

## FOR A FEW BUNNIES MORE

“Would you like to say anything to your little friend before you all die?” Jim asked.

Butch tried to take in everything around him without being obvious. He was aware of the advancing Black Fathers, Samuel’s imminent demise, Sundance preparing to make some ludicrous response to Jim’s question and an odd sound that seemed very out of place in the scene.

“Don’t worry Sammy-boy!” Sundance called on cue. “We’s got it all under control.”

Jim chuckled, low and full of evil menace. “Very good, very good. Anyone would think you believed that.”

“That’s the problem,” Butch said as Black Jack pounced at him.

Butch leapt to one side, narrowly avoiding Jack’s big grasping hands. He turned to watch the huge bulk crash into the wall.

“He does believe it,” Butch finished, still listening to the sound which now seemed closer.

Black Bull was trying to grab Sundance with little success. The hyperactive rabbit was bouncing like a rubber ball in a lift making it impossible for Jim’s henchman to gain a hold on him.

Butch shot a glance to where Samuel was being lowered towards his death. There was no way he could stop a brute like Black Board on his own and although he could leap over the Bunny Boiler and snatch Sam before he fell, there was one problem. Jim was blocking his way.

“You can’t save him,” Jim tittered, seeming to read Butch’s thoughts. “Now we can do this the easy way or the...what is that?”

Everyone in the small room looked up at the same time. The noise was now clearly coming from directly above where Jim stood and at that moment, what looked like the tip of a shovel broke through the ceiling.

“Harry,” a voice said from behind the shovel. “I think we bloody well found—”

Butch seized his moment when the first chunks of dirt began to fall. He bounded around Black Jim, springing off the wall and landing behind the leader of the Black Fathers.

All hell suddenly broke loose as a collection of bodies and digging utensils crashed through the ceiling in a din of swearing, shouting and falling stone. Somewhere in the chaos, Black Jim was bellowing orders that no one could hear, until he was flattened by Abe Drake’s falling shovel.

Butch tried to concentrate on the task in hand, rushing across the room and leaping for Samuel. He snatched the dangling bunny and the rope swung them away from the bubbling liquid. Butch stretched his neck enough to reach the rope. The swing reached its peak and the pair of rabbits arced back across the Boiler. Butch waited until they were clear then bit through the rope.

The force of the swing carried them over the head of Black Board, who seemed torn between the escapees and his fallen leader. Black Bull stood before them, but he was already moving to where Jim lay dazed in a heap of limbs.

“Hey, I isn’t finished with you yet, pal!” Sundance was yelling after the huge henchman.

“You are for the minute, Sundance,” Butch said, grabbing his partner as they ran for the tunnel.

The three rabbits scurried up through the hole in the wall. Butch paused to look back at the chaos of the room behind them. He took two hops into the tunnel then heard something that made him stop.

“I don’t see any eggs, Harry.”

*Eggs?*, Butch thought. *They thought the Eggs were buried under the Saloon.*

He didn’t wait to hear more. They would surely work out their mistake soon, and he had to act before they did. He had to get to the eggs first.

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“Are ya sure ya don’t want me to come up with ya?” Sundance asked.

Butch had led Sundance, Samuel and a few more bunnies up to the surface. Archimedes had told him where the Lost Eggs were hidden and to know that someone other than Black Jim had discovered that place to be the Muldoon Saloon surprised him.

“Yes, I am,” Butch said. “Just make sure no one else gets up onto the roof.”

“Certainly will, buddy,” Sundance said, bouncing off to rally the troops.

Butch hopped onto a water barrel and looked for his next step up the side of the Saloon.

The window sill was his only option. He tensed and sprang for the ledge, landing with only his front paws taking purchase while his back legs scabbled to keep him from falling.

*It’s great when a plan goes well*, he thought, dragging himself fully onto the sill.

He looked up at the sheer wooden wall of the Saloon. This was never going to work. There had to be some other way.

He glanced through the window at the empty Saloon. Why couldn’t he just be like the humans and use the stairs?

He stared up at the roof then looked thoughtfully through the dirty glass. Why couldn’t he?

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Sundance hopped around the perimeter of the Saloon.

Everything was just as it should be. These were the good times. Him and Butch. They’d had some adventures in their time. There’d be a lot more too, Sundance knew it.

The other bunnies were around the front of the Saloon, nibbling at the dry grass and looking inconspicuously rabbit-like. They would make sure the alarm was raised if anyone was up to no good. Sundance couldn’t stand still and be an inconspicuous lookout. He couldn’t stand still period.

He bounced around the rear corner of the building and stopped. A ladder stood upright against the wall, reaching up to the roof of the Saloon. Sundance looked thoughtfully at the open invite to the rooftop.

“Hoho, yup yup,” he muttered to himself. “Sundance, me boy, you’s no fool. No bad luck’s gonna come ya way.”

With a dizzy spring in his step, he bounded around the ladder rather than under it and continued on his perimeter check.

As the rabbit disappeared around the corner, a short human shadow fell upon the foot of the ladder.

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Butch squeezed his body out through the skylight and onto the rooftop.

Finding his way through the building to the skylight had been much easier than scaling the walls would ever have been. Sometimes he really believed that being around Sundance was bad for him. Everything always became so much more difficult with his partner around. Still, what could he do?

Butch hopped across the wooden roof, heading for the object of everyone's desire.

It was so obvious when he thought about it. The Lost Eggs had been there for everyone to see all these years, yet no one had discovered them. Perhaps Sundance wasn't the dimmest being there was. Humans were obviously a few carrots short of a cake too.

Butch looked at the wind vain. It was in the shape of a large rabbit, made of what appeared to be brass, and at its feet lay an equally brass basket. One glance inside the basket, however, revealed anything other than brass eggs. One glance inside the basket revealed what Butch now knew to be...

"The Lost Eggs of The Bunnies!"

Butch spun around to find Black Jim standing behind him with a pistol in his hand.

"You know," Jim said, "too many evil geniuses have been foiled by making small talk. I don't intend to be the next."

The shot rang across Redwood and the bullet knocked Butch across the roof.

"And now," Jim said, hobbling towards his prize. "the Lost Eggs will be—"

"Them's our Eggs." Sundance shouted from the top of the ladder. "Get him!"

Sundance bounced to one side as a tidal wave of small furry bodies poured over the rim of the roof.

Jim cried out as the torrent of rabbits crashed into him, biting, scratching and clawing. He staggered under the force, finally losing his balance and toppling over the edge. Down he fell, his scream filling the air until he plunged head first into the waiting water barrel. The impact tipped the barrel over and set it rolling along the street, spilling water but containing the small leader of the Black Fathers inside.

On the Saloon roof, dozens of rabbits watched the barrel pick up speed and disappear from view with Black Jack, Bull and Board in hot pursuit.

After a brief moment their attention turned to the still body of Butch.

Sundance bounced over to where his partner lay.

"Stand back, everybody," he shouted. "Let me in. I knows the kiss of life."

Sundance lifted Butch's head and planted a wet, drool laden kiss on his lips.

Butch's back legs kicked out instantly. "That's disgusting! Sundance, never, ever, try that again! I don't care how bad a state I'm in, do you understand?"

"Yup yup, old buddy," Sundance said with senseless joy. "I thought he got ya?"

Butch reached into his holster and pulled out his lucky carrot. Jim's bullet had buried itself deep into the stale vegetable but had failed to penetrate it.

"He shot ya lucky carrot!" Sundance cried, tugging his ears woefully. "How unlucky is that?"

Every bunny on the rooftop slapped a hand to their forehead.

"I guess from the carrot's point of view, you're right," Butch said, patting his partner on the shoulder. "Now, let's get these eggs and get back underground."

Butch hopped over to the rabbit-shaped wind vain, and plucked the three Eggs out of the basket. He passed one to Sundance, and another to Pie.

“Hey,” Sundance said, rubbing the sand and dust from the surface. “It’s got writing on it.”

“He’s right,” said Pie. “This one has too. It says, ‘carrots then you will.’”

Sundance held his egg up, squinting against the light. “Mine says, ‘If as a bunny you eat all your.’”

In a dazed, slow movement, Butch wiped the dust from his egg. “‘always have good eyesight’”, he read. “That’s the great secrets of the elder Bunnies? If as a bunny you eat all your carrots then you will always have good eyesight? That’s what we’ve been protecting all these years?”

“Hey, it’s all true, buddy,” Sundance said. “My Uncle Root used to eat a hundred carrots a day and his eyes was perfect.”

“Sundance, he died from over-eating.”

“He still had good eyes though, yup yup.”

“Well, I’m sure Jim would be devastated if he knew the knowledge he had come so close to,” Butch said, staring off into the distance and knowing that another quest had come to a rather anticlimactic end.

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Harry, Bill and Abe hobbled through the doors of the Muldoon Saloon into the sunlight.

“Harry,” Bill said, coughing out lungfuls of dust. “Next time you have any bright ideas go tell them to my ass.”

“You can tell them to my ass too,” Abe spluttered, holding his back. “He’s in t’next stable along.”

Harry spat out a stone chipping and turned around to his dirt-smearred companions.

“Well you know, when the plans said those Eggs were at the Saloon, maybe they meant...”

Harry turned his gaze skywards. He found many eyes staring back at him and quickly diverted his eye-line to ground level.

“Never mind,” he said hastily. “What are you drinking, Bill? Make mine a large one.”

Harry staggered back towards the Saloon, leaving Abe and Bill to exchange puzzled glances. They looked up at the roof of the Saloon.

All they saw was the golden weather vain turning slowly on the breeze.

“A’hm guess he’s had enough’a bunnies f’r a while,” Abe said.

“Well all I can say is thank the Lord,” Bill said, leading the barman back towards the doors. “Make mine a large one as well, Abe, and then we’ll work out how we’re going to fix your cellar.”