

## A FISTFUL OF BUNNIES

“And there you have it,” Harry concluded, taking an almighty gulp of beer from his glass. “Like I said, it’s just what we need!”

“It still sounds like some flight of fantasy to me,” Bill said solemnly. “Bunnies? Eggs? And right under the Muldoon Saloon?”

“I’m telling you it’s not, Bill. All we have to do is get under the cellar floor and dig down through the foundations.”

“You make it sound like digging a hole in the back yard to bury your buckshot in. How exactly do we get Abe to let us dig up his cellar?”

“We don’t,” Harry said, swilling the rest of his beer into his mouth and, in his excitement, down his shirt. “He’s already started down there.”

“He’s what? You mean you told old Abe Drake about this before you told me? Some friend you turn out to be. Gimme the money for that beer.”

“Never mind the beer money. Are you going to help or just grouch about it?” The pause was infinitesimal before Bill answered.

“Where’s the shovel?”

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Butch Harekup clipped his lucky carrot into his holster. He felt an elbow dig into his ribs.

“So, Butch, what’s the plan, buddy? How we gonna get Sam back, ay?”

It was easy to despair at Sundance T’Werp. He had always been a carrot short of a cake, and by some eccentric twist of fate he always ended up by Butch’s side.

“Do you have to poke and prod me all the time?” Butch asked. “Is it really necessary?”

“You want me to give ya a kick instead?”

“Forget I said anything,” Butch said. “Have you got everything I told you get?”

“Yup, yup. Ah’ve got the rope, the carrots, the crowbar, the carrots, the toffee hammer and the carrots.”

Butch raised his hands. “What’s with all the carrots? Haven’t I told you about the carrots?”

“Aww, ya can’t have too many carrots, Butch. Ya never can tell when you might just need a good carrot.”

“Ok, fine, take the bloody carrots. You’re carrying them though. Now are the others ready?”

“Oh, yup yup,” Sundance said with unparalleled and frequently irritating enthusiasm. “They’s all ready. Pip, Pumpkin and Pie are coming with us, and Honey is coordinating the others through the tunnels.”

“Great. We’ve got to get moving now. They’ve had enough time to take Sam into the torture chambers. The scouts lost him and Black Jim’s men near the Muldoon Saloon. The Black Fathers only have one hideout anywhere near there so they must have him there.”

“What if they don’t, Butch?”

“Sundance,” Butch said, patting his partner on the back, “sometimes you ask far too many questions.”

“It helps me get the answers, old buddy.”

“That’s true. It would just help if you remembered them. Now, let’s get the others and get going. We don’t have much time.”

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The ancient wooden door, cracked, chipped and clawed, swung open and thumped against the wall.

A long dark shadow fell across the dirt, menacing and huge, and came to an end by the dangling feet of Samuel Gun. The bunny was chained to the wall by his wrists and ears, with his head hung low.

The shadow moved forward, shrinking with every step until it was no more than four feet tall.

Black Jim looked up at the little furry captive.

“So,” Black Jim said. “Are you ready to tell me what I want to know?”

Samuel coughed and wearily lifted his head. “Yes. You’re still a small, ugly fuck.”

Black Jim twitched then smiled. It was disconcerting in so many ways.

“You and your type always did have a lot of spirit,” Jim said, taking hold of Sam’s cheek and shook it like a loving parent. “I will break it, though. Believe me I will break it.”

“You’d struggle to break wind,” Sam said.

Black Jim turned red. “YOU WILL TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW!” he bellowed, fluffing out the fur on Sam’s face and smothering him in breath that smelled of garlic sausage. “Or something very, very bad will happen to you.”

“I think it already did,” Sam coughed. “Your breath stinks.”

“Insolence! We’ll see how long you can endure...” Black Jim paused. His eyebrows lowered, his eyes narrowed and his lip curled back. Sam suspected the leader of the Black Father’s thought it an evil glare, but it looked more like he was having his face squeezed by two hands. “...the Bunny Boiler!”

Black Hole and Black Horse squeezed their bulk through the doorway, carrying a large rusty cooking pot and a small gas burner.

“Undo his chains,” Black Jim ordered, “and start heating the water. Our little guest is going to take a dip.”

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The constant chit-chit, chit-chit of soil being dug hissed in the cellar of the Muldoon Saloon.

Harry, Bill and Old Abe bent and rose in perfect synchronicity, displaying bare backs and bare wrinkly cheeks every time they bent into the growing hole in the cellar floor.

“How far down did you say we need to dig this thing, Harry?” Bill asked, hoofing a spadeful of dirt out of the hole.

“Bet’r not be much bl’dy fu’thr,” Old Abe huffed. “A’hm bl’dy knackered and ready to konk.”

“It’s only a few more metres,” Harry told them. “It’ll be worth it though. We’ll be able to buy this town and turn it into the new Tombstone.”

“Ah’ll need a bl’dy tombstone aft’r a few more metres!” Old Abe spluttered.

Abe Drake had been landlord of the Muldoon Saloon for as long as anyone in the town could remember. He talked like a relic, looked like one, and almost been

buried twice. His hair was pure white, as was the moustache that usually trailed from his upper lip to his chest but today was tied up behind his ears while he worked.

“And I thought we were meant to looking to outdo Deadwood?” Bill questioned. “Nobody mentioned going as big as Tombstone.”

“Yesterday we hadn’t mentioned any of them,” Harry pointed out. “With this Eggs, we could be bigger than anywhere you can think of!”

“How ‘bout Texas?” Abe asked.

“Now you’re just being silly,” Harry said. “Now do you want to waste any more breath on gabbing, or are we going to put our backs into it?”

Without anyone making a response, the three treasure seekers began to dig like men possessed.

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“What can ya hear, old buddy?”

“Shhh, Sundance,” Butch hissed.

Butch, Sundance and a small fistful of bunnies stood in a freshly dug tunnel running right alongside the chamber where Butch knew Samuel was being held captive. .

The Black Fathers had crossed paths with the bunnies many times, and many times the bunnies had thwarted Black Jim’s nefarious plans. The hideouts of the Black Fathers moved from time to time, but the rabbit scouts did a good enough job to keeping track of the changing lairs.

Butch pressed his ear against the tunnel wall. “I can hear talking,” he whispered. “It’s got to be the right place.”

“So what’s we gonna do now then, Butch?” Sundance said, in something that he seemed to believe was a hushed tone. “How’re we gonna bust him outta there?”

“How many times have we done this kind of thing, Sundance?”

“Oooh, haha, haha. Loads a times, buddy. We’s a right pair of heroes, me ‘n you.”

“Exactly. How do we usually do rescues?”

“Ah, we uses the element’a surprise, don’t we.”

“Right. So this is going to be no different. Now if you’ll be quiet a minute. I can hear Jim.”

Through the very thin layer of dirt separating the tunnel and the chamber, Butch could hear the conversation clearly with his ear held gently against the wall.

“Ooh, lemme hear,” Sundance said, diving forward in his usual childish manner.

“Sundance! Nooooo— ”

Butch’s yell echoed through the tunnel as Sundance bounded into him, knocking them against the tunnel wall which cracked under the weight.

In a shower of stone and soil the pair of bunnies crashed onto the floor of the Black Fathers’ torture chamber, coughing and spluttering in the dust.

Butch groaned. “You know something, Sundance? Sometimes I could take my lucky carrot and show it right up your ar—”

“Well, well,” the melodious tone of Black Jim broke in. “This is an unexpected pleasure.”

Butch rolled over and jumped to his feet. He immediately noticed three things.

Only he and Sundance had fallen into the chamber, which meant the others had hopefully avoided detection.

Other than Jim, there were three other Black Fathers, outnumbering them two to one.

Finally, on the far side of the room, Samuel hung over a bubbling cooking pot by his ears on what looked like a winch mechanism.

“Why do you bunnies always think you can just charge in and ruin my plans?” Jim asked.

“Ah’ll tell ya why,” Sundance answered to Butch’s dismay. “It’s because we’s bloody better than you, that’s why. Me and Butch here are rough and tough. So you’s all just say ya prayers.”

*Oh my God, Butch thought. He really never knows when things have gone wrong, does he?*

“Oh, I’m not sure I need to,” Jim chuckled. “You see, I think my prayers have been answered already. Jack, Board, Bull. Show them just how we deal with their kind. Give the bunny a bath!”

“No!” Butch yelled as Jack and Bull moved menacingly forward, and Board reached for the winch.

The story concludes in “For A Few Bunnies More.”