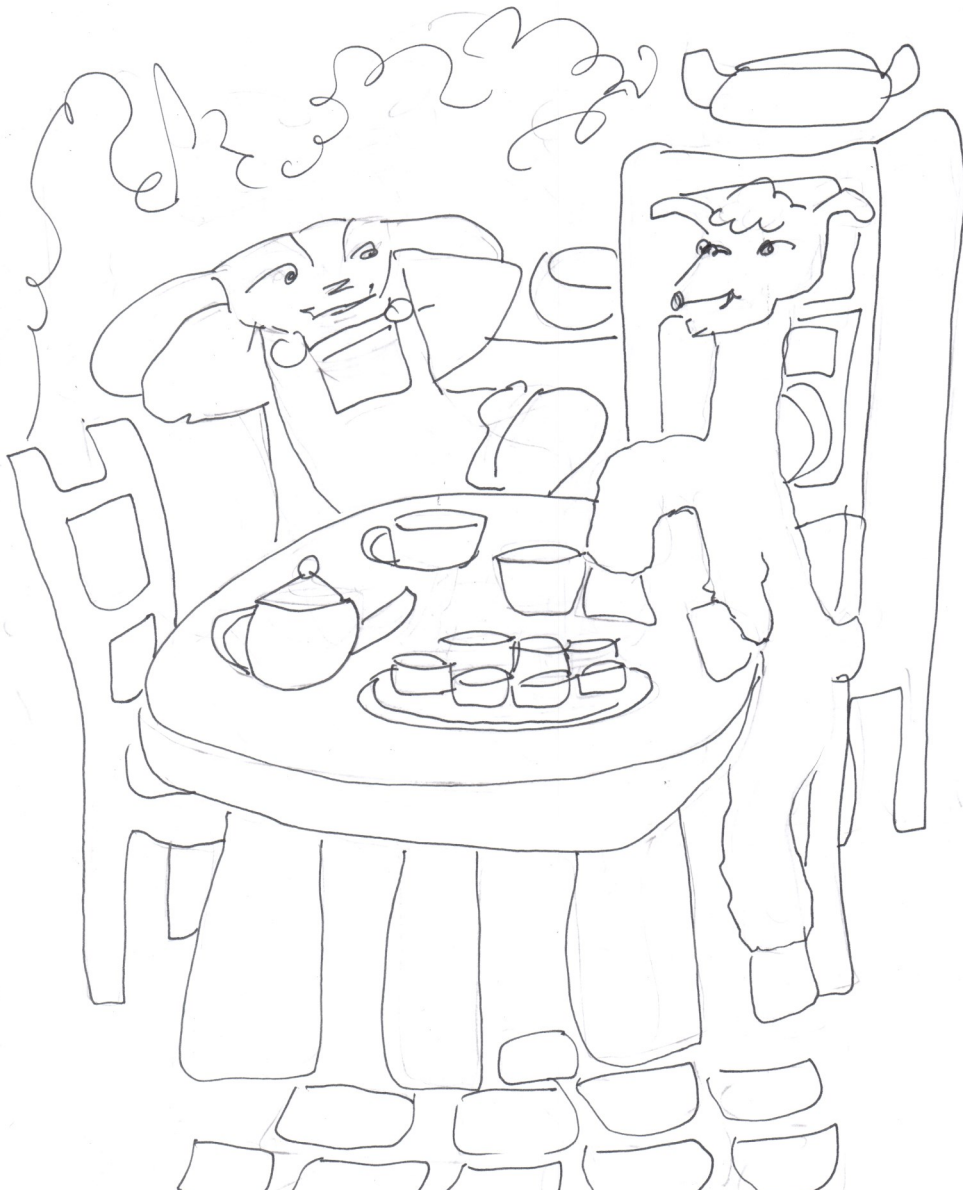


# WELLINGTON RABBIT

FIXING FIXES



Written and Illustrated by

Sandra Leigh Jett Ball

For grandson Felix Cullen Ball  
our beaming ray of sunshine

Titles set in Harrington Bold  
Text set in Goudy Old Style

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Published by Colington Press  
Post Office Box 250  
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948  
252-441-5351 800-723-3057  
sandraleigh@wellingtonrabbit.com

ISBN 978-1-952407-13-0

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## Foreword

Because a loving and gifted mother wanted to do something special for her children at Easter, Wellington and his friends came into existence. Other books for children have been created for similar reasons and have lived on to become classics and masterpieces, enriching the literature of the world. *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wind in the Willows* especially come to mind. This little book is ageless and has the same kind of magic.

Miriam Haynie  
Reedville, Virginia

## Preface

The story of Wellington Rabbit began as an Easter project for our five children. I decided to make a stuffed rabbit, complete with clothes and accessories, as a gift for each of them. Thus Wellington, his magical cape and haversack, with its never ending supply of colored eggs was born. As an explanation, I wrote a short note telling the origin of Wellington's name and of his talents. One paragraph became a page, and then two, and soon there was a book in progress. But, as good things sometimes do, it got left by the wayside and didn't get picked up again until the following Easter.

That Easter I made everyone an Uncle Wells rabbit for their collection, but as yet no one had seen the book or knew much at all about the story, myself included. Now you may find my lack of knowledge strange, but remember, even though my name appears on the title page, everyone knows that Wellington is the real author.

Another Easter came with Georg, the bear with magical powers, arriving on the scene. By now we were all getting anxious to know the whole story. It was time to finish the book. I worked on it now and again all that following year, and in a great blitz of creative energy finished in time to sew together small books for each Easter basket. There were even photos of Wellington, Uncle Wells and Georg.

Everyone loved the story, but being somewhat greedy, they all wanted more—illustrations, they begged. The reason I had not done any drawings was because I needed just the right setting for Wellington, and nothing seemed to fit. Then one day we were visiting my cousin, Miriam Haynie, a published author herself, and it dawned on me that her house was the missing piece. It was perfect for Wellington and Uncle Wells. She had an incredible collection of gifts and treasures accumulated through a lifetime of being creative and loved by family and friends. When I told her my idea she laughed and said that her house did have a sort of rabbitish feel to it.

Each illustration has 'Easter eggs' of its own. Family mementos, from Wellington's Oshkosh overalls that all the kids wore to Donny's favorite chair he brought from home when we married. Wellington sits in it as he learns his destiny.

Every book needs a good editor and this is where my soul mate and creative partner Donny shines. He sorted that first book into chapters and created a format for the books that followed. He polishes far into the night and then lets me have all the limelight. He is my kindred spirit and love of my life.

Once the first book became a reality I understood that more were needed to finish the tale, thirteen in all. Family members and friends became characters and as the grandchildren came along they became members of the team. After the final book was written another grand joined our family and I realized there was more to the story. Because, truth be told, a good story never really ends but continues from thread to thread. And in case you're wondering, Wellington gets his name from the gardening boots any sensible rabbit wears unless your name is Peter and you find yourself face-planting into one.



## Chapter 1

### More to the Story

Wellington woke up with a start. “Black Veil has turned into Black Evil and Easter is doomed!” He leapt out of bed pulling his overalls on backwards. “Oh drat,” he grumbled, switching them around the right way. “There’s no time to waste.” And then, breathing a sigh of relief, he sank back down into the bed. “This nightmare will be the death of me.”

Every night, or so it seemed, Wellington found himself in a recurring dream where Black Veil turned from bad to worse. A born mischief maker, he was not merely content to stir up trouble as Black Veil. He sought bigger fish. He evolved into Black Vile, causing massive disaster after disaster in his wake. And as if those two were not enough, the dreaded Black Evil appeared. This nastiest of rabbit devoured all the Easter candy and trashed every Easter basket. He even caused the wishflowers to wilt and die. In the nightmare, Wellington could not save anything. The world got darker and darker until he woke up and realized that it was all a horrible dream.

“This has to stop,” Wellington said with more conviction than he felt. He knew that Lewis the Legendary had successfully traveled through magic portals back to the birth of the little black bunny and tweaked things just enough so that he grew up to be known as Black Live, a very goodly rabbit. “But what if Lewis didn’t fix it all?” Wellington headed to the kitchen to make a pot of tea. “A lifetime can be a long time and Black Veil, I mean Black Live, might have slipped into evil ways.” Wellington did tend to overthink things. He knew that about himself.

But he did have a good point. Wellington was also very good at arguing with himself. “If only I knew how to find Black Live and have a look see without raising suspicion.” He took his tea outside to a small secluded patio that adjoined the kitchen. He loved this patio. He had made it with recycled bricks and planted forsythia around the edges. It grew into the most lovely privacy hedge. Here Wellington could view the world, but the world could not see him. It was perfect. He was friendly enough, everyone knew that, but he did love his quiet spot.

“You could go on a bound-about.” Wellington looked up to see a tiny llama poking his head around the corner of a forsythia that was overflowing with sunny yellow blooms.

Wellington was startled. “Hullo, who are you? And what do you know about bound-about?” Wellington could be curt, especially when he was troubled, and particularly when he was interrupted in his seclusion.

“My name is FeliX. I’m a llama. I like tea.” The llama looked Wellington up and down, “I like you.”

“Do I know you?” Wellington met a lot of folks on his many travels, too many to keep track of very well.

The little llama eyed the tea pot. “I like tea.” Wellington sighed. He really was not in a mood to entertain. “I like you.” FeliX’s big blues eyes met Wellington’s in a rather pleading manner.

Wellington started to say that he had no time for idle tea, but his manners would not let him be rude. “Would you like to join me?”

“Oh yes!” The llama strolled over to the table before Wellington could change his mind.

“So where did we meet, exactly?” Wellington reached for a cup and saucer in the outdoor cupboard he kept filled with clean dishes for a quick spot of tea with friends.

“Oh, we’ve never met,” the llama eyed the tiny tea cakes Wellington had added to his morning repast. “I like tea cakes.”

Wellington sighed. “Of course you do.” This morning was not going at all like he expected. “The lemon ones are the best. But they are all delightful. Bayside Bakery never misses. Help yourself.” Wellington poured the tea. He had brewed raspberry-ming. It was his beloved Uncle Wells’ favorite and his as well. It was very hard to come by. In fact, Wellington only had the stash Uncle Wells had left him when he faded to the WEB and it was dwindling at an alarming rate, even brewed sparingly. The shrubs that Uncle Wells tended so lovingly had simply faded when he did. Wellington suspected that Uncle Wells wanted to enjoy his favorite tea in the WEB, but at any rate the endless supply was gone just like that. And so, Wellington only brewed raspberry-ming when he was really out of sorts which seemed to be happening a lot lately.

It vexed Wellington that he was forced to share his delicious tea and his precious time. “If we have never met, why are you here?” he got straight to the point.

“I smelled your raspberry-ming tea,” the little llama said as he took a sip. “You brew a nice cup.” He nibbled a tea cake.

Wellington eyed the llama. “What do you know about raspberry-ming tea?” Nobody knew about raspberry-ming tea except Uncle Wells. And Wellington. And Georg. Okay only a few folks knew about raspberry-ming tea, but nobody knew where to get any more.

“It’s my favorite,” the llama took another sip. “You could enhance the flavor further if you...”

“Stop!” Wellington had enough. “You practically invite yourself to tea. And now you presume to tell me how to brew my tea better? Perhaps you should go.”

FeliX looked dejected. “I only want to help.”

“Sometimes less is more.” Wellington was not letting go of the fight he had started.

“I can get you some more raspberry-ming tea.”

Wellington took a breath. He took a sip of tea. A fresh supply of raspberry-ming tea? “Go on.” Maybe he had judged this little llama too hastily.

FeliX sipped his tea. He ate another tea cake. “Actually, I do know you. Or of you anyway. You are Wellington, the Easter Bunny.”

Wellington cleared his throat. “What does that have to do with anything? And why did you mislead me?” FeliX hesitated. He took another sip of tea and ate another tea cake.

Wellington went on, “You cannot get me raspberry-ming tea either, can you?”

“Oh, no sir. I can get you all the raspberry-ming tea you want. I really can. The shrubs grow like wild weeds in Lla Lla Land.” FeliX looked down. “I just wanted to go on a bound-about with you. Everyone says that you do them the best.”

Wellington drained his teacup. He did not know what to say. His ire had gotten the best of him, again. That bothersome nightmare had to go. “A bound-about? Why would you need me for a bound-about?”

“I don’t know anything about planning a bound-about. Everyone thinks I’m daft. Llamas



don't go on bound-abouts." FeliX charged ahead. "But I know I'd like one. I just know I would. Will you help me?"

Wellington looked at the little llama. He knew a thing or two about being told that he could not do something. It always caused him a terrible sinking feeling, that is until his fighting spirit took over and he rose to the challenge as best he could. He looked closer at the FeliX. Something was ever so slightly off. "You're not telling me everything. Exactly what is the rest of your story?"



## Chapter 2

### A Plan

FeliX began to cry. “I-I’m not like all the other llamas.”

“In what way?” Wellington poured more tea. The pot was getting low. He was relieved to know that FeliX could get him more. He leaned back in his chair. FeliX needed time to tell his tale. Wellington was good at waiting.

“I don’t like to spit. I like to be alone. I so want to go on endless bound-about all by myself.”

“Those don’t sound like problems.”

“If you’re a llama they are. Llamas are very social. They are always planning group activities. They even have spitting contests! I’m in a fix. If I act like I enjoy llama life, then I’m miserable. If I confess my true yearnings, they’ll all think I’m snobby and just don’t want to be social.”

“I see.” Wellington pondered everything that FeliX said. He was tempted to tell FeliX about his nightmare and how that was a real fix, but now did not seem like exactly the right time. So instead he said, “How about we go on that bound-about?”

“Really?” FeliX could not believe his ears. “Really? We can really go on a bound-about together? Just like that?”

Wellington smiled. FeliX might know some things about him but apparently he did not know how impulsive Wellington could be when his mind was made up. “Just like that.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“How about yes?” Wellington gathered up the dishes. “That is why you sought me out isn’t it?”

“I only hoped. And my family was giving me a hard time about finding my purpose in life.”

“Your family loves you or they would not care about your life so much.”

“I know they do. It’s just hard being so different.”

“Go home. Gather your things and meet me back here as soon as you can. I have a few things to tidy up before I can take off.”

“I don’t have any bound-about type things. What do I need?”

Wellington could see that this project was going to be all time consuming. “Do you have a haversack, or knapsack, or, you know, something to pack your food and gear in?”

“A saddle bag?”

“Perfect!”

“I don’t have one. Llamas can be beasts of burden but I never cared for it.” Wellington tried not to roll his eyes. He really did try but the eye roll just rolled out. “You think I hopeless.” Tears formed in FeliX’s eyes.

“No, no, no,” Wellington sighed. “Complications can be the spice of an adventure.” I have an extra haversack you could borrow. I just thought your own pack might be more

comfortable. But since you don't have one, try this on." While he was chatting, Wellington had begun rummaging in the bottom drawer of the patio cabinet. He held up a weathered looking pack.

FeliX took it and managed to hook one leg through but his back was too broad for the other leg to reach the adjoining strap. "This is hopeless."

Wellington saw that he was going to need to teach the young llama the art of perseverance. "And probably a whole lot more," he mused to himself.

"Maybe a bound-about is not a good idea." FeliX sat back on his haunches. "Or maybe, if you don't mind, we could make the straps fit me."

Wellington grinned. Maybe there was hope for this youngster after all. "Now that's the adventuring spirit. I knew you had it in you. Of course I don't mind. Follow me."

Wellington led FeliX to his study where a sturdy looking sewing machine sat at the ready in a corner. "Can you sew?"

FeliX puffed out his chest. "Snaps and buttons in a snap. I do need to use my handy dandy Snap-A-Lot machine since I don't have opposable thumbs, but I'm speedy."

"How about seams?"

He deflated a little. "Not very straight."

"That doesn't matter. Cut yourself some new straps from these canvas scraps and attach them to your pack."

"You mean your pack that I'm borrowing."

"I mean your pack. I'm giving it to you as a gift for your first bound-about."

FeliX hugged Wellington. "Thank you! I will cherish it always."

Wellington was embarrassed at how a secondhand gift could mean so much. He got a bit gruff. "Fix those straps now while I gather us some supplies."

He left FeliX singing a little ditty to himself as he busily measured and cut. "It's a bound-about life for me. Adventures abound for free..." floated down the hallway.

"That lad shows promise." Wellington was impressed with FeliX's clever use of a bound and abound. He hummed a little tune of his own. Wellington loved making up songs on the spot and skipped down the stairs to the beat.

"Well what do you think?" FeliX leapt into the kitchen just as Wellington finished organizing the supplies he had pulled together. The pile on the table was quite daunting. FeliX stopped in his hooves. "Do we need all of that?" His horror of being burdened down like a pack llama floated all too real before his eyes. Balancing The Load had been one of the classes he was all too glad to have completed. It was hard and he had not done very well. In fact, he had gotten failing marks with a stern notice from his instructor that he was one of the worse students ever to take the class. FeliX shivered.

"Too much?" Wellington gave the huge pile a once over. "I was not sure what you favored and so selected a lot of this and that."

FeliX shuddered. "Ummm...I do like to eat, but might we have opportunities to get things along the way?"

"We should, but one never knows. Still, we can thin this pile. Why don't you put what appeals to you into your pack and we'll see what's left. While you do that I'll just go get my

haversack.” Wellington scooted out of the room before FeliX could blink.

FeliX looked over the pile of staples. He really didn’t know much about cooking and camping. Actually, he didn’t know much about cooking at all. That subject was not on the Level One curriculum. He picked up a can. It felt heavy. He put it down. He picked up another can. It felt even heavier. He put it down. He picked up every can and jar and beeswax wrapped package on the table. They were all heavy. He finally put one jar, one can, and one wrapped package into his pack. He shifted the weight. It felt okay. He added a spoon and a canteen. He lifted the pack. It felt heavy but manageable. He added one more jar and one more can and two more packages that were the lightest. The pack was getting full. FeliX decided that he had plenty.

Wellington came back with his haversack. He surveyed the remaining goods scattered around the table. “Find something that works for you?” FeliX nodded. He had no idea what he had selected but he was not going to tell Wellington as much.

Without waiting for more details Wellington began stuffing things into his haversack at lightning speed. He put away the balance and turned to FeliX. “Tuck this into your pack.” He handed FeliX a small box.

FeliX opened the box. “What’s this?”

“It’s called a harmony harp. In some worlds they are called harmonicas. Since llamas are good at spitting, I thought this might be the thing for you. You blow into it.”

FeliX put the harmony harp to his lips. He blew. A note blasted out.

“That’s the ticket, but gentle breaths.” Wellington took his own harmony harp out of a pocket and played a tune.

FeliX was in awe. “You’re good.”

“Thank you. I’ve been practicing. Now you try a tune. Change notes like this.” Wellington demonstrated.

FeliX listened carefully. “I think I’ve got it.” He played a complicated arrangement.

“That’s quite good,” said Wellington. “You’re a natural.”

FeliX beamed and played another tune. Wellington joined in, playing harmony.

“We’re good!” the two chimed together as they finished. “Definitely beats spitting,” grinned FeliX.



## Chapter 3

### A Fine Fix

Wellington put his harmony harp back into his pocket, checked the buckles on his haversack and turned to FeliX. "Ready for adventure?"

FeliX grinned his biggest grin. "Yes sir!" He swung his pack onto his back with a jaunty swagger and tripped through the screen doorway. "Coming?" he teased.

Wellington was doing a last-minute check to be sure that he had banked the stove fire and that the icebox door was secure before he followed the llama. He pulled the door shut and locked it, putting the key under a big black stone frog that sat sentinel near the door. "You're not leaving me behind," he returned the tease.

By now it was late afternoon, but the days were long this time of year. There was still plenty of time before the shadows of twilight began their crawl across the landscape.

"Where are we going?" asked FeliX.

"Where would you like to go?"

"Everywhere."

"Well let's start with the dell over by Bertie's farm and see how much you actually like being on a bound-about." Wellington headed in that direction.

"Who's Bertie? What kind of farm does she have?"

"Bertie is a very good friend. She helped me out with a very tricky quest. She raises goats."

"What for?"

"I needed pollen from some very evasive bees. Bertie had just what I needed to get the pollen."

"Why does she raise goats? Can't they raise themselves?"

"Bertie makes the best goat cheese around. The goats love her. Since she is a bear, they get all the honey they can eat plus a great number of other tasty things Bertie grows in her garden just for them."

"Those goats do have it easy." FeliX sneezed.

"Are you catching a cold?"

"What's catching a cold? Is that a good thing? Do I need to run?"

Wellington rolled his eyes. This llama was sorely lacking in common knowledge in a lot of areas. "A cold is a sneezing germ that clogs up your head. Catching it merely means the bug got hold of you and moved in."

"Achoo!" FeliX sneezed yet again.

"What can I do?"

"Endure," said Wellington. "Bothersome pesky bug but it'll move on in a day or so."

"A day or so! I'll be dead by then."

"You will not. Colds are common. Maybe Bertie has something to ease your symptoms. Honey works wonders I've heard." Wellington pulled out his harmony harp and began warming up. He always loved how inhaling through the harp created one note while exhaling produced a

different note. Two for one!

FeliX took the cue. He reached for his harp and then realized something awful. He could not walk and play at the same time. Unlike Wellington, who only needed two paws unless he was in a mighty big hurry, FeliX needed all four hooves all for any kind of movement, fast or slow. He stopped.

Wellington was in the lead and did not notice that FeliX was not right behind him. He did notice there was no accompanying music. "Missing that harmony," he called back.

"I can't." FeliX's voice was small and dejected.

"Of course you can." Wellington still had not turned around.

"No, I really can't." FeliX sounded distant.

"Where are you? In a well? That's my domain. A well, get it?" Wellington was joking around.

"I need all of my hooves for walking. I can't walk and play at the same time."

Wellington hurried back to where FeliX was sitting on the ground looking very forlorn. He sat down beside the dejected llama. "This is a fine fix. But we'll fix this. Let me think."

Wellington thought and thought. Nothing came to mind. "I don't think that it's so fine," said FeliX bravely. "But I'll be fine. We can harmonize when we make camp."

Wellington was impressed with FeliX's optimism. Sometimes it was hard to press disappointment down and move on. "You are a good lad, FeliX. We'll solve this problem or my name's not Wellington Rabbit."

"Just how did you get the name Wellington?" asked FeliX. "It doesn't have much of a rabbit feel to it like Peter or Cottontail. I mean I like it and all that," FeliX rushed on, not wanting to offend his newest friend.

"It's a long story," said Wellington, getting up and resettling his haversack. "I'll tell you all about it while we look for a good place to make camp."

Wellington was not even half finished telling the tale of his titling and Uncle Wells, and finding Georg, and Easter when they came upon a lovely spot beside a little brook to pitch camp.

"What about that Black Live rabbit you were muttering about when I popped in? Is he part of the story?" FeliX watched as Wellington carefully cleared a spot to start their campfire.

"You heard me?"

"You were very vexed. It was hard not to hear you."

"Black Veil turned Black Vile turned Black Evil turned Black Live. It's too much for one responsible rabbit to deal with."

"That's a lot of turning. But why are you so worked up? Is he your brother?"

"Brother? Did you just ask if that, that vile evil thin veil of a rabbit is my brother?" Wellington got quite owl eyed.

"Well you do seem very concerned about his well-being."

"I am concerned," here Wellington paused for emphasis, "because his entire life goal was to thwart Easter. And only by the sheer genius of Lewis the Legendary did that fail."

"What did this Lewis dude do?"

"He's not a dude. He's a wizard. A very important wizard." Wellington gave FeliX the 'do not say a word' look. "Lewis went back in time and changed Black Veil to Black Live, a very



suitable name for doing good.”

“You mean Lewis just changed a name and everything else changed too?”

“In theory. No one has ever tested it.”

“So now you’re worried that the name change is not enough?”

“Something like that.” Wellington chewed his whiskers. “Lewis is very smart. His work is well, legendary, but still...”

“We need to find this rabbit and see what he’s up to now.”

“My thoughts exactly, but he knows my face too well.”

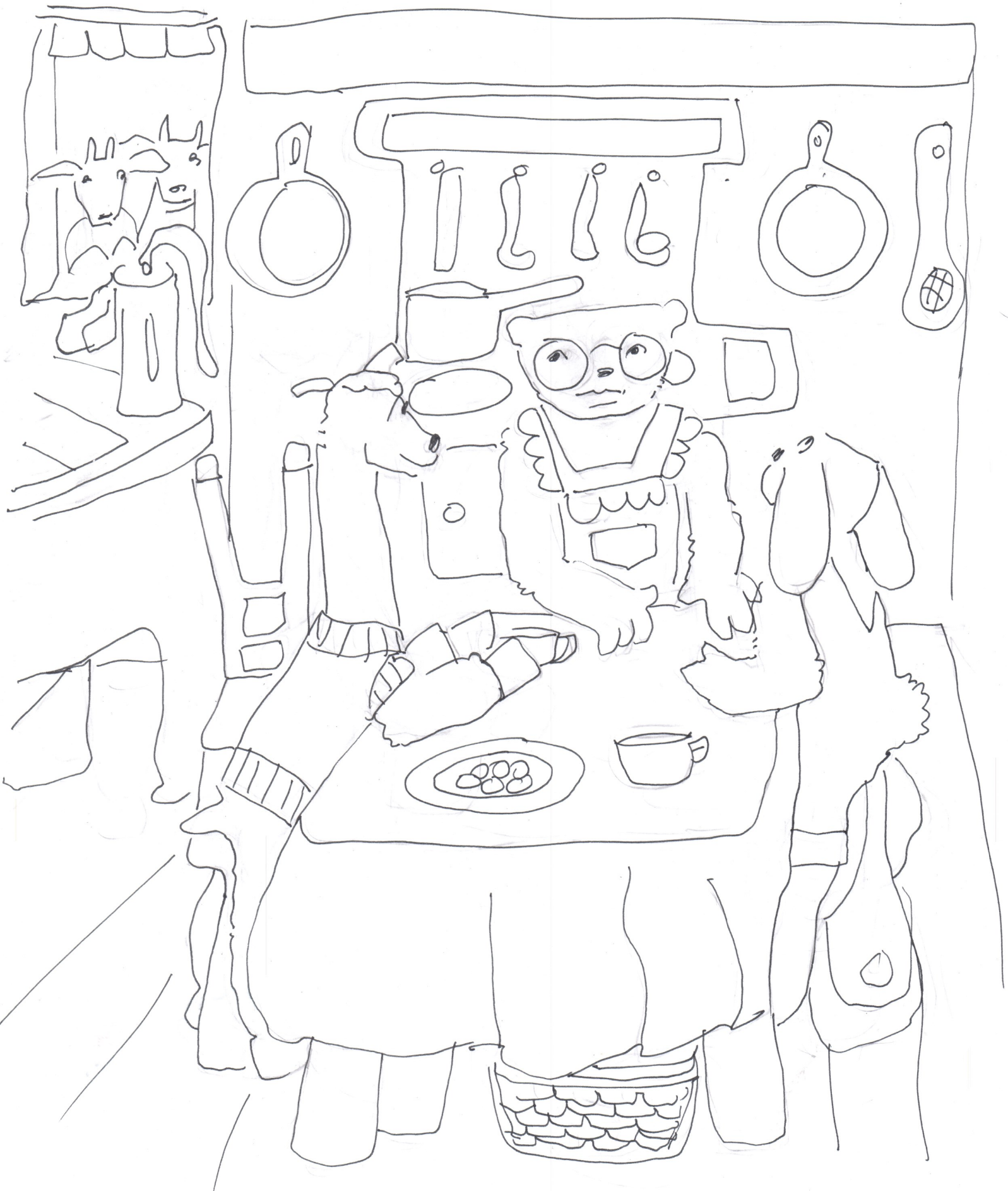
“He doesn’t know mine.” FeliX tapped his head. “That’s why you were so eager to take me on a bound-about. I fell right into your trap.”

Wellington gasped. Had he really set a trap for FeliX? He thought that he was doing the lad a good deed by offering to teach him about bound-about. “I-I did not think that at all.”

FeliX gave Wellington a hard stare. “It makes perfect sense. You’re having massive nightmares about this Black Live rabbit. I come along babbling about a bound-about. You seize the moment.”

Wellington didn’t respond. He lit the campfire and pulled dinner staples from his haversack. “Here,” he said changing the subject entirely. “Find a nice branch to attach this to and get us some dinner.” He handed FeliX a fishing line and hook.

FeliX shrugged and took the line. This was getting very complicated. And he still did not have a way to walk and play his harp.



## Chapter 4

### FeliX Meets Bertie

Neither friend got much sleep that night. By sunrise the next morning both were grumpy and hungry. FeliX had only caught a tiny fish that barely made a decent dinner.

“Look,” Wellington said as he stirred up the fire to make a pot of tea.

“I don’t want to look.” FeliX grumbled. “Or listen.” He turned his back on Wellington. Wellington sighed. “We could start over.”

FeliX swung around. “Go all the way back to your cottage and begin again? What good would that do?”

“No. It’s a term. It can mean literally start over or it can mean erase all the unhelpful things we said and begin again.”

“I never said anything unhelpful.” FeliX was not yielding.

“Well I did.”

FeliX waited. Wellington cleared his throat. “Maybe not in actual words but I pretty much implied that you were daft to think that I lured you on this trip with ulterior motives.”

“Didn’t you?”

“I do not know.” Wellington was being honest. He honestly did not know if he had grasped a straw and hung on to it or not.

FeliX figured that this was as good an apology as he was going to get, and truth be told, it was heartfelt. And he really did want to go on a bound-about. Maybe he was using Wellington for his own gain. “Alright, let’s do this start over thing.”

Wellington grinned and handed FeliX a mug of freshly brewed raspberry-ming tea. FeliX breathed in the aroma and already he felt better. “Maybe, maybe I was using you,” he said in a small voice.

“It doesn’t matter,” soothed Wellington. “We both have goals and we can help each other.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I don’t have a plan.”

FeliX sipped his tea.

Wellington drained his mug and began cleaning up their campsite. “First things first. We need to find a way for you to play your harp while we hike.”

FeliX liked that idea, “Do you have a plan for that?”

“Not a single idea. But Bertie might.” He raked the already smothered fire bed with a branch and then doused it with water from the brook. “Her homestead is not far from here.”

Quicker than the shake of a lamb’s tail the hikers were knocking on Bertie’s door. “This homestead is very pretty.” FeliX breathed in the fragrant air of a sea of beautiful blossoming trees. He figured that planting shrubs and flowers would be wasted energy on a goat farm, but the trees outdid themselves. “Stop that,” he spit at a goat that came too close to his pack.

Wellington knocked again. “Bertie, it’s Wellington. With a friend.”

The door flung open, "Wellington. You're a sight for sore eyes." Bertie had a big wooden spoon in her hand and an ample apron covered her body.

"What on earth, Bertie?"

"Making muh secret Honey DeLight recipe. You caught me midstream. Only opened the door cause 'twas you."

"We don't want to interrupt. We can come back."

"Stuff and nonsense. The sauce can bubble a bit. No harm done." She opened the door wider indicating that the travelers should come in.

"Tea?" Bertie didn't wait for a reply. She scurried to the stove, closed the damper ever so slightly and moved the simmering goodness away from the hottest part of the stove.

"What kind of stove is that?" said FeliX, watching in fascination.

"It's a wood burner just like my Granmammy had. She could rustle up some mighty fine eats. Even when ElecTricity came along Grandmammy preferred her wood burning cook stove." Bertie put a huge emphasis on the E and T.

"ElecTricity, such an unusual cadence to such a common word." FeliX felt right at home. He loved this quirky bear.

Wellington gave FeliX a 'whatever look' and changed the subject. "Bertie, you are so clever. FeliX needs help devising a system that will let him play his harmony harp while we hike."

Bertie looked at FeliX. "Need all those handsome hooves for trotting, eh?" said Bertie, putting her tea down. She pulled out her sewing basket from under the table and began rummaging around. "Nope." She dug deeper. "Nope." And deeper. "Nope." Finally she reached the bottom of the basket. "Nothing at all useful in here." She put it back under the table. Wellington and FeliX were beginning to have a sinking feeling that Bertie might not have a solution after all.

Then FeliX had a brainstorm. "Miss Bertie," he began. "Miss Bertie," he continued, suddenly becoming shy.

"Spit it out son."

FeliX stared at her. He sputtered, "I am a responsible llama. I do not spit unless provoked, seriously provoked."

Bertie looked at Wellington and pointing at FeliX, who was blinking and trying not to cry, mouthed, "Really? This kid doesn't know figures of speech?"

Wellington lifted his eyebrows in affirmation and for emphasis added a shoulder shrug.

"I mean tell me what's on yer mind, lad."

FeliX blinked away a tear. Bertie wasn't thinking him uncouth, was she? "The handle on your basket. It looks like it could fit around my neck."

"You want my sewing basket handle? That was my Grandmammy's too."

"Noooo," drew out FeliX not wanting to admit that is exactly what he was thinking. "Maybe you have a spare laying around."

"A spare handle? A spare sewing basket handle? Sure, I have a whole drawer full of 'em. Collect 'em. Like savings stamps."

"Savings stamps?" FeliX forgot all about the handle and Bertie's joking. "Why would you save stamps? Aren't they used up in package mailings?"

Bertie began to laugh. It was too much. This literal llama. “Savings stamps are special stamps you get when you shop. You put them in a book and when you have enough you get free things. Like a new sewing basket handle,” she winked at FeliX and pulled the sewing basket back out. Before he could protest, Bertie untied the straps holding one of the two handles in place. “Here,” she offered. “Let’s see how it fits.” She looped the handle around the neck of the llama.

“It’s perfect!” He could barely feel the wood on the nape of his neck. Wellington and Bertie helped tie the straps to the harmony harp. FeliX looked from one to the other. He was speechless.

“Try it out,” they said in unison.

He bent his head down. His lips reached the harp. He sucked in. Out came notes. He blew out. Different notes. He started dancing around the room on all fours, playing a snappy song, hooves free.

“I think he’s got it.” Wellington began playing harmony.

“By Jove you two are good.” Bertie was impressed. “Come back for the BurrBear festival. You can be our headliner!”

“Bertie, you’re the best!” FeliX gushed.

“Aw shucks,” Bertie blushed, “don’t tell anyone. Wouldn’t want to ruin my standoffish reputation. Now scoot on out of here you two before I change me mind.”

“Ah choo,” sneezed FeliX loudly. “So sorry Miss Bertie, it just slipped out.”

“Never mind that young’un. Take some of this with you.” She scurried to the stove and ladled out a measure of her secret Honey DeLight into a small jar. “This will snap that sneeze right out of you. Never known it to fail.”



## Chapter 5

### Red Phish, Blue Phish

Wellington and FeliX gathered their packs, put their mugs in the nearby sink, gave Bertie a quick hug and scrambled through the curious goats gathered near the door. “She just might change her mind,” cautioned Wellington as they hurried up the lane, “keep up the pace.”

FeliX obeyed and they were soon well out of sight of the goat farm. “Now where?” he quizzed the rabbit as they slowed to a more leisurely amble.

“Not a clue. Wellington pulled out his harp and started a tune.

FeliX was so happy to be able to join in. “One Fix, Two Fix, Red Fix, Blue Fix,” he sang making up a snappy ditty.

Then he tootled a long string of complicated notes. Wellington could barely keep up a good harmony. “That was some workout,” he breathed heavily as they blew the last notes in a long and extended finale. “Did you make that song up?” he asked as he sipped some water from his canteen.

“No. It’s the title of my favorite book. Well not exactly the exact title. I changed Fish to Fix since we seem to jump from one fix to the next, but otherwise, yep, my very favorite book.”

“Cannot say that I’ve ever heard of it. What’s it about?”

“Mostly nonsense rhymes about being different and how that it absolutely does not matter.”

“I like that theme.”

FeliX grinned. “Me too!”

“Help. Help. I’m in a fix!” a voice called out.

“See what I mean, just like that, another fix.”

Wellington drew himself up. “Sometimes we’re fixing fixes not in them.”

FeliX thought that was being generous but he let the subject rest.

“Help me,” and then, “please.”

“See,” continued Wellington. “Someone is in a fix and needs help fixing it.”

“And while we argue nothing is being done to do fix that.” FeliX countered. “But I give you points.”

Wellington was not sure what kind of tally was going on but he moved ahead, calling out “Where are you?”

“In the brook. Sort of, that is, I should be in it. But I’m beside it.”

FeliX and Wellington ran to the brook that meandered along the pathway sometimes close by enough that an amble over to get a drink and refill their canteens was easy and sometimes far enough away not to be seen.

FeliX almost tripped over a huge red fish floundering in the grasses and in distress for lack of air. “Help me, Wellington,” FeliX said as he began shoving the big fish toward the brook.

Wellington dropped his haversack and began tugging. Between the two of them they finally managed to get the fish into the water.

“Thank you,” exclaimed the fish.

“You were a fish out of water?” asked FeliX. “I’ve always wondered if I’d ever see one.”

Wellington inhaled and counted to ten. “Fish out of water means being uncomfortable in a situation.”

“He certainly was!”

“It is not a literal phrase. Fish do not flop themselves on the shore as a matter of course.”

“Why would you say fish out of water if you meant something else?”

Wellington did not have a good answer for that. “Idioms are like that,” was all he could offer.

“Help, help,” the still recovering fish yelped. The brook was weaving sideways faster than he could swim to keep up.

Wellington pulled a collapsible bucket from his haversack and held it open while Felix scooped up the fish and splashed in as much water as the bucket could hold. Just in the nick of time, because the brook had wandered completely out of sight.

“I wish I had a cool collapsible bucket.” Felix had a moment of envy. “Stop,” he chided himself and turned his attention to the fish. “How on earth do you manage to live in such an unstable environment?”

“It’s never happened before. Our brook used to be very well-behaved and wandered at a much more leisurely pace. Blue and I could always keep up.”

FeliX looked harder at the fish. “You’re red.”

“That’s me, Red Phish at your service.”

“I mean you are actually red.”

The fish looked puzzled. “Why yes, my name matches my color. My brother, who I hope is not in trouble but very well might be, is blue, and his name is Blue Phish. We help fishes in fixes. I never expected to be in one myself.”

FeliX muttered to himself. “Fixing fixes for fishes, of course.”

“We must act swiftly.” Wellington ignored FeliX and got straight to the point. “Was Blue with you when the brook wandered away the first time?”

“No, he was in our secret spot under a growth of tree roots that make an excellent hideaway. I had gone out for some exercise.”

“Is the spot far from here?”

“Not as the fish swims,” then Red paused, “do you suppose Blue is...” he couldn’t finish.

“Blue might be in a pocket of water,” soothed Wellington, “but we must hurry.”

Red pointed his fin in the direction they should take. “Come, come FeliX,” Wellington urged. “Whatever are you doing?”

FeliX was furiously digging, “I spied something that might be useful.” He stood up shaking dirt off a piece of cloth with a big X stitched from edge to edge.

“Why, that looks like one of Zach’s signal flags,” exclaimed Wellington. “He sometimes uses flags over his ears to send signals longer distances.”

“Who?” asked FeliX.

“Friend,” Wellington brushed off a longer explanation. Time was of the essence. “Put it in your pack and let’s go.”



“Roger that.” FeliX was all business.

“Nice find,” Wellington called over his shoulder, his ears flapping in the breeze he was stirring up at the fast pace he set.

“Thanks!” FeliX called back. He quickly passed Wellington. “Beat you!” Maybe there was a bit of competitive spirit in his llama bones after all.

“I do have a fish in tow,” reminded Wellington.

FeliX chuckled but slowed to keep Wellington’s pace.

Red tried not to slosh out of the bucket Wellington had secured to his haversack “Hold on Blue,” he called into the air. “Help is on the way!”



## Chapter 6

### The Blues

In short order the trio was at the tree root hideaway. There was a nice pocket of water remaining. The brook was nowhere to be seen. Nor was Blue.

“Blue, Blue, Blue,” Red sobbed. “Where are you? Please be okay.”

FeliX reached into the hideaway and pulled out a large flat leaf. It had a note on it formed with glittery scales using a mysterious goop for glue. He read, “CROATAN.” He turned the leaf over. There was nothing else. “What does that even mean?”

“Croatoan is part of a human mystery that I read about in a book,” offered Wellington. “When supply ships arrived at a settlement there were no humans around. The only clue was the word ‘Croatoan’ carved on a tree. No one was ever found to explain the mystery of the disappearance of their lost colony.”

“But this says CROATAN,” said FeliX, pointing out a possible flaw in the clue.

“Blue is a voracious reader but a miserable speller. It’s definitely a clue he left for me.” Red was confident.

“So mysterious disappearance. Mystery clue.” FeliX strained his mind. “What if it’s an anagram?”

“What’s an anagram?” asked Red.

“Rearranging letters to build another word or group of words using the same letters.” FeliX squinted his eyes closed and then popped them open. “I’ve got it Blue has been carted away in a carton!”

“And he didn’t want his fishnapper to see a real note, so he left this mixed up word clue,” Wellington was on board with this theory.

“Oh my goodness, Blue may be okay.” Red began to cry. Huge tears rolled down his scales.

“Now is not the time for crocodile tears,” said Wellington.

Crocodile tears?” FeliX’s eyes grew big. “I thought he was a fish.”

Wellington sighed. How quickly he forgot that FeliX was an idiom newbie. “We need to think.”

“I think I’m hungry,” said FeliX.

“How can you think of food at a time like this?” Red was flabbergasted.

“Our dinner was very small.” Just in time FeliX put two and two together. Mentioning that he had caught a tiny fish for dinner did not seem like such a good idea.

“Did you catch a fish?”

“Ummm. I think it was a crab. That’s right, a crab,” deflected FeliX.

“Crabs don’t live in fresh water,” Red countered. “I bet you caught a flounder. They are weird. They have funny eyes. Moving from one side of their body to the other. And they love to hide on the bottom just to be found. I will never understand a flounder. They think that being caught is a badge of honor. The ones that get caught and released brag on and on. And the ones that get caught and eaten are elevated to hallowed status. Weird fish. That’s all I gotta say.

Course now I myself do eat minnows. But they would hardly do for you.”

“Only flounder for us,” affirmed Wellington. “And minnows for you.” But before we can all have a snack, we have to find that brook.”

“Let’s get to it then,” said FeliX. “I’m so hungry.” He tucked the leaf into his pack and lifted his nose in the air. “I smell water this way. Follow me.”

The three companions headed in the direction FeliX indicated. Two anyway. Red was at the mercy of Wellington’s folding bucket.

“Not to be ungrateful or anything,” Red gurgled, “but this water is getting harder and harder to breath in.”

“You need a fresh supply along with that minnow,” Wellington acknowledged. “Hold on.” He wished, and not for the first time this day, that he knew a magic spell to ease Red’s discomfort. “What good is magic if you cannot help your fellow travelers?” he mumbled to himself.

“What did you say?” quizzed FeliX.

“I know all of these magic spells and none of them apply to the situation.”

“Maybe they do if you use them in a different way. You know, think outside the box.”

Wellington was all ears. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not sure,” confessed FeliX. “It just came to me. But maybe,” he said, “if, for example, you know how to make something float, the spell is also creating magic air as part of the spell. If true, then maybe you can redirect the air into the bucket.”

“I do know a minor floatation spell. Let’s see if I can recall it. Oh, wait. How could I forget. All of the spells are woven into my cape,” he carefully put Red down and began pulling things from his haversack. “Drat and cat whiskers, we left in such a rush I must have left it behind.”

“Never mind,” said FeliX.

Think,” urged Red and FeliX almost simultaneously.

Wellington pursed his lips and then began chanting. Soon a balloon appeared out of thin air, and immediately floated away.

“A start,” said FeliX positively.

Wellington was inspired by the support. He tried again. This time the balloon hovered ever so slightly before floating away.

“I have a plan,” said FeliX. He retrieved the rescued flag from his pack and spread it out on the ground. He gathered three corners in his mouth and held the fourth between his front hooves. A balloon appeared. FeliX lunged for it. He almost got it in the flag. But it slipped away.

Wellington sat down. This was tiring. He did not know how much more he could do without a break. But Red needed help. As did Blue. He rallied.

This time FeliX captured the balloon with the flag. But he could not move without risking it floating away. It was even trying to lift him into the air. Thankfully Wellington rushed over and took the balloon filled flag from the grateful llama before things got out of hand. “I simply must get opposable thumbs.” FeliX looked at his limited use hooves with disdain.

“Quick,” Wellington called out, struggling to stay on the ground.

FeliX grabbed his canteen and added the water to the bucket. He bit the balloon through

the flag. As magic air rushed out he collected most of it in the canteen and quickly snapped on the cap. "Success!"

Then Wellington did collapse. He was spent. "FeliX, can you put the air...." he fell asleep before he could finish his question.

FeliX knew what to do. He put the magic air-filled canteen under the water in the bucket and unsnapped the cap. The magic air bubbled into the water.

"Thank you," said Red as he breathed deeply and then began to float right out of the bucket.

It was a good thing FeliX was still close by. He pushed the fish back into the water and pulled the draw string edges that let the bucket also be a pouch together.

"That was close," said Red. All these setbacks. He was getting the blues and all he wanted was one blue, his brother Blue.

"I'll say," said FeliX.

He shook Wellington awake. "We need to go."

Wellington hopped up, much refreshed after his power nap. "I can call up balloons for us all to ride on."

"No thank you," said Red.

"We have had enough magic for one day," chimed in FeliX, explaining in detail exactly what had happened.

Wellington continued, undeterred, "What if we used your clever technique, FeliX, to somehow rescue Blue? Just float him away."

Wellington shook himself. Why was offering to fling magic charms around like those Mardi Gras beads he read about in a human book? He knew magic was to be used both carefully and sparingly. He was off kilter. Perhaps that black rabbit was upsetting the equilibrium of things?

"First we have to find him," said FeliX, bringing Wellington back to reality.

"We will."

"Could work."

"We can make him into a flying fish. Put a small hook in his mouth so we don't lose him altogether."

"You all are putting a lot of faith into your plan." Red did not want to get too hopeful.

"It's a solid plan," said FeliX. "What could possibly go wrong?"

"Right," agreed Wellington, "What could possibly go wrong?"



## Chapter 7

### We Meet Poppy Leigh

“First we need to find the brook,” said Wellington.

“And then a carton?” asked FeliX. He was having trouble following Wellington’s line of thought.

Wellington pondered the sequence. If Blue was in a carton, like FeliX suggested, he could be anywhere. Finding the brook could be counterproductive. But since the trouble started with the brook, perhaps finding it could provide some clues. “Brook first,” he declared. “Sniff it out, FeliX.” He was all business.

FeliX did not argue. “This way,” he indicated, and took off at a trot. They had not gone far when they heard singing. “Is that the brook babbling?” FeliX asked.

Wellington perked up his ears. “It sounds more like a girl than a brook.”

“What does a brook sound like then?”

“Gurgling and more brook-like.”

FeliX thought that description less than helpful, but before he could say so, a girl appeared in their path. “Who are you?” she demanded.

“Who are you?” returned FeliX.

“My name is Poppy Leigh. Who are you?”

Wellington viewed this feisty lass. “I am Wellington, and this is Felix. Red Phish is in my bucket.” He continued, “I have a good friend named Clara Leigh. Do you know her?”

“Of course I do. All Leighs belong to a lovely society named The Love Leighs. I have not seen lovely Clara in oh so long though. How is she?”

“She is quite fine. She lives near me with her best friend Marie Kelly.”

“I will visit them!” Poppy Leigh started to skip off but then stopped. “Where do you live?”

Wellington sensed a slight flightiness in the demeanor of Poppy Leigh. “In Willis Warren, not far away, just beyond Bertie’s Goat Farm.”

Poppy started to skip away again but stopped again, “Why exactly are you in my poppy fields?”

Wellington looked around. He didn’t see any red flowers. All he saw were pink blossoms that did not look like poppies. “Poppy fields?”

“You’re standing in the middle of one of my favorites. I have fields in bloom over there and there and there, too,” she swung her arms in every direction.

“What do you do with so many poppies?” asked FeliX.

“I make poppers.” Poppy beamed. “Calm poppers, love poppers, sleep poppers.”

“With poppies?” Wellington had questions. “I thought popping poppy poppers was a very bad habit.”

“You’ve been reading too many of those human books.” Poppy Leigh was defensive. “My poppy poppers are not habit forming. It’s the special uniqueness of the pink poppy.”

“Wellington!” FeliX jumped up and down excitedly. “We could possibly use one of

Poppy's poppers to help make our real mission successful."

"What is your mission?" Poppy Leigh was rather curious.

"We have several," pronounced FeliX. "We are fixers of fixes.

Wellington explained about their current mission helping Red to find Blue. And solve the problem of the off-course brook.

"I know where the brook is. I can take you there. But we need to hurry. It has been acting very strangely lately. Moving hither and yon at lightning speed, not at all like its usual meander type wandering."

"Quick, lead the way!" FeliX pranced back and forth, anxious to get started.

Poppy Leigh took off. She was fast. Taken by surprise the guys were barely able to keep up. It was a good thing Red was secure in his laced-up bucket.

"I see it," shouted Poppy Leigh, waving her arms at the lagging behind duo. "It's getting ready to hop the fence."

"How can you tell?"

"It's got that look."

Wellington did not know what that look was, but he trusted Poppy Leigh. He ran faster.

They arrived at the brook just as it was about to jump away. Wellington now saw what Poppy Leigh was talking about. The water was agitated. Tiny whirlpools were everywhere. "Stop!" he called out to the brook.

"I can't help myself," wailed the brook. "Help me."

Wellington was dumbfounded trying to figure out how they could stop the brook from wandering. "How?" he shouted.

"Throw all of the rocks that you can find into me," whirled the brook. "Fast!" It was beginning to rise out of its sandy bottomed bed.

FeliX was already tossing and kicking and nudging rocks with his nose and all four of his hooves. He had not waited to hear the call. He figured that extra weight could not hurt.

Wellington joined in. He and Poppy Leigh rolled a mighty rock down a slope just as a whirlpool formed a tiny waterspout. The rock squashed it flat. "Nice work, Poppy Leigh. We are a great team." Wellington was relieved to be staunching the strange flow of the brook.

They found more boulders and splashed them into the water. The brook breathed a watery sigh of relief. The whirlpools were settling down. "Thank you," gurgled the much-relieved brook.

"What happened to you?" asked Wellington.

"I do not know. I was just babbling along, wandering just a bit here and there in my usual casual lifestyle when suddenly I was compelled to jerk this way and that. And as if that wasn't enough, my bed began shoving me out of bed."

"Whatever can this mean?" asked FeliX.

"Bad magic," steamed Wellington. "It has to be that black rabbit."

"You mean Black Live?"

"I'm afraid so."

"So, I guess Lewis the Legendary didn't fix things after all."

"We don't know that," said Wellington, not wanting to believe that Lewis had failed. "We



need to find that rabbit and see what's up."

"Will he turn into, you know, those other forms you told me about?" FeliX avoided saying the names.

Wellington did not want to speak the names either. "I certainly hope not. But we can leave nothing to chance."

"What can we do?"

"I am not at all sure what the best course to take is."

"I'm good at courses," said the brook. "If you ride on me you can swiftly get to that rabbit."

"What's your name, brook?" asked Poppy Leigh. She found the conversation boring and was busy building a sandcastle on the sandy shore of the brook. "Babble?"

"B Rook," the brook babbled. "Babble is so common."

FeliX laughed "I like your name. It's anagram just like our Blue clue."

"That's not an anagram," said Poppy Leigh. "Anagrams are words made remixing the letters. B Rook just pulled them apart."

FeliX was let down. He thought he had anagrams all figured out.

"Boo who," Poppy Leigh changed the subject.

FeliX handed her a tissue. "Don't be sad. We'll fix B Rook."

"I'm not sad," said Poppy Leigh, looking at the tissue quizzically. "Boo who?"

"Ohhh," FeliX got it. "Not Boo, Blue. He's Red's brother. He got carried away in a carton. At least we think that is what happened."



## Chapter 8

### Khaun the Leprechaun

At the mention of Blue, Red began thrashing about in his bucket. Wellington opened the laces a tiny bit. He did not want Red, who was filled with magic air, to float away. But the air seemed to have lost its magic. Red's body did not pop up. "What about Blue?"

"We need a raft." Poppy Leigh began gathering sticks and vines, focused completely on finding the source causing her new friend B Rook's angst.

"Can you magic us one?" FeliX asked Wellington.

"The less magic used the better," returned Wellington, suddenly being very possessive of his magic capabilities. Weird," he shivered. "I must be near the aura of that black rabbit and it's affecting my magic sensibilities."

"What about Blue?" Red persisted.

"We have not forgotten Blue," Wellington assured Red. "If we can find the source of this magic that is enchanting B Rook, I am almost certain the mystery of Blue will be solved as well." Wellington said this with more confidence than he felt, but he wanted to ease Red's anxiety and it was just possible that he might be right.

"I could tow your raft and you would get there faster," volunteered Red.

"That could work," said Wellington gratefully.

"We've almost got enough to put a small raft together." Poppy Leigh added another branch to the growing pile. "I'll get started while you get a few more vines," she directed FeliX.

"I'll help here." Wellington unloaded his haversack careful to set Red upright. He began lining sticks of the same size side by side. Poppy Leigh started weaving them together with vines she had already collected.

She had used the last one when FeliX appeared with a fresh supply.

"Thanks. FeliX. I think that should do it." Poppy Leigh twisted the new vines into place and stood up. "There."

They shoved the raft to the edge of B Rook. "I can swim," said FeliX. If I pull the raft Red can lead the way."

Wellington liked that plan even more. He took the bucket into the shallow water and untied two lashes. "Follow the lead of B Rook and take us to your brother," he upturned the bucket into B Rook.

Red splashed into the water, glad to be out of the confined bucket. He was grateful for the ride and air supply, but open spaces were wonderful.

With the last of the vines Poppy Leigh fashioned a harness for FeliX and put it on him.

He stepped into B Rook and waited while Wellington and Poppy Leigh floated the raft and boarded. Wellington picked up the trailing vines on the harness, "Let's go!"

FeliX walked out to a deeper part of B Rook and waited for Red to signal which way to go. Red could feel B Rook's current close to the bottom. He rose to the surface and splashed his tail and shouted, "I've got it. This is the way."

They were off. Things were going very smoothly when suddenly B Rook started bucking with whirlpools forming all around. "Oh no," cried Poppy Leigh. "He needs stabilizing. Quick, FeliX, pull us to shore."

FeliX did his best but B Rook was stirring up quite a bit of trouble. By the time FeliX reached sure footing the brook was frantic with whirlpools.

Wellington leapt from the boat. Poppy Leigh was dead on his heels. FeliX could manage the boat. They began throwing rocks and boulders into the water as fast as they could. Their efforts managed to settle B Rook down but not before the raft escaped the futile attempts of FeliX to keep it near shore.

"I'm sorry," wailed FeliX. "I so need opposable thumbs."

"I'm not sure they could have helped," consoled Wellington. "That enchantment is a wicked one."

B Rook looked bedraggled. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault." Poppy Leigh watched the raft drift out of sight. "You were a good raft! Safe travels," she called.

"Did I hear the word raft? Anyone need a life raft?" A sing song voice rang out, "Got one to sell. Cheap."

Wellington's head jerked up. "Is that you Lance?" he asked hopefully.

Name's Khaun. Lance is my cousin twice removed. But not far enough removed if you ask me. He's nothing but trouble," an emerald green leprechaun stepped out of the green grasses. "Got anything to trade? Gold was mighty slim this year."

"Nice *crochóga*." Poppy Leigh pointed to Khaun's rainbow colored suspenders.

Khaun was dumbstruck. Who was this girl who knew such a fine Irish word as *crochóga*? "Thank you," he bowed. "At your service, *bean óg*. What do you have that might interest me?"

"I've got poppers."

"Poppers?" the leprechaun danced a jig. "That does sound interesting. Tell me more."

"My pink poppy poppers are safe and soothing. They create a magic mood like no other."

"We could work a trade," Khaun approached the girl. "What's your offer?"

Poppy Leigh thought for a moment, "Eleven poppers for a raft."

"How do I know you'll keep your word?"

"How do I know your raft is any good?"

"Trust," Wellington interjected.

"Do you have a sample for me to try?"

Poppy reached for her pouch but Wellington stayed her hand. "We don't have time for this."

"Guess you don't need that raft so much after all." Khaun turned to leave. "Those poppers sound suspicious anyway. And really, why would anyone want to be in a good mood?" he started to scamper through the grasses.

"Wait," called Wellington. "Take the sample but be quick about making up your mind if we have a deal or not. Time's a'wasting."

"Here." While Wellington was talking Poppy had approached the stalled leprechaun with

a huge beautiful pink popper gleaming in her hand. "Enjoy your dreams."

Khaun greedily took the popper and popped it into his mouth. Almost instantly his body began to sway and sink. "Ummm. Nice. Raft's over...."

Wellington stared at the cagey girl. "What did you just do?"

"Oh, sort of gave him my special double dose popper," she smirked. "He'll be asleep in a lovely dream world for hours."

"And awake none the worse?" Wellington did not want any more trouble.

"None the worse, even with a double dose."

"I found the life raft," yelped FeliX. He was concerned that Khaun was all talk and had begun looking around while the others negotiated. "That leprechaun might be a rascal, but his offer was real."

"And I'm honoring my end of the bargain," Poppy Leigh said as she tucked an envelope holding eleven poppers into Khaun's gold sack. She noticed that the leprechaun was not conning them about his gold. The sack was almost empty.



## Chapter 9

### So Close

While the shore team had been negotiating with the leprechaun, Red had busied himself collecting information from fish as they swam by him in the brook. "It's not far now!" he was happy to report to the crew as they launched the life raft.

"What makes you so sure?" asked FeliX, skepticism in his voice. He was having trouble with the life raft. It was round in shape and spun this way and that, refusing to cooperate. "Too good to be true," he grouched. They were making some progress, but with all the unhelpful swirling and twirling, it was causing Wellington and Poppy to be dizzy and disoriented.

"My fish friends have word that the strange behavior of B Rook stops at the waterfall."

"How would your friends know this?" said Poppy, holding her head in her hands.

"A bird flying by accidentally dropped a fish that he had caught below the falls right on top of a meeting the Above the Falls fish were having, discussing what to do about B Rook's quirks and jerks."

"How close are the falls?" Wellington sputtered, trying not to be seasick.

"Not far," said Red as he did an impressive flip jump clearing the water and delivering the news at the same time.

"We must be ready," Wellington cautioned. "FeliX, start pulling us closer to the shore."

FeliX was still having trouble with the stubborn raft but he managed to get a bit closer to the shoreline. He could hear the roar of the falls. He pulled harder.

Poppy Leigh was a good swimmer and the crazy twisting of the raft was making her sicker and sicker. She leapt into the cold water and began swimming for shore. She could see why B Rook, even enchanted, could not budge this part of his path. It was full of rocks and water rushing so fast that upending the bed would be impossible. She reached the shore exhausted and thankfully no longer dizzy. But the sight that greeted her eyes was enough to make her throw up. The raft was going over the falls!

"Noooo!" she cried. "My friends will be tossed to shreds." She started to cry. Mucus ran down her nose and dripped onto her jumpsuit with its beautifully stitched name, joining the tears already there. "Whatever can I do?"

"Get up and get going." Khaun was standing over her, tissue in hand. "Some dream state you put me in tricky girl."

"I'm sorry," sniffled Poppy.

"Not so fast girlie. I didn't say it was a bad thing. I think we can do great business together." Khaun could envision the cash flow now.

"Not those poppers. They are for very special occasions only."

"Right. Which is why we'll charge a goodly sum for them."

"Later, leprechaun." Poppy was already tired of this exchange. "Do you think that my friends survived the falls?"

"Possible. Only one way to find out."

Poppy stood up, wiped her nose with Khaun's tissue, dried her eyes and said, "Lead on."

Khaun looked at her. He wanted to continue talking about their future business partnership. "Did all of your poppers get ruined in the brook?"

"I said later, leprechaun." Poppy was beginning to think this guy was too green around the gills to know when to stop. She was not so sure that doing business with him would be a wise decision anyway. "Do you know the way or don't you?"

Khaun gave up, for now. "At your service." He took off through the brush on what was a barely perceptible path. As annoying as he was, Poppy was glad for Khaun's expertise.

While they walked Poppy told Khaun about the wild brook and Wellington's theory.

"A rogue rabbit, you say?" Khaun scratched his head. "Seems that I've heard rumors about such a vagabond."

Poppy was excited. "What have you heard?"

"Not a lot," Khaun was prone to exaggeration but when pinned down got closer to the truth. "Just that some black rabbit was working on a project and needed volunteers."

"What if we volunteer?"

"Why would we do that?"

"My new friends were on a quest and if I can help them I will." Poppy was fired up.

"Maybe we should find your friends first?" Khaun had his doubts about volunteering.

"You brought it up."

"I was offering information about the black rabbit. Not about actually volunteering."

"I suppose you're right. Safety in numbers and all of that."

They ploughed in silence through the downhill underbrush until the terrain leveled out. Poppy began calling out, "Wellington. FeliX. Red. Anyone. Tell me you're okay."

"Hullo! Hullo!" Khaun joined in. He wanted this adventure over so that he could start a popper supply business with Poppy.

Poppy pushed through the brush to the edge of the brook. "B Rook, do you know what happened to the raft and my friends?"

"I'm not B Rook," glubbed the brook. "I'm Be Yond. You know, like beyond the falls, get it? I have not seen a raft. I did see a carton a few days ago. It floated ashore down there." He made a wake of waves pointing to a spit of sand downstream.

Poppy Leigh followed the waves. "Is that?" she got excited. "It looks like," she began running. "Wellington! FeliX! You made it over the falls."

FeliX and Wellington were busy inspecting a cardboard box when they heard a familiar shout and their names called out. Wellington could not believe his ears. "Poppy Leigh, is that you?"

"Oh, Wellington. FeliX." Poppy Leigh was sputtering, "I thought you were lost forever."

"I fear our raft is," said FeliX. "It crashed into a bazillion pieces."

"We owe our salvation to Red." Wellington praised the fish. "He snagged a vine from the raft when it floated by and told us to hang on."

"We were in such a whirlpool at the bottom of the falls." FeliX shuddered to think about it. "But Red, Red he kept his head and saved us."

Red was circling nearby in Be Yond and heard all the accolades. "It was nothing guys." But



I sure wish you could deliver the same kind of good news about the carton.”

“What about the carton?” Poppy Leigh looked from one to the other.

“It proved to be a dud. Just a carton. No Blue. Never was.” Red could hardly get the words out.

“How do you know?”

“Because Blue sheds scales worse than any dog sheds fur. And they are glittery. There’d be evidence in the carton and there is not a shred.”

“Why are you so sure that you’d find Blue in a carton anyway?” asked Poppy Leigh. She had not heard the entire story.

FeliX explained how he found a leaf in the hideaway of Red and Blue with the word CROATAN on it. And how they all thought it an anagram clue to trick Blue’s captor.

“But why a carton?”

“Because he’d need water to breathe.” Red did not want to think about any captor, not caring if Blue had air or not. That was just too much misery to consider.

“Sounds more like a con rat to me,” said Poppy Leigh. “I’m very good at anagrams.” She turned to look at Khaun, hands on her hips. “Well?”



## Chapter 10

### A Final Fix

“I’m waiting, leprechaun.”

Khaun shuffled his feet. He was especially good at lying. But only if he was driving the narrative. That girl was in charge. He was in trouble.

“I’m going to give you one more chance to come clean and then, well, you don’t want to know the ‘and then’. But trust me, it’s more than even you and all your wiles will be able to handle.”

Khaun realized that he was outmatched. “He wanted volunteers.”

“So.”

“I wasn’t interested in going first. Then I saw that glittery fish and I seized my opportunity.”

“What. Did. You. Do. With. My. Brother?” Red screamed, jumping out of the water and snapping his teeth before diving back in with a huge splash in Khaun’s direction.

The leprechaun was soaked through and through but he never flinched. “He’s—he’s fine.”

“How would you know that?”

“I don’t,” Khaun’s voice was small. “But the notice said Volunteers Needed. Good Pay. Why would you offer pay if you were going to off your volunteers?”

“Because, dimwit, then you don’t have to pay them.” FeliX was exasperated at the level of competence lacking in this leprechaun. “I’m dumb and even I know that.”

“You’re not dumb,” Wellington encouraged the llama. “You just are not very worldly. But we’re fixing that.”

“We’re fixing a lot of things. Good fixes and not so good fixes.”

Wellington turned to Poppy Leigh. “Tell me what’s going on, please.”

“This rat of a leprechaun volunteered Red’s brother to that black rabbit for some kind of whatever.” She approached the leprechaun. “What was the volunteering all about? And don’t say that you don’t know because I know you too well already to believe that.”

“Word is he discovered that he could do magic and wanted to try some things. I honestly don’t know any more than that.”

“Magic? Uncontrolled magic! That rabbit is mad. He could harm others, not to mention himself. We have to stop him.” Wellington was livid.

“How are we going to do that?” asked Poppy Leigh.

“I have a thought.” FeliX held up a hoof. “You are good at anagrams, Poppy Leigh. Fix his name.”

“Lewis the Legendary did that when he went back in time, remember?” said Wellington, saddened that FeliX did not have a cleverer idea.

“Yes, but suppose he doesn’t like his new name so much?” FeliX held firm to his idea. “It’s very close to being like those other ones, easy to slip back into. Lewis was on the right track. We just need to change it more.”

“What’s the name?” asked Poppy Leigh.

“Lewis turned the letters around to name him Live, Black Live.”

“Since no one wants or dares to say the other names he went by I am going to assume they were somewhat similar to Black Live.”

“Yes, just the letters rearranged, toward the darker and darker side.”

“FeliX is right. Change it up more.”

“What have you got in mind?” FeliX was curious.

“Ummm...Cavel Bilk?” Poppy was a bit unsure of that one herself.

“No,” the entire team affirmed.

“B Lake Liv,” you know B for bunny live by the lake.”

“That’s really a stretch.” Wellington felt this line of reasoning was going nowhere fast.

“Okay, this is the one.” Poppy cleared her throat. She looked around. She hesitated. She really wanted them to like it.

“Spit it out,” FeliX clamped his hooves over his mouth. “I did not mean to say that. I did not. I absolutely did not.”

Poppy winked at him. “B Like Calv(in).” She waited. She was so proud of her idea. Nobody said a word. “Well?”

“B Like Calv(in)? What does that even mean?”

“Wait. What? You don’t know Calvin and Hobbes? Tell me you’re joking. Everybody but everybody knows Calvin and Hobbes. It’s perfect for our mischievous rabbit. Calvin gets into innocent mischief. Sometimes Hobbes helps but together they have fun and nobody gets hurt.”

It was growing on Wellington. “But what about (in)? Those letters are not part of his letter history.”

“They’re in parentheses. In parentheses, get it?” Nobody laughed. “Anyway, technically they don’t count.”

“Are you sure?”

“Sure enough to give it a go.”

“How is this going to work?” Wellington was very curious.

“Khaun owes us,” she glared at the leprechaun, daring him to say a word to the contrary. “He can take one of my poppers as a gift to this rabbit.”

“And when he pops it, we switch his name around.”

“And rescue Blue!”

Wellington was elated. “This could work!”

Not knowing how Black Live was containing Blue, the team outfitted Khaun with Wellington’s bucket filled with water that they enhanced with magic air for good measure.

“Best we stay behind,” cautioned Wellington, even though every member wanted to be close to the action. “If there are guards around, a gang could look suspicious.”

“I’m not staying behind,” said Red. “There may be other fish. The leprechaun might not be able to identify Blue.”

“He can identify himself.”

“That’ll take too long.” Red dove into the refilled bucket and Wellington tightened the laces.

“How are you going to do the name changing?” Poppy Leigh pointed to Wellington.

“I was thinking of a remote change about?” Wellington was a bit unsure himself.

“Too risky.”

“Very well, we’ll all creep closer but stay far enough back from Khaun and Red.”

Khaun was not exactly sure where the encampment was but he figured that if he followed the ‘Volunteers Needed’ signs posted around he’d stumble on it. He headed toward the last sign he had seen. The gang followed but not too closely.

“Who goes there?” a huge black rabbit stomped out from behind a big tree.

“Just me. Khaun the leprechaun, looking for Mr Black.”

“I’m Mr Black. What are you doing in my woods?”

“I want to volunteer,” the words stuck in Khaun’s throat, but he managed to get them out. “And I have a gift for you too.”

“A gift?”

“Yes, it’s a very special popper. I stole it from a silly girl.” The team was back a ways but close enough to hear. Poppy gasped at being called silly, never mind the stealing lie.

“Stole it? You are very clever. I could use you on my team.”

“You don’t want me. But you do want this popper. Took a dream trip myself with one.”

“Just how many did you steal?”

Khaun thought quickly. “Two. I needed to be sure you’d like it before I gave you one.”

While Khaun had Black Live engaged, the team was busy. Wellington brushed up on the Switcharoo Make It New spell. FeliX and Poppy Leigh stealthily entered the camp and found Blue circling anxiously in a fishbowl.

“Blue,” whispered Poppy Leigh. “We’re here to rescue you. Jump in.” She opened the water-filled pouch that Khaun set aside when he started chatting with Black Live. Blue did not know who these people were, but they knew Red, and that was enough for him. He leapt and landed right on top of a surprised Red. They both began to cry with joy.

Just then Poppy Leigh heard FeliX shout. “Run!” She took off. One glance back told her FeliX had the situation well in hand. He was spitting. He spit and he spat. He did double spits and super flying spits. The guards didn’t stand a chance. They turned tail and ran.

“Guess you fixed them.” Poppy Leigh was so proud of the young llama.

“Spitting does come in handy sometimes.” FeliX grinned. They had a lot to tell Wellington, who at that moment was madly waving his wand and invoking the spell over a slumbering black rabbit soon to be B Like Calv(in).

“Tell me later,” Wellington said with a final flip of his wand. He could see success in their eyes, and he wanted to hear every detail over a cup of tea. “I think a little more magic today has been well earned.” With a wave of his wand he cited the Return to Sender spell and Red and Blue were suddenly swimming in a becalmed B Rook near their tree root hideaway. Poppy Leigh and Khaun found themselves discussing business in her favorite poppy field. And Wellington and FeliX were once again in the garden at Willis Way with fresh raspberry-ming tea on the table.

“I’m so hungry,” said FeliX as he ate three lemon tea cakes in one gulp.

## Epilogue

"Wellington has a lot of explaining to do is all I've got to say." Bethleann spoke in a pouting tone.

"Now Bethie, maybe he had good reasons." Georg tried to sooth his beautiful bride and mother to his adorable Sebastian. Georg's words were more bravado than not. He too was hurt that Wellington had gone on a highly important mission without them, or even telling them. After all, they were the team, the Easter team.

"What was he thinking?" Bethleann voiced exactly what was on Georg's mind.

"Let's just get ready for this party. As soon as we can we'll quiz him to get some answers. This second guessing is driving both of us crazy."

"You're right. Here, put this pink bow over there." Bethleann and Georg were busily decorating for a party that Clara Leigh was throwing for The Love Leighs. "Funny that Clara Leigh never mentioned anything about The Love Leighs before now. Sounds like a lovely group.

Georg laughed, "that's my gal, never missing an opportunity for a good chuckle."

"Well, they really do sound lovely for real. I think the letter Clara Leigh got last week from a Poppy Leigh inspired her. She immediately called up her cousin Anderson Leigh and together they started plotting."

"And here we are hosting a party."

"At which we'll pin Wellington down for every single detail."

"Agreed!"



## The Story of the Other Wellington

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, or pilings as they are called around the Outer Banks of North Carolina where we live. He seemed rather tame and we did not want any harm to come to him, so we found a box and persuaded him to enter it. We were cautious because we knew rabbits could bite. We had two cats, and so pondered what to do with him (we were supposing it was a him). He behaved so politely, not the biting sort at all.

We called our mail lady, who had lovely pens for her pet rabbits, hoping that she would take him. Joan came right over. One look and she said that he was too tame to be wild and must be one of several she had seen around the neighborhood. She figured that their owner had grown 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 has 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. There was no leash law, so dogs roamed freely. Our lost bunny hopped his way from several streets over and around a nice sized pond to our home, located on one of those peninsula cul-de-sacs. Already amazing!

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.

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 had 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. We had a good-bye party. We kept up, Wellington sent Easter cards. Then one Easter a choked up Joan called to say Wellington was very sick and she was worried about his dignity of life. He had broken his hip and it was not healing well. The cast he had to wear was tiring. Just as she reached a heavy decision, Wellington got better. Joan immediately cancelled the appointment. Wellington gave Joan and Walt three more months of love and devotion before he crossed the Rainbow Bridge on July 24, 2003.

I sent an email to Joan asking what she recalled about Wellington's beginning and this is what she replied. "I know that he had been running around the Harbour for at least two years before he made it to your house. I would see Wellington and his three friends around the Shipley's house and give them cookies almost everyday. The four had disappeared shortly before you found Wellington and I heard that someone had caught two of the bunnies. I don't know what happened to the other one....I'm guessing it wasn't good. I sometimes wonder if there are any little Wellington 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 grandbunnies eating people's gardens. Take care and God Bless you all....Joan."

And that is the story of the Other Wellington.



