.

Crack the two whole eggs and add them to the four yolks. Beat the whole eggs and yolks together with a fork or whisk. Add the melted chocolate to the yolks. Stir the mixture until all of it becomes the same color.

Beat the four egg whites with an electric mixer until stiff peaks form.

Gently fold the egg whites into the chocolate mixture.

Whip $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of heavy cream until it forms stiff peaks. Fold it into the chocolate mixture. Pour the mixture into individual serving dishes and refrigerate for at least two hours.

When the mousse is firm, whip the rest of the heavy cream, sugar and vanilla until it forms peaks.

Put the whipped cream on top of the mousse. Top each serving with a strawberry, if you wish.

Bethleann's Mint Brownies

1 cup of sugar
½ cup of softened butter
4 eggs
1 cup of flour
½ teaspoon of salt
1 can of chocolate syrup
1 teaspoon of vanilla

Preheat oven to 350°

Spray vegetable coating into a 13x9 pan.

Mix the ingredients together well and pour into the prepared pan.

Bake for 30 minutes, remove from the oven, and allow to cool completely.

2 cups of confectioner's sugar
2 teaspoons of peppermint extract
2 or 3 drops of peppermint oil (optional)
½ cup of softened butter
Several drops of green food coloring
A few drops of water if needed for spreadability

Mix together, spread on cooled brownies, and refrigerate.

1 cup of semi-sweet chocolate chips
6 tablespoons of butter

Melt the chips and butter together in a double boiler or on low in the microwave. Cool five minutes and then pour over chilled brownies. Refrigerate until set, then cut into squares and serve.