Bunny Stampede
The Book



Written by Kai and Dan Moeller

-Prologue-

Billy Carlson was trying the impossible. On that very sunny day in mid-August, he was looking to go viral. He was attempting to do a double backflip on his backyard trampoline. Landing the double backflip wasn't the goal although it would've been nice; what he really wanted was to get two to three million views on NicNac in the next couple of days.

"Are you sure it has to be a *double* backflip?" asked Prisha as she held out Billy's phone to record.

"Yeah, why don't you improve your regular backflip a bit more before trying a double?" added Amar who seemed more nervous than Prisha. Julian, ever the quiet one, nodded in agreement watching Billy get on the trampoline.

Billy moved the conversation along without hesitation. "Prisha, could you move the camera a tad that way?" he said as he pointed to the left.

"Come on man! Be reasonable. I don't want to have to take my bus seat buddy to the ER tonight," said Amar. Julian looked from Amar to Billy while nodding his head again.

"Start recording," was Billy's only reply as he jumped higher and higher on the trampoline.

Meanwhile, William Wadsworth-McGee was taking his pet rabbit Hector out for their weekly stroll. For any normal person, the idea of taking a rabbit for a walk would seem preposterous, slow, and would likely involve some strange bunny harness. Not for William though. Every Tuesday

morning, he brought Hector around the neighborhood still in his cage. To William, Hector was a delicate and agreeable creature that needed a well-balanced schedule full of enrichment and exercise.

To Hector the rabbit, these walks in the hot sun being rattled around in his metal cage were the opposite of fun. In fact, Hector was a grouchy homebody. All he wanted was to lie down at home and eat - poop - sleep - repeat. Additionally, he did not like being paraded around the neighborhood watching all the anxious and vocal dogs jumping up and down. You see, Hector was a jealous individual. If any pet was the loudest or most athletic in the neighborhood it should've been him.

It was at this very moment that Hector saw a boy's body appearing over the fence again and again. Such height! Such grace! And such ease! A mixture of jealousy and rage gradually built up in Hector's otherwise docile body until his soul was saturated with a fire that couldn't be extinguished. He pounded his little claw fist on his water dish, overturning it.

"Uh oh, it looks like little Hector Chubb Chubbs accidentally spilled his sparkling water," said William in his babiest of baby talk. William pulled out an emergency bottle of sparkling water from his fanny pack and began opening the cage door.

Hector's rage accumulated into his strong little bunny legs until they reached a critical mass. And then it happened: an event that would be excitedly talked about for ages to come. Hector's fury propelled him straight through the cage wire at mach speed towards the jumping boy's neck 20 feet away. Aside from the screech emanating from Hector's body, the only audible sound was that of William screaming, "HECTOR, NOOOOO!"

Even years later, Billy wasn't sure what first clued him in to something being off. Was it his double backflip instantaneously becoming a triple sideflip? Was it his blood-speckled glasses? Or was it the searing pain in his neck? What he did know was that when he came to, he was staring with fuzzy vision up at a large hole in the trampoline netting. He heard his name a few times before blacking out again.

After Hector the rabbit landed on the ground and rolled a few times, he escaped under the fence never to be seen by William again. In person, that is.

-Chapter One-
“Hector’s Recruit”

Hector had been running all day. He didn’t know where his legs were taking him and he only started to slow when dusk hit. He flopped down face first on a patch of moss in a suburban backyard. *What had happened? One moment he was out for a walk with William, and the next he was shooting through the air like a cruise missile and biting a kid in the neck.*

His chest was heaving. Oh how easy he had it, living a posh life eating three square meals a day. But now, it all suddenly seemed hard, torturous even. Sleep started to creep up on him.

But something was not quite right. He heard light footfalls approaching in the grass. Hector quickly stood up and turned to see a fox standing before him. Hector tensed up.

“What are you doing all alone out here, little bunny?” the fox said. Hector remained motionless. This was the last thing he wanted to deal with. He began summoning the last ounce of strength in his body.

“Not much of a talker, eh?” the fox chuckled.

Hector sprinted forward and rammed the fox right in the chest. The fox yelped and backed away too stunned to defend itself.

“This isn’t worth it,” the fox muttered before bounding over the fence and disappearing into the woods. Hector collapsed back to the ground and exhaled through his nose.

“Wh…what did I just witness exactly?” a new voice rang out from the corner of the yard. Hector saw a rabbit peering out from a hutch. “You just scared away Drake–the biggest, baddest predator this side of the woods,”

said the new rabbit. “Teach me your ways. Teach me to be strong and brave like you!”

Hector groaned. “Look at you man. You’re all locked up. Of course you can’t be brave.” Hector dragged his tired body over to the hutch and opened the latch. “But I see a bit of myself in you. Especially myself from this morning.”

The rabbit exited the cage and dropped to the ground. “I’m not a man, by the way. The name’s Strawberry. I’ve been living in cages since the pet store,” said Strawberry. “What’s your story?”

Hector looked at Strawberry. “Honestly, I don’t think I can quite explain it. It was like a switch flipped this morning and I’ve been running from my past ever since. But I’m so tired...”

“How can I learn to be bold like you? You’re like a hero! You’re the coolest rabbit I’ve ever seen. Maybe even the coolest animal!”

Hector groaned again, licking his paws, his tired head sagging. “Less talk, more sleep.” He swatted at her, scratching her left shoulder.

“Youch! What was that for?” Strawberry asked, trying to lick at her wound.

Hector opened one eye. “Oh, sorry,” he said. “Hey! You want to be strong and brave and now you have some street cred with those cuts.” An idea was forming inside his mind. He lifted his head. “You know what? My whole life I’ve been eating pellets and pooping out something *darn close* to pellets as well. It’s really no way to live. Something needs to change.”

“I think you’re right! But right now we just need to leave this place. Especially because the dog will be out any minute.”

They both decided to find a safe place past the fence to sleep for the night.

Little did Hector know, scratching Strawberry would set off a chain of events leading to what some would call The Great Bunny Stampede.

-Chapter Two-
“Going Viral”

“But you got the video, right?” asked Billy from the hospital bed. “Did you post it to NicNac?”

Prisha gave Billy’s phone back to him, and said, “The thing about the video is…”

“You mean it went viral?” Billy shouted trying to sit up. “Oww, my neck!” Billy tenderly felt the bandages.

“Umm,” started Prisha looking out the door, “Let's back up a bit.”

Billy pulled up the last video on his newly cracked phone screen and pressed play. Prisha leaned in to watch. They saw Billy jumping higher and higher on the trampoline. Then there was a bang and a screech while the video somersaulted and went black. “HECTOR, NOOOOO!” someone screamed while the sound of footsteps passed the microphone.

“It was the craziest thing,” Prisha said. “Pure chaos.” She explained to Billy the flying rabbit that bit him in the neck. “And the screech came from nowhere. That's why I dropped your phone. It was scary.”

Billy didn't know what to say. It was definitely not the kind of story he was expecting.

“Oh, have you seen the news, Billy?” Prisha suddenly asked.

“No, why?” Billy picked up his phone and opened the news app. “Ladies underwear shortage?” he said, reading the first headline. “Due to large waves off the coast of Spain, a large cargo ship lost nearly half of its containers holding almost exclusively women’s undergarments.” Billy

looked at Prisha. “Is this about the time I found my moms underwear in my soccer bag? I told you it was a mix up with the laundry.”

“No you idiot, scroll down to the live feed,” Prisha said. “Your story is all over the news!”

Billy clicked on the live video and they both watched.

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“And here we are at the scene of the mysterious pet shop break-in at the corner of East 26th Street and Old Stump Road. Allegedly, countless animals, primarily rabbits, have gotten loose through a hole in the pet shop wall. I have here Roger Snoltzfist, the owner of Grab N Go Pet Shop. Roger, explain for our audience what exactly transpired here.”

The man stared blankly at the camera.

“Roger, uh, you OK?” asked the reporter.

“Well, it was about 6:30 or so when I was closing up the shop and I heard a loud rumbling outside. It reminded me of my time in the Korean War when tanks rolled by our station late at night. You know, I was selling bunnies left and right at the time. Just like I am here today! So come on down to Grab N Go Pet Shop at the corner of…”

“Thank you, Roger,” cut in the reporter, smiling uncomfortably, “Tell us about the property damage you sustained.”

“Right. Well, I heard the rumbling as I was just saying and I ran outside and wouldn’t you know it, there was a big explosion all loud-like. I ran around and saw a big gaping hole in the side of my beloved Grab N Go Pet Shop right here on East 26th Street and it reminded me of the explosive deals we have here at the Grab N Go Pet Shop where you can get three-for-one hamsters on Wednesdays.”

“Alright Roger, thank you.” said the reporter. “Exactly how many animals are missing?”

“I reckon one small snake, two zebrafish, a badger, a racoon, and 37 bunnies.”

“A badger, a racoon, and 37 rabbits?” asked the reporter. “A badger? Wha…why so many rabbits? Let's start there.”

“Yeah, well, they’re just so cute and cuddly and honestly they were the first animal to show me what it means to appreciate the life the good lord gave me when I first got out of the Korean War and was homeless living in the park and I would just watch those darn cute little bunnies hopping around, prancing, dancing, and well, one thing I always wondered was how come those little fellers poop out little pellets and eat pellets. It just ain’t right. I never figured it out.”

“How…touching,” commented the reporter.

“Yeah well, that’s the kind of question we can explore together if you enroll in my three-week Pet Rabbit Owner Accelerator course for $99.99. So come on down…”

“Alright, Roger. Thank you for your time. Well, back to you Dave!” said the reporter.

“Thanks, Walter. Strange, really.” replied Dave in the studio before pausing and pressing his fingers to his ear. “This just in… we have a live interview with the boy attacked by a rabbit earlier this week.”

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Billy looked up from his phone as his friends Julian and Amar rushed into the room.

“Yo buddy! How you doing?” said Julian. “You ready to go viral?”

Billy wasn't sure if he was more surprised by the question or the fact that quiet Julian was talking at all. Suddenly, a news crew entered the room with a bright light and a boom mic aimed at Billy.

The reporter started, "I'm here live with Billy Carlson, son of Mayor candidate Joseph Carlson. Billy was attacked by what appeared to be a rabid rabbit. Billy, how are you feeling?"

Billy looked down at his phone in disbelief. He looked up at the camera and a devious smile spread across his face. He sat up straight and said, "Well, the doctor says I have a concussion in my neck so it's pretty bad. Like I could have died, I think."

"Astounding. Where did this rabbit come from?" asked the reporter.

"Well, I heard a screech in the video we recorded but we didn't get any footage. I think rabbits are apex predators or something and maybe this one got all cranky because I was being loud doing double flips on my trampoline in my backyard. Double flips are pretty easy for me." Billy's eyes met with Prisha's and he saw that she, Julian, and Amar were all expressing disappointment in different ways.

"Interesting, I'm not quite sure rabbits are predators, but it seemed like this one was angry for some reason. Has rabies been ruled out? And how long until you get out of the hospital?"

A nurse swept into the room, "Alright, everyone out. This patient needs his rest."

"Alright, you heard it here first on CB3 Action News, I'm Laura Clark. Back to you Dave." Laura turned off her mic and dropped a business card on Billy's bedside table. "Call me if you remember anything else."

Billy, too overwhelmed to respond, nodded and turned his attention to the live feed on his phone as everyone exited the room.

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“Thanks Laura. Lots of rabbits in the news today. Maybe there’s a rabbit rebellion in the works. Heh. Well, that’ll be it for the 12 O’clock news. I’m Dave Davidson wishing you a happy hump day!” The news anchor began shuffling some papers. “God, must be a slow news day. Who the heck cares about this crap?”

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Then, the live feed stopped.

-Chapter Three-
“The Meeting”

Hector and his crew were on the way back from the pet store when he pulled Strawberry aside.

“Come with me,” he whispered.

“Where? Ooh, is this something romantic?” she asked, following him. “I love surprises.”

“Oh boy,” he replied. “No. This way, please.”

After a few silent minutes Strawberry asked, “Are we heading back to my old yard?”

“Yeah, in fact this is around the same time of day that I rescued you.”

“So?” asked Strawberry.

“You’ll see,” said Hector. “Just trust me, OK?” He slipped under the fence and hopped into Strawberry’s old hutch. In a high pitched voice, Hector said, “Oh I’m so lonely out here.”

Strawberry giggled behind the fence. “Careful,” she warned, “The dog will be out soon.”

He replied in the same voice, “Oh no, whatever shall I do?”

Suddenly the back door opened and a large mutt rushed out barking. The dog traced the perimeter of the backyard intermittently sniffing and yapping toward the treeline. Soon it approached the rabbit hutch.

“Oh look, it's the stupid bunny again. You ran away but came crawling back, huh?” said the dog.

At that moment Hector burst out of the hutch at top speed and headbutted the dog in the shoulder. The dog's front leg gave out and it collapsed to the side.

"What the–" exclaimed the dog.

"Stupid dog!" yelled Hector over his shoulder as he dashed under the fence. "Later, sucker!"

Strawberry and Hector laughed most of the way back to the other rabbits.

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At the hideout, the crew was milling in anticipation of the big meeting. The hideout was actually an old, abandoned tool shed in the middle of the woods. Rakes stood against one wall and crates were stacked against another. Hector looked around. He was still amazed by the amount of bunnies they had amassed. The last roll call had documented 46 in attendance but it seemed that the numbers were steadily growing. Most bunked here at the hideout at night where they slept in baskets, crates, nests of foraged leaves and grasses, or just on the floor in a big bunny heap. But right now, everyone was facing forward trying to get the best vantage of the stage–which was actually just an overturned wooden crate. One small, yet serious bunny was even balancing at the top of a rake.

Hector cut through the rabbits as a hush fell over the crowd. Strawberry followed close behind. Hector reached out and touched the scratch marks on each rabbit's left shoulder with ceremonial grace. Some of them winced in pain. Hector then mounted the stage and silently looked over the crowd.

"Speech! Speech!" the rabbits began chanting. Hector smiled and looked toward Strawberry just below the stage.

“Eight days ago, I attacked a boy on a trampoline. It was a wild turn of events for me. Man, I was enraged. I’d never felt called to enact any sort of change up to this point in my life. But why do humans feel a need to jump higher than us, and be better than us?”

There were murmurs in the crowd.

Hector continued, “I was being reactive. Now I'm grounded and I have a better perspective. You know, I have more energy than I ever had before. Maybe I'm just antsy for change. I know some of you are feeling this way too. We're in this together,” he said, patting his paw on his shoulder.

The crowd started cheering. Hector motioned with his paws to quiet them down.

“But let's look at some of the things we have accomplished so far. Together we’ve freed seven neighborhood bunnies from substandard living conditions. Also, thanks to Strawberry’s intel, we were able to target the pet shop and break out an additional 37 comrades. Funny enough, they were already training to attempt their own jailbreak.”

Someone from the crowd shouted, “Great minds think alike!” There were some cheers and some laughs.

“Ahh yes, thank you.” replied Hector. “Also, our food gathering efforts are working but we need to think bigger. I’m not sure how just yet.” Hector scratched his neck. “Finally, what we’ve accomplished is unity. We have a bond. We have a purpose now.”

“We’re stronger together!” Strawberry yelled out. More cheers were heard.

“Yes, Strawberry, I like that. Stronger together.” replied Hector. “I brought you all here to inspire you and to put our heads together. I’m only one rabbit and we are many.” The crowd roared in applause and whistles.

Hector went on, “We need to continue our search for other captive rabbits. And the pet shop operation was certainly a victory, but it almost went south. We need to tighten up.”

A rabbit from the audience yelled out, “Blue Team Leader Lucky here. Sorry about the botched operation. I know it was supposed to be in-and-out. The trash can was the only way to get on the roof. As we were dragging it closer, it got caught on something and fell on one of our crew…who happened to drop the grenade we found earlier in the hideout. Won’t happen again. Sorry, sir.”

“Lucky, I told you we don’t need teams yet. We barely have one team. Literally, it was me, you, and five other bunnies. I was the one that dropped the grenade, for Pete's sake. But thank you for briefing everyone.”

Lucky stood at attention.

Hector sighed. “At ease, soldier.”

Lucky relaxed his stance and his smile beamed.

Hector went on, “There are a lot of moving parts and we're still learning. The good news is that everyone is still with us. I *am* worried about the attention, though. To comment further, we have Poplar here.”

A tortoiseshell rabbit clambered up onto the stage and stumbled on an uneven piece of wood. Some of the crowd snickered.

“Thank you, Hector. I believe training will become a necessity here. Many of us are weak. Some of us are uncoordinated…as you just saw. We need to train our bodies to minimize injuries and we need to train our minds to stay mentally prepared. Overall, stealth would be a great advantage. Especially with humans on high alert at the moment. If any of you are interested in becoming a training leader, please see me after the meeting. Training starts at midday tomorrow.”

Hector returned to center stage as Poplar retreated. “Thank you, Poplar. Insightful as always.” He broke off, bringing his paws together. “Humans. You know, they think they’re smarter than us. But how come we’ve been doing nothing but outsmarting them recently? I have a proposal. A big one. There’s a Fly Zone nearby. It's an indoor trampoline park about four miles away. I always saw commercials for it back at my owner’s house. I say we raid this place. For one thing, there’s food there. Two, I’m sure they have separate rooms full of human sit-pots. You know, flush once and you have a fresh, endless supply of drinking water. Three, it would make a nice training facility as we continue to grow our numbers. And finally, you know I have a thing against trampolines, right?.”

There were a few laughs from the audience.

“I have a counter proposal,” shouted the small but serious rabbit atop the rake handle. “There’s a carrot factory west of here. It has carrots, of course. That’s food. Sit-pots, too.” He shuddered. “And it’s a large space for anything we need as long as we can fortify it. Finally, they make *baby carrots* there.”

“Comrade Brownie, what’s wrong with baby carrots?” asked Hector. "They're just the right size for our bunny mouths and bunny bellies.”

Brownie replied through gritted teeth, “They’re ground down from normal-sized carrots.” He continued, “And they make carrot juice from all the waste.” He shuddered.

The crowd made unpleasant sounds and disgusted faces.

One rabbit, drinking from a carton, said, “Mmm, can't get enough of this sweet carrot juice.”

The crowd all faced him. “Dude!” said a nearby rabbit knocking the carton out of his paws. The juice splattered against the wall. Everyone turned back to the small bunny on the rake.

“As I was saying, it’s a clear goal that might work better. What’s bad is that it’s twice as far and that’s going to be hard on my delicate little toe beans,” Brownie said as he looked at his front paw pads.

The crowd laughed.

“Hmm. That makes sense. Let’s you and I hash this out further,” Hector said, nodding at Brownie. “As for now, that’s all everyone needs to know. The meeting is adjourned. Oh, we also have some refreshments outside. Don’t worry it’s not carrot juice.”

After everyone filtered out of the meeting hall, one rabbit stayed behind to lick the liquid dripping from the wall.

-Chapter Four-
“The Sleepover”

William was so confused. He had no idea how Hector blasted out of the cage or jumped so far or why he was so aggressive when never having displayed any similar behaviors before. These possibilities definitely weren’t covered in the Pet Rabbit Owner Accelerator course he was taking at the local pet shop.

William remembered running into Billy’s backyard the day of the incident, still holding the cage. He watched as Billy’s friends tried to wake Billy up. He frantically knocked on the door to Billy’s house to tell his mom to call 911, and then waited for the ambulance huddled next to Prisha, Amar, and Julian. Even after Billy was loaded into the back of the ambulance, they were all still too stunned to leave the yard. They kept recounting the events and then pausing for long stretches of silence.

William felt responsible most of all. He visited Billy in the hospital several times and was even there the day Billy woke up. Billy enjoyed the company and as it turned out, they had a lot in common. They both liked graphic novels, Hungry Hungry Hippos, and the banana milkshakes the hospital served. Billy seemed happy enough to engage in a few lengthy games of Risk when William brought it. William enjoyed listening to all of Billy’s wild adventures with a mixture of awe, surprise, and sometimes disgust–especially about the time Billy licked a port-a-potty seat and didn’t even manage to record it. Billy was a bit of an odd kid but still likable and his heart was in the right place.

A week after Billy was released from the hospital, they planned a sleepover at Billy's house. William had begged his mom to let him go but she was cautious because this would have been William's first ever sleepover. On top of that, Billy was still going to be wearing his neck brace.

When Billy answered the door, William held up the cage and said, "This is what I was telling you about. Crazy, right?"

"How is that even possible?" asked Billy

"I know right?" said William.

The cage had a large hole where the wire was blackened and bent outwards. After close inspection, they headed upstairs to Billy's room and got settled.

"How's your neck doing?" asked William.

"Ehh, it's ok. I'm still taking the pain medicine. And sleeping hasn't been the best. But oh well. YOLO, am I right?" replied Billy.

"Hey Billy and Willy, the pizza's here!" Billy's mom announced from downstairs. "Do you want me to bring up a few slices?"

"Yes, please," shouted Billy. "Hah, it's almost like we have the same name… Billy and Willy."

"You're joking, right? You know they both come from William, right?" William stared hard at Billy trying to confirm a baseline of understanding.

"What do you mean?" asked Billy. "Ooh, pizza!" he said as his mom came in with two plates of pizza.

"In a few minutes we're heading out. *Another* dinner with some of your dad's *friends*," explained his mother fixing her hair. "Keep an eye on your sister, please. And, as always, call us if you need anything. Willy, you have our phone numbers too, right?"

“Yep, they’re saved in my phone!” replied William. He welcomed the interruption and decided not to broach the topic of their shared names again.

Afterwards, the boys finished eating and played several rounds of Hungry Hungry Hippos before realizing the noise was keeping Billy’s sister awake and worse, wanting to play. Later, two and a half hours deep into a game of Risk, William brought up the news interview with Roger Snoltzfist.

“That guy is hilarious,” said Billy.

“Well, yeah, but he’s the foremost rabbit expert in the Northeast. I'm actually enrolled in his Accelerator course but it’s on pause because of the pet shop repairs.”

“Has that guy ever talked about bunnies shooting out of cages before?” asked Billy.

“No, that was so wildly abnormal.”

As if this conversation itself had summoned a rabbit, they heard a shrill squeaking coming from outside. Billy and William looked at each other with wide eyes. Then a loud crash was heard. The boys ran to the window, Billy holding the back of his neck and wincing.

“My sister's rabbit hutch!” yelled Billy. “Woah, that’s a lot of rabbits!”

The boys darted out of the room.

“What’s going on?” yelled Billy’s sister sleepily through her door.

“St…stay in your room!” replied Billy as they ran down the steps.

They made their way through the dining room towards the back door but stopped when they spotted rabbits *in* the house. The rabbits were stealing vegetables from the fridge vegetable drawer one at a time and exiting through an open window. Each rabbit was carrying a rib of celery, a carrot, or a few leaves of cabbage. As crazy as it sounded, it all seemed to

be organized and directed by a tiny, squeaking rabbit perched on the counter.

“What?!” croaked William.

The rabbits froze. The tiny rabbit on the counter piped out a string of violent squeaks and they all began bolting to the window.

“What the hell…” said Billy under his breath.

Too confused to act, the boys watched as the small rabbit base jumped off the counter and somehow caught onto the ear of the last escaping rabbit. The larger rabbit vaulted through the open window with its head pulled to the left side from the weight of the small rabbit. The small one squealed as it audibly slammed into the windowsill and, still clinging on, flung out of sight.

The boys ran out into the backyard to grasp at any understanding of the past few minutes.

As they watched the last few rabbits scramble under the fence, Billy said, “There are way too many weird rabbit things going on. This is definitely not a coincidence.”

Headlights flashed through the backyard as Billy’s parents pulled into the driveway. The boys would have some serious explaining to do.

“Oww, my neck hurts.”

-Chapter Five-
“Brownie’s Backstory”

The circumstances of Brownie’s life had drastically changed over the last few weeks. He missed his old home with the soft music in the mornings, the intricate maps on the walls, and the times he was able to romp freely on the fuzzy carpet and playfully pounce on his young owner's toes. But those were only the good memories. There was also the loud music at night, the chaotic parties, and that one time after a bath he slipped off the bathroom sink into the toilet. That was especially traumatizing. It was *also* his owner’s fault. Just like how he wasn’t fed his morning pellets for the third time that week. Wow, was he hungry!

(Side note: the funny thing about Brownie is that he didn’t like to eat his own poop. While that *may* seem normal to most of you, the truth is that an essential part of a rabbit’s diet is actually feces. Now, a rabbit can’t just go around eating any old poop they find. That would be unhealthy. And gross. But rabbits actually have a special type of poop filled with vitamins and nutrients just waiting to be digested a second time. Yum yum. Seriously, look it up. Honestly, just thinking about all that made Brownie nauseous, especially because he was a rather picky eater. Furthermore, such a lack of nutrients might explain his small size.)

Brownie looked around his narrow cage. His stomach grumbled and he decided he couldn’t take it anymore. He needed somewhere that had a more consistent and palatable supply of food. It was time to escape. Brownie, being as small as he was, just dipped his head through the cage wire and surprised himself by slipping out without much struggle.

From his desktop home, Brownie jumped down onto the empty bed, and then down onto his young owner's back–who was peacefully snoring away on the floor. Brownie squeezed under the bedroom door and into the hallway.

The hallway floor was a mess of dirty clothes, plastic toy bricks, and doll accessories. On his way, he scooped up a military action figure backpack, painted pink and bedazzled to be used as an accessory for a Malibu Fantasy Bargie[1]. Brownie made his way to the bathroom. He sized up the easiest path to the toilet as he slung the backpack over his shoulder. He sprang onto a pile of dirty laundry and then clawed up a hand towel. From there he jumped onto the sink and made his way to the edge closest to the toilet.

As much as he hated poop–and his only experience with a toilet–he knew that one flush could instantly transport him out of the house. He had no idea *where* it would take him, but at this point, it was a risk he was willing to take.

His knees grew weak. After a few deep breaths he leaped down hitting the toilet handle with an "oof" effectively flushing the toilet. He slid off the handle smacking the rim on the way down before getting swallowed by the unspeakable liquid vortex.

After what felt like death-by-drowning, he resurfaced in a horizontal current with the unexpected aid of his buoyant bag. The smell was vicious. Through intermittent dry heaving, he spotted a rusty grate that offered him a break from the sewage. Luckily, above the grate, light shone through a rusty hole as if the bunny gods themselves were showing Brownie the way. As he ascended, a sewage tsunami shot him right out the hole and into a

[1] Rhymes with Margie.

quickly expanding pool of brown, toilet-papery liquid–a stark contrast to the bright green grass.

As Brownie pulled himself from the vile sludge, he was surprised to see little humans playing in a sandbox nearby. The smell emanating from the puddle (and, *oh god, his fur*) made him sick to his stomach. He quickly exited the yard of the little people prison, entered the nearby woods, and happened upon some damp moss to roll in–to try to rid himself of that wretched smell.

Food was the next thing on his mind: where to get it, how to store it, and how quickly he could appease his grumbly stomach overlord. As he foraged in the underbrush, his backpack served him well in storing the seeds and edible greenery that weren't immediately shoved into his chubby cheeks. He wasted no time with achieving stealth; he remained in the shadows, under leaves, and traveled along networks of abandoned mole tunnels. He knew that if he met with any unfamiliar creatures he could beat them off with his new trusty backpack.

As Brownie traveled deeper into the woods, he noticed signs of other rabbits: a tuft of fur here, rabbit droppings there. Quietly he followed these clues until he saw a big shed in the distance with a few rabbits on patrol. Were they safe? It was best not to assume anything at this point. He bided his time until the patrols seemed less attentive and wandered off elsewhere. Quietly he darted up to the structure and sidled alongside the wall until finding a hole big enough to allow him through. To keep a lookout, he wiggled through the hole, back side first.

"Hey buddy," came a voice from inside the shed, "we know you're trying to sneak in here but honestly, this is an all-access area."

"Oh," replied Brownie after scooting all the way in and turning around.

Another rabbit added, “Yeah, we also saw you out front peeking from behind a bush for like half an hour. Why didn’t you just come up and introduce yourself?”

“Uh, you can never be too sure who you can trust,” said Brownie, picking under his claws.

“That's why we painted ‘WELCOME’ in big letters across the front door,” the second rabbit replied. “Why is it so hard to gain trust nowadays?”

“Sorry, it’s just deep mission protocol,” Brownie said standing at attention.

“I mean, we could *hear* you humming the *Mission Improbable* theme from where we were standing,” the first rabbit said. “And you have a pink, sparkly bag. You weren’t exactly the embodiment of stealth.”

“Oh, also, we’re just letting everyone know: we heard reports of an old lady rabbit hitting passersby with her purse. So, just be careful out there,” the second rabbit added. “That wasn’t you, was it?”

“Uhh, not likely,” Brownie replied quickly, glancing around the room. He removed his bag. “And anyways, what’s with this interrogation? Do you think I’m the kind of rabbit that normally engages in assault and battery? Am I being detained or am I free to go?”

“Er, *anyway*, I’m Poplar and this is Lucky,” said the second rabbit. “There’s free food in that crate in the corner and a stream to the East.”

“You mean a *klick* to the east,” said Lucky informatively.

Poplar let out a sigh.

Brownie took a deep breath. “Well, I’m Brownie…Brownie Bun Buns. At least that's what the other rabbits called me at the pet shop. This is a nice place you guys got.” He pointed at the hole in the wall and said,

“However, that's a big security concern especially with snakes around. We should put someone on the job, pronto.”

“Sounds good,” said Poplar. “Come with us to meet our leader and you can tell him yourself.”

“Also, we’re prepping for our first big meeting later this evening,” said Lucky. “Can we count you in attendance?”

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The next day, emboldened by the big meeting, many recruits were practicing tactical combat techniques (or TCTs, as Lucky and no one else would go on to call them). Punches and kicks were flying everywhere and the collective rabbit coordination seemed like it couldn’t get any worse.

“Alright, privates,” shouted Lucky over the chaos. He stood there panting in the hot midday sun. “Paw-to-hand combat is no joke. We really wanna kick them where the sun don't shine!”

Strawberry smothered a giggle from the sidelines. Hector elbowed her in the ribs, whispering, “Shh,” as his own mouth evinced a grin.

“Uh-tennnnn-shun!” announced Lucky. “Now let's work on the Art of the Takedown!”

“How are we supposed to take down a target 10 times our height and like 50 times our weight?” a female rabbit cried out.

“That's a good question, Oak,” said Lucky. “And for that, I introduce to you all, drumroll please…the Art of the Stampede!”

“Holy rabbit’s paw,” sighed Oak. “How many arts are there? Wait, nevermind. I don't—”

“There are approximately 709 arts–that I know of!” Lucky said excitedly, cutting her off. “Unfortunately, our time constraints will limit us to only about 21 to 24.” The exhausted trainees dropped their heads in defeat.

“TUNNELS!” a voice rang out from the edge of the woods.

Everyone looked around in confusion.

“Tunnels,” said Brownie again, approaching the training grounds. “That's how we fly under the radar, and that’s how we kick them where the sun doesn’t shine.”

“Stand down, Comrade Brownie,” said Lucky.

Hector stepped forward. “Wait, hold on. I think he’s onto something there. We definitely want to avoid picking a fight until we are ready. That means stealth will be our best friend. Utilizing tunnels is not a bad idea.”

“Oooh, the Art of Stealth. Like ninja warfare. I hadn’t even considered it!” said Lucky. “Adding it to the list now.”

More groans were heard.

Brownie continued, “I got here through a system of tunnels that allowed me to sneak up completely undetected.”

“Oh come on, Brownie,” said Oak. “I was literally on the patrol that watched you try to sneak in. It was painful. Some of the bun buns have even been reenacting your entrance much to everyone's amusement. You're kind of viral now, after only a day.” She paused. “Huh, bun buns. Is that how you got your name? Because you're small like a baby rabbit?”

Brownie pulled some lettuce out of his backpack before breaking the awkward silence, “*Anyway*.”

“What Oak is trying to say is: you're a legend,” said Hector. He looked around to everyone. “We’re talking about Brownie here–the spirit of a squirrel, the smarts of a crow, and the strength of, well, of Brownie. We all know he is very strong for his size, of course.”

“Aww, that warms my heart,” said Strawberry, as she held her forepaws to her chest. Brownie stood tall with courage, intermittently chewing the lettuce in his chubby cheeks.

“Hey…Hector. Weren’t you, umm, also talking about, uhh, how good I am with this military stuff?” Lucky vied for some attention.

“Of course,” replied Hector with a ceremonial nod to Lucky.

At that moment, Poplar ran up panting and whispered into Hector’s ear, “Sir, we just received word from a South Fort messenger. There are two rabbits that have grown unusually large. We’re talking approximately 7 to 8 times the mass of an average rabbit. I think I have an idea of what's going on. From all the data we’ve collected, such as the increased need to move, mate, and migrate, my theory is that we all have a virus that is slowly changing our DNA. Actually, maybe not so slowly.”

“Woah,” said Hector to no one in particular. He looked right at Poplar. “7 to 8 times bigger? That’s major.”

-Chapter Six-

In progress! 🐇😉🤫

Reach out to unschoolingwithkai@gmail.com with any questions or comments!

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