

THE LOST EGGS OF THE BUNNIES

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE BUNNIES.

There's eggs in them thar hills. That is what legend says. That is what Wild Bill Harekup used to say.

For centuries, relic hunters have taken to the dirt tracks and chasm filled mountains in search of the elusive Lost Eggs of The Bunnies - sacred eggs that are said to contain secrets so secret that no one actually knows what they are about. That, however, does not prevent people wanting to know.

But the hunters are not alone in their quest. Others also seek the ancient artifacts to use for their own gain.

And in the midst of these adventurers, the bunnies are out to claim back their lost treasures.

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The wind blew down Main Street like a close-range belch – warm and damp. A stray leaf danced along the sandy road, performing pirouettes and leaping summersaults until it came to rest with a crunch under a size ten leather boot.

“Eggs at Easter? How appropriate.”

The boot continued walking, allowing the crumpled remains of the leaf to raise itself from the ground before a second boot, this time in size nine, ground it into the dirt.

“So the timing makes it seem like a joke, but I've had it on good authority that it isn't.”

The two men turned off the road, the crunch of feet on dirt becoming a thud on wood. They walked out of the sunlight and into the clammy, dim-lit interior of the Muldoon Saloon.

“What are you drinking, Harry?” the first of the men asked.

“Would it be too much to ask for eggnog?” Harry responded.

“Yes.”

“A beer then, Bill. I'll get the table.”

By the time Bill approached the table with two very full pint glasses, Harry had unfolded a number of papers and was gripping them with knuckles whiter than an Englishman's arse.

“Come on then, Harry,” Bill said as he thumped down the glasses. “Tell me all about it before your head explodes.”

“I can't help it, Bill. This could be just what this town needs. We've been scraping together pennies here and there, but this isn't Deadwood. We need something good unless we want to end up like Range Creek!”

“Where the hell is Range Creek?”

“Exactly! I don't know and neither does anyone else.”

Bill rubbed his temple. “So if no one knows where it is, then how does anyone know it's not there?”

“I didn't think of asking that, but if anyone did find it, they'd say it was bad. Bad, bad, bad.”

“Ok, so it’s bad. I don’t know if you’ve looked around out there recently but like you said, this isn’t Deadwood. It’s Redwood, and it’s a hole.”

“Which is why this could be just what we need!” Harry hissed, seeming to be a man very much on the edge of yelling his every word at the top of his voice.

“I’m listening.”

“Well, it’s like this…”

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“It looks like these eggs had been thought lost for centuries, maybe even longer than that.”

The smoky air in the room made it difficult for many of the occupants to breathe or see. Allowing more than a dozen people to puff on cigars in a compact, unventilated room had been something of a mistake.

One person who didn’t mind was Black Jim, the four feet tall leader of the Black Fathers. Whether he stood or sat, his head remained just below the level of the rising grey clouds.

“And are you sure about this, Black Bull?” Jim asked the six foot monstrosity beside him.

“Yes, Master Jim,” came the reply from the above the cloud. “The Lost Eggs are somewhere in Redwood.”

“So what of the legends? They say the Eggs were never found in the mountains.”

“It seems the legend was created as a diversion to keep the Eggs safe from hunters.”

“And us,” Jim said, rubbing together his sweaty little palms. “Well done, Black Bull. You have been very clever in gathering this information.”

“It was the nutcrackers that did it,” Black Bull said with a grin lost in smoke.

“I don’t need to know that,” Jim said. Being the head of a shadowy organization wasn’t a guarantee you wouldn’t be squeamish. “So where in Redwood are the Eggs hidden?”

“Well, that’s the problem,” another man said.

“What do you mean, Black Jack?” Jim asked.

“Well it seems that while the legend was created to put treasure hunters off the scent, there has been nothing written of where in Redwood the Eggs are to be found.”

“Maybe I was premature in my congratulations,” Jim said, steepling his fingers and glaring into the cloud overhead. “I trust you have thought of a way to narrow down our search?”

“We have,” said a third conspirator.

“Who is that?” Jim asked. “Is it Ball or Hole?”

“It’s Black Hole, Master Jim,” the voice said.

“And how have you managed this?” Jim asked.

Black Bull and Black Ball bent down and lifted a large metal pot onto the table. Black Bull lifted the lid.

Jim was forced to climb onto the table in order to see the inside of the pot. When he leaned over the edge, a wicked smile spread over his little, podgy face.

“Excellent,” he said. “Now all we need is to do is find out…”

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“Where they’ve taken him.”

The Council Room of the warren was crowded with furry bodies. More bunnies crammed the hallway outside. This was not a normal Council meeting. It was a Crisis gathering.

“We’re not sure, Butch,” one of the scouts said. “We lost them near the Muldoon Saloon.”

Butch Harekup, seventh generation grandson of the legendary Wild Bill, looked out across the mass of fur and ears.

“How many of them were there?” he asked.

“Three. Black Fathers by the looks of it. They’ve gone too far this time.”

A rumble of agreement rustled through the crowd.

“Quiet!” Butch bellowed, his voice echoing through the halls of the warren. “Why have they suddenly decided to go this far now?”

“I think I can answer that,” an ancient voice spoke from behind him.

Butch turned around, to find the eldest of the warren dwellers occupying the opening there.

A hundred and one pairs of fluffy ears lowered as the bunnies bowed, and many furry bottoms were tickled in the process.

“There is no need for that,” Archimedes said. He shuffled forward, resting on a crude stick. “There are more pressing matters to be dealt with.”

The crowd waited in silence for the elder to proceed.

“The reason the Black Fathers have taken Samuel is because they are seeking the Lost Eggs.”

“The Lost Eggs are nothing but a legend, aren’t they?” Butch asked. “A story one generation passes down to the next like that of the Easter Bunny. We all know we are the ones who put the chocolate eggs in the baskets, and we do it to keep the legends alive, right?”

“All legends have to start somewhere, young Butch,” Archimedes said. “The Lost Eggs are real, and contain the secrets of the first of our kind. The secrets that have helped us survive this long. If the Black Fathers or anyone manages to get their hands on the Eggs, then I cannot begin to imagine what will befall our kind.”

“That really doesn’t sound good,” Butch said to the mumbled agreement of the gathering. “I guess this means we have to do what we have to do?”

“It does,” the elder said with a half smile.

“I thought I was past all this,” Butch said with a sigh as he turned to face the crowds. “Sundance, where are you?”

A small furry body bounced up and down in the middle of the throng.

“Hoi hoi, a’m here Butch, my old pal, my old buddy!”

Butch rubbed his hand over his face. This was going to be just like old times.

Why me? Butch thought. *Of all the rabbits in all the world, why me?*

He addressed his partner, along with what amounted to an army of rabbits. “Open up the store hold, Sundance, and hand round the artillery. We’ve got a hostage to save and our heritage to fight for.”

“Bunnies! Today we fight to keep our freedom!”

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 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.

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 chucks 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.

* * * *

“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 scrabbled 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?

* * * *

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.

* * * *

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 guessin’ 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.”