Possibilities
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Summary

Vervain kills Woundwort and flees Efrafa. At Watership Down, two rabbits go visit Redstone but don't come back, so Hazel and Bigwig go search for them. In their absence, a group of strangers arrives at the warren, bringing new ideas that not everyone appreciates. Things get messier when it turns out Woundwort isn't really dead...

Notes

I have been working on this story since November 2016, before finally finishing it in April 2018. It is based on the WD TV series, with characters from other adaptations of WD (including both books, the 1978 film, the 2016 radio drama, and the BBC/Netflix miniseries) also appearing. I will try to post at least one chapter every Sunday.

This is essentially an alternate third season of the TV series. Everything that happened after episode 25 (Bigwig's Way) did not happen here. If you have read the book but haven't seen the series, you may have trouble understanding this, but don't worry. The series is available in its entirety on Youtube, and the first chapter of this fanfic includes a brief introduction of
most major characters.

You may notice that there are very few relationship tags right now. I will add more as the story progresses.

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Meet the Rabbits

“The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.”
The sun was slowly rising over the horizon. At first, an observer wouldn't have seen anything more than faint light, as the sun was obscured by a large shape. As it rose further, one could see the high lonely hill of Watership Down, with the shadow of the lone beach tree at the top.

At the top of the Down, several rabbits were lying in the grass, contemplating the sunrise during an early silflay. It was a peaceful day, no sign of danger anywhere. The rabbits relaxed, without a care in the world.

Suddenly, one of the rabbits noticed something unusual. At the bottom of the Down, there was an unusually pale spot in the grass, and it was moving. The rabbit motioned to another nearby, who went to see him.

-"What is it, Hazel?" the other rabbit asked.

-"There is something at the bottom, Fiver," Hazel replied. “Do you have any idea what it is?”

Fiver looked in the distance at the strange shape that was approaching, before answering Hazel:

-"It's a creature of some sort. I know that much. But that's all I know. I don't know if it's a rabbit or something else, or whether its intentions are friendly or hostile."

-"Fiver, go see Bigwig immediately. Tell him to make sure the owsla is ready to attack if necessary."

Fiver nodded, and did as he had been told. Hazel did not move, instead choosing to remain there and face the creature, whatever it was, when it reached the top.

Further away, two rabbits were lying on their side in the grass, sound asleep, when suddenly...

-"Oi! You two! Wake up!"

-"Oooh Bigwig," one of the two rabbits mumbled as he woke up, “why do you always have to be so loud? I was just dreaming that I was in a field full of giant lettuces...”

-"You can get back to your giant lettuces later, Hawkbit," Bigwig said sternly, “but right now there is owsla duty to be done.”

-"Bigwig, you should learn to relax sometimes,” the other rabbit said. “This is too good a day to waste doing owsla training.”

-"This isn't regular training, Dandelion,” Bigwig corrected. “Fiver told me there is a strange creature coming up the Down, and we have to be ready to fight it if necessary.”

-"Fight it yourself! Can't you see I'm tired?” Hawkbit said, causing Bigwig to growl menacingly. “All right, all right,” Hawkbit continued nervously, “no need to get excited. I'll be ready.”

With that, Bigwig left Hawkbit and Dandelion alone, and went to see Hazel. Along the way, he was stopped by another, younger, smaller buck.

-"Captain Pipkin of the junior owsla reporting for duty, sir!” he said.

-"It's good to see someone takes owsla duties seriously,” Bigwig replied. “Round up the junior owsla, and if the enemy overpowers us, be prepared to lead everyone through the emergency escape tunnel.”
"Righty, Bigwig!"

As Pipkin went away to do as he had been ordered, Bigwig went to see Hazel, still sitting on the edge of the Down, tensely awaiting the arrival of the strange creature. Fiver was also nearby.

"So how is it going, Hazel-rah?" Bigwig asked. "Any idea what it is?"

"It's a rabbit," Hazel replied, "I can see that now. But he looks unusual..."

"Efrafan?"

"Doesn't smell like it."

"Well, that's good news. I'll go tell Pipkin and the others. I told him to prepare for an evacuation if necessary."

With that, Bigwig went away, leaving Hazel and Fiver alone. They stayed together, looking at the other rabbit slowly climbing up the Down. As he got closer, they decided to go and meet him.

This rabbit, based on its smell, appeared to be a buck. He had unnaturally white fur, with the exception of his ears, which were brown, and a few other brown markings around his eyes and across his back. He seemed to be limping, and his right eye was half closed; it was plain that he could hardly see with it. His left eye, however, was wide open and shining brightly.

Hazel and Fiver waited for the stranger to introduce himself, but he remained silent. Finally, Hazel spoke:

"Do you come from far away?"

The stranger took his time. He scratched his right ear with his hind leg, and nearly lost his balance in the process. After he had stabilized himself, he replied:

"Each rabbit has his or her own definition of "far away". Some could say that, yes, I do come from far away, but the place I come from is not really that far, if you know where to look."

Hazel and Fiver looked at each other. Neither could really understand what the stranger's reply meant. Their thoughts were interrupted as he started talking again:

"Do you know of any warrens nearby?"

"Y- y- ye- yes, uh, yes, our warren is right at the top," Hazel stammered. "Shall I show you the way? Um...I'm Hazel, I'm the Chief Rabbit. This is my brother Fiver."

"It's good to meet you, Hazel, Fiver. Would you mind if I spent the day at your warren? I'm feeling tired, and I could use some rest."

"We always welcome any rabbit in need at Watership Down."

The stranger smiled, and resumed his ascent. Progress was slow, and it took a long time before he finally reached the top. Meanwhile, Hazel was talking to Fiver:

"I really don't know what to make of this rabbit. How can he survive with fur like this? You saw how he stands out against the grass. It's a wonder he hasn't been devoured by eril by now."

"His fur is very pale, true, but so is Primrose's," Fiver said.
"Her fur is really beautiful."

Fiver shook his head.

"I know his fur is unnatural, but it's something else that worries me."

"What is it?"

"I feel something unusual about him. Something strange."

"Is it dangerous?" Hazel asked worriedly.

"Oh no, nothing like that," Fiver clarified. "It's just that, he seems vaguely familiar, somehow. But I can't remember where we saw him. He's certainly not from Cowslip's warren, he doesn't smell like that. He's not from Sandleford either. I really don't understand..."

By that point, the three rabbits had reached the warren. Further away, they could hear another rabbit's angry shouts:

"You mean you woke us up for nothing? What's the matter with you, Bigwig?"

"Hey, I didn't know it was just a wandering rabbit," another rabbit said. "The price of safety is constant vigilance."

"What's going on here?" the stranger asked.

"That's just the owsla arguing with the captain," Hazel answered. "Bigwig! Hawkbit! Dandelion! Meet...what did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say. But anyway, it's nice to meet you three," the stranger said, hopping over to the three rabbits. "Small owsla, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's not the entire owsla," Bigwig said. "There is also Strawberry and...wait a moment. Where IS Strawberry? Why is he always missing during training..."

Bigwig went back underground with an angry look on his face. The wanderer looked at Hazel and Fiver, puzzled.

"Strawberry is another buck in the owsla," Fiver explained. "For some reason he doesn't participate in owsla training as often as Hawkbit and Dandelion. Our owsla also includes Captain Holly and Captain Broom, but they don't participate very often either."

"Oh, then the owsla isn't that small after all," the stranger said. "Do you think we could go underground now?"

Hazel nodded, and soon went underground, followed by Fiver and the stranger. The run was long and wide, and the three rabbits soon came across a blue-grey doe, carrying several leaves in her mouth.

"Hello Hazel," she said. "I was stocking up on healing herbs, our supply was getting low. I see there is a new rabbit behind you."

"Oh, right," Hazel said. He turned to the stranger. "You should really tell us your name. It would make things much easier for all of us."

"I don't see why my name matters," the stranger replied. "I am what I am, and my name doesn't
really change what I look like, or how I behave.”

“Yes, right,” Hazel said, slightly annoyed at the stranger's uncooperativeness. “So, this is Blackberry, our digging and healing expert.”

“It’s nice to m-” Blackberry started to say, but suddenly became silent. She kept staring at the stranger, with a worried look on her face. Hazel and Fiver also looked at him, and saw what had attracted her attention: his hind leg on the left side was missing. The fur had grown back around the wound, hiding it from casual observers. Only a rabbit like Blackberry, who paid close attention to details, could have noticed it so easily.

“I lost it to a hrududu, many seasons ago,” the stranger said, having noticed the other rabbits' reactions. “It’s rather hard sometimes, especially when my ear itches, but I can manage, most of the time.”

“Do you want me to inspect the wound?” Blackberry asked.

“No, that wouldn't help. By now, it has healed as much as it ever will. Thanks for the offer, anyway.”

With that, he moved further down the run, leaving Hazel, Fiver and Blackberry alone.

“Hrududil are nasty creatures, aren't they?” Blackberry said. “It’s a good thing we don’t have those near the warren.”

She picked her leaves back up, and went toward her burrow, where the warren's supply of healing herbs was kept. Hazel looked at Fiver worriedly.

“Why does he refuse to tell us his name?” he said. “It sounds like he's hiding something.”

“I don't know why he refuses, but that's not what worries me,” Fiver said. “It's this feeling I have we already met him somewhere. The more he talks, the more familiar he sounds, but I have no idea where we met.”

“Neither do I. I hope you will be able to find out.”

With that, they continued their way and found the stranger again further down the run.

“I just realized something,” he said. “I've met several rabbits living here so far, and you mentioned a few more, but so far, Blackberry is the only doe. You don’t have many, do you?”

“We have a few, but not nearly as many as we have bucks,” Fiver said. “Apart from Blackberry, whom you just met, there is also Clover, whom we helped escape from a hutch last summer, and...”

“She was a hutch rabbit? That's very interesting. And she's still alive, after almost a year?”

“Why, of course she is!” Hazel said, surprised. “Why wouldn't she be?”

“It's just that I've heard a few stories about those hutch rabbits. Most of the time, they are killed by elil mere days after being released in nature, as they are unaware of the danger.”

“Well, it's a good thing there are hardly any elil in the area,” Fiver said, “or she might have stopped running. Anyway, other than Clover and Blackberry, we have one other doe...”

Fiver was interrupted by a loud sound coming from the Honeycomb, the largest burrow in the
warren. He and Hazel rushed there to see what was happening, with the stranger doing his best to follow them.

As they arrived at one of the Honeycomb's many entrances, they chuckled as they saw what was going on: three kittens were running crazily around the burrow, with a yellow-furred doe trying (and not really succeeding) to catch them.

The kittens tried to dart through one of the runs leading outside, but Fiver was faster and was soon standing in front of the run, blocking the passage. By the time they turned around to try another exit, they were completely surrounded. The doe stopped to catch her breath.

"They're getting more energetic every day, Hazel dear," she said. "It's nearly impossible to get them back to the burrow for their nap."

"What's going on?" the stranger, who had just entered the Honeycomb, asked. "There seems to be a lot of excitement around here."

"There is always some excitement when the kittens are around," Fiver said. "Anyway, this is Primrose, the doe I was telling you about. She's also my brother's mate."

"It's always nice to have a new rabbit join us, here on Watership Down," Primrose said. "And as for you," she continued, turning to the kittens, "it's time for your nap, now. If you follow me to the burrow, I will tell you a story of El-ahrairah to help you fall asleep."

Large smiles appeared on the three kittens' faces, and they followed Primrose out of the Honeycomb quietly, excited at the prospect of a story.

"Nice kittens," the stranger commented once Primrose and the kittens were gone. "What are their names?"

"Snowdrop, Mallow and Gilia. And they are all mine," Hazel said proudly. "They are also part of the junior owsla, and doing a good job of it. Sometimes, a better job than the regular owsla, actually."

"Are they the only kittens in the warren?" the stranger asked.

"Actually...no," Hazel said. "I have a fourth one, Periwinkle is her name. She doesn't hang around very often with the other three, though."

"Let's go back outside, shall we?" the stranger suggested. "It's been a while since I last went to silflay, and I'm starting to feel a bit hungry."

The three rabbits went out another run, and made their way outside. The stranger started to nibble the grass.

"The view from up here is amazing," he said. "I hadn't really had a chance to contemplate it when I first arrived here, but I can't believe how far you can see."

"It's really useful," Fiver said. "You can see any enemies coming from a long way off, before they can see us. If we need to fight them, we have the advantage."

"But I thought you said that there were hardly any elil around here?"

"We have enemies, they are just not elil, but other rabbits," Hazel said. "There is a hostile warren nearby, called Efrafa."
"With a name like that, it doesn't sound friendly."

"That's true. Living there is a real nightmare. Primrose lived there for several seasons, until we got her out. Ever since then, they've been sending out wide patrols to find the location of our warren, so they can attack and destroy us. Thankfully, they haven't been successful so far."

"Thank you for the warning. I'll try to stay away from them in my wanderings. And good for you, helping Primrose escape. Did anyone else escape with her?"

"I think there was another one...a buck, I think...but I can't remember his name at the moment..."

"Blackavar," Fiver said.

"That's right, Blackavar, I always forget his name, thanks Fiver," Hazel continued. "We helped him and Primrose escape."

"Was there anyone else?" the stranger asked.

"No, they were the only two."

The stranger remained silent for a while, nibbling the grass in front of him. After a while, he said:

"This is a good warren, Hazel-rah, a positive contribution to rabbitry. But there are a few unusual things about it, that leave several open possibilities."

"What sort of possibilities?" Hazel asked.

But the stranger did not reply. Instead, he closed his eyes and remained motionless for what felt to Hazel like forever. Finally, he opened his eyes again, and looked at the two brothers.

"It's been a good day. I really enjoyed spending it at your warren, but now, I must leave."

"Leave? But where to?" Hazel asked.

"I am a wanderer at heart. It is not in me to stay for extended periods in one place."

"It's sad to see you leave, but if that's what you want we can't stop you," Fiver said. "But if you ever feel like returning, remember that you will always be welcome here at Watership Down."

"Thank you kindly for your offer. I will keep it in mind."

With that, he slowly started to make his way to the bottom of the Down. It took him a while to reach the bottom, as he always had to walk carefully to avoid tumbling down the rest of the way.

"You know, Fiver," Hazel said, "I've been thinking there was something wrong with him ever since I first saw him this morning. But now that he's gone, I can't help but feel that we'll miss him."

"He'll never truly leave, Hazel," Fiver said.

"But how is that possible?"

"I've remembered where I met him. It was in a dream, a long time ago, when we still lived at Sandleford warren. I was..."

"Hazel, I've got to talk to you," came another voice from behind the two brothers. Hazel turned; it was Bigwig.
"What's the matter, Bigwig?"

"I couldn't find Strawberry anywhere in the warren, so I went to search for him in the caverns leading to Efrafa. I hear someone in there, and it's doesn't sound like Strawberry. I think you should take a look..."
Meet the Erafans

“When I employ people as advisors, I will occasionally listen to their advice.”

--Peter Anspach, Evil Overlord List

While the mysterious stranger was getting a guided tour of Watership Down, a group of slave rabbits were hard at work in a nearby field. They were busy gathering flayrah for the leader of Efrafa, the tyrannical General Woundwort, under the close supervision of corporal Moss.

Among the slaves was a rabbit called Vervain, who was previously a captain in Woundwort's owsla. However, the previous fall, a simple trick had been played on him by Hazel and his gang of outsiders, resulting in General Woundwort declaring him insane and demoting him to the lowest possible rank.

“All these seasons, I've served Woundwort loyally,” he thought, “and look how I end up: a slave! While that traitor, Campion, is still a trusted captain. It's totally unfair! How I wish I could capture those outsiders and deliver them to the General! I would finally get the glory I rightfully deserve...”

Suddenly, he noticed that further away, Moss had stopped one of the slaves, who had apparently not brought enough flayrah. Vervain took advantage of Moss' distraction to try to run away. He dropped the small carrot in his mouth and ran as fast as he could, away from Efrafa. It did not take him long to hear the faint voice of Moss:

-"Oi! Where's Vervain? Owsla, follow his scent!”

Vervain gasped in terror as he heard this. He was not a particularly fast runner, so he would have to mask his scent and find a place to hide if he wanted to avoid capture.

Luckily for Vervain, there was a river nearby. He jumped into the water; it was shallow enough for his paws to touch the bottom. He ran upstream and eventually came to a wall covered with moss, although there seemed to be a small hole behind it. “This won't be very comfortable, but it's the only hiding spot nearby, so it will have to do,” he thought.

As he jumped through the moss, however, he saw that the “small hole” he was in was actually a large cavern. “This looks like the lair of the Black Rabbit of Inlé”, he thought. He walked a little further into the cavern, and stepped out of the river onto the shore.

Suddenly, as he was shaking the water out of his fur, he saw that the “small hole” he was in was actually a large cavern. “This looks like the lair of the Black Rabbit of Inlé”, he thought. He walked a little further into the cavern, and stepped out of the river onto the shore.

Suddenly, as he was shaking the water out of his fur, he noticed a few tracks further away, and they were clearly rabbit tracks. He went to smell them, and the scent was vaguely familiar. And then, it hit him: it was the outsiders' scent, and it was still fresh. The outsiders had clearly been there very recently and, Vervain reasoned, this cave might lead directly to their warren. “The General will be amazed when I tell him this!” he thought.

Excited at the prospect of reclaiming his rightful position as the captain of Woundwort's owsla, and possibly exposing the traitorous Campion, Vervain ran back out of the cavern, straight toward Efrafa. The warren had been dug beneath the roots of a dead tree, at the bottom of a large pit. Vervain ran through the first entrance he could find, only to come face to face with Campion, Moss and another officer whose name he didn't know.

-"I demand to see General Woundwort!” he ordered. “I have discovered the location of Hazel's warren!”
He carefully examined the other rabbits' faces, and could see that Moss was considering granting his request of an audition with the Chief. However, Campion intervened:

-"He's raving. Keep him confined to the prison chamber."

As soon as Campion's order had been issued, Moss and the other rabbit grabbed Vervain by the shoulders and dragged him away.

-"You don't understand!" he cried desperately. "Campion is a traitor to Efrafa and is working with the outsiders! General Woundwort will have your ears for this!"

The officers did not react. They carried Vervain the rest of the way and roughly threw him inside the chamber.

-"Campion, you shall suffer for this! I promise you!"

-"Fortunately," Moss said sarcastically, "you never keep your promises, do you?"

Vervain couldn't stand it anymore. Campion had silenced him, and now Moss was making fun of him. He was going to talk to Woundwort, not matter how hard everyone was trying to stop him.

-"NO!" he shouted, as he ran straight out of the chamber, knocking all three officers down in the process. He made his way towards the main chamber, where he found General Woundwort, proudly sitting high on a rock, like a king on his throne. Vervain bowed in respect.

-"Vervain, explain yourself," the General ordered, visibly annoyed.

-"General, sir, I have brilliant news for you. I have new information that will lead to the capture of Hazel and his outsiders."

At that moment, Moss entered the chamber and pounced on Vervain.

-"I'm sorry for the disturbance, sir, this slave has escaped from the prison chamber, but everything will soon be back under control."

-"Hold," Woundwort ordered. "I wish to hear what he has to say."

-"Thank you, sire," Vervain said. "But I refuse to speak while that big oaf is on my back."

-"Let him go, Moss."

Moss sighed, and hopped off the prisoner's back. At that moment, Campion entered the burrow, while Vervain, unaware of the captain's presence, began to explain his discovery:

-"You know how, near Efrafa, there is this river..."

-"I know about the river, Vervain," Woundwort said. "Get to the point."

-"And how upstream there is a wall of moss..."

-"GET TO THE POINT!"

-"Behind this wall of moss, there is a cavern, and it leads to the outsiders' warren."

After Vervain had finished explaining his discovery, all four rabbits remained silent for a few moments. Campion was the first to speak:
-”But General, I already checked that cavern while on patrol, there's nothing there.”

As he heard that, Woundwort growled in anger.

-”Take this troublemaker to the digging squad! Cut his rations in half!”

-”As you wish, sir,” Moss said.

-”NO! I'm telling the truth, I swear! It's all a conspiracy!” Vervain said as he found himself getting dragged away once again. “Everyone is working for the outsiders!”

Campion, meanwhile, hopped into a nearby run. He had lied: he had never visited the cavern, and was unaware of its existence until Vervain had mentioned it. He really was sympathizing with the outsiders, and had silenced Vervain before Woundwort would get suspicious.

However, Campion knew that it was unlike Vervain to imagine things like this; he therefore decided to take a look at the cavern himself. He hopped over to the river and cleared away the moss; did this cavern really lead to the outsiders' warren?

-”Hazel! Bigwig!” he called out, receiving no response other than the echo of his own voice. He walked further into the cavern, and got out of the water. The outsiders' tracks were clearly visible in front of him.

Campion continued to walk further and further into the cavern; the outsiders' scent kept getting stronger. Suddenly, after a turn, he came face to face with Hazel, Fiver and Bigwig.

-”Campion!” Hazel said in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

-”Oh Hazel, I've got terrible news,” Campion said. “Vervain found an entrance to your warren, the one behind the moss near the river.”

-”That really is terrible,” Bigwig said. “I guess we'll have to prepare for an attack.”

-”It's not all that bad. Currently everyone, including Woundwort, thinks Vervain is insane; nobody believes him.”

-”Hmm. But if anyone else ever discovers this entrance, we can count on you to warn us before it is too late, right?” Bigwig said.

-”And while you're here,” Fiver suggested, “why don't you take a look around, and see what you've been working so hard to protect?”

-”Yes, I would like that very much,” Campion said.

The three Watershippers smiled, and all four rabbits soon went towards the Honeycomb, with Campion staring in amazement at his surroundings.
“How many things, too, are looked upon as quite impossible, until they have been actually effected?”

--Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*

While Campion was visiting Watership Down, Vervain was tunnelling through the rocky soil at Efrafa. He was supposed to dig a new storeroom for General Woundwort's flayrah, but progress was slow, partly because the soil was unstable, but also because Vervain was not particularly good at digging. To make things worse, he was digging in the wrong direction, and soon broke into an existing burrow.

“I can't believe I'm forced to do does' work all day long just General Woundwort can have fresh flayrah,” he thought, filled with anger. “I find the location of the outsiders' warren and he doesn't even believe me, trusting that traitor Campion instead. Was I ever rewarded for my loyalty? Of course not, I got nothing but trouble! Sometimes, I wish he was dead...”

Suddenly, it dawned on him: why couldn't he kill Woundwort? The tunnel he had dug was connected with the main Efrafa burrow system, which he could navigate by heart. The guard outside the chamber had only been recently promoted to the owsla and was not paying close attention. Vervain could easily sneak into Woundwort's burrow, kill him, and return to the tunnel without the guard, or anyone else, noticing. And that, he reasoned, would be the end of his problems.

Vervain cast one last look outside; the guard was still not paying attention to him. As silently as he could, he sneaked out of the chamber. He spent a long time wandering through the most obscure (and least frequented) passages, until he finally came to the great chamber. Woundwort, as usual, was on his rock and, luckily for Vervain, sound asleep. He climbed on top of the rock, and sneaked up behind Woundwort when, suddenly, he was filled with fear. While he had set up a perfect alibi, he didn't know how to actually perform the murder. He had executed many prisoners while he was in the owsla; in most situations, a single blow to the head was enough to kill them. But the General was much larger and stronger; killing him would be a massive challenge.

Vervain remained there, sitting next to the General. He had to make up his mind, and either act or flee. The longer he stayed on the rock, the higher the chances of him getting caught were. Eventually, he decided he would have to try, and bit the General's neck as hard as he could.

At that moment, a terrible sound broke from the General, louder than anything Vervain had ever heard before. He completely panicked, clawing the General's neck, praying to Frith the noise would stop. And eventually, it did.

Vervain stared at the body for a few moments. Woundwort was covered with blood; he looked dead, but Vervain didn't have time to check. With that terrible scream, the entire owsla would probably be there in just a few moments; he had to get away. Vervain tried to retrace his steps back to the chamber he was supposed to dig, but in his panic, he couldn't think properly, and got lost. To make matters worse, his teeth and his claws were covered with blood, and he had no idea how he would be able to clean them.

Meanwhile at Watership Down, Campion was walking through the various burrows and runs, amazed at how large the warren was: Efrafan burrows were much smaller, and served the needs of
more rabbits than there were at the Down. But what amazed him the most was how happy everyone seemed. He had never seen such a cheerful bunch of rabbits before in his life.

For many months, he had been taking advantage of his position as captain of Woundwort's owsla to protect Watership Down, his rank keeping him above suspicion. As he visited the warren, which he had been fighting to protect for almost an entire year, he thought back on all the events that had caused the war in the first place.

After a long time, he finally made it above ground, where he saw Primrose lying in the grass, with her eyes closed and a large smile on her face. As he lied down further away, she opened her eyes and turned at him.

"Feel the freedom, Campion," she said.

"What?"

"Feel the wind of freedom blow through your fur."

Campion closed his eyes too. It was rather windy, but he didn't really focus on “feeling the freedom”. He had something on his mind, and he felt obligated to tell Primrose about it.

"Primrose," he asked, “why did you run away?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you choose to escape from Efrafa?"

"Campion, you know what life is like in Efrafa. I vowed that I would have freedom, or welcome death. Besides, I love Hazel, and I wanted to be with him."

"Primrose, why didn't you mate with me instead? I would have tried to make you happy. You would have earned a few privileges granted to the families of officers, and Vervain couldn't have bullied you anymore."

Primrose remained silent. She had never seriously considered the possibility of mating with Campion; Hazel was the only rabbit she had ever been in love with. But it dawned on her that if she had stayed in Efrafa and mated with Campion, the war between the two warrens would probably never have happened. Suddenly, Campion said:

"Hey, it's getting late. I should probably go back to Efrafa before Woundwort starts suspecting anything."

With that, he got up and made his way toward the warren's main entrance. Before going underground, he cast one last look at Primrose; the cheerful expression she had earlier had completely vanished. Campion briefly wondered whether he had made a mistake, but nevertheless went back underground, toward the caverns.

"Leaving so soon?" Hazel asked him.

"I have to, unfortunately, before anyone gets worried back at Efrafa. But I'll come back."

"You will always be welcome, here at Watership Down."

Campion nodded, and entered the caverns, with Hazel following him. Slightly further away, he bumped into another rabbit.
"Oh, I'm sorry, I..." she started to say. "Oh, hello. You're new here, aren't you?"

"Blackberry, this is Campion," Hazel said, introducing the two rabbits. "Campion, meet Blackberry, our digging and healing expert."

"I've heard a lot of stories about you, Campion," Blackberry said.

"Yeah...and you did a good job digging this warren..." Campion said, rather awkwardly.

"I wasn't the only one. But it did take a while to convince some of the others to participate..."

Blackberry and Campion continued to stare at each other, with Hazel awkwardly watching the scene unfold. After a while, Blackberry said:

"Well, it was nice meeting you Campion. And be careful in the caverns. I was just inspecting them, and the ceiling seems rather unstable in some places."

"It was a pleasure meeting you too. And thanks for the warning, I'll keep it in mind."

With that, the two rabbits went their separate ways, Blackberry going toward the Honeycomb, with Campion returning to the river. Hazel followed the nearest run leading outside, and along the way met Primrose, her ears drooping to the sides of her head.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked. "You look like you have something on your mind. You know I'm available if you want to talk about it."

"No, it's all right, Hazel, I'm fine," she replied, without even looking at him.

Hazel looked at Primrose as she walked away deeper in the warren. He was sure that she wasn't feeling very well, but he didn't know how he could help. Hopefully she would accept to talk to him about it later...

When Campion returned to Efrafa, there was a large crowd gathered in the central chamber. He squeezed his way through the crowd, trying to locate Moss. He finally found him near the rock.

"What's going on, Moss?"

"The General is dead! Someone killed him!"

Campion gasped in shock. He looked up at the rock; Woundwort's bloody corpse was still there, where Vervain had left it.

"Oh Frith help us..."
Chaos persisted in Efrafa for a long time. After it had finally subsided, a few officers carried General Woundwort's body away from Efrafa. He was by far the largest rabbit in the warren, and it took four members of the owsla to transport him. A deep hole was dug some distance from the warren, and the body was deposited at the bottom. The hole was then filled up again, and an officer returned with a few leaves of woundwort, which were scattered over the grave. The officers then remained silent and bowed in respect for their fallen leader.

A while later, the owsla was gathered in the central chamber. Moss jumped on top of the rock overlooking the chamber; it was still stained with Woundwort's blood.

-“Today is a sad day for everyone here in Efrafa, and all rabbits everywhere. General Woundwort, the most fearless, strongest, bravest and wisest rabbit ever, has stopped running today. He did not die in the line of duty, but was mercilessly killed in cold blood. We do not know yet who is responsible, but when the murderer is discovered, they will pay the supreme penalty.

General Woundwort was one of a kind. No other rabbit can replace him, but Efrafa nevertheless needs a new Chief to carry on his legacy. He did not have a mate or kittens; therefore, according to ancient Efrafan law, the new leader is to be his captain of owsla: Campion.”

As Moss finished his speech, everyone started to cheer, pleased with Campion's promotion. Only Campion himself was unhappy; as he made his way to the top of the rock, he was filled with a mixture of sadness and anger. Seeing everyone pressuring him for a speech, he had no choice but to make one:

-“I thank all of you for your kind words, and for trusting me with such an important job.

General Woundwort's main goal, for the past year or so, has been to find the outsiders' warren and destroy it, a task we have failed to accomplish so far. If we were unable to find the warren in a full set of seasons, how can we be expected to do it now, when we have just lost our leader? I therefore order that all patrols are to be stopped until further notice. That will prevent a lot of unnecessary deaths.

The General's death has also affected the outskirters and the slaves. Many of them are in bad health, and the news of today's tragedy will probably weaken them further. Disease may break, and if that happens, it would be impossible to stop, and might possibly destroy us all. Therefore, I order that all rabbits are hereby allowed to silflay whenever they wish...”

-“STOP!”

Everyone turned to see who had spoken. It was Vervain, sitting at the back of the crowd, his fur completely wet. He had taken advantage of the confusion following the discovery of Woundwort's body to go the river, where he had thoroughly cleaned himself. It did not take long for Moss to pounce on him and pin him to the ground.
"I'm sorry, Campion sir," the officer said, "this slave must have escaped in the confusion, and now interrupts your speech. I will make sure this doesn't happen again."

"You can't!" Vervain insisted. "Campion is a traitor to Efrafa! He is working with the outsid-"

"Let him go, Moss," Campion ordered. "Give him back his old burrow. The General's murder has affected his fragile mind, give him time to recover. But remember that he is insane and is to be treated as such."

"As you say, sir," Moss said reluctantly. Vervain, meanwhile, was angry:

"You think you can buy my silence with privileges. Well, let me tell you: you can't. I will not rest until you are exposed as the traitor you really are."

With that, he stormed away toward the burrow he had when he was a captain of owsla. Most of the officers looked at him with contempt; after he was gone, Campion finished his speech:

"As I was saying, all rabbits may silflay whenever they wish. And finally, General Woundwort's killer must be discovered. Nobody in the owsla is to rest until the rabbit responsible is discovered and punished. That is all."

With that, Campion walked away from the crowd. He took Moss aside.

"Look, take over for the day, will you?" he said. "I have some business elsewhere to take care of."

"As you say, sir," Moss replied. "When can we expect you back?"

"I don't know, but wait until my return before putting anyone on trial for Woundwort's murder. I want to be the judge."

With that, he walked out of the warren. Moss looked at him until he lost sight of him near the river.

At Watership Down, a certain number of rabbits were enjoying a late afternoon silflay. Hazel was quietly nibbling a dandelion when he suddenly saw a large shadow appear next to him. He turned to see what it was.

"Hello Campion," he said. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon."

"WHY DID YOU DO IT?" Campion asked angrily.

"Do what?"

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about!"

By this point, several rabbits had gathered around Hazel and Campion.

"What's going on here?" Bigwig asked.

"You're all pretending not to know," Campion said, "but I'll tell you. General Woundwort was killed today."

Everyone gasped in shock at the news.

"Do you know who did it?" Hazel asked cautiously.
“One of you outsiders did, obviously. You were all keeping me busy, showing me all the wonders of your warren, but while I was distracted, one of you mercilessly murdered my Chief.”

“Eh, if he's dead, so much the better,” Hawkbit said, only to be cuffed in the ears by Bigwig.

“I may have agreed to work against Woundwort from the inside,” Campion continued, “but that didn't give you permission to kill him in cold blood like you did.”

“Campion,” Fiver said, having just arrived, “you don't seriously think we would have misled you like this, do you?”

Campion stared at Fiver for a long time. Ever since he had first seen Woundwort's corpse, he had been convinced that the outsiders were responsible, but the look on the small buck's face almost proved that they had nothing to do with it.

“Oh, this is all so MEANINGLESS!” he shouted in anger, before running toward the bottom of the Down, away from Efrafa. The Watershippers remained motionless and silent.

“Do you think...Woundwort is really...dead?” Dandelion asked after a while.

“Campion wouldn't joke about something like this,” Hazel said.

“I can't believe it,” Blackberry said. “This war has been going on for almost a full set of seasons, and suddenly...it's over. Without a battle or anything.”

“Whoever killed Woundwort saved us a lot of trouble,” Hawkbit said. “Now that the war's over, Bigwig, you'll stop all these patrols and everything, all right?”

“The patrols will continue as usual,” Bigwig said sternly. “This war may be over, but if we ever have to fight another one, we have to be ready.”

With that, Bigwig walked away from the others, when he suddenly bumped into another rabbit; it was Strawberry.

“Where have you been?” he asked angrily. “I've been searching for you all day!”

“I'm sorry, Bigwig,” Strawberry stammered, “there was a patch of clover at the bottom of the Down, and I thought I would visit it. Once I was there, I met this bird and we had a long, thought-provoking discussion until she flew away. And then...I fell asleep, I guess.”

Strawberry expected Bigwig to lecture him on his lack of discipline, but that did not happen:

“It doesn't really matter. General Woundwort is dead. The war is over.”

“Really? That's good news. I suppose this means the patrols will stop?”

“You're the second one to ask me this, but the answer remains the same: no. Say, did YOU kill Woundwort? You weren't anywhere in the warren when it happened. This clover patch story isn't just an excuse, is it?”

“No, I tell you, Bigwig, it wasn't me. I wouldn't have been brave enough. I really wonder who it was...”

The news spread quickly throughout the warren. Most rabbits were happy that the war was finally over, but shocked at the way it had ended. The only one who had reservations was Fiver.
"I'm a bit worried about Campion," he told Hazel that evening. "I really don't like the way he ran away. This could potentially spell trouble."

"Don't worry about that, Fiver," Hazel said. "He's probably just as shocked as we are. Give him a few days and he will probably be back to normal. Then, maybe we will be able to go to Efrafa and begin formal negotiations."

"Perhaps you're right, Hazel. But altogether, I don't like it."

Meanwhile, some distance from Efrafa, a weasel was wandering through the woods, searching for food. He eventually came upon some freshly disturbed ground, and a fresh scent of blood. There was probably a dead creature buried there.

Suddenly, the ground started to move. The weasel remained motionless, looking at the moving dirt as it seemed to cave in. After it had stopped, he slowly approached it again. At the moment when he least expected it, something sprung from the hole. It was a rabbit, but unlike any other rabbit he had ever seen before. It was unusually large and covered with blood, with its right eye shining bright red.

The weasel was about to dismiss this strange apparition as a ghost and look for an easy meal elsewhere when suddenly, the "ghost" bit his nose. The weasel yelped in pain, and tried to get his nose free, to no avail. After a few seconds, the rabbit let go, and the weasel ran away as fast as he could. It took a while for the bleeding to stop.

Woundwort finished to dig himself out of his grave. Vervain had not killed him, but would have succeeded had he not panicked. Instead, the General had been knocked unconscious, and was still in great pain from the attack. He cleaned the blood, but it would take a while before he could move his head properly again.

He turned and looked at the dead tree under which Efrafa was built. It looked unusually calm and silent.

"I made Efrafa great again," he thought, "and this is how they repay me: burying me alive. They won't get away with it. I will have revenge."

With that, he ran away into the night, thinking about nothing but revenge, against the outsiders responsible for his downfall, and his own owsla, who had deserted him when he needed them the most.
“Many small businesses are doomed from day one, not from competition or the economy, but from the ignorance of their owners . . . their destiny is already decided because they have no idea how a business should be operated.”

--William Manchee, Go Broke, Die Rich: Turning Around the Troubled Small Business

It was early in the morning, shortly after sunrise. Hazel peaked out of the warren's main entrance, and went outside. The sky was cloudy; a thunderstorm was on its way. He estimated that it would not break until that evening.

Hazel heard a soft noise coming from behind him. He turned, and saw another rabbit slowly approaching him.

-"Can't sleep, Bigwig?"

-"Not really," Bigwig answered. “I know I should be happy, the war being over and all, but that will probably make my job even more difficult. You know how I've been having trouble getting the owsla to take the job seriously, but now that the war is over, they're convinced that there is no purpose in training.”

-"At least Pipkin takes his job as captain of the junior owsla seriously.”

-"Yeah. Thank Frith there are still rabbits like him! I'm sure he will be a fine replacement for me, when I retire in a few sets of seasons. But until then, the regular owsla is short on useful rabbits”.

-"Why don't you give them a break for a few days?" Hazel suggested. “I'm sure we could all use some rest, now that the war is over.”

-"Perhaps I could try that. But you seem to be having problems of your own, Hazel. You rarely go outside at this time of day, and when you do, Fiver is usually with you, but now you're alone.”

-"I think there's something wrong with Primrose. She didn't get much sleep last night. When I told her that Woundwort was dead, she said something about how she was responsible for the war, but when I asked her what she meant, she didn't reply.

Bigwig remained silent, as he tried to think of a decent reply.

-"The only one responsible for the war is Woundwort himself, and he's dead now. Where did she get that crazy idea that it was her fault?”

-"I wish I knew. If I did, it would probably be easier to help her. Do you have anything to suggest? I'm rather short on good ideas at the moment.”

-"How about going on a nice, quiet little raid on Nuthanger Farm? No rabbit can resist the rich, sweet, crunchy taste of fresh lettuce. If that doesn't cheer Primrose up, I don't know what will.”

-"You may have something there, Bigwig. And besides, the war is over, shouldn't we celebrate? Why don't we organize a feast?”

-"Brilliant idea, Hazel! Who else do we bring for the raid?”
"Perhaps it should be just the two of us. This way we can surprise the others when we return with the flayrah."

"Hmmm, that makes sense. What do you say we start ni-Frith?"

"I'll be ready, Bigwig."

With that, the two rabbits hopped away; Hazel went back to his burrow to check up on Primrose, while Bigwig decided to patrol around the Down. His mind was full of exciting thoughts about the upcoming adventure, and as a consequence he wasn't paying close attention to his surroundings, causing him to bump into another rabbit.

As he got back up, Bigwig looked at this other rabbit; his fur was mostly brown, almost black, and he had a strange overgrowth of fur on his head, not unlike Bigwig's, but smaller. He could not remember seeing this rabbit before.

"Who are you?" Bigwig asked.

"My name is Blackavar, sir," the stranger replied.

"Blackavar?" Bigwig repeated, searching his memory for more information on this rabbit. "Oh yes, I remember you now," he lied. "I'm sorry, I wasn't looking where I was going..."

Bigwig walked away, casting an awkward glance at Blackavar. "I know I've met him somewhere before, but I can't remember where," he thought.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Down, Blackberry was lying in the grass. At first glance, it might look like she was enjoying the feeling of the wind blowing through her fur, but she was actually absorbed in deep thought. When she had first arrived at Watership Down as part of Hazel's band of fugitives from Sandleford Warren, she had taken part in the digging of the warren. While several of the bucks also helped, she still ended up doing most of the work. But that was several seasons ago, and since then, hardly any new digging had had been done. The only new burrow dug afterwards had been made by Primrose while she was pregnant. Afterwards, the warren was mostly preoccupied with the war with Efrafa, and she felt like she had done very little to help the others.

She pondered the question of what she had done wrong, and what she could do to help now that the war was over. She eventually made a decision, and decided to talk to Bigwig about it.

Meanwhile, Bigwig was in the Honeycomb talking to Hazel.

"I met a rabbit outside just now," he said. He told me his name is Blackavar, but I can't remember anything about him."

"Oh, I think he's the rabbit whom we helped escape from Efrafa along with Primrose," Hazel explained.

"I can't believe I forgot about him. Is there anyone else living here that I don't remember?"

"I don't think so. If there is anyone else, I don't remember them either. But it's terrible. When we helped him escape, he seemed like a good, useful rabbit. A bit loud, sometimes, but a good runner. Despite this, I can't remember a single mission of importance he participated in."

"Hmm. Hazel, why don't we bring him along on today's raid? That would be giving him a chance to do something useful."
"I'm not sure about that, Bigwig," a third rabbit said. Both Hazel and Bigwig turned to see who it was; it was Fiver.

"How long have you been spying on us?" Bigwig asked.

"I wouldn't exactly call it spying, but I have been listening for quite a while. Don't worry, though, I won't tell anyone about your secret project. I'm just a bit worried about Blackavar."

"What's the matter with Blackavar?" Bigwig asked, slightly annoyed.

"As you said, Hazel, he hasn't participated in a single mission of importance since the escape from Efrafa. He's been kept sheltered here in the warren for almost a full set of seasons. And before that, he was in Efrafa, where he didn't learn much about the natural lives of rabbits. Even Clover has more experience than he does."

"What nonsense!" Bigwig exclaimed. “Clover was born in a hutch, and her parents before her were also born in a hutch, and their parents too, probably. This lack of natural instincts runs in their blood. Blackavar, meanwhile, lived in the wilderness all his life like normal rabbits...”

Bigwig ignored the fact that Clover was lying in a corner of the Honeycomb and overheard the entire conversation. She did not take his comments very well.

"So I'm not a normal rabbit, eh?"

Bigwig was taken aback, and did his best to control the damage.

"That's not what I meant..."

"You said that I lack natural instincts and I'm not a normal rabbit. I'll admit I'm not as fast or strong as some of you “normal” rabbits, but I still do my best, you know?"

"I didn't..."

"I'll be at silflay. Hopefully I can still digest grass properly despite not being a normal rabbit."

With that, she hopped out of the burrow.

"Nice job Bigwig." Fiver rolled his eyes. “Anyway, the fact remains that Blackavar's lack of experience has weakened his instincts. If he wants to participate in any raids, he should at least take part in some basic owsla training before."

"You have to contradict me in everything I say, don't you?"

"Look, Bigwig, you won't get anywhere shouting like this." Hazel stepped in to resolve the argument. “Fiver, I understand everything you say. That is why I will take the greatest care to make sure nothing bad happens. Me and Bigwig will guide Blackavar throughout the whole experience, and be on the lookout for cats and dogs. He will be fine."

"As you say, Hazel," Fiver said reluctantly. “But I still feel uneasy about all this, and if something happens, I don't want to be the one saying “I told you so.”"
The early spring wind was blowing through the leaves of the many trees surrounding the warren. Among the many rabbits at silflay was a handsome black-furred buck, who was staring with admiration at a doe, further away. The two had known each other for a few months, and got along very well. That day, however, the buck was feeling mischievous. He slowly approached the doe, who did not appear to have noticed his presence. Suddenly, he put one of his front paws on her tail, and removed it instantly.

-“Chibiscuit, tail tag!” he said, running as fast as he could the opposite way.

-“Oh Vervain, you rascal,” the doe said, as she started to chase him.

Chibiscuit chased Vervain across the field, before finally catching up with him, putting her paws on his tail and leaping the other way. Vervain tried to run after her, but she was too fast for him. He would have to change tactics.

Chibiscuit continued to run across the field, until she suddenly stopped. She looked around her, and there was no sign of Vervain anywhere. At that moment, she felt something touch her tail. She turned and realized she was sitting in the mouth of a hole, where Vervain was hiding.

-“Hey, that's not fair!” she said.

With that, Vervain tried to run away, but Chibiscuit touched his tail again before he managed to get out of the tunnel.

Chibiscuit and Vervain spent most of the afternoon playing their game, with a few other rabbits briefly joining in. Finally, in an attempt at catching Vervain before he could make it underground, Chibiscuit jumped into his side. The two rabbits rolled for a short distance before stopping.

Chibiscuit and Vervain remained lying on their sides in the grass for a while, trying to catch their breaths. They looked at each other, smiling.

-“Chib,” Vervain said, “is it all right if I call you Chib?”

-“Sure, you can call me what you want,” she replied.

-“For a few months now, we've been good friends. I...”

-“Yes?”

-“I've been wanting to ask you for a while now...”

-“EVERYONE UNDERGROUND!”
Chibiscuit and Vervain turned and stared in shock at the captain of owsla, who had just issued the order.

-"Wha- what's the matter?" Vervain asked worriedly.

-"We're being attacked. Everyone is to go underground at once."

He ran into the nearest hole without waiting for a reply. Vervain looked away, further down the field. There was a large band of rabbits there – strangers. One of them was larger than any other rabbit he had ever seen, and his glowing red eyes filled him with terror.

Vervain squealed. The red-eyed rabbit was no longer there.

Vervain had the same nightmare on a somewhat regular basis, but this time it had terrified more than ever before.

He stared at the walls of his burrow; he had lived in that burrow ever since he had become a captain in Woundwort's owsla. He recalled how he had first obtained the position.

Vervain never liked being on the losing side of things, except maybe a game of tail tag. He had quickly realized there was no chance his warren would win a battle against these invaders. He therefore decided to offer his services to their leader. While not a particularly good fighter, his knowledge of the warren's defences and several rabbits' weaknesses in combat proved to be extremely valuable to Woundwort.

The battle was over by morning. Half the rabbits in the warren were dead; the other half were taken to Efrafa, where they remained slaves for the rest of their lives. While General Woundwort lost his left eye in the battle, not a single of his rabbits was killed. Vervain was promoted to captain of owsla, and soon afterwards was chosen to lead the attack against Redstone Warren, where he kidnapped Primrose and several other rabbits. Vervain remained Woundwort's most trusted officer (along with Campion) for many seasons...until the outsiders showed up. Now, Vervain had been demoted, Campion was a traitor, and Woundwort was dead. Vervain's entire life had fallen apart.

-"Oh Chib," he said, sobbing. "What have I done?"

Vervain had never seen Chibiscuit again since that day. However, her body was not among those of the rabbits killed in the battle, nor was she among the slaves taken to Efrafa. Therefore, Vervain still hoped that she had managed to get away from the warren, and was still alive, somewhere.

Suddenly, Vervain remembered: the General was dead. The only thing holding him to Efrafa was gone forever. He had no reason to stay there. He was now free! Free to go and search for his best friend! Nothing could stop him now!

Full of energy, Vervain ran out of the burrow. He turned left and followed the run until he was outside. He stopped to feel the wind; it was very refreshing.

-"Hello Moss!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Wonderful day, isn't it?"

He ran to the edge of the pit, and effortlessly climbed out, with Moss staring at him from a distance.

-"Moss, do something!" another officer shouted. "He's going to get away!"

-"No, let him go," Moss said. "Campion was right: he IS mad. There is no way he could ever pose a threat to us. Besides, we have more important things to take care of the moment, such as finding
the rabbit who killed the General.”

Chapter End Notes

The character of Chibiscuit is inspired by a real person and is used with her permission.
Dandelion's Big Story

Chapter Notes

Part of this chapter is loosely inspired by an unproduced episode of the TV series that has been mentioned on the DVD boxset. (I also stole that episode's name for the chapter name)

"Great stories happen to those who can tell them."

--Ira Glass

Hazel, Bigwig and Blackavar were staring worriedly at the clouds. It had not taken a lot of persuasion for Blackavar to accept to participate in the raid; he was very excited at the thought of adventure.

-"If we want to get back before the storm breaks, we'll have to start now,” Hazel said.

Just as they were about to start their descent, however, they heard a female voice:

-"Bigwig, could I talk to you for a moment?"

“We haven't even started yet and we already get interrupted,” Bigwig thought. He turned to face the rabbit who had addressed him.

-”What's the matter, Blackberry?”

"I've been thinking things over, and I feel like I haven't been contributing enough to the warren.”

-”Nonsense, Blackberry!” Hazel said. “You helped a lot with digging the warren, and nobody else knows as much about healing herbs as you do.”

-”That's true, but...I still haven't done anything in the war against Woundwort.”

-”What's your point?” Bigwig asked.

-”I want to join the owsla.”

Bigwig remained silent for a few moments, unsure what to reply.

-”Join the owsla? But that's impossible! You have no experience!” he finally shouted, momentarily forgetting how inexperienced Blackavar was. “And you're...”

He was about to say “and you're a doe”, but decided against it. Blackberry most likely wouldn't take the comment very well, and after the incident with Clover earlier, he wasn't in the mood for another argument.

-”I would be willing to learn, Bigwig,” Blackberry said.
"Look, I'm rather busy at the moment. If you're serious about this, we'll talk it over tomorrow, all right?"

With that, the three bucks hopped away, leaving Blackberry alone at the top of the Down. When they were halfway to the bottom, however...

"Hazel, Bigwig, where are you going?"

Bigwig sighed loudly and turned around. Pipkin was further away, looking at them with a look of curiosity on his face.

"I can't tell you," Hazel answered. "It's a secret."

"I love secrets! Tell me more."

"The whole point of a secret is that you don't tell anyone about it."

"Can I come with you, then?"

"Look, Hazel, let me handle this," Bigwig whispered. "You and Blackavar go...where you have to go. I'll meet you later."

"Be nice to him, Bigwig..."

"Look, I know I didn't handle Clover very well, but have I ever shouted at Pipkin? It'll be fine, I promise."

With that, Hazel and Blackavar hopped away. Bigwig, meanwhile, went back to the top of the Down, with Pipkin following him from a distance.

Hawkbit, Dandelion and Strawberry were lying in the grass next to each other.

"Such a peaceful day," Hawkbit muttered. "Nothing can interrupt this..."

"Oi! EVERYBODY WAKE UP!"

"Oooh...what's the matter now, Bigwig?"

"I'm going to need you lot to keep Pipkin entertained for the day."

"But Bigwig," Dandelion interjected, "how do you expect us to do that?"

"I don't know. It's your job to find a way."

"Hey, why don't we try that game," Strawberry said, "what's it called already...right, owslafa. A bird told me about it. The players..."

"A bird? Has Kehaar been telling you any more crazy stories about the Big Water?"

"No, it wasn't Kehaar, it was that bird I mentioned yesterday, her name was S..."

"You can't talk to a bird! They're savage brutes. Except Kehaar, of course."

"She was quite friendly..."

"They have gone nuts, both of them." Hawkbit rolled his eyes. "Come on, Dandelion, let's discuss
what we're going to do, alone.”

-”I don't want to hear any more about it,” Bigwig told the orange buck. “Find a way to entertain Pipkin, that's all I ask.”

With that, Bigwig walked away, leaving Pipkin with Strawberry and the others. He rejoined Hazel and Blackavar some distance from the Down, thankfully having not been interrupted again.

-”How are you two getting along?” he asked.

-”Well, sir, I must say it's an unusual experience,” Blackavar said, “but I have a feeling it's going to be exciting.”

-”You'll get used to it after a while,” Hazel said. “I just wish Kehaar were here.”

-”Where is he?” Bigwig asked. “I didn't even notice he was gone.”

-”He and Hannah went to visit some of his gull friends at a place he called the “big city”, whatever that is. He didn't say when he would be back.”

After Bigwig had brushed her off, Blackberry did not know exactly what she should do. It was clear to her that Bigwig didn't want her in the owsla. His offer to discuss it the next day was most likely a trick to get her to leave him alone.

Then, she remembered Captain Broom. While he was rather old, he still knew several interesting tricks and had proven his worth on more than one occasion. Maybe he could teach her a few tricks she could then use to impress Bigwig. She wandered around the Down searching for him, when she heard loud voices. She approached the two rabbits responsible and listened.

-”I tell you, Hawkbit, I can't play bobstones all day.”

-”Nobody's asking you to play bobstones all day, Dandelion, and it's not as if you had any better ideas to suggest!”

-”What is there to suggest? I was looking forward to a quiet afternoon lying in the grass and relaxing. But no, instead we have to babysit Pipkin.”

-”Why couldn't Bigwig choose someone else, I don't know, Primrose, maybe? She's already got four kittens, she wouldn't mind taking in another one for one day, would she?”

-”Look, Dandelion,” Blackberry interjected, “you're good at telling stories. Why don't you try that?”

-”But I can't tell stories all day. I'll get a sore throat.”

-”Perhaps you could act out the story? Pipkin pretends to be one of the characters in the story, Hawkbit can be another, and you, Dandelion, yet another.”

Hawkbit and Dandelion remained silent for a few moments, contemplating the idea.

-”That could probably work,” Hawkbit said after a while, “and in the end, what have we got to lose? Let's try it. Thanks, Blackberry. Now where's Pipkin...”

The two bucks went away to search for him. Blackberry, meanwhile, resumed her search for the elderly captain.
It did not take long for Hawkbit and Dandelion to find Pipkin. He was sitting further away with Strawberry, looking at a ladybug on a dandelion.

-”Hey Pipkin,” Dandelion said, “I’m going to tell a story, how would you like to be one of the characters?”

-”Wow! That sounds very exciting!” Pipkin said.

-”All right. So you're wandering through the forest one night, looking at the full moon in the sky...”

-”But it's daytime. There is no full moon.”

-”We'll have to pretend. Just stare at the sky.”

Pipkin raised his head and did as Dandelion had said.

-”...when suddenly, a fox springs from...”

-”Hold on,” Hawkbit interrupted. “What story are you telling?”

-”The Story of the Rabbit who Served in the Owsla of the Black Rabbit of Inlé.”

-”Are you sure this is a good idea? It sounds like a rather scary story...”

-”Oh, it's all right, Hawkbit,” Pipkin said, “I like this story so far. Do carry on, Dandelion.”

-”So, as I was saying,” Dandelion continued, “a fox sprang from a nearby bush, and landed on you!”

With that, Dandelion playfully pounced on Pipkin, pinning him to the ground and making a lot of weird sounds.

-”What are you doing?” Hawkbit asked.

-”I'm supposed to be a fox, right?” Dandelion said. “So naturally I have to sound like one.”

-”You sound more like Vervain who didn't get enough sleep, than like a fox, but never mind, we get the idea.”

-”So, the fox attacked you, Pipkin, and killed you. You're dead. And you know what happens when you're dead?”

-”The Black Rabbit comes for you?” Pipkin guessed.

-”Exactly. So now we need someone to pretend to be the Black Rabbit...”

Pipkin and Dandelion looked at Hawkbit. As he realized what was happening, he panicked.

-”Hey, don't look at me, I'm grey. Find someone with black fur.”

-”I think you'll do very well, Hawkbit,” Dandelion said, “although you're a little pale. Come with me, I have a plan.”

“Oh no,” Hawkbit thought. “What did I get myself into?”
“While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die.”

--Leonardo da Vinci

Ever since his departure from Watership Down the previous day, Campion had been aimlessly wandering throughout the area. He had not gone back to Efrafa, although he had briefly stopped by Woundwort's grave. It had been opened, and the smell of weasel was everywhere. Everything seemed to indicate that the corpse had fallen victim to elil.

Early that afternoon, Campion reached a large canal. He looked down the stone walls at his reflection in the water far below. Who was he? He was an Efrafan, and it was his responsibility to lead his warren. But he had made mistakes. He had been trying to help the outsiders, but they had betrayed his trust by killing his Chief. Or maybe they were telling the truth, and they really were innocent. But either way, Vervain was right: he was a traitor. Efrafa had no need for traitors; the warren would be better off without him. Moss was a competent rabbit; he could handle things fine without him.

“And if the outsiders are responsible for his death, at least pretty little Blackberry is innocent,” he thought, raising his head to look at the darkening clouds in the sky. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he didn't pay attention to where he was doing, and as a consequence walked straight into the canal. He squealed in fear as he fell for what felt like forever, before he painfully collided with the surface, and slowly sank in the uncomfortably cold water. Almost immediately afterwards, he was struck by the propeller of a passing boat.

It took a while before Campion regained consciousness. When he did, he struggled to remember where he was or why he was there. This place looked like a desert; there were no plants nearby, not even a single blade of grass or weed. While there was a green meadow in the distance, it was so far away that it was hardly visible to Campion. He tried to move, but his legs were too tired to carry him very far. At this rate it would take him moons to reach the meadow.

Suddenly, it became very windy. This was not the soft breeze he had experienced the previous day on Watership Down, but an ice-cold feeling that prevented him from moving forward. It took him all his strength to turn around. In front of him was a tall, dark figure, roughly the shape of a rabbit, with two red shapes where the eyes should be.

"Are you the Black Rabbit of Inlé?” he asked.

"YES,” the figure replied in a low-pitched, echoey voice. “WHAT DID YOU THINK I WAS?”

"If my time has come, I am ready to go with you, Black Rabbit.”

"YOUR TIME HAS NOT COME YET CAMPION. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE IN THE SHADOWLANDS? ONLY THE DEAD ARE ALLOWED HERE.”

"I...honestly don't know, Black Rabbit. I remember something about a river, and a boat...”

"EXACTLY. YOU CARELESSLY WALKED INTO A RIVER WHERE YOU WERE STRUCK BY A BOAT. BE MORE CAREFUL NEXT TIME.”

"Since my time has not yet come, what happens now?”
"I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO RETURN YOU TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING."

"Before you send me back, may I ask for a favour?"

"THAT DEPENDS."

"May I speak with General Woundwort one last time?"

"YOU CANNOT, FOR HE IS NOT HERE."

"Not here? But the outsiders killed him! Don't all dead rabbits end up here?"

"THREE THINGS. ONE: THE OUTSIDERS DIDN'T KILL HIM, IT WAS VERVAIN. TWO: VERVAIN DIDN'T EVEN KILL HIM, HE'S STILL ALIVE. THREE: NOT ALL DEAD RABBITS GO HERE, SOME GO TO THE MEADOW YOU SAW EARLIER INSTEAD."

"Vervain? Are you telling the truth?"

"ARE YOU CALLING ME A LIAR?"

Campion chuckled.

"Good old Vervain...I never thought he would be brave enough to try that."

"IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER, DOES IT? GENERAL WOUNDWORT IS STILL ALIVE AND HIS HEART IS FILLED WITH DARK THOUGHTS OF REVENGE."

"Are you sending me back to deal with him?"

"NO. YOUR TIME HAS NOT COME YET, SO IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO SEND YOU BACK. BUT YOU CAN STILL TRY TO KEEP HIM UNDER CONTROL."

"Do I have to kill him myself?"

"DON'T EVEN TRY. WHEN AND WHERE WOUNDWORT WILL DIE HAS ALREADY BEEN DETERMINED, AND NEITHER YOU, NOR ANYONE ELSE, CAN CHANGE THAT. YOU CAN ONLY MODIFY WHAT HAPPENS UNTIL THEN."

Campion was about to reply, but he was not given the chance. The Black Rabbit dissipated into a thick cloud of black smoke that entered Campion's nose and penetrated his lungs, causing him to cough uncontrollably until he fell unconscious again.

When he regained consciousness, the first thing he felt was cold in his tail and hind legs. He turned his head, and realized that he was on the shore of a river, and the lower half of his body was still in the water. He dragged himself out of the river and shook the water out of his fur. He briefly looked at his reflection in the water; the top half of his left ear was missing. To the left, he saw the canal he had fallen in. To the right, he could see the boat he had collided with; he reasoned that it was responsible for his ear injury. His mind drifted back to his trip to the Shadowlands.

“That must have been a nightmare,” he thought. “There's no way I met the Black Rabbit of Inlé only for him to send me back to the world of the living. And Woundwort still being alive, that doesn't make any sense: I saw his body, there's no way he could have survived such a savage attack. The Black Rabbit was right about one thing though: I should look more carefully where I walk next time.”
The Flexibility of Storytelling.

“The Flexibility of Storytelling.

“Creativity has always depended on openness and flexibility, so let us hope for more of both in the future.”

--Siri Hustvedt

Hazel, Bigwig and Blackavar arrived at Nuthanger farm soon after they had left the Down. The farm was unusually quiet, and the farmer's hrududu was nowhere to be seen. Hazel slowly approached the doghouse, without getting too close, and looked inside.

”Duster isn't here,” he said. “That will make things easier, with only Tabitha and other cats to worry about.”

The three rabbits walked towards the garden, where several rows of fresh vegetables were growing, mostly lettuce and roots. The scent of cat was old; Tabitha was clearly not going to be a problem, at least not at the moment.

Hazel approached the first row of turnips. The smell of fresh flayrah was overpowering. He grabbed one of them with his teeth and pulled as hard as he could. Suddenly, he heard a hissing noise and saw something move in the grass nearby. His first thought was that he had disturbed a snake; just as he turned to bolt, however, a cage fell on top of him. He had fallen victim to a trap of some sort.

”Hazel!” Bigwig cried as he rushed to the scene. “Are you all right?”

”I'm not hurt, but I'm trapped inside this cage. How do I get out?”

Hazel quickly examined the cage. The wires were too thick to chew through, and the cage itself was too heavy for even a strong rabbit like Bigwig to shift. The only way out was to dig a tunnel.

Hazel stared to scratch at the ground, with Bigwig and Blackavar also digging from outside the cage. Progress was slow, and Hazel was struggling to get the dirt out of the small cage. Blackavar had no digging experience at all: Primrose had dug the entire escape tunnel in Efrafa herself while he acted as a sentry. His digging was so clumsy that Bigwig eventually sent him away to warn them of any approaching cats.

Suddenly, they heard a sound coming from the direction of the farmhouse. The door had been opened and a young human girl was walking out of the building, staring at the smartphone in her hands. She briefly took her eyes away from her phone, and something caught her attention. She slowly started to walk toward the cage.

”Bigwig, run!” Hazel ordered.

”I'm not going to leave you at the mercy of this human,” Bigwig replied.

”You stubborn fool! If you stay here, we'll BOTH get captured.”

”I'll fight to the death.”

”You can't fight a human! JUST RUN!”

Bigwig glanced at the human, then back at Hazel.
"This isn't the end," he said before bolting into the bush where Blackavar was hiding.

The girl approached the cage and looked inside. She then sat down next to it and tried to squeeze one of her fingers through the bars. Hazel growled menacingly, so she hurriedly took it back out. She mumbled something incomprehensible in a human language, then went back to her smartphone. She sent a few text messages and took a selfie in front of the cage, before putting the phone back in her pocket. With that, she effortlessly removed the cage from over Hazel, but before he had the chance to bolt, she put one of her hands around his chest, and the other under his tail and hind legs. She held onto him firmly, and picked him up.

The girl had some experience in handling rabbits, having picked up the hutch rabbits on several occasions. Therefore, the way she held Hazel did not cause him any pain, but being carried by a human was nevertheless a terrifying experience for him.

Bigwig and Blackavar watch with terror as the scene unfolded before their eyes. After the girl vanished inside the barn with Hazel still in her arms, Blackavar asked:

-"Well, sir, what do we do now?"

-"We have to rescue him," Bigwig replied. “And stop calling me sir! We're not in Efrafa.”

-"Yes si- uh...how do we rescue him?"

-"I don't know. We'll have to think of something."

After searching most of the warren, Blackberry finally found Captain Broom in one of the deepest burrows, sleeping on his back and snoring very loudly. She wondered whether she should leave him alone, when he rolled on his side and slowly opened his eyes.

-"I smell something..." he mumbled as he slowly got up. “Oh it's you. You're Blackberry, right?”

-"Yes Captain. I was wondering if you could teach me some owsla tricks.”

-"You want me to teach you tricks? Woah. That's the first time in seasons someone asked me to teach them tricks. Young rabbits these days think they know everything...”

-"But can you teach me?"

-"Of course I can. Come outside with me and I'll show you.”

Captain Broom slowly got up and walked out of the burrow, with Blackberry following him. He moved very slowly, but Blackberry tried to remain patient. Once they were both finally outside, the elderly captain stopped.

-"All right, so exactly what kind of tricks do you want to learn?”

-"Anything you can teach me.”

-"Ooh...so let's take a look at what we have.”

With that, Captain Broom grabbed one of Blackberry's front paws and examined it very carefully.

-"Ooh, very nice. Now let me see your hind legs.”

-"Why?”
"I need to know what they are like, to see what I can teach you."

Blackberry lied down and stretched out her hind legs. Captain Broom sniffed them for a few moments, before hopping away.

"Overall a well-built body," he explained. "Very good for digging."

"But exactly what kind of tricks can you teach me?"

"Ooh...tricks...well you can't use your weight, that won't do. You're too light. You'll have to be flexible."

"Flexible?"

"Yes. Did you ever notice how does are more flexible than bucks?"

"I...never really paid attention."

"Neither did I!"

"In that case, captain, how do you know they are?"

"Ooh, the flexibility of does is a well-known fact."

"How am I supposed to use it to my advantage? I want to do something that will impress Bigwig so he will let me join the owsla."

"Ooh, joining the owsla. That's always a great adventure. Oh yes."

"Can you teach me anything that could impress him? I don't think he's going to find this...flexibility useful, or anything."

"Impressing another rabbit can be really hard sometimes. I remember that day at Old Redstone when..."

With that, Captain Broom started to tell a story, from when he was the captain of the owsla of Redstone Warren, where Primrose was born. He explained how he thought a certain doe, Lavender, would be a useful addition to the owsla, but the Chief Rabbit refused to let her join because she was a doe. A few days later, Broom's patrol was attacked by a badger. Lavender and Primrose's sister, who had been following the patrol uninvited from a distance, managed to distract the badger long enough for the others to get away. The Chief Rabbit was impressed, acknowledged his mistake, and agreed to let both does join the owsla.

While in most situations, rabbits either walked away from captain Broom or changed the subject when he started telling one of his boring old stories, Blackberry listened with interest.

"That's very interesting, captain," she said once he had finished. "But what can I learn from it?"

"Sometimes," he replied before walking away, "if you want to get yourself noticed, you have to do something crazy. In the end, you either succeed or die."

Three rabbits were climbing the Down. Pipkin and Dandelion were the first to reach the top.

"Come on, Hawkbit, it can't be that bad," Dandelion teased.
Hawkbit grumbled. In order for him to look more like the Black Rabbit of Inlé, Pipkin and Dandelion had rubbed mud all over his fur; however, this made him look brown than black.

-"Is there anyone else at silflay?" he asked.

-"No, just the three of us," Dandelion said. "Come on!"

Despite Dandelion's urging, it took a while for Hawkbit to reach the top of the Down. When he had finally made it, he looked around him, and saw Blackberry and Captain Broom further away.

-"I thought you said there wasn't anyone else!" he said accusingly.

-"They weren't there when you asked," Dandelion said, "but you took so long that..."

-"Well, never mind, let's just continue the story. The sooner this scene is over, the faster I can start cleaning myself. So where were we?"

-"I just got killed by a fox," Pipkin said.

-"Oh right. So...what happens now, Dandelion?"

Dandelion hopped over to his friend and whispered something in his ear. A look of horror appeared on his face.

-"Do I really have to do that?"

-"We don't have anyone else to play the Black Rabbit, so you will have to."

Hawkbit grumbled, then hopped over to Pipkin.

-"Pipkin, I'm the Black Rabbit of Inlé. Welcome to the Shadowlands."

-"It's nice to meet you, Black Rabbit. I've heard many stories about you, but we never actually met before."

-"Pipkin, is that seriously the way you would react if I really was the Black Rabbit of Inlé?"

-"Yes. I must not let him know I'm afraid; instead I must use my fear to make myself stronger, like Bigwig said."

Hawkbit sighed. The more the story progressed, the more ridiculous he felt.

-"Anyway, Pipkin...you were the last rabbit to die on the night of the full moon. Therefore, you have to serve in my owsla until the next full moon. You will be the Black Emissary."

-"That sounds exciting! What does the job involve?"

-"Many rabbits die each day, and I can't take care of all of them myself. So, you will have to travel around the world and take other rabbits' souls with you as they die, and bring them to me so I can process them. But be careful, and take the soul only once the body is dead. If you take them before, bad things will happen."

-"How do I take those souls?"

Hawkbit remained silent for a few moments, before turning to Dandelion.
"Well? How DOES he take those souls?" he said.

"I don't know. The story doesn't say that..."

"What?" Hawkbit groaned. "How do you expect me to play a role when I don't have all the information I need about my character?"

"Well, it's not my fault, I didn't create this story. I'm just retelling it."

"In that case perhaps we can move on to the next part of the story?"

"That seems like a good idea. Pipkin, will you go get Clover? We'll need her."

As soon as Pipkin had left, Hawkbit started to lick the mud off his fur.

"This is the last time I try one of your crazy ideas, Dandelion."

"Come on, it can't be that bad. It won't take you long to remove all the mud. But until then, can you go and get Strawberry?"

"I've already humiliated myself in front of you and Pipkin, we're not bringing him into this."

At that moment, Pipkin returned with Clover.

"Good job Pipkin," Dandelion praised. "We'll need Strawberry too, and Hawkbit here doesn't want to go and get him. Could you take care of him?"

Once Pipkin had gone, Dandelion turned to Clover.

"All right, we're going to need you to pretend. Just lie down in the grass, and pretend you're dead. Do you have any questions?"

"Am I a normal rabbit?" she said.

"What has that got to do with what I just said?"

"Nothing at all. I was wondering what you think?"

"Uh...you seem normal enough..." Dandelion said, exactly unsure what Clover was talking about.

"Thanks. It's nice to see there's someone around here who believes in me. Anyway, I'll take part in this game you're playing."

With that, she lied down in the grass, spread out her front paws and closed her eyes. However, almost immediately afterwards, she started to giggle.

"Clover, what are you doing?" Hawkbit asked. "Dead rabbits don't make any sounds."

"It's not my fault you're so cute in that disguise, Hawkbit."

"Cute? You think I'm CUTE? Of all the words that could describe me right now, I can't think of a single one that would be less appropriate."

"You're too hard on yourself, I really think you're cute."

"Hawkbit! Wha-"
Hawkbit turned and saw that Pipkin had returned with Strawberry. The latter was staring at him in shock.

-"Don't ask, don't ask,” he warned. “I don't want anything more said about this.”

Strawberry held his tongue, but he continued to stare awkwardly at the grey buck.

-"So, Strawberry,” Dandelion explained, “you just returned home at the end of the day, and you found out that your sister is dead. She was killed by enemy rabbits while you were gone. You are unable to do anything about it.”

-"Clover is not my sister. And she's not dead, I can see her breathe.”

-”No! No no no no no!” Hawkbit cried.

-”Just pretend that she's your sister and she's dead,” Dandelion clarified.

It took Strawberry a few moments to understand what Dandelion was asking him. Finally, he approached Clover, put his front paws on her side, and turned his head towards the sky.

-”Who could have done something so cruel?” he said in an intentionally overdramatic voice. “Why did they do this? She never harmed a single creature and she did not have anything worth stealing other than a very small supply of flayrah. I can never rest until whoever is responsible for this has been punished.”

-”So, Pipkin, you can now harvest her soul,” Dandelion continued. “I don't know exactly how this is done, but let's say you touch her head.”

Pipkin slowly approached Clover while Strawberry continued his speech. Before he had a chance to “take her soul”, however, she started to squirm and giggle again.

-”Clover,” Hawkbit said angrily, “you're supposed to be dead!”

-”I can't help it,” she said between fits of giggles. “It tickles!”

Hawkbit groaned in frustration. “At this rate we'll never finish the story today,” he thought.
“The most absurd and reckless aspirations have sometimes led to extraordinary success.”

--Luc de Clapiers

Blackberry spent a while thinking about what Captain Broom had told her. “Sometimes, if you want to get yourself noticed, you have to do something crazy.” Bigwig was the champion of crazy and reckless things; what could be crazy enough to attract his attention?

Blackberry continued to think about various parts of Captain Broom's story, until one detail suddenly caught her attention: Redstone. The warren had recently been repopulated by refugees from Cowslip's warren, who were on good terms with the Watershippers. What if she travelled to Redstone and back? It was some distance away from the Down, and there were several obstacles along the way. That should impress Bigwig.

She couldn't very well go there alone, though. As she had never been there before, she didn't know the way; someone else would have to go with her. Her travelling companion couldn't be Hazel or Bigwig: that would defeat the whole purpose of going to Redstone in the first place. Hawkbit and Dandelion, while they did know the way, were not the easiest rabbits to get along with (especially not on a difficult mission like this), and they were busy with Pipkin anyway.

Then, she remembered Primrose. Primrose had been born at Redstone, before Vervain raided the warren and took her and many others to Efrafa. The two does had developed a close bond with each other, making Primrose the perfect travel companion for such a journey.

Blackberry soon found Primrose in the burrow she shared with Hazel. The four kittens were sleeping close together in their nest in a corner, a rare occurrence. Primrose, meanwhile, was in the opposite corner staring blankly at the wall. She turned her head and noticed Blackberry's presence.

-"Hello Blackberry,” she said simply.

-"Hello Primrose,” Blackberry replied, as she entered the burrow and sat down next to her. “I've been thinking about Redstone today.”

Primrose did not reply.

-"I would like to visit that warren,” Blackberry continued.

-"It's a nice place, I'm sure you'll like it.”

-"I want you to go with me.”

Primrose briefly turned her head towards Blackberry.

-"Why?”

-"You're my friend. You've been looking down since late yesterday, and I thought a visit to your old home might cheer you up.”

Primrose sighed. As much as she hated to admit it, she really WAS feeling down. What Campion had said the previous day was still making her think, and she still felt guilty over being indirectly
responsible for the war. Like all rabbits at Watership Down, she would gladly have sacrificed her life to save the warren. But perhaps Blackberry was right, and the trip would cheer her up.

-"I'll talk to Hazel about it when he comes back from...wherever he is now. All three of us could probably go tomorrow."

-"Never mind Hazel, I was thinking just the two of us, today."

-"Wouldn't that be dangerous?"

-"Travelling such a long distance is always a danger. But don't worry, I'll protect you."

-"Well, if you say everything will be all right, Blackberry..."

-"I'm glad to have you with me."

The two does walked out of the burrow and went outside. Before leaving the warren, Blackberry briefly stopped to inform Pipkin (who had taken a break from the story to pass hraka) of their plans, in case anyone else should ask about them. Halfway through the descent of the Down, Primrose stopped to cast a last look at the beech tree at the top, thinking about how it had been her home for the past year or so, before following Blackberry.

Meanwhile at Nuthanger Farm, Bigwig and Blackavar continued to stare at the barn, until after a while, the farm girl went out of the building. She was still holding her smartphone, but Hazel was nowhere to be seen.

-"Do you have a plan now, sir?" Blackavar asked.

-"Stop calling me sir. And no, I don't have a plan, not until I know what we're up against."

-"Now that the human is gone, s- uh, the barn should be mostly safe?"

Bigwig nodded in approval. The two bucks slowly made their way to the barn, looking for cats but not seeing any. Thankfully, the farm girl had not bothered to close the barn door when she had left, allowing the rabbits to walk inside the building.

The barn was very large, and stacks of feed bags and haybales were everywhere. The scents were too strong to allow the rabbits to find Hazel by smell.

-"I don't think we should split up," Blackavar said. "We could easily get lost in this mess."

-"You're right about that. But you should take a look at the ground."

Blackavar glanced around the ground. It seemed to be made of dirt, and he soon noticed that the girl's footprints were still clearly visible.

-"You're starting to learn things," Bigwig said, after his companion had started smelling the first footprint. "After a few more raids like this, you'll probably be the most useful member of the owsla."

Blackavar smiled at Bigwig's praise. The two rabbits followed the tracks; it seemed that the farm girl had walked a long distance throughout the barn. At one point along the trail, they suddenly heard Hazel's voice:

-"Bigwig! It's nice to see you again."
"Hazel?" Bigwig called out. "Where are you?"

"Look up, to your left."

Bigwig looked where Hazel had said; on top of two or three haystacks was a small hutch, the same one from which Clover had escaped the previous summer, and where her former companions were still living. Bigwig jumped on top of the haystacks.

"Hazel! How did you get in there?"

"The human put me inside. Now can you please get me out?"

"How do I open this thing? I wasn't there when you helped Clover escape, it was just you, Fiver and Pipkin. What do I do?"

"Try to chew something, around the border of the hutch. If you chew the right thing, this grid should fall off."

"And if I chew the wrong thing?"

"Then we'll just have to hope for the best. But try to look for my chew marks from last year."

"Anything I can do, sir?" Blackavar asked.

"Yes," Bigwig replied, "you can warn us of approaching cats and stop calling me sir!"

Blackavar nodded, and Bigwig jumped on top of the hutch. Hazel's chew marks were still clearly visible on the metal hinges, although they were covered with adhesive tape: the farmer had not gotten around to fully repairing the hutch yet. Bigwig took a brief look at the tape, before clawing at it. He made a small tear, but part of the tape remained stuck to his paw. He shook it violently in an attempt to get it off, and eventually succeeded. However, he was faced with the same problem a few moments later, after tearing off a bit more tape.

"This thing is so sticky!" he shouted, cursing.

Inside the hutch, the three rabbits living there were smelling Hazel carefully.

"Why do you want to escape?" one of them asked. "Life is nice here. The farmer brings you food every day."

"Almost every day," another rabbit corrected the first one. "It's been a few days since the last time we got any new food."

Hazel looked at the back of the hutch. There were a few half-mouldy fruits with the labels still on, and a mouldy chunk of bread. The water in the bowl was covered with something green; the smell was nauseating.

"How do you eat that stuff?" Hazel struggled to say.

"We have to. It's all we have."

"Would any of you like to follow me? When I get out of here, I'm going back to my warren, and if any of you want to come, you are free to do so."

"Why would we come with you?"
"Well, for one thing, the food is fit to eat."

"This isn't the first time someone asks us if we want to leave," the third rabbit said. "Last summer, someone also did this, and he took what's-her-name with him."

"Clover. I helped her escape," Hazel said. "She is still alive and well, I'm sure she would be happy to see you three again."

"Oh, I don't think so," another of the rabbits said. "We didn't get along with her very well. She was just so curious about things. She thought too much. And besides, there are plenty of creatures trying to eat you out there, isn't there?"

"Hey! I actually liked Clover quite a lot. I would have liked to be her mate, but I wasn't brave enough to ask her."

"Probably a good thing you didn't. She never would have accepted you, she probably would have..."

Hazel sighed; these rabbits were starting to get on his nerves.

"How's it going, Bigwig?"

"It's really painful, Hazel-rah. The humans put that stuff everywhere, and it's sticking all over me!"

Meanwhile at Watership Down, the story was still going on. Hawkbit had been licking himself almost constantly, but at least half his fur was still covered with a thick layer of mud. Pipkin had tried to harvest the souls of a few other rabbits, but it was very hard, as Clover and Strawberry were not always taking their roles very seriously.

"So, for the next part of the story," Dandelion said, "we need a white rabbit."

"That won't be me," Hawkbit said firmly. "You're not putting anything more on my fur."

"Snowdrop is white," Pipkin said. "No need to put anything on her fur."

"Snowdrop is too young for this!" Hawkbit insisted. "How about Primrose?"

"Well..." Dandelion said, "she's more yellow than white and she's too thin, but she'll do."

"You'll have to find someone else, she's not at the warren right now," Pipkin said.

"Where is she?" Hawkbit asked.

"She and Blackberry went to Redstone."

"What? That's the most ridiculous thing..."

"Calm down, everyone," Dandelion urged. "We clearly won't find anyone perfect for this role, so I will play it myself."

Dandelion lied down in the grass, and resumed the story:

"They say there is a place where it is winter all year long. It is always very cold, the water is nearly always frozen, and it snows nearly every day. Also, time flows much slower there. What
they feel as a day feels like a full season to us. The rabbits living there are almost entirely white, with a few black markings. This makes it more difficult for elil to spot them in the snow. I am one of these rabbits, fearlessly trying to make it through this dreadful snowstorm.”

Dandelion walked slowly and kept his eyes half-closed, as if he was in an actual snowstorm.

-“It's so snowy I can't even see the tips of my whiskers. I don't know if I'm going in the right direction. When suddenly...”

He looked at the others; Pipkin was clearly anxious to hear what was going to happen, while Hawkbit was shaking his head at Dandelion's ridiculous behaviour.

-”...the ice breaks and I fall in the water. I try desperately to get back on solid ground, but I can't. I die. Pipkin, you go and take my soul.”

-”But Dandelion, something similar happened to Bigwig last Frith's Eve, and he survived. Why do you die?”

-”...I don't know. Maybe it's because there is nobody to pull me out of the water?”

-“Dandelion, I'm starting to think you're making it all up as you go along,” Hawkbit said.

-”Since I'm clearly not doing a good job, perhaps you would like to tell the story yourself?”

-”Who, me? Oh no. No no no no no! I'm not telling this story, or any other story!”

-”In that case, please stop complaining. You're only slowing things down. Anyway, Pipkin, I'm dead now. You can come and claim my soul.”
Sometimes, You Do Something Crazy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

We are gonna die tonight,
there's nothing to be done about!

There comes the black abyss
Singing on this trip right under,
everyone has to deal with it,
it won't take much longer...

--"Silverweed's Claws"

It took Bigwig a long time to finally open the hutch. Removing the adhesive tape from the hutch was very easy, but then it was stuck to his claws, and getting rid of it was a major challenge. After a while, he had removed most of the tape, and was able to push the hutch door open.

-"So, are any of you coming?" Hazel asked the three others for the last time.

The first rabbit started grooming his face. The second one remained silent, clearly considering the offer. The third one said:

-"I think I'll come, if you'll have me."

-"We'll be glad to have you," Hazel said. “And as for you two, if you decide to change your minds, you can always follows us. Just beware of the cats.”

-"Speaking of cats, Hazel, we didn't meet any so far,” Bigwig said.

-“That's good news. But that doesn't mean we won't later on. We still have to be careful.”

-“I did, however, see a giant chicken. It was quite scary,” Blackavar added, causing Bigwig to roll his eyes.

With that, the four rabbits ran out of the barn. Meanwhile in the hutch, one of the two remaining rabbits was staring at them.

-"I think I'll go."

-"What's wrong with you all?" the other rabbit said. “Why do you all want to run away? Life in the hutch is great. We don't have to worry about elil, we always have food...”

-"I miss Clover."

-"Look, I don't mind losing the other one who just left with them, she kept getting on my nerves. If anything, I'm glad she's gone now. But I don't want you to leave. I'll be the last one here, and I'll be lonely.”
"All right...I'm staying..."

Despite this, Clover's friend remained sad, and started weeping quietly.

The garden was just as Hazel and the others had left it, and the trap was still there.

"All right, everyone. Be really careful," Hazel warned. "Inspect all vegetables before taking them out of the ground. We don't want any more accidents like earlier."

Bigwig, Blackavar and the hutch rabbit nodded, and all four rabbits started to examine the vegetables. They had picked up a few when suddenly, Blackavar gasped.

"What's the matter Bla-" Hazel started to say, but was unable to finish. He heard the meow of a cat, and before he could react, he found himself pinned under Tabitha's paw. He tried to kick his hind legs, but hit nothing but air.

"Bigwig...I think there's a cat over me."

"No kidding! She's over me too!"

Hazel turned to his head and saw, much to his horror, that Bigwig was pinned under Tabitha's other front paw, and he too was entirely helpless. Seeing the rabbits' distress, Tabitha meowed in satisfaction.

"Meow meow long-ears meow make big mistake meow. Big meow meow mistake..."

Suddenly, she vanished from Hazel's field of vision.

"All of you take your flayrah and run!" came the voice of Blackavar. "I'll take care of this beast!"

Hazel and Bigwig got up and stared at Blackavar in shock. As soon as Tabitha had recovered from the blow, she got back up and pounced on Blackavar, but he dodged just in time.

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. Just RUN!" he urged.

Hazel, Bigwig and the hutch rabbit had no choice. They picked up the flayrah in front of them and bolted. They ran as fast as they could, until they were safely out of the farmyard. They then stopped and dropped their flayrah to catch their breaths; all they had been able to gather was a medium-sized lettuce, a turnip and a few small carrots.

"Where's Blackavar?" Bigwig suddenly asked.

Hazel looked around; Blackavar was nowhere to be seen.

"We'll have to go back for him," he said.

Hazel and Bigwig ran back to the farmyard, leaving the hutch rabbit behind to guard the flayrah. Hiding in a bush, they cautiously looked around; Tabitha was limping towards the barn, bleeding from several deep scratches, clearly not in the mood for any more fighting. In the middle of the garden was a small brown shape with large red spots. Hazel and Bigwig rushed to it.

Blackavar was severely wounded, bleeding from the side and the throat. One of his hind legs was clearly broken. Both Hazel and Bigwig could plainly see there was no hope of recovery.

"Don't...worry...about me...I fi...finally did...some...thing that...helped...th...the...warren... Tell...Primrose...I...love...he..." he said between shallow breaths. His eyes drifted to Hazel, then to
Bigwig, then to the rapidly darkening clouds in the sky. Finally, he closed them for the last time, and his breathing stopped. The two others remained silent.

-"My heart has joined the Thousand, for my friend stopped running today,” Hazel said after a while.

-"Fiver's vision was right...” Bigwig said sadly.

-"Fiver is always right. Why didn't we trust him?"

-"This isn't the first time we refuse to listen. But this is the first time we lose a rabbit over it.”

Hazel and Bigwig remained motionless, until the insects started to tackle the corpse. They dragged him to the tunnel that they had started digging earlier, and filled it up again. As Blackavar was not named after any plant or anything that could be deposited on his grave, Hazel simply marked it with a small cross. The two bucks sadly left the farm with the hutch rabbit, carrying what little flayrah they had gathered with them. The warren had paid a high price for it.

At Watership Down, Pipkin had just obtained the soul of Fiver's character, who had suffocated to death in a collapsed burrow (really just a few leaves gathered from around the Down).

-"Is the story over yet, Dandelion?” Hawkbit asked impatiently. He had made a certain amount of process in cleaning his fur, but a few brown spots remained.

-"Just one more scene and it's finished,” Dandelion replied. “What's the matter, Hawkbit? Don't you want to know what happens next?”

-"Not really, but if we made it this far, we might as well make it to the end. What do I have to do now?"

-"Well, you're the Black Rabbit again and Pipkin has completed his time in your owsla, so now you set him free.”

-"I hope you won't have to put more mud on my fur...”

-"No, don't worry about that, it won't be necessary. Your fur is still black enough.”

Hawkbit approached Pipkin.

-"Well, mate, you've done a good job in my owsla, but now your time has expired. You're out.”

-"Exactly what does that mean, Black Rabbit?” Pipkin asked.

-"Eh, you'll just be an ordinary dead rabbit.”

-"No more harvesting of souls?”

-"That's right.”

-"I'm glad. It was getting depressing.”

-"And such ends the story of the rabbit who served in the Black Rabbit of Inlé's owsla,” said Dandelion.

-"Wait a moment,” Hawkbit interjected. “It ends just like that?”
"Can you think of anything else to add?"

"...not really."

"So, Pipkin, did you enjoy this story?" Dandelion asked.

"It was very fun, and it has a very positive message behind it," he answered.

"I don't see what kind of positive message there can be behind a story all about death," Hawkbit said.

"Well, you see, we all have to die at some point. As I dealt with the souls of all these poor rabbits, I couldn't help but think about what they left behind. I'm sure many of them, had they known they were going to die at that point, would have lived their lives very differently. They might have spent less time goofing around and more time doing rewarding and meaningful things, such as spending more time with those they care about."

Meanwhile, Fiver was sitting at the opposite end of the Down. The dark clouds filled the sky, and there had already several flashes of lightning. Hopefully Hazel, Bigwig and Blackavar would make it back to the Down before the rain started.

After a while, he finally saw some rabbits approach the bottom of the Down. He was filled with joy, but it vanished when they reached the top and Blackavar was not among them. Hazel nodded sadly.

"Sometimes, I wish my visions were wrong," Fiver said. "Why do they always have to be correct?"

"It's not your fault, Fiver," Hazel said. "You tried to warn us, but I didn't listen."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, Hazel," Bigwig interjected, "I'm as much to blame as you are. I didn't listen to him either."

"Arguing like this won't bring Blackavar back," Fiver said. "Who's your new friend?"

"Oh, this is..." Hazel started to say, only to suddenly pause. "What's your name?"

"Cornflower," the hutch rabbit replied.

"Welcome to Watership Down, Cornflower," Fiver said. "I just wish the circumstances of your arrival were more pleasant..."

The news of Blackavar's death spread throughout the warren rather fast. Cornflower's arrival went largely unnoticed; Clover, Hazel and Fiver were the only who talked to her. Everyone's thoughts on the day's events could best be summarized by something Hawkbit had said: "I wasn't particularly close to Blackavar, but he was still a nice chap. I think I'll miss him."

A while later, Hazel went to the burrow Fiver shared with Pipkin. While Pipkin was asleep in a corner, Fiver was still awake.

"Have you seen Primrose?" Hazel asked. "I've been searching for her and I can't find her anywhere."

"Pipkin said something about her going to Redstone with Blackberry. They left earlier today."

"They went to Redstone? Alone?"
"Nobody else went with them. What's the matter, Hazel? You look angry."

"I am. I know that everyone is free to leave the warren to go wherever they wish, but seriously, that's really careless. Aren't you afraid something might happen to them?"

"I don't know. I don't feel anything about them, one way or the other. Visions don't always come. But if I do have one, I will let you know."

This proved to be only mildly reassuring for Hazel. He remained worried that something bad might happen to his darling mate, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Chapter End Notes

The character of Cornflower comes from the 2016 BBC radio drama and belongs to Brian Sibley.
The Four Warrens

“The thunderbolt without the reverberations of thunder would frighten man but little, though the danger lies in the lightning, not in the noise.”

--Jules Verne, 20 000 Leagues under the Sea

General Woundwort was running. He had been running all day, away from Efrafa. Apart from the outsiders’ warren, there was only one other warren nearby that he knew of; it was run by a buck called Cowslip.

The previous summer, Cowslip had, in exchange for his own freedom, told Woundwort the location of a warren called Redstone, where Hazel and his outsiders were presumably staying temporarily. However, when Woundwort had sent his owsla to attack Redstone, the only creature there was a crazy old rabbit who called himself Captain Broom and claimed to be the sole survivor of “the great sickness”. The outsiders had played a trick on him.

Woundwort later learned the dark secret of Cowslip’s warren and how it was infested with snares. He had every reason to avoid it, but at the moment he had nowhere else to go. He had to build a new owsla in order to regain control of Efrafa and attack the outsiders. From what he had heard, Cowslip’s people were well-fed and unusually large, exactly the type of rabbit he needed.

As he approached the warren, Woundwort started to walk carefully. It did not take him long to encounter a snare; with a single blow of the paw, he ripped it off its peg and broke the wire in two. Finally, after getting clear of the bushes, he looked at his surroundings. The warren was easily accessible by one large entrance, with a few other smaller ones spread throughout the field. A large, light-furred rabbit with curly whiskers was lying in the middle of the field, munching on a carrot.

"General Woundwort," he said, softly and slowly. “How nice to see you after so long.”

"Yes, Cowslip. How very, very nice.”

"Shall we go underground? This thunder disturbs me.”

Cowslip started to walk towards the entrance. He was clearly in no hurry, and took his time with each step. Woundwort was annoyed at how slow Cowslip was: what a waste of time! However, since Cowslip would be a useful ally against the outsiders, he tried to conceal his annoyance.

"Shall we go down to the great burrow?” Cowslip asked once they were underground. “Eat fresh flayrah we carried there, listen to one of Silverwe-”

"Never mind all that, I just want a large burrow for myself, and a look at your owsla.”

"Owsla?” Cowslip chuckled. “My dear Woundwort, we have no owsla. What do we need an owsla for? Fresh flayrah every day, no elil, Sil-”

"In that case, I ask for your permission to build an owsla, and be its captain.”

"Exactly why should I give you this privilege? What can you give me in return?”
"Revenge. Think, Cowslip. Is there anyone, deep down in your heart, that you hate, and want to see suffer and die a painful death?"

"Revenge. Sweet, sweet revenge. Hickory, Marigold and the band of traitors who dared to establish a new warren away from me. If only they were all dead..."

"Consider it done. They will meet the Black Rabbit of Inlé very soon."

"How sad. How sweet. Shall you have some flayrah now?"

Woundwort and Cowslip walked into the great chamber. A large number of rabbits were grouped around a large pile of flayrah, and listening to a silver rabbit sitting on a rock in the corner.

"Who is that rabbit they are all listening to?" Woundwort asked.

"Silverweed. A master poet, I must say..."

"Poetry!" Woundwort sneered. "When I build my owsla, things will change around here!"

"Change? How disappointing. Things are so good as they are, but if change is necessary to have revenge on the deserters, feel free to change anything you wish."

Woundwort smiled. Taking over this warren was going to be easier than he had first thought.

Blackberry and Primrose had been travelling for a while. Primrose's mind had frequently drifted back to thoughts of Campion, but she also knew that it was her responsibility to lead Blackberry to Redstone safely. By the time they reached the canal, the storm had greatly intensified, and it had started to rain.

"How do we cross this?" Blackberry asked.

"I'm not eager to try stepping stones again," Primrose answered, "but there is a bridge further away. Follow me."

Primrose started walking downstream, with Blackberry following her. It did not take them long to come across the canal gates. While they were currently closed, they seemed to be leaking.

"That doesn't look very stable," Blackberry said.

"It wasn't like that the last time I crossed it," Primrose replied. "But it's the only way to the other side."

"I'll go first, if it's safe then you can cross."

"No, I go first. You're more important to the warren than I am."

"Everyone is important to the warren in their own way! I go first."

Before Primrose had a chance to reply, Blackberry dashed across the gates, and soon reached the other side.

Primrose sat next to the gates, staring at the water far below, before finally deciding to start crossing. She walked rather slowly, barely paying attention to where she was going.

Suddenly a bolt of lightning came out of the sky and struck the metal armrest on top of the gates.
The electricity travelled through the gates themselves, and one of them broke apart. The pieces of wood soon vanished from sight, carried away by the torrent of water rushing past where the gate used to be.

The gate Primrose was standing on, while still attached to the mechanism opening and closing it, seemed ready to break off at any moment. To make matters worse, she was too absorbed in her thoughts to realize how dangerous her situation was, and she therefore remained sitting there, staring blankly at the current.

“Why doesn't she move?” Blackberry thought. She called out to her friend, but did not receive any reply. She soon realized that she had no choice but to save her herself. She rushed back onto the gate and shoved her head over Primrose's tail to get her moving. At this, Primrose finally seemed to register the urgency of the situation and started to run; Blackberry followed close behind. As Primrose started to make the final jump onto the shore, the mechanism finally broke. A powerful wave swept the gate off its hinges. Blackberry, feeling she was losing her balance, made a desperate leap off the gate, and collided with her friend in mid-air. Both rabbits landed roughly on the rocky shore.

Blackberry and Primrose remained lying on the shore for a long time, during which the rain intensified. Finally, Blackberry got up and spoke.

-“You all right?”

-“I'll survive.” Primrose got up too. “You saved my life just now.”

Blackberry remained, silent, unsure what to reply.

-“Come on,” Primrose continued. “Redstone isn't far now. If we keep going, we can make it before the storm gets worse.”

With that, the two does resumed their journey towards the warren.

Meanwhile in Efrafa, the pit was slowly filling with water. The burrows were well insulated and no rain could be felt underground, but the sound of thunder remained loud and terrifying.

Moss was standing in the main burrow, staring at the rain. It had been just over a day since Woundwort had fallen, and the owsla had been very busy questioning every rabbit in the warren. So far, there were no obvious suspects, but the search was to go on until the culprit was found.

Moss’ thoughts, however, were not about Woundwort, but about Campion. He had not heard anything from him since his hasty departure soon after he became the new Chief Rabbit of Efrafa. It was unlike Campion to act like that; whatever his reason for running away was, it must have been important. And after a day, he had still not returned; this was rather worrying.

Suddenly, he heard another thunderclap, and it was unusually loud. This was followed soon afterwards by the sound of wood cracking, and dirt falling from the ceiling. The tree around which Efrafa was built had been struck by lightning.

The cracking became increasingly louder, and more dirt kept falling. Throughout the warren, panicked rabbits ran out of their burrows. The owsla tried to keep the crowd under control, but there were too many rabbits, and several of the officers were as panicked as the slaves. Even after the cracking stopped, everyone remained terrified.

Once most rabbits had calmed down, Moss and the owsla were able to see the extent of the
damage. The tree, while not entirely destroyed, was severely damaged: several roots and branches had broken off the trunk. A few burrows had collapsed, but there did not seem to be any casualties. Massive cracks had appeared in many walls, a sign of more damage yet to come. If a run collapsed, several rabbits would be trapped in the burrows beyond, and rescue would be impossible without triggering even more collapses. All Moss could hope was that the storm would end soon, before the situation got worse. Afterwards would come the hard task of stabilizing what remained of the warren to prevent its complete destruction.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for my extended absence, real life was really messy for the past few weeks. I should now be able to resume posting at least one chapter every Sunday.

“The boldness of asking deep questions may require unforeseen flexibility if we are to accept the answers.”

--Brian Greene, The Elegant Universe

Hazel peeked out of the warren's main entrance. It had been raining all night, but it was now early morning and the sky had cleared.

Further away, he could see Clover and Cornflower sitting in the grass together. Cornflower was smelling various plants, and occasionally nibbling some of them. Hazel approached them.

-"So, how are you liking it here, Cornflower?” he asked.

-"I must say it's really different from the hutch,” Cornflower replied. “I never felt the wind in my fur before, and it's an amazing feeling. And this grass, it's very wet. I've never tasted such wet food in my life. Not that I mind it, I was often thirsty back at the farm. The only thing that worries me is the elil. You saw what happened to Blackavar yesterday, and I'm afraid something like this might happen to me.”

-"Your concern is understandable,” Hazel said. “Luckily, we can see any elil coming from a long way off, but nevertheless, if I were you I wouldn't stray too far from the warren.”

-"I'll keep an eye out for you,” Clover said. “Nothing bad will happen to you. If anything tries to attack you, I'll fight it.”

-"I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for me...”

-"Who said anything about a sacrifice? I know I don't have any experience in fighting, but I'll still give it my best shot and I'll probably survive.”

Hazel hopped away and looked at the sky. Blackberry and Primrose were not back yet. He was not really surprised: the journey to Redstone was a long one, and they would probably stay there a short while. What he could not understand was why they had decided to undertake such a journey in the first place, especially without telling anyone except Pipkin. He heard another rabbit behind him; it was Fiver.

-"You're feeling worried, aren't you?” he asked.

-"It's just Primrose and Blackberry.”

-"You don't give them enough credit. They probably made it to the warren safely.”

-"But what if they didn't? If they encountered trouble along the way, there is nothing we can do to
help them.”

-“Calm down, Hazel. Worrying won't help anyone.”

-“I know, Fiver. But sitting here and doing nothing is really depressing.”

Hazel fell silent. Fiver remained close to him, trying to think of a way to cheer his brother up, until suddenly an idea came into his mind. Without any warning, he pounced on Hazel, knocking him on his side, and started moving his paws through his brother's fur. Hazel struggled, but was unable to escape.

-“Fiver, stop!” he said desperately, when it became obvious there was no other way out of Fiver's tickle attack.

Fiver obeyed, and Hazel got up to catch his breath.

-“Thanks Fiver. I needed that.”

The two rabbits started to walk towards the warren. As they were nearing the main entrance, Fiver said:

-“Bigwig, you don't have to hide from us.”

At this, Bigwig peaked out from behind the tree. He looked at the two brothers, visibly embarrassed at having been caught spying on them. He attempted to distract them:

-“Uh, Hazel, I've been thinking...now that the war's over maybe we should try to form an alliance with Efrafa.”

-“Always looking for adventure, aren't you Bigwig?” Hazel said. “But with the way Campion reacted, don't you think we should wait a while longer?”

-“It's already been two days, Hazel. I'm sure he must have recovered by now. After all, he didn't send out the whole owsla into the caverns to attack us. A good thing he didn't, because we couldn't have won such a battle.”

-“But Bigwig, as you say it's only been two days. After we've been at war for almost a year, it can't end in just two days.”

-“I don't think it would cause any problems if we were to go to Efrafa now.” Fiver stepped into the argument. “But I don't think we would be able to form an alliance either.”

-“Then what would happen?” Hazel asked.

-“Nothing. It might make you feel better, Hazel, as it would keep you occupied, but the situation between the two warrens won't change today.”

-“In that case, we're going,” Bigwig decided. “I don't see the need to bring many rabbits, so let's go just the three of us. Let's start after silflay?”

-“Sounds good,” Hazel said.

-“YAAAAAAAAAAARK!!”

The three rabbits turned at the direction of the noise, to see a large white bird, with a mouse on its back, flaying straight towards them. They ducked just in time, as the bird crashed into the grass
further away, and fell off onto the ground.

"Oof!" she said, removing the dirt from her fur. "Ye could at least try to work on improv'n those landins, Kehaar."

"Sorry, Hanniah," Kehaar said, as he got back up and started to clean his feathers.

"What's going on?" Hawkbit asked, having arrived at the scene following the noise. "Oh, it's you again."

"We're glad to have you two back," Hazel said. "How was your trip to the...Big City?"

"Oof, twas bad," Hannah said. "Full o noise and hrududil and humans and de air stink so bad."

"Ya." Kehaar agreed. "Kehaar not going back there soon. Hey vat did I miss?"

"Many things," Hawkbit said. "Many things..."

It took a while for Primrose and Blackberry to reach Redstone. By the time they had arrived, their fur was soaking wet. There were no other rabbits outside, and the two does simply wandered into the first empty burrow they could find, where they fell asleep.

Blackberry awoke a while later, her fur mostly dry. Primrose was still asleep in the far corner of the burrow; Blackberry debated whether she should wake her friend up, eventually deciding against it: Primrose couldn't really enjoy her stay at Redstone if she was exhausted.

Blackberry got out of the burrow and started to wander throughout the warren. She had never been to another warren since she had left Sandleford the previous year with Hazel and the others; visiting Redstone was a fascinating experience.

Redstone was a very different warren from Watership Down: it contained many more runs and burrows, but they were smaller on average, and there was no large central chamber like the Honeycomb. The number of rabbits was similar, with bucks and does in seemingly equal numbers.

But what struck Blackberry the most was how everyone seemed worried, to varying degrees. She couldn't understand why: unlike Cowslip's warren, there were no snares there, or any other major dangers. While in their previous warren they had every reason to worry, here they had none. They had been living there since early the previous fall, so they should have gotten used to this new life by now. Was there an unseen danger that she ignored?

After a while, Blackberry went above ground. When she had first arrived in the middle of the night, it was too dark and she was too tired to take a look at the warren, and now that she did, she was concerned by what she saw. The Watership Down warren was well hidden, but Redstone was plainly visible. The rocks (which, despite the warren's name, were grey) stood out against the grass, and the holes were extremely easy to see. Blackberry remembered how a few weeks before, several rabbits had visited the warren after the birth of Marigold's litter, and upon his return Bigwig spent a while complaining about how lax their security was. She had initially dismissed this as him overreacting like he often does, but now she saw that he had a point. This was made even worse by the fact that Redstone, unlike Watership Down, was on even ground, making it nearly impossible to see approaching elil before they had reached the warren.

This, however, was not the most shocking thing about the area: the grass seemed to be scarce. There were several patches of ground without vegetation, and where the grass was growing, it seemed thinner than at the Down. There were a few rabbits at silflay, but some of them had to go
far from the warren to find decent food. One of them, a yellow-orange doe, was looking carefully around her. Blackberry approached her; the other doe sniffed her carefully before starting to talk:

-"You're not from here, are you?"

-"No, I come from..."

-"Welcome to Redstone warren. You're free to live here if you want. There isn't as much food as we would like, but we manage to make the best of what we have."

-"I'm not coming to live here, I'm..."

-"That's all right. You're free to leave any time you want, but you will always be welcome..."

-"No, I'm a visitor from Watership Down."

-"Oh...I'm sorry, I thought you were a hlessi, I wasn't thinking. It's always nice to have someone visit us from Watership Down. I don't think I've met you before..."

-"I'm Blackberry."

-"I'm Marigold. It's nice to meet you, Blackberry. How are things at your warren? Did you come alone, or did..."

-"One question at a time. I didn't come alone, I brought Primrose, I'm sure you remember her."

-"Yes, I remember her. Where is she now?"

-"The last time I saw her, she was still in the empty burrow where she fell asleep when we arrived in the middle of the night. Anyway, I have great news: the war with Efrafa is over."

-"Really? That's amazing! How did it happen?"

-"It was really unexpected to all of us. A few days ago..."

While Blackberry was telling Marigold all about the end of the war, Primrose was slowly waking up. Her first feeling was one of confusion: why was she in this cramped, damp burrow, and why was she alone? It took her a few moments to clear her mind and remember that she was at Redstone, and that Blackberry had come with her.

She remained motionless for a while, thinking about her problems. She tried to push them out of her mind, but they kept forcing their way back in. There did not appear to be any obvious solution; she would have to ask someone else for advice, but she didn't know anyone who would be able to provide an unbiased opinion.

She slowly walked out of the burrow, up the run and outside. Judging by Frith's position in the sky, it was already late in the morning. She walked further away and started to nibble a small patch of grass. She had not eaten anything in over a day; she had no idea how to resolve her problems, but until then, there was no point in starving.
“‘He can occasionally see to an enemy,’ she conceded. ‘If he manages to get his sword pointed in the right direction and the enemy does him the favor of falling upon it in precisely the right way.’”

--Lynn Kurland, Star of the Morning

-WAKE UP!

Woundwort walked a little further down the run, before putting his head inside the next burrow and repeating what he had previously said.

-”What's all the racket?” Cowslip said, having arrived from another run, alerted by the shouting.
-”I'm trying to get them to wake up,” Woundwort explained. “An owsla must have discipline.”
-”Ah, yes. The owsla. Do you really intend to carry out this project?”
-”Absolutely. You didn't seriously think I was joking, did you?”
-”No, but I think you should learn how to relax. Ever since you have arrived, you have seemed tense and angry, at everything and nothing. Why don't you learn to appreciate the simple things in life? Fresh flyrah every day…”

-”I've never seen such a sloppy lot.” Woundwort was profoundly annoyed at how Cowslip kept repeating the same things, always very slowly, and cut him off. “Seriously, have they absolutely no discipline?”

-”They wake up and go to sleep whenever they please. We have no need for a precise sleeping schedule.”

As the two leaders spoke, a few groans came from a nearby burrow. A rabbit poked his head into the run and briefly looked around, before returning to his burrow and going back to sleep.

-”If any of them want to be part of the owsla, everything will have to be strictly monitored: sleeping, eating, training, everything,” Woundwort explained. “Now, go and find everyone who is already up, and bring them all outside. I'll wake up a few others.”

Cowslip hesitated, briefly questioning General Woundwort's sanity. He quickly came to the conclusion that any rabbit who doesn't experience the benefit of daily flyrah and poetry is crazy, but hopefully Woundwort would mellow down after a while. Still, now was not the time to anger him, so he might as well follow the instructions.

As Cowslip walked away, Woundwort looked into the next burrow.

-WAKE UP!” he shouted yet again.

The only rabbit inside, an undersized silver white buck, did not stir. Woundwort briefly wondered whether he was dead, but there was no smell of disease. He approached him and cuffed him in the ears.
"WAKE UP!"

The small rabbit stretched out his hind legs, and moved one of his front paws through his whiskers. He slowly got up and opened his eyes, before staring intensely at Woundwort, who found this rather unsettling.

"Good day, General Woundwort," he said suddenly. "What's on your mind?"

"How do you know my name?"

The young rabbit was about to answer, but Woundwort cut him off:

"Never mind. What's YOUR name?"

"Silverweed."

"All right Silverweed. You are to follow me at once."

"Where are we going?"

"Outside. You're in the owsla now, and you must train."

Silverweed was confused by this, but nevertheless followed Woundwort outside. Cowslip had already gathered a small group of rabbits, and was waiting with them. A squirrel was sitting on a branch near the top of a nearby tree, watching the scene unfold.

"Is that all you got?" Woundwort asked.

"Not many rabbits are up at this time of day, General Woundwort."

"Well, this will do, for now anyway. All right everyone! You're in the owsla now!"

"What's an...owsla?" asked one of the rabbits.

Woundwort stared at the crowd in shock, appalled by this random rabbit's ignorance.

"An owsla is a group of rabbits who fight to protect their warren and maintain the glory of their Chief."

"That sounds nasty," another rabbit said. "I don't like fighting."

Woundwort sighed loudly. These rabbits were clearly not interested in being part of an owsla, and unmotivated rabbits are perhaps the hardest to train.

"Everyone, arrange yourselves in pairs."

The rabbits stared at him, before carrying out the order. However, it took a long time for everyone to get organized. A rabbit would come across one potential partner, only to decide do resume searching for another one. This went on for quite a while.

"Fools," Woundwort mumbled, before turning to Cowslip. "Now, show me the location of the shining wires."

Cowslip stared at Woundwort awkwardly for a few moments.

"We have fresh flayrah every day, and..."
Suddenly, he found himself grabbed by the neck. Woundwort's front paws held him tightly, not
enough to choke him, but tightly enough for him to be unable to get away.

-”Where. Are. The. WIRES!”

-”If...you'll let me go...I'll show you...General...”

Woundwort let go; Cowslip rubbed his neck before going into the undergrowth, with Woundwort
following him. Near the roots of the bush was a single shining wire. Woundwort struck it with his
paw; the peg was ripped out of the ground.

-”This is all a lie!” Cowslip said. “There can be no escape from the shining wire! This is the truth,
the answer, the solution, fo...”

-”Perhaps,” Woundwort replied, before Cowslip could finish his sentence, “but I don't want to
waste any time training other rabbits only for them to get snared. Lead me to the other wires.”

Cowslip and Woundwort spent a long time wandering around the warren, with the General
destroying every snare Cowslip showed him. After hair snares had been removed, they went back
to the warren, and saw that the rabbits had finally manged to assemble in pairs as they had been
ordered.

-”All right, everyone. Now your first task for today: fighting. Each one of you is to try to fight the
rabbit you are paired with. Your goal is to put them in a situation they can't escape: keep them
pinned to the ground with your claws at their throat. When that happens, don't finish them off just
yet, call out to me. Any questions?”

All the rabbits stared at Woundwort. One of them started to talk, but decided it would be better to
remain silent.

-”ATTAAACK!!!” Woundwort ordered.

The rabbits attacked. In the first pair, both collided painfully with each other and collapsed. In the
second pair, one rabbit succeeded in pinning his opponent easily, but sneezed, allowing her to get
away. One of the rabbits in the third pair had run away, and the other one had no idea where he had
gone or what to do. In the fourth pair, one rabbit tried to pounce over the other, but ended up
jumping over him and crashing in the grass behind him. Silverweed stared intensely at his
opponent, who was unable to escape his gaze. She ceased to move and eventually lied down,
before Silverweed approached her and closed her eyes, allowing her to fall asleep.

Woundwort was horrified by what he saw. How was he to turn this sloppy lot into a decent owsla
that could defeat the outsiders?

Meanwhile, the squirrel was still looking at the rabbits. At first, she had been horrified at how the
one Cowslip called “General Woundwort” wanted everyone to fight, but after she saw them try, she
sighed in relief: they clearly had no idea what they were doing, so there was no way anyone would
get hurt.
The characters of Rake and Leo are based on real people, and used with their permission.

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

--Thomas Merton

Hazel, Fiver and Bigwig peaked out from behind the moss at the exit of the caverns. During the trip, Hazel had disturbed a small boulder, but other than that nothing significant had happened.

As they walked out of the river towards Efrafa, they gasped as they saw the warren's condition. While the Efrafan tree always appeared to be unstable, this time it was worse than ever before. It was leaning precariously into the hole, and several roots and branches were clearly broken.

-"I didn't remember it being that bad!” Fiver said.

-"Must have been the storm last night,” Hazel said. “Let's go and see.”

-"I'm no digging expert,” Bigwig said, “but it doesn't look stable.”

As they got closer to the warren, they were stopped by a large rabbit. His fur was black, and the shape of his body was closer to that of a hare than that of a rabbit.

-"Greetings, Captain Rake Nightfur at your service, but just call me Rake. What can I do for you?”

The three Watershippers were taken aback. Rake actually sounded friendly towards them, which was unusual for an Efrafan officer.

-"We would like to see the Chief Rabbit of this place...Rake,” Hazel said.

-"Right. Wait here, I'll go and get him.”

Moss was underground, supervising a group of slaves. They had been ordered to pack dirt around the remaining roots; hopefully this would make them stronger. So far, a lot of progress had been made, and only a few more roots needed to be stabilized.

-”Hey Moss! Three rabbits outside want to see ya!”

Moss turned at the run from which the voice came.

-”Who are they, Rake? What do they want?”

-”I don't know, I've never seen them before. One of them has a strange overgrowth of fur around
"Oh, I know," Moss said, as he realized that Rake was describing Bigwig. "I'll see them, alone. You stay here and supervise the digging."

"Right-o."

Meanwhile, Hazel, Fiver and Bigwig were getting nervous. Bigwig was convinced that this was all a trap, until Moss suddenly jumped out of a nearby bush, alone.

"G'day outsiders," he said. "Don't mind Rake, he was promoted earlier today and it may take him a while to get used to everything."

"YOU are Chief Rabbit?" Bigwig asked in disbelief.

"You probably already know about Woundwort's death, or you wouldn't be here. Campion is the new Chief Rabbit, but he vanished shortly after the events, so I'm in charge until he comes back."

"Hmm. We came here to discuss the end of the war," Bigwig explained. "Now that General Woundwort is dead, we want to know what's going to happen."

"Before he left, Campion cancelled all patrols due to low morale. But as to whether the war will continue, that's something you will have to discuss with him, after his return."

"All right," Hazel said. "Let us know as soon as he comes back."

"But we don't even know where your warren is! How can we notify you?"

"We'll send Kehaar and you can tell him."

"Who's Kehaar?"

"The gull who has been attacking your patrols. Don't worry, we'll tell him not to attack you."

Moss remained silent; Hazel and the others, sensing that there was nothing further to say, left him alone. Once they were back in the caverns, Hazel said:

"Well...that's rather worrying."

"Do you think Moss was telling the truth?" Bigwig asked. "If Campion is still blaming us for Woundwort's death, he may be secretly getting ready to attack."

"No." Fiver spoke for the first time since the beginning of the mission. "I don't think Moss would lie to us like that."

"Then how do you explain the fact Campion completely vanished?" Hazel asked.

"That, I can't explain. I don't know why he did what he did, but I have a feeling it's something...I don't know how to describe it...something unusual, something we don't think about."

"What sort of thing?"

"I wish I knew. All I have is this vague feeling. I don't even know if it's true. But if I have any more feelings, I'll let you know."

Moss had kept staring at the three outsiders until they vanished from view near the river. He then
returned to the warren, where he found Rake at silflay with another buck. His companion had mostly grey fur, but three of his paws were black (the fourth one was white). He also had a black stripe on his back and a white chest and muzzle.

-"What's the matter, Moss?" Rake asked. “Is there something wrong?”

-"Oh, Rake. Last year, I made a bet with another officer: I would have to give him three carrots if it was proven that the gull attacking our patrols was working with the outsiders. I just learned the bird WAS working with them.”

-"So you'll have to pay?”

-"Thanks for stating the obvious. But I don't have three carrots and I can't spare anyone to go on patrol to steal them, not at the moment anyway.”

-"In that case, all I can suggest is: as soon as we have recovered from the recent events, get the carrots, and don't make any more crazy bets.”

-"I'll have to keep that in mind.”

-"Don't worry,” the grey buck said. “Everyone makes mistakes. I'm sure everything will be all right Moss, sir.”

-"Thanks stranger. I've seen you around the warren a few times, but I don't think I caught your name…”

-"Leo, sir.”

-"Nice to meet you, Leo.”

The two rabbits looked at and sniffed each other for a while, as Rake awkwardly stared at them.

-"I'll have to go see how things are going underground now and bring out the next mark,” Moss said after a while, before hopping away. “See you again soon, I hope.”

Primrose had been at silflay for a while, before she finally decided to take a look at the area. She climbed on top of the largest and highest rock, and tried to lie down. She was not very comfortable due to the rock's rugged shape, but she didn't mind too much. The warren itself had changed very little since the time when she had lived there when she was a kitten, although grass seemed more scarce.

What had changed, however, was the rabbits living there. When she was a kitten, the warren was quite large and prospering. She let her mind drift away from her current problems, to reflect on the past instead. She thought back on how amazing life was.

It had all started with a tragedy, with a weasel attack when she was just a few days old. By the time the owsla had managed to drive it away, it had already killed everyone in her litter, except her and one other kitten.

As the months went by, she managed to lead a fulfilling life. She fondly remembered all the time she spent playing games and telling stories with the others. Her first bite of fresh lettuce. The day her sister was allowed to join the owsla, the second doe in the warren to get that privilege. It was a simple life, but a happy one.
Until one day, when she was not even one year old, everything changed.

At first it seemed like any ordinary day, until a bunch of Efrafans, led by Vervain, attacked. It soon became clear to the enemy that they would need more rabbits to take the warren by force, but returning to General Woundwort without having destroyed the warren would have been very humiliating. Therefore, Vervain decided to simply wait for a few days and, once they let their guard down, capture a few prisoners. Primrose had been perhaps the first rabbit Vervain had chosen to take back to Efrafa; he had said something about her fur, but she never quite understood what he had meant.

Once they had returned to Efrafa, the prisoners were split between the marks. Primrose never saw any of the others again, but later heard that nearly all of them had died from starvation the next winter.

Those who had remained at Redstone were not much better off. Soon after Vervain's raid, the warren was struck by the White Blindness. Everyone died, with the exception of Captain Broom who, for some reason, was immune to the disease. Vervain, while responsible for all of Primrose's suffering in Efrafa, had ironically saved her life.

She fell from the rock.

Meanwhile, Blackberry had just finished telling Marigold about Woundwort's defeat.

-"That's almost unbelievable," Marigold said. "But it's all for the best, I'm sure."

Suddenly, she stopped and stamped, before trying to push Blackberry towards the nearest entrance to the warren.

-"What's going on?"

-"There is something lying in the grass over there. I don't know what it is or how it got there without anyone noticing, but it's very bad."

Blackberry peaked out from behind Marigold. The thing in the grass was plainly visible, but as she saw what colour it was, she immediately calmed down.

-"That's not elil. That's Primrose."

Marigold remained silent, rather embarrassed at mistaking a rabbit for elil. Blackberry approached Primrose; she was lying in the grass, her head buried beneath her front paws, and she seemed to be crying.

-"What's the matter?" Blackberry asked.

Primrose raised her head; she stared at her for a while, before grabbing her, so tightly that this upset their balance, causing them to fall over on their sides.

-"What's the matter?" Blackberry asked again. She had never seen her friend cling so desperately before.

-"Blackberry," she said weakly, and remained silent for a while. "They are all dead. My friends, my sister probably, they are all dead. I miss them."

As she heard this, Blackberry became sad. One of the reasons why she had brought Primrose to Redstone was to take her mind off her current problems, but instead the visit brought back painful
memories from the past.

-"Primrose, Frith never meant for rabbits to live in the past. The past is gone, it cannot be changed. But think of the present, and the future. You still have other rabbits who care about you. You've got Hazel, you've got me, and pretty much everyone else back at Watership Down."

This seemed to calm Primrose down, somewhat. She stopped crying and managed to get back up, but the preoccupied look on her face remained. Perhaps there was truth in Blackberry's advice. However, this did not solve her current problems, as she still didn't know who she could ask for advice.

-"Come on, Primrose,” Blackberry said. “Marigold here will show you around.”

Primrose nodded, and the two does went back to Marigold; the guided tour continued.
"However, his staff were only allowed to be there to work, and went to their own homes at night - George wouldn't allow any "common folk" to live at his precious estate."

--Bill Welch, *The Promised Friend* (chapter 5)

-"FOOOOOLS!!"

General Woundwort had taken a few rabbits on patrol. When he had ordered them to “take cover”, one pounced onto another, one lied down as flat as she could, and the others remained motionless; nobody had actually followed his orders.

-"How am I to get anywhere with this band of ignorant fools?"

-"Perhaps,” Cowslip said, “if you explained what you want from them instead of shouting all the time, they would be more receptive.”

-"When I want your advice, I'll ask for it. Until then, kindly shut up."

Woundwort turned to the group of rabbits he had brought on patrol.

-"When I say “take cover” I mean “hide where the enemy can't see you! In a ditch, under a bush, anywhere!”

Even with this new information, nobody actually obeyed Woundwort's order. A few cast nervous glances at a nearby ditch, but moved. It did not take long for Woundwort to realize why.

-"Cowslip,” he said menacingly, “how far away from the warren to the wires stretch out?"

-"Freedom is a lie. There is no escape...” Cowslip heard a faint growl coming from the General. “Some distance, further away than most rabbits ever go.”

-"Show me where they are, so I can remove them.”

Cowslip sighed, and carefully walked into the undergrowth where he showed Woundwort the snares.

-”You do realize, I hope,” he explained, “that if you keep tearing these snares apart, the farmer will stop giving us flayrah? He might try something more drastic. It was a fine life until you came along and ruined everything.”

-”I'm not ruining anything. I'm making you great again.” He tore out another snare. “And besides, we won't be here very long.”

-”What do you mean, we won't be here very long?”

-”As soon as I have a decent owsla, we will march towards the enemy. We will have revenge against the deserters, the outsiders and everyone else I'm not thinking about at the moment.”

Cowslip remained silent for a few moments. After so long, he would finally be able to have revenge on Hickory, Marigold and the others.
"Wonderful," he said.

"Yes. What's not so wonderful are those rabbits of yours. They are really large, I'll give you that, but it's all flayrah and no muscle. And then there's that runt Silverweed. There's no way he will ever be able to do anything useful."

"Silverweed has some special talents of his own. You should not underestimate him."

"Talents! Telling creepy poems that everyone listens to. How can that help me win a war?"

"He has other talents..."

"Well, I think that's the last snare, now. Let's get back to training."

As Woundwort walked out of the undergrowth, however, he realized he was alone with Cowslip. The other rabbits had run back to the warren and could be seen eating from the pile of fresh flayrah. Woundwort ran up to them.

"What do you think you're doing?"

The rabbits were stricken with fear at his sudden arrival.

"Uh...when you vanished..." one of them started to say, "we assumed that...that training was over, and..."

"Stop lying! You assumed I had been SNARED, didn't you?"

The rabbit remained silent, but the look on his face indicated that Woundwort was telling the truth.

"Stop assuming so much. Training is never finished until I say it is. And right now, it isn't. Now TAKE COVER!"

The look on Woundwort's face absolutely terrified the other rabbits. Under most circumstances they would try to avoid the undergrowth, out of fear of being snared, but the General was even more terrifying. Most of them jumped into the ditch, which had fortunately been cleared of snares by Woundwort earlier that day.

However, loud rustling could still be heard, and a few tails were sticking out. Suddenly, one of the rabbits bolted out of the ditch screaming; several followed soon afterwards. Woundwort pounced on the last one.

"What is going on here?"

"A hedgehog! RUN!"

Woundwort hopped off the other rabbit and looked into the ditch. Sure enough, a lone hedgehog was sitting there with a sad look on her face.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't want to hurt anyone..."

Woundwort sighed loudly at these rabbits' incompetence. They still had a lot to learn before they would be ready for a war.

"YOU IDIOTS! Hedgehogs aren't dangerous!"
Vervain had been travelling for an entire day. He was not going anywhere in particular, he was just wandering. At first, he felt very excited to be free from Woundwort. However, as time went on, his excitement turned to worry. This was a new world to him. While wide patrols took up most of his time when he was in the owsla, he never strayed very far from Efrafa, and if anything ever went wrong, he could retreat to the warren, where he would be safe unless the General was in a bad mood. Now, he was further from the warren than he had been in seasons.

Suddenly, he saw some rustling in the bushes nearby. There was clearly some creature hiding there. He did not know what it was, and didn't really want to know. He bolted in the opposite direction. After running a while, he stopped to catch his breath, and turned around to see if the creature had followed him. Further away, he could see the dark shape of a rabbit.

Vervain felt rather embarrassed at his mistake; hopefully he didn't look too stupid now in the stranger's eyes. However, the stranger could potentially make a good travel companion, so Vervain decided to approach him.

The stranger was a lop-eared, middle-sized rabbit with pale fur. As soon as he saw Vervain, however, he immediately bowed and closed his eyes.

-"I'm sorry, Vervain sir, for running away from Efrafa, I..."
-"You're an Efrafan?"
-"Yes sir, I'm...
-"State your name and rank!"
-"Aspen, sir. Rank of corporal. I'm sorry I ran away..."
-"You ran away from Efrafa?"
-"Yes, I confess to everything, please don't kill me, I'm sorry I..."
-"Stop whining! If it makes you feel any better, I ran away too."

Aspen seemed to calm down.

-"YOU ran away?"
-"Yes...don't rub it in..."

Vervain felt disappointed. He was hoping that this stranger would be an experienced hlessi who could guide him through this new journey. Unfortunately, he turned out to be an inexperienced Efrafan officer, who underranked him and had run away from his post like a coward. Vervain started to walk away, when Aspen ran after him.

-"Uh...sir...do you think I could...uh...travel with you sir?"

Vervain thought quickly. This rabbit was a massive disappointment but, he reasoned, it would be better to travel with an idiot than to travel alone.

-"Sure, go ahead. Just remember that I outrank you, so don't go around giving me orders."

-"Does it really matter now, sir? We're not in Efrafa anymore, so I'm not a corporal anymore, and neither are you a captain."
“Never mind. I don't feel like arguing.”

“Neither do I.”

“Then DON'T ARGUE.”

The two rabbits walked silently for a long time, until last Aspen asked:

“Why did you leave Efrafa, anyway?”

“I'm searching for a friend. I have to talk to her. Tell her I was wrong, and I'm sorry.”

“Yeah...I don't know what you did, but I hope you find her. Any idea where she could be?”

“I don't know.”

“Why don't you go to the last place where you saw her?”

Vervain looked at Aspen angrily, too proud to admit that he had not thought of this himself.

“That's exactly what I was going to do!” he lied. “Follow me.”
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“If we do find the sign location, will the sign still be there?”

--”Dave n' Kathy, Eddie and George Wake Up Somewhere In the Sign Post Forest

Blackberry, Primrose and Marigold had travelled a short distance from the warren. The subject of conversation had changed from the war with Efrafa to recent happenings at Redstone.

-”How does it feel, being Chief Rabbit?” Blackberry asked after a while.

-”That's something you will have to ask Hickory,” Marigold answered.

-”But I thought you were both Chiefs?”

-”Technically we are, but I let Hickory make most of the decisions and I rarely have any reason to object.”

-”How do you feel about this?”

-”Well, sometimes I wish he would ask me for advice, but in most situations he makes good decisions, so I can't really complain. There he is now, maybe you could ask him.”

Hickory was approaching the three does, with a nervous look on his face.

-”Well, Marigold, there's no sign of that fox that has been hanging around the warren for the past few days, but there's something else. Uh...who are these two?”

-”Hickory, dear, these are Blackberry and Primrose, who are visiting from Watership Down.”

-”It's good to meet you. Perhaps you two would know what that...thing over there is?”

-”What sort of thing?” Marigold asked.

-”It's hard to describe. It smells of humans but it's clearly made of wood. It's hard to describe, you should go see it for yourselves.”

Hickory returned to where he had found the mysterious wooden thing, with the others following him. When they were some distance from the warren, they could finally see it. A large flat wooden surface was placed on two posts. It was much shorter than the nearby trees, but nevertheless taller than the rocks under which Redstone was built. It was a sign of some sort, but none of the rabbits were able to read the terrifying message written on it.

-”Do you have any idea what this is?” Hickory asked.

-”I have never seen anything like this before,” Marigold said.

-”Neither have I,” Primrose added, “but altogether I don't like it.”
Blackberry, meanwhile, smelled the posts carefully. There wasn't much to smell, it was just wood, with a faint scent of humans. But this object seemed vaguely familiar.

-"I have an idea what this might be, but I'm not sure. Before I left Sandleford Warren, Fiver mentioned something he saw in a field near the warren. While I didn't see it myself, this looks a lot like what he described."

-"But what is it?" Hickory insisted. "What does it do?"

-"I don't know, and neither did Fiver: all he said was that bad things were going to happen and we should leave the warren. And it was a good thing we did, because humans destroyed the warren soon afterwards."

-"Does this mean Redstone is in danger?" Primrose asked nervously.

-"I don't know. Fiver seemed to think that the object at Sandleford was some sort of warning. But it is also possible that it was completely unrelated to the warren's destruction."

-"Let's go back to the warren," Hickory suggested. "There's nothing more we can learn from this."

Marigold nodded, and the four rabbits slowly made their back to Redstone. However, despite what Hickory had said, a nervous look on his face persisted.

-"What should we do about it?" he asked suddenly.

-"About what?" Marigold asked in response.

-"That thing over there. Maybe Redstone will be destroyed just like Sandleford was."

-"I didn't say that to make you panic," Blackberry said. "I hope Redstone won't be destroyed, but either way, you should have a plan to evacuate the warren in case of an emergency."

-"Exactly what would such a plan involve?" Hickory asked.

-"I'm afraid I can't help you with this. Hazel, Fiver and Bigwig developed the plan we have at Watership Down, and I don't know the details."

The rabbits remained silent for the rest of the trip back to the warren. Once they had returned, there were only a few rabbits out at silflay.

-"Well, thanks for the help anyway," Hickory said. "I'll try to devise an emergency evacuation plan, but hopefully we will never need to use it."

-"I'm in the mood for some excitement tonight," Marigold said. "Do you think you're ready?"

-"Absolutely." Hickory turned to Blackberry and Primrose. "Is it all right if we leave you two alone?"

-"It's fine," Primrose said.

Hickory nodded, and he and Marigold soon vanished together underground.

-"When do we go back to Watership Down?" Primrose asked.

-"But we just got here earlier today!"
"I know, but the others are going to worry if we vanish for an extended period of time."

Blackberry stared at the sky for a few moments.

"You have a point. But it's late today, and if we leave now, we will have to travel by night. What do you say we spend the night here, and start the journey back to Watership Down in the morning?"

"I suppose it would be fine." Primrose sighed. "Until then we might as well silflay."

The two does spent a while outside, nibbling at the grass. By the time they finally went underground, the sun was setting. Their previous burrow was still damp, so they found another empty one to spend the night. They were still very tired, and it did not take them long to fall asleep.

Hazel, Fiver and Bigwig finally made their way out of the caverns and into the warren itself. The trip back had taken them much longer than expected, as the ceiling seemed very unstable in several places and they had to avoid making sudden movements that might cause it to collapse. As they went outside, they saw that the sun was already setting.

"So, how did it go?" another rabbit asked. Hazel turned; it was Clover.

"The war is over, for now," Hazel explained, "but Campion is still gone. And I assume Primrose and Blackberry aren't back either?"

"You worry too much, Hazel," Fiver said. "They have only been gone for a day, they will be back soon."

"What's that you said about Campion?" Clover asked.

"He's nowhere to be found. He vanished without a trace," Bigwig explained.

"Eh, it doesn't matter," came the voice of Hawkbit, who was at silflay further away. "The war's over, we have no use for him anymore."

Hawkbit received a stern look from Bigwig, but simply walked away. Hazel sighed.

"It's not Campion that worries me. It's Prim-

"I told you, there's nothing to worry about," Fiver insisted. "If they are not back in, say, two days, then we can go and search for them."

"I think that's reasonable, Hazel," Bigwig said. "Two more days should give them enough time to return safely. And when they do, I'll teach them a lesson about discipline."

"Don't be too hard on Primrose," Hazel said. "I'll deal with her myself when she comes back. It's not like her to do things like this, and I want to know what made her do it."

"All right, all right! I won't try to argue with a rabbit in love. But Blackberry will have to...

"Bigwig," Fiver interrupted, "why don't you forget about discipline for the moment? Take the time to appreciate the simple things in life."

"Like what?"

"Like the sunset."
"Hmmm. Well, it has been a while since the sky looked so beautiful..."

The three rabbits spent a while contemplating the view and, after a short silflay, went back underground. The Honeycomb was rather quiet, with Strawberry playing bobstones in a corner with Dandelion. Clover and Cornflower, the only two adult does in the warren at the moment, were having a discussion at some sort. Captain Broom was telling another story from Old Redstone, and Captain Holly was the only one listening to him. Hazel approached the two elderly captains, hoping the story would distract him from his worries. Suddenly, he was pinned to the ground by three of his kittens.

"Nothing like the boundless energy of youth, eh wat?" Captain Broom said. "Now where was I? Oh yes, she tried to convince..."

As the kittens were not very heavy, Hazel easily got up and they slid off his back.

"Where's mother?" Gilia asked.

"...she'll be back soon."

"Where is she now?" Mallow said.

"I think he's keeping something from us," Snowdrop said.

"Yeah! There's something fishy about this."

"Aunty Blackberry is gone too..."

"Maybe they are simply preparing a surprise."

"Children, please." Hazel tried to get his voice heard over the noise. "Primrose will be back soon, there is nothing to worry about..."

"He's just repeating himself."

"Yeah, he's not saying anything new, just the same old thing!"

"He's really keeping secrets!"

"Please, I tell you she's fine," Hazel insisted. "Don't you trust me?"

"No, you're totally keeping a secret."

"He needs to be punished."

"How?"

"That is specified in the rules of the Junior Owsla."

"I never heard of any such rule, why do you two always leave me out of all the decisions?"

"Hey, I'm not to blame, I didn't know about these rules either! Mallow, you just made the whole thing up yourself! That's not fair!"

"I did not! You're just trying to get out of your responsibility."

"I've had enough arguing, just tell us what the punishment is so we can carry it out."
"Tickling."

"Hey, he's getting away!"

"AFTER HIM!"

"What do you say we go to my burrow, Captain?" Holly said. "It will be much more quiet there, and you could finish telling me the story in peace."

When the kittens started talking about punishment, Hazel tried to sneak away from them as quietly as possible. As soon as they noticed this, they ran after him. He ran as fast as he could, but this proved to be of little help. In his panic, he ran in circles, and the kittens soon decided to use that to their advantage. While he was much larger than them, he was greatly outnumbered, and he soon realized that there was no escape.

"Fiver!" he called out. "HELP!!"

"What's the matter, Hazel?" Fiver walked out of a nearby burrow and saw what was happening. "Oh. Don't worry, I'll keep them busy."

Suddenly, Snowdrop pounced on Fiver, knocking him down. He got back up and managed to grab her, but she was very agitated and he struggled to hold his grip. He finally let go when Gilia attacked him from behind.

"What's going on?" Hawkbit asked while walking by.

"Hawkbit, help us with the kittens," Hazel begged.

"Huh. Remind me never to have any."

Hawkbit joined the two brothers. He successfully managed to grab two of the kittens, one under each front paw, but the third one tackled him from behind, allowing them to get away.

"This is not working."

"We need to try something else," Fiver said.

"Like what?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, very helpful."

Fiver and Hawkbit were too busy arguing to notice another rabbit approach and grab Gilia. They only realized her presence when she spoke:

"I've got this one, get the other two!"

Fiver and Hawkbit stared at the sandy brown doe, around the same size as Hawkbit.

"Who is she?" the latter asked.

"I don't know," Fiver replied, "but let's grab the kittens."

Capturing two excited kittens is much easier than capturing three. With the new doe keeping Gilia out of the way, Fiver and Hawkbit had no trouble picking up Mallow and Snowdrop.
"What do I do with her now?" the doe asked.

"You get her to their burrow," Fiver explained. "I'll show you the way."

The three rabbits hopped to Hazel and Primrose's burrow, and dropped off the kittens in their nest, which was made of a mixture of soft grass and fur Primrose had torn from her belly. Periwinkle was already there, asleep. It was probably for the best, or she would have felt sad at being left out of her siblings' latest escapade. Hazel arrived soon after the others.

"You know, Hazel," Hawkbit whispered as he was leaving the burrow, "sometimes I don't know how you can stand them."

Hazel cast an angry glance, at him, but Hawkbit ignored it, simply walking away. Hazel then turned to the stranger.

"Thanks for the help," he said. "I don't know what we would have done without you. You're new to this warren, aren't you?"

"Yes. I've been wandering throughout the hills for a while now, until I stumbled upon your little warren. I think I'll stay here for now, if nobody has any objections. Name's Flora."

"I'm Hazel, and this is my brother Fiver. You are welcome to live here if you wish; we would be glad to have you."

"Thank you."

As Flora hopped away, Hazel and Fiver approached the nest.

"Will mother be back soon?" Mallow asked.

"She will be back soon," Hazel said, looking at Fiver. "I promise she will."

"That's good to hear..." Gilia said, but one could hear the drowsiness in her voice. It did not take long for all three kittens to fall asleep, snuggled closely together around Periwinkle. Hazel quietly walked away from the nest to avoid disturbing them.

"Fiver," he said, "do you really think she will be fine?"

"I don't see any danger at the moment, but if I ever feel any I will let you know. Until then, there is no point in worrying."

"Do you think you could sleep in this burrow with me tonight?"

"When we were younger, I used to be the one asking to sleep with you. But I'll do it, Hazel."

"Thank you, Fiver."

Hazel lied down in the centre of the burrow, with Fiver next to him. Hazel had already helped Fiver through various hard periods of his life, generally related to the latter's visions. Now, the roles were reversed, and it was time for Fiver to cheer up Hazel.

Chapter End Notes
The character of Flora is based on a user of this site (florapaw) and used with her permission.
“We learned about honesty and integrity - that the truth matters... that you don't take shortcuts or play by your own set of rules... and success doesn't count unless you earn it fair and square.”

--Michelle Obama

Moss had just finished inspecting his owsla's digging. The task had been well-done, preventing an immediate collapse of the warren. However, it was plain that even with these reinforced roots, it was only a matter of time before another, larger collapse would occur, possibly destroying Efrafa.

Moss walked into the pit, and stared at the sky; it was starting to get dark. He saw one rabbit climb out of the pit and run away from the warren, but made no attempt to stop him. If someone wanted to leave, let them. He had more important things to worry about.

-"You look like you have something on your mind, Moss sir,” came the voice of another rabbit. Moss turned around, and saw Leo further away; he hopped over to him.

-"I suppose I do.”

-"Would you like to talk about it? I know I'm not an officer, but I would still like to help, if I can.”

-"It would be nice to talk to someone who isn't an officer, for once.” Moss sighed. "It seems to me that they all just follow orders without thinking. The only two exceptions are Campion and Rake, but Rake has only been promoted recently and is still an outskirter at heart. And, as you probably know, Campion is currently absent.”

-"I can't say you're wrong.”

-“You won't tell anyone what I'm telling you, right?”

-"I'll keep it quiet.”

-“Thanks. As you probably know, the tree was struck by lightning a few days ago. Now, the warren is pretty much falling apart, and I don't know what to do.”

-”Are you contemplating an evacuation of the warren?”

-"I thought about it, but I would want to wait for Campion to return before attempting such a massive undertaking. But I don't know when Campion will be back. IF he comes back...”

-"I'm sure he will return. He's not the type of rabbit who would just run away from his duty.”

-"You're right, but he can't very well come back if he's dead.”

-"We must stay hopeful. Worrying won't keep him alive or make him come back faster.”

At that moment, Moss heard another rabbit approach him from behind.

-”Yes, Rake, what is it?”

-”Moss, the owsla thinks they have found the General's murderer.”
Finally some good news. Take me to him, so I can interrogate him.”

”Actually, it's a doe. But all right, I'll show you.”

Captain Rake Nightfur led Moss through several tunnels, leading deep underground, where the prison burrows were. However, these burrows were also the most unstable of the warren. The walls were littered with cracks, and while they were not visibly expanding, they still looked worrying.

Finally, Moss arrived at the burrow where the prisoner was held. Two large guards were standing outside to prevent her from escaping. As Rake went back above ground, Moss went inside the burrow, and gasped.

The prisoner was lying in the middle of the burrow, her eyes closed. She was a small orange doe, visibly underweight. THIS was the rabbit who had killed Woundwort? No, this could not be possible. She would never have the strength to do something like this, especially not in her current state. Moss rushed back out of the burrow, and shouted at the guards:

”WHERE did you find this rabbit?”

”She had the perfect motive,” one of them said. “She said quite plainly that she hated Woundwort, and she had no alibi.”

”Don't all slaves hate Woundwort?”

”They sure do, the nasty beasts. But from what I've heard, she seemed to hate him more than the others.”

”Do you seriously think she killed him?”

”My job isn't to investigate murders, all I'm supposed to do is make sure the prisoners don't escape.”

Moss sighed. Like he had told Leo, in Efrafa, owsla officers simply carry out orders without thinking. This was good for discipline, but in situations like this, it was very frustrating.

”Go get her some flayrah, Can't you see she's starving?” he ordered one of the guards.

”Flayrah? For the prisoner?”

”Yes. Campion wants to be the judge at her trial, and I want to make sure she's still alive when he gets back.”

”Trial? Those embleer technicalities...let's just execute her tomorrow morning at silflay.”

”If Campion says there is going to be a trial, there IS going to be a trial. Now get going.”

After the guard had left, Moss returned inside the burrow. The prisoner had not moved. As he approached her, she briefly opened her eyes before closing them again.

”What's your name?” he asked.

”What do you care?”

”I just want to know.”

”Heather.”
"I'm Captain Moss."

Heather did not reply. The guard had returned with a small amount of flayrah, which he dropped at the entrance. Moss picked it up and placed it in front of Heather.

"Here, have some flayrah."

"Why would I eat it? You're going to kill me anyway."

"If you don't want to eat it, you don't have to. But if you ever want it, it's going to be there."

Moss waited for a reply, but did not receive any. He walked out of the burrow and went above ground, where Rake and Leo were at silfly.

"So, what do you think?" Rake asked him.

"I think whoever led this investigation should be expelled from the owsla."

"You think she's innocent? So do I, honestly."

"What do you intend to do about this, Moss?" Leo asked.

"I'll take charge of the investigation myself. Can I count on you two to help me?"

"I would be glad to help," Leo said.

"Me too," Rake added.

"Thank you both. Meet me in my burrow tomorrow morning at dawn; we'll start then."

The squirrel and the hedgehog were sitting next to each other in the field, looking at the rabbits.

"Earlier today, they had no idea how to fight, Rosie, but they're getting better," the squirrel said worriedly. "That Woundwort fellow seemed like a nice rabbit at first, I saw him rip out some snares, but now...he might cause some of the others to get seriously hurt."

"Why does he want them to fight anyway?" Rosie replied. "At first, I thought that he wanted them to be able to defend themselves against elil, but now I honestly doubt it. I really have a bad feeling about all this, Tumbler..."

Further away, General Woundwort was giving instructions on how to fight to a young buck.

"Do you know what the biggest weak spot is?" Woundwort asked his student, only to answer his own question almost instantly. "The eye! The eye is the weakest spot in any rabbit's face. At the first opportunity, you aim a big blow there, preferably with your claws. Like this."

With that, he brought his paw close to Cowslip's face. He almost penetrated the eye with his claws, but stopped just in time. While Cowslip did not move during the demonstration, he was visibly nervous.

"And while they are still getting over the pain," the General continued, "bite their throat as hard as they can. And they are dead, you win. Now try it out. And be careful not to hurt me."
The student remained silent, trying to figure out exactly what Woundwort was asking.

-"You just taught me how to kill someone, and now I'm supposed to be careful not to hurt you..."

-"Use common sense! Don't actually hit me in the eye, hit me NEXT TO the eye."

The rabbit nevertheless hesitated for a few moments. Finally, he leaped at Woundwort, who dodged him and pinned him, but he managed to scratch him with his hind legs. Woundwort moved off, allowing his student to strike him in the face and win the fight.

-"Very good. Next!"

-"Before you continue," Cowslip said, “may I ask that you find someone else to use for your demonstrations?”

-"Why would I? You're doing a great job."

-"You scare me. What if you DO hit me in the eye? I would be blind."

-"What? You've been living in a warren full of snares all your life without being afraid of them, and now you're afraid of ME?"

-"I know how to avoid the wires, but I don't like the way you're treating me. May I remind you that you are merely a guest here? So far you've rejected everything that made this warren great. If you push things too far, I may have to ask you to leave."

Woundwort remained staring at Cowslip for a long time. His first instinct had been to kill Cowslip, but he decided against it: revenge would come later.

-"I'll remember this," he finally said. “I'll use someone else, but I'll remember this.”

Woundwort walked away and went underground, leaving Cowslip alone in the field.

-“Previously, it was Cowslip who oppressed them, but Woundwort looks like an even bigger tyrant,” Tumbler said sadly.

-"You're right,” Rosie replied. “I don't see these poor rabbits' situation getting better anytime soon.”

Woundwort went underground and lied down in the great burrow, reflecting on the current situation. At least half of the rabbits in the warren might be able to hold their own in a fight against an inexperienced outsider, and several of them were already teaching others what they had learned. Patrolling, however, was another matter.

These rabbits were fat and lazy, but their weight could actually be used to their advantage in a fight, allowing them to pin their opponents to the ground, defenceless. However, their weight would also be a major problem: how could they be expected to travel long distances? They would get tired very easily and would have to rest, at least at first. Woundwort brushed away these thoughts. If this proved to be a problem, he would deal with it later. Until then, he had to stop wasting his time and continue training the other rabbits.
A day late, I’m sorry. The name “Ahfernwort” comes from an ancient role-playing group started by “Blueberry-rah”. The characters of Rosie and Tumbler are based on real people, and used with permission.

“The stones here speak to me, and I know their mute language. Also, they seem deeply to feel what I think. So a broken column of the old Roman times, an old tower of Lombardy, a weather-beaten Gothic piece of a pillar understands me well. But I am a ruin myself, wandering among ruins.”

--Heinrich Heine

Aspen and Vervain had been travelling for a long time, before they finally reached Vervain's old warren, known as Ahfernwort. Most burrows and runs had collapsed long ago; only a few holes remained.

-"This is where you last saw that friend of yours?” Aspen asked. “How long has it been?”

-"Many seasons,” Vervain answered. While he had expected to find the warren in such a state, he still felt disappointed and sad. This was one occasion where he would have preferred to be wrong.

-"Where do we go now?” Aspen asked.

-"We're not going anywhere until we have inspected this warren. It may look deserted, but that doesn't mean it necessarily is.”

Vervain looked at the holes before finally deciding to enter the largest one. As he moved underground, however, he felt something touch his face, something sticky and clingy. He walked out tail first and ran through the field in a state of panic.

-"ASPEN! TAKE IT OFF! HELP ME!”

Aspen looked at Vervain in confusion. He had never seen the former captain so panicked before.

-"How can I help you if you run around like that?”

-"I don't care, DO SOMETHING!”

Aspen continued to look at Vervain, wondering what to do. Finally, when Vervain came close to him, he pounced on top of him. With his companion pinned to the ground, he managed to brush off the few pieces of cobweb clinging to the fur; Vervain sighed in relief.

-"Aspen, I just want to tell you…”

Vervain stopped abruptly. He was about to thank Aspen for what he had just done, but questioned whether that was a good idea. He had the reputation of claiming to be always right and better than everyone else. He never thanked anyone in Efrafa except the General, and doing it now was more
than he could handle at the moment.

-"Get off me, you big oaf!” he decided to say instead. That was more fitting for the personality he tried to project.

-"I'm sorry, sir,” Aspen apologized, “but it was the only way to get you under control so I could clean you up.”

-”Right...you go first now, all right?”

Aspen walked inside the run, with Vervain following him. When they finally came inside a burrow, Aspen started to remove the cobwebs he had picked up along the way; Vervain had purposely sent him first to clear the way.

The burrow was not in good shape, but remained stable enough that the two rabbits' lives were not in imminent danger. In a corner, Vervain saw the body of a rabbit. She had clearly died many years ago, probably in the battle against the Efrafans. There was nothing left but the bones, faintly glowing against the dark burrow floor. Vervain gasped in fear, but tried to calm himself down to avoid making a poor impression on Aspen, who slowly approached the body.

-”What are you doing?” Vervain asked.

-”Licking the bones,” Aspen said. “In respect for this unfortunate rabbit who lost the privilege of existing. And to keep the evil spirits away. I hope she's having a nice life in the Meadow, now.”

-”Right...I'm not afraid of ghosts,” Vervain lied. Was there really any point in keeping up appearances? He was no longer in Efrafa, so why did he still have to worry about his reputation? Why couldn't he just act naturally without worrying about what others would think of him?

-”Hey, there's been someone else here recently,” Aspen said, pointing to another run which was strangely clear of cobwebs.

Vervain didn't think: in his mind, this could only mean one thing. He ran straight through the run and into the burrow it led to.

-”CHIBISCUIT!” he called out.

The creature in the burrow wasn't Chibiscuit, but Vervain only realized this once it had opened its eyes.

-"RUN!” he shouted as he bolted out of the burrow.

-"What's the matter, Vervain?” Aspen said as he walked towards the burrow, clearly not taking Vervain's warning seriously. When suddenly he saw a weasel, its mouth wide open...

Vervain ran for a long time until he was some distance from the warren. Only then did he remove the cobwebs from his face: he had been too scared to do it before. Suddenly, he realized that he was alone; Aspen was no longer with him. The idiot, why didn't he run? Vervain slowly made his way back to the warren. Hiding in the undergrowth, he looked at the weasel, who walked out of the warren and vanished into the night. Vervain could clearly see that it had rabbit blood all over its face.

Vervain looked at the sky. It was fu Inlé, and the moon was perfectly round. There was no point in staying there. He was no closer to finding Chibiscuit, and his travelling companion was dead.
"No matter how hard I try to accomplish something, I always end up causing a disaster," he said sadly, but there was nobody around to hear him.

"ATTACK!"

It was early morning. General Woundwort had spent the entire night teaching the rabbits of Cowslip's warren how to fight. It was now time for the final test.

The rabbits were once again paired up, and as soon as Woundwort gave the order, they pounced on each other. They fought very hard, inflicting wounds on each other, until finally some of them couldn't take it anymore and surrendered. Silverweed did not participate, however: as he was the smallest rabbit in the warren, he had no chance against any of the others. Therefore, he simply sat by the warren's main entrance, watching the others.

Woundwort looked at the events with satisfaction. His hard work had paid off: he had an owsla worthy of the name, and he could use it to defeat the outsiders.

"Perfect. Everyone wait here for me."

Woundwort went back underground, to make sure he hadn't forgotten anyone. All the burrows he visited were empty, except Cowslip's.

"WAKE UP!"

"What's the matter now, General?" Cowslip mumbled.

"I have successfully trained an owsla."

"Good for you. Now if you will let me sleep..."

"Sleep? This is no time for sleep. It's time to attack the enemy!"

"Good luck with the war, General. When the traitors have been defeated, I ask that you bring me the ears of the two ringleaders, Hickory and Marigold, as proof that they are really dead. I shall hang them to the roots of the great burrow as a warning to future rebels."

"What are you talking about? You're coming with me."

"Very well. As soon as I finish this nap..."

"You can nap after the outsiders are destroyed. Follow me."

"Come on, General, surely the war can wait half a day?"

Woundwort placed his front paws on Cowslip's neck; the white buck could feel the claws.

"I don't have much of a choice, do I?" he asked nervously.

"Absolutely no choice at all."

Cowslip sighed.

"Very well...

As soon as Woundwort allowed him to, Cowslip got up and walked out of the burrow, eventually
making it above ground.

"Owsla," the General shouted, addressing everyone, "now is your chance to help me achieve my destiny! We are going to war against an enemy who deserves no mercy! Onward!"

Cowslip, however, had slipped away from the group. He could see the farmer in the field further away, inspecting the destroyed snares and scratching his forehead in confusion.

"I'm sorry," Cowslip said. "I'm sorry I failed you. It's not my fault. I tried to stop General Woundwort but he left me no choice but to show him where they were. Please forgive me!"

The farmer, however, did not appear to have heard him. Woundwort approached Cowslip.

"What are you waiting for? You shall march next to me."

Cowslip had no choice but to obey Woundwort. As he was about to leave completely, however, he cast one last look at the warren, thinking about how it was quite a shame to leave this life behind.

Rosie was nearby, hiding in the grass, when she overheard the rabbits' conversation and saw them leave. She was horrified that everyone was going to war. She ran over to a nearby tree; her friend was asleep on one of the branches.

"Tumbler, wake up!" she shouted.

Tumbler opened her eyes, stretched and yawned.

"Rosie? What are you doing up at this time of night? You need sleep."

"Come down. The rabbits are gone."

"Gone?" Tumbler climbed down the tree trunk and ran over to Rosie. "Where are they going?"

"I don't know, but Woundwort said they are going to war."

"How terrible! War never accomplishes anything."

"Who knows how many will die in the battle..."

"Are they all gone?"

"All of them. Not a single one is still here."

"At least the farmer won't be snaring them any more. But dying in a battle is not any better than dying in a wire."

"I wish there was something we could do, but I can't think of anything. They're all terrified of Woundwort, there's no way we could convince any of them not to fight."

"I suppose we could ask...Frith to help them? I think that's what rabbits call Him?"

"Let's do that. It's a shame we can't really do more..."

Tumbler wrapped her tail around Rosie, doing her best to avoid getting spiked. They remained together for a long time, watching the stars in the sky. After a while, three weird creatures, standing on their hind legs, came running by.
“What are those creatures?” Rosie asked.

“I'm not sure, but I've heard a lot of funny stories about them,” Tumbler explained.

Moments later, a large, overweight human also ran by, but he tripped on a tree root and fell head-first into the warren's main entrance. He tried to get back up, but was unable to; his head had gotten stuck in the hole.

“Does he show up in the stories too?”

“He often does. He's always chasing the three.”

“Why?”

“Because it's funny. He never succeeds, but it's probably for the best.”

“Perhaps we should help him? The three creatures he was chasing must be far away by now, there's no way he could be able to catch up with them.”

“You're right, Rosie. Let's do this.”
“Things die. That's part of life. It's bad to kill, but it's not bad to die.”

--"The Iron Giant"

Vervain was not the only rabbit travelling alone; Campion was also aimlessly wandering. Watership Down, Efrafa and the canal were far away; he had gone further than the usual range of the wide patrols and could not recognize any familiar landmarks.

He stopped in the middle of a field and stood on his hind legs to look at the sky. The thunderstorm was still raging in the area. Ever since his encounter with the Black Rabbit of Inlé the previous day, he had been thinking. There was only one logical explanation for what had happened, and he didn't like it at all.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck Campion's left ear. His body was filled with a burning sensation for a moment, then it was over. Unaware of anything happening around him, he collapsed and fell unconscious.

When he woke up, the place he was in seemed vaguely familiar: it was the same arid desert where he had first met the Black Rabbit of Inlé. Campion shook his head, refusing to believe this.

In front of him, the air was slowly turning black. The darkness arranged itself into a familiar shape.

-"CAMPION, WHY ARE YOU BACK HERE?"

-"Black Rabbit, I've been thinking.”

-"WHAT ABOUT?"

-"About our previous encounter. Supposedly I had died before my time and you therefore sent me back to the real world to finish my life.”

-"THAT IS AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION, BUT ESSENTIALLY TRUE. AND NOW YOU DIED AGAIN!”

-"No. I am not dead. You see, Black Rabbit, I am still alive. Yesterday, I was hit by some sort of boat. Today, I got struck by lightning. Don't you see, Black Rabbit? I suffered physical trauma my body cannot handle, causing my mind to fluctuate and see things that aren't really there. I'm not dead, I'm just going crazy.”

-"ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT I AM NOT REALLY HERE AND ALL THIS IS IN YOUR MIND?"

-"I'll quote you: this is an oversimplification, but essentially true.”

-"I SHALL HAVE TO GET THIS RIDICULOUS IDEA OUT OF YOUR HEAD. LOOK TO YOUR LEFT."

Campion turned; he could see a faint brown spot far in the distance. The spot seemed to grow larger as it approached him. He soon realized that this was a rabbit, floating closer and closer to him, with a look of terror on its face, until he stopped right in front of him.

-"DOES THIS RABBIT LOOK FAMILIAR?” the Black Rabbit asked.
The rabbit still looked terrified. He turned around to try to run away, but remained in the same place. He kept floating over the same spot, moving his paws in all directions and at one point flipping over on his back. But he could not get away, as if held by an invisible force. All the time, he was squealing in terror. Campion sniffed him.

-“Why is he screaming like this?” Campion shouted.

-“I’LL TAKE CARE OF HIM.”

The Black Rabbit of Inlé raised one of its front paws and touched the rabbit with it. He continued to struggle and his mouth was wide open, but no sound came out of it.

-“It's nice to have some silence again. Anyway, this rabbit is an Efrafan. I don't know why he's so afraid of me, though, I always tried to be a friend to the slaves and the outskirters.”

-“YOU WEREN'T MUCH OF A FRIEND TO THIS ONE. YOU WERE ON THE PATROL THAT CAPTURED HIM WHEN HE TRIED TO RUN AWAY. HOW MANY RABBITS DID YOU ACTUALLY HELP ESCAPE WHEN YOU WERE STILL IN EFRABA?”

Campion fell silent; he knew very well that the answer to the Black Rabbit's question was “none”, but he was too ashamed to admit it.

-“I've encountered many rabbits when I was in Efrafa. I can't seem to recall this one,” he finally said, trying to change the subject.

-“DOES THE NAME BLACKAVAR SOUND FAMILIAR?”

-“Let me think...is he the rabbit who escaped with Hazel and the outsiders? Not pretty little Primrose, the other one?”

-“THREE THINGS. ONE: YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD YET, SO YOU ARE THE OUTSIDER HERE. TWO: STOP BOTHERING ME WITH ROMANCE. THREE: YES, HE IS THE RABBIT YOU DESCRIBE. HE WAS KILLED BY A CAT YESTERDAY.”

-“That's unfortunate. But why are you showing him to me?”

-“TO PROVE TO YOU THAT THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING AND NOT A BRAIN GLITCH.”

Campion hopped over to Blackavar, who was still struggling silently.

-“That doesn't prove anything. I could be imagining his presence, just like I'm imagining yours.”

He raised his front paw and moved it towards Blackavar.

-“DON'T TOUCH HIM!”

But it was too late; Campion's paw was already on Blackavar's back. He was immediately filled with an extremely unpleasant sensation of cold, darkness, despair and fear. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced before. Worst of all, his paw seemed solidly anchored to Blackavar: he was unable to remove it.

-“OH, GOOD JOB!” the Black Rabbit shouted sarcastically.

Campion finally managed to remove his paw, but as he looked at it, he realized its underside was
completely black; he tried rubbing his paws together, but it didn't go away.

-"The eyes, the ears and the nose can be fooled, but touch doesn't lie...you mean I'm really dead? This is all really happening?"

-"ABSOLUTELY."

Campion remained silent for a few moments, processing this new information.

-"You were right, I shouldn't have touched him,” he eventually said. “Now I've got that nasty stain on my paw.”

-"THAT'S NOT THE MAIN REASON WHY I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO TOUCH HIM. IT'S JUST AN UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECT.”

-"What is the main reason then?"

-"YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD, BUT HE IS. IF I AM TO SEND YOU BACK TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING, I WILL HAVE TO SEND HIM TOO. I WISH IT WASN'T THIS WAY, BUT IT'S ONE OF THE MANY COMPLEXITIES OF DEATH. EITHER WAY, I WILL HAVE TO ARRANGE A SECOND DEATH FOR HIM AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE. I HAVEN'T HAD TO DO THAT IN OVER FIVE THOUSAND YEARS, SO I'M A LITTLE RUSTY.”

-"How many years?” Campion was confused by the large number.

-"IT DOESN'T MATTER. NOW, IF YOU WILL excuse me FOR A MOMENT, I HAVE TO DEAL WITH MY ASSISTANT.”

The Black Rabbit raised one of his front paws to scratch behind his ear. As he did that, Campion's vision went blank. He could not see anything, no matter which way he looked. However, he could still hear, smell and move normally.

-"Now, Black Rabbit,” a rabbit said, “as you know it's fu Inlé on the night of the full moon. My time serving in your owsla is over. I demand that you set me free.”

-"FINALLY,” the Black Rabbit said with a sigh. “YOU'VE BEEN ONE OF THE LEAST PRODUCTIVE BLACK EMISSARIES IN A LONG TIME. I HOPE YOU BROUGHT YOUR REPLACEMENT WITH YOU?”

-"What? Oh, him. I left him back at the Meadow. Now can you just give me my reward?”

-"YOU DON'T DESERVE ANY REWARD FOR YOUR SLOPPY WORK, BUT THE RULES ARE THE RULES, SO YOU SHALL GET ONE ANYWAY.”

Campion then heard plenty of seemingly random noises. Soon after they had stopped, his vision came back; the rabbit he had heard was nowhere to be seen; only Blackavar and the Black Rabbit were still there.

-"SORRY FOR THIS INTERRUPTION,” the Black Rabbit said. “REGARDLESS OF HOW DIFFICULT IT MIGHT BE FOR ME, I WILL HAVE TO SEND BOTH OF YOU BACK TO THE WORLD OF THE LIVING. TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DIE AGAIN, CAMPION, I SHALL SEND A THIRD RABBIT WITH YOU TO PROTECT YOU.”

The Black Rabbit scratched his ear again. Suddenly, in a puff of smoke, another rabbit appeared.
He seemed to be running and absent-mindedly looking at his surroundings, but as soon as his paws touched the ground he found himself slipping, and collapsed further away.

-"Uh, who are you?" he asked as he got up. "Are you the Black Rabbit of Inlé?"

-"YES. AND SINCE YOU ARE THE LAST RABBIT TO DIE ON THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON FU INLÉ, YOU HAVE TO SERVE IN MY OWSLA UNTIL THE NEXT FULL MOON. YOUR JOB WILL BE TO PROTECT THIS RABBIT SO HE STAYS ALIVE. ANY QUESTIONS?"

-"Woah, you talk fast, but you seem to make sense. Can I meet this rabbit?"

-"OF COURSE. IF YOU BECOME GOOD FRIENDS, SO MUCH THE BETTER. HE'S RIGHT BEHIND YOU."

The rabbit turned, and gasped in shock as he saw him.

-"Captain Campion, is that you sir?"

-"Yes. You look familiar...are you Corporal Aspen?"

-"You remember me! It's great to meet you again, Campion sir, I just wish we weren't both dead..."

-"IF YOU TWO DON'T MIND, HAVE THIS DISCUSSION ELSEWHERE. I HAVE OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT, SUCH AS BLACKAVAR HERE."

With that, bright red beams of light emerged from the Black Rabbit's eyes, each one striking one of the two rabbits and teleporting them back to the world of the living, leaving nothing but smoke where they used to be. He then turned to Blackavar.

-"CALM DOWN AND GET USED TO IT. ONCE CAMPION DIES FOR REAL, YOU WILL HAVE TO SPEND ALL ETERNITY WITH HIM. OH, AND HERE'S YOUR VOICE BACK. USE IT FOR POSITIVE PURPOSES, NOT TO ANNOY OTHERS."

He touched Blackavar again. The dead rabbit, despite having calmed down somewhat since Campion's disappearance, was still breathing fast.

-"Can I be alive again now?"

-"NOT YET! LIKE I TOLD CAMPION, THIS IS A VERY COMPLICATED PROCESS. WHILE I MAKE THE NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS, YOU WILL STAY HERE IN THE SHADOWLANDS. YOU'LL PROBABLY BE ALIVE AGAIN TOMORROW."

Blackavar looked like he was about to cry.

-"Can I at least go to the Meadow until then?"

The Black Rabbit sighed.

-"I SUPPOSE YOU CAN."

-"Oh thank you Black Rabbit. I'm so grate..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Blackavar was teleported away from the Shadowlands to the Meadow, where he crashed in a patch of clover. He started to nibble it; being dead wasn't so bad after all.
Blackberry and Primrose left Redstone early in the morning, as they had planned. Before leaving, they wished Hickory and Marigold the best with their warren.

Travelling by daylight and in calm weather, along with the fact that Blackberry was now familiar with the path, helped the two does to travel faster than during their initial trip. No unusual events happened during their journey, until they reached the canal. The water level seemed to have risen since their previous visit. The gates had been destroyed when they had crossed them; therefore the bridge to the other side no longer existed. The human authorities were aware of this, and were in the process of installing new gates. Until then, however, the area was off-limits to the rabbits.

"Are you sure there's no other way across?" Blackberry asked.

"None that I know of," Primrose replied. "The first time I returned to Redstone, with Hazel, we travelled a long time alongside the river without finding anything, so I decided to use a boat as a stepping stone. It didn't work out and we both nearly drowned. We discovered the bridge on the way back, and that's what has been used in all trips since. But now that the bridge isn't there anymore, I don't know what to do."

"There has to be another way. It may take us a while to find it, but it must exist."

Blackberry started to walk along the canal. Primrose, however, remained on the edge, staring down at her reflection in the water below. Her thoughts were soon interrupted by Blackberry:

"You coming?"

"Ye- yes, I'm coming."

She ran after her friend, and the two started their search for another way across the canal.

"I'm tired. Let's rest, shall we?"

Without waiting for an answer, Cowslip lied down in the patch of clover. He had been travelling with Woundwort and the rest of the owsla for most of the day, and was starting to feel tired.

"What do you think you're doing?" Woundwort asked. "We have an enemy to defeat, and we won't defeat anyone by sleeping."

"I know, but we won't defeat them if we're too tired to fight them, will we General?"

"Fine. If you want to sleep, sleep. I'll go on with the others, and once you have rested, you can try to catch up with us."

"I'm tired too," another rabbit somewhere in the crowd said.

"You stay here and rest too. In fact, anyone who wants to rest is free to do so. The rest of you will
follow me.”

Woundwort started to walk away from the crowd. A certain number of rabbits ran after him, but most of them remained where they were, whispering.

-”Why did we ever follow that crazy freak?”
-”Yeah, let's go back to the warren!”
-”We'll follow our tracks.”
-”Good idea.”
-”You forgot that crazy Woundwort fellow taught us how to walk without leaving tracks.”
-”Cowslip, which way do we go?”
-”I don't know, I really don't know, I've never been so far from the warren before!” Cowslip cried, on the verge of hysterics. “We have no choice but to follow him.”

Cowslip ran after Woundwort as fast as he could. His followers stared at each other in confusion, before joining him. Cowslip made his way back to the front of the crowd, next to the General.

-”I didn't think you would stay away very long,” Woundwort said.
-”I just want to know what your plans are, how long this war will go on, and...”
-”The plan is simple: find the outsiders' warren and kill everyone. The outsiders can't fight, so I would say the war will end less than a day after we get there.
-”When we will be able to go back home?”
-”The true home is the battlefield, not some oversized old warren full of snares.”
-”My warren is the best in the world. Fresh flayrah daily, the po-”
-”Shut up. I've already heard this many times before, and it doesn't sound any more exciting than the first time you said it.”
-”You can't appreciate good things when you see them.”

Woundwort did not reply; the rabbits continued their journey for a long time, until they came to a hrududu trail. The road was diverging in three different directions, and a few hrududil were rolling around the roundabout.

-”General Woundwort, wait!” Cowslip said suddenly. “You're going the wrong way. Redstone is closer to the road on the right.”
-”Who said we were going to Redstone?”
-”Bu- but General! You said you wanted to train an owsla so you could help me get revenge on the traitors.”
-”It's not my fault you were stupid enough to believe that. You see, I was merely using you. Now that I have an owsla, I am free to lead it anywhere I want. I know the outsiders' warren isn't in the same direction as Redstone, so we're going another way. After the outsiders are all dead, maybe
we will go to Redstone and destroy it too. Maybe.”

With that, Woundwort crossed the road without even bothering to see if it was safe; most of his owsla followed. Suddenly, a hrududu arrived; Cowslip stared at it in horror as it approached his people. The driver slammed on the brakes, hoping his car would be able to stop in time: cleaning rabbit blood off his shiny vehicle would be very time-consuming. The vehicle stopped near the middle of the crowd. While most rabbits were unharmed, a few were crushed by the wheels. The driver poked his head out of the window and shouted:

-"LIFE IS BETTER AT THREE DIGITS! NOW GET OUT OF THE WAY."

Woundwort and the others stared in horror at the remains of the corpses, lying in a puddle of blood around the wheels.

-"Why don't you idiots watch where you're going?” Woundwort said angrily. “I spent a lot of time training you all, and you're of no use to me dead. Let's get going.”

The survivors stared nervously at the hrududu, half-expecting it to start moving again. But it didn't, and the driver kept shouting at them; while they couldn't understand what he was saying, it didn't sound very friendly. Eventually, they finished crossing the road without looking back at the scene.

Cowslip could not get over the coldness with which Woundwort had commented about all the deaths. He briefly wondered whether this was hypocrisy, considering his own detachment towards the deaths of rabbits at his warren, but soon brushed away these thoughts, unwilling to admit his own faults.
The Beginning of the Investigation

“A person's a person, no matter how small. “

--Dr. Seuss

It was early morning in Efraf; most rabbits were asleep underground. Moss woke up rather early, but instead of going on a short patrol around the warren as he usually did, he remained in his private burrow, awaiting the arrival of Leo and Rake for the meeting. It did not take them long to arrive; Moss invited them to lie down in the corner.

-”You remember yesterday how I told you I was taking over the investigation?” Moss said. “I don't want anyone else to know about this.”

-”Why not?” Rake asked.

-”The only reason I'm in charge of the warren right now is because Campion said so. If anyone finds out that I'm trying to free the rabbit they all think is guilty, they would just kill her without a trial. And probably kill me too: I don't have the same respect Campion has.”

-”I always knew this warren was dysfunctional, but this is even worse than I thought,” Leo said sadly.

-”You will find a lot more examples of this, now that you're in the owsla.”

Leo stared at Moss in shock.

-”But I'm not in the owsla.”

-”Not yet, but you will be. I'm going to promote you right now.”

-”But we just met a few days ago! I appreciate that you trust me, but how do you know I'm the right rabbit for the job?”

-”I know a good rabbit when I see one. You're strong, you're intelligent, and you're good-looking. Can't ask for anything more.”

-”When do we do the ceremony?” Rake asked.

-”What sort of ceremony?” Leo said.

-”It's not much of a ceremony, really,” Moss explained. “Just two words and a mark.”

Moss placed both his front paws on Leo's head; the grey buck was rather ticklish, but did his best to remain motionless.

-”Leo, do you swear that you will always do your best to protect Efraf from enemies and loyally serve Wo...Campion?”

-”I do.”

-”Don't move, this might hurt...”

Before Leo could react, Moss slashed him across shoulder. It didn't hurt as much as he had
expected, but he winced at the sight of blood on Moss' claws.

-"Welcome to the owsla Leo."

-"It's an honour, sir."

-"Cut out the ‘sir’ business. Just call me Moss."

-"So, where do we start the investigation?" Rake asked.

-"First, we should meet the prisoner again, and see if she's willing to speak to us."

The three rabbits hopped out of the burrow and made their way towards Heather's burrow. Along the way, Rake bumped into a tree root and a large amount of dirt fell from the roof.

-"Didn't you have the warren stabilized yesterday, Moss?" he asked.

-"I did," Moss replied. “What just happened is bad news: the warren is clearly still unstable.”

-"We'll have to walk carefully to avoid any further collapses," Leo added.

When they finally reached the burrow where Heather was confined, they saw that the two guards at the entrance had fallen asleep. Moss poked one of them, who woke up instantly.

-"I'm sorry, sir, I've been tired..."

-"Don't let it happen again. I'll let you off with a warning this time, but next time I may not be so lenient."

The other guard, alerted by the noise, also woke up. He stood up straight, trying to look as if he had never fallen asleep in the first place.

-"How long have you two been on duty, anyway?" Moss asked.

-"Ever since the prisoner was arrested, sir."

Moss could not believe this. These two rabbits had been forced to guard the prisoner for half a day without any breaks. No wonder they had fallen asleep.

-"All right, you're relieved, go to silflay. And the first officer you find on your way is to be sent here at once to replace you."

He peaked inside the burrow; Heather was still lying down facing the back wall, but the flayrah was nowhere to be seen.

-"Oh, and get some more flayrah for the prisoner," he added.

The two guards nodded and did as they were told. Moss, Leo and Rake stayed behind and kept an eye on Heather from outside the burrow. She briefly got up to scratch her ear, but other than that remained motionless.

After the replacement guard returned, carrying a few pieces of lettuce with him, Moss took the flayrah and finally went inside the burrow himself, with Rake and Leo following.

-"I see you've eaten," he said. “Have some more.”
Heather turned her head to look at the visitors.

-“Oh it's you again. Why don't you just leave me alone?”

-“I don't want to hurt you. Come on, eat. It's not poisoned.”

Heather looked at Moss, then at the lettuce, trying to figure out what he was trying to accomplish with this. Eventually, she glanced at Rake and Leo.

-“And who are these two?”

-“I'm Captain Rake Nightfur.”

-“And I'm Leo-rah.”

-“Oh great,” the doe said. “You brought your friends to interrogate me.”

-“Actually, we want to hel...” Rake started to say, but Moss silenced him:

-“Let's not say that yet.”

-“Keeping secrets, eh?” Heather said. “No need to, I already know what you're up to.” She then took a bite and started chewing, very slowly. ”You're trying to bribe me with flayrah, aren't you? It's not going to work.”

-“Do you know why you're here?” Moss asked, trying to change the subject.

Heather sighed. She had no reason to lie, at least not yet. Besides, the odds were that Moss already knew the answers and was just testing her.

-“They say I killed Woundwort.”

-“Did you?”

-“No, but I tell you, if I had been given the chance, I wouldn't have hesitated to do it!”

-“The same could probably be said of many Efrafans,” Leo said.

-“Sure. And I will be forever grateful towards whoever actually did it.”

-“You said you wanted to kill him, but you didn't actually do it,” Moss said. “I didn't think you had.”

Heather did not reply.

-“Do you know who did?”

-“I don't know, and even if I did, I wouldn't tell you.”

-“Why not? Don't you trust me?”

-“Oh, I trust you all right. The moment you find the real killer you'll have them imprisoned in this burrow with me until Campion comes back for the trial.”

-“Heather...” Moss stopped. This was the first time he had called the prisoner by her name. He awkwardly glanced at his two friends, unsure how they would react; they were both staring at him, but neither spoke. ”As I was saying, I want to help you. I don't think you're guilty, so I want you to
be free."

-"What do you care whether I'm free, or dead? I'm just a slave."

Moss remained silent for a few moments, trying to think of what he could reply. Officers trying to help slaves was virtually unheard of.

-"Slave or not, you don't deserve to be punished for something you didn't do."

-"Tell that to Vervain. He used to make me..."

-"I think we all know what Vervain did," Leo said, recalling his own horrible encounters with the bearded rabbit. "I'm sorry he hurt you too."

-"The fact remains that we're here to help you," Rake said. "As far as I know, they only way we can do that is to find the true culprit."

-"Well, then," Heather shouted, "what are you here questioning me for? I told you I don't know who killed him!"

-"Do you have any information that could..." Moss started to say.

-"Go away! Leave me alone."

Moss fell silent. With a sigh, he and his two companions left the burrow.

-"I didn't hear your entire conversation with her, but she sounded rather rude towards you," the guard said as Moss hopped past him. "Shall I discipline her?"

-"Worst thing you can do," Moss replied. "Just let her alone, and make sure she doesn't escape."

-"Come on, there's nothing a few bites and slashes to the tail and ears won't fix."

-"I don't want anyone to hurt her until Campion's return."

Moss placed his paws around the guard's neck. "Clear?"

-"...yes sir."

The three rabbits made their way above ground. Overall, Moss was satisfied with the way the conversation had played out. While Heather still resented his authority, at least she talked to him, already a major improvement over the previous evening. His thoughts were interrupted by Rake:

-"You have a crush on her, don't you?"

-"On who?"

-"Heather, who else?"

-"What? Of course not!"

-"No use denying it, Moss..."

-"I tell you, I don't have a crush on anyone. Can you back me up, Leo?"

Leo remained silent for a few moments, thinking of what he would reply.

-"You have a crush on someone, but it's not Heather."
"You see? I don't have a crush on her," Moss told Rake.

A while later at silflay, Moss pulled Leo aside.

"Who do you think I have a crush on, if it's not Heather?" Moss asked.

"I would rather not say..." Leo winked, before hopping away.

Moss remained unsatisfied by Leo's answer. Surely he knew his own feelings better than anyone else? Nevertheless, he decided not to press the issue: the investigation was more important. Hopefully Leo would elaborate later on, though.
The characters of Hyzentlay, Bluebell and Silver come from the original book (also, Silver and Silverweed are two different characters). Flyairth and Prake come from the second book, Tales from Watership Down.

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it--always.”

--Mahatma Gandhi

Cowslip collapsed yet again. It was late afternoon and he was still travelling with Woundwort and the others. It had been a while since they had left the roundabout, and they had not come across any other rabbits all day.

-“I don't think I have the strength to go any further,” he said.

-“Then stay here and follow us when you're rested enough,” Woundwort said, thinking Cowslip would change his mind again like he had earlier. However, he soon realized that this was not going to happen. All the rabbits were visibly exhausted, and nearly everyone had lied down.

-“Fine. We rest here for a while. But Cowslip, I want to talk to you privately.”

Cowslip sighed. He slowly got up and approached the General. The two rabbits hid in a small ditch to have privacy. However, Cowslip stepped in something he didn't expect to find there: a cluster of hraka.

-“How nasty,” he complained, talking slowly as usual, as he started to clean himself. “It's all over my claws and between my toes.”

-“But that is rabbit hraka, isn't it?”

-“Of course it is, but I don't see how that changes anything.”

-“If that's rabbit hraka, that means there must be other rabbits nearby. Maybe even a warren.”

-“Oh, good. I was really hoping I would be able to spend the night in a warm, comfortable burrow. I'll go and tell the others now.”

-“Go ahead. But if there is a warren, don't allow anyone underground until I say so. I want to take a look at it first.”

After Cowslip had gone out of the ditch, Woundwort decided to check out this warren. Hopefully the rabbits living there would agree to join him, allowing him to have an even larger owsla to face the outsiders. Unless, of course, this was the outsiders' warren, in which case they would attack.

It did not take him long to reach the warren. It was in the middle of a clearing in the woods further
away, and several rabbits were at silflay. Judging by the number of holes, the warren seemed larger than Cowslip's, although nowhere near as large as Efrafa.

Woundwort slowly approached the warren, nibbling the grass as he went, trying to get an idea of what the rabbits there were like. It did not take long for his presence to get noticed.

-"Hi! You're new here, aren't you?"

Woundwort turned to look at the rabbit who had spoken. It was a young doe, average-sized and with entirely brown fur. The friendly greeting meant that this was not Hazel's warren, but he remained unsure how to react.

-"Yes, I arrived just now..."

-"Welcome to the warren! You're free to stay as long as you wish. We're somewhat different from most warrens, but you'll get used to it. What's your name?"

Woundwort hesitated before telling this strange rabbit his name: what if they already knew about him?

-"I'll tell you later," he eventually replied.

-"Well. Anyway, I'm Prake-rah."

-"Rah? You're Chief Rabbit?"

-"Actually, we have two Chiefs here, and I'm one of them. Having two of us is one of the things we do differently here."

-"And the other one? I assume he's your mate?"

Prake did not answer. Instead, she hopped to another rabbit further away. This rabbit, another doe, was almost as large as Woundwort himself. Her fur was mostly black, although with several large orange stripes.

-"Flyairth," Prake said, "we've got a visitor. He won't tell his name, though."

-"Greetings, stranger," Flyairth said. "I'm sure you will enjoy it here at the warren of Marli-rah."

-"YOU are the second Chief?"

-"Yes, that's me. We founded this warren together many seasons ago and have been leading it ever since. Shall I show you around?"

-"Go ahead."

Flyairth nodded in satisfaction, and made her way towards the nearest hole, followed closely by Prake and Woundwort.

The warren was well-built. The runs were smooth from many seasons of usage, and seemed very solid. It was a fine warren, but Woundwort had problems with its social structure. There were two Chiefs, something unusual in itself, and they were both does. When Prake had first explained she was one of two Chiefs, he had expected the other to be a buck, probably her mate. This buck would have run the warren, with Prake acting as some sort of adviser. When he learned that the second Chief was another doe, he had trouble believing it: he had never heard of such a thing before. But that was not all: even if Flyairth had not been Chief, he still would have been afraid of her. She was
the only rabbit he had ever met who was around the same size as him. If he ever had to fight her, she might end up defeating HIM.

After a while, the three rabbits entered a large burrow. It was not as large as the Honeycomb on Watership Down, but it was still large enough to fit a small crowd. At the moment, besides Flyairth, Prake and Woundwort, there were only two other rabbits there. One was a young, small buck, currently nibbling a piece of lettuce. The other was a doe, larger than Prake but not as large as Flyairth, who had sleek black fur with a few white strands, giving it a shiny appearance.

-"Flyairth-rah," she said, "there's a large group of rabbits outside. I don't know where they come from, but right now they are all lying in the grass."

-"And who's that?" Woundwort asked.

-"Oh, that's the detective," the other buck replied.

The "detective" sighed.

-"I've had that nickname for many seasons. It's somewhat popular, although it would be nice if they used my real name instead," she replied.

-"What is your real name?"

"Hyzenthlay. I'm the captain of owsla."

-"You're the captain of owsla?" Woundwort said. "Say, what kind of a warren is this anyway?"

-"I told you we did things differently here," Prake said. "But it's not really that different. I'm sure you will like it here."

-"But seriously, ever since I've been here, everyone of importance I've seen is a doe!"

-"It is true that both Chiefs are does, and so is our owsla captain, along with all rabbits in the owsla," Flyairth explained. "But it's not really different from an owsla made entirely of bucks, is it? Nevertheless, we try to make this warren an enjoyable place to live for everyone, bucks and does alike. Now, Hyzenthlay, what did you say about strangers?"

-"Many rabbits are outside, and they are all huge," Hyzenthlay replied. "I didn't talk to them, I wanted to report them to you as soon as possible."

-"Oh yes. They are with me, they are MY owsla," Woundwort said. "And since I couldn't afford to be picky when I assembled it, it's got both bucks and does."

-"You have an owsla?" Flyairth said. "Are you attacking our warren?"

-"No, I'm attacking another warren, and I was hoping I could get you to join us."

-"Why do you want to attack this other warren?" Hyzenthlay asked.

-"Because they tried to kill me. They would have succeeded if..."

-"They succeeded? Woo hoo," the other buck said. "I've never met a ghost before. While you're rather creepy, with your dead eye and all, you don't look like you would haunt anyone. It's nice to meet you, sir ghost."

-"Bluebell, shut up!" Flyairth ordered.
"Were you even paying attention to what I was saying? They tried to kill me, and they obviously failed. Either way, I will have revenge."

"Why did they try to kill you?" Hyzenthlay asked.

"Because I was at war with them."

"Why were you at war with them?"

"Because they kidnapped some of my people."

"Were they really kidnapped, or did they choose to leave?"

"They were happy to leave, the ungrateful fools. They refused to appreciate what I had done for them."

"What HAD you done for them?"

"I made them great again."

"You know what? You sound like a tyrant. Perhaps they would rather be free than great."

As much as Woundwort hated to admit it, he knew that Hyzenthlay was right. He was somewhat of a tyrant in Efrafia, but he had his reasons. The rabbits in Efrafia were safe from elil and any other outside enemies, and they were forbidden to leave for their own safety (and also so they couldn't team up with the outsiders). Many were ill, but that also meant they wouldn't have the strength to run away. Before he had arrived in Efrafia, the warren was weak, and elil were taking advantage of them. But then he came, and he made them great again.

"I didn't come here to argue about the way I ran my warren. I have an enemy to defeat and I want you to help me fight them."

"We have no plans for going to war at the time," Flyairth said. "You and the other rabbits you brought are free to stay here as long as you wish, but there is to be strictly no fighting. We try to live peacefully, but if we are attacked, we will not hesitate to defend ourselves."

"I suppose this means there is no chance of getting you all to join me and my cause?"

"No, but you remain free to stay..."

"I have no wish to live in the same warren as cowards."

With that, Woundwort ran out of the warren through the first run he could find, while the others remained underground.

"What do you think he's going to do?" Flyairth asked worriedly.

"I'm not sure," Hyzenthlay replied. "He won't settle down here, that's for sure. Perhaps he will just leave and keep searching for that warren he's been talking about. I hope he won't destroy it, though. Rabbits have enough enemies as is without having to fight each other."

Outside, Woundwort's owsla was getting restless. Several were trying to reach the holes, with others trying to hold them back.

"General Woundwort," Cowslip said, slowly as usual but visibly nervous, "can they go underground now?"
"No."

"When will they be able to go underground?"

"Not now, not ever. Did you know that this warren is dominated by does? Both Chiefs are does, and their entire owsla is made of does. How revolting!"

"I don't care if they worship the Black Rabbit of Inlé, as long as they have warm burrows to sleep in."

"Perhaps they are Inlé-worshippers, but it doesn't change anything. We shall attack them and kill them."

"Can't we sleep first and attack later? Why do you want to kill them, anyway? These are not my deserters, nor the outsiders you hate so much. And I don't see how the fact that the does are in charge justifies their death."

"They refused to join me and must pay for it. If you want to sleep, you'll have to do it right here above ground, and as soon as you're ready, we'll attack."

"But the elil..."

"We'll fight them too."

"I've had just about enough." One of the rabbits, a buck with grey-white fur, stepped forward.

"What do you mean, you...whatever your name is?" Woundwort said menacingly.

"I refuse to follow you any longer. These rabbits didn't do anything wrong and don't deserve to be killed. Also my name is Silver."

"I'm the one giving the orders around here, Silver! If I say they should die, they WILL die!"

"But I won't be the one killing them. I'm switching sides, and if you do proceed with this attack, I won't hesitate to fight you."

Woundwort was about to pounce on Silver, but the white rabbit dashed underground through the nearest hole. Seeing a few other rabbits also approaching the hole, he ran in front of them, blocking the way.

"If anyone else tries to betray me like Silver did just now, I'll blind them. Do I make myself clear?"

The rabbits, knowing Woundwort would not hesitate to carry out his threat, nodded slowly.

"Good." Woundwort turned to the rest of his owsla; everyone looked terrified. "Sleep if you want to, but we will attack as soon as possible."

"Why don't YOU sleep, General, for a change?" Cowslip said. "You haven't slept a wink since you first arrived at my warren two days ago."

"Hmm. I'll take a nap."

With that, Woundwort lay down in the grass and closed his eyes. Cowslip could not determine whether he was actually sleeping or just pretending to. Nevertheless, most rabbits also lay down in the grass: while they would have preferred to go underground, they were afraid of doing so.
Backports...the Opposite Way

“At this period, too, Leningraders resorted to their most desperate food substitutes, scraping dried glue from the underside of wallpaper and boiling up shoes and belts.”

--Anna Reid, Leningrad: The Epic Siege of World War II, 1941-1944

"They want to destroy the warren!"

When Woundwort had run out of the warren of Marli-rah, he had not bothered to check whether he was being followed, or if anyone else was nearby. Therefore, he had noticed a single kitten doe, slightly older than Pipkin, hiding under a few leaves. She listened to his entire conversation with Cowslip and the others, unnoticed; as soon as Woundwort had lied down, she bolted down the first hole she could find, to notify Flyairth and Prake of this upcoming attack.

"I see," Prake said. “While this General Woundwort fellow looked weird, I didn't expect he would try to do this. I thought he would just leave to fight those other rabbits he's been talking about. It's a good thing for us all that you heard this conversation, Nyreem."

Nyreem smiled at Flyairth's praise, satisfied to have done something that helped the warren. As the young doe hopped away, Prake turned to Flyairth.

"Get the two captains of owsla and come with them to the owsla chamber. We need to discuss the best course of action."

Flyairth nodded, and did as Prake had asked her. While Hyzenthlay was a captain of owsla, she was not the only one: she focused mainly on the warren's defences while another doe, Thethuthinnang, handled daily business in the warren. It was another thing done differently at Marli-rah.

The owsla chamber was an average-sized burrow that the warren's main leaders used to discuss potential improvements to the warren, with other rabbits occasionally invited. The discussions were generally friendly and most suggestions made were carried out unanimously. However, as the four rabbits settled down inside the burrow, there was a feeling of nervousness filling everyone's minds. They had never had to deal with an attack before. The awkward silence persisted until finally, Flyairth spoke:

"So...what would be the best course of action to survive this attack?"

"I had a good look at these rabbits,” Hyzenthlay said. “While they are all very large, most of them don't look like they were built to be good fighters."

"In that case, it shouldn't be too hard to defend ourselves,” Prake said.

"You're right about that, as long as we keep them above ground. If they manage to break into the warren, then we're in big trouble."

"We could position members of the owsla in all runs and try to prevent the enemy from entering the warren this way," Flyairth suggested.

"And what if they try to dig a new way in?" Prake asked.

"They don't look like they are good diggers,” Thethuthinnang said. “They probably won't try, but if they do, we should be able to hear them before it's too late, and get ready to fight them when
they break through.”

-”That might not work, because they would already be underground, and we would lose our
advantage,” Hyzenthlay said. “Their weight is of little use to them in narrow runs, but in a large
burrow, things are different. But I can't think of a better option.”

-”I have an idea,” Flyairth said. “Nyreem said they all fell asleep. Why don't we attack them now
and drive them away? They won't be expecting that.”

-”I don't think that would be a good idea,” Hyzenthlay replied. “While they don't look like good
fighters, there are so many of them we couldn't fight them without sustaining heavy losses
ourselves.”

-”I'm afraid you've got a point there...” Flyairth reluctantly agreed.

At that moment, a buck with pale fur entered the burrow.

-”I was told I could find the Chief Rabbit here,” he said. “Which one of you is it? I have an
important message for them.”

-”That would be me, and Flyairth here,” Prake said. “Who are you?”

-”My name is Silver, and I came with the group of rabbits who are currently above ground. They
want to destroy this warren, but I don't think you deserve to die, so I would like to join you and
help you fight them, if you wish to have me.”

-”I think you're telling the truth, and we would be glad to have you,” Hyzenthlay said, staring deep
in Silver's eyes. “We've already heard the news, and we have a plan.”

The members of the owsla were split out among the many runs leading outside. However, there
were not enough rabbits in the owsla to guard all the runs, so other strong rabbits, bucks and does
alike, were also chosen to help.

-”ATTAAAAACK!”

Cowslip and the others were unpleasantly woken up by Woundwort's shout. Judging by the sky, it
was in the middle of the night.

-”Now is a fine time to attack,” Cowslip complained. “We were all sleeping, and actually resting.”

-”We have to attack now when it's not expected. ATTAAAAACK!”

The rabbits, still half-asleep, failed to understand Woundwort's order properly. They arranged
themselves in pairs and started duelling.

-”FOOLS! Not yourselves! The enemy! Attack the warren!”

As they heard this, the rabbits realized their mistake. They slowly started to make their way
towards the warren, two rabbits per run. As they dove into the runs at mostly the same time, the
fight broke out.

Woundwort's owsla failed miserably. The holes were too narrow for both attackers to enter side-by-
side, so one had to enter first with the other following. There they met the rabbits of Marli-rah, but
in the narrow runs, their weight was not very useful to them. The rabbits they were supposed to kill
were able to hold their own, and while the attackers were desperate to make it back outside, their
partners behind them blocked the way.

Just a few minutes after the attack had started, all rabbits in Woundwort's owsla were back above ground, most of them wounded. While the wounds were not life-threatening, the rabbits were still in great pain. Nyreem had bitten one of them's nose, and he was running around the area in a state of hysterics.

Woundwort stared at the scene in shock. All by himself, he had turned this sloppy, lazy bunch of useless rabbits into a strong owsla that should be able to defeat anything that stood in its way. And now, after only a few moments of fighting, they all retreated like cowards.

"Get back in there!" he ordered. "Don't let a few scratches stop you! Fight like your life depends on it!"

Most of the rabbits were in too much pain to want to fight any more at the moment, and therefore remained motionless. However, a few of them went back to the holes, afraid of being killed by Woundwort if they didn't.

The owsla's second attack was also a complete failure. Their intended victims were once again able to hold their own and push them back out of the warren. Woundwort became furious.

"You worthless cowards! I'll go down there myself and show you there's nothing to be afraid of."

Woundwort fearlessly dove down the first hole he could find. Before he could get very far underground, however, he came face-to-face with Flyairth, who slashed him across the neck, where Vervain had wounded him. The pain resurfaced; he did his best to ignore it and keep fighting, but Flyairth kept slashing him across the face. As much as he hated to admit it, there was no way his owsla could win a battle against these rabbits; he would have to try something else. He turned and went back above ground where, upon seeing him, several rabbits burst into laughter.

"Shut up!" he ordered. "This is war, and is not supposed to be funny."

The laughter immediately stopped. Woundwort glanced at the crowd and gave further instructions:

"This is a siege. You are to make sure that the enemy stays underground. If anyone tries to make it outside, push them back underground. If they can't silflay, they will grow hungry and will have no choice but to surrender."

He stared intensely at his owsla.

"I don't think that's too much to ask of you," he added menacingly before walking away to silflay.
The Hole

“As many have discovered, it is entirely possible (although not particularly desirable) to love two people with all your heart. It is entirely possible to long for two lives, to feel that one life can't come close to containing it all.”

--Gabrielle Zevin, Elsewhere

After their return to the world of the living, Aspen and Campion had started travelling again. Aspen was excited to have been tasked with protecting Campion. Like all Efrafan officers except Vervain, he admired Campion. Now that they were together he did not hesitate to praise him and ask him about his adventures all day. At first, Campion appreciated the attention and told him several tales from wide patrols, but after a while, he grew tired and ordered him to shut up. This had the exact opposite of the intended effect: Aspen was saddened at having annoyed the rabbit he respected the most and spent a long time apologizing, annoying Campion even more. They eventually reached a farm, and Campion ordered Aspen to carry a carrot: it was the only way to keep him quiet.

It took until late afternoon for Campion to speak again.

-"Aspen, I'm going to ask for your advice. It's probably not going to be useful, but I have nobody else to ask, so you'll have to do."

Aspen dropped the carrot on the ground.

-"I would be glad to give you some advice if you want some, Campion sir."

-"Right. So, I have a friend who made a mistake...oh never mind that nonsense, you would figure it out anyway. I am the one who made the mistake, and don't know what I should do about it."

-"Well...what exactly was the mistake, sir?"

-"Stop calling me sir, all right? I'm asking you this as a friend, not as an officer. Anyway, there is a doe, and I told her I loved her."

-"I don't see anything wrong with that..."

-"She's already someone else's mate."

-"...oh."

-"...is that all you have to say? I'm asking you for advice!"

-"But what CAN I say? You've hardly told me anything. Does she love the one she mated with?"

-"Yes, she loves him. From what I've seen, it seems like a perfect relationship, just like in the old stories of El-ahrairah and what's-her-name. His favourite doe."

-"Nur-rama?"

-"I think that's her."

-"I never really liked those old stories,” Aspen confessed. “El-ahrairah and Nur-rama have nothing in common, and besides, I thought...”
"I agree, but that has nothing to do with the problem I'm currently facing."

"Sorry. What were you saying?"

"This doe I love, and her mate, seem to have a perfect relationship. At times, it seems a little too perfect."

"Do they have kittens?"

"Yes..."

"Who's the father?"

Campion sighed loudly as he realized what Aspen was implying.

"Her mate is, of course! Seriously, did you think I would do something so low as to steal someone else's mate?"

"I didn't, but you said you had made a mistake and I just wanted to make sure. What exactly WAS the mistake anyway?"

"To make long things short, I shouldn't have told her that I loved her. She seemed quite depressed the next time I saw her."

"What do you plan to do about it?"

"Aspen, I'm asking you for advice! What SHOULD I do?"

"I don't know. There might not be much you could do, honestly. If she and her mate are happy together, you shouldn't try to meddle. Maybe apologize to them the next time you see them? I'm not sure if that would help though."

"So there's nothing I can do? Thanks, Aspen. You've been VERY helpful."

"Always glad to be of service," Aspen replied, failing to catch Campion's sarcasm.

The two rabbits continued wandering for a while, until Campion decided to reveal another secret:

"There's also another doe I love."

"What's the matter with this one? Does she have a mate too?"

"As far as I know, she never had one. I may want to mate with her at some point in the future. She's really beautiful. Her fur is blue and white, and she has cute pink ears."

"You won't be too broken-hearted over the other one, then. It's all perfect."

"There is a problem though: I can't remember the blue doe's name. All I remember is that it's some type of berry."

"How about Blueberry? That would match her fur."

"Blueberry...that doesn't sound right, but I can't think of anything else, so it'll do."

Suddenly, Campion stopped. He did his best to remain silent, and crouched in the tall grass.

"What's going on?" Aspen asked him.
"Keep still, and keep quiet. There's something in the grass over there."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, but stay away from it!"

Aspen, however, did not listen. He calmly hopped over to the thing in the grass. It was the beginning of a sinkhole; at the moment it was round and descending vertically into the ground. He looked down the hole; it was completely dark and he could not see the bottom.

"Hello? Anybody here?"

Aspen remained silent for a few moments, waiting for an answer that did not come. He turned to Campion, who was staring at him in fear.

"Well, there's nothing in there. I can't hear or smell anything. I just don't know why it's there."

Campion was really afraid for Aspen. Maybe there wasn't anything dangerous in the hole, but standing so close to the edge like he did certainly wasn't safe. He ran straight into Aspen, knocking him into the grass further away. Aspen squealed, and looked at Campion angrily.

"Get away from that hole!" the captain shouted. "Do you want to fall in or something?"

Just as Campion said that, the ground fell from underneath him, and he silently vanished down the hole.

Aspen stared at the scene in shock. He slowly approached the now-rectangular hole, which was still as dark and mysterious as before.

"Campion? You all right?"

Just like the last time he had talked down the hole, he did not receive any reply. However, the Black Rabbit of Inlé had tasked him with protecting Campion. It was his responsibility to see that nothing bad happened to him. Aspen tried less-than-successfully to push his fear out of his mind. Finally, he decided to simply close his eyes and jump down the hole.

Campion dug himself out of the pile of dirt he had found himself buried under. Once he had broken through, he spent a few minutes coughing, before looking at his surroundings. Unfortunately, it looked familiar. A dark coloured cloud of dust was carried in front of him by the wind, where it materialized into a familiar shape.

"Well, Black Rabbit, why am I here again?"

"YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE. THE FACT YOU ARE IS BAD NEWS."

"Campion! Oh thank Frith you're all right!" Aspen said, appearing behind Campion; only then did he notice the Black Rabbit. "Oh. I guess I was unable to save you. I'm sorry Campion."

"YOU FOOL! I THOUGHT MY PREVIOUS BLACK EMISSARY WAS BAD, AND YOU, ASPEN, FAIL RIGHT ON YOUR FIRST DAY! IT TOOK FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE LAST ONE MADE A MISTAKE."

"Don't be too hard on him," Campion said. "I fell down the hole so he wouldn't."

The Black Rabbit remained silent for a few moments, thinking about what Campion had said.
"FINE. BUT DON'T TRY THIS AGAIN, CAMPION. ASPEN, BEING THE BLACK EMISSARY, IS UNABLE TO DIE, SO YOU DON'T NEED TO SAVE HIM FROM ANYTHING."

"I'm sorry I failed you, Black Rabbit," Aspen said tearfully. "I'll do my best to do my job properly next time."

"I HOPE YOU WILL, FOR YOUR SAKE."

"Um, Black Rabbit?" Campion said. "Why are you so small?"

Indeed, the Black Rabbit seemed to be gradually getting smaller. While at the beginning of the conversation he was towering over Campion and Aspen, now he was barely taller than they were, and visibly getting smaller by the moment.

"OH, I'M GOING AWAY. THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT."

As he finished talking, he vanished entirely. There were no traces of him left other than a black puddle on the ground. Campion looked at it, half-expecting to see his reflection, but instead he saw something else, something terrifying. He squealed, and fell to the ground unconscious. Aspen rushed to him. He wondered what Campion had seen in the puddle that had affected him so, and decided to look too, only to see that it had already drained away through the sandy ground.

When Campion came to, he was back in the world of the living, lying next to the hole with Aspen shaking him.

"Campion! What happened to you? You really had me worried."

Campion slowly got up. His fur was still covered with dirt after the incident with the hole.

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine," he said as he started to clean himself. "But don't go near any more mysterious holes. That's an order. Pick up your carrot and let's get going."

"I think it fell down the hole."

"In that case don't jump down there to get it back! Just follow me."

Campion walked away; Aspen was trying to figure out exactly why Campion was acting the way he was, but decided to quietly follow him. The questions would come later.

It did not take long, however, for Aspen to break the silence.

"What happened to your face?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The left side is completely bald. It wasn't like that before you fell in the hole."

"I probably lost it in the Shadowlands. I hope it will grow back though."

"Perhaps you could ask the Black Rabbit about it the next time you meet him?"

"It's your job to make sure there won't be any 'next time'."

"Oh. Right. That momentarily escaped my mind..."
-"Well, I sure hope you will remember to protect me the next time I'm in danger!"
Don't Panic!

Chapter Notes

This chapter features a minor crossover. This is most likely a one-time thing rather than a regular occurrence.

“It is sometimes very hard to tell the difference between history and the smell of skunk.”

--Rebecca West

Blackberry and Primrose had spent the day travelling alongside the canal, searching for a way across. However, they had failed to find one; there weren't even any boats on the river.

Late that afternoon, as Blackberry sniffed the air, a look of disgust appeared on her face.

-”What's the matter?” Primrose asked.

-”There's something nearby, and it smells horrible.”

Primrose sniffed the air too; she too immediately noticed it.

-”What could produce such a smell?”

Blackberry, meanwhile, was looking around her, trying to pinpoint the origin of the smell, until she saw a purple spot next to a tree further away.

-”A skunk.”

She then hopped closer to her, with Primrose following.

-”Shouldn't we go away from the smell?”

-”Under ordinary circumstances, yes, but she might know a way across.”

-”You may be right...”

The two rabbits soon arrived next to the skunk. She was lying against the tree, her overly-large tail wrapped around it. She was looking at a couple of birds in the sky, with a look of peace and happiness on her face.

-”Excuse me, but we're lost,” Blackberry said. “Do you know any way to reach the other side of the river?”

Primrose expected the skunk to suddenly spray Blackberry, but this did not happen. Instead, the purple-furred creature looked down at them and did not seem the least bit hostile.

-”My, you're tiny aren't you?”

-”I suppose we are, compared to you,” Blackberry replied.
"No, you're much tinier than my two bunny friends. They are the same size as me."

Blackberry and Primrose looked at each other in disbelief. The skunk was larger than General Woundwort; how could a rabbit possibly be so big?

"Can you help us get to the other side?" Primrose asked.

"You're bunnies. Can't you jump?"

"It's too far," Blackberry said.

"In that case, perhaps you should just walk over it. If you look at the sky, you won't fall."

"I don't understand."

"Gravity only works if you look down."

"I'm...really confused now. What is gravity?"

The skunk looked at the two rabbits in disbelief.

"Perhaps I could teach you?"

"Maybe later," Primrose said. "We're in a hurry to get to the other side."

"Well, in that case I know of a bridge further away. Shall I lead you there?"

"Yes," Blackberry said. "Thanks for the help."

With that, the skunk unwrapped her tail and got up. She walked alongside the canal on her hind legs; while both rabbits were confused by this, they did not question her, and simply followed her. Primrose kept her distance, however: she remained afraid of being sprayed.

"I'm Fifi," the skunk said after a while. "What are your names?"

"Unusual name," Blackberry thought.

"I'm Blackberry."

"Primrose."

"Nice to meet you two. Have you seen any boy skunks around here recently?"

"No," Blackberry replied, slightly taken aback by the question. "I haven't seen any girl skunks either, other than you."

"Oh, what a shame, I was hoping you might know of one. You must know this area better than me, I'm just here on vacation."

"Where do you come from?"

"Acme Acres."

"Never heard of that place before."

"Lots of people haven't." Fifi sighed. "Have either of you ever experienced true love?"
"My friend Primrose has a mate, and they really love each other."

"But..." Primrose was about to speak, but Fifi cut her off:

"How lucky you are! It must be wonderful to have someone who is utterly devoted to you and loves you unconditionally!"

Primrose lowered her head. Fifi had just described Hazel. Despite how much she loved Hazel and Hazel loved her, she still felt guilty over abandoning Campion. She was about to cry, but her thoughts were interrupted as they reached the bridge Fifi had mentioned. It was a wooden drawbridge that was part of a road, and it was up at the moment.

"I don't understand it," the skunk said, scratching the fur on her head. "There's no boat nearby, so it should be down."

"Does this mean we can't use it?" Blackberry asked.

"No no, I'll just have to use some dynamite."

Suddenly, Fifi pulled a red cylinder out of nowhere and lit it on fire, before throwing it into a small cabin next to the bridge. A few moments later, there was a loud explosion, and the drawbridge dropped back into place. Now that it was closed, the rabbits were able to cross it.

"How did you do that?" Blackberry asked.

"A squirrel taught me," Fifi replied.

"Well, thanks for helping us reach the other side, Fifi. We really appreciate it."

"No problem." The skunk grinned. "And if you ever meet a pretty boy skunk, please let me know!"

"We will."

"Let's get going," Primrose said, eager to forget the entire incident. They had not been sprayed yet, and she was in a hurry to leave before it happened.

After they had crossed the drawbridge, the two rabbits realized that the area around them was virtually unrecognizable. They had strayed away from the path they had taken during their initial journey, and they failed to recognize any familiar landmarks. They were both exhausted; they would have to stop, but where? As far as Blackberry knew, there were no warrens nearby, and being forced to sleep above ground had been one of the most difficult aspects of the journey from Sandleford Warren to Watership Down.

She considered digging a scrape, but after she and Primrose started scratching the ground, it became obvious that they were too tired to dig. They were forced to lie down in a small ditch, filled with tall plants. While it was not as good a hiding spot or as warm as a hole, it would have to do until they had rested enough to continue their journey. They both fell asleep almost immediately, lying right next to each other.

Blackberry woke up in the middle of the night. After stretching, she hopped out of the ditch for a quick silflay. However, there was something unusual, which she could not understand: an unusually loud sound of footsteps, as if many creatures were approaching. She turned, and saw many shadows in the distance, rapidly approaching. She bolted back into the ditch, only to land on Primrose, who was immediately woken up.
"Don't move," Blackberry urged. "Our lives depend on it."

Time seemed to go by very slowly for the two does. The footsteps kept getting louder until the creatures stopped just outside the ditch. It was a group of rabbits, but all of them were extremely large, some of them as large as General Woundwort. Suddenly, one of them stopped and sniffed the air. It was a doe, with brown-purple fur and a green feather was hanging out of her right ear. She sniffed the ground, coming closer to the ditch with each step. Blackberry and Primrose huddled together in a far corner of the ditch. This rabbit did not look friendly, and neither did any of her companions; if their presence was noticed, an attack seemed likely.

Blackberry thought about how she had decided to take on this journey a few days before, to impress Bigwig, and how she had taken Primrose with her to show her the way, and because she thought this would cheer her up. This whole mission, Blackberry thought, had been a failure. The odds were that they would be killed right then and there. Not only would she have failed to impress Bigwig, who would remain forever ignorant of her motivations, but she would have also caused the death of one of her closest friends. Primrose, meanwhile, was thinking about Hazel and the kittens. She was going to die, and nobody would ever find out what had happened. They would be heartbroken.

Suddenly, a voice was heard:

"Let's get going. There's nothing in that bush, Spartina."

Instantly, the doe turned around and hopped away. The footsteps resumed, and gradually faded away until the air became silent again. Primrose peaked out of the ditch; the rabbits were gone, and only a faint smell proved that they had ever been there.

"We're...safe?" Blackberry asked.

"It looks like it."

"Thank Frith! Who were these rabbits? Are there any other warrens near Redstone?"

"Not that I know of. But I tell you, I haven't been so afraid in seasons."

"Neither have I. For a moment, I was sure we were off to Inlé."

The two rabbits remained silent for a long time, reflecting on their lucky escape.

"Why do you suppose she left us alone?" Blackberry said after a while. "I was sure she had smelled us."

"I don't know. It probably has something to do with that other rabbit calling her. Maybe she was straying too far away from the group? I've heard of things like this happening on Efrafan patrols."

"That could make sense. But altogether, I wouldn't feel safe staying here. They might come back. Do you think you would be able to continue travelling?"

"Yes, I would be ready, whenever you are."

Blackberry nodded; she and Primrose walked away from the ditch, hopefully towards Watership Down.
“Soon after, I returned home to my family, with a determination to bring them as soon as possible to live in Kentucky, which I esteemed a second paradise, at the risk of my life and fortune.”
--Daniel Boone

Hazel was outside, staring at the sky. The previous evening, he had sent Kehaar to Redstone for news of Blackberry and Primrose, and he was awaiting the gull's return. The only other rabbits above ground were Fiver and Flora; Fiver approached him.

"Spending your day looking at the sky won't make Kehaar come back any faster," he said.
"I want to know the moment he comes back, so I can hear the news as soon as possible."
"You don't have to sit here and wait. Even in the deepest burrow, you could easily hear him arrive, you know how noisy he is."
"There he is now! HEY KEHAAR OVER HERE!"
Hazel started to run madly across the Down, trying desperately to attract the attention of the bird. Fiver cast a quick glance at the sky, and shook his head.

"Hazel, that's not Kehaar."
Hazel abruptly stopped running as he learned of his foolish mistake.

"I don't know. But I doubt we've seen the last of this bird."
"Is it elil?"
"Hazel, I know you're really worried, but you should at least be able to see that this bird is too small to be dangerous."
"I'm sorry, Fiver, it's just that..."
"I know, Hazel. I know. But seriously, calm down. When Kehaar comes back, you will know for sure what's happening. Until then, this is all speculation. Come on, there's a bob-stones tournament going on in the Honeycomb right now, and we're all hoping you can participate."
Fiver managed to persuade his older brother to participate, and all three rabbits went underground. Hazel, however, cast one last glance at the bird he had mistaken for Kehaar. It appeared to be a small falcon, possibly female. She perched near the top of the beech tree, and flew away.
"Cute, isn't she?" Flora said. “Hopefully the bird you're waiting for will show up soon, though.”

As the bob-stones tournament progressed, Hazel's mood greatly improved: he was too busy thinking about the game to worry about Blackberry and Primrose. He defeated all opponents that stood in his way, until only one remained.

"Guess this one right, Bigwig, and you win," Pipkin said.
"Don't rush me, Pipkin," Bigwig replied, “I'm trying to think.”
Bigwig kept staring at Hazel, trying to pick up hints in the Chief's body language, to no avail. He would have to trust his instincts.

"Bob-stones guess is..."
The rabbits were interrupted by a raucous cry coming from above ground. That could only mean one thing. Hazel immediately ran outside, revealing the two stones he was concealing. He found Kehaar cleaning the feathers under his wings, with Hannah still on his back.

"What's happening?" he asked.
"'ello meester 'azel! How are things going here?"
"Please, I just want to know..."
"Ya. Vell...friendly Blackberry and lovely Primrose left Redstone yesterday mornin'."
"Yesterday morning?" Hazel repeated in disbelief. “Where are they now?”
"I dunno. Didn't search for 'em."
Hazel was horrified by these news. If they had left the previous morning, they should have made it
back by now. What had happened to them? Where they lost? Had they been attacked? Were they still alive? He bolted back underground towards the Honeycomb.

“Bigwig, we're leaving.”

“Leaving?” Bigwig was visibly confused. “Where are we going? What about the bob-stones tournament?”

“Never mind, you win, let's go!”

“Hazel, we need to finish the...”

“But there's no time! We have to go now!”

“And you still didn't tell me where we're going or what's so urgent about all this,”

“Hazel, calm down,” Fiver said. “Tell us everything from the beginning.”

Hazel took a few deep breaths to relax, but still remained visibly nervous.

“Kehaar just came back from Redstone. Primrose and Blackberry left yesterday morning and should be back by now. Since they are not, we should go and search for them.”

“All right, we'll do that. But first, let us finish the tournament,” Bigwig decided.

“How can you stay calm when the lives of two of our rabbits are in danger?”

“We've wasted more time arguing than it would have taken to finish the tournament. Let's get back to the game, and in just a few moments, we can leave.”

Hazel reluctantly agreed, and hid some stones under his paws again. Bigwig was still taking his time to examine Hazel's body language; he didn't notice anything besides minor trembling, but that probably had nothing to do with the game.

“Bob-stones guess...is three,” he finally said.

Hazel raised his front paws, revealing one stone under one and two under the other.

“You win, good job Bigwig. Now can we go and search?”

“Now that our tournament is finished, there is no point in waiting, Hazel. Who do we bring?”

Hazel looked around him. Nearly all rabbits in the warren had gathered in the Honeycomb to watch the bob-stones tournament.

Hazel wondered whether anyone would be suited for such a mission. In most situations, they brought Pipkin along, but with Primrose absent from the warren, he would have to stay behind to keep the kittens under control. They also often brought Hawkbit and Dandelion along, but Hazel wondered whether they would actually be useful this time. Primrose, if she was still alive, would probably be depressed, and Hawkbit's sarcasm might end up making things worse.

“Just the two of us, with Kehaar and Hannah,” he finally decided. “Fiver, you're Chief Rabbit until we get back.”

“Who, me?” Fiver said suddenly. “Oh no Hazel, not me. I don't know anything about being a Chief Rabbit. You're a natural leader, I don't have that skill.”

“I'm sure you'll do fine, Fiver. Don't underestimate yourself.”

“You should at least give me some tips as to what to do.”

“It's really not that hard, now that the war is over. Just be confident and optimistic, and if there are any disputes, use your wisdom to settle them. There's nothing to it, really.”

Meanwhile, Bigwig was discussing things with Pipkin.

“Pipkin, you've done a good job leading the Junior Owsla for a while. As you know, I'm not as young as I used to be, at some point I will probably retire from my position of captain of owsla, and I think you would make a fine replacement for me when that happens. I'm not really good at speeches, am I?”

“No, it's a good speech, Bigwig. I just don't know what you're trying to tell me. You're not retiring now, are you?”

“Of course not. What I'm trying to say is: while I'm gone on the rescue mission, you're captain of owsla.”

“That's amazing, Bigwig! Thank you for trusting me with the job. Exactly what do I do?”

“Keep in mind that you're still not as experienced as I am, so don't do anything crazy. Just make
sure the others train every day, and your Junior Owsla stays under control. Feel free to take out some patrols if you want, but don't go further than the bottom of the Down."

-"Eh, Bigwig..."

Bigwig turned and saw Hawkbit and Dandelion standing in front of him. Dandelion continued to speak:

-"I've, uh, WE've been thinking about things, and how you're leaving Pipkin in charge while you're gone...he's still young, and still in the Junior Owsla. Don't you think you should appoint someone more experienced...look Hawkbit, I'm better at telling stories than making speeches, you explain, all right?"

-"Heh. Essentially, he's saying that you should leave me in charge instead."

-"Not necessarily you! It could also be me, or even Strawberry..."

-"I've considered it," Bigwig explained. "But you're forgetting one thing."

-"What?"

-"Pipkin, unlike you lot, actually takes his job seriously. Any further complaints are to be addressed to him. You ready, Hazel?"

-"Yes, I'm ready anytime you are," Hazel replied. "Let's go."

Hazel and Bigwig made their way outside; along the way, however, they came across another rabbit, a scarred brown buck with an unusual overgrowth of fur on his head.

-"Blackavar?" Hazel asked.

-"Yes, that's me."

-"I thought you were dead!" Bigwig shouted. "I saw you die with my own eyes."

-"I came back. Am I still welcome here?"

-"Of course," Hazel said. "I'm sorry we buried you alive, you really looked dead. We're really glad to see that you survived, against all odds."

While Hazel seemed to accept Blackavar's return easily, Bigwig wasn't convinced. As Blackavar hopped past him, Bigwig bit his tail. He could feel the fur on his tongue, so logically Blackavar really was alive and not a ghost.

-"Ouch! What was that for?"

Bigwig immediately let go of the tail.

-"Sorry...sorry..." he awkwardly said, before following Hazel, who was outside speaking with Kehaar:

-"Kehaar, we're going on a mission. We're going to search for Primrose and Blackberry."

-"Ya, ees very eenteresting mission."

-"We would want you to come with us, to help us with the search."

-"Very good idea. I'm ready anytime. HANNIUNG!"

The mouse came out of a nearby hole holding a few sunflower seeds.

-"What's the mattah, Kehaa?"

-"Ve're going flying."

-"But we juss came back!"

-"Good, good. Ve start now."

-"But...oof never mind. Yur one stubborn gull, Kehaa."

-"I'll do my best to keep the warren alive while you're gone, Hazel," Fiver told Hazel. "And I'll make sure Blackavar doesn't die again."

-"I know you will. Just one last thing: did you have any feelings or visions that could help us?"

-"I'm sorry Hazel, but no. The visions come when they do, I can't make them happen. I didn't see anything about Blackberry and Primrose or where they are. I didn't see anything about you two either. So please be careful. I want you all to come back alive."

-"Don't feel bad about this. It's not your fault you didn't have any visions. And we'll be careful, I promise."

Fiver and Hazel exchanged one last hug, before the two searchers left the warren on their journey. Kehaar, with another of his signature cries, took off, carrying Hannah on his back. Fiver looked at the two rabbits until they vanished from view further down the field.
The First Crash

Chapter Notes

The characters of Dewdrop and Sainfoin are backported from the miniseries. The miniseries hasn't been released yet, however (just a few weeks to go...) so my portrayal of them may be inaccurate.

“I've buried a husband and a son. I'm a widow and a... Funny, there's no word. Lose your parents, you're an orphan. Lose your only son and you are... Nothing.”

--Suddenly, Last Summer

It was late afternoon in Efrafa. Moss was at silflay, alone. He, Rake and Leo had spent most of the day interrogating various rabbits in the warren, separately. Doing so allowed them to talk to more rabbits than if the three had worked together. Also, a group of three always together would be easier to notice by the other officers, and they might get suspicious. They only met together again after silflay, in the hraka ditch.

-"Any luck?” Moss asked.

-"None at all,” Leo said sadly. “Every rabbit I talked to said they were in their burrow at the time. No witnesses, of course, except for the other rabbits in their burrow.”

-"What about you, Rake?”

-"Same as Leo. Apart from one rabbit who was out here in the ditch, and an officer was there with him and kept a close eye on him the whole time, he couldn't have sneaked away.”

-“I can't say I'm surprised,” Moss said sadly. “I went through pretty much the same thing. I'm starting to think we're looking at this the wrong way.”

-"What do you mean?” Rake asked.

-"Maybe it wasn't just one rabbit who did it. Maybe there were several of them who ganged up on the General. They would all be backing up each other's alibis.”

-"It's worth considering,” Leo said. “The General was a strong rabbit, and it seems unlikely that a single rabbit would be able to kill him. But I don't know how we could find everyone involved.”

-"We might be able to stumble upon one of them by chance,” Rake added, “and he might reveal the identity of his partners in crime.”

-“I doubt he would reveal anything unless we tortured him,” Moss said, ”and I really don't want to do that. It's almost hopeless...”

Suddenly, there was a loud noise coming from inside the warren. Moss hopped out of the ditch, followed by the two others, and they saw that a large branch from the tree had fallen. They ran underground to see if there was any damage. As they reached the area where the branch had fallen, however, they saw that a large number of rabbits, outskirts and owsla alike, were gathered in
front of a wall, with several of them digging. Moss tried to break to the front of the crowd to see what was happening, but was unable to do so.

-"What's going on?" he asked the first owsla officer he found.

-"The burrow there just collapsed. We're trying to dig out those trapped inside. There's not much time before they suffocate!"

Moss realized the urgency of the situation. While some rabbits were digging, others were simply crowding the run, making it harder for the owsla to keep the situation under control. Moss tried to steer some rabbits back to their burrows, but this proved to be impossible, as more rabbits kept arriving. Moss soon lost contact with Leo and Rake, and was unable to do anything to help. He was just another rabbit in the crowd, complicating the situation.

After what felt like forever, the diggers had finally managed to break through the wall into what remained of the burrow. They dragged two rabbits out of the dirt, both of them dead. They did not know if there were any other dead bodies buried in the dirt; if there were, they would be unrecoverable.

Due to all the noise, it took a long time for everyone to learn the sad news. As it sank in, the rabbits slowly wandered away. Some went back to their burrows, while others lied down nervously in the corners of various runs, not willing to risk returning to their unstable burrows. Moss approached the bodies to examine them. Nearby, an elderly doe could be seen with tears in her eyes; an owsla officer was next to her, trying to persuade her to go back to her burrow.

-"Did you know them?" Moss asked her.

-"I didn't know the brown one. But the white one...her name was Dewdrop. She was my daughter."

With that, she lied down and covered her face with her front paws. The officer tried to drag her away, but she refused to budge.

-"Moss, can you help me with this?" he asked.

Moss, however, was not paying attention. He wanted to alleviate this doe's suffering.

-"We shall give her a proper burial," he said.

The officer looked at Moss with shock. Burying outskirters was unheard of: in most cases, the body was simply carried a long distance from the warren to attract elil. Generally, a few officers stayed nearby for a few days to kill whatever creature stumbled upon the corpse.

-"And what about the other one?" he asked. “What do we do with him?”

-"First, find out who he is."

After an extensive search, the brown rabbit was identified as Sainfoin, a former owsla officer who had retired years before; he had no living relatives. Moss ordered that he be buried next to Dewdrop. The two bodies were carried some distance from Efrafa and placed in a small trench dug by Rake, Leo and another officer. Dewdrop's mother was allowed to supervise the whole process. After the hole was filled up again, she took a large leaf, with faint traces of dew still on it, and put it on her daughter's grave. She remained sitting next to it for along time. Moss stared at her, before starting to make his way back towards Efrafa with Leo and Rake.

-"Hey, what am I supposed to do now?" the remaining officer asked.
“Stay with her as long as she wants, and make sure no elil come. When she's ready, escort her back to the warren.”

After Moss had gone, the officer looked at the doe and sighed. He had been trained to obey all orders without questions, but having to babysit an old emotional slave doe was really annoying.

The three other officers, meanwhile, went back to the hraka ditch.

“We have to make sure things nobody else dies in any more burrow collapses,” Moss said. “We need to inspect all burrows in the warren to see if they are structurally sound.”

“What about the investigation?” Rake asked.

“It will have to wait a day or two.”

“I don't know much about digging,” Leo said, “how do we know if a burrow is stable?”

“Poke the walls. If something collapses, then the burrow isn't fit to live in, the rabbits living there will have to sleep in the central chamber.”

“It's going to get very crowded...”

“I know, but I can't think of any other solution. Hopefully Campion will be back soon...”

“Uh, excuse me,” came a fourth voice. The rabbits turned around, and saw another rabbit. He had black fur, and judging by his size, he was still very young. He appeared to have a small object tied to his back, with a wire reaching into his ear. A quick scan of his body failed to reveal a mark; he was therefore not an Efrafan, but an outsider.

“May I help you?” Leo asked.

“Does anyone know the way to Watership Down?”

“I've never heard of this place before, I'm afraid,” Moss said.

“It's a warren,” the stranger explained. “I heard that it's at the top of a high hill near the farm, but that's all I know.”

“I'm not familiar with the area you describe. Would you like to spend the night at my warren, though?”

“Thanks for the offer, but I think I'll just keep searching.”

With that, he hopped away towards the river.

“Was that the Black Rabbit of Inlé?” Rake said.

“I really don't think so,” Leo said. “I know he smelled weird, but he didn't smell like death.”

“We should probably go back to the warren now,” Moss decided. “We have a lot of work to do.”
It had been almost a full day since Woundwort and his owsla had begun the siege at Marli-rah, and so far they had succeeded at keeping the enemy underground. Five rabbits were discussing the situation underground in the owsla chamber.

"I tell you, we can't keep going like this much longer," Thethuthinnang insisted. "Nobody in the warren was able to silflay today; at this rate, our underground supply of flayrah won't last very long."

"I understand," Hyzenthlay interjected, "but there's no way to get Woundwort's gang to leave. We could try fighting them, but they are too many. While we might be able to get rid of them this way, a lot of us would die too."

"That leaves only one possibility: evacuate the warren," the fifth rabbit said; it was Silver. "From what I know of Woundwort, he won't give up until we're all dead."

"No," Flyairth said. "I can't agree to this. Me and Prake have dedicated our whole lives to this warren, to make it a positive place to live. A place where all rabbits could come and live their lives in peace and happiness. A place where does would have a decent chance at life instead of being exploited by bucks. A place where we would be safe from humans and other outside dangers. A place where everyone is friendly and happy, essentially."

"Flyairth," Prake said, "I understand all this. I remember the old days, when we travelled from warren to warren, trying to convince other rabbits to join us, until we finally all settled down here. Over the seasons, some rabbits left the warren to pursue new lives elsewhere. We also had others stumble upon our warren and join us. It was a good place while it lasted, but now we have no choice but to leave. Marli-rah will end, but the ideals behind it cannot be destroyed. We can start a new warren elsewhere, all of us."

"I know, Prake, but...this warren is still the place where we all lived for many seasons. I know that even if we leave, the community will remain, but still...it's going to be hard to leave."

"Then we really are evacuating?" Thethuthinnang asked.

"We have to," Flyairth said sadly. "It's the only way we can hope to survive..."

"I'll go tell the others, then," Hyzenthlay said.
It took a while for the evacuation of the warren to be organized. Notifying everyone was only the first step of the process, and it took a long time for everyone to come to terms with the fact that they had to leave, and this was not a joke. Then, there were a few rabbits who did not want to leave, mostly does with kittens too young to travel long distances by themselves. Other rabbits volunteered to help carry the kittens.

However, a few elderly rabbits were also not interested in leaving, preferring to stay at the warren and fight instead. Old rabbits can be hopelessly stubborn, and it took forever to convince them to leave.

Fu Inlé, Flyairth led her people through the warren's deepest run, which led to the bottom of a hill some distance from the warren. It had been dug many seasons before to serve as an alternate exit in case of an emergency. It had never been used before, but it had been well-maintained by the owsla.

As she reached the tunnel's exit, Flyairth turned to address the others. Thethuthinnang was immediately behind her, with her friend Violet next to her, both of them with a kitten in their mouth. There were more rabbits as far as she could see; Prake and Hyzenthlay were bringing up the rear.

-“All right, everyone,” Flyairth said, rather loudly so everyone could hear her. “This is very important. All I have to say is this: run. Don't stop for ANYTHING.”

-“Not even for flayrah?” came the voice of Bluebell further away.

-“No! Escape first, eat later! Now if you're all ready, let's go.”

Meanwhile, Cowslip was slowly nibbling some dry grass. He had been around this warren for more than a day, yet nobody had been able to go underground. The owsla was getting restless, and several were simply pacing around, without any purpose. A hawk attack earlier that day had left one of their own dead, and this was not something they could ignore and forget like the snares back at the old warren. Cowslip wanted to take everyone back “home”, but he didn't know the way back. His thoughts were interrupted as Woundwort poked him on the side.

-“Do you hear anything?”

-“No. Is there anything to hear?”

-“Listen carefully.”

Cowslip raised his ears. Now that he was paying attention, he could hear something.

-“It sounds like footsteps,” Cowslip eventually said. “And not just one creature, but hrair.”

-“It must be the enemy! They're trying to get away!”

Woundwort ran into the first run he could find, and looked around him. As he walked through the runs, he peaked inside all the burrows, but all were empty. There were no other rabbits anywhere.

-“They're running away!” he shouted as soon as he made it back above ground. “Everyone follow me.”

He dashed through the field, with the others doing their best to keep up with him.
It took a while before all the rabbits of Marli-rah made it through the tunnel. Just as the last few rabbits made it outside, Nyreem squealed. At the top of the hill stood the dark figure of General Woundwort.

-”Nooooo we're gonna get caught HEEEELP!”

They did not wait for him to catch up with them. Everyone ran as fast as they could. Nobody, not even Flyairth, knew where they were going. They were running just to save their lives.

Woundwort, however, did not seem in any particular hurry to catch them. He remained at the top of the hill, staring at rabbits as they ran away.

-”I want what these rabbits have,” he suddenly said, to nobody in particular.

-”What do they possess that is the object of your desire?” Cowslip asked as he managed to catch up with him.

-”The mindset, or the flayrah, they used to compel them to act like this.”

-”You're overanalyzing the situation. They're just trying to stay alive. What would you do if they were chasing YOU?”

Woundwort looked sternly at Cowslip.

-”I would kill them, of course. And I will, even if they're not chasing me. Everyone, get ready to attack!” he ordered, before dashing towards the bottom of the hill.

The rabbits of Marli-rah had a head start and were therefore able to maintain a reasonable distance between them and Woundwort's owsla. A few were struggling to keep up, but Prake and Hyzenthlay urged them onwards. However, one of them somehow managed to get separated from the rest of the group without anyone noticing.

It did not take long for Woundwort to notice the straggling doe, running as fast as she could, but plainly exhausted.

-”Cowslip, grab her!” he ordered. “We can use her as a hostage if necessary. But be prepared to kill her if I tell you to.”

Cowslip hesitated: while he had been indirectly responsible for the deaths of many other rabbits, he had never killed anyone in cold blood before. However, seeing Woundwort's stern look, he decided to obey. He easily managed to lift the doe off the ground and hold on to her. She was still very young, and having not reached her full size, she was unable to break free from Cowslip's grip, no matter how much she squirmed.

Meanwhile, the others continued to run as fast as they could, until they suddenly came upon a wide, flat surface in the middle of the grass. It was the same roundabout Woundwort and the others had encountered the previous day.

-”What is that thing?” Violet asked. “Is it dangerous?”

-”It's some type of road,” a young buck with black-tipped ears replied as he smelled the road. “But there's one thing I don't understand: why it keeps going in all directions. Usually it's just a straight line.”

-”But is it dangerous?”
The discussion was interrupted by loud stamping. As soon as Flyairth heard it, she scanned the area for any possible threat, and soon saw other rabbits, all of them very large, on the other side of the roundabout. At the front of the group, they could see two rabbits staring at them: a white buck, and a brown doe with a feather near her ear.

-"Well, well, what have we here?” the buck said menacingly.

It did not take long for Flyairth to realize that these rabbits, whoever they were, would also want to kill them. She turned around, and saw Woundwort and the others rapidly approaching. They were trapped between two groups of rabbits, both of whom wanted to destroy them.

-“After all these adventures it has to end like this?” Hyzenthlay shouted. “NO!”

-“Outsiders,” Woundwort shouted, “your time is up. You refused to help me fulfil my destiny, and you shall have to pay for it. Owsla, attack! But leave the detective alone, I want to deal with her myself.”

-”No!”

Woundwort turned to see who had said that; it was Silverweed.

-”No?” Woundwort repeated.

-”Don't do it. If you walk any further towards them, you will die. Several of us are already doomed by our current placements in the field.”

-”You insolent little runt! Too small to accomplish anything, so you resort to scaring others to get what you want!”

He roughly grabbed Silverweed by the neck and threw him into the grass further away. As he hopped over to the rest of his owsla, slowly marching towards the group of terrified rabbits on the road, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his tail, causing him to collapse to the ground. As he tried to get back up, he realized he was unable to do so: his entire body was paralysed.

-”I’m sorry I had to do this, General Woundwort,” Silverweed said as he approached him, “but it was the only way I could save your life.”

If Woundwort had not been paralysed, he would have killed Silverweed. Suddenly, he saw several beams of bright light come from Silverweed's claws. The light bounced off a traffic sign and hit the feathered rabbit on the head. She fell to the ground unconscious, and the white rabbit next to her looked at her motionless body.

-”RETREAT!” he shouted, and the entire group of rabbits had soon vanished from sight, leaving her where she had fallen.

Silverweed repeated the process with several of the rabbits from Marli-rah; some were knocked unconscious, while others were simply immobilized.

-”What is he doing?” Cowslip said, terrified. “I've never seen him do this before! Will someone please tell me what he's doing!”

At that moment, he too was struck by light from Silverweed's claws. He collapsed onto his hostage, who remained conscious. Silverweed was about to immobilize her too, but was unable to do so, before disaster struck.
Restrictions, Decisions and Confusion

“You’re four times
It’s hard to
more likely to have
concentrate on
a road accident
two things
when you’re on
at the same time.
a mobile phone.”

--Unknown

The man was calmly driving his truck along the road. He was supposed to deliver a load of gasoline to a gas station in Kingsclere. He would have reached his destination several hours ago, but he had been forced to take a detour due to a construction site. Apparently a bridge had been destroyed. He was in a hurry to reach his destination and finish his job for the day, but nevertheless drove at a reasonable speed. An accident would only cause him to lose more time. Besides, he would lose a salary bonus for not having a single accident in an entire year.

As he approached the roundabout, he saw something on the road in front of his vehicle. As his truck got closer, he realized that it was a large number of rabbits. At the last moment, he turned the other way, no doubt saving the lives of all these creatures. “I wish these roads were lit properly, I would have seen them earlier,” he mumbled.

Suddenly, there was a loud crashing noise, and his truck abruptly stopped. While the driver was unharmed, thanks largely to the airbags, he could see smoke coming from the engine. This was terrible news, and it would only be a matter of time before the entire vehicle was engulfed in flames. He ran out of the truck, and saw what was left of a small car. “What kind of idiot drives with their headlights off?” he shouted in anger. Still, he had to try to save the driver of the car. The window had been shattered, making it easy for him to reach inside and open the door.

As soon as the door was open, the air was filled with a strong stench of alcohol. The driver of the car was half-conscious, bleeding from several cuts in his face, holding a smartphone in his hands, the screen showing an unfinished text message. It was the same person who had run over several rabbits in Woundwort's owsla the previous day. The truck driver grabbed him and pulled him out of the vehicle.

-“Get away from here, before it blows up!”

The injured driver responded with a soft moan; the trucker was unable to determine whether it was just a random sound or if he was trying to say something. The two slowly walked away from the
scene of the accident, the trucker supporting the other the best he could.

Once they were a certain distance from the scene of the accident, the trucker heard a loud noise. He did not look back: it could only mean one thing. His load of gasoline had exploded. The rabbits were showered with fragments of glass and other pieces of sharp debris. Suddenly, the car driver raised his arm towards the sky.

-“I reached 100 miles an hour, so [incomprehensible mumbling] my hood to stop me ‘cause it's just too fast!”

With that, he fell to the ground unconscious. The truck driver pried the smartphone out of his hands, desperate to call an ambulance.

Fiver had spent a large portion of the afternoon dealing with Snowdrop, Mallow, Gilia and Periwinkle. The kittens were very agitated, as both their parents had vanished from the warren without telling them anything. He had tried playing bob stones with them, but this did little to calm them down. He then asked Dandelion to tell them a story, but that didn't work out either: instead, Dandelion soon found himself pinned to the ground and tickled relentlessly. In desperation, Fiver asked Pipkin to take them out on a patrol.

The five rabbits made it to the bottom of the Down, as far as Bigwig had allowed them to go. Periwinkle was quite excited, as she had never ventured that far before. Her siblings, however, were less than enthusiastic.

-”There's nothing interesting here!” Mallow complained. “I silflay here all the time, and it's boring.”

-”If it's so boring, why do you silflay here?” Gilia asked sarcastically.

-”Because of the clovers and dandelions. Except I ate most of them.”

-”Pipkin, why don't we go a bit further?” Snowdrop suggested. “Bigwig would never know.”

-”I can't betray his trust,” Pipkin explained. “He said not to go further than the bottom, so we won't. It's too dangerous.”

-”It's not fun unless it's dangerous!”

-”Quiet!” Periwinkle suddenly said. “I think I hear something.”

-”But…”

-”She's right,” Pipkin said, “I hear it too.”

Everyone fell silent and raised their ears. They picked up a faint voice; it sounded like a rabbit, a buck.

-”Should we go and meet him?” Mallow asked.

Pipkin thought quickly. From one point of view, Bigwig had forbidden him from bringing the kittens beyond the bottom of the Down, but from another, the rabbit they were hearing might need help.

-”Let's go to him, but stay close to me. Don't venture too far away.”
The rabbits followed the sound, until they finally stumbled upon its source. A black rabbit, only a few months old, was lying behind a bush, singing. Another rabbit, this one with white fur and blue eyes, was lying nearby; he was around the same size as Fiver. Neither seemed to notice the junior owsla's presence.

-"I'm scared," Snowdrop said. "I don't know about the white one, but the small one looks like the Black Rabbit of Inlé. Let's get back to the warren before he sees us."

-"No, I think he's a real, living rabbit," Mallow said. "But what's that thing in his ears?"

-"I don't know, but it's probably not supposed to be there," Gilia said. "I'll save him."

Before anyone else could react, she pounced on him and ripped the object out of his ears. The buck was clearly scared by this and wiggled his way out of Gilia's grip, leaving the object lying in the grass.

The black rabbit was about to pounce on Gilia, but suddenly stopped.

-"Uh, I'm sorry, I thought you were a weasel, or a fox..." he said rather awkwardly.

-"Are you all right?"

-"Uh, yes, I'm all right..."

-"We've been travelling for a while now," the white rabbit said, "and I was wondering if you know of any nearby warrens where we could stay?"

-"You are both free to stay at our warren, Watership Down," Pipkin said.

-"I heard about Watership Down!" the black rabbit suddenly said. "I would love to stay there."

Fiver was nibbling a patch of clover, and staring in the distance, feeling the wind blowing through his fur. Hazel, Bigwig, Kehaar and Hannah had left the warren to search for Blackberry and Primrose earlier that day, and he had not heard from them since. He was not worried, as he knew they would be able to take care of themselves, and he had not had any visions of approaching danger.

There weren't many other rabbits at silflay: the only others were Flora and Blackavar, who appeared to be having a discussion of some sort. Fiver decided to join them.

-"So you're saying you were dead but the Black Rabbit sent you back?" Flora asked the brown buck.

-"That's what happened. He didn't want to, but he said he had no choice but to do so. I didn't really understand the full explanation."

-"Spooky! How did it feel, being dead?"

-"Depends. The Shadowlands were horrible, but the Meadow was a nice place. Honestly, I wish I could have stayed there longer. There are no elil there, and plenty of clover. I like clover."

-"Me too. She's the most beautiful rabbit I've ever seen."

-"I was talking about the plant, not the rabbit."
"I know, I was just joking. But she really is pretty."

Fiver then hopped away, and looked up at the moon. It was only a few days past the full moon, and it was getting smaller every night. He stood up on his hind legs, to better appreciate the view, when suddenly, he felt something take over his mind. A loud scream broke from him, and he collapsed as a vision began.

“A trip to the Valley of Fire

Where there is a long thin wire

There is only one way out

For one we cannot do without”

There was a terrifying machine of human construction, a machine that could both be powerful and dangerous, depending on the human in charge of operating it. The entire area was something so terrible it was hard to believe it actually existed.

"Fiver! Fiver, what's the matter?"

Fiver opened his eyes. Pipkin was standing over him, staring worriedly at him.

"I'm...fine..." he replied as he got up.

"Are you sure? You look rather nervous."

"Yes, I'm sure. I'll be fine." Fiver then noticed the kittens behind his friend, along with two strangers. “Who are these two?”

"My name is Leo Barning," the white rabbit said, “and this is Blueberry."

"Nice to meet you two..."

Fiver slowly made his way back to the warren, and lied down in his burrow. He had had a vision of approaching danger, but there was nothing he could do about it. He could not warn Hazel or Bigwig so they could do something to prevent it. He could not go himself, because the vision only told him what was going to happen, but he had no idea where the Valley of Fire was. He was entirely powerless to stop it. The two newcomers most likely had nothing to do with his vision, but this was only mildly reassuring.
Follow the Trail of the River of Knowledge.

“The best way to get rid of the pain is to feel the pain. And when you feel the pain and go beyond it, you’ll see there’s a very intense love that is wanting to awaken itself.”

--Deepak Chopra

It did not take long for an ambulance to arrive, and carry both drivers to the hospital. This rapid response probably saved the car driver's life; his wounds were treated and he was released from the hospital a few days later.

Putting out the fire, however, took a long time. There were no fire hydrants in the area, so water had to be carried to the site of the accident by truck, and no such vehicles were available until morning. It took several hours before a firefighting crew was on site, battling the fire; by then, the vehicles had burned almost entirely.

Violet slowly opened her eyes. She got up and shook her head. Her back hurt slightly, due to a few pieces of glass. The entire area around her was covered with debris and dead (she assumed) rabbits, with two flaming hrududil further away. She slowly remembered what had happened. A rabbit who called himself “General Woundwort” had attacked Marli-rah, and everyone had been forced to run away. Violet couldn't understand how a rabbit, even one as terrifying as General Woundwort, could be responsible for the destruction around her. This must have been work of humans.

Suddenly, a sharp cry filled the air. Violet looked upwards, and saw a hawk, diving towards the ground. Judging by the angle at which it was descending, she managed to calculate the approximate location where it would reach the ground. It was a short distance in front of her, where Thethuthinnang was also waking up, clearly as confused by the scene as she was.

She did not stop to think. Ignoring the pain, she plowed head first into Thethuthinnang, knocking her out of the way. The last thing she felt was the sharp talons of the hawk as they grabbed her and lifted her off the ground.

Some distance away, Hyzenthlay was also waking up. She felt was a sharp pain at the base of her right ear. She raised one of her hind legs to scratch it, but that only made things worse. The area around her was covered with debris; she was lucky not to be worse off.

"Can I get up now?" came a soft voice.

Hyzenthlay looked down, and saw Nyreem's head sticking out from underneath her. Hyzenthlay hopped off the kitten.

"What were you doing there?" she asked.

"All I know is there was a loud noise and you jumped on me, and then I fell asleep. Do you know what's happening around here?"

Hyzenthlay looked around. Apparently, when the catastrophe had happened, she had instinctively jumped on the nearest rabbit to protect them from the falling debris; Nyreem was the lucky rabbit who had been saved this way.

"Hey, what's that thing hanging from your ear?" Nyreem asked.
"I wish I knew, so I could get it out. It hurts."

"Let me take a look," another rabbit said. Hyzenthlay turned; it was Thethuthinnang.

"It's nice to see you're alive."

"It's only because Violet sacrificed herself to save me," Thethuthinnang sadly looked upwards; by then, the hawk was nothing more than a small black spot against the sun. "We can't help her now, but I can help you. Let me take a look at your ear."

Thethuthinnang carefully smelled the ear, and soon removed the piece of glass lodged into it. She then took a nearby leaf and held it against the wound to stop the bleeding.

"Keep it there for a while," she said. "Your ear may droop for some time, but everything will be all right. Did anyone else make it?"

"Other than Nyreem here, I don't know. I didn't get a good look at the crowd yet."

The three rabbits made their way across the field, walking carefully to avoid stepping on debris.

They soon came across a large rabbit with something clinging to her head (it was a piece of fabric from the seat of the truck). Clearly unable to see, she was clumsily walking around, trying to get it off. Nyreem seemed afraid of this creature, but as soon as Hyzenthlay had pinned her to the ground, Thethuthinnang managed to remove the fabric; it was Flyairth.

"Thanks for getting that embleer thing off of me," she mumbled. "Say, what's happening around here?"

"I don't know," Hyzenthlay said, "but it's horrible. Most of us are dead."

The four rabbits continued their search. The next living rabbit they found was a doe called Quiens, but she was in terrible shape. Most of her fur was gone, and her bare skin was covered with large burn marks. Thethuthinnang went to search the area for some herbs that could ease her pain, while the other three remained with her.

"Well...I guess it wasn't notable. I didn't make it in," Quiens said; none of the others were able to understand what she meant.

"We're going to do everything we can to help you," Flyairth said.

Thethuthinnang came back with a few leaves, and placed them on the burn marks; Quiens grimaced in pain.

"Let's face it, there's nothing you can do for me," she said weakly.

"You will get better. There's nothing we won't do for you."

"You don't understand. I can't move without excruciating pain, and if I stay here the elil will get me. Just put me out of my misery, will you?"

The other rabbits looked at each other sadly. Nyreem started to cry.

"Are you sure you want us to do this?" Flyairth said.

"Absolutely. Existing has become a burden. Just make it stop. Please."
"In that case, I'll fulfil your last wishes. I'm sorry it has to end this way." Flyairth turned to the others. "You three may wish to turn around."

Hyzenthlay, Thethuthinnang and Nyreem did so. They heard a sickening crack as Flyairth dealt Quiens a single powerful blow to the head. It was the most painless death she could have experienced, under the circumstances. Once that was finished, the four rabbits walked away, to continue their search for survivors.

The results were grim. They only succeeded in finding six other survivors: Vilthuril, another doe who, despite her young age, had a reputation for being very wise; Bluebell, the joking rabbit who had made fun of Woundwort previously; Blackberry, the buck with black-tipped ears who had questioned the purpose of the road the previous evening; Silver, the buck who had deserted Woundwort's owsla; Myrkin, a small buck with brown-orange fur, and another doe, called Strawberry. None of them had suffered worse than minor cuts.

Finally, they came across the last rabbit, the furthest away from the others. She was in particularly bad shape. There was a large piece of shrapnel protruding from her chest, and her breathing was slow and irregular. Flyairth looked at her sadly.

"Prake..."

Prake slowly opened her eyes. A faint smile appeared on her face as she saw her friend.

"Flyairth dear...I'm going away now..."

"No! We'll carry you, we'll do anything for you! Just hold on!"

She looked at Thethuthinnang desperately, but the latter shook her head sadly.

"I've lived a good life..." Prake continued. "I have no regrets..."

"No! Don't give up! We'll take care of you!"

"Don't worry about me. Think of the others. They're your responsibility now..."

She cast one last, painful look at Flyairth, before closing her eyes for the last time, as her breathing stopped. Flyairth completely broke down; she lied down next to the body and started crying. The others thought it best to leave her alone.

"You know," Bluebell said, "I have a feeling there's someone missing."

"There were a few that were burned so heavily we couldn't identify them," Blackberry said.

"I know. But all the same, I think there's someone missing..."

"Wait," Thethuthinnang said. "I think I hear someone."

Everyone raised their ears. There was a faint sound in the air, and it was coming from a rabbit. They followed the sound until they came across Cowslip's body close to what was left of the truck, his hostage alive and conscious.

"Nelthilta? What happened to you?" Nyreem asked.

"He grabbed me. Please set me free."

Hyzenthlay and Thethuthinnang looked at each other. Cowslip had a large metal rod going through
his ears; he was most likely dead. In order to liberate Nelthilta from his grip, they had no choice but to tear out most of his claws. By the time she was free, Nelthilta seemed badly shaken up, but luckily, she had no visible injuries.

The small group of rabbits made their way back to where they had left Flyairth, who was still sitting next to Prake's body, staring into the distance. She turned to look at the others, who were staring at her, waiting for her to speak. As Prake had said, Flyairth was in charge now, and it was her responsibility to get everyone to safety. But what could she do? She considered taking everyone back to the warren, but that wouldn't really work. There were too few of them to survive on their own, and with all the dead bodies nearby, it would only be a matter of time before the elil discovered the warren's location.

-”They attacked us to destroy us,” she said. “And while they are destroyed now, those of us who remain have nowhere to go.”

-”We can't really stay here,” Strawberry said. “With all the blood and bodies, elil are bound to come. We've already lost one of us over this, and we can't afford to lose more. We have to get out of here.”

-”I know. But where can we go? I don't know of any other warrens nearby where we could go.”

-”There's something unusual here,” came the voice of Vilthuril.

-”What, exactly?” Blackberry asked.

-”The river. Can't you feel it?”

The other rabbits tried to “feel” the “river” Vilthuril had mentioned, but were unsure what to make of this. There was no river nearby, and they couldn't understand how a river could be “felt”.

Vilthuril made a few steps forward. Occasionally, she could have some sorts of feelings, that something was true and could not be changed, but this was unusual. It seemed as if there was an invisible current travelling through the air; as she put her head in its path she could feel it quite clearly.

-”What type of feeling?” Hyzenthlay asked.

Vilthuril moved backwards. Her head went out of the path of the river, and the feeling disappeared.

-”Feel it in your mind,” she explained.

Hyzenthlay closed her eyes and tried to focus on the “river”.

-”Well, I feel SOMETHING, but I don't know exactly how to describe it. You say it's a river?”

Vilthuril did not reply. She had put her head back in the path of the river, and it felt strangely relaxing. It was a feeling of peace, of happiness, that slowly seemed to take over her mind. She loved the experience, and thought it wise to give herself up to the river, to give it total control of her. She closed her eyes and made a few more steps forward, so that her entire body was in its path.

The feeling of peace took her over completely. She stopped hearing Hyzenthlay, and could no longer smell any of the nearby plants. Her vision seemed to gradually fade, the colours slowly vanishing. However, in front of her, a trail seemed to appear. After a long time, the entire world seemed to have faded, leaving only the trail. Then, through no effort of her own, she seemed to find herself floating, carried away by the river.
On the outside, however, Vilthuril looked anything but peaceful and relaxed. An expression of fear was on her face, and she was making small, uneasy steps.

-"What is she doing?” Flyairth asked.

-"I don't know,” Hyzenthlay replied, “but let's follow her.”
Acorn, Buckthorn, Speedwell and Toadflax come from the original book. Tindra and Flesca come from TFWD.

Also this is the last chapter of 2018. I will be taking a break for a few weeks, hopefully giving some people a chance to catch up. I should start posting again in mid-January. Until then, merry Christmas, and enjoy the new WD miniseries! It will air on BBC One in the UK on December 22 and 23, and internationally on Netflix on 23.

"You know what makes me crazy, Susie? Being crazy, that's what. Try staying sane when everyone treats you like you're insane."

--Martine Leavitt, *Calvin*

Acorn slowly opened his eyes. His tail was in great pain. He got up and started cleaning it, soon removing the piece of glass embedded in it. There was slight bleeding, but he didn't seem too concerned.

As he looked around him, however, he saw the devastation. There were two flaming hrududil further away. It was just after sunrise, and the authorities had not come to the scene yet. The ground was covered with debris, and the road and field were full of rabbits. He could also see lots of rabbits from Marli-rah, but he left them alone. Instead, he examined the rabbits of Woundwort's owsla, to see if any of his friends had survived.

He soon came across Woundwort himself; the one-eyed rabbit looked dead. Acorn smiled: this was probably the only good thing that had come out of the whole accident. With Woundwort gone, there would be no more fighting. He then continued his search for survivors.

He didn't find many. Most of his former friends were dead; he only found three who weren't. Speedwell was an old friend; they had known each other ever since they were kittens. Buckthorn, meanwhile, was only a more recent arrival to the warren. Finally, there was Tindra, the only remaining doe; Acorn had only met her a few times at silflay, but Speedwell seemed to know her rather well.

The four rabbits hid behind a bush, so they could discuss the next course of action.

"Woundwort is dead," Speedwell said. “Cowslip is dead too. Nearly everyone is dead.”

"Silverweed?” Tindra asked.

"He's nowhere to be seen.” Acorn said. “It's just the four of us now.”

"What do we do?” Buckthorn asked.

"I have no idea,” Speedwell said. “The elil will come soon. We have to go.”

"But where to?” Acorn asked. “That warren, Marli-rah, is too close. The elil will come there too.”
"I want to go back to the old warren," Buckthorn suggested. "And continue life as usual, before before Woundwort came."

"Nobody knows the way back," Tindra pointed out. "And I'm not sure I would want to go back there anyway."

"But I know the way!" came another, mysterious voice.

"Oh no, not him..." Tindra sighed.

"He was one rabbit I wouldn't have minded seeing dead," Speedwell added.

"Who are you talking about?" Buckthorn asked.

"Toadflax," Acorn said.

"That's me!" Toadflax suddenly burst through the bushes, follow soon afterwards by a doe, who was covered in soot.

"And who is she?" Buckthorn asked.

"I'm Flesca," the doe replied, faintly laughing. "Isn't that a weird name?"

"We're going back to the warren," Toadflax decided. "I think I know the way back."

"And if we choose not to follow?" Tindra asked.

At this, Flesca started to laugh again.

"You make it sound like Toadflax is giving you a choice."

"Shut up!" Toadflax told the doe threateningly, before turning to the others. "You can choose not to follow, but if you don't, Woundwort will kill you."

"But Woundwort is dead, I saw his body!" Acorn interjected.

"I saw his body too, and he is NOT dead, he's just unconscious. You either follow me, or you follow Woundwort. Your choice."

Speedwell looked at his three friends, and sighed.

"We don't have much of a choice, do we?"

Woundwort slowly opened his eyes; the first thing he noticed was that he was able to move again. He briefly wondered whether the previous night's events had been nothing but a dream, until he saw the two flaming hrududil further away.

Woundwort walked through the area, staring at the dreadful scene. The ground was covered with debris, which he took care not to step on. The road and field covered with dead bodies. At first glance, all the rabbits of Marli-rah seemed dead, dying or unconscious. However, as he looked closer, he saw fresh pawprints on the ground, indicating that some of them had escaped alive.

Woundwort carefully inspected the bodies of the rabbits who had followed him. Some were missing, but all those who remained were dead, killed by debris from the hrududil or burns from the fire. He came across Cowslip, bleeding from the front paws and with a metal rod through his
ears; his hostage was nowhere to be seen. At first sight, he looked dead, but suddenly he opened his eyes and shouted:

-”Darling! You came back!”

-”I am not your darling,” Woundwort replied. 
-”I always knew you wouldn't leave me for long! Come, meet the kittens!”

Woundwort shook his head; Cowslip had clearly gone insane. 

-”You have outlived your usefulness to me.”

With that, he pushed down on the metal rod, smashing it into Cowslip's skull and breaking it open.

Eventually, Woundwort came across Silverweed, sleeping in the middle of the field, completely unharmed. He woke him up.

-”Wha- oh. It's good to see at least someone is safe around here.”

-”You saved my life, Silverweed. I won't forget that.”

-”I'm sorry I couldn't save everyone else.”

-”They were useless anyway. I'll have to build myself a new owsla. Come with me.”

-”Where are we going?”

-”I don't know. We'll find out when we get there.”

-”But...what about the others?”

-”They are all dead.”

-”Not all of them! There is at least one who is still with us.”

-”Traitors. Cowards. They deserve everything that's coming to them.”

-”Aren't you at least going to try to help them?”

-”Why would I? They refused to join me. They must suffer the consequences.”

-”And I thought there was still a tiny bit of sympathy left inside your heart. I should have paid closer attention when I looked inside. If you won't help them, I'll do it myself.”

-”Don't. You. Dare.”

Woundwort jumped in front of Silverweed and raised his front paws menacingly. Silverweed was too afraid to do anything but follow Woundwort as they walked away from the area. As they vanished behind a row of trees, Silverweed cast a last look at the bodies, thinking about how he had failed to save them from the disaster.

It did not take long for Fiver to fall asleep following his vision. However, in his dream, he received a visit from another rabbit, one he hadn't met in a full year.

-”I'm being manipulated,” Silverweed said.
“Of course,” Fiver replied coldly. “Cowslip uses you to keep the other rabbits under control and prevent them from rebelling against the wires.”

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“Of course,” Fiver replied coldly. “Cowslip uses you to keep the other rabbits under control and prevent them from rebelling against the wires.”

“Is Cowslip as you know him doesn’t exist anymore. I was talking about someone else.”

“Why can’t you say that he’s dead, like any normal rabbit would say?”

“Being manipulated is a painful feeling.” Silverweed blinked a few times. “You want to build your own path, but instead they build it and make you follow it.”

“I can’t help you, Silverweed. You’re the one who has to stand up to them and leave the path they built for you.”

“I really should, but I’m not brave enough. You are, though.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re being manipulated too, Fiver.”

“By whom?”

“Break free!”

Before Fiver could reply, Silverweed dissolved into the mist. Fiver woke up uneasily. He could not understand anything Silverweed had told him, but the fact that someone else was manipulating him terrified him. He hopped over to the flayrah storage burrow where, in an attempt at calming down, he nibbled a few loganberries. He did not swallow them, instead keeping the sweet fruit in his mouth, until he fell back asleep.

His next dream was pleasant: something about a river, and finding true love. When he woke up early in the morning, he felt refreshed. His mind drifted back to the two hlessil who had arrived at the warren the previous evening. Pipkin had presumably found them while on patrol, but Fiver had been unable to greet them properly. He would have to do something about that.

He soon found Leo in the Honeycomb, talking with Strawberry.

“Good morning...Leo,” Fiver said, “I think that's what you said your name was?”

“Yes, that's my name. You're Fiver, aren't you?”

“Yes.”

“I've been meeting the rabbits here, this seems like a great warren.”

“I'm glad you like it here. Where do you come from?”

“This may sound quite unusual, but you see, I used to be a human. I was having a picnic with some friends...”

“A what?”

“Sorry. We were eating in a field, when suddenly a woman arrived and told us this was a protected area and we didn't have the right to be there. We started to gather our belongings, but clearly we weren't fast enough for her, so she chased us away. I was separated from my friends, I tripped and hit my head on a rock, I think. I fell unconscious, and when I woke up...I was a rabbit.”
"That's...quite a story," Fiver said. "Any idea what happened to your friends?"

"I don't know. I hope they're not too worried about my sudden disappearance...

"I'm sure everything will be all right. What about that rabbit who arrived here with you last night? I think he was called Blueberry."

"He wasn't one of my human friends; I only met him yesterday. He left early this morning, he said he was gathering berries."

"He should have just asked, we have some in our flayrah supply. I guess I'll tell him when he returns."

The doe slowly woke up. As she got up, she stood up on her hind legs to take a look at the area. She seemed to be close to a road, which was covered with sharp pieces of glass and metal, with dead rabbits here and there. Further away, the remains of a hrududu were spewing some smoke. The humans had finally arrived, and were pouring water on the hrududil in order to put out the fire.

Who were these rabbits? What was this place? What was she doing there? Her mind was filled with questions. She felt as if something was tickling her ear, so she scratched it. Something fell out of it, and upon closer inspection, she saw that it was a green feather. Deep inside her, she was convinced this feather had a purpose of some sort, but she didn't know what it was. She nevertheless put it back.

She lied back down and closed her eyes, trying to make sense of what was happening. Apparently, a terrible catastrophe had killed a large number of rabbits nearby, and she had somehow survived. But she did not know who these rabbits were, or why she was the only survivor.

She tried to remember what had happened, but could only recall one word: “Spartina”. Was that her name? How weird. It doesn't sound like a name, but what else could it be?

She had no idea what was happening, but she knew one thing: staying there with all these humans around wasn't a good idea. She ran away behind a nearby bush. But she really needed to think of who she was.

She spent what felt like a long time lying in the grass, trying to think, but was unable to remember anything else other than the single word “Spartina”, which was of little help to her. During this time, the fire was entirely put out, and another hrududu arrived to remove what was left of the debris.

Spartina eventually wandered away from the area. There was no point in staying there, and it was clearly not going to help her remember anything. Maybe if she were to travel, she might stumble upon a landmark of some sort, which would help her remember?

A short distance from the road, she came across some fresh pawprints, clearly those of other rabbits. The smell was very recent, and the tracks seemed to lead away from the area. It seemed likely that some of the rabbits involved in the accident had survived, and left. Maybe, if she were to follow the tracks, she might meet some rabbits she knew, and they could possibly help her?
Hey I'm back! I hope you all had a great Christmas. How did everyone like the miniseries? Personally, I think it wasn't perfect, but I still enjoyed it quite a lot. Captain Orchis will be appearing later on in this story. The female Strawberry already made a quick cameo but will have a more important role later on.

Anyway, I'm going to resume posting at least one new chapter every Sunday. I hope you will enjoy the updates :)

"Some may be very intelligent, some may be very personable, and some may be experienced fighters. However, very few are likely to be all three as you are, my friend."

--Gabi-hime, Wanderer: Parsley's Story

Heather was at silflay. It had been a few days since her arrest, and this was the first time she had been above ground since then. Moss had used his authority as temporary Chief Rabbit to drop all charges against her, therefore allowing her to go to silflay like all the others. The investigation was to resume after Campion's return. Until then, the owsla was busy inspecting the burrows to see if they were safe.

Heather had trouble understanding why Moss had freed her without arresting anyone else. Moss had not gained anything by his actions. In fact, some other officers had accused him of incompetence. He had acted for a reason, but Heather couldn't understand it.

Moss, meanwhile, was trying to make his way through the great hall, where all the displaced rabbits were staying. The damage to the warren was worse than he had previously thought, and so far over half of the deepest burrows had been evacuated. The others had been deemed safe for the moment, but Moss was unsure how long they would remain that way.

As Moss stood on Woundwort's rock, still stained with blood, he wondered just what to do with all the rabbits. He had not finished inspecting all the burrows, but it would soon become impossible to fit any more rabbits in the great hall. Some would have to sleep outside, or more burrows would have to be dug. The first option would be unpopular among the owsla, as it would make it much easier for rabbits to run away. The second option was not much better: digging new burrows in a collapsing warren is a recipe for disaster. Campion would have been able to handle such a situation perfectly, but now, when he was needed the most, he was not there. Until then, Moss decided to continue the burrow inspections.

Moss and another officer made their way inside one of the deepest burrows of the warren. The only rabbit inside was sleeping in a far corner. One of the officers cuffed her in the ears to wake her up.

"Get outa here, we're to inspect yar burrow!"
The rabbit sighed, and quietly walked out of the burrow. Moss smelled the walls, and placed his paws on a few cracks.

-“It's not safe.”

-“Not safe, not safe, not safe! That’s all I've been hearing since you started inspecting burrows!” the other officer shouted in anger. “You don't even know what a safe burrow is! You're just afraid! It's possible that it will collapse, but so what? Any burrow may collapse even if there are no cracks in the walls. And besides, who's living in here anyway? One doe, a slave. If it collapses, so what? She dies, but it's not as if she was worth anything.”

-“I still say it's not safe and she should move out...”

-“I tell you, it's perfectly safe. I'll show you!”

With that, he started to angrily kick the wall. Large chunks of dirt fell onto the burrow floor.

-“Stop!” Moss urged. “You will cause everything to collapse.”

-“I'm trying to show you how there won't be any collapse even if I damage the walls. You'll see.”

-“Please! You're only making things worse.”

The officer was about to reply in anger when suddenly, loud rumbling could be heard. The cracks on the walls widened. The burrow started to cave in.

The two rabbits ran out of the burrow as fast as they could. The ground was falling apart, large cracks appeared everywhere, with many rabbits falling inside, never to be seen again. The tree roots broke apart, causing the trunk to fall down and smash a large section of the warren. Moss and the other officer were filled with fear and didn't pay attention to where they were going. Therefore, neither made it above ground. Instead, they eventually found themselves trapped in a small chamber with no exits. There were no other rabbits with them.

-“Take a look at what you did!” Moss shouted accusingly.

-“...oops.”

-“Well, looks like we'll have to dig an escape tunnel.”

-“Bucks don't dig.”

-“Of course, if you would rather stay here and suffocate, go ahead. But I won't.”

Meanwhile above ground, a small number of rabbits were staring in shock at what used to be Efrafa. There was nothing left but a great hole in the ground. A few pieces of the tree were sticking out of the dirt at seemingly random angles. The only survivors were those who were at silflay at the time; the only owsla officer among them was Leo.

-“Some of them might still be alive down there!” he suddenly said. “We need to dig!”

The digging went on all day, with the various rabbits taking turns removing dirt from the pit. However, any sudden movements could easily destabilize the structure even further, so progress was slow. By sunset, they had found several corpses, but only one survivor: Rake.

-“We might as well stop,” one rabbit suggested. “We're too deep, it's too dangerous, and I can't see how anyone else could still be alive down here after so long.”
"Wait," Heather said. "I think I hear something."

Everyone raised their ears, trying to hear the sound. They could hear some faint scratching, clearly coming from underground.

"Anybody in here?" Leo shouted as he inserted his head in a crack.

Then came a faint sound, clearly a voice. While he wasn't able to make out the exact words, he could clearly identify who had spoken.

Leo and Heather dug as fast as they could, making a small, nearly vertical tunnel at the bottom of the pit, before bursting burst into a small chamber, where two rabbits were sitting.

"Stop stamping, you idiot!" Moss told his companion.

"But the vibrations may guide the diggers to us..." the other officer replied.

"Maybe, but they would also weaken the burrow structure. The last thing we need now is another collapse."

"Moss!" Leo shouted. "Thank Frith you're alive, I was sure we'd lost you."

"Leo! Heather! You found us!" Moss smiled.

"It took all day to find you, but yeah, I guess we did," Heather said. "Come on, now, the soil isn't stable. Follow me."

The four rabbits made their way back out of the tunnel, and out of the pit.

"Gyah, I didn't think just digging out one wall would cause this," the other officer, who had been trapped with Moss, said as he looked at the warren.

"You dug out a wall?" Leo asked.

"Not exactly, I just scratched it, and everything started falling apart..."

"He's responsible for this!" a random buck shouted. "He killed most of us with his digging!"

"Yeah! He must pay the penalty!"

"KILL HIM!"

Before he could realize what was happening, the officer found himself attacked by a large number of rabbits. He was a good fighter (he was in the owsla, after all), but against so many rabbits, all driven by anger and revenge, it was no use. Moss, Rake and Leo tried to intervene, but by the time they made it to the center of the mob, the other officer was already dead. The ground was covered with fur and nearly all rabbits' paws and faces were stained with blood.

By the time the mob had calmed down, it was Inlé. The fact that it was impossible to spend the night safely underground was stressful to the rabbits. Moss jumped on top of a large rock close to the remains of the warren, to address the crowd.

"Rabbits of Efrafa, today has seen the destruction of our warren. Some of us were killed, but several of us remain. We, the survivors, have to find a new place to live, a place where we can start a new life. Who is with me?"
He looked at the crowd, but they did not seem very enthusiastic. A few rabbits raised their paws, but most were chattering uneasily.

-”Come on,” Heather said, as she approached the rock. “This is your chance to start a new life. To experience freedom. The Efrafa that oppressed you is gone. Down that pit. Now is your chance! We shall be free!”

While Moss was an owsla officer, symbolizing everything the Efrafan hated, Heather, being a former slave, was someone they could relate to. She managed to convince them while Moss had failed. Nearly everyone raised their paws in approval.

-”All right, everyone. Let us begin a new journey,” Moss announced, as he stepped down the rock. However, before setting out, he took Heather aside.

-”I...I just...I'm not very good at speeches...”

-”Nonsense, Moss. You did great just now.”

-”You still helped save my life, by digging me out of that burrow. But what I want to say is...I...”

-”Yes?”

-”...thank you. For saving my life.”

-”You saved my life too. When you dropped the charges against me, you prevented my execution. Let's face it, trial or not, that's how things would have ended.”

-”Uh, well, yeah, I guess, what I mean is...”

Moss struggled to speak coherently, his mind rushing from one thought to another as he tried to express his true feelings. Heather suddenly realized why Moss had acted the way he had: he was in love. No owsla officer would sentence the doe they love to death. She waited patiently until he had calmed down enough to utter a grammatically-correct sentence.

-”Uh...you try to round up the others, and let's get started shall we?”

Heather sighed. She had expected Moss to ask her to be his mate, an offer she would have gladly accepted. Disappointed, she nodded and did as he had asked her. A few minutes later, the small group of survivors were travelling through the woods, further from the warren than any of them except Moss had ever been before.
Magic Powers of Overanalysis

“That was awesome,” Seth told Kendra. “You’re psychotic,” Kendra replied.”

--Brandon Mull, Fablehaven: Grip of the Shadow Plague

The river had many twists and turns that carried Vilthuril for a long time. She let the stream carry her without resisting, simply enjoying the feeling of peace that came with it.

However, the stream gradually seemed to be slowing down, and the end approached. As she got closer, she could see that the river led to a large lake of light. The current kept slowing down, until it finally stopped as she reached the lake; it seemed as if the feeling of peace and happiness was at its strongest.

Suddenly, the vision ended, and Vilthuril's mind was sent back to reality. She violently shook her head, attempting to fully regain her senses, before finally opening her eyes. Her trip in the river had been so pleasant; why did it have to end so brutally?

She turned around; several rabbits, all those who had survived the hrududu accident, had been following her. All of them looked exhausted, and Nyreem was asleep on Flyairth's back.

-"Hey welcome back!” Bluebell said, smirking. “How was your trip to the other world?”
-"Does anyone have any idea where we are?” Vilthuril asked. “The last thing I remember is telling you all about a river. There isn't any river here.”
-"You said something about feeling the river in your mind,” Hyzenthayl said. “I could feel something, but then you wandered away, so we followed you.”
-"We tried on a few occasions to get you to snap out of that trance you were in,” Thethuthinnang added, “but it was just impossible. You kept wandering, and we kept following.”
-"Bluebell kept joking the entire time,” Strawberry said. “I don't know how we would have managed to keep going for so long without him.”
-"I...think I understand,” Vilthuril said, “but I still can't recognize this place. Why did the river lead me here?”

Vilthuril looked around her. They were at the bottom of a large hill, at the top of which stood a lone beech tree.

-"I can't recognize it either,” Flyairth said in agreement, “but it seems like a good place to dig a new warren.”
-"I don't feel like digging,” Bluebell said. “I'm tired, and I don't think I could handle it.”
-"We're all tired,” Hyzenthayl said, “but if we stay above ground, we're bound to attract elil.”
-"But we've been wandering all day, and did we meet any elil? No! Only the hawk that took Violet,” Nethilta objected.
-"We were lucky, but our luck may not hold much longer,” Blackberry explained. “I'm just as tired as any of you, but we have to get underground.”
-“In that case,” Flyairth said, “we should simply dig a few scrapes for now. This will allow us to be safe for the moment, and once we have rested, then we can do some serious digging.”
-"I guess you make a valid point,” Bluebell said. “But bucks can't dig.”
-"Yes they can,” Strawberry said. “If we're to survive here, all of us will have to dig.”

At the top of the Down, several rabbits were at silflay. Clover had taken Cornflower to the edge of the Down to contemplate the view, although the latter felt rather nervous about this, afraid that elil might sneak up on them. Pipkin was out on a patrol around the Down with the rest of the Junior Owsla.
Fiver was calmly nibbling a dandelion, thinking about the previous night's dreams. He understood more clearly what Silverweed had told him, about being manipulated. He had identified the creature responsible; it felt profoundly liberating, and he could now take the proper course of action.

He glanced at the view, and saw several creatures at the bottom of the Down. He moved closer to the edge, and managed to see that they were rabbits. He stared at them for a while.

They were friendly; he could feel that. But he did not know who they were, or why they were there. Hazel probably would have been able to handle the situation perfectly, but he wasn't there. Fiver had been left in charge of the warren, so it was his responsibility to make sure these other rabbits were to be invited to the warren and, if they chose to stay there, feel welcome there.

"Why did Hazel leave me, of all rabbits, in charge?" Fiver thought. "I have absolutely no experience in such matters; I might end up doing more harm than good. I don't have much of a choice though, so I'll have to do my best."

Fiver started to make his way towards the bottom of the Down to greet the rabbits. Most of them were scratching at the ground, doing some light digging, while the others were lying further away, probably asleep.

Fiver thought of how he could notify these rabbits of his presence without scaring them. However, this proved to be unnecessary, as one of the rabbits soon poked her head out of the small hole she was digging and stared at him. Fiver stared back, admiring her sleek grey fur, and the white line between the eyes, experiencing something unlike anything he had ever felt before.

"Why did you stop digging, Vilthuril?" Flyairth asked, before suddenly noticing Fiver. "Hey, who are you? What are you doing here?"

Fiver snapped out of his trance as he heard this. He turned to Flyairth, who was looking at him defensively.

"Uh...I'm Fiver, and I come from the warren at the top."
"There's a warren at the top of the hill?"
"...yes. You're all welcome to join if you want."
"Why do you want us to join?"
"I'm just inviting you to stay if you want. Travellers are always welcome to stay at Watership Down. You don't have to if you don't want to, of course, but it would save you the trouble of digging your own burrows."
"How do we know you're telling the truth? For all we know, your warren may be..."
"I think he's telling the truth," Hyzenthlay said. "He has nothing to gain by lying to us, as we would be bound to discover the truth sooner or later."
"Hyzenthlay's right," Vilthuril said. "There's a reason the river led me here, it must be because of the warren here."
"What river?" Fiver asked. "There isn't any river close by."
"Not a river of water, but another type of river, one that can only be felt in one's mind. I've been following one for a while, and it led us here."
Fiver recalled his dream; the river in his dream and the one Vilthuril had followed were most likely the same.
"That sounds fascinating, although I don't fully understand it myself." Fiver chuckled. "Anyway, as I was saying, you're all free to come to the warren if you want, we would be glad to have you, but don't feel obligated if you don't want to."
"We'll come with you," Hyzenthlay said.
Fiver nodded, and soon started the ascent of the Down, with the others following him. He led them through the warren's main entrance, until they finally reached the Honeycomb.
"You can all rest here if you wish," he explained. "Let me know if there's anything else I can do
"Thank you for your kindness," Hyzenthlay said.
"We always try to make other rabbits feel welcome here at Watership Down," Fiver said, as he walked out of the Honeycomb, leaving the new arrivals to rest quietly.
"The long grass soft and flowing, it's color a deep green as if in celebration of the new summer. Small white and pink flowers poked their heads out from between the long blades, giving the meadow an extra dab of cheerfulness. The thrush's voice died away, and the breeze halted it's blowing as the meadow was framed in a perfect, peaceful moment.

--Erika Austin

Hazel stared at the sky. He and Bigwig had left Watership Down the previous day to search for Primrose and Blackberry. They had attempted to follow the scent the two does had left behind, but this proved to be impossible: the thunderstorm had washed it away. They searched a large area around the canal, the place where accidents would have been the most likely, but could find no trace of the does.

After a while, the two bucks came across another familiar landmark: a tall fence with a large gate in the middle.

"We're close to Buttercup's warren, I think," Hazel said.

"You're probably right," Bigwig replied. "This area looks so different without snow, doesn't it? If it weren't for this fence, I probably wouldn't have realized where we were until we came right to the entrance of the maze."

"Maybe we could stop there?" Hazel suggested. "They might be able to help us with our search."

"I wouldn't mind stopping for a bit, although I doubt they know anything that could help us."

The two rabbits hopped between the bars in the gate, towards the building further away. The area was completely different without its thick blanket of snow. Instead of the colourless winter landscape, there was green grass, and several colourful flowers were spread throughout the area. The rabbits, however, did not play close attention, and simply hopped over to the right of the building. It did not take them long to reach the hedge maze where the warren was dug.

"You wouldn't happen to remember the path leading to the centre, would you?" Bigwig asked.

"I was hoping you did," Hazel replied. "I don't really fancy just wandering around, hoping to stumble upon the warren."

"I remember that Kehaar helped us find the right path last winter, since he could see the maze from above. Perhaps we could ask him?"

"Where is Kehaar though?"

The two rabbits looked around; there was no sign of either Kehaar or Hannah.

"That blasted gull!" Bigwig shouted. "Never here when you need him most! We can't really wait for him, so I guess we'll have to find the way ourselves. Hopefully we will meet someone along the way who could guide us to the warren."

Hazel nodded, and the two rabbits entered the maze. It did not take them long to reach their first dead end. They retraced their steps, only to soon reach another one. After a few more failed
attempts at finding the correct path, they stumbled upon a lone rabbit nibbling the grass. It was a 
doe with brown-orange fur, not unlike Strawberry. She also had blue eyes and unusually long ears.

-"I'm afraid we're lost," Hazel said. “Could you show us the way to the warren?”

The doe took a break from her silflay to look at the two rabbits.

-"Sure. Just follow me."

She hopped away, and the two bucks followed her.

-"I don't remember seeing you two here before,” she said after a while. “Where do you come 
from?”

-"We come from the warren of Watership Down,” Hazel said. “We visited your warren last Frith's 
Eve.”

-"Ahh, right. I was still a kitten back then, that explains why I don't remember you. Buttercup-rah 
told me about you. You're Hazel and Bigwig, right?”

-"...yes.” Hazel was really surprised that she had managed to identify them based only on physical 
descriptions she had heard from another rabbit. “And you are...”

-"Meadow. I'm the captain of owsla, I've had the job for only a few days now. The warren should 
be just around the corner...”

A few moments later, the three rabbits finally reached the warren. It looked very different from in 
the winter, as the tree had been stripped of ornaments and several rabbits were at silflay.

-"Shall we go underground?” Meadow suggested. “I'm sure Buttercup's going to be really excited 
to see you again.”

While, above ground, the area looked completely different, underground, things were nearly 
identical. The only noticeable difference was that the holly and other decorations present the 
previous winter had since been removed. Buttercup was listening to a story with a few others, when 
she suddenly noticed the three rabbits.

-”Hazel, Bigwig, it's great to see you again,” she said, hopping towards them. “I trust Meadow has 
been taking good care of you?”

-"She has,” Hazel said. “We were lost in the maze, and she helped us find our way.”

-"Is there anyone else with you?”

-”Just the two of us this time,” Bigwig explained. “We're on a mission.”

-"You'll have to tell us all about it! Follow me.”

Buttercup hopped in a nearby run; Meadow, Bigwig and Hazel followed her until they reached a 
small burrow.

-"Here, we can have a private discussion without being interrupted,” Buttercup said. “So, tell us, 
how did it go last Frith's Eve, after you left us?”

-”It went very well,” Bigwig said. “With our friend Kehaar helping us, we had no trouble finding 
our way back home, and thanks to the flayrah you gave us, we had quite a feast.”
"We couldn't have pulled it off without your help," Hazel added.

"What is this mission you're on right now?" Meadow asked.

"Two rabbits from our warren went missing a few days ago," Hazel said. "We went to search for them, and we stumbled upon your warren in the process."

"Since you two arrived here alone, I assume you didn't find them yet?" Buttercup asked.

"Exactly," Hazel replied sadly. "Unless they stumbled upon this warren too?"

"That's highly unlikely," Meadow said. "If any visitors went into the maze, they would have been noticed by now."

"Well, thanks anyway. If it's all right with you two, we'll rest here for a while, and then we'll get going again."

It was early morning when Hazel and Bigwig had reached the warren, and ni-Frith when they left. This was the first time they had taken a break from their search since they had left Watership Down, and it had provided them with some much-needed rest. The warren's flayrah supply was much more limited than the previous winter, but they were still able to nibble a few leaves of lettuce.

After wishing Buttercup the best, Hazel and Bigwig ventured out into the maze, with Meadow guiding them so they wouldn't get lost. As they finally exited the maze, the two bucks turned to thank her.

"Without your help, it might have taken us all day to get out of there," Bigwig said.

"Glad to have been of help. I really hope you find those two rabbits you're looking for."

"We hope so too," Hazel said. "We'll visit your warren again soon."

"Can I come with you?"

The two bucks were taken aback by this question.

"You want to come with us?" Hazel said.

"Yes, I want to help you find them. I know the area around here very well."

"Does your Chief know about this?" Bigwig asked.

"Yes, I talked to her while you were asleep. She said it was up to you to decide. We don't have much of an owsla, so I probably won't really be missed if I'm gone for a few days."

"In this case we'd be glad to have you." Hazel smiled.

As Hazel and Bigwig made their way towards the gate, however, Meadow went in the opposite direction. Realizing this, she shouted:

"That is pretty dangerous, the hrududil come sometimes!"

"But there's no other way out!" Bigwig shouted back.
“Actually there is! There's a hole in the fence on the other side of the house, it's much safer.”

Hazel and Bigwig looked at each other, before following Meadow towards the hole. It was well-concealed, located behind a tool shed and covered with hanging vines.

“I'm afraid I brought you here for nothing.” Meadow shook her head. “There's a big white bird on the other side, and it doesn't look like it's going to leave anytime soon.”

“A gull?” Bigwig asked.

”Why, yes! How did you know?”

“If it's the gull I think it is…”

Bigwig ran through the hole, and shouted at the gull:

”Kehaar! Where have you been? We've been looking for you!”

”You're friends with a gull?” Meadow asked Hazel.

“Yes. We helped him when his wing was injured last spring, and he's been living with us ever since. You remember earlier how Bigwig mentioned someone called Kehaar? That's him.”

“It must be really useful to be friends with a bird.”

“It is, except when he suddenly vanishes like he did earlier. We should probably go save him from Bigwig's wrath now…”

As Meadow and Hazel made it through the hole, Bigwig was still shouting at Kehaar.

“We asked you to keep an eye out for Primrose and Blackberry from above, and what do you do? You just fly off without telling us! I have a good mind to…”

”Bigwig,” Hazel said, “calm down. Give him a chance to explain himself.”

”So sorry meester 'azel, meester Pigvig, mees bun.” Kehaar wiped his eyes with his wing. “I vas havin' a veeree peeg talk VIT DUCKS!”

He suddenly spread out his wings, nearly knocking the rabbits down in the process. Hannah popped out from under some feathers on his back.

”Wastin' 'is time, rlly. Sum wired talk about rocks 'n shadoos.”

”Do you seriously think I care?” Bigwig shouted. “Ducks are of no use to us.”

”Hue has bin flyin' a loo n' crashin dew, web'ter get going, len-bunny,” Hannah mumbled.

The three rabbits looked at each other; it was plain that none of them had understood what the mouse had just said. Seeing everyone's reaction, she rolled her eyes.

”Whatevuh. Less juss go.”
Woundwort and Silverweed had been travelling almost constantly since their departure from the roundabout. Silverweed, however, was not used to travelling long distances, and was rapidly getting exhausted.

-“Can't we please rest, General Woundwort? I feel as if my legs are going to fall off.”

-“Very well, you can rest. By the way, I've been wanting to ask you a question for a while.”

-“What do you want to know?” Silverweed asked as he lied down and closed his eyes.

-“You saved my life last night. How did you know the collision between the hrududil was going to happen?”

-“Sometimes, I can see the future. Not always, and when I do, it's often just a vague feeling. I knew you and a few others would be killed if you moved, so I immobilized you. But I didn't know it would be hrududil.”

-“See the future, can you? What does MY future hold?”

-“To find out, I would have to look into your heart. I must warn you, however, of an unavoidable side effect. I will also see your entire past, your greatest fears, your hidden desires. I will know everything about you, even things you've done your best to forget. You may not be ready for the shocking information I will obtain.”

-“You may look into my heart. I feel ready for anything.”

-“As you wish.”

Silverweed got back up and placed one of his front paws on Woundwort's chest, approximately where the heart was. His eyes grew wide and started shining. Woundwort remained motionless, unsure how to react to this. After a few moments Silverweed removed his paw and blinked a few times; his eyes faded back to their normal green colour.

-“So, what did you see?” Woundwort asked.

-“Something terrible. Massive destruction.”

-“Of the outsiders, I assume?”

-“No. I saw your old home. It was a fine warren, located in the middle of the forest close to a river. Plenty of grass, everyone was friendly, the owsla didn't oppress the outskirters. There were many rabbits living there, and the warren prospered for a long time.”

Woundwort listened attentively, amazed at how accurate Silverweed's description was. The silver buck continued:
"There were many thunderstorms in the area. Nobody really knew why, it was just that way. Nobody minded, it allowed the grass to grow. But as a consequence, the warren was called..."

Suddenly, another creature ran into the two rabbits, knocking them both down. Silverweed could see that it was another rabbit, who instantly ran away.

"...Stormhaven."

"That's NOT what it was called," Woundwort said in anger, “but first, let me deal with this troublemaker who attacked us.”

Woundwort got up and ran towards the ditch where the other rabbit had hidden. However, just as he was about to pounce, he realized who it was.

After leaving Ahfernwort, Vervain had continued wandering. He had a certain amount of experience in the outside world, from his many patrols while he was in Efrafa, but before, he always had several companions. While he was frequently annoyed at their incompetence, it was much better than being alone like he was now. His former travelling companion, Aspen, had been killed, and it was his fault.

Vervain felt lonely. And to make things worse, he still had no idea where Chibiscuit was. There were no traces of her, not even a faint scent or an ancient pawprint. He wasn't surprised, considering the many seasons that had passed since he had last seen her, but deep down, he felt sad. She was probably still alive somewhere, but he would most likely never find her.

Suddenly, he saw two bright lights coming from behind a bush. While they vanished a few moments later, he was terrified. What type of creature has eyes that glow in daylight? Only one: the Black Rabbit of Inlé. Unable to think rationally, he bolted out of his hiding spot and ran away. In the process, he crashed into two other rabbits, but this didn't stop him; he got back up and kept running.

Suddenly, he stopped. One of the rabbits he had crashed into looked a lot like General Woundwort. “No, it can't be him, I killed him,” Vervain thought. “But what if it's...a ghost?” Vervain had always been a very superstitious rabbit.

His thoughts were interrupted when another rabbit jumped into the ditch. It was Woundwort, there was no doubt about that. Vervain gasped in terror, and bowed.

"General Woundwort, I'm sorry! Please forgive me!"

"Vervain! What brings you here?"

"I'm sorry I killed you, General, I don't know what went over me..."

"Vervain, you've always been crazier than the average rabbit, but what are you talking about?"

"I killed you a few days ago in Efrafa, and now you're back to haunt me.”

"Vervain, is it possible to be touched by a ghost?"

"N- n- no..."

Suddenly, Woundwort cuffed Vervain in the ears.

"Did you feel that?"
"Y- ye- y- yes..."

"Since I touched you and you felt it, I am logically not a ghost. Convinced?"

Vervain remained silent for a few moments. Everything seemed to indicate that Woundwort was alive, which would mean he had survived the attack.

"...yes."

"Good. With that out of the way, what's all this nonsense about you killing me?"

"Since you're not a ghost, I didn't kill you, but I tried! Apparently I failed. I'm sorry General! I don't know what I was thinking!"

Woundwort stared at Vervain for what felt like a long time. Vervain expected Woundwort to attack him, and probably kill him, but nothing happened. The delay was making him increasingly nervous.

Finally, Woundwort spoke:

"No. You wouldn't do that."

"But I tell you, I did!"

"No. I know you, Vervain. You've been in my owsla for seasons. You would never be brave enough to attempt anything like this."

"I did do it..."

"Shut up. You didn't do it, and repeating it won't make you sound more convincing. While someone did try to kill me, it wasn't you; it was the outsiders. I don't know how the killer managed to sneak inside the warren, though. My officers are supposed to be skilled guards, yet someone managed to sneak inside the warren and try to kill me without anyone noticing. And then, they just bury me as if I were dead! Didn't they even bother to verify whether I was still alive?"

Vervain remained silent, as Woundwort rambled about his “death”. He was not really paying attention; instead he reflected on how nobody ever took him seriously.

"Come on, Vervain," Woundwort eventually said. “Follow me. I'm off to build a new owsla so I can destroy these outsiders.”

"And you want me in your owsla?"

"Not really, but you're the only rabbit with me at the moment, so you'll have to do."

"What about that half-sized creep on the other side of the bush?"

"Oh. I forgot all about him.” Woundwort hopped over to Silverweed, who was nibbling some grass. “My warren was not called Stormhaven, it was called..."

"Darkhaven. I know, but it used to be called Stormhaven. Until the humans came, and built something there. A place where all the stuff they don't want anymore goes. Anything from rotten food to broken hrududil, it all goes there. The rabbits stayed, but life changed drastically and the name was changed to Darkhaven.”

"That's perfectly true. Keep going.”
"However, the humans didn't like the rabbits' presence, so they tried to dispose of them, using fire. The rabbits ran away in terror, but the humans were waiting with guns. Your mother, Laurel, was killed by a weasel as she tried to help you get away."

As Silverweed recalled these tragic events, Woundwort struggled to hold back his tears. That day, his previously peaceful life had turned into a terrible nightmare. However, he refused to show his emotions: he did not want to appear vulnerable in front of Vervain. The bearded rabbit would never shut up about it.

"You've done a good job telling me about my past. What does my future hold?"

"It seems like you're going back to Darkhaven. Some of the rabbits came back, but it's not the Stormhaven you grew up in. The humans are still dangerous, although now it's cluelessness rather than malice. I wouldn't go back to that terrible place if I were you."

"If my destiny leads me to Darkhaven, that's where we shall go. Come on, both of you! Follow me. We're going to Darkhaven!"

"With a name like that, it doesn't sound like a nice place," Vervain said.

"It doesn't really matter; I'll make Darkhaven great again!"

"I still have a bad feeling..."

"Are you questioning my authority, Vervain?"

"...no, sir."

With that, Woundwort dashed off, with Vervain and Silverweed doing their best to follow him. Everyone remained silent for a while, until Silverweed finally spoke:

"Vervain, I know he doesn't believe you killed him. If it makes you feel any better, I believe you."

"Heh. How did I convince you?"

"I saw it in your heart. While the tongue can lie, the heart always tells the truth. Vervain, your heart is full of anger towards Woundwort. Why do you feel this way?"

"Did you ever try to break free from the past, only for it to come back to haunt you?"

"I've never had the opportunity to think about this before, I'm afraid. But it sounds terrible."

"It is. It absolutely is."

"But if you hate Woundwort so much, Vervain, why do you follow him?"

Vervain shot a look of anger at Silverweed. He knew that there were no valid answers to that question, but he was unwilling to admit it.

"I didn't ask you for advice. Leave me alone."

Silverweed sighed. Vervain was clearly unhappy about his current situation, but you can't help someone who doesn't want help.

The rabbits continued to travel until after a while, Vervain suddenly gasped.
"What is it now, Vervain?" Woundwort asked.

"I smell a fox."

"Let's fight it."

"Fight it, sir? But that's madness!"

"It's glorious madness!"

Woundwort stayed motionless as he waited for the fox to become visible. However, it did not come; a few minutes later, an unusually small rabbit with dark black fur arrived instead.

"Are you sure that was a fox you smelled, Vervain?" Woundwort said, annoyed.

"Sorry to bother you," the black rabbit said as he hopped closer to Woundwort, "but I've been searching for berries. So far I have blackberries and strawberries, but I still need some blueberries and raspberries for my project. Do you know where I can find some? Also I hope that fox didn't attack you before I scared it away..."

"See! I told you there was a fox, sir!" Vervain said.

Woundwort glared at Vervain, angry at having been corrected, especially in front of a stranger. He was eager to change the subject.

"Follow me, little one! We're going to Darkhaven!"

"Are there any berries there?" the black rabbit asked.

"Just follow me!"

"All right then."

"Didn't his parents ever tell him not to trust strangers?" Vervain mumbled.

"His parents are dead," Silverweed said. "But there's something else about him, that I don't quite understand..."

Chapter End Notes

The name "Stormhaven" comes from some picture books released to promote the 1999 WD series.
The Positive Ones

“I'm stuck. I'm stuck in yesterday, and you're tomorrow.”

--Rebecca Donovan, Out of Breath

The rabbits were still sleeping soundly in the Honeycomb, when Strawberry woke up. She spent a few moments trying to recall what this place was, before remembering the attack, and the arrival at this other warren. She glanced at the rest of the chamber, and soon spotted Blackberry lying slightly further away. She walked to him and nuzzled him, awakening him.

-"Hello Strawberry,” he said. “How are you feeling?”

-"Sad. My warren was destroyed today, and most of my friends are dead.”

Strawberry lowered her head.

-”What you need is something to take your mind off things,” Blackberry explained. “How about another trip on the boat?”

-”Blackberry, we haven't come across any river since we left the old warren. Except Vilthuril's river, but I still can't understand it.”

-”I don't see how that prevents us from going on a trip on a boat.”

Strawberry was visibly confused. She and Blackberry had, on numerous occasions before, stepped onto a boat at a nearby river and let it float downstream. They had many adventures this way, but without a river, a boat was absolutely useless. Seeing his friend's reaction, Blackberry got up.

-”The best thing would be to show you. Follow me.”

The two rabbits walked out of the Honeycomb, leaving the others where they were, and soon made it above ground. Blackberry sniffed the ground, and came across a large, flat rock. He put his paws on it, to verify its stability. Satisfied with the results, he climbed on, with Strawberry following soon afterwards.

-”What do we do now?” Strawberry asked.

-”Use your imagination, Strawberry. We don't have a boat, or a river, but let's imagine we do. We can still appreciate our calm, quiet surroundings together.”

Strawberry stood up on her hind legs and looked around her. She had not really paid much attention to the view when she had first climbed the Down, but now that she did, she saw how beautiful it was.

Blackberry and Strawberry were not the only rabbits to wake up: Flyairth and Hyzenthlay followed soon afterwards. Flyairth cleaned her fur, and the two rabbits went above ground. Fiver was one of the few rabbits at silflay.

-”It's nice to see you're up,” he told the two does. “How do you like the warren so far?”

-”It's well-built, but there's something I don't understand. Why did you let us stay here without the Chief Rabbit meeting us first?” Flyairth said.
"Under normal circumstances, the Chief Rabbit would have met each one of you personally. However, Hazel-rah is not at the warren at the moment, and he left me in charge."

"So YOU are the Chief Rabbit? I'm sorry, I didn't know..." Hyzenthlay said.

"Oh, it's all right. The only reason why I have the job is because I'm his brother. I tried to tell him I wasn't suited for the job, but he wouldn't listen."

"Couldn't he have left his mate in charge instead?" Flyairth asked.

"No. The reason he's gone right now is to search for his mate, who isn't at the warren either right now."

"She's gone too? Hey, is your brother the kind of rabbit who mates with does without their consent?"

"Oh, Flyairth," Hyzenthlay said, "I appreciate your concern, but you should stop always assuming the worst. I'm sure Hazel-rah is a really kind rabbit."

"He is best brother I could ever wish for," Fiver said. "He and his mate love each other deeply. It's just that Primrose..."

"Did you say Primrose?" Hyzenthlay asked.

"Yes. Is there anything wrong?"

"No, it's all right, it's just that I knew a rabbit called Primrose a long time ago." The doe sighed. "Sorry for the interruption, what were you saying?"

"Primrose, Hazel's mate, went to visit another nearby warren with her friend Blackberry. They left several days ago and they're not back yet, and we're afraid they might have had an accident of sorts."

"Blackberry? One of the rabbits who came here with me is also called Blackberry," Flyairth said.

"Interesting. I'll have to get to know you all better," Fiver said.

"Anyway, since the Chief Rabbit and his mate are not here, shouldn't the captain of owsla be in charge?"

"Technically yes, but Bigwig is gone with Hazel."

"And Bigwig's mate?"

"He doesn't have one."

"I assume this Bigwig is the type of rabbit who devotes his life to the military and has no time for love?" Hyzenthlay said.

"That describes him rather well."

"But the fact remains that you're in charge at the moment?" Flyairth said.

"Yes.""I'll be blunt: under what conditions will me and the others be allowed to live here?"
“Just be friendly, kind and respectful towards the other rabbits living here. If you want to mate, both rabbits involved need approve, but no permission from the Chief is required. Anyone is free to come and go as they please. You can probably see Nuthanger Farm in the distance, and you are free to organize raids there, but beware of Tabitha, the cat, and Duster, the dog. They almost killed some of us in the past.”

Flyairth remained silent for a few moments, expecting Fiver to continue speaking, but he too remained silent.

“Just that’s it?” she finally said.

“We don't need many rules. Nobody broke them so far, and as long as it stays that way, we'll be all right.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Hyzenthy said.

“May I see your owsla?” Flyairth asked.

“Of course, if you want,” Fiver said.

“You coming, Hyzenthy?”

“No thanks, if you don't mind I'll just silflay for now,” Hyzenthy said.

Flyairth followed Fiver until they made it to the other side of the beech tree. Four rabbits were grouped around a large rock and a hollow log.

“What's the small one doing?” Flyairth asked, pointing to the younger rabbit sitting some distance from the other three.

“Oh, that's Pipkin,” Fiver explained. “He's the captain.”

“HIM? Say, do you have a rule here that the smaller the rabbit, the higher their rank?”

“Under ordinary circumstances, he's the captain of the Junior Owsla, but Bigwig left him in charge during his absence because, as you will see, he takes his job more seriously than anyone in the regular owsla.”

The three other rabbits slowly approached the rock then, one at a time, attempted to jump over it. Strawberry did rather well, and moved on to the log. Dandelion also made the jump, but collapsed as soon as he had finished. Hawkbit made it halfway through to the top, then let himself roll back down.

“Oh my back!” he said, groaning.

“Pipkin, can't you give us a break for today?” Dandelion said. “We're exhausted.”

“Bigwig said that you are to train every day, and I have to make sure this happens. If you refuse, I'll have to tell him when he comes back,” Pipkin explained.

“Pipkin, I'll give you four carrots if you let us stop for today.”

“That’s very nice of you. But I'll still have to tell Bigwig...”

“Oh no you don't!” Hawkbit shouted. “You better not try to tell him anything...or else.”
“Hey Hawkbit, I know you don't like training,” Strawberry said, “but aren't you taking things too far? I never thought you would resort to threats to get away from training.”

“Huh? Oh, well I have no intention of carrying them out. I'm just trying to scare him.”

“That Black Emissary story didn't scare him,” Dandelion said. “Your fake threats probably won't scare him either.”

“Why are you all arguing?” Pipkin asked. “By the end of your life, you may regret having...”

“Oh, there he goes with the deep talk again,” Hawkbit mumbled.

“This is the owsla?” Flyairth said in disbelief. “The entire owsla?”

“There are two elderly captains too, but they don't really participate very often,” Fiver explained. “They just teach a few tricks on occasion.”

“I see what you mean about Pipkin taking things more seriously than this sloppy lot. But why are they in the owsla if they are so incompetent?”

“It's not as if there was anyone else who could replace them.”

“Does?”

“Before you and the others arrived, there weren't many does at the warren. Two of them are currently not here, the third one arrived only days ago, and the other two...well, I'll show you.”

The two rabbits left the owsla alone, and made it to the other end of the Down. Two does, with extremely pale fur, were at silflay. One of them seemed very nervous.

“They look weird,” Flyairth said.

“They didn't spend their entire lives in the wilderness. We helped them escape from a hutch.”

“That explains everything. If the elil don't get them, they probably will never be worth much, either for the owsla or mating.”

“They may be physically weak, but Clover is strong-willed.”

“The fact remains that hutch rabbits don't belong outside their hutch.”

“HEY!” Clover shouted. “I may be a hutch rabbit, but my ears are still very powerful, you know! Come on, Cornflower, let's go where we're appreciated!”

With that, the two does hopped away.

“I thought you had agreed to treat other rabbits living here with respect,” Fiver said, rolling his eyes.

Flyairth mumbled a quick apology.

“What about the other three does?” she then asked, eager to change the subject. “Why are they not part of the owsla?”

“You'll have to ask Bigwig.”
“I'll have a lot of things to tell this...Bigwig, when he gets back. But until then, would it be all right if I taught a few tricks to Pipkin and the others?”

“Go ahead. Just...don't be too rough on them, all right?”

Fiver and Flyairth returned to the training grounds. Hawkbit and Dandelion were sitting at one end of the log, with Pipkin further away, shaking his head. Strawberry was nowhere to be seen.

“Pipkin,” Fiver said, “what's going on around here?”

“Strawberry's stuck in the log,” Pipkin explained. “The other two are trying to push him out. If I were them, I would try to pull instead. Who is that with you?”

“Pipkin, meet Flyairth. She's going to try to teach your owsla a few tricks.”

“It's nice to meet you. I hope you'll have better luck with them than I had.”

Hawkbit and Dandelion stopped pushing to stare at the doe.

“Are you a hare?” Dandelion said.

“No, I'm a rabbit,” Flyairth said. Anything wrong with that?”

“Does shouldn't be so big,” Hawkbit mumbled.

“Uh, welcome to the warren, Flyairth,” Strawberry said, “but could you help me?”

Flyairth looked at Hawkbit and Dandelion sternly, then walked over to the log. Suddenly, she gave a single powerful kick of her hind legs, completely shattering the log. It took several moments for Strawberry to get over the shock.

“Thank you,” he finally said.

“Hey!” came a female voice from further away. “Are you Flyairth?”

Flyairth turned to the rabbit who had spoken.

“Yes, I am. Who are you?”

“I'm Flora. Clover tells me you hurt her feelings.”

“She's that other doe I told you about,” Fiver told Flyairth.

“You really weren't nice to her, telling her she still belonged in a hutch,” Flora continued. “You should apologize.”

“I'm busy right now,” Flyairth said, clearly not interested in apologizing.

“Training can wait,” Pipkin said. “Take care of what you need to do, and I'll be waiting.”

Further away, Hyzenthlay was lying in the grass, feeling the wind blow through her fur. She had been thinking about the recent events ever since she had woken up, and how her old warren had been destroyed. She was one of only a few rabbits to survive. Why? What did she have that any of the victims didn't, that allowed her to continue her life?

She came to the conclusion that there was no logic. The Black Rabbit of Inlé had taken a large
number of rabbits with him, but for some reason he had chosen to let her and several others live. That is the way it happened. She was still existing, so she should make the most of it.

She closed her eyes and channelled the excitement of existence into a powerful leap. It felt to her as if she stayed in mid-air for a long time, before she finally fell back to the ground, crashing into another rabbit in the process.

-"I'm sorry, Thethuthinnang, I hope I didn't hurt you.”

-"No, I'm fine. What's the matter Hyzenthay? Are you all right?”

-"I'm all right, I'm just excited.”

-"What's so exciting?”

-"Existing!”

With that, Hyzenthay quickly looked around her and, seeing no other nearby rabbits, jumped again. Thethuthinnang looked at her; she didn't see her friend excited like this very often. She figured that the best course of action would be to leave her alone, so she simply started nibbling a dandelion.
Never Mess With a Buck in Love

“He handled a very delicat[sic] situation with the tact of a caveman.”

-- "Claws"

After their departure from Buttercup's warren, Hazel, Bigwig and Meadow continued their search. After a while without finding any sign of the two does, Hazel asked Kehaar and Hannah to look from above once again. They had been flying for a long time, and he was eagerly awaiting their return.

Suddenly, Hazel saw something appear in the sky. The creature was flying high above, silently. Hazel was sure of who it was.

- "Kehaar!" he called out.
- "He's right be..." Meadow started to say, but was cut off by a loud screech:
- "VAT YOU WANT MEESTER 'AZEL?"

Hazel jumped in fear and bolted into a nearby bush. After a few moments, he peeked out, and saw Kehaar standing in the grass with a surprised look on his face.

- "Vat's da matter, meeter 'azel? You look scawed."
- "Kehaar! I thought you were up there!"

Kehaar turned his head upwards, and saw the same creature Hazel had seen.

- "Nah, dat's not me. She not gull, but still plenty..."
- "Don't you ever scare me like that again!"
- "Sorry, Hazel," Meadow said, “I tried to warn you, but he came too fast...”
- "You didn't do anything wrong, it was Kehaar who scared me, not you."
- "So, Kehaar," Bigwig said, “did you find anything?"
- "Ya! Ve see tree veird creachurs vit a fat man chasin' em!"

All three rabbits remained silent, waiting for Kehaar to elaborate, but the gull remained silent.

- "What sort of creatures were they?" Meadow eventually asked.
- "Vat? Ah dunno."
- "Did you see any rabbits?"
- "Oh. Nah, nah, we find noddings..."
- "Oof you silly boid," Hannah said, jumping off Kehaar's back, “ye fowgot again. We did see two rabbits..."
- "WHERE?" Hazel shouted.
"...but dere not ze ones you're looking for," the mouse continued. "Dere bucks, and one of 'em is in plenty bad shape."

"Oh. Dem. I fowgot," Kehaar said, closing his eyes.

"I go meet the three weird creatures, and you two go see the rabbits?" Meadow suggested.

"Very well," Hazel replied with a sigh.

"I show you vere dey are," the gull said.

The two rabbits that Kehaar and Hannah had spotted were actually close by. Hazel and Bigwig only had to cross a few rows of trees and a small ditch before they could spot them. One of them was a large, pale-furred buck, who was staring in amazement at his surroundings, while the other had reddish-brown fur, and was covered with scars. The latter seemed vaguely familiar to Hazel, but he could not remember where they had met before. Hazel and Bigwig slowly approached the two strangers.

"Oh hello Hazel," the scarred rabbit said. "What brings you here?"

Hazel gasped; while he had failed to recognize the stranger by his appearance, a voice like this could only belong to one rabbit.

"Campion! What happened to you?"

"Wait, you two know each other?" Aspen asked.

"Oh sure," Campion said. "Anyway, Hazel, don't worry about my scars. I met the Black Rabbit of Inlé, but he sent me back to the world of the living so I could stop Woundwort."

Hazel stared at Campion, dumbfounded.

"But Woundwort is dead! You said so yourself!"

"I thought he was, but I was wrong. Vervain tried to kill him, but he did a poor job, so Woundwort's still alive and I have to stop him. By the way, I'm sorry I falsely accused you of killing him, without any evidence. You're innocent, and I'm sorry."

Hazel looked at Bigwig sadly. The captain of owsla shrugged.

"Whatever happened to him," he said, "it must have affect his mind as much as well as his body. What a shame, he was a good rabbit at heart..."

"You may think I'm insane," Campion interjected, "to which I say: I probably am. But I really did meet the Black Rabbit of Inlé and Woundwort really is still alive. If you don't believe me, perhaps Aspen here can convince you."

"Yeah, he's telling the truth," Aspen said hesitantly.

"Could you sound any less convincing?" Campion asked sarcastically.

"I suppose I could, if I..."

"Never mind. Anyway Hazel, Bigwig, I need to continue my journey, and you two should go back to your warren. Keep it free and amazing." Campion started to walk away, but soon stopped and turned back to Hazel and Bigwig. "By the way, how's Primrose doing?"
“She ran away from the warren, and we're searching for her,” Hazel explained. “I don't suppose you've seen her?”

“I didn't think she would do something like that. When you find her, will you tell her I'm sorry?”

“Sorry? Why?”

“While I was touring your warren, I talked to her a little, and I asked her why she ran away. From Efrafa, I mean. Because I could have made her happy if she had mated with me. I guess it wasn't such a good idea to tell her that. She loves you, she doesn't love me, and even if she would have gained some privileges by mating with me, it still wouldn't have been the freedom she gets at your warren. Basically I would have forced her into an unhappy life just to fulfil my own selfish desires. It never would have worked. So just tell her I'm sorry, and if you don't mind, I'll mate with Blueberry instead. As far as I know, she doesn't have a mate yet...”

As Hazel listened to Campion, his anger started to boil. By the time Campion was talking about “Blueberry”, Hazel wasn't paying attention anymore. Campion had tried to steal Primrose away from him, and was surely responsible for her decision to leave the warren.

Unable to contain himself, Hazel growled loudly, and dealt a powerful blow to Campion's head.

“Whatever happens, keep on loving her,” were Campion's last words before he fell to the ground unconscious.

The other rabbits spend a few moments staring at him in shock. Bigwig was the first to react.

“Hazel! What are you doing?”

“I didn't realize I was that strong,” Hazel replied, as he looked at his front paws. “Come on, let's get out of here.”

He quickly hopped away; Bigwig looked at him, then at Campion, then at Hazel again, before finally deciding to follow his Chief. Aspen slowly approached Campion, and nudged him; he did not react.

“Campion, please wake up,” Aspen begged. “Please don't die, the Black Rabbit will kill me if...oh wait I'm already dead. Never mind, you know what I mean, please don't die!”

Meanwhile, Hazel was running away from where he had left Campion, with Bigwig trying to catch up with him.

“Hazel, what did you do that for?”

“You heard what he said, Bigwig,” Hazel said sternly. “He tried to steal Primrose away from me. He's the last rabbit I'd expect to pull a stunt like that, but he confessed.”

“I know that, Hazel, but don't you think you're taking things too far?”

“You wouldn't understand. You just don't know anything about love. Your life is dedicated to your owsla.”

“It's true that I don't want a mate, that saves me the trouble of dealing with situations like this. I know how much you love Primrose, but did you really have to hit Campion like that?”

“It's his fault she ran away. If she's dead, that's also his fault.”
'But Hazel! Don't you remember all the trouble we went through to convince him to join us? You might have ruined everything just now!'

"The war is over now. Whatever side he's on, it doesn't matter anymore. I suppose I'm partly responsible, though. I should have anticipated he was going to do something like this, with the way he looked at Primrose during our meetings. What a..."

"But Hazel..."

"Come on, we're wasting time. Kehaar, Hannah, go and scan the area for Primrose and Blackberry."

"Agyen?" Hannah said.

Kehaar sighed, and as soon as Hannah had climbed onto his back, he took off with his trademark cry.

"Meester 'azel, he crazy vit love!" he said once airborne.

"Oof! Kehaar, why can't ye shut yur beak for once? Can't ye see you're gonna make tings woyrse?"

Meanwhile on the ground, Bigwig and Hazel's argument continued.

"But Hazel, what if Woundwort really is still alive? I don't think that's true, but what if it is?"

"In that case, Bigwig, we'll have to deal with him alone. Not that Campion was doing much to help us anyway."

"He helped us rescue Pipkin when he got kidnapped."

"I suppose he did. But he didn't help anyone else escape, did he?"

Bigwig sighed. Like Kehaar had said, Hazel was crazy with love. The last time that had happened, when he had failed to rescue Primrose from Efrafa, nobody (not even Fiver) had been able to bring him back to his senses. Hopefully he would calm down soon before he would do anything else he would regret...

Suddenly, Meadow burst out of a nearby bush. She had a large wooden object in her mouth, and a daisy on her tail. She shook her head and spit out the wooden object. She then removed the flower from her tail and ate it.

"What happened to you?" Bigwig asked.

"I'm not even sure myself. These creatures are insane. I'm afraid they didn't know anything about Blackberry and Primrose though. How did it go with you two?"

"Now we know why Primrose ran away," Hazel said. "I gave the rabbit responsible a piece of my mind."

"But we're no closer to actually finding the missing rabbits, I'm afraid," Bigwig added.

"We must not give up hope," Meadow said. "Let's keep searching."
The Complexities of Life and Love

“Things come apart so easily when they have been held together with lies.”

--Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*

The two rabbits walked out of the foliage. They could see nothing but trees, all of them looking more or less alike. There were no familiar landmarks.

-“There's no other way to put it, Primrose, we're lost,” Blackberry said. “I said I was going to get you to Redstone and back to Watership Down safely, and I failed. I'm sorry.”

Primrose looked around her blankly.

-“Yes. So where are we?”

-“Primrose? Didn't you hear what I just said? We're lost!”

-“I kinda figured. So what do we do now?”

-“I suppose we should dig a scrape. We'll be safer this way than above ground.”

Blackberry started to dig; Primrose tried to help, but she was slow and unenthusiastic. As soon as the scrape was finished, the two does silently hopped inside. The hole was barely large enough for the two rabbits, and they were forced to lie down very close to each other.

-“Primrose,” Blackberry said, “you haven't been feeling very well ever since we first left Watership Down. Exactly what is the matter?”

-“Telling you won't help.”

-“Perhaps it won't, but it certainly won't do any harm. Just tell me. You can trust me.”

Primrose remained silent for a few moments. A tear escaped from her left eye.

-“It's Campion.”

-“What about him?”

-“I should mate with him.”

-“Why? I thought you were happy with Hazel.”

-“That doesn't matter. I was selfish in leaving Efrafa and...”

-“Primrose, I know you're stressed over us being lost. I am too. But you're taking things too far. Efrafa is a horrible place to live in, and...”

-“You don't understand, Blackberry. He saved my life once. I should return his kindness by mating with him.”

-“Do you love him?”

-“That doesn't matter.”
"You shouldn't mate with someone unless you love them."

"He's a nice rabbit and all, but Hazel is the only rabbit I truly love."

"Why are you even considering mating with Campion then?"

"I really don't know."

With tears in her eyes, Primrose ran out of the scrape and lied down in the grass further away.

Blackberry sighed; Primrose's conversation with Campion the day he had visited Watership Down had apparently had a negative impact on her. Blackberry followed her above ground and lied down next to her.

"Primrose, I didn't mean to hurt you. I was trying to help you, and I'm sorry I made things worse."

"It's not your fault. I don't think anyone can help now, except maybe Hazel."

"Let's go back to our scrape and get some sleep. After we've rested, we'll keep searching for the way back."

-----

A while after his encounter with Hazel, Campion finally opened his eyes. He had a massive headache, and nearly fell back down as he tried to get up, when he suddenly noticed the dark shape in front of him. He looked upwards, and recognized who stood before him.

"This doesn't look like the Shadowlands. It this the Meadow I heard you mention?"

"NO, THIS IS NEITHER," the Black Rabbit answered. "YOU ARE STILL ALIVE, BUT YOU WOULD HAVE DIED HAD I NOT STEPPED IN. LOOK BEHIND YOU."

Campion did so, and saw a jumping fox, frozen in mid-air with its mouth open. Aspen was standing further away with a look of horror on his face, completely motionless. Campion started to sniff the fox.

"You stopped time? Why?"

"THAT'S AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION, BUT ESSENTIALLY TRUE. IF IT HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND IT BETTER, CALL IT THAT WAY. AS FOR WHY I DID IT, IT'S SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU'RE STILL NOT SUPPOSED TO DIE YET, AND IT'S EASIER TO PREVENT YOUR DEATH THAN TO UNDO IT. CAMPION, WHY DO YOU KEEP GETTING YOURSELF IN TROUBLE LIKE THIS?"

"Well, thank you for saving me. But it's not my fault if a friend attacks me for no reason."

"PERHAPS YOU SHOULD TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHY HAZEL REACTED THE WAY HE DID?"

Campion suddenly turned around, but this proved to be a mistake. One of the fox's claws penetrated his skull, just over the eye.

"Frith and Inlé, that hurts!"
The Black Rabbit sighed, and shot a bright beam of red light at Campion's face. The pain immediately stopped, but the entire area changed. The grass was replaced with sand.

-"Did...did you just kill me?" Campion asked in disbelief.

-"YES. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD STOP THE PAIN. YOU JUST HAD TO RUIN EVERYTHING, DIDN'T YOU?"

-"Stop making it sound like I'm enjoying this. You don't know how painful it can be to have your eye almost impaled. It wasn't YOUR eye."

-"JUST BE GLAD IT WAS A FOX'S CLAW, AND NOT A BLACK STONE FROM A HUMAN GUN."

Campion shuddered at the thought of being shot in the eye. Not wanting to think of this any longer, he changed the subject.

-"Anyway, we were talking about Hazel."

-"PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE."

-"I suppose he hit me because of what I said about Primrose. But I was apologizing. I don't see why he would get angry. She's not dead, is she?"

-"THREE THINGS. ONE: AT THE TIME YOU APOLOGIZED, HAZEL DIDN'T KNOW WHAT YOU HAD DONE. TWO: HAZEL SOMETIMES GOES CRAZY WITH LOVE. THREE: PRIMROSE IS STILL ALIVE, BUT THAT'S RATHER SURPRISING. MOST RABBITS WOULD HAVE GONE IN GASTROINTESTINAL STASIS BY NOW."

-"Gas-what?"

-"GASTROINTESTINAL STASIS. IT'S A COMMON DISEASE IN RABBITS. IF THEY ARE STRESSED, THEY STOP EATING, THEIR ENTIRE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM SHUTS DOWN AND THEY DIE SOON AFTERWARDS."

-"I never heard of this before."

-"IT GENERALLY HAPPENS WITH THE RABBITS HUMANS KEEP AS COMPANIONS. BUT THAT'S BESIDES THE POINT."

-"It affected her that much?"

-"YOU HAVE TO REALIZE SOMETHING, CAMPION. SOME RABBITS ARE MORE EMOTIONAL THAN OTHERS. PRIMROSE, AFTER ALL SHE'S BEEN THROUGH, IS ONE OF THE MORE EMOTIONAL ONES. SHE NEEDS STABILITY, AND THAT'S SOMETHING SHE HAD AT WATERSHIP DOWN WITH HAZEL. WHEN THE BALANCE IS DISTURBED, THE MIND IS WEAKENED, SO SHE DID SOMETHING CRAZY, WHICH WEAKENED HER BODY AS WELL."

-"I think I understand."

-"STABILITY MEANS NO SUDDEN CHANGES OF ANY KIND, NOTHING THAT COULD EMOTIONALLY UPSET HER, AND NO EXTREME ADVENTURES. THIS TIME, EVERYTHING WILL GET SORTED OUT, AND SHE WILL BE ABLE TO ENJOY WHAT REMAINS OF HER LIFE. UNLESS, OF COURSE, SOMEONE MAKES A MESS AGAIN."
"I'll try to be careful, but I don't like the way you say “what remains of her life”. How long does she have?"

"I AM NOT ALLOWED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH EXACT NUMBERS, BUT SHE STILL HAS SEVERAL SEASONS. NOT AS LONG AS HAZEL OR FIVER, BUT LONGER THAN SEVERAL OTHERS, INCLUDING YOU.

"...oh. How long do I have?"

"THE FEWER TIMES YOU DIE, THE LONGER YOU HAVE TO LIVE.”

"Do you have any tips on staying alive?"

"YOU HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE IN PATROLLING. USE THAT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE. DON'T PROVOKÉ ANYONE. AND FIND WOUNDWORT AS SOON AS YOU CAN."

"I haven't done a very good job at that. There hasn't even been a sniff of him since we first met."

"HE'S AT A PLACE CALLED DARKHAVEN. ONCE YOU'RE CLEAR OF THESE WOODS, YOU SHOULD SEE ITS SHADOW IN THE DISTANCE.”

"I think I know the place you're talking about, I once saw it on wide patrol. But I thought it was a human place, so I stayed away.”

"IT MAY BE A HUMAN PLACE, BUT WOUNDWORT IS STILL GOING THERE. IF YOU WANT TO STOP HIM, YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW HIM THERE.”

"If you say so. But a place like that can't bring anything good.”

"DOES THAT CHANGE ANYTHING? YOU'LL BE FOLLOWING HIM THERE ANYWAY, SO GET GOING. I'LL UNFREEZE ASPEN, AND AS SOON AS YOU'RE AWAY FROM HERE, TIME WILL START FLOWING NORMALLY AGAIN. BUT BE CAREFUL, HE MAY BE CONFUSED.”

"What about my eye? Will it still hurt?”

"NO, BUT YOU WON'T HAVE THAT EYE ANYMORE.”

"Will my right eye be fine?”

"STOP ASKING STUPID QUESTIONS. ONLY YOUR LEFT EYE WAS DESTROYED."

With that, the Shadowlands faded, and Campion was back in the forest. Moments later, Aspen broke out of his apparent trance.

"Campion! Wha- I thought you were unconscious! What's happening to that fox? Frith and Inlé, your eye!”

"Look Aspen, I don't want to explain everything, let's just get out of here.”

"Well...as you say, Campion.”

The two rabbits ran away from the scene, but suddenly Campion stopped and turned back, to see that the Black Rabbit had sprouted flames.
Hey before you finish incinerating yourself, can I ask you something?"

"ONE LAST QUESTION," the Black Rabbit replied with a loud sigh.

"I can't mate with Primrose, but can I mate with Blueberry?"

"THE RABBIT YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT IS CALLED BLACKBERRY."

"Blackberry? But Aspen said..."

"KEEP IN MIND THAT KITTENS ARE GENERALLY NAMED BEFORE THEIR FUR GROWS. ALSO HER FUR IS..."

"You still haven't answered my question."

"HOW SHOULD I KNOW IF IT'S ALL RIGHT? I SPECIALIZE IN DEATH, NOT LOVE. EITHER WAY, YOU HAVE A MISSION TO FULFIL."

By the time he had finished talking, there was nothing left of the Black Rabbit but a pile of dust on the ground, that the wind soon dispersed. Campion walked away, slightly annoyed at not having received a definitive answer; Aspen followed him.

"What is this mission he mentioned?" he asked.

"We're going to a terrible place, so terrible it should not exist," Campion replied.

"Then why are we going there?"

"I wish I knew myself."

Aspen quickly realized he wasn't going to get any decent answers from Campion. He would find out what this place was, why it was terrible, and why they were going there, when they got there.
“Right now I’m having amnesia and déjà vu at the same time. I think I’ve forgotten this before.”

--Steven Wright

"That was the best boat ride I’ve ever had."

It was late evening. Blackberry and Strawberry had spent most of the afternoon on the “boat” rock, before finally stepping off for silflay.

"We could do this again tomorrow, if you want," Blackberry suggested.

Gradually, the rabbits made their way underground. Hawkbit, Dandelion and Strawberry were among the first; they looked exhausted. Blackberry and the other Strawberry followed soon afterwards.

Fiver hopped over to the edge of the Down and glanced at the area. Hazel and Bigwig had been away from the warren longer than he had expected. He had no idea where they were, or how they were doing; he didn't even know if they were still alive, although he had no reason to believe they weren't. Kehaar and Hannah had not flown back to the Down with updates; he was not surprised, but he still felt disappointed.

Suddenly, his eyes caught something moving near the bottom of the Down. It did not take him long to realize that this was a rabbit; he made his way towards the bottom to greet her.

The rabbit was a brown-purple doe, larger than Primrose but smaller than Flyairth, who for some reason had a green feather hanging from outside her right ear.

Spartina had been travelling for most of the day, following the scent left behind by Flyairth and the others, until she reached the Down. She stared at Fiver, attempting and failing to recall him. It took a while before he broke the awkward silence:

"Hello. Have you travelled far?"

"...yes, I suppose I have. Have we met before?"

"I can't remember. When did it happen?"

"No, I didn't think we met before, but I just wanted to make sure." Spartina was disappointed. This rabbit clearly did not know her, she was no closer to discovering her identity or her past. “I have been wandering for a while, do you know of any nearby warren?”

"There is a warren at the top, and you are free to stay there if you want.” This situation reminded Fiver of the arrival of Flyairth's group. “I'm Fiver, temporary Chief Rabbit. What's your name?”

"I'm Spartina. Could I really stay?"

"Of course you can. Anyone who wishes to live here is free to do so. Follow me.”

The two rabbits slowly made their way to the top. Once there, Flyairth approached them.

"Fiver-rah, we're all going underground now, and I would like to know what is going to happen
about the burrow arrangements. Do we still sleep in that same underground chamber where we slept this morning? And who's that with you?"

-"This is Spartina, she just arrived here and I assume she's going to spend the night here too. Spartina, meet Flyairth."

The two does looked at each other. Flyairth scanned Spartina's body, paying close attention to her paws, while Spartina tried to remember if she had ever met her before; like with Fiver, she could not recall any past meeting.

-"You look like one strong doe," Flyairth said suddenly. "Did you ever serve in an owsla?"

Spartina had no idea what to reply. It was possible she had been a member of an owsla in the past, but she had no memories of it. Should she say she didn't know? That would cause a lot of awkward questions. Or should she lie? That would also be awkward, should she ever regain her memories.

-"It's been a while, I have been wandering and..."

-"What a shame, I'm sure many warrens would be glad to have someone your size and talents in their owsla. Hopefully this warren's owsla captain will be satisfied with you once he comes back. But Fiver, what about the burrows?"

-"Several of the rabbits living here are currently away from the warren, so you will probably find a lot of empty burrows you can use," Fiver explained. "But I'm afraid some of you will have to share."

-"I don't mind," Flyairth replied. "I'll be going underground now."

After a quick silflay, the last few rabbits made their way underground. As Fiver had predicted, there were enough empty burrows for everyone, with two or three rabbits in each burrow.

A while later, Fiver, who was sleeping in Hazel's burrow with Pipkin and the kittens, was woken up by another rabbit. He slowly opened his eyes, and saw Strawberry, Dandelion and Hawkbit near the entrance.

-"What's the matter?" he said as he yawned.

-"Uh, well the thing is, someone is sleeping in our burrow," Strawberry said.

-"That's unfortunate. Are there any other burrows you could use?"

-"All full."

-"Can't you just share the burrow with those who are already there?"

-"I refuse to surrender my dignity like this," Hawkbit said. "I will not sleep with the rabbit who tortured us."

-"Tortured you?" Fiver was visibly confused.

-"Yeah, the big one, Flyairth. She kept forcing us to continue training no matter how tired we were."

-"I'm sorry if she mistreated you, I'll have to do something about it tomorrow. But if you won't sleep with her, I will let you sleep in this burrow, just for tonight. Tomorrow I assume some digging will be done and everyone will have their own burrow. Just...don't wake up the kittens, all
right? It took me and Pipkin forever to get them to sleep.”

-”We'll be very quiet,” Dandelion said, as he glanced at the small nest in the far corner of the burrow.

Fiver nodded, and nudged Pipkin. The two moved closer to the nest, allowing the other three to sleep near the entrance. It was cramped, but it would have to do for the night.

As Fiver looked at the kittens, he felt something unusual, almost as if he wished they were his. For the first time in his life, he wished he had his own kittens. He knew who he wanted to mate with, but would she be interested in a runt like him? He was still thinking about this when he fell back asleep.
“No, no, no, no, no. It's the truth, I'm telling you! You gotta help me! Don't leave me here! [...] My IQ's dropping by the second! I'm becoming one of them!”

--Cars

As Fiver walked out of the warren's main entrance, the first thing he noticed was how dark it was, despite the fact it was day. There was a thick blanket of fog over the area; this was not the first time this had happened, but it was easily the worst. Even at night, the moon and the stars provided faint light, but now there was nothing. He could see as far as the edge of the Down, but no further. He thought of Blackberry, Hazel, Primrose and Bigwig, all of them far away from home in this miserable weather. He hoped all them would make it back to the warren safely.

Further away, Blackberry and Strawberry were sitting on the rock. They heard another rabbit approaching from behind and turned to see who it was.

-"I'm bored.” It was Bluebell. "What are you two doing?"

-"We're riding a boat,” Blackberry said.

-"A boat? Can I join you? I've always wanted to be a water rabbit.”

Blackberry and Strawberry looked at each other, trying to think of what to reply.

-"Our boat is small, but there is enough space for someone who wants to become a water rabbit,” Strawberry finally said.

Bluebell smiled, and jumped on the rock behind the other two. Immediately afterwards, he placed a kiss on Blackberry's cheek.

-"I'm not in the mood for this,” Blackberry said, with a faint trace of annoyance.

Bluebell remained silent for a few moments, trying to think of something else he could do.

-"Look!” he eventually said. “Up there in the sky! What is that?”

Blackberry and Strawberry looked upwards, then at each other, and finally at Bluebell.

-"It's fog...” Strawberry started to say.

-"It's a cloud! A big one, I must say. It's going to rain soon.”

Blackberry and Strawberry looked at each other again; Strawberry was visibly puzzled.

-"Fog technically is a cloud, but I think he's trying to play a game with us,” Blackberry whispered.

Strawberry smiled, and looked at the sky again.

-"Oh yes, that is really worrying,” she said. “I hope we will make it to a safe place before the storm breaks.”

-"It probably looks worse than it will be, Strawberry,” Blackberry said. “I'm sure we'll be fine.”
Meanwhile, Bluebell had hopped off the rock and cut off a few blades of grass with his claws. After he had accumulated a small pile of grass, he threw some of it over the two others.

-“It's raining,” he said.

-“Oh, what a nuisance,” Blackberry said. “I was hoping we would make it back before it started.”

-“It's a good thing I planned ahead,” Strawberry said, as she hopped away. A few moments later, she came back with a cabbage leaf from the warren's flayrah supply, and draped it over both her and Blackberry's heads. The “rain” could no longer bother them.

Bluebell decided to try something else. He jumped on the rock and started stamping.

-“What's going on?” Blackberry asked.

-“The storm is intensifying! The waves are rocking the boat, carrying it up and down, left and right, there is no escape. The water is agitated, be careful, don't fall off!”

It was no use: the “waves” caused Blackberry and Strawberry to fall (or, more accurately, jump) off the boat into the “water”.

-“Blackberry, help!” Strawberry shouted, as she squirmed in the grass. “I can't swim!”

-“I'll save you!”

Blackberry “swam” towards his friend as fast as he could, and once he had made it he grabbed hold of her and placed his head under hers, keeping it above the “water's” surface. The two rabbits slowly started to make their way back to the boat, until suddenly, Blackberry stopped and squealed.

-“Are you all right?” Strawberry said.

-“My paw caught something. I can't move.”

Strawberry dove below the surface to examine the situation. Blackberry was clearly in a bad way; his paw had gotten stuck in some underwater plant, and the more he moved, the tighter it got tangled.

-“I'll save you!”

Strawberry dove again, and raised one of her hind legs, placing it under Blackberry's chin to keep his head above the surface while she tried to untangle the plant. The fact that she was underwater prevented her from chewing it, forcing her to use her front paws instead, making things much more complicated.

After what felt like a long time, Blackberry's paw was finally free, allowing the two rabbits to continue their journey towards the boat. Once they were close to it, though, a wave swept them back.

-“The water wants you!” Bluebell said as he threw leaves onto the other two. “You can't have your boat back! Will you have the strength to make it to the shore?”

-“I can't last,” Strawberry said, as she sank below the surface.

-“But you can't be the first either!” Bluebell joked.
"No, we will make it through this!" Blackberry shouted. "There has to be a way out."

As Blackberry dove beneath the surface to grab hold of Strawberry, he caught sight of something unusual at the bottom of the river. It looked like some sort of tunnel, that might lead them to safety.

"I think I found a way out, just take a deep breath and follow me."

The two rabbits soon dove again, and swam towards the tunnel. It was too narrow for both of them to swim side-by-side; Blackberry went first to see if it was safe.

It seemed to Blackberry as if the tunnel would never end. They would never make it to the other side, they would just drown there. He was rapidly losing strength. Too weak to continue, he let himself sink towards the bottom.

Strawberry was also slowly drowning; she used her last strength to push Blackberry out of the way towards the end of the tunnel. They had reached a hot spring some distance from the river. It was a trivial step to swim to the safety of the shore.

The two rabbits remained in the grass for a long time.

"That was amazing," Blackberry finally said.

"I know this is only a game," Strawberry said, "but you still saved my life."

"I would have done the same thing if this were real. And you saved mine too."

Bluebell looked at the scene from a distance, satisfied at having brought some excitement in everyone's lives.

Further away, Fiver was nibbling the grass, when he suddenly saw Flyairth come outside. She hopped over to the edge of the Down and stared into the distance, seeing nothing. Fiver hopped over to her.

"Nasty weather, isn't it?" he said.

"You can say that again. Is it always like this?"

"Not always. Anyway, what do you plan to do today?"

"Keep training the same three rabbits to turn them into a decent owsla."

"Speaking of them, they talked to me last night. They accused you of torturing them. Supposedly you forced them to continue training despite the fact that they were exhausted."

Flyairth sighed.

"Cowards, they couldn't even complain directly to me, instead they had to talk behind my back," she complained. "Those three are the most incompetent group of rabbits I've ever seen in an owsla. That Strawberry fellow is the only one who takes things seriously. Am I still allowed to train them today?"

"You're right that they don't take their job seriously enough, but you were probably too hard on them. You can still train them, but ease up, please."

"I don't think I'll be able to accomplish much if I treat them too softly, but I could still try. Could I
also train the rabbits I brought here with me?”

-”You can, but whether or not they get to join the owsla will be for Bigwig to decide, once he gets back.”

-”He better let them join! Most are far more competent that those three I trained yesterday.”

-”If they're that good, he probably will. But ultimately, it's still Bigwig’s decision.”

With that, Flyairth walked away, towards the owsla training ground.

The training grounds were covered with small fragments of the log Flyairth had destroyed the previous day. The only useable piece of equipment available was the rock. But first, Flyairth had to go and find everyone. She could see Blackberry and Strawberry further away. Both were lying on the grass, and Strawberry was nibbling the grass near Blackberry's hind legs. She had no idea what they were up to, but she didn't really care. There were other rabbits to train.

Meanwhile, Spartina walked out of the warren's main entrance. She had been talking with several of the rabbits underground, but nobody seemed to remember seeing her before. She had clearly never been at this warren before, and still couldn't remember anything about her past. But maybe it was for the best. Maybe she didn't remember because there was nothing good to remember. And besides, she had no reason to cling to the past; she could start a new life at this warren, Watership Down, free from any past mistakes she might have made. She lied down in the grass and started to nibble it.

Suddenly, she noticed an unusual scent. It was a smell of humans, but not strong enough to indicate the presence of an actual human. It was probably a small object of human origin somewhere nearby. Her instincts told her that this was a bad thing and she should get away from this object as soon as possible, but for some reason, she was not worried, almost as if she was used to such scents. She did not understand why she felt this way, she just did.

It did not take her very long to find the object she had smelled. In the grass near the top of the Down, there was a very long, thin piece of fabric; it had probably been carried there by the wind. She found its colour, blue like the sky, very pleasing, and decided to carry it back to the warren.

The Honeycomb was nearly deserted. Hawkbit was in a corner; Snowdrop, Mallow and Gilia were sitting on top of him.

-”When are mother and father coming back?”

-”How many times do I have to tell you: I don't know.”

-”How do we know you're not keeping secrets?”

-”Dandelion will vouch for me.”

-”But I miss them so much...”

-”I miss him too. If he were here, he would get that crazy doe under control...”

-”Why didn't they tell us before leaving?”

At that moment, Flyairth entered the burrow, followed by Hyzenthay, Thethuthinnang and a few others.
"If you are to participate in training today, Hawkbit, you will have to...” She suddenly stopped to sniff the air. “What's that smell? It stinks of humans.”

"It must be this ribbon thing...” Spartina started to say.

"You brought a human thing inside the warren? Get that thing away from here! You want to infect us all with the White Blindness?”

"Spooky!” one of the kittens said.

"I told you she was crazy...” Hawkbit said.

"You may think I'm crazy now, but when you're all ill and dying you'll wish you had listened to me."

"There is no smell of disease,” Spartina said. “If there was, I would have left it alone.”

"But humans ALWAYS bring disease.”

"Flyairth, I thought you wanted to train us,” Thethuthinnang said, eager to put an end to the argument.

"But what about...”

"I'm ready, and I'm sure everyone else is. Let's not keep them waiting.”

Flyairth wanted to protest, but soon realized that it was no use, and simply followed Thethuthinnang outside, mumbling something about how nobody ever wants to listen to her.

After the two does had left, the situation in the Honeycomb mostly calmed down. Spartina dropped the ribbon and looked at it worriedly.

"Don't worry,” Hyzenthlay said, “you didn't do anything wrong.”

"But what if she's right, and this ribbon thing will make us all sick? Perhaps I really should get rid of it.”

"Flyairth has been obsessed with the White Blindness for a long time. If the disease enters a warren, everyone will die. She means well, but she sometimes takes things too far. Your ribbon looks harmless, it doesn't smell of disease, you can keep it.”

"I don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable.”

"In that case, I suppose you could keep it in your own burrow, and not bring it out until after the smell has faded.”

Spartina nodded, and carried the ribbon all the way to the burrow where she had spent the previous night. It would take a while for the smell to fade, but she could still try to speed up the process, by licking the ribbon.
“Then they attacked a town, a small town I'll admit, but nevertheless a town of people, people who died.”

--Ed Wood, Plan 9 From Outer Space

The area around Watership Down was not the only place affected by the fog. Some distance away, four rabbits were sitting on the edge of a deep pit; they could hardly see in front of them.

After a while, the largest of the four rabbits stood up on his hind legs and stared in the distance.

-”There it is. Darkhaven. Witness its glory.”

The second rabbit shook his head.

-”I can't see anything, sire, with all this fog...”

-”Can't you smell it, Vervain?”

-”The fog masks all scents...”

-”You can't HEAR the fog, can you?”

-”...no, sire.”

-”Then hear the glory of Darkhaven!”

Vervain raised his ears. Woundwort had a point that the fog itself was silent, but there was another faint sound in the air. As he paid closer attention to it, however, he was filled with horror. It was the loud noise of human machines, metallic clanging, motors of hrududil, random voices. Vervain desperately wanted to get away from this terrible place. He slowly started walking backwards away from Woundwort, until he bumped into Silverweed.

-”You all right, Vervain?”

-”What do you think? Besides, you can read my heart, can't you? Why do you need to ask?”

Vervain was about to push Silverweed over the edge, but at the last moment he decided against it. He didn't want to provoke Woundwort if it could be avoided.

-”I'm sorry, Vervain,” Silverweed said. “I was just trying to be friendly...”

-”Yes...well next time stop trying to be friendly, all right?”

-”All three of you, follow me,” Woundwort said.

Vervain sighed; if Silverweed hadn't intervened, he would have run away. Now, he had no choice but to follow Woundwort inside that nasty place. His thoughts were interrupted by Blueberry:

-”Wow, so this place is a junkyard? That's even better, I can find colourful stuff that isn't a berry and not as messy.”

This time, Vervain was unable to contain himself, and shoved the smaller buck off the edge.
Blueberry did his best to stabilize himself, and successfully landed on his paws on an old, discarded mattress, preventing any injuries. However, in the fog, he could not see further than the tip of his whiskers. He didn't mind, however; the journey had tired him. With the fog masking his scent and making him nearly invisible, he lay down to take a nap.

The path leading to the bottom of the pit consisted of a narrow ledge with many curves; it took a long time for the three other rabbits to reach the bottom. The area was filled with many different objects of human origin, nearly all of them severely damaged. In the background, there was a large metal structure, although the fog prevented the rabbits from getting a clear idea of what it was. They could faintly see other rabbits, standing on various heaps of trash. Suddenly, another rabbit crashed into Woundwort, knocking him off his feet. The General had not seen him coming due to the fog.

Woundwort angrily kicked the other rabbit off of him, causing him to collide with a rocky wall further away. With that, he shook the dirt out of his fur and walked towards the centre of the pit, where a white buck almost as large as him was standing, staring at him in shock.

-Oy! Who are you? And what are you doing here?-

-Don't you know who I am?" the General asked.

-No, but I should. The patrol who picked you up should have notified me of your arrival."

-I wasn't picked up by any patrol, I just walked in."

-Walked in? If the guards are incompetent enough that someone can actually walk into Darkhaven without anyone noticing...anyway, who are you?"

-I'm General Woundwort!"

-"General? That's pretentious of you, you just arrived here."

-"You don't understand! I am General Woundwort!"

-"Repeating the same words doesn't make it sound any more convincing. If you want to be general, fine. You'll have to defeat me in single combat."

-"Why would I waste any time fighting a weakling like you?"

-"Weakling? I beg your pardon, I'm Granite-rah, the Chief Rabbit of Darkhaven."

-"He's telling the truth, Woundwort," Silverweed said. "I can see it in his heart. He really doesn't know you, and he really is the Chief."

Woundwort turned to Silverweed and spent a while staring at him. He stood up on his hind legs and shouted:

-"Does anyone here know who I am?"

This was met with complete silence. Woundwort looked around him, desperate to find even just one rabbit who knew who he was.

-"Don't any of you remember who I am? General Woundwort! I was born here, when this place was still called Stormhaven!"

-"Stormhaven, eh?"
Woundwort turned to see who had spoken. A dark shape slowly came out of the fog, gradually becoming clearer. It was a grey-furred doe, about Vervain's size, and she had a rabbit's skull on her head. Woundwort was slightly creeped out by this last element, and the other-worldly energy emanating from her. She slowly walked towards him, and only resumed talking when they were standing face to face:

-“Was your father known as Hemlock?”

-”Yes.”

-”And your mother was Laurel?”

-”Yes again.”

-”Then you're General Woundwort.”

-”...that's what I've been trying to tell that pack of fools ever since I arrived here.”

-”Wait, wait, wait,” Granite said. “You actually know him, Speaker?”

-”Sure, he just happens to be the son of the founder of this warren, that's all. But seriously, General Woundwort, why are you still alive?”

-”Why am I still alive?” the General repeated. “The appropriate question is: why did you think I was dead?”

-”Many seasons ago, you and your mother were face to face with a weasel and neither of you were ever seen again. Draw your own conclusions.”

-”She was killed, but I wasn't. I am too strong to be killed by a weasel!”

-”Um, General Woundwort,” Silverweed said, “why do you lie? The fact is she sacrificed herself so you could live. You weren't really strong back then.”

-”I didn't ask you for your opinion,” Woundwort said with a growl, “so keep it to yourself until I do ask.” He turned back to the doe. “The fact remains that I'm not dead. Now who are you, and why are you the only one who remembers who I am?”

-”I am the Speaker of the Past. I have been tasked with preserving the history of this warren and passing it down to the next generation. Therefore, I know absolutely everything there is to know about Stormhaven and Darkhaven.”

-”You clearly haven't done a very good job passing on this knowledge, since nobody else knows about me.”

-”I'm supposed to pass it on to kittens, and I would if there were any kittens. But there are none, since everyone is too busy fighting to worry about m...”

-”Fine. And what's your name?”

-”You don't want to know. And even if you did know, you couldn't pronounce it. So just call me Speaker.”

-”Very well, Speaker. I proclaim myself the new leader of Darkhaven! I will make...”

-”It's not that simple. To become Chief, you have to defeat the old Chief in single combat. That
would be Granite-rah, the one you've been arguing with."

-"That won't take long."

Woundwort's prediction proved to be accurate. For a while, he and Granite stood some distance from each other. Granite kept mimicking Woundwort's movements, waiting for him to pounce. Woundwort, however, remained calm, and kept moving away from Granite, hoping to exhaust him. His plan was working. Granite was losing patience, until he finally growled and lunged at Woundwort. However, his opponent had anticipated this; just as Granite was about to land on him, he hopped out of the way, causing him to land on the hard dirt ground. Granite tried to get up, but Woundwort had placed one of his hind legs on his neck, pinning him to the ground.

Granite tried to break free from Woundwort, but it was no use; the pressure on his neck made it hard for him to breathe.

-"Please, sir," he struggled to say, "just hit me on the head and get it over with. You win. You're Chief Rabbit now."

Woundwort looked at Granite for a few moments, before finally removing his paw. Granite got back up, gasping for air.

-"No, I'll let you live," the General said. "Not because I like you, but because you can be useful to me. Now tell me: are there any other warrens nearby?"

-"No, sir. Not that I know of."

-"But there could be some that you don't know about?"

-"I suppose so, sir."

-"That's not good enough! Now go to your burrow!"

-"I don't have one anymore, sir. You defeated me, so it's yours now."

-"Then dig another one!"

With Granite out of the way, Woundwort turned to Silverweed.

-"You now have an opportunity to prove that your skills are useful to me. Do you think you could find the location of another warren?"

-"If it's not deserted, maybe I could. I would have to ping the mind of another rabbit and attempt a connection, which, if successful, would allow me to access their mind and location properties, making it possible to..."

-"Don't bother me with all the technical details. Could this allow you to find the location of the warren?"

-"I think so, if..."

-"Very good. You never cease to amaze me. Now get to work."

-"I can't very well do this now. I need to be in a place that is very quiet and free from distractions."

-"I know the perfect place," the Speaker said. "Follow me."
With that, the Speaker walked through a small hole under a pile of trash, with Woundwort and Silverweed following her. At the end of a lengthy tunnel, they finally reached a large underground chamber. In a corner, there was small cushion; it looked soft and comfortable. Silverweed hopped onto it, and lied down.

-"This is perfect," he said. "I'll rest now."

-"But what about finding the outsiders' warren?" Woundwort asked.

-"I need to rest first. But I'll start my mental probing as soon as possible."

With that, he lied down and closed his eyes. Woundwort was annoyed at having to wait for Silverweed to be ready, but until then, he had other things to do.

-"Speaker, I want you to show me around this place," he said. "I want to know everything there is to know."

-"If that is your wish, I shall do so. Follow me."

-"What about me, sire?"

Woundwort turned around and saw Vervain. He had completely forgotten about him and Blueberry, ever since they had entered Darkhaven.

-"Oh, well just follow me, so you can learn about this place too. Also do you have any idea what happened to that half-sized black rabbit we picked up earlier? I haven't seen him in a while."

Vervain gasped. He thought for a few moments, desperately trying to come up with the least suspicious possible answer.

-"I haven't seen him since we arrived here, with all the fog..." Technically not a lie, Vervain thought, but if he figures out the rest...

Luckily for Vervain, Woundwort did not appear to suspect anything:

-"As soon as we have finished the guided tour, I'll send out a patrol to look for him. I don't have time for this, I have more important things to worry about than a young kitten who..."

-"Can you please hurry up with that tour of yours?" Silverweed asked. "I can't sleep with all this noise."

-"Let's get going, then!"

Woundwort, Vervain and the Speaker walked out of the chamber, into another, larger chamber.

-"This burrow is where the Chief Rabbit lives," the Speaker explained. "There is an escape tunnel..."
At Watership Down, a few rabbits were gathered around a large rock. Flyairth was standing next to it, addressing the others.

"Since none of you seem to be interested in fighting, it looks like we'll have to do almost the same thing we did yesterday."

"Not again," Hawkbit mumbled.

"To make sure nobody complains again, I'll make this even easier than yesterday. All you have to do is jump to the top of the rock, look around, and jump off on the other side."

With that, Flyairth effortlessly jumped on the rock. She spent a few moments sniffing the air, feeling the wind in her fur, before jumping off.

"All right, everyone go ahead."

She hopped away, and found Spartina standing on her hind legs further away.

"Do you want to participate?"

"Not at the moment, thanks. I'll just watch, if you don't mind."

Hyzenthlay was the first rabbit to tackle the course, and completed the task rather well. Then came Nyreem, who managed to make it near the top of the rock, but slid back down. Thethuthinnang came next, and she nudged Nyreem, allowing her to finally make it to the top. The smaller doe turned and smiled at the other doe, before jumping down herself. The next rabbit was Nelthilta, and while she made it to the top rather easily, she spent a few moments there trying to catch her breath before finally jumping back down.

Then it was Hawkbit's turn. It took him two attempts to reach the top and, once there, he mumbled something about how painful training is. Suddenly another rabbit crashed into him; he fell head first off the rock. Everyone rushed to the scene of the accident.

Hawkbit slowly opened his eyes. As he had landed on his head, it appeared to him that the sky was upside down. After a few moments, he fell on his side, and soon got back up, shaking his head.

"Hawkbit, you all right?" Strawberry asked.

"I'm all right," he replied, when he suddenly noticed something unusual in his field of vision. He raised his front paws and placed them on the sides of his head; he could clearly feel his ears. He groaned and kicked them back up, but they fell back down. "My ears. What happened to my ears?"

"They're falling down, Hawkbit," Strawberry replied matter-of-factly.

"So I'm going to be stuck as a lop-eared rabbit for the rest of my life? Oh Flyairth, mate, you are not getting away with this!"
“Stop implying that I meant for this to happen,” Flyairth replied.

“Oy Hawkbit,” Dandelion said, “if you’re going to get angry at anyone, get angry at me. I’m the one who crashed into you. Sorry mate.”

“You did? You fool, why don’t you watch where you’re going? This isn’t the first time this happens, and now I will have to suffer the consequences for the rest of my life.”

“If it makes you feel better, you can ruin my ears too.”

“No point in doing that, mate, one of us being lop-eared is enough.”

“Wait a moment, Hawkbit,” Thethuthinnang said. “I might be able to do something about your ears.”

She hopped over to him and raised his left ear to look inside. Hawkbit remained motionless as she examined him; while he was annoyed at having someone else touch his face, if it made it possible to straighten his ears, he would tolerate it.

“Hyzenthlay, get me a few twigs,” the doe said.

This request made Hawkbit start to feel nervous.

“Twigs? What do you want to do with twigs?”

“Do you want your ears back up or not?”

“That all depends! I don't like this...”

With that, he started to squirm violently; Thethuthinnang struggled to keep him motionless.

“I'm going to need someone else to make him stop moving.”

“I'll do it,” Bluebell said, as he walked up to Hawkbit, and lied down on the latter's back.

“Ow ow ow, you're heavier than you look!” Hawkbit said with a moan.

Finally, Hyzenthlay came back with the twigs. Thethuthinnang lifted Hawkbit's left ear with her nose, and carefully placed the twig underneath, before repeating the process with the right ear. After both twigs were safely in place, she slowly moved away, as Bluebell jumped off Hawkbit's back. The grey buck slowly got up; his ears seemed to remain in place.

“It works! I can't believe it actually works! Thank you so much!”

He made a single leap of joy...only for both twigs to fall out and both his ears to crash back down on the sides of his head.

“Well, you will have to be a bit more careful than that,” Thethuthinnang said. “Hold still while I put them back...”

“Oh no you don't!” Hawkbit shouted. “I'm not going to let Bluebell sit on me again. Blackberry knows a lot about healing, she can fix this, I'm sure.”

“I'll go get him,” Bluebell said.

“Yeah, well thanks a lot for...wait. Blackberry isn't supposed to be at the warren at the moment.
You mean she came back? Why did nobody tell me?"

-"You wish to see me?"

Hawkbit turned at the rabbit who had just spoken. It was a buck, slightly larger than him, and with black spots at the tips of his ears.

-"Who are you?"

-"I'm Blackberry. Didn't you want to talk with me?"

-"I'm going insane."

With that, Hawkbit ran underground, his ears moving up and down with each step. Blackberry turned to Bluebell.

-"What was that all about?"

-"Apparently there's another rabbit living here, also called Blackberry," Bluebell said. "This other Blackberry is a doe."

-"I like my name," Blackberry said with a chuckle. "I should be honoured to share it with someone else."

-"How about you share something else with me?" Bluebell smirked as he leaned in for a kiss.

-"How about...no."

-"After what just happened, I don't think anyone is in the mood for training anymore," Flyairth said. "How about we dig instead? We do need more burrows than we have now."

-"That sounds like a good idea," Hyzenthlay said. "However, we should probably ask the Chief Rabbit what he thinks, before we start anything."

-"I'll do that," Vilthuril volunteered.

Fiver was lying in the grass near the beech tree, half-asleep, when he suddenly felt someone nudge him. He opened his eyes; it was Vilthuril.

The two rabbits spent a while awkwardly staring at each other, each waiting for the other to speak. Vilthuril turned out to be the first:

-"We've been talking about digging some new burrows, and we want to know if that's all right with you."

-"Oh, uh...you are free to dig if you want. Just don't take out any tree roots, Blackberry says that might cause the warren to cave in."

-"All right then. We'll be careful. Thank you."

Vilthuril turned and walked away, but Fiver ran after her.

-"Wait! If you're going to dig...I want to help if I can."

-"The more rabbits who participate, the faster the work will be finished."
The two rabbits made their way back to the warren, and soon there were no rabbits visible at the top of the Down.
“The full moon cast an eerie glow through thick ancient dark woods. In the shadows around a tree, the serial killer ran his knife lovingly over Chelsea’s trussed dead body. She lay, as if posed for a photo, wearing only bloody pink underpants.”

--H. Raven Rose, *Dark Eros*

Rosie was sitting in her den, holding a twig in her front paws. It had been several days since the rabbits had left the warren, and she remained anxious over their fate. In an attempt at distracting herself from her worry, she carved shapes into the dirt, or onto leaves, with her twig. It was relaxing; she was generally pleased with the results, and so were her friends.

While Tumbler visited nearly every day, that day she was also expecting a visit from another squirrel who lived further away, Crackers. Apart from a white spot at the tip of one's tail, the two squirrels looked absolutely identical.

Rosie and Tumbler were working together on the latest leaf carving when Crackers burst into the den.

-“RROOOOSIIIIIEE! TUUUUMBBLEEEEERR!!”
-“Great to see you,” Tumbler said, as the two squirrels wrapped their tails around each other.
-”Yey you're back!” Rosie added as she joined the group hug.

After the hug had ended, Crackers looked at the leaf on the ground.

-”Purdy.”

Rosie smiled.

-”Anyway, how are you?” she asked. “It's been a while.”

-”Eh, life is life. Dancing is amazing, except when the neighbours interrupt. It takes a lot of restraint not to smack them, sometimes.”

-”I'll smack them for you!” Tumbler picked up the twig and raised it half-threateningly, making Crackers laugh.

-”Thanks, but I don't think they’ll be necessary.”

-”You learn any new dance moves recently?”

-”A few. Do you want to see them? We would have to go outside for that.”

-”Of course!” Tumbler said.

-”I would love it!” Rosie added.

Crackers smiled, and made her way above ground. She looked at the nearby trees, trying to determine which one was best suited for the demonstration. She eventually chose the tallest one, and climbed around halfway to the top.
"You two ready?" she shouted.
"Yes!" Rosie and Tumbler replied in unison.
"All right then, here goes!"

Tumbler and Rosie looked attentively as Crackers gracefully jumped from one branch to the other, making complicated movements along the way. This went on for several minutes before she stopped at the top of the tree; the two creatures on the ground started clapping.

"That was beautiful," Tumbler said.
"I think I might have messed up that last..." Crackers started to say, but was cut off by Rosie:
"Nooooooo, you were great."
"Should I do more?"
"YES!"

As Crackers was about to start dancing again, however, she noticed something unusual some distance away.

"There's a group of rabbits approaching."

"All the rabbits from the warren left a few days ago," Tumbler explained. "They're coming back?"
"You say that they left? All of them? They are not all coming back."
"How many are there?"
"I can't quite figure out the exact number, they're not close enough, but if all of them left, there are a lot of them missing."

"We should take a closer look," Rosie decided.

Crackers danced her way down the tree, and reached the ground just as the first rabbits made their way through the warren's main entrance. The total number of rabbits was depressingly low; only six of them, none of whom the squirrels and hedgehog knew by name. While they seemed physically unharmed, with only minor scratches, five of them all had the same depressed look on their face. The sixth one, instead, was laughing creepily.

After all the rabbits were underground, Rosie, Crackers and Tumbler stayed hidden in the grass for a long time, hoping more would arrive, but none did.

"What do you think happened?" Rosie asked after a while.
"I don't know," Tumbler replied. "If they did go to war like Woundwort said, I guess they lost."
"Who's this Woundwort fellow you're talking about?" Crackers asked. "I never heard you mention him during my previous visits."

"He only arrived recently," Rosie explained. "He taught everyone how to fight, then took them away to destroy another warren that he called 'the outsiders'."

"Why is it that some seem obsessed with teaching others how to hurt creatures?" Crackers with a
sigh. “Even those who try to defend us, often end up hurting us instead.”

-“War is pointless,” Rosie said.
-“It sure is,” Tumbler agreed.

With that, the three creatures silently made their way back to Rosie's den.

-“We should probably go talk to them tomorrow, see if there's anything we could do to help them,” Rosie eventually suggested.
-“I agree,” Crackers said. “We probably won't be able to do much, but it's better than nothing.”

The next day, however, nothing went as planned.

The rabbits had plenty of empty burrows to choose from, but they weren't picky. After such a journey, they were just happy to be underground, and they all fell asleep in the great burrow.

The next morning, the first rabbit to wake up was Acorn. After stretching and yawning, he decided to silflay. With Toadflax still asleep, he wouldn't have to worry about being bullied away from the flayrah.

He made his way above ground, towards the pile of flayrah. It was clearly several days old; the farmer had presumably not distributed any more with all the rabbits gone. It still tasted wonderful, a major improvement over the dry grass he had been forced to silflay on while traveling. He closed his eyes, feeling that nothing could disturb this peaceful moment.

Until his nose caught the scent of blood.

Rabbit blood.

They had only been back for less than a day, and one of them had already fallen victim to the wires. And this was not something that they could ignore like they did in the past. They were too few for that; anyone vanishing would be immediately noticed.

He looked around him to see if anyone else had followed him outside. It was then that he saw the corpse, in plain sight in the middle of the field. The head was at an awkward angle, clearly indicating a broken neck, and the tail had been ripped off the body. That, along with the body's location, indicated that Buckthorn had not fallen victim to a snare, but to another creature.

Acorn was nauseated by the gruesome sight, but it was also impossible for him to look away. The flies were loudly buzzing around the corpse, and it was only a matter of time before the larger elil arrived. He lost all taste for flayrah. He bolted back underground.

In his near-tharn state, he didn't pay attention to where he was going, and stepped on one of Speedwell's front paws. Speedwell didn't flinch; Acorn lied back down and pretended to be asleep, as if nothing had ever happened.

However, moments later, he heard Speedwell get up, and hop away. Judging by the direction of the sounds, it seemed that he was heading through the same run Acorn himself had used.

This was followed by a few minutes of silence, and then rapid footsteps, as Speedwell also came running back underground, presumably having seen the dead body too. What followed afterwards, however, was different.
"Acorn, wake up," Speedwell said, as he poked his friend's back.

"What is it?"

"Buckthorn is dead."

"Dead? What happened?" Acorn did not want to reveal that he had already been above ground, out of fear someone might accuse him of killing Buckthorn.

"I don't know. He's just lying there in the middle of the field...dead."

At that moment, Acorn and Speedwell heard a yawn; Tindra was slowly waking up.

"I had a horrible nightmare," she said. "I went out to pass hraka and there was a dead rabbit in the field."

"That's not a nightmare," Speedwell said. "There really is a dead rabbit outside."

Tindra stared at Speedwell for a few moments, hoping, against all odds, that this was a (terribly unfunny) joke.

"Who?" she eventually asked.

"Buckthorn," Acorn replied.

Tindra looked around the burrow; Buckthorn was nowhere to be seen. It really wasn't a joke.

"What happened?"

"NOBODY LEAVE THIS BURROW!"

Nobody had noticed Toadflax's absence until they heard his voice coming from above ground. The last sleeping rabbit, Flesca, woke up immediately.

"Oh great, the fool is back..." Tindra mumbled.

"Someone killed Buckthorn!" Toadflax shouted as he burst into the burrow.

"You're just about the last one to find out," Acorn said.

"And one of you is responsible."

The burrow fell silent.

"Are you saying that one of us killed him?" Speedwell asked.

"Exactly. There is no scent of elil, and there are no snares near him. There is no other possibility. And I will make sure that, whoever is responsible, they will pay the ultimate penalty."

"And how do you intend to find out who did it?" Flesca asked.

"I am going to lead a thorough investigation. But first, I need to know what each of you were doing just before sunrise this morning."

"Seriously? We were asleep." Tindra rolled her eyes. "Like any sane rabbit would be."

With the exception of Toadflax, everyone in the burrow nodded.
"Clearly," he said, "someone's lying!"

"Too bad it wasn't HIM who was murdered,” Acorn whispered in Speedwell's ear.

"Looks like the next few days will be pretty miserable for us all.”
Reverse Hacking

“Dumping tdp into Ghidra makes it pretty easy to find a function that calls `recvfrom()`, the call that copies information from a network socket. It looks at the first byte of the packet and uses this to determine which protocol is in use, and passes the packet on to a different dispatcher depending on the protocol version.”

--Matthew Garrett, *Remote code execution as root from the local network on TP-Link SR20 routers*

Woundwort had just finished his tour of Darkhaven. It was a very different place from Efrafa: most of the “burrows” were actually large chambers above ground, built between various parts of the human structures. In addition to this, the structures were routinely used for training. In the middle of the warren was the large battle pit, where Darkhaven rabbits fought each other; these battles often resulted in the death of one of the fighters, sometimes both. There was no grass growing in the warren itself; to silflay, the rabbits had to either leave the pit, or stick with weeds. Woundwort's only worry were the humans working there, but at the moment, only two of them were present and, like all humans, they did not seem very intelligent.

Satisfied with what he had learned, he could move on the the next task. He briefly debated whether he should search for Blueberry now or check up on Silverweed first; he eventually decided on Silverweed. Vervain, having nothing else to do, followed him. Silverweed had just woken up, and was cleaning his ears.

-“Greetings General,” he said. “How are you feeling right now?”

-“I want to know when you will be ready to search for the outsiders' warren.”

-“I suppose I could start now, if you wish. But first, I must warn you: you may feel some sort of tickling in your mind while it happens. The best thing you can do is ignore it. If you pay attention to it, it will simply become more persistent, and it will distract me.”

Woundwort nodded; Silverweed lay down and lowered his ears behind his head. He closed his eyes, and raised his front paws to the sides of his head.

The digging at Watership Down was going rather well. The rabbits were split in groups of three or four rabbits each; while no burrows had been entirely finished yet, progress was fast. The worst they had to deal with were the occasional complaints from some of the bucks. At the current rate, there would be enough burrows for everyone by sunset. Suddenly, Hyzenthlay shook her head.

-“What's the matter, Hyz?” Thethuthinnang asked.

-“There's some insect buzzing around my ears. I'll be all right, though.”

In another burrow, Fiver was scratching the wall; he was not as fast as most of the others, due to his small size, but his contributions were still helpful. However, he had the vague feeling that there was someone missing, a rabbit who should be at the warren but wasn't. The feeling just wouldn't go away, so he took a short break from digging to wander around and check up on everyone.

All the rabbits who had arrived with Flyairth appeared to be present. He also located all the Sandleford refugees (with the obvious exception of Blackberry, Bigwig and Hazel). All four kittens were listening to one of captain Broom's tales, a rare audience for his ramblings. Clover and
Cornflower were among the diggers (although Cornflower appeared to be among the slowest of them all due to her lack of experience). Blackavar, Flora, Spartina and Leo were also digging.

As he looked closer at Leo, however, he suddenly remembered: Blueberry. The mysterious hlessi had arrived at the warren with Leo, only to leave the morning after his arrival, allegedly to find some berries, but he had never come back. Fiver chastised himself for forgetting; a better Chief Rabbit, like his brother, would never have let that happen. To make things worse, the hlessi had only been at the warren very briefly; he clearly hadn't had the time to meet many other rabbits who could have spotted his disappearance and alerted Fiver.

He debated whether to take out a search party. But he didn't trust himself to lead one, and those he did (Hazel and Bigwig) were already gone on a search party of their own. He had only met Blueberry very briefly, immediately after a vision; as a consequence, he had not been able to get a good idea of his scent. Even if he had, the fog would make it nearly impossible to find him. As much as Fiver hated to admit it, any attempt at finding Blueberry would have to wait until after the weather had cleared.

His thoughts were interrupted by another strange feeling that seemed to fill the air around him. It had actually been there for a while, but he had only just noticed it. It felt vaguely like a buzzing insect; he shook his head, attempting to get rid of feeling, but it only became stronger.

-"I'm sorry it's happening like this," came a chillingly familiar voice. "Please don't resist, you'll only make it harder on yourself."

Suddenly, there was an instant peak in intensity, as it seemed to him that whatever it was around him was attempting to break into his mind. It was trying very hard, and he was struggling to fight back. A terrible scream broke from him, as he collapsed to the ground and covered his eyes with his paws.

This caught the immediate attention of all nearby rabbits, who assembled around him.

-"The Chief is down!" Nelthilta shouted.

-"What's happening?" Nyreem asked. "It looks serious."

-"He's probably having a vision," came the voice of Pipkin. The small buck slowly made his way through the crowd until he reached Fiver. He instantly realized that this was no normal vision. On most occasions, Fiver's eyes were wide open, sometimes shining another colour, and he spoke in rhymes. This time, though, he was lying on his side, his paws over his eyes, and the only sound coming out of his mouth was a soft, constant moan.

Suddenly, the moaning stopped. Fiver remained motionless for a few moments, before carefully removing his paws from his eyes, and getting back up.

Meanwhile in Darkhaven...

-"Please stop paying attention to the probing! I just lost the connection."

-"I'm sorry, Silverweed," Vervain said, "but I couldn't help it. Your mind signal was just too strong, it tickled my mind..."

-"I understand that, Vervain, but you need to be more careful. You need something to keep your mind occupied while I work. How about digging?"
"Digging? I don't want to dig. Bucks don't dig. Why would I dig? We don't need any new burrows."

"You will be too busy paying attention to the dirt to pay attention to what I'm doing."

"But..."

"Vervain, if Silverweed says you should dig, you will dig," Woundwort said. "Am I making myself clear?"

"...yes sir."

With Woundwort ordering him around, Vervain realized that there was no way out of this situation. He walked away from the two other rabbits until he was close to the burrow exit. He cast one last glance at them, before starting to scratch the ground.

"So, did you find anything?" Woundwort asked.

"I found a warren some distance from here, and there are a certain number of rabbits living there. I managed to find a few who seem gifted with powers from beyond like I am, and I tried to invade the mind of the most promising subject. His name is Fiver."

"Fiver? Then you found the right warren! Do you know where it is?"

"I'm afraid I don't. Vervain's interference disconnected me before I could find out more than the warren's name. It's called Watership Down."

"That's not very helpful. Can you try to invade Fiver's mind again?"

"I suppose I could try. It might be easier now that I have located the entry point into his mind, but now he knows I'm coming, so he might be better at fighting back. Could you go dig with Vervain, please?"

Meanwhile at Watership Down...

"Fiver, what was that all about?" Pipkin asked. "I've never seen your visions affect you like this before."

"It wasn't a vision," Fiver said, shaking. "I don't want to go through this ever again. Silverweed was trying to take over my mind."

"Fiver, surely that's not what you mean? You look tired, you should probably rest."

"I wish it was something else, but I can't see what else it could be."

"Someone was trying to invade your mind?" Hyzenthlay asked. "Exactly how did it feel like?"

"This is not the time..." Pipkin started to say.

"It's all right, Pipkin." Fiver interrupted. "As for how it felt, it's one of those things that no words can describe. It was a bit like someone was repeatedly kicking me on top of my head, but that doesn't even come close to describing it."

"Do you know the one who was trying to do this?"
"I knew Silverweed once, but he's not in the warren where he used to be. Now he's at a place called Darkhaven, but I have no idea where it is, or why he's there."

"Are you sure this is the same Silverweed? Could it be another rabbit with the same name instead?"

"It's him. I'm sure of it."

"Do you have any idea why he would want to invade your mind?"

"We didn't get along very well, but I don't see why he would want to do this, especially since it's been a full set of seasons since we last physically met." Fiver thought back about his dream a few days before, about how he was being manipulated; this was something else he had not yet fully sorted out, but he couldn't see any link between that and the invasion attempt. "But what worries me the most is, I don't know why the attack stopped. It may start again."

"I think I may be able to help you stop this. The next time this happens, don't try to fight Silverweed, just think of me."

"How can that solve anything?"

"This would essentially forward the invasion signal to me. So your mind would be fine and I would get invaded instead."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Nelthilta said.

"I don't want you to suffer because of me," Fiver said.

"I won't suffer," Hyzenthlay explained. "I have a plan, that might put an end to this invasion for a while."

"What is that plan?"

"It's complicated. Just trust me."

Fiver was about to reply, when suddenly he started to feel his attacker again. The invasion seemed to be stronger than before, and Fiver knew he would not be able to hold on much longer. He was left with no choice but to try Hyzenthlay's suggestion; while he remained doubtful of the chances of success, he couldn't think of any other option. As he focused his thoughts on her, he felt as if the invader left his head, but remained present all around him. A few moments later, everything suddenly vanished. There was no trace of the invader; it was as if nothing had ever happened.

"Sire, how long do I have to keep going? My claws are killing me."

"Patience, Vervain. Patience."

Vervain was slowly digging the hole, as he had been ordered to. Further away, one could see Woundwort's tail and hind legs sticking out of another hole; he too was digging so Silverweed could work in peace.

"But sir, I don't know how long I've been digging, and it's starting to get dark," Vervain complained.

"It's still day, you're just getting dirt in your eyes."
"Sire, please. Can't you check to see how Silverweed is doing? This is taking him so long, something must be wrong."

"Very well, Vervain. I'll go take a look."

Woundwort hopped out of his scrape and made his way towards the corner, where Silverweed was lying down, eyes half-open. While Silverweed often took up weird poses when using his powers, this was clearly not normal.

"What's happening?" the General asked.

"I'm drained..."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know exactly what happened. I was making good progress and I had reached the part of the database that contained the required information, but suddenly I realized I was invading another rabbit entirely. At first I thought it was a doe, but I was actually invading my own mind, which resulted in..."

"Enough with the technical details! Did you learn anything new?"

"Nothing I didn't know already."

"Can you try to invade him a third time?"

"No." Seeing Woundwort's angry look, he added to his reply. "I mean, not at the moment. My powers are drained. I need to rest for now, but I should be able to try again later tonight, or tomorrow morning."

Woundwort sighed. Letting Silverweed rest meant more delays in finding the location of the warren, but he had no choice. If he were dealing with any other rabbit, he could simply bully them until they did what he wanted, but with Silverweed this was not an option. Woundwort therefore silently walked back towards the scrapes.

"Well, sir?" Vervain said.

"You were right, Vervain. There was something wrong, but it's resolved now. Don't gloat about it."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of doing such a thing, sir!"

"Just a warning. Now, if you don't mind, we have a kitten to search for."

"Do we really have to..."

"Are you questioning my orders?"

"...no, sir."

"Then let's get going."

Fiver had gotten up, unsure exactly what had happened. He scanned the area, searching for a signal from Silverweed, but was unable to pick up anything.
"That was amazing, Hyzentlay, it worked!" he said. "Thank you so much. Just what exactly did you do?"

"When Silverweed tried to invade your mind, you thought about me, passing the signal over to me," Hyzentlay explained. "Then, I thought about him, so the signal went back to him, causing him to essentially invade his own mind."

"Did it hurt?"

"It didn't hurt me. As for him, he will be tired for a while, but until he recovers you're safe from invasions."

"There's just one thing I don't understand. Why couldn't I send the signal back to Silverweed myself? That would have saved you the torment of getting invaded yourself."

"I tell you, none of this hurt me in any way. But the reason you couldn't do it yourself was because connections only work one way. You can't try to invade him while he's invading you, because the signal is blocked. However, the connection between me and him was open, so by forwarding the signal to me, I could send it back to him."

"I still have no idea what you're talking about," Nelthlita said.

"If it makes you feel any better, I don't know either," Flyairth added.

"And for once, I agree with that crazy doe," Hawkbit mumbled.

"I suppose that makes sense," Fiver said, "Thanks for everything you did."

With that, Fiver hopped away; while he would have liked to continue helping with the digging, the incident had left him exhausted; he needed rest. Just as he was about to leave the burrow, however, he remembered something else.

"Does anyone know what Blueberry smells like? Uh, sorry, that came out creepier than intended..."

"Who?" many of the other rabbits present asked.
The Real Trouble

“It sounds plausible enough tonight, but wait until tomorrow. Wait for the common sense of the morning.”

--H.G. Wells, The Time Machine

Violet slowly opened her eyes. Her paws were in great pain, and every movement made it worse. She slowly tried to get up, doing her best to ignore the pain. Where was she anyway? This place was clearly not Marli-rah. It looked like a tree. Wait what? She slowly turned her head and looked down; the ground was far below. She was somehow on a branch near the top of a tree.

What was she doing there? Rabbits are not very good climbers, so she had certainly not made it there on her own. Another animal, probably a bird of some sort, must have carried her there. Only then did she remember what had happened, how she had saved Thethuthinnang from a hawk; the pain in her paws was related to the sharp pieces of glass she had stepped on. She couldn't understand how she could have survived such an attack.

She looked down, trying desperately to think of a way to get back to the ground before the hawk came back. Jumping down would kill her, or worse, leave her paralysed and in agonizing pain until the hawk came back and put her out of her misery.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of flapping wings. Her first instinct was to hide, but there was nowhere to go. She therefore remained on the branch, nearly tharn, as the hawk arrived and perched close by. Suddenly, another, smaller hawk also arrived, and landed next to the first one.

There was no way out of this situation. Violet simply closed her eyes and put her front paws over her head, awaiting the inevitable. She could hear the two hawks squawking randomly; why didn't they just kill her now and spare her the mental torment?

Little did Violet know, the two hawks were actually having an elaborate discussion in their own language, which she did not understand. The larger hawk was the one who had captured Violet near the roundabout, and brought her back to the tree so her young son could practice killing. However, the son seemed to object to the idea of killing a rabbit in cold blood like this. The mother reminded him that that this is a necessary skill if he intends to survive, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not convince him to try it out. She finally gave in to his requests, and flew away to search for a creature that was already dead; killing practice would have to wait.

As she heard the flapping of wings, Violet grew tense. Could this mean the hawks had left her alone and gone someplace else? She slowly uncovered her eyes, and saw the face of the younger hawk, his eyes staring right into hers. She squealed and leaped back in fear, nearly stepping off the branch in the process, but the hawk grabbed one of her front paws and pulled her back up.

The hawk spent a while staring at Violet; she was unable to figure out what his intentions were. He lowered his head and looked at her front paws, which were stretched out in front of her. She squealed and leaped back in fear, nearly stepping off the branch in the process, but the hawk grabbed one of her front paws and pulled her back up.

The hawk spent a while staring at Violet; she was unable to figure out what his intentions were. He lowered his head and looked at her front paws, which were stretched out in front of her. Suddenly, she felt his beak underneath her paws; the pain became much worse, and the paw started bleeding again. She saw the hawk spit out something, before returning to her paw and removing another piece of glass.

After he had finished removing the glass embedded in Violet's front paws, the hawk flew further down the branch and inspected her hind legs, before removing the glass there too. She struggled to
figure out why he would bother to do this, before finally coming to the conclusion that it was for his own safety. Sharp pieces of glass wouldn't do any more good to a hawk's stomach than to a rabbit's paws. She weakly raised her front paws and started to clean the blood, hopefully easing the pain until her inevitable death.

After a long time, the hawk had finished removing the glass from Violet's hind legs too, and returned in front of her. She did her best to ignore the bird, simply focusing on her paws; when he would finally decide to eat her, she would hopefully die quickly.

Soon afterwards, the older hawk returned, carrying a dead rat in its talons. The younger hawk screeched, complaining about the purpose of life. At his mother's urging, he eventually ate the rodent. Violet grimaced as she saw blood drip out of the hawk's beak.

Blackberry was walking along the river, attempting to find her way through the fog. Earlier that morning, she and Primrose had resumed their journey towards Watership Down. The two does had remained largely silent; the fear caused by being lost in a strange land had drained their strength.

Suddenly, Blackberry spotted a dark shape on the river. Judging by the scent, it wasn't dangerous, so she got closer. The shape was a large wooden object, and it seemed vaguely familiar to her. She stepped on top of it; it leaned a little, but overall seemed very stable. As she walked along the edge of the object, she could see that it was floating on the water. It was hollow, and there were claw marks at the bottom, clearly coming from rabbits. It all came back to her: this was the boat used several seasons before during the escape from Efrafa. After the stream had carried it a certain distance, it had finally gotten stuck on the riverbank, a short distance from Watership Down. Therefore, if this was the same boat, then it was the same river, so the warren had to be nearby.

-”Hey Primrose, take a look at this!” she said. A nearby frog jumped into the water; there was no other sound.

-”Primrose?” she called out. Still no answer. She jumped off the boat back onto solid ground, and sniffed the air. There was no sign of her friend. Looking at the ground, she could only see one set of pawprints: her own.

Blackberry worryingly retraced her steps, periodically calling her friend's name, but never receiving any answer. After walking for a while, she finally saw the second set of pawprints, which she identified by smell as Primrose's. The tracks led in a completely different direction; Primrose had no doubt gotten lost in the fog. Blackberry started to follow this other set of tracks.

The tracks went on for a long time, and Blackberry did her best to follow them, until suddenly, she came across a dreadful scene. There were many sets of tracks and claw marks in the flattened grass, along with the scent of several other rabbits she didn't know. It was as if there had been a struggle of some sort, and Primrose had been captured by strangers.

She blamed herself for what had happened: had she kept a closer eye on Primrose, her friend would not have strayed away, and would not have gotten captured by these other rabbits. Unfortunately, it was too late to prevent this now, but she could still attempt to find her again. A few sets of tracks led away from the scene of the incident; Blackberry decided to follow them.
The Unlikely Friends

Chapter Notes

This chapter features a minor crossover. This is once again a one-time thing and will not be a recurring part of the plot.

“In these dark days it’s good to have reliable companions, friends that will stick with you to the bitter end. But in a pinch, a dog will do.”

--LastFootnote

The fog around Watership Down seemed to be thickening; Fiver was the only rabbit above ground. He reflected on the current situation. Hazel, Bigwig, Blackberry, Primrose and Blueberry were all somewhere in the fog. He had no idea how they were doing, or if they were still alive. He couldn't even telepathically call them; the only other rabbits who could receive his signal were those who had similar abilities like Hyzenthlay, and maybe Vilthuril. The weather seemed to be the perfect reflection of Fiver's mind.

Suddenly, he smelled something unusual over the fog; he concentrated his thoughts on identifying it. After a few moments, he realized that it was the scent of a cat. What would a cat be doing on Watership Down? It didn't smell like Tabitha; it was another cat. He then noticed another smell, that of a dog. There was no smell of blood though; clearly the two creatures were not fighting each other, but this made the situation even more mysterious, as it is a well-known fact that dogs and cats are mortal enemies.

Fiver's instincts told him to run back underground, but his curiosity told him to stay there and see what exactly was going on. His curiosity ultimately won out, when he heard the two creatures. Unlike Tabitha, whose speech was full of meows every few words, and Duster, who didn't speak at all, these two had perfectly normal speech patterns, and appeared to be having a conversation of some sort.

"It sure is foggy around here, Runt. I don't know if we're even on right trail.” Fiver could clearly hear that this voice came from a female, but he was unable to determine whether it was the dog or the cat who was speaking.

"Yep, it's foggy around here. Definitely, definitely foggy.” This voice was that of a male.

"The weather can be so unpredictable. But when we reach our destination, hopefully we will soon find someone who will give us a home."

"I definitely hope you're right. Gee, Rita, you're a good dog. Definitely a good dog.” Fiver then realized that the female, “Rita” as she seemed to be called, was the dog, while the male, “Runt”, was the cat. Either way, they definitely had weird names.

Then, there was silence. Fiver could no longer hear the two creatures, only their faint footsteps. Weirdly, despite having heard two voices and smelled two creatures, he could only hear one creature's footsteps. Then, the voices resumed.
“You think we'll reach Yellowstone soon, Rita?” the male said.

-”How should I know? Maybe if I could see where we're going, I might be able to tell you.”

-”Gee, Rita, maybe we could be able to see from the top of that hill?”

-”To the top of the hill we go, then!”

Fiver sat up. He had been hoping that the dog and the cat would steer clear of the Down, but they had just announced that they would go to the top. They did not appear to be aware of the warren's existence...yet. But, once they would be at the top, it would be impossible to conceal. Fighting them would be impossible in such weather.

Fiver tried to think of a way to protect the warren, until he finally came up with a solution: he had to lead them away. Due to the fog, he would probably have to go very close to them in order for them to notice his presence. Hopefully he would survive this mission: if he didn't, Hazel would be heartbroken upon his return. But there was no other solution.

Fiver set towards the bottom of the Down, but around halfway down, he came face-to-face with the two creatures. The dog was really large, comparable in size to Bark the badger, and also fat. Most of the fur was beige, apart from one weird overgrowth on the head that partially obscured the eyes. The cat, meanwhile, had green eyes and grey fur, although the chest, the front paws and the tip of the tail were white. The cat was sitting on the dog's back; that would explain why Fiver only heard one set of pawsteps.

Fiver was startled by the sudden appearance of the two creatures. He was about to bolt another way to hopefully draw their attention, when suddenly, the cat spoke:

-”Woah there Runt, there's someone else in front!”

Under ordinary circumstances, Fiver would have run away, but the cat's voice baffled him. It was the female voice he had heard earlier; how could this be possible? He had clearly heard the male voice call the other a “good dog”. His thoughts were interrupted when the dog bent down to get a closer look at him.

-”Aww, look at the cute little puppy!” he said. Fiver was slightly relieved at this. Clearly this dog had trouble figuring out the differences between species. That would explain why he had called the cat a dog earlier and, even better, he probably wouldn't attack him, since he thought Fiver was one of his own kind.

-”No,” the cat suddenly said. “Not a puppy. A bunny.” Fiver rolled his eyes; of course the cat had to ruin everything. “Like at creepy Bob's ranch.”

-”Oh, yeah. That Bob definitely was a creepy guy. Yup, definitely definitely creepy. Good thing we helped all the bunnies escape before he turned them into fur coats, isn't it Rita?”

-”Sure, but I still say we let Bob off easy. He deserved worse than that.”

-”Yeah, you're right. You're a good dog, Rita. Definitely a good dog.”

-”Don't tell him,” Rita told Fiver, presumably referring to her species, before jumping off Runt's back. “Look, bunny, is it all right if we hang around at the top of the hill for a bit?”

Fiver thought quickly. The dog and the cat had apparently helped some rabbits escape from an evil human. So far they did not show any signs of hostility towards him, and he did not have any
negative feelings about them. He had no reason to deny their request.

-"You can come," he finally said. "I'll lead the way, it's easy to lose your way in the fog."

-"Thanks," Rita replied.

Fiver hopped back to the top of the Down. Rita and Runt were behind him; while he could not see them, he could still smell them and hear them speak:

-"This bunny definitely is cute, isn't he Rita?"

-"Sure, Runt. This fog isn't clearing, is it?"

-"Well, here we are," Fiver finally said. "This is the top."

Runt looked around in confusion, as Rita jumped off his back and walked around.

-"This is the top, eh?" she said. "You can't see any better than at the bottom."

-"Perhaps you could try climbing to the top of the beech tree?" Fiver suggested. "Maybe it isn't as foggy up there."

-"Oh shoots no. Not after what happened last time in Nebraska."

-"What is Nebraska?"

-"Doesn't matter." She walked over to Runt, mumbling: "Bunnies. Go fig." Not the most polite thing to say, Fiver thought, but at least she didn't attack.

-"Gee, Rita, I'm sorry I brought you to the top," the dog said. "I thought we would have had a good view from the hill."

-"View from a hill, huh?"

At this, Rita stood up on her hind legs, raising her front paws high in the sky, as she started to sing:

Like the view from a hill
I can see you and me
Like the view from a hill
It's so easy to see
Here's where we belong
I feel it so strong
I see it so clear
As I always will
Like the view from a hill

Fiver listened attentively to Rita's song; he hadn't heard anything like this before. He also admired the unlikely friendship between her and Runt; as she sang, she walked around him, at one point looking deeply into his eyes as she played with his ears. Runt seemed to be smiling, a facial
expression Fiver had never seen on Duster. He was glad to have brought them to the top of the Down. If Tabitha and Duster were as friendly as Rita and Runt, raiding the farm would be much easier.

His thoughts were interrupted by a horrifying scream coming from underground. Rita and Runt did not seem to be bothered by it, and the cat kept singing:

> Like a bird in the sky  
> I can see us below  
> As it all passes by  
> I believe that I know  
> This feeling of love  
> Seen from above  
> Goes on and on  
> And it always will

Like the view from a hill

Fiver, however, rushed underground to see what was happening. As he tried to trace which burrow the sound came from, he bumped into Vilthuril, their noses accidentally touching in the process. While Fiver had enjoyed the soft feeling of the doe's fur, the situation remained awkward.

-“Uh, sorry...” he finally said. “Any idea what that scream was about?”

-“You don't have to apologize.” Vilthuril blushed. “I don't know what happened, I was digging and Hawkbit just randomly started screaming.”

-“I should go talk to him.”

The two rabbits made their way to the burrows being dug, and Fiver realized that Rita's song could clearly be heard underground:

> Like the view from a hill  
> I can see through the tears  
> Like the view from a hill  
> I can see down the years  
> Here's where we belong  
> I feel it so strong  
> I see it so clear  
> As I always will

Like the view from a hill
When they finally arrived at the new burrows, they were met with total chaos. Several rabbits, including Hawkbit, Dandelion, Nelthita and Nyreem, had their faces covered with their ears and their front paws, presumably in order to stop hearing Rita. Several others, including Pipkin, Snowdrop, Gilia, Mallow, Clover and Thethuthinnang, had their ears straight up instead.

-"You were above ground, Fiver, weren't you?" Flora said, hopping over to him. “What type of bird makes this wonderful sound?”

-“Wonderful?” Dandelion shouted, temporarily uncovering his face. “You call that wonderful? Please, Fiver chase that bird away!”

-“Chasing other creatures away is the owsla's job,” Strawberry said, “so it's not really up to Fiver. Although, honestly I kinda like that sound…”

-“I don't think it's a bird,” Blackberry said. “It doesn't sound like one, unless it's another type of bird from far away.”

-“It's not a bird,” Fiver said. “It's Rita.”

-“Regardless of what it is, please make it stop!” Hawkbit shouted.

-“Weird name,” Thethuthinnang said.

-“It sounds almost like a human name,” Clover said. “I remember the human child back at the farm once brought her friend over, and her friend was called Rita.”

-“It's not the same Rita, though,” Fiver said.

-“I'm certainly glad there's no human outside,” Dandelion said.

-“What type of creature is she though?” Flora asked.

-“She's a cat.”

-“A cat?”

-“A cat?”

-“Surely he must be joking…”

-“Anything but a CAT!”

-“You stayed above ground with a CAT?” Vilthuril turned to Fiver. “Why? She could have killed you!”

-“She's quite harmless,” Fiver explained. “Surely any creature who can make such a lovely sound cannot be evil.”

-“Except the sound isn't lovely at all!” Dandelion said, before turning to Strawberry and Hawkbit. “Looks like we'll have to go and get rid of it ourselves, since nobody else seems to care enough to take action on their own.”

-“Look, before anyone attacks, I'm going to take a look at this cat myself.” Hyzenthlay had been sitting in a corner of the burrow, watching the scene unfold. “If she turns out to be a threat to the warren, I'll lead the attack, but if Fiver says she's harmless, she probably is, so we would have nothing to worry about.”
Before anyone else had a chance to reply, she hopped out of the burrow. Fiver followed her.

"Thanks for what you did back there," he said. "You seem to be a more qualified leader than me. Would it be all right if you took over until Hazel comes back?"

"I appreciate that, but no. You're a good leader, don't underestimate yourself. But for now, let's take a look at this cat."

"You will find that there is a dog too. His name is Runt, and he too is harmless. He didn't even realize that I was a rabbit until Rita pointed it out. And for some reason, they are friends."

"Many weird things happen around here, it seems."

Fiver and Hyzenthlay made it above ground just as Rita was finishing her song:

*Like the view from a hill*

*I can see you and me*

*Like the view from a hill*

*It's so easy to see*

*Here's where we belong*

*I feel it so strong*

*I see it so clear*

*As I always will*

*Like the view from a hill*

*Like the view from a hill*

*Like the view from a hill...*
“When people look at me, they automatically assume I'm dark and weird. Why can't they see the truth? I'm just a girl, trying to find my place in the world.”

--Gena Showalter

-Gee Rita...that definitely was a pretty song. Definitely, definitely a pretty song,” Runt said.

-”It sure was...Rita...” Hyzenthlay said, hopping over to the two creatures.

-”Oh look, it's another cute bunny!”

Runt licked Hyzenthlay's back. The doe realized that the dog was trying to be friendly, but this remained an unpleasant experience: her fur was covered with dog saliva and it would take a while for the resulting scent to go away.

-”You were right, Fiver,” she said. “Mostly harmless.”

-”Another bunny?” Rita said. “Are there many of you living here?”

-”Sure, there's a whole warren,” Fiver said.

-”Wow, can I meet them, can I meet them?” Runt asked. “I would definitely love to meet them!”

Runt was quite excited, jumping around. While he had no ill intentions, Rita, Fiver and Hyzenthlay nevertheless had to be careful not to be stepped on.

-”I'll go see if anyone wants to meet you,” Fiver said.

With that, Fiver went back underground. He found that the situation had calmed down somewhat, now that the song was over. Nevertheless, several rabbits were visibly nervous at the thought of a cat being above ground, so close to their home.

-”They are quite harmless,” Fiver started to say.

-”They?” Strawberry shuddered. “You mean there's more than one?”

-”Yes, there's a dog too...”

At this, Hawkbit let out another scream, even louder than the previous one.

-”I tell you, they're quite harmless...” Fiver repeated.

-”If they're so harmless, where's Hyzenthlay?” Blackberry asked. “I don't see her with you.”

-”I am right here,” Hyzenthlay said, as she too entered the burrow. “Are you satisfied of their friendly intentions now?”

With both Fiver and Hyzenthlay having spent time with Rita and Runt without being attacked, most sceptics had to agree that they did not pose a threat to the warren.

-”Anyone want to go and meet them?” the doe asked.

-”I think I'll go,” Blackberry said. “The fact that such peaceful dogs and cats exist is worth
investigating.”

-“I’ll go too,” Clover said. “I want to meet this friendly cat, especially after how Tabitha tormented me back at the farm.”

Several other rabbits, including Vilthuril, Flora, Pipkin and the kittens, also expressed desire to meet the two creatures, and made their way above ground.

-“As for the rest of us,” Nelthita said, as the last few rabbits who wanted to go above ground left the burrow, “who are sane enough not to mingle with elil, what do we do?”

-“Anyone who wishes to stay underground is free to do so,” Hyzenthlay said simply, before joining the others.

The rabbits spent a while with Rita and Runt. Flora had a lengthy conversation with Runt, and at one point he took her for a ride on his back. Clover, having watched Flora's ride, asked to go next, which Runt accepted. She too seemed to have enjoyed the ride, although she spent most of it clinging to Runt's ears. Most of the others, meanwhile, talked with Rita, who told them several stories of human malice and stupidity. However, when Snowdrop, Mallow and Gilia started playing with her tail, she began to lose patience.

-“It's hard to tell with all this fog, but it must be getting late,” she said. “We'd best be on our way.”

-“Where are you going?” Hyzenthlay asked. “We might be able to give you directions.”

-“Which way is Yellowstone National Park?”

Looks of confusion appeared on all rabbits' faces.

-“Do you mean Redstone?” Pipkin eventually asked.

-“No, Yellowstone.”

-“I'm afraid I don't know of any such place,” Clover said.

-“I know,” came the sudden voice of Fiver. His eyes seemed far away; it looked like he was having a vision. “It's far away.”

-“How far?” Runt asked.

-“On the other side of the Big Water.”

-“Oh, that's...definitely far away...”

-“Drat!” Rita made a weird gesture with her front paw. “I knew we got on the wrong plane.”

-“It seems you did,” Fiver said, still in a trance. “There are no humans around here who can give you a good home. Except...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Fiver fell unconscious.

-“Humans stink,” Rita said bitterly. “What's wrong with HIM though?”

-“He...does that every once in a while,” Pipkin said, not wanting to get into the details of Fiver's special abilities. “Flora, Clover, can you help me carry him back underground?”
The two does nodded, and started dragging Fiver towards the warren. Along the way to his burrow, however, they bumped into another rabbit; it was Flyairth.

-“There's this smell I can't place...” she said. “It's almost like a dog...”
-“Runt is quite friendly...” Clover started to say.
-“There IS a dog then! That filthy human companion, I swear I'll kill it!”

She pushed her way through the group and rushed above ground.

-“It's a shame, really,” Flora said. “She's good-looking but she's not right in the head...”
-“Hyzenthlay and the others can keep her under control, I'm sure,” Clover replied.

As soon as she was outside, Flyairth looked around her; it didn't take her long to spot Rita and Runt.

-“And there's a cat too! GO AWAY YOU SAVAGE BRUTES!” she shouted. Just as she was about to pounce, however, Hyzenthlay held her back.
-“It's not what it looks like,” she said. “They don't mean any harm.”
-“Have you gone crazy? They're elil! And even if they haven't attacked, how do you know humans haven't sent them to infect us with the White Blindness?”
-“Stop worrying so much,” Thethuthinnang said, as she grabbed one of Flyairth's front paws. She and Hyzenthlay soon started hopping towards the warren, dragging her away. “Dogs and cats can't carry the disease.”
-“Let me go, I tell you!” Flyairth shouted desperately. “I'm just trying to protect you! You'll regret...”

Her screams faded as she made it underground, leaving Blackberry alone with Rita and Runt.

-“What a psycho.” Rita rolled her eyes.
-“Yeah, definitely, definitely a psycho bunny,” Runt added.
-“That's a bit harsh,” Blackberry said, “but she's always been one of the crazier ones.”
-“Well, I suppose we ought to be on our way then.” Rita hopped on Runt's back. “Thanks for allowing us to spend the afternoon with you.”
-“Drop in again, sometime!”
-“We might, if we ever come back to this area.”

-“We definitely will!” Runt stood up on his hind legs and picked up Blackberry, hugging him tightly; Rita slid off his back in the process.
-“Dogs...go fig,” she mumbled.

While Runt didn't hurt Blackberry, the buck couldn't help but remain nervous until the dog put him back down. Rita jumped back on top of Runt.
"Let's go, Runt."

With that, Runt slowly started walking downhill. Rita turned around and waved at Blackberry.

"See ya, bunnies!"

Blackberry waved back, as Rita and Runt vanished into the fog. With the two visitors gone, he went back underground.

Fiver slowly opened his eyes. His vision was blurry, but he could make out the faint shape of another rabbit in front of him.

"Pipkin?"

"It's great to see you're awake, Fiver," Pipkin said. "I was worried about you, after the way you just collapsed above ground. I brought you some flayrah."

"Collapsed?" Fiver remained silent for a few moments, attempting to recall what had happened. "Oh right, I was talking with Rita and Runt. I better go back to them now..."

Fiver got up and was about to hop out of the burrow, when Pipkin said:

"I'm afraid it's too late for that. Blackberry told me they left just now."

"Oh..." Fiver was visibly disappointed by these news, and lied down in a corner.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"I suppose I should..."

With that, the two friends started nibbling the lettuce together.

"It was quite nice to have them visit us, wasn't it?" Pipkin said after a while.

"Yes, I suppose it was," Fiver replied absent-mindedly.

"Just what WAS that vision you had earlier?"

"It's hard to explain, really. For a moment, it seems almost like I could experience the world like they did. How much did you understand, from Rita's stories?"

"Not as much as I would have liked to. She kept mentioning these human things. What is a pyramid? A politician? A fiddle? A pound?"

"A pound is a place where humans dump animals they don't want anymore. Not sure about the other three. Anyway, Rita and Runt escaped from one of these so-called pounds, and decided to stick together until they found a home."

"Did they find one?"

"They found a few, but for reasons beyond their control, it never worked out. They always found themselves getting kicked out or running away within two days. They've been searching for years and years, and they have yet to find a decent place to live."

"That's...really sad. One would never think they had gone through such hardships by looking at
them.

-"And you know what's the worst part of it all? I know of a place where they could have found a home, right in this area. But I fell unconscious before I could tell them, and now they're gone."

-"Perhaps they can still stumble upon it on their own?"

-"Not a chance. Their only hope is if they somehow return to the warren.” Fiver sighed. “Sometimes I wish I didn't have visions.”

Seeing Fiver getting increasingly depressed, Pipkin hopped over to him and hugged him tightly.
“Are you alright, Sam? I did the same thing when I got back. We can't touch just yet, since you're still just a soul.”

--kamikazitwinkie, *Prince Rainbow's Blessing*

Fiver and Pipkin spent a long time together, before Pipkin went above ground to silflay. Fiver's thoughts drifted back to Silverweed. Hyzenthlay's trick had clearly put him out of action for a while. He decided to go and see how the digging was going.

As he entered the Honeycomb, he realized that it was nearly empty. Most of the time, there were a few rabbits there having a discussion of some sort, but in this case, there was only one other rabbit there; it was Vilthuril. Finding himself alone with her made him feel rather awkward, especially after the incident earlier. He was unsure what to do, but she broke the silence first:

"I hope you're feeling all right, after what happened to you above ground."

"I am. How is the digging going?"

"We're taking a break now. We have a few burrows finished, but we could still use a few more."

"Oh." Fiver remained silent for a while, trying to figure out what to reply, but Vilthuril was once again the first to speak:

"I've been thinking about today's incident, with Silverweed. You seem to have mind powers of some sort, don't you?"

"You could say that. Sometimes, I have visions of the future. I know something is going to happen, and there's nothing that can be done to stop it."

"That sounds like a useful talent."

"It can be. It saved lives on several occasions. But it's not always so simple. On several occasions, the visions were so vague that nobody understood what they meant before it was too late. And I have no control over them: I can't make them come or suppress them. Sometimes, I wish I was just an ordinary rabbit."

"Don't feel bad about that. Despite the limitations, it's an amazing skill."

"But why does it have to be me? I didn't do anything to have this skill, it's just like that. Why couldn't it have been someone else?"

"Frith works in mysterious ways." Vilthuril hopped closer to Fiver and nuzzled him. "Think about the river of knowledge. A few days ago, when me and the others first stumbled upon your warren, I had been following the river in my mind, or, more accurately, I let it carry me. But essentially, my mind felt this thing, despite the fact that most of the others had no idea it was actually there."

"I saw the river in my mind," Fiver replied, "but I didn't create it. I don't think I have the ability to do that."

"We both have special talents, as well as Silverweed. But they are different, both the powers themselves and the way we use them. I felt a river that lead me to a new warren. You have visions..."
of the future, which allowed you to save other rabbits' lives. Silverweed can penetrate other rabbits' minds, and does so with hostile intentions.”

-”He apologized to me before he started his invasion. I think there's more to this than one would think at first. If only I could talk to him...”

-”Perhaps you should try that.”

-”But how? He's in the place called Darkhaven, and I don't know where it is.”

-”Well, I remember an El-ahrairah story Bluebell told a while back, at the old warren. El-ahrairah and Rabscuttle were at a pond when suddenly, a weird duck showed up and split their souls from their bodies. Their bodies remained motionless next to the pond, and while their souls could still see, hear and smell each other, nobody else could. They became increasingly nervous until suddenly, the duck's niece randomly arrived and reversed the process.”

Fiver chuckled.

-”That's a really weird one. I don't think I heard it before.”

-”At first I thought he was making it all up, especially with that random ending, but now I'm not so sure. Do you think you could pull off something like what the ducks did?”

-”I honestly don't know.”

-”It might be worth trying out.”

Fiver was about to reply, but Vilthuril had already left the Honeycomb towards the digging area. He remained motionless, staring at the run, and thinking about what she had said. Could he possibly attempt to contact Silverweed using a trick similar to what the duck had done in Bluebell's story? Vilthuril was right: it was worth trying out. But first, he would have to try with someone else to see if it was possible. If he tried with Silverweed and failed, the results could be disastrous.

Fiver walked out of the Honeycomb and went outside; it was still as foggy as ever, but he estimated it was late in the afternoon. A few rabbits could be seen at silflay further away. Among them was Pipkin; Fiver hopped over to him.

-”Pipkin, there's something I would like to try, some sort of mind trick, but I would need your help.”

-”Sure! What do I need to do?”

-”Just sit over there and silflay normally, do your best to ignore me.”

-”That's it?”

-”That's it.”

-”Uhhh...” Pipkin was visibly confused. “All right, if you say so...”

Pipkin hopped further away and started to nibble the grass. He turned and looked awkwardly at Fiver, who was staring at him.

-”Please, Pipkin,” Fiver said, “just pretend I'm not here.”

Pipkin returned to his grass, wondering exactly what Fiver was attempting to do. A few moments
later, he heard a noise like a twig being broken in two. He turned to Fiver, who was still staring at him.

-"I'm sorry, Fiver, I just can't not pay attention."

-"You're doing fine, Pipkin. Climb on my back."

-"What? Fiver, I've grown since the last time we played that game. I'm heavier now, I don't want to hurt you."

-"It's all right. You can climb on top of me, I'll be fine."

Pipkin hesitated for a few moments, before finally deciding to make the jump. However, as soon as he was sitting on Fiver's back, he saw his friend walk away. He looked down, and saw that he was floating in mid-air.

-"I'm flying? Like Kehaar? That's your mind trick? That's amazing, Fiver!"

With that, Pipkin started running around the sky, clearly enjoying the experience. Fiver looked at him the whole time, satisfied that everything was working as he had hoped it would.

Pipkin kept running for a while, until he suddenly looked down, and saw a familiar shape lying in the grass. He moved towards it and, after recognizing it, he turned to Fiver.

-"Hey Fiver, why are there two of me?"

-"There is only one of you, Pipkin, but your mind is the only part of you wandering in the sky. Your body has to stay on the ground."

-"I'm not sure I understand."

-"Neither do I, but it's amazing, isn't it?"

Pipkin glanced at his body one more time.

-"Can I go back to my body now?"

-"As you wish."

Fiver raised his front paws and placed them over his eyes; as soon as he had done this, Pipkin's mind was sucked back inside his body. Pipkin shook his head.

-"That was something. I enjoyed it, I guess. I appreciate that you did this, but I would rather you didn't do it to me again."

-"I won't. Thanks for helping me though."

Pipkin smiled and hopped away. Following the success of this experiment, Fiver felt ready to try to connect with Silverweed. He was just about to begin the process when he suddenly saw three dark shapes climbing the Down. Due to the fog, it took a while before he could finally identify them.
“If children were brought into the world by an act of pure reason alone, would the human race continue to exist? Would not a man rather have so much sympathy with the coming generation as to spare it the burden of existence? or at any rate not take it upon himself to impose that burden upon it in cold blood.”

--Arthur Schopenhauer, Studies in Pessimism

“I don't know, Hazel. This place looks awfully familiar.”

Hazel, Bigwig and Meadow had been continuing their search for Blackberry and Primrose. Progress was slower than before, due to the fog. Hazel had spent a while fuming over Campion; while the Efrafan captain had made a mistake, he would be of little help to correct it. The search for Blackberry and Primrose had to go on, even if there were no traces of the two does anywhere. This had a negative impact on Hazel's morale, and the weather certainly wasn't helping either.

“Maybe, but does it really change anything?” he said. “Maybe they came back here since the last time we searched here.”

“Probably not, Hazel. There is no scent here. But all the same, this looks familiar.”

The two rabbits slowly continued their way, until they came across a tall metal structure, and some soft buzzing could be heard.

“Now THIS looks familiar,” Bigwig said.

“A pylon,” Meadow explained. “Humans build them, but they're perfectly safe. Just don't run head first into them.”

“No,” Hazel said. “It couldn't be...”

Hazel took several cautious steps forward, and stood up on his hind legs. Close by, he could the dark shape of a hill.

“No!”

“What's wrong?” Meadow asked.

“We're back home. We failed.”

“We didn't find them so far, but that doesn't mean we won't. Maybe they made it home on their own.”

“Well Primrose is up there, she's dead. This is our last hope. Let's go check.”

Hazel and Bigwig made their way to the top of the Down, with Meadow following from a distance. They could see another rabbit sitting at the edge; as they got closer, they recognized him as Fiver.

“It's nice to see you two again,” he said. “How did it go?”

“Are they here?” Hazel asked.

“No...”
At that moment, Kehaar crash-landed further away, sending Hannah flying.

-"Ye not gettin any beta at landin, ar ye Kehaa?"

-"Kehaar nut as bad as som udders."

Hazel lowered his head, struggling to hold back his tears.

-"She surely stopped running," he eventually said.

-"Which one?"

-"Both."

-"I'm really sorry, Hazel. What happened?"

-"I don't know. We searched the entire area, but we didn't find anything. Even Kehaar failed, and looking from above, it should have been much easier to find them."

-"So sorry, meester 'azel," the gull said. “But dis stoopid foog...Kehaar see noddings.”

-"It's not your fault if there's nothing to see."

-"Since you didn't find their bodies, maybe they're still alive," Fiver said.

-"Impossible, it's been too long."

-"Hazel, this is unlike you," Bigwig said. “Fiver's right, we didn't find any bodies or anything, so maybe they are still alive.”

-"Not necessarily," Hazel said. “If they were killed by elil, or drowned in the river, there wouldn't be any bodies left to find.”

-"I'm sure you did your best," Fiver said.

-"Well our best clearly wasn't good enough, was it?"

-"Oof! Why ye all give up?" Hannah said.

-"Look Hannah," Bigwig said, “Hazel isn't feeling very well, it's better to let him rest a while.”

-"Rabbits! Dey quitters, whole lot of 'em. Come on, Kehaa. We go search vorslefes."

With that, she climbed onto the gull's back and, with his signature cry, he took off on his quest.

Meanwhile, Hazel hopped over to the warren's main entrance; along the way, another rabbit approached him.

-"Hi! Who are you?"

Hazel did not react, and simply entered the warren, ignoring her. Bigwig, however, stopped and stared at her.

-"Who are YOU?"

-"I'm Flyairth. And you?"
"Who's that?" Bigwig asked, as he turned to Fiver.

"This is Flyairth. She was one of several rabbits who joined the warren while you and Hazel were gone."

"Oh...well say hello to the newcomers for me." With that, he too went underground. Flyairth stared at the hole where the two rabbits had vanished, before turning to Fiver.

"Do you know who they are?" she asked.

"The first one is Hazel, the Chief Rabbit, and the second one is Bigwig, the captain of owsla."

"They are the two rabbits in charge of the warren? If you don't mind me saying so, they don't seem to be doing a very good job."

"They just returned from an exhausting mission and failed to find the rabbits they were looking for."

"The Chief simply ignored me. All I'm asking for is a short greeting; am I being unreasonable?"

"He thinks his mate is dead. I'm sure that, if you had lost a loved one, you wouldn't be your normal self either."

Flyairth fell silent. She and Prake had been very close for almost their entire lives. But Prake had been killed a few days before; Fiver's words brought back painful memories.

"I guess you're right," she said simply, before hopping away to a place where she could have a mental breakdown without anyone else noticing.

Fiver, meanwhile, hopped over to the edge of the Down and stared in the distance. The fog stretched out as far as he could see, and he could barely make out the familiar shape of Nuthanger Farm. There was no way Hazel and Bigwig could have found Blackberry and Primrose in such nasty weather. He had a vague feeling that they were not dead. After all, Hazel had admitted that no bodies were found. He had not had any vision, it was just a feeling like he sometimes had. He would have to talk to his brother once the fog had cleared, making it possible to efficiently search again. His thoughts were interrupted by another rabbit coming out of the fog.

"Are you Fiver?"

Fiver looked over the rabbit; he was unable to remember meeting her before. The fact that she knew his name slightly worried him.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Meadow, I'm the captain of owsla of the hedge maze warren that you visited last Frith's Eve. If the description my Chief gave me is accurate, you would be Fiver."

This reassured Fiver; while he couldn't remember meeting Meadow herself, the warren she lived in was a nice place, and the Chief was a positive rabbit.

"Yes, I'm Fiver."

"You're the one who has visions of the future, right?"

"Yes."
“As you probably heard, your Chief and owsla captain failed to find the rabbits they were searching for. I have been searching with them, and I think there's still hope.”

“I agree with you, but I'm not sure what that has to do with my visions.”

“I was wondering if you could use your visions to find any clues as to their whereabouts.”

“My visions don't work that way, I'm afraid.” Fiver briefly wondered whether Hyzenthlay or Vilthuril might be able to help, but instead he found his mind drifting towards Silverweed. Silverweed was more powerful than he was; he would be the best hope. “I know someone who might be able to help, though. He might not be easy to reach.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I need to use my powers to contact him. Could I bring you along for the ride?”

Meadow thought for a few moments. She wasn't sure exactly what Fiver was suggesting, but she remained determined to find the two missing does.

“Go ahead.”

“Touch my paw, and we'll begin.”

Meadow did as Fiver instructed, and Fiver started to search for Silverweed's mind. As he scanned the area, Fiver noticed something unusual: thoughts of revenge and destruction. These thoughts were clearly not coming from Silverweed, but he let himself stray away from his original goal to investigate.

Soon afterwards, he started to recognize a worryingly familiar pattern in the thoughts: revenge, outsiders, Efrafa, wide patrols. He waited a few more moments to make sure, before finally reaching a terrible conclusion: this was General Woundwort.

How could it be? Campion had clearly said that the General was dead; what could have happened? Fiver's mind was filled with questions. Had Campion lied to them? Was he preparing a surprise attack, while the Watershippers thought the war was over? Or had Campion simply made an honest mistake? What was Woundwort doing in Darkhaven anyway? Why had he left Efrafa?

Fiver would have to tell Hazel about this shocking discovery soon. Until then, he left Woundwort alone. He did not have a lot of experience with mind control, and he was afraid of accidentally revealing sensitive information, such as the warren's location.

As he continued probing across Darkhaven, Fiver recognized another familiar mind pattern. Upon closer inspection, he realized that this was Blueberry. Fiver became even more confused: why was Blueberry in the same warren as Woundwort? Could the General have sent him as a spy? That would explain why he had only stayed at the warren very briefly. But if that was the case, why did Woundwort need Silverweed to invade Fiver's mind? It didn't make any sense.

Finally, Fiver came across Silverweed. Fiver easily sneaked up on him and detached his mind; Silverweed, being asleep, had been unable to fight back.

“One thing you should know, Meadow,” Fiver said, “we're in another warren now, and I'm going to bring him to my warren.”

“I'm not sure I fully understand, but I'll probably figure it all out as it happens.”
“Will you search through the lonely earth for me
Climb through the brier and bramble
I'll be your treasure”

--Johnny Flynn, Detectorists

Silverweed was woken up by a soft cracking sound. As he opened his eyes, he saw two other rabbits sitting in front of him. He gasped in shock.

-“Hello,” one of them said.

-“Fiver! Wh- wha- what are you doing here? Who's that with you?”

-“This is Meadow, she's a friend. Follow me.”

Fiver made a few hops towards the exit; Meadow cautiously followed. He then turned to Silverweed again, who had remained motionless.

-“Come on! Follow me.”

Silverweed made a few hops towards the other two rabbits, and cast a worried glance at the guard just outside the burrow.

-“Don't worry about him,” Fiver said. “He'll never know.”

Silverweed hesitated for a few more moments, before finally deciding to follow Fiver. The three rabbits made their way outside; it remained very dark due to the fog. Silverweed saw Fiver climb on top of a small pile of trash, although it was so foggy he could not see the pile itself.

-“There's nothing to be afraid of. Follow me.”

Silverweed still hesitated, but nevertheless jumped onto the pile. After he had reached the top, however, he suddenly realized that there was no pile. They were both standing in the middle of the air. Silverweed hesitated to question this, but remained visibly nervous.

-“You two are floating,” came the sudden voice of Meadow, still on the ground. “But how?”

-“It's complicated,” Fiver said simply. “But there's nothing to worry about. Come and join us.”

Meadow made a few cautious steps into the air, and soon was floating too. She remained closer to the ground than the two bucks, however, as she remained nervous that she might suddenly fall back to the ground.

-“Come on now,” Fiver said. “Let's run!”

-“How am I supposed to run?” Silverweed asked.

-“Just do it.”

With that, Fiver started to run, very fast, almost as if he were on solid ground. Silverweed could not
understand how this was possible, and was starting to think all this was nothing but a dream. If this was the case, he couldn't get hurt by falling, and he would soon wake up again in Darkhaven unharmed. Having nothing to lose, he ran after Fiver, treating the sky as if it were the ground.

After a while, however, Silverweed reached a tree, and sat down on one of the branches. He looked worriedly at the ground, wondering how he would get down.

-"I'm sorry I forgot to warn you about this," Fiver, who was on the ground, said. "I guess it doesn't matter. Jump."

After all he had just been through, Silverweed reasoned that there was nothing that could go wrong, so he did as Fiver had said, and landed safely next to him.

-"Welcome to Watership Down, Silverweed."
-"This is your warren?"
-"Yes. Isn't it wonderful?"
-"Why do you show it to me? Don't you realize that I will have to tell General Woundwort about this, and that he intends to destroy you?"

-"We'll talk about that later. But first, imagine the view. Under normal weather conditions, you can see fields and forests all the way to the horizon. The only traces of human activity are the pylon line and Nuthanger Farm. Imagine the soft breeze caressing your fur. A feeling of peace unlike anything you've ever experienced before."

Meadow had decided not to run; instead, she calmly hopped through the air, taking her time to sniff her surroundings. She was hoping she might be able to find a trace of the two missing does from above, but the fog was too thick. When she finally reached Watership Down, Fiver and Silverweed were lying down in the grass next to each other, with their eyes closed.

-"What's going on?" she asked.
-"Just enjoying the view," Fiver replied. "Or at least pretending to."
-"It really is beautiful," Silverweed added.
-"Let's go underground," Fiver suggested.
-"But I like it here!"
-"This is only the beginning. Follow me."

Fiver hopped over to the warren's main entrance, with Meadow and Silverweed following him. As they neared the honeycomb, however, Fiver ducked into another run.

-"Get out of the way!"

Meadow instantly saw what Fiver was talking about: three kittens running towards them. She hopped out of their way, but Silverweed remained motionless. She had to jump onto him, pushing him to safety just in time. A few moments later, a fourth kitten ran by, doing her best to catch up with the other three.

-"Why didn't you run?" Meadow asked Silverweed.
"The kittens. It's been so long since I last saw any, and I couldn't take my eyes away," Silverweed said. "Who are their parents?"

"Follow me," Fiver replied.

Fiver hopped out of the run, and led Silverweed and Meadow towards another burrow. In a corner, there was a single rabbit, lying down with his front paws covering his eyes. They could hear him crying, and he did not react to their arrival.

"The failure really hit him badly," Meadow said sadly.

"What failure? What's going on?" Silverweed asked.

"This is Hazel," Fiver explained. "He's the kittens' father, my brother and the Chief Rabbit. Also he thinks his mate is dead."

"Thinks?"

Fiver and Meadow explained to Silverweed what had happened, how Blackberry and Primrose had left the warren, and how Hazel and Bigwig had failed to find them.

"Perhaps I could find them," Silverweed suggested. "If they're still alive, I should be able to access their minds."

"Please try," Meadow said.

Silverweed lied down, and started the process. He seemed to become slightly transparent until suddenly, a smile appeared on his face.

"Is Blackberry blue and Primrose yellow?"

"Yes! That's them." Fiver said.

"What's up with the weird fur colours?"

"In fairness, silvery and sandy might be more accurate than blue and yellow, but I get your point. I'm sure there is a logical explanation, although I don't understand it myself. Are they still alive?"

"Yes. I found them close to a river."

"Tell me everything you know that could help me find them," Meadow said.

"They will face some massive challenges before hiding in a secret place that may not be obvious at first sight, near where they are now. You have until tomorrow evening to find them, or it will be too late."

"Anything else?"

"Beyond that, I can't see anything. There are limits to my abilities."

"If neither of you have any objections, I'll go search for them now."

"Go ahead," Fiver said. "But first, I must disconnect you."

Meadow appeared to gradually dissolve until she was no longer visible, as her mind was sent back to her body, which was still outside. She spent a while trying to clear her thoughts; this adventure
had been very confusing and had left her with so many questions, but at least she had an idea where the two does were. After a few minutes, she departed, hopping towards the nearest known river to search for them.

Meanwhile, Fiver and Silverweed remained in the burrow with Hazel.

-”If only there was a way for Hazel to know this,” Fiver said. “As you can see, he's very depressed over this.”

-”Can't you just tell him?”

-”I already tried, but it didn't really help.”

-”There might be another way. I would have to break into his mind and modify it.”

-”Is it safe?”

-”It should be.”

-”Please go ahead then.”

Silverweed nodded, and placed his front paw on Hazel's head, keeping it there for a few seconds before removing it. Suddenly, Hazel stopped crying. He got back up and made a few steps forward, before looking upwards.

-”Looks like it worked,” Fiver said. “Good job, Silverweed. Now, let's visit another burrow.”

The two rabbits hopped out, and went towards the Honeycomb. Along the way, however, they heard a loud noise, and decided to investigate that instead. It did not take them long to pinpoint the source of the noise as being the burrows being dug. They arrived just in time to see Hawkbit emerge from a pile of dirt.

-”That's it. I've had enough.”

Before anyone else could react, he had already hopped away, his ears still drooping.

-”Well, I've had enough too,” Dandelion said, “so if you don't mind...”

-”You've been doing a good job,” Hyzenthlay said. “Why do you want to stop?”

-”I'm just tired.”

-”Well, I suppose we can stop now. We've accomplished a lot, and we'll probably have enough burrows for tonight. Thanks everyone for participating.”

The rabbits spent a while thanking and congratulating each other on the work well-done, and slowly started to leave the burrow, until everyone was gone except Fiver and Silverweed.

-”They're all so friendly,” Silverweed said. “It's been so long since I met anyone like them.”

-”We all try to be friendly here at Watership Down. Let's go outside.”

The two rabbits moved out of the burrow, and soon made it back above ground. There were a few more rabbits there than earlier, since most of the diggers had gone to silflay.

-”Come on,” Fiver said. “Feel the freedom!”
With that, Fiver made a powerful leap, and landed in the grass further away; Silverweed imitated him. The two rabbits spent a while frolicking around the Down, enjoying this simple pleasure, that Silverweed had never experienced before.

After a while, however, Silverweed lied down in the grass.

-“That was amazing. I love the freedom.”

-“Better than Darkhaven?” Fiver said.

-“There's no comparison. The only thing I don't understand is why nobody speaks to us. Except Meadow, before she left. But all the others act like they can't see us.”

-“That's because they can't. I'll show you.”

Fiver hopped a short distance, and nudged something in the grass. Silverweed approached, and saw that it was another rabbit.

-“Who's that?” he asked. “He looks a lot like you.”

-“He's my body.”

Silverweed remained silent for a few moments, attempting to figure out what Fiver meant.

-“But, if that's your body...then who are you?”

-“I'm my mind. You see, I had to separate the two, so my mind could sneak into Darkhaven unnoticed to bring you here, something I would never have been able to do with my body.”

-“Does that mean...that I'm just my mind too?”

-“Exactly. Your body is still in Darkhaven.”

-“Oh.” Silverweed was visibly disappointed. “It's just like that old El-ahrairah story of the minimalistic processing power. But in that case, I'll have to go back soon. Another story clearly explains that if you remain in two separate parts for too long, you run the risk of the forceful bird infiltration of the purple branch into the shad...”

-“I'm not really familiar with the story you're describing. All I know is that yes, you will have to go back.”

-“I don't want to! I like it here, I want to stay here with you!”

-“I'm sorry, Silverweed, but there is no other option. If you want to return here, you will have to bring your body with you.”

-“But how can I escape from Darkhaven? From what I hear, the guards there are very good at their job.”

-“You know more about that warren than I do; I'm afraid I can't help you. Just remember that, if your desire is strong enough, you can accomplish anything. Before I send you back, however, I have one last question. What can you tell me about Blueberry?”

-“Who?”

-“A small black-furred kitten who is also in Darkhaven right now.”
"Oh, him. He's just a random hlessi the General picked up a few days ago."

"I see. When you escape, could you try to bring him with you?"

"I'll do my best..."

"I'm sure you will. Good luck, may Frith be with you. See you soon."

With that, Fiver put his front paws over his eyes; this broke the mind connection, and both their minds flew back to their bodies. Silverweed found himself flying through the air for what felt like a long time, squealing the entire time. Fiver stared in the distance, unable to see anything through the fog. He was confident that what he had done with Silverweed would help. Silverweed had plainly said that Watership Down was better than Darkhaven; he had no reason to betray them to Woundwort now.
“The negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. Besides, I seemed to hold two lives - the life of thought, and that of reality.”

--Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*

The door was opened with an annoying squeak, and was loudly closed. The footsteps echoed throughout the large room; this was followed by the sound of a chair moving on the floor, as the human sat down.

The desk was extremely cluttered, covered with many pieces of paper and other objects. It was impossible to find anything, everything would have to be carefully sorted at some point. But not today, it would have to wait. Until then, he shoved as much paper as possible into the drawer, until it became nearly impossible to close it again.

Suddenly, he saw a larger object on his desk, where a pile of paper used to be. He picked it up, and spent a while staring at it. It was a framed picture of his daughter, Daisy, taken several years ago. He had long ago forgotten where that picture was and had given up searching for it, only to realize it had been right there on his desk all along.

A tear fell from his eye as he looked at the picture. Daisy was graduating from high school today; the ceremony was in just two hours. His work as the owner of Gryphon Junkyards Inc. left him with very little free time. He had promised her he would be there, but she did not believe him: he had already broken many such promises in the past. This time, however, he was determined not to disappoint her.

A few days ago, while attempting to sort through the papers on his desk, he came across a letter from the government, that had been sitting there unopened for at least two weeks. It notified him that an inspector was coming to visit his junkyard to make sure it conformed to health and security regulations. The inspector was scheduled to visit on the exact same day of his daughter's graduation, and he had no choice but to be there. If everything went well, the inspection would be completed in time for him to go to his daughter's graduation ceremony; but for that, he had to make a good impression on the inspector. A messy desk would be really problematic.

As he finished to place the last few papers in the drawers, he straightened the picture, placing it prominently in the middle of the desk. Suddenly, he heard the door again, and he saw another human run in.

-"Hey Sir Fredrick!” the other human shouted. “You wouldn't believe the brilliant idea...hey nice desk.”

The junkyard's owner sighed. The other human was Lionel-Hector Appleby, his sole employee. He fancied himself as an author of children's books. His first book, “What's wrong, Aaaaa!?” has been rejected by all major publishers, so he resorted to self-publishing. Less than 100 copies were sold.

-"Look, LH, I'm busy and...”

-"But I tell you, it's brilliant! It's about a horse and a barge, see?”

-"What's a horse got to do with a barge?”

-"Nothing, see, but I'll get to it. So you see, there's this horse. The farmer wants to change his
horseshoes. But you see, the horse doesn't want them changed. So he runs away, and the farmer chases him, see? All the way to the harbour. And the horse, he sees this barge, see? So he jumps, and the barge is leaving, and the farmer stays there on the pier, see? Then the horse sees that he's surrounded by water and he's like 'huh. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all'.”

The boss tapped his foot.

-“I see. And then what?”

-“Uh, I don't know, I'm out of ideas!”

-“Right. In that case maybe you could help me get ready for the inspection?”

-“Sure. Exactly what do you want me to do?”

-“For one thing, get rid of those rats in the corner, over there.”

-“Rats?” Lionel-Hector repeated. He walked over to the corner, and bent down do get a good look at them. “Awww. Aren't they cute?”

-“These aren't your ordinary pet rats, LH. I know there are rats in every normal junkyard, but in the main building? That makes a poor impression.”

-“How am I supposed to deal with them?”

-“Didn't I tell you to buy some mousetraps last month?”

-“...whoops! I forgot.”

Fredrick sighed. This was not the first time Lionel-Hector had forgotten to take care of an important task, and it was certainly not the last.

-“All right, then. Just deal with the rats the best way you can.”

-“Yes, sir Fredrick.”

-“And one more thing: once the inspector gets here, cut out that Sir Fredrick nonsense. Call me by my last name.”

-“Yes sir Fred...I mean Mr C...”

-“It's all right. Just hurry, please. We don't have much time.”

The humans were not the only ones in Darkhaven having problems. Blueberry, still asleep on the mattress, was brutally woken up by another rabbit cuffing his ears. As he opened his eyes, he saw Woundwort and Vervain in front of him.

-“What are you doing?” the General asked.

-“I was napping...”

-“Do you realize that I've been searching for you all afternoon instead of taking care of important business?”

-“Sorry! I didn't realize you would miss me...”
"How did you end up here anyway? As we entered the warren, I clearly said to follow me."

"I WAS following you, but Vervain pushed me off the ledge."

Woundwort angrily turned his head and stared at Vervain.

"It was foggy...I didn't mean to...when I realized what I had done it was too late..." the bearded rabbit lied, clearly trying to avoid being punished.

"You clumsy fool! And why did you wait so long to tell me? If you had told me earlier, I wouldn't have wasted all this time searching."

"He's lying," Blueberry said. "I saw him push me, and he totally did it on purpose."

"No, I swear it was an accident!" Vervain shouted desperately. "I'm sorry, just like I'm sorry for almost killing you, General..."

"Shut up, both of you!" Woundwort boomed. "I have no time to waste with unprovable accusations and false confessions. Both of you, follow me."

"Where are we going?" the kitten asked.

"To check on Silverweed. And this time, both of you follow me VERY closely. If either of you get lost again, I'm not wasting any more time searching for you."

Silverweed slowly got up; he wondered whether his trip to Watership Down had really happened, or whether it was just a dream. It was extremely detailed for a dream, and it felt so real. Either way, Watership Down seemed like a great place; the fact that he was back in Darkhaven made him sad.

"Ah, Silverweed. I see you're awake."

Silverweed was startled by the voice; he saw General Woundwort sitting further away, slowly approaching him, with Vervain and Blueberry following closely. He did not know what to reply.

"I assume you would be ready to resume your search for the outsiders' warren?" Woundwort asked.

"Uh, yes, maybe, I think. I know where it is."

"Good! Now tell me."

"First, I have to ask you a question: why do you want to know? You told me you wanted to destroy the warren, but why?"

"They deserve it!"

"What have they done to deserve it?"

"They defied me. They helped some rabbits at my old warren escape, and later they tried to kill me."

"They didn't try to kill you, General. It was Vervain."

"Of course it's not Vervain! He would never be brave enough to attempt it, why does everyone keep saying it's him? Regardless. I am General Woundwort, and it is my destiny to rule over all
rabbits in the world...and destroy everyone who stands in my way.”

-”General, war isn't the way. Many rabbits get hurt or killed, and for what? Rabbits already have enough enemies as is, without fighting amongst ourselves. So many elil, not to mention humans...”

-”Not all humans are evil,” Blueberry interjected.

-”Perhaps not, but I have yet to meet one who isn't. Anyway, General, what you want is a free society, where all rabbits, without exception, are free to do as they please. There are no restrictions, as long as their actions do not hurt anyone else. Doesn't it sound amazing?”

Woundwort remained silent for a few moments, thinking about what Silverweed had said. Yes, it did sound amazing. He considered the possibility for a few moments, before brushing it away. The outsiders had tried to kill him. That was something he could not forgive.

-”I didn't ask you for advice, I just asked you for the location of the outsiders' warren. Where is it?”

-”I won't tell you.”

-”You won't? Do you seriously think you have a choice?”

-”You can't make me! I have claws!” Silverweed raised his front paws, doing his best to look threatening. Woundwort stared at the claws; Silverweed was a rather small rabbit, as such his claws were not particularly long or sharp. They would be of little use to him in a fight.

-”Just try!”

-”All right then.”

Suddenly, Silverweed cuffed Woundwort near his wounded eye. This ripped off a lot of fur, leaving only bare skin around the eye.

-”Woah that was a great fighting move!” Blueberry shouted.

-”Vervain, get the owsla,” Woundwort ordered, surprisingly calmly. “Make sure everyone comes.”

After Vervain had gone, Woundwort turned back to Silverweed.

”Do you realize what you did?”

-”Don't worry, General, it should grow back soon. I just wanted to make you realize you were wrong. War isn't the way.”

-”War is the ONLY way. What you did now must be punished.”

Woundwort turned around; by that point a certain number of rabbits, nearly all those he had met earlier, had arrived in the chamber, and were gathered around him. Vervain stood near the back of the crowd, waiting anxiously for the General to do something.

-”Where's Granite?” Woundwort asked. “I said that everyone was to come.”

-”He and Shale are gone on patrol,” Vervain explained, prompting a loud sigh from Woundwort.

-”I didn't tell them to go on patrol. Remind me to teach them a lesson when they come back. Anyway...”
“What happened to your face?” a random officer asked.

“This rabbit Silverweed here, has attacked me, and what you see is the result. I want all of you to know that you can't attack me and get away with it. Vervain, come here, and keep him motionless while I carry out the sentence.”

Vervain slowly made his way through the crowd, before finally jumping on Silverweed's back to keep him pinned to the ground.

“What is the sentence?” Blueberry asked.

“Death.”

“That's a bit harsh, don't you think?”

“May I remind you that I'm the Chief, while you're just a puny kitten? I didn't ask for your advice, so keep it to yourself until I do ask.”

Woundwort raised his paw over Silverweed's head, but just as he was about to strike...

“Wait!”

“WHO SAID THAT?”

“Me.” An elderly rabbit, although still in good physical shape, made his way to the front of the crowd. Vervain cringed as he saw the distinctly un-rabbit-like face. “Captain Orchis, sir.”

“Well, captain,” Woundwort said, “give me one good reason why I shouldn't carry out the sentence right here and now.”

“Wouldn't you prefer a method that, in addition to killing this insolent runt as efficiently as a blow to the head, would also cause him some intense mental torment before?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Death...by hrududu.”

Woundwort remained silent for a few moments, clearly considering Orchis' suggestion.

“That sounds perfect,” he finally said. “Do you know any hrududil nearby for us to use?”

“I certainly do.”

“Very well. Orchis, take charge of the prisoner, and lead him towards the hrududu. The rest of you, follow me; you shall all witness the execution.”

“I still say that's har...” Blueberry started to say.

“I'm STILL not asking for your advice. If you try this one more time, you shall be executed alongside Silverweed. Clear?”

“...understood, sir.”

Orchis hopped over to Silverweed. After sniffing him for a few moments, he suddenly bit his left ear and pulled; Silverweed had no choice but to follow. Orchis dragged him this way all the way out of the chamber.
Vervain looked at the scene from a distance. He didn't like this Captain Orchis. Silverweed was going to die anyway, extended mental torment shouldn't be necessary. And how dare Orchis make a suggestion without Woundwort asking? A suggestion that was accepted, no less! Every time Vervain had tried to advise Woundwort in the past, he got shrugged off at best; he was jealous of Orchis, although he did his best to hide it. He nevertheless followed the rest of the crowd out of the chamber.

As Woundwort walked outside of the burrow, he came face-to-face with another, brown-ish/green rabbit.

-“Uh, me and Granite just got back from the patrol...”

-“Did you find anything?”

-“No warrens, but we found one hlessi. And she sure is a pretty one...”

-“I don't have time to deal with random hlessil at the moment. Granite, you stay here with her and make sure she doesn't escape. You too, Vervain.”

-“As you say, sir,” Granite mumbled. He was standing further away, holding the hlessi’s ear in his mouth. He made several large hops towards another burrow, with the doe struggling to keep up with him.

-“VERVAI!” Woundwort shouted.

-“Yes sir?”

-“Did you hear what I just said?”

-“...no sir.”

-“You stay here with Granite, and watch over the prisoner.”

-“But I thought you and Orchis were taking him to get put to death by a hrududu.”

-“No, you idiot. Another prisoner!”

-“As you say, sir.”

Woundwort nodded, and made his way towards the warren's exit, with Orchis and nearly all the others following.
The railroad tracks stood silently in the middle of the grass. No sound could be heard, apart from a soft rustling in the undergrowth, gradually becoming louder. Suddenly, several rabbits hopped out. The largest of them stared at the tracks.

-“Is this the place?” he asked.

-“Absolutely, General,” Orchis replied. He made a few steps forward, and threw Silverweed onto the tracks. Orchis then jumped on top of him, keeping him pinned to the tracks. “All that's left to do now, is wait.”

Woundwort scoffed.

-“Allow me to point out the obvious flaw in your plan. Silverweed won't be the only one to get crushed: you will too.”

-“I was planning to jump at the last moment.”

-“And what would prevent Silverweed from doing the exact same thing?”

-“...you're right, I hadn't thought of that.”

-“You fool! I don't know how you ever managed to get into the owsla. Now go get some weeds to tie him up.”

At Watership Down, Hazel was lying in his burrow, when he suddenly heard another rabbit approach.

-“Come in, Fiver.”

Fiver hopped over to his brother and lied down right next to him.

-“It's great to have you back,” he said, “I missed you.”

-“Missed you too, dear brother,” Hazel replied, nuzzling Fiver. “How have things been in my absence?”

-“It's been busy. We had several new rabbits join us.”

-“Always nice to have new rabbits. I'll have to meet them all, tomorrow.”

-“How did it go with you?”
"Well, as you already know, we didn't find Primrose and Blackberry. But there's something I really don't understand. I don't know, Fiver...I got a feeling that I can't let go."

"What sort of feeling?"

Fiver had an idea what this was about: the knowledge Silverweed had implanted in his brother's mind. He didn't really want to reveal Silverweed's involvement though, out of fear it might make Hazel worry even more.

"Somehow," Hazel explained, "I know that Meadow...she's the captain..."

"Yes, I know, I met her earlier."

"Right, so Meadow will return to the warren tomorrow night with both Primrose and Blackberry."

"That's great news."

"What I don't understand is, how do I know this? You're the one who is supposed to have visions of the future, not me. So how can I know about something that hasn't happened yet?"

"Frith works in mysterious ways."

"I suppose so, but, I don't know...how do you feel about this? Do you think Meadow really will return with them?"

Fiver hesitated for a few moments. Silverweed had said that the does' safe return was a possibility, but not a certainty. He didn't want to worry his brother more than necessary, but the mission's failure remained a disturbing possibility.

"Meadow is a good rabbit," he eventually said. "If anyone can make it happen, it's her."

"Thanks Fiver. But I'm also worried about Bigwig. My attitude earlier might have had a negative impact on his mood..."

But Fiver was no longer paying attention. He felt his mind abruptly cease functioning, and simply focusing on one thing; this was not Silverweed trying to invade him again, but it wasn't the usual vision either. It seemed as if someone was sending him a specific message.

It took a while for the feelings to clarify into a coherent message. Apparently, Woundwort was going to kill Silverweed; that was one outcome he had not expected. He knew exactly what was going to happen, when and where, but he had no idea what he could do about it. However, this was plainly something he could not handle alone.

But who would be able to help? Hazel seemed to be feeling better now, but he could still not be expected to lead any mission of importance, and neither could Bigwig. Pipkin and the junior owsla, while they would probably be glad to volunteer for the mission, would not be of much help, due to their reduced size and lack of experience. Some of the new arrivals might be willing to help (although Flyairth might be hard to convince), but in his vision Fiver had seen a large crowd of rabbits guarding Silverweed, more than there were at Watership Down; some of the new rabbits might get seriously hurt or killed. To make things worse, even Kehaar was of little help, as he had left immediately after his return.

Suddenly, he remembered Bark. The female badger had saved his life the previous summer, and the two had remained friends afterwards. She would probably be strong enough to defeat almost any rabbit in a fight.
"Fiver?"

Fiver snapped out of his thoughts; he hadn't realized his brother was still talking.

"I'm sure everything will be all right," he said, as he hopped out of the burrow.

"Where are you going?"

"I, uh...I promised Pipkin I would play bob-stones with him tonight."

Fiver hated lying, especially to his dear brother, but under the circumstances he couldn't see any other options; he didn't want to worry him more than necessary.

"I see. Have fun, you two," Hazel replied, apparently not noticing the lie.

Fiver made his way above ground; the fog was as thick as ever. He rushed down the hill to make it to the orchard, where Bark lived.

"Hey Fiver, where are you going?" came the voice of Pipkin from further away.

"Don't worry, I'll be right back!"

Pipkin remained silent. Fiver was not the type of rabbit who would run away without any explanation, so he probably had a reason to do this. However, he seemed to be in quite a hurry so, Pipkin reasoned, it probably wasn't a good idea to ask, at least not yet. Leo was also at silflay nearby, and was also rather worried by Fiver's sudden departure; he therefore decided to follow him.

Fiver soon reached the bottom of the Down, and made his way into the orchard. He had some trouble finding the entrance to the burrow where Bark lived, since the fog made navigating between the trees very difficult. Soon after his arrival, however, he noticed the dark shadow of another rabbit.

"Flora?"

"Fiver?" Flora seemed as surprised as Fiver. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm visiting a friend. What are you doing here?"

"I was gathering flowers for a friend."

"Clover?" Fiver asked; this made the doe blush.

"Please don't tell her, I want this to be a surprise."

"I won't."

"Anyway, who is your friend?"

"She's a badger, but quite harmless towards rabbits. I need her help for a mission I'm going on."

"Would it be all right if I went with you on this mission? It sounds exciting."

"Yes, of course, but I must warn you, it's likely to be dangerous."

"Eh, I'm used to it."
Fiver and Flora resumed the search for Bark's den, until they finally came across a hole between the roots of a nearby tree. Fiver peaked inside the underground chamber. He could faintly hear growling coming from inside, gradually becoming louder, until he could see the badger's eyes shining in the darkness. As soon as she saw him, she grabbed him and hugged him tightly.

-“Oh, Fiver, you come back like you promise.”

-“Uh, it's good to see you again, Bark, but would you mind putting me down?”

-“Oh. Bark sorry, forget rabbits not like picked up.” She put him back on the ground. “Who is with you?”

-“This is Flora, she's another friend.”

-“Any friend of Fiver is friend of Bark.” The badger also picked Flora up and held her for a few moments before putting her back down.

-“I'm afraid I need your help, Bark,” Fiver said. “To rescue yet another friend. Do you think you could help?”

-“Bark do anything for friends.”

As Fiver, Flora and Bark made their way out of the orchard, however, they stumbled upon a third rabbit.

-“Leo? Were you following me?” Fiver said.

-“Hey Fiver,” Leo replied. “Yes, I followed you. I was a bit worried, with the way you just ran off. Is there anything...look out, there's a badger behind you!”

-“I know, she's harmless. Leo, meet my old friend Bark.”

-“Nice to meet you, Bark. But Fiver, why did you run away?”

-“I need to go rescue another friend. It will be a dangerous mission.”

-“Can I come with you? I'll do my best to protect you and your friends.”
“So, whadda we do now? We're stuck in the back of a semi, I ain't seen a way out, and I don't even know where we are!”

--James Jago, *The Beginning of a Great Career*

Vervain was wandering around Darkhaven, dark thoughts filling his mind. He was one of only three rabbits whom Woundwort had asked to stay behind, and he found this humiliating. In Efrafa whenever someone needed to be executed, Vervain was always the one carrying out the sentence, but now, nearly everyone had gone EXCEPT him. The way Orchis seemed to have taken over the situation also made him nervous; what if Orchis were to replace him as Woundwort's favourite officer?

He would have to do something about that when Orchis came back. Hopefully by peacefully talking to him and, if that didn't work, kill him. Vervain had already tried to kill Woundwort; fighting Orchis shouldn't be too hard. But Woundwort had survived the attack; what if the same thing happened with Orchis? His thoughts were interrupted when he saw Granite come out of a nearby burrow.

"Hey Vervain, do you think you could watch over the prisoner for a few moments? I have to pass hraka."

Vervain felt like replying “why should I do your job for you?” but he decided against it: there was no point in antagonizing anyone unless absolutely necessary. Besides, all he had to do was prevent one rabbit from escaping; that shouldn't be too hard.

"All right, I'll do it," he finally said.

Granite nodded and made his way towards an old tyre, before jumping on top of it. Vervain, meanwhile, went inside the burrow. The prisoner was lying in a far corner with her eyes closed. Vervain instantly recognized her, and slowly walked towards her. His initial plan of watching her from a distance was forgotten. He now had something else in mind.

"Hellooo," he said in the creepiest tone he could manage. The doe opened her eyes; as she saw him, she became completely terrified.

"There's no point in screaming, Primrose," Vervain continued. "Nobody's going to hear you. No annoying Campion not minding his own business. No dashing Hazel to help you escape. This time, it's just you, and me."

Vervain half-expected Primrose to make a short and sarcastic comment, but instead she remained silent, clearly terrified.

"Do you remember what I told you all these seasons ago in Efrafa?" he continued. "I'll make you scream for the Black Rabbit of Inlé, Primrose, but he'll be a long time coming. Did you think I had forgotten after your escape? Of course I didn't forget. You just delayed the inevitable. Now that we're together again, I intend to keep my promise. But this is only the beginning."

Vervain stopped for a moment. His plan was working. In Efrafa, he had always tried to crush Primrose's spirits, and failed. Now, for the first time ever, he appeared to be succeeding. He would soon scare her into complete submission, and she would lose all will to resist. However, while he had said that this would be “only the beginning”, he had no idea what would come afterwards. He
spent a few moments thinking about a plan that would be demoralizing enough for the doe, before finally shouting:

-"You shall be my eternal slave!"

Before he could gauge her reaction, however, he heard Granite's voice:

-"What are you doing?"
-"I thought you were passing hraka?"
-"I was, but I'm done now. You still haven't answered my question."

Vervain remained awkwardly silent.

-"I told you to keep an eye on the prisoner," Granite continued, “not to threaten her.”
-"I used to be Woundwort's chief interrogator, so I decided...”
-"Woundwort didn't tell us to interrogate her. He probably intends to do this himself after he comes back.”
-"Until then, there's no harm in asking a few questions, is there?
-"From the looks of it, you weren't asking her any questions. In fact, you seemed about to attack her and maybe kill her. She's of no use to us dead, you know?”
-"Who said I was going to kill her? I clearly said that the Black Rabbit would be a long time coming.”

Granite looked at Vervain in disbelief, clearly confused by what the bearded rabbit had said.

-"What DID you intend to do, then?"
-"That's none of your business!”

Primrose, meanwhile, was struggling to think clearly. This had been the worst day of her life. She had gotten separated from Blackberry in the fog, and then was attacked for no reason by two large rabbits, who brought her to this terrible human place they called Darkhaven. Then, she found herself in the same burrow as Vervain, her worst nightmare.

Submitting peacefully and letting Vervain carry out his plan was out of the question. She had only one option: running away. She wasn't very optimistic that she would succeed, but it was her only chance. Two bucks were completely absorbed in their argument; she quietly sneaked out of the burrow, and neither seemed to notice.

Once outside, she looked at her surroundings, but was completely lost. Darkhaven appeared to be at the bottom of a pit, but she did not know how to get out, and it was only a matter of moments before the others would notice that she had vanished and track her down. She had no choice but to run to the area that offered the best cover: a pile of human trash, containing everything from car parts to carpets, and even some rocks. Hopefully Vervain wouldn't search for her there...

Meanwhile in the burrow, the argument continued.

-"Look, Granite, why do you worry so much about what Woundwort DIDN'T say?” Vervain said. “He didn't tell us not to interrogate her.”
"But he didn't tell us to do it either."

"Oh look! Just outside the burrow. It's General Woundwort! Let's go ask him!"

Granite rolled his eyes.

"Do you seriously think I'm going to fall for that old trick?"

"It's not a trick, he really is back!"

Granite hesitated for a few moments. It was very likely that Vervain was just lying to get him out of the way, but he couldn't risk it. He turned and hopped towards the exit. Vervain, meanwhile, turned towards the corner where Primrose was a few minutes before.

"Now where was I? Oh right, you are my sla..." Only then did Vervain notice that Primrose was gone. He suddenly felt himself pinned to the ground; while he couldn't see his attacker, he assumed it was Granite, considering the weight.

"The prisoner has escaped!" he said.

"The General isn't here," Granite said with a growl. "You shall pay for this."

"No! You don't understand! The prisoner is gone! When the General finds out, he'll kill us both."

"...you're right." Granite let Vervain get up. "We better find her before he gets back. You search the area around the hruududu, and I search the tower, all right?"

"Where's the hruududu?"

"And after we find her, I shall challenge you to single combat."

"Single combat? B- b- but why?"

"You lied to me and humiliated me. You won't get away with it."

"Is this really worth fighting over? There has to be another way..."

"The law clearly says that single combat is the only solution."

"Look, we're wasting time! Shouldn't we be looking for the escaped prisoner rather than arguing?"

"Let's go then!"

With that, Granite ran out of the burrow. Vervain was profoundly annoyed: not only had he failed to destroy Primrose's fragile mind, but she had escaped, he didn't know where to search, and after she was found, he would have to fight Granite. Hopefully he would be able to find her, and talk Granite out of fighting him...
The Rescue

“Through endless fields of flowing greens
Each flower bearing good memories,
Of friends he left behind,
When he went off to eternity.”

--RavenShadowIV (link)

Fiver, Flora, Leo and Bark continued to travel through the wilderness. Despite the fog, Fiver knew exactly where to go, trusting what the call for help had said.

-“Exactly what does this mission involve?” Flora asked after a while.

-“A group of rabbits are holding my friend Silverweed prisoner. They plan to use a hrududu to crush him to death, unless we save him.”

-“What did he do to deserve such a horrible punishment?” Leo asked.

-“The one who ordered his execution, General Woundwort, is a tyrant. Silverweed probably did something that displeased him.”

-“Why are some creatures determined to harm others?”

-“I don't know. It seems unlikely we could get Woundwort to see the error of his ways, considering he's been at war with us for a full set of seasons. We're almost there now...”

The four creatures could see a narrow strip of land, with the iron road plainly visible in the middle; Silverweed was lying on his back on top of it, completely motionless. The forest continued on the other site of the iron road, and many rabbits were standing in the grass on both sides of the tracks. The four creatures remained hidden in the undergrowth until they were ready to take action.

-“Frith and Inlé, they're larger than I expected...” Fiver whispered.

-“What do we do now?” Bark asked.

-“Silverweed is the small white one in the middle, and the largest one with the red eye is Woundwort. Bark, you keep them all distracted. Flora and Leo, you'll help me get Silverweed to escape in the confusion. Also, stay on the lookout for a small black-furred kitten. If you see him, we'll have to help him escape too.”

-“Good plan,” Flora said. “Who is this black kitten though?”

-“Blueberry. I made a mistake, and I must correct it.”

-“I'm ready whenever you are, Fiver,” Leo said; Flora nodded.

-“All right, we start when I give the signal.”

Woundwort was looking around him; the other rabbits were getting restless. They had been waiting
for a while for a hrududu to arrive, but so far none had come. Suddenly he heard a faint whistle.

-”Ah, here we go,” Orchis said. “We won't have to wait long now…”

-”Finally, I was starting to think we would have to spend all evening here.” Woundwort said.

Suddenly, he heard another rabbit stamp, and bolt into the forest. Several others followed, with the occasional cries of “run!” Desperate to find out what was happening, he pounced on a nearby runner, who turned out to be Orchis.

-”Let me go! Please!”

-”Not until you tell me what is going on.”

-”Elil!”

Woundwort looked around him, trying to see what the other rabbit was talking about; it did not take him long to spot a falcon flying overhead.

-”Why are you all so afraid?” she shouted. “Why are you running away? You're too large for me to be able to hurt you. Well, this is probably a good thing, since THEY won't have to do too much fighting, you know, heal don't hurt and all that prophecy. But the concept of fear is a fascinating subject that needs to be considered from all angles. Anyway, I still try to do my best and stay positive because that's the important thing and…”

-”Go away, you treacherous bird!” the General shouted as he tried to strike her, but she was too swift, she had already flown away.

By that point, nearly all the rabbits had run away from the tracks. Only Woundwort, Orchis, Silverweed and another rabbit called Feldspar remained.

-”You cowards!” Woundwort shouted. “You all brag about how fearless you are, but when faced with a harmless bird, you all run away.”

Fiver, Flora, Leo and Bark watched the scene unfold in confusion when, suddenly, the bird landed in front of them.

-”You all keep calm and battle on,” she said, before taking off again and flying away.

-”What just happened?” Leo asked.

-”That was so...random,” Flora added.

-”I fear she may have unintentionally given us away,” Fiver whispered. “It's now or never. Let's go.”

Instantly, the badger ran out of the undergrowth to the other side of the tracks. Before Orchis could realize what was happening, he found himself picked up and thrown into the bushes. Feldspar bolted instantly.

-”Come back!” Woundwort ordered. “Badgers aren't dangerous!” He let out a ferocious cry, but just as he was about to pounce on Bark...

-”General! What are you doing?”
Woundwort stopped and turned towards the source of the voice. Further away on the tracks, he saw a large brown rabbit, covered with scars. While the body was only vaguely recognizable, the voice was unmistakable.

-“Campi...” He was interrupted as Bark picked him up and threw him against a nearby tree, knocking him unconscious. Moments later, Campion ran away.

With all the enemy rabbits out of the way, Fiver, Flora and Leo hopped over to the tracks.

-“Fiver! You've come to help me!” Silverweed said. “How did you know?”
-“You called for help,” Fiver explained.
-“No, I didn't.”
-“Someone did. If it wasn't you...who was it then?” Suddenly, the whistle was heard again. “We don't have much time.”

With that, Fiver and Flora started to nibble through the weeds that kept Silverweed tied up. The ones around his head and front paws were easy to dispose of, but another was tied tightly around one of his hind legs. Upon closer inspection, Flora saw that it was stuck in a crack in a piece of wood below the iron.

-“It's impossible to get a grip on it!” she said desperately. “We won't make it in time!”
-“No no no no no that can't be happening!” Leo said.
-“Of all places to get stuck, you pick hrududu trail?” Bark said in exasperation.
-“I'm sorry,” Silverweed said, “I don't know what happened...”
-“Nobody's blaming you,” Flora said. “We'll have to try to pull you off.”

Flora grabbed one of Silverweed's front paws, Fiver took the other.

-“Leo, could you help us push him?” Fiver asked.

Leo hopped over to the other side of the iron road, and placed his front paws on Silverweed's lower back, just over the tail. As he pushed, Flora and Fiver pulled as hard as they could, but Silverweed remained on the tracks.

A few moments later, the train came into view. It would only take a few seconds before it crashed into the rabbits at full speed.

-“One last try!” Flora shouted.

The three rabbits started pushing and pulling again. Finally, just at the last moment, there was a metallic clang as Silverweed was freed from the tracks; all four rabbits crashed into the grass next to the iron road. The train roared by, and suddenly it was gone, as quickly as it had arrived.

The four rabbits remained in the grass for a long time, long after the train had gone.

-“Is anyone hurt?” Fiver eventually asked.
-“I'm all right,” Leo said.
"Me too," Flora added. "That was a close call."

"I'm not hurt," Silverweed said.

As Silverweed tried to get up, however, he fell back down. It was only then that everyone realized that the weed had not broken. Instead, part of one of the iron tracks had been ripped off, with the weed still tied to it.

"Looks like we'll have to do something about that," Fiver said.

"At least, there's no time limit this time," Flora added.

The trip back to Watership Down was mostly uneventful. Everyone remained silent, apart from when Bark left the other four to go back to her home in the orchard, with a promise from Fiver that he would visit her again soon.

Fiver continued to walk towards the Down, with the other three rabbits following, until they finally made it to the bottom.

"Here we are," Fiver said. "Home at last."

Silverweed sat there for a while, simply staring at the Down, before finally shaking his head.

"Why did you do this?" he asked.

"Do what?"

"Flora, Leo, I never met you before today. Fiver, our interactions were also very limited. Why did you all risk your lives to save me?"

"Friends help each other," Leo said.

"But why? I tried to invade your mind, Fiver..."

"I forgive you," Fiver said.

"Thanks, but that's not all. I spent most of the life at the warren of the shining wires, believing lies. Like everyone else, I thought the shining wire was the only logical possibility, a blessing from Frith, without which we would not be able to survive at all. As the warren's poet, I actually helped propagate this idea. After General Woundwort took me away, I became his pawn, another rabbit he manipulated into helping him build his empire of tyranny and destruction. Don't you realize how my entire existence has been a waste? The world would have been better if I had never been born. And even just now, I failed again. Fiver, you told me to help Blueberry escape, but I failed. Woundwort said that he was supposed to witness my execution, but I haven't seen him since we left Darkhaven."

"We all made mistakes," Flora said. "So many seasons spent in the world, and you feel like you haven't accomplished enough. There's no point in regretting past mistakes and missed opportunities. But the future is different, and it's never too late to make positive accomplishments."

"And as for Blueberry," Leo added, "anyone could have gotten lost in such weather. When the fog has cleared, then we'll have a chance at finding him."

Silverweed remained silent for a while, thinking about what the others had said.
"Thank you. That helped."

"Let's go to the top, then," Fiver said.

"I think I'll go back to the orchard," Flora said. "I never did finish gathering those flowers."

"Thanks for letting me know," Fiver said. "I'm sure your friend will be very happy."

"Thank you, I hope so," she replied, blushing, before hopping away. Fiver dashed towards the warren; the other two rabbits soon followed.

"Come on, Silverweed. Let's go to the warren, and meet all the others."
The Other Side of the Iron Road

“The dark is temporarily light.
My soul, yes, my dead soul
Is among them,”

--”Blackavar The Broken Bunny” *The Black Rabbit of Inle*

Fortunately, the train managed to make it past the broken tracks without derailing. However, the last wagon was destabilized: a few wheels did not make it back on the tracks. Around two kilometres later, the metal bolt linking it to the rest of the train broke apart. With nothing to keep the wagon stable anymore, it fell on its side next to the tracks; it burst open, spilling its entire load of gasoline onto the grass.

Campion and Aspen had been travelling through the forest for a while. However, since his last meeting with the Black Rabbit, Aspen had noticed a change in Campion's behaviour. He was no longer aimlessly wandering, he seemed to have a specific destination in mind (although Campion stubbornly refused to say where this was). The trip was mostly uneventful, until they came across the iron road.

-"It seems that the place where we have to go is on the other side,” Campion said.

-"Let's cross it then,” Aspen replied. “I don't know what this thing is, but it looks a bit dangerous.”

-"They can be, sometimes. But not always.”

Campion started to cross the tracks, when he suddenly noticed something unusual further away. It looked as if a creature was lying on the iron road; if it stayed there, it would be crushed. Determined not to let that happen, he started to walk towards it.

-"Campion, no!” came Aspen's alarmed voice. “You said yourself this was dangerous.”

-"Don't worry, I'll be careful.”

Campion started to walk along the tracks, with Aspen worriedly following. He realized that there were actually many rabbits next to the tracks, one of which was General Woundwort. The Black Rabbit was right: the General was still alive, and he looked about to fight a badger twice his size. This couldn't end well.

-"General! What are you doing?”

Campion saw the General turn and stare at him, only for Woundwort attacked by the badger, and thrown against a tree.

-"Come on, Aspen, let's go,” Campion suddenly said.

-"Why?”

-"The Black Rabbit would be furious if I let myself get killed by a badger.”
With that, Campion bolted away; Aspen was extremely confused, and it took him several moments before he ran after him. Due to this, Campion was soon far ahead of Aspen, until he crashed into another rabbit. The doe looked familiar.

-"Blackberry?"

-"How do you know my name?" the doe replied.

-"Don't you remember me? Captain Campion, of Efrafaf!

-"Campion! Last time I saw you, you were in seemingly perfect health, and now you're all wounded and scarred! What happened to you?"

-"It's a long story. It doesn't really hurt that much, anyway."

-"Glad it doesn't hurt. But have you seen Primrose anywhere? She's been kidnapped."

-"Kidnapped? How horrible! If you do find her, will you please tell her I'm sorry?"

-"Wait, what? Why are you sorry?"

-"Look, there's a badger nearby, we have to run. When we're at a safe distance, I have something really important to tell you."

With that, Campion dashed away. Blackberry remained silent, confused by this encounter. Moments later, another rabbit approached her, clearly out of breath.

-"Excuse me miss," he said between breaths, “but have you seen a fellow called Campion? Big guy, lots of scars...”

-"He just ran past me. Who are you?"

-"I'm Aspen, his bodyguard. Thanks for telling me where he went..."

-"Can you explain..."

But Aspen had already run off towards Campion. Blackberry wondered whether she should join Aspen in chasing Campion, but ultimately decided against it. Her priority at the moment was finding Primrose before the kidnappers hurt her; Campion would have to wait.

Campion, meanwhile, continued to run. Eventually, the train caught up with him, but at the worst possible moment: the last wagon broke free and fell on top of him. Before he could realize what was happening, he had been crushed.

Campion did not feel any pain; instead, he found himself in the same familiar desert place he had already visited many times before. He sighed loudly, profoundly annoyed at having died yet again. Especially since, this time, he had put actual effort in staying alive.

-"Black Rabbit, I know you're here somewhere."

-"YOUR GUESS IS CORRECT, CAMPION."

-"But where, exactly?"

-"I AM EVERYWHERE...AND NOWHERE."
"Makes perfect sense," Campion replied sarcastically. He uneasily turned his head in all directions, unsure where the Black Rabbit was. In the distance, he could vaguely see the shapes of other rabbits, slowly moving in a line, but he decided to ignore that for the moment. "I assume I'm dead again?"

"YOU ARE. I WISH YOU WOULD STOP DYING LIKE THIS."

"You can't really blame me this time. That badger attacked Woundwort, I had to get away."

"SHE WAS TRYING TO PROTECT ANOTHER RABBIT."

"Protect? But she's a badger!"

"NOT ALL BADGERS ARE ELIL."

"Seriously, Black Rabbit. You couldn't expect me to just walk up to her and say "hey are you elil?" It's not that simple."

"I UNDERSTAND THAT, BUT WHY DID YOU HAVE TO LEAVE ASPEN BEHIND? HE'S SUPPOSED TO PROTECT YOU, BUT YOU DIDN'T GIVE HIM THE CHANCE. WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THE BADGER ANYWAY? YOU WERE KILLED BY A HRUDUDU."

"But I wasn't even on the iron road! What was the hrududu doing next to it?"

"IF YOU HAD BEEN EVEN FURTHER FROM THE IRON ROAD, YOU WOULD STILL BE ALIVE."

Campion rolled his eyes, tired of being blamed for everything by the Black Rabbit. He glanced at the line of rabbits further away when suddenly, one of them caught his eye.

"Hey Black Rabbit...that rabbit over there, is it...captain Moss?"

"HE'S NOT A CAPTAIN ANYMORE, BUT YES, IT'S HIM."

"I didn't know he was dead. What happened?"

"A WEASEL."

"Do you think I could see him? Talk to him for a few moments."

"VERY UNUSUAL REQUEST."

"Please?"

"THREE THINGS. ONE: DON'T TOUCH HIM LIKE YOU DID WITH BLACKAVAR. TWO: YOU MUST PROMISE ME YOU WILL STOP DYING. THREE: IF YOU AGREE TO THESE TERMS, I WILL GRANT YOUR REQUEST."

"I agree."

"VERY WELL."

Far in the distance, the rabbit Campion had identified as Moss broke from the chain, and was slowly moved towards him. As he got closer, Campion could see that he was motionless and enclosed in a bubble of some sort. Once it was right in front of him, the bubble burst, and Moss fell to the ground; he got back up and shook himself, before noticing the other rabbit's presence.
“Campion?”

“Yes, Moss. It’s me.”

“I would like to say it’s nice to see you again, but it’s not. Because it means you’re dead too.”

“Don’t worry about me, Moss. I’ll get sent back.”

Moss stared for a few moments at Campion, unable to understand what the latter had just said.

“Never mind about me,” Campion added, “what happened to you?”

“I was leading the survivors towards a new place, when we got attacked...”

“Survivors? What survivors?”

“Efrafa was destroyed; the whole warren caved in. So many rabbits were killed, including nearly the entire owsla except, me, Leo and Rake.”

“That’s terrible. But who are Rake and Leo?”

“They were promoted soon after you left the warren. But anyway, after it was destroyed, the survivors left to start a new life elsewhere, when we suddenly got attacked by this pack of weasels.”

“What happened then?”

“I was killed.”

“I know that. What else happened?”

“I probably wasn’t the only one, but I hope at least some of them survived.”

“I hope so too.”

The two rabbits remained silent, unsure what to say.

“How does it feel like, being dead?” Campion eventually asked.

“I don’t know how to describe it. It’s like trying to explain life to an unborn kitten. But I must say I have regrets. The biggest one being that I never found out who killed General Woundwort. The investigation only turned up one rabbit, a slave doe called Heather, but she was obviously innocent. I hope she’s still alive, and she’ll be all right without me, and the...”

“You should have spared yourself the trouble of investigating all the slaves and the outskirters,” Campion said. “It was Vervain.”

At that moment, Moss started to laugh.

“Oh Campion, your sense of humour never fails to amaze me!”

“I’m not joking!” This only made Moss laugh even louder, he clearly didn’t believe in Vervain’s guilt. “Fine. May I ask...”

“TIME IS UP!” came a loud voice from nowhere in particular.

“What? You didn’t say there was a time limit, Black Rabbit!”
"Before I go," Moss said. "I have one last request: if, while wandering through the Shadowlands, you come across Heather, tell her I love her. Hopefully this won't happen, though. I hope she's still alive..."

"I'll do my best," Campion said. "Goodbye Moss."

"Goodbye Campion. And thank you for being my best friend back in Efrafa."

All emotion vanished from Moss' face as the bubble rematerialized around him, and slowly moved back to the chain of rabbits in the distance.

Campion was filled with sadness as this happened. Moss was a good rabbit, he didn't deserve to be dead. He had to do something about it, even if it meant breaking a promise he had made the Black Rabbit. He pounced on the bubble, bursting it and colliding with Aspen. As the bubble burst, a loud thunderclap was heard.

"CAMPION, WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?" the Black Rabbit shouted.

"Don't worry, Moss, you'll soon be alive again."

"CAMPION, YOU SPECIFICALLY AGREED NOT TO TOUCH HIM! DO YOU REALIZE HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU JUST CAUSED?"

As if on cue, another, louder bang resonated through the air, and raw shadowy spiritual energy started to rain. Each drop hitting Campion's fur brought a painful stinging sensation.

"Campion," Moss said, "I don't want you getting in trouble over me."

"TOO LATE FOR THAT!"

The loud rumbling continued, and various explosions could be seen in the distance. Large cracks appeared in the sky, gradually widening.

"I really messed up, didn't I?" Campion cautiously said.

"THAT'S AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION, BUT ESSENTIALLY TRUE. THE SOONER YOU TWO ARE ALIVE AGAIN, THE BETTER. I HAVE A BIG MESS TO CLEAN UP."

Suddenly, Moss vanished.

"I'm sorry, Black Rabbit," Campion repeated, "but I just couldn't let Moss stay dead."

"IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN HALF AS BAD IF YOU HAD TOUCHED HIM BEFORE THE BUBBLE WAS REBUILT. I WILL HAVE TO PUNISH YOU, WITH A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH."

Campion fell silent, wondering what this "fate worse than death" would be, especially since his experiences with death weren't all that bad. The sky shattered around him like glass, revealing an endless black void. Suddenly, he found himself back in the world of the living, a few meters above the ground. As he fell, he landed in a thick, oily, black substance. He slowly swam out of the puddle, the gasoline covering his entire body. He realized how he had underestimated the trouble he was in; this punishment was even worse than Vervain's torture methods.

A few minutes later, he saw the blurry shape of Aspen approaching. While he could hear him speak, there was gasoline inside his ears, preventing him from making out the exact words.
"Just guide me to the nearest river now!" he shouted.
"His fluffy tail and posterior [sic] had already been sucked under by the mess he would drown in. Sidling up to him, Fungi closely watched his last moments. Just before his little wet nose and gasping mouth went under, he used his last breath to shriek, "Mother!"

--Titania, Finian

The smell was horrible, as the rotten body of Buckthorn attracted all nearby insects. A squirrel was carefully examining it, before running back to her two friends.

-"He's dead," she said sadly. "Been this way for most of the day, it looks like."

-"This is sad," the hedgehog said. "These rabbits clearly have been through a lot, and now one more of them has died."

-"Any idea how it happened, Crackers?" the second squirrel asked, wrapping her tail around the hedgehog.

-"It's really weird. If it was a predator, it would have eaten him, but the whole body is still there. Whoever killed him, didn't do so for food."

Not wanting to stay close to the corpse longer than necessary, the three friends retreated back to Rosie's den.

-"But if he wasn't killed for food, why was he killed?" Tumbler asked. "It's almost as if whoever is responsible did it...just because they could. Just for the sick fun of it."

-"It would take a really twisted mind to do something so horrible," Rosie said. "And how do we know they won't strike again?"

-"We should warn the other rabbits before it's too late!" Tumbler said.

-"Let's go then," Crackers replied. "Hopefully we won't find any more bodies underground."

Underground, there were no other bodies, everyone was still alive. Toadflax was pacing back and forth in front of all the other rabbits, who were neatly lined up.

-"So, Tindra, you openly admit to going above ground during the night," he said.

-"I told you, I was passing hraka. Go outside and see for yourself."

-"I did, but how do I know that the hraka is yours? That it's from last night?"

-"Use your nose, you idiot," Acorn mumbled. Unfortunately for him, Toadflax had heard the remark.

-"Of course I used my nose," he replied. "What made you think I didn't? Either way, it proves that Tindra was at the scene of the crime last night. If anything, this makes her look even more suspicious."

-"Look, do we even know for sure that one of us is responsible?" Flesca asked. "I'm a light sleeper,
I would have heard if someone went above ground.”

-”But you didn't hear me going above ground to pass hraka,” Tindra pointed out.

-”Let's try something else,” Speedwell suggested. “Whoever killed Buckthorn must have gotten blood on their claws.”

-”And cleaned it off afterwards, obviously,” Flesca said.

-”They could have removed most of it, but not all of it.”

-”Except it rained a few days ago,” Toadflax pointed out. “There are plenty of nearby puddles that the killer could have used to clean their paws afterwards more efficiently than with the tongue, removing even the slightest traces of blood. Now will you please stop wasting my time with your foolish ideas? I'm trying to lead the investigation here!”

-”I find it weird how you're the one leading the investigation,” Acorn suddenly said. “Who decided to put you in charge? So far you've just been shouting random illogical accusations, and you won't let us express our own theories. For all we know, maybe YOU killed Buckthorn and now you're trying to frame someone else.”

Everyone looked at Acorn, shocked at his sudden outburst. While nearly everyone agreed with what he had just said, none of them had been brave enough to stand up to the bully in charge. Toadflax, meanwhile, was visibly angry.

-”How dare you...”

It looked like he was about to strike Acorn, when suddenly...

-”Rabbits!”

Everyone turned their heads to look at the great burrow's entrance, where two squirrels and a hedgehog were standing.

-”Your friend was killed during the night,” the hedgehog continued.

-”You might want to be careful, with a murderer on the loose,” Tumbler added. “We don't want any more of you to die.”

-”What are you doing here?” Toadflax said, as he hopped over to the creatures. “Only rabbits are allowed underground.”

-”Since when? I never heard this rule before...”

-”We just wanted to warn...”

-”We're aware,” Toadflax continued, “and in the middle of something important right now. So go away! Shoo! Out!”

-”Come, Rosie,” Tumbler whispered, “let's go. If they won't listen, there's not much we can do.”

As Rosie and Tumbler made their way back above ground, Crackers stared in anger at Toadflax, before slapping him across the face with her tail.

-”NOBODY TALKS TO MY FRIENDS LIKE THAT OKAY!”
Toadflax rolled his eyes, and it looked like he was about to hop back to the other rabbits. At the
last moment, however, he kicked the squirrel with his hind legs.

Crackers remained in the air for several moments before she crashed in the grass a short distance
from the warren.

"Ow."

"What happened to you?" Rosie asked, as she helped the squirrel get up.

"That big jerk kicked me when I told him what I truly thought. I know he said that only rabbits
were allowed underground, but what kind of messed-up rule is that anyway?"

"That really wasn't nice at all," Tumbler said. "The next time he comes back above ground, I'll
make him apologize to you."

"Thanks, but I don't want you getting hurt too."

"I don't think all the rabbits are like the one who talked to us," Rosie said. "From what I saw,
they're all afraid of him. And after what he did to you, Crackers, I can't say I blame them. We
should help them overthrow him."

"Might be easier said than done," Tumbler replied. "But if we can get to talk to the others while
he's absent, we might have a chance."

The three creatures returned to Rosie's den, with Crackers dancing the whole way. However, her
movements weren't as fluid as those she had demonstrated to Rosie and Tumbler the previous day.

"That kick hurt my right-hind paw," she said. "There's supposed to be a contest tomorrow night,
and there's no way I'll be able to perform all my moves in this state."

"Could you perhaps alter your moves so you don't put too much strain on that paw?" Tumbler
suggested.

"You must rest the paw," Rosie added. "And maybe try some herbs to take the pain away."

"It's worth looking into. Would you want to come with me tomorrow night, to watch me and the
others perform?"

"That would be snazz!" Tumbler said.

"It sure would," Rosie said.

"It's going to be great to have you two. I hope I won't disappoint you..."

"Nonono you won't, you're a great dancer!"

Meanwhile underground, the interrogation continued.

"Was that really necessary?" Tindra asked. "I'm sure they didn't mean any harm."

"Now where were we?" Toadflax said, clearly avoiding the doe's question. "Oh yes, the killer
washed their claws in a puddle after they were done. There are several puddles around the warren,
though, so we need to find out which one was used."

"How do you intend to do that?" Flesca asked.
"I'm going to need a volunteer to drink from all the puddles, and see if they can taste the blood in the water."

"Of course he wouldn't do it himself," Tindra mumbled.

"What does blood taste like anyway?" Acorn added.

"And how will that help us figure out who is the murderer?" Speedwell said.

"We check the nearby pawprints, to see who was near the puddle recently. No two rabbits have the same pawprints, so it should be easy to identify."

"Except that by going near the puddle, we'll be adding more prints," Acorn pointed out. "Come on, admit it, you have no idea what you're doing."

As he made his way out of Darkhaven with the others, Blueberry stopped. Based on Woundwort's outburst earlier, the one-eyed rabbit appeared to be in a really nasty mood, and Blueberry would rather stay away. Besides, he still thought that the execution of Silverweed was an overly harsh punishment, and wanted nothing to do with it. Therefore, he simply lied down near the edge of the pit.

Suddenly, he was startled by a long, thin object that found itself wrapped around his abdomen, and he was flipped on his back.

"Hey! What the..."

"Got you..." Another rabbit approached Blueberry, and stared at him with a look of surprise on his face. "You're a bunny?"

"Of course I'm a bunny! What did you think I was?"

"Oops." The rabbit untangled Blueberry. As the kitten got up, he got a closer look at the stranger. He had mostly brown fur, but with black ears. He was wearing a necklace, and also had several twigs and other small objects attached to his hind legs.

"I thought you were a bat, with all this fog," the stranger said.

"No harm done." Blueberry cleaned his fur. "What's your name?"

"My name's Acacia, and I'm from the desert! What's your name?"

"I'm Blueberry. The desert? That's far away, what brings you here?"

"I travel a lot, searching for villains so I can capture them and bring them to the proper authorities."

"So you're a bounty hunter?"

"You could call it that."

"That's a pretty dangerous task. You're very brave to be doing this."

"It is rather dangerous at times. But I have do it to be able to bring flayrah to my friend Nicole."

"Oooh, romance! Is she the one who gave you that necklace?"
"What? No! She's more like a sister to me than a girlfriend. And no, the necklace belongs to another friend of mine. He's been very busy recently, learning all about becoming a water-rabbit. I'm keeping it for him in his absence.

"A water-rabbit? You mean a sailor, or a swimmer?"

"He seemed sad the last time I saw him." Acacia lowered his head. "He's lonely. He really doesn't have many friends, and he's also been searching for a girlfriend."

"More romance! Speaking of which, I met someone a while back..."

Acacia, however, appeared to no longer be paying attention; there was something further away that had caught his attention. He made a few cautious steps, before suddenly throwing the same long thin object he had used on Blueberry earlier. This time, it collided with a bat in the sky, bringing it down to the ground, tied up so that it couldn't escape.

"NOW I got you!"

"What do you have against that bat?" Blueberry asked.

"It killed the parents of a mouse friend of mine. Why it didn't stick with insects, I don't know, but I intend to bring it to the appropriate authorities so they can deal with it."

"The mouse police? Really?" Blueberry was clearly not convinced.

"Not just mice, but also other small woodland creatures like rats and hedgehogs. Many species are working together to protect themselves."

"Didn't know that."

"Well, now that I captured the bat, I should probably go. Nice meeting you, Blueberry! By the way, are there any villains you know of, that you would want me to take care of?"

"No, not that I can think of..."

"All right then. See you later!"

With that, Acacia hopped away, dragging the bat behind him. The bat was clearly unhappy about this, and squeaked furiously.

Blueberry, meanwhile continued to stare at Acacia as he faded away into the fog. After he was gone, he suddenly remembered Vervain. Acacia had offered to take care of any “villains” he might be dealing with, but the bearded rabbit had temporarily escaped his mind.

“Oh well, I'll just have to take care of him myself if necessary..."
Fredrick was wandering throughout his junkyard, his mind filled with conflicting thoughts. The inspector was late, and at this rate he would not be able to attend Daisy's graduation. Should he wait just a few more minutes, or should he just let Lionel-Hector deal with the inspector? Neither choice was appealing.

He had yet to reach a decision when he suddenly saw a car near the edge of the pit where the junkyard was built. This was not an old, broken-down car like the many he had scrapped, but a new model, clean and shiny, and there was someone getting out of it. This could only mean one thing. He ran towards the dirt trail leading outside the pit; building a proper staircase was something he had delayed far too long.

As he got closer, he looked at the inspector. She had blonde hair and brown eyes; her T-shirt was black with white stripes, and her name tag was unusually imprecise, reading only “Hazel C.”

-“Greetings, ma'am,” he said. “My name is Fredrick H. Chesterflooz, and I'm the owner of Gryphon Junkyards Inc.”

The two shook hands.

-“Good day,” Hazel said. “Sorry I'm late, but with this fog I had to be really careful when driving. I'm ready to start the inspection whenever you are.”

-“Good. Right this way.”

Fredrick walked towards the tortuous path leading to the bottom of the pit, with Hazel following. Halfway through the descent, she asked:

-“Is there any other way to the bottom?”

-“Not yet...”

-“No guard rails, unstable soil, this doesn't look very safe.”

After both had reached the bottom of the pit, Hazel took out her clipboard and started scribbling rapidly.

-“Hiya inspector!” came another voice. “I'm Lionel-Hector Appleby, and I work here.”

Hazel raised her eyes, and shook hands with the employee. He had a painfully firm handshake.

-“So,” Hazel said, “first I need to see your scrap metal dealer license, to make sure this is in order.”

-“I'll go get it,” Fredrick said.

-“Don't bother, here it is,” Lionel-Hector said, as he handed Hazel a piece of paper, which she spent a few moments reading.
"But this license expired four months ago!"

"Mr Appleby!" Fredrick shouted in anger. "The license was renewed, I'll go get the paperwork, I'll be right back. In the meantime, LH, perhaps you can show Ms C around the junkyard?"

With that, he walked inside the building, to search for the right piece of paper.

It took a while for Fredrick to find the license. It was supposed to be right there on his desk, but earlier he had put all papers inside the drawer without sorting them. When he finally found it, he made his way out of the building, and heard the loud rumbling of an engine. He honestly hoped it was not what he thought it was. He ran towards the crane, and saw Lionel-Hector sitting inside the cabin, with Hazel standing a short distance away.

"What are you doing?" he shouted.

"What?" Lionel-Hector turned his head to look at him. "Oh, I'm just showing Ms C the crane here."

"But it's broken. You know how it has a tendency to suddenly drop."

Just as he said that, the crane's wire suddenly unrolled, and the hook crashed to the ground.

"I know," Lionel-Hector said. "But if I just pull this switch here," he did so, "it goes right back up. See?"

"Wrong switch! The one you just flipped closes the hook. Pull the other one!"

"Oh." Lionel-Hector said simply, as he pulled the correct switch.

"This seems like a security hazard," Hazel said. "How long has this been broken?"

Fredrick was about to reply, but Lionel-Hector gave the worst possible answer: the truth.

"Several years..."

Eventually, it was time to inspect the main building. Hazel was walking through the office, and was paying close attention to Lionel-Hector's desk in a far corner.

"What is this?" she asked, pointing at an object on top of the desk.

"It's a typewriter," Lionel-Hector said.

"I know, but what is it doing on your desk? Don't you use computers?"

"I..."

"Wait. What's that noise?"

Everyone remained silent for a few moments, but no noise was heard.

"Well, whatever it was, it's gone now," Hazel said. "Now what were you saying?"

"I'm..."

"We have computers, that typewriter is just a silly project he's been working on for months now,"
Fredrick said, before his employee could make the situation even worse.

-"I see," Hazel said. She walked around the desk, before she suddenly noticed that part of the typewriter wasn't the same colour as the rest. "Looks like it's rusting."

-"Oh dear, I thought I had already sorted that out," Lionel-Hector said matter-of-factly. He pressed one of the keys, but its mechanism fell apart. Several other keys soon followed.

-"...whoops."

-"Wait. There's that noise again," Hazel said suddenly.

The three stopped to listen. This time, everyone heard a soft splashing sound.

-"I'll go see what it is," Lionel-Hector said.

-"You're not going alone," Fredrick said sternly. "I'm coming with you."

Fredrick and Lionel-Hector ran out of the building, leaving Hazel inside. She sighed, and took more notes on her clipboard, before following the two men outside. It did not take them long to pinpoint the source of the noise: the crane was still functioning, the hook had just fallen inside a large barrel on the edge of the pit, and was now being raised again.

-"LH!" Fredrick shouted. "Why didn't you turn it off after you were done with it?"

-"...whoops. Don't worry, Sir Fred, I'll turn it off now, see?"

Lionel-Hector jumped inside the crane's cabin, and pulled the switch.

-"It's not working."

-"That's because you pulled the wrong switch again! You just opened the hook."

-"I don't know who came up with the placement of these switches, it's so illogical."

He tried to pull the second switch, but instead he ripped it off the control panel. He awkwardly stared at it for a few moments before turning to Fredrick.

-"What do I do now?"

Fredrick could not stay calm any longer. He picked up the first object he could find (which happened to be an old blender) and threw it onto the crane, shattering the cabin's windshield. Lionel-Hector jumped out of the cabin, and walked over to Fredrick.

-"What did you do that for? You could have killed me!"

Hazel watched the argument from a distance. The two people in charge of Gryphon Junkyards Inc where plainly incompetent. While she hadn't toured the entire junkyard yet, she already knew what her report would say. She simply walked out of the junkyard through the same, unstable dirt path she had taken when she had arrived.

Fredrick and Lionel-Hector kept arguing for a while, until Lionel-Hector said:

-"Can't you see we're making a poor impression on the inspector?"

-"The inspector? Oh no, I forgot all about her."
Fredrick ran back inside the building, but Hazel was not there. He went back outside just in time to hear her car's engine.

"She's gone," he said simply. "She's gone! Do you realize what this means?"

Fredrick broke into a jig, and soon forced Lionel-Hector to join him.

"Why are you so happy, sir Fred?"

"Don't you see? Now that the inspection is over, I can go to my daughter's graduation without worrying about anything!"

Fredrick ran towards the path as fast as he could, while Lionel-Hector stayed behind, staring at his employer in shock. A few moments later, he heard the hook crash into the barrel again.

"But what about the crane?" he shouted.

"I'll deal with it when I come back!"
“It's only in fairy tales that princesses can afford to wait for the handsome prince to save them. In real life, they have to bust out of their own coffins and do the saving themselves.”

--Meg Cabot, Abandon

Primrose was still trying to find a way out of the warren, when she suddenly felt a sharp pain in her tail. There was only one explanation: Vervain had caught her, this was the end.

She was dragged on the ground a short distance, before she suddenly felt herself carried upwards. Before she had a chance to realize what was happening, her hind legs had left the ground, followed soon afterwards by the rest of her body. She was hanging upside down in mid-air.

Terrified and in intense pain, it took her a while to notice Vervain on the ground, wandering through piles of trash searching for her. If he was down there, then it wasn't him who had captured her. She painfully looked upwards, and saw the metal hook of the crane. She gasped in fear as she saw how large this horrible monster was. Suddenly, she felt herself falling, causing her to squeal in terror.

Then, just as suddenly as she had started to fall, she landed in a barrel of water. She had no idea what was going on, but that was the least of concerns. She tried desperately to make it to the surface so she could breathe, to no avail. After what felt like forever, she was pulled upwards again, out of the water.

Her fur soaking wet, Primrose tried to catch her breath. After having regained enough strength to move, she tried kicking the hook, with the hopes that it would let her go, but nothing happened, it stubbornly held on to her tail.

Suddenly, she felt herself falling again, and landed in the water. As she struggled to remain conscious and uselessly attempted to get her head out of the water, she heard the loud cry of a seagull; it sounded even worse than usual, with her ears filled with water. To make things worse, she only heard one cry; Kehaar had plainly flown away without doing anything to help her. He had most likely not spotted her.

Once again, the hook was raised, and Primrose desperately gasped for air. It was plain that whatever this monster was, it took great pleasure in torturing her. After a few moments, she fell for the third time, but this time, she was able to return to the surface. The hook had set her free.

She slowly swam to the edge, and pushed herself out of the barrel, landing roughly on the ground next to it. She spent a long time lying on the ground, motionless. The pain in her tail was unbearable, but at least Vervain hadn't found her.

After a while, she heard some soft footsteps. She slowly opened her eyes and saw the one rabbit she feared the most, staring at her with an evil smirk on his face. She opened her mouth, but she didn't have enough strength to squeal. She simply ran away as fast as she could. After a few moments, she crashed into another rabbit; it was Blueberry, but with her blurry vision, she mistook him for the Black Rabbit of Inlé.

-"Wha..." the kitten said in surprise. “Say, ma'am, there's something wrong with your tail.”

-"My lord,” Primrose said, “please take me with you. Anything to get me away from him.”
"What are you talking about? You're in no condition to go anywhere. You mustn't let your wound get infected..."

Primrose couldn't understand what the Black Rabbit was saying. Why didn't he just take her to Inlé? As Vervain kept getting closer, she had no choice but to keep running.

Moments later, Vervain arrived next to Blueberry.

"Which way did she go?" he shouted.

"That way," the kitten replied, pointing towards Hazel's car. "Just follow the blood. I hope she'll liv..."

"Blood?"

"Yes, her tail is bleeding. In fact, you stepped in it..."

Vervain looked down. His front paws were in a puddle of Primrose's blood. The sight was more than he could handle. He pounced onto Blueberry, and both rabbits fell over the edge. A few moments later, they landed on a mattress, the same one that had saved Blueberry's life earlier; Vervain was on top of him.

"Seriously, Vervain?" the black rabbit said. "That's the second time you shove me today! What is wrong with you?"

"Blood..." Vervain weakly mumbled.

"Oi! What are you two doing?"

Vervain turned his head, and saw Granite angrily staring at him.

"She's just outside the pit. Just follow the blood and you'll find her," the bearded rabbit said; he didn't feel strong enough to track down Primrose himself, so he might as well let Granite do it.

"I'm going right away!" the white rabbit shouted. "And as soon as she's back in the pit, I'm fighting you, Vervain."

With that, Granite ran towards the path leading out of the warren.

"Would you mind letting me get up?" Blueberry said.

Vervain silently hopped off Blueberry, and ran away before the kitten could say anything. He spent a long time wandering throughout the pit. After a while, he hopped on top of a heap of trash; the fog had started to clear, and the view was rather decent.

"I seem to be alone here with that half-sized Blueberry rabbit," he told no-one in particular. "This is creepy."

"Except you're not." Vervain leaped back in fear, almost falling off the trash, before turning to see who had spoken.

"You!"

The Speaker of the Past was staring at him, her face not showing a single emotion.

"You are not feeling well, Vervain," she eventually said.
"Of course not, do you realize how much you scared me?"

"There's something else..."

Before the Speaker could finish her sentence, Vervain had already run off.

After her encounter with “the Black Rabbit”, Primrose had continued to run. Her strength was rapidly fading, and she left a trail of blood everywhere she went. Suddenly, she saw two bright red lights further away, and heard a loud noise. They were the lights at the back of Hazel's car, but she thought they were the eyes of the Black Rabbit; she ran towards them and climbed on top of the bumper. Moments later, the vehicle started to move, carrying her away from the junkyard.

Primrose remained on the bumper for a long time, in a state of half-consciousness. The pain persisted, and a few drops of blood fell from her tail onto the road at regular intervals. After a while, a bump caused her to fall off the bumper, landing roughly in the grass next to the road.

"Hazel...I love you..." were her last words before losing consciousness.
“I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.”

--Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

"Stoopid foog! Kehaar see noddings in dis weather."

Kehaar was flying in the area around Watership Down, continuing to search for Blackberry and Primrose.

"Fly lowa, ye silly boid,” Hannah said. “How do ye expect to see anyting oderwiz?"

"Ya."

Uttering one of his signature cries, Kehaar dove towards the ground, and was soon flying just above the top of the trees.

"Ye see any rabbits, Kehaa?"

"Nah. Kehaar see noddings. Ees veree sad."

"Don worry Kehaa, youl fine 'em. Juss keep a low atitude."

Kehaar did so, but did not find the rabbits. At one point, he flew over Darkhaven, but failed to spot Primrose, as she inside the barrel at the time. He remained awkwardly silent for most of the flight, until he suddenly closed his eyes and uttered a loud cry.

"Kehaa, wash where yer goin!" Hannah said desperately.

Kehaar opened his eyes, but it was already too late, and he collided with the tree. After falling down a few branches, he finally landed on his back on an especially large one. Hannah crawled out from underneath him.

"Hoo many tims do I have to remine ya to flee wit yer eyes open?"

"Kehaar so sorry." He wiped tears from his eyes. “But Kehaar fail. Everything is fail.”

"What are ye talkin aboot, fail?"

"Kehaar fly everywhere, but didn't find mees Plackberry or mees Prim. Dey gone!"

"What makes ye tink that, Kehaa? Ye cnt assume ey're dead oonless ye have any bodehs te prov they arr."

Kehaar did not listen, and kept crying. After a few minutes, he let out a loud sigh.

"I go to peeg vater,” he finally said.

"Whet? But don't ye remembah wat happen lass tim ye went 'ere?"

Kehaar thought back of that day when he had visited the Big Water. He had left disillusioned with his former friends. He had found them selfish and arrogant, and they took great pleasure in trashing
puffin nests for no reason. But the wonderful waves, the sounds of boats, the taste of fresh fish...

-“I go anyvay,” he eventually said.

-“Is dere anytin ah can do er say to make ye see c'mon sense?”

-“Nah.”

-“All righty ‘en. Go. I'm not shtoppin ye.”

-“I'll just drop you off at Watership Down before I go, ya?”

-“Na, don't bother. Whil I'm 'ere, ah might as well go see Tassel. The squeeel.”

-“Ya sure?” Kehaar asked.

-“Oh sure I'm sure. If yer gonna go, juss go.”

-“Vell, goodbye Hannyah. Maybe I see ya anudder time, ya?”

-“Ye. I say. Bye now.”

Kehaar nodded, and uttered a loud cry as he took off; Hannah put her front paws in her ears so she wouldn't hear him. The vibrations shook the entire tree, and a leaf fell on top of the mouse.

Blackberry had been following the strangers’ tracks for a while, when her nose suddenly caught a dreadful smell. As she tried to identify it, she realized that it was the scent of rabbit blood. There was no smell of elil, so she could safely approach the source of the smell. She made a few cautious steps towards in that direction, and slowly brushed away the undergrowth to get a closer look. Further away, right next to a road, she could see the motionless body of a rabbit. As she got even closer, she finally recognized the body, and she gasped in shock: it was Primrose. What had happened to her?

A quick examination showed that Primrose was thankfully still alive, but she was clearly in a bad way, especially her tail. The top priority was to stop the tail from bleeding; Blackberry had a supply of healing herbs at the Down, but unfortunately she didn't have anything available at the moment. She found a leaf on the ground and wrapped it around her friend's tail; it would have to do until they got back to the warren. But until then, they couldn't stay there: it was only a matter of time before the scent of blood attracted elil. She started to lick her friend's face, until she slowly opened her eyes.

-“Do you think you will be able to get up now?”

Primrose weakly nodded, and slowly got up. The two does made their way back to the river, and started to walk alongside it. Progress was very slow: while the bleeding had stopped, Primrose was still in great pain. Suddenly, Blackberry heard a twig snap. She worriedly looked behind her, but was relieved when she saw that the creature responsible for the noise was another rabbit. It was Granite, but she had never seen him before, and therefore didn't recognize him.

-“I'm sorry to bother you, sir,” she said, “but could you please help my friend? She's wounded, and I'm trying to get her back to our warren. Could you please help us?”

-“I'm afraid you'll have to come with me to Darkhaven,” the stranger replied.

As she heard the word “Darkhaven”, Primrose raised her ears. She cast a glance at the stranger,
then fell to the ground.

-”Don't let him take me,” she begged Blackberry. “He's going to kill me.”

Blackberry thought quickly. At first, she thought that Primrose might be raving, but the stranger had said that he would take them to a place called “Darkhaven”. With a name like that, it couldn't possibly be friendly.

Blackberry made a few cautious steps backwards, and looked around her. The boat she had noticed a while earlier was on the riverbank, right where she had left it.

-”As soon as I stamp, jump onto the boat,” she whispered in her friend's ear.

-”I was hoping we would be able to avoid fighting,” the stranger said with a sigh, “but your refusal to cooperate leaves me no choice.”

-”NOW!” Blackberry shouted as she stamped.

Primrose hopped towards the boat; she nearly fell into the water, but Blackberry pushed her to safety, before pushing the boat off the shore into the water. The current was rather fast, and the boat was soon in the middle of the river; they had successfully escaped. Blackberry sighed with relief, and lied down on the bottom of the boat.

Suddenly, she found herself knocked onto her back, with another creature's paw on her neck. A quick glance besides her showed that Primrose was in the exact same situation.

-”Now, you didn't seriously think a river would stop me, did you?” Granite said with an evil smirk.

-”Why are you doing this to us?” Blackberry asked.

-”My leader said that any hlessil I find are to be brought back to the warren. So will you come peacefully or do I have to force you?”

The two does were too afraid to reply. Granite growled menacingly, but suddenly fell silent as he heard loud rumbling. Before anyone could react, the boat plunged over the edge of the waterfall, carrying all three rabbits with it.
The Long Wait

“The Long Wait

‘Bewilderment, doubt, and a feeling of hopeless [sic] had overcame [sic] them then, and overcame them now.’

--Infinite Light, *The Four Warrens*

Bigwig slowly made his way above ground. It was morning, half a day after his and Hazel's return to Watership Down after their failed mission to find Blackberry and Primrose. The previous evening, he was not yet ready to admit defeat. However, since then, he had thought things over more clearly, and had come to the conclusion that continuing the search would be pointless. Either the two does were dead, or they had intentionally concealed their whereabouts so they couldn't be found. He could see Hazel further away, sitting on the edge of the Down, staring in the distance. He approached his Chief.

-"How are you feeling, this morning, Hazel?"

Hazel did not flinch, but kept staring in the distance.

-"I'm waiting."

-"What are you waiting for?"

-"Primrose and Blackberry."

Bigwig was taken aback by this response. Last night, Hazel was convinced the does was dead, and now he was waiting for them. He could only find one possible explanation for this.

-Hazel, you mustn't give up on life. They wouldn't want that."

-"Who says I'm giving up on life?"

-"But didn't you say you..."

-"They'll be back. Tonight."

Bigwig sighed. No two rabbits grieved the same way, but Hazel's coping mechanism was quite unusual. Bigwig would have to keep a close eye on him, to make sure he still ate and took care of himself. He hopped away to silflay, and sat next to Fiver.

-"It's really sad, the way your older brother is feeling, isn't it?" he said.

-"He'll probably be all right, when tonight comes,” Fiver replied.

-"You mean they really WILL come back?"

-"Most likely. Meadow is gone searching for them and everything seems to point towards success.”

-"Oh, right, Meadow. You met her?"

-"She's a great rabbit."

-"But how do you know she will find them? Is it one of your visions or something?”
“Silverweed told me.”

“Silverweed? Isn't that the crazy poet from Cowslip's warren?”

“Yes, it's him. He joined the warren last night.”

“From what I've seen last night, he wasn't the only one who joined. Are the others from Cowslip's warren too?” Bigwig seemed to be growing aggressive.

“Bigwig, calm down. He's the only one from there, and he's quite harmless.”

“Harmless? You call him harmless? Don't you remember what happened to me at his warren, how I almost died in the wire?”

“I remember everything, Bigwig, but Silverweed wants to start a new life. Like Hickory, Marigold and all the others at Redstone.”

“I'll have to discuss this with Hazel. What about the others? Who are they, and what are they doing here?”

“They came here after their old warren was destroyed.”

“So many warrens getting destroyed...what was it this time?”

“They didn't say.”

“That's besides the point. What are they like?”

“They seem like a good bunch.”

“Have they been causing any trouble?”

“Most of them have been pretty harmless.”

“Most of them?”

“Hawkbit and Dandelion have been complaining about one of them. I didn't get to fully investigate the matter yet.”

“Those two really like to complain, don't they? Speaking of which, I should probably go talk to Pipkin, to see how he handled owsla business in my absence.”

“See you later Bigwig.”

With that, Bigwig hopped away. Now that the captain was gone, Fiver hopped over to Hazel. The two rabbits spent a while sitting next to each other.

“The waiting is hard,” Hazel finally said.

“I can see why, Hazel,” Fiver replied. “But you won't have to wait long now. Less than one day left.”

“I know, Fiver but...I feel so powerless. Meadow will bring them back, and there's no way I can help.”

“What you need is something to keep you busy while you wait. They should return tonight, so
there's no point in staying here all day waiting.”

-“What else is there to do?”

-“Like I said last night, several rabbits joined the warren while you were gone. You said you wanted to meet them, and I have a feeling that Bigwig might cause trouble.”

-“Good old Bigwig...are there many?”

-“Hrair. Bucks and does.”

-“What do you think of them?”

-“I didn't have any bad feelings or visions about them. They seem like a good bunch.”

-“That's good news. I'll go and meet them. I just hope that...”

-“You have nothing to worry about, Hazel. Everything will be all right.”

Hazel remained silent for a few moments, before turning around and starting to walk towards the warren, with Fiver following him. Just as he was about to enter the warren, however, he heard some steps in the grass. He didn't stop to think; he turned around and ran towards the source of the noise.

-“Primrose! You're ba-” He abruptly stopped as he realized that the rabbit was not Primrose, but another doe, and she was holding several flowers in her mouth. “Oh, sorry Flora, I mistook you for someone else.”

-“Don't worry about it,” Flora replied, dropping the flowers in front of her. “Do you know where I can find Clover?”

-“She's at silflay with Blackberry and Thethuthinnang on the other side of the tree,” Fiver explained.

-“Thank you.”

With that, Flora hopped away.

-“Are you ready to go underground now, Hazel?” Fiver asked.

-“Yes. Let's go.”

As they entered the warren, however, they were immediately tacked by the kittens.

-“Father, where have you been?”

-“We missed you!”

-“Where's mother?”

-“Why are you two so quiet?”

-“Yeah, you're definitely keeping secrets!”

-“Has he told you any secrets, uncle Fiver?”

Flora, meanwhile, hopped over to the spot Fiver had indicated. Like he had said, Thethuthinnang
and Blackberry were present alongside Clover. She debated whether to present her gift to Clover right now, or wait until she was alone. However, she was unable to reach a decision before Clover noticed her presence.

-“Hey Flora, how's it going?”

She would have to do it now. Waiting could only make the situation even more awkward.

-“Clover, these are for you.”

Flora dropped the flowers in front of Clover. It was an elaborate bouquet, with daisies, roses and cornflowers, as well as a four-leaf clover in the middle.

-“For me?”

Flora nodded.

-“They're...they're beautiful,” Clover continued. “Thank you.”

-“Pretty flowers for a pretty bun.”

Clover hopped closer to Flora and nuzzled her.

-“I really appreciate these.”

-“Thank you.”

-“So...want to play tail tag?”

-“Sure!”

With that, the two does hopped away. Blackberry looked at Thethuthinnang in confusion.

-“What just happened?”

-“They're going to play tail tag. It's a fun game, I used to play that all the time with Hyzenthay back at the old warren.”

-“Last time I played that game, it was with Bluebell. He said that if he were to win, his prize would be a kiss from me. He lost, but he STILL tried to kiss me.”
“But when they turned to go back, they found they couldn't. The edge of the wood had completely disappeared, but not because of the mist. It seemed as if it had been moved. One second it was just behind them, the next, it was gone.”

--”Pipkin3”, *Brindle 1: The Forest of Dreams*

The boat landed into a tree branch hanging over the waterfall, but this did little to help the rabbits onboard. Primrose quickly slid off the boat into the water below. Blackberry desperately clung onto the boat by the tips of her claws, but Granite, also hanging off the boat, accidentally kicked her in the face with his hind legs, causing her to fall.

The water was uncomfortably cold, and Blackberry struggled to stay afloat. Primrose was half-conscious, and made no attempt at fighting the current. Both does soon fell down another, smaller waterfall.

Luckily, the current seemed to slow down following the second waterfall, allowing Blackberry to carry Primrose to the shore. But that was only a temporary solution: they were both exhausted and soaking wet, not to mention that the scent of blood from Primrose's tail would attract elil. Granite was still hanging off the boat, but that was Blackberry's least concern at the moment. She looked around, desperately trying to think of a solution.

Suddenly, she recognized the area. Shortly before Bigwig's infiltration of Efrafa, he had an encounter with a fox. While Bigwig led it away, Blackberry and the others hid in a small chamber behind a waterfall. She hopped over to the waterfall and put her paw in the stream, clearly revealing the chamber. The water would mask their scent while they rested enough to finish their journey.

"I found a safe place,” Blackberry said, hopping back to her friend.

Primrose weakly raised her head and tried to look at Blackberry, but her vision was all blurry. She did not utter a sound.

"Come on, it's not far!”

Primrose got up and took a few cautious steps. She was evidently in a great deal of pain, and every step was a challenge for her. After what felt like forever, she finally managed to make it inside the cavern, where she collapsed on the ground, unconscious. Blackberry examined her tail; it was in a bad way, still bleeding, and the leaves she had placed on it earlier had fallen off in the water.

Blackberry jumped out of the cavern; she could not expect to find the exact herbs to treat her friend, she just needed something that could stop the bleeding until they could get back to Watership Down. She soon found a few large leaves, and hopped back to the river. However, there was another creature there floating on the surface, motionless. As she looked at it, she realized that it was Granite, who had apparently fallen from the branch while she was in the cavern. The boat was floating further away, broken in two.

Blackberry couldn't leave a rabbit in need behind. She jumped in the river and grabbed him by the ear, slowly pulling him to the shore. He was much heavier than she was, making this extremely difficult. Soon after reaching the shore, he regained consciousness, coughing up some water, and stood back up.
"Why did you save me?" he said weakly.

"I'm not going to let anyone die if I can prevent it."

"Nobody ever did this for me in Darkhaven."

"I don't know what Darkhaven is, but it sounds like a bad place. Don't go back there."

"Where should I go then?"

"Anywhere. That's for you to decide."

With that, she hopped back to the cavern, and applied the leaves to Primrose's tail.

Granite stared at the waterfall for a long time. When he had found the two does on the boat, he had every intention of killing them. After Blackberry had saved his life, however, he didn't feel comfortable doing that anymore. Perhaps she was right, and he should leave Darkhaven forever and start a new life elsewhere. But he had spent his entire life there, and had no other place to go. Besides, if he just vanished, the others would probably track him down and execute him as a traitor. Going back wasn't very appealing, but he had no choice.

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It took a while for Fiver and Hazel to break free from the kittens. Even Pipkin was unable to get them to participate in junior owsla training. Eventually, Hyzenthay and Vilthuril were forced to pick them up one by one and carry them back to the burrow.

"I'm going to need someone to keep an eye on them while I meet the newcomers," Hazel said.

"Strawberry could do a good job," Vilthuril suggested.

"Strawberry? He never struck me as the fatherly type."

"Hazel," Fiver interjected, "I think Vilthuril is talking about another Strawberry, who joined the warren in your absence."

"Fiver's right," Vilthuril replied. "I think she should be able to take care of them for the day."

"If you say so..." Hazel said, clearly unsure.

"I'll go get her," Fiver said.

Fiver hopped out of the burrow towards the Honeycomb; Strawberry was lying in a corner, and he woke her up.

"What is it Fiver?"

"Can I ask you a favour?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"Could you watch over some kittens for the afternoon?"

"Of course, but...why me? I never dealt with kittens in all my life."

"I think you can still manage it, and Vilthuril seems to think so too. Besides, it's not for long."

"I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee anything."
Fiver led Strawberry to Hazel's burrow; she took one quick glance at the kittens, and lied down in a corner, keeping an eye on them. The two brothers left the burrow and went towards the Honeycomb.

-“Are you sure she's reliable, Fiver?” Hazel asked.

-“Hazel, you worry way too much.”

The Darkhaveners slowly made their way back to the warren. The mission to dispose of Silverweed had not gone as expected, but most rabbits were nevertheless satisfied. Silverweed was probably dead, having been run over by the hrududu as planned.

Woundwort, however, disagreed, as Silverweed's body was nowhere to be found. When Orchis pointed out he had probably been vaporized by the impact with the hrududu, Woundwort replied that there still should have been blood; nobody was able to find a convincing counterargument.

Everyone remained silent for the rest of the journey back to the warren. Once they were back, they climbed down the same ramp they had used when they left. It was in the middle of the night, and the warren seemed deserted.

Woundwort wandered around the warren, trying to find Granite, Vervain or the prisoner. The first rabbit he stumbled upon was Vervain, lying near a pile of trash in a tharn state.

-“Vervain, what are you doing?” Woundwort asked. He waited several moments for an answer, but Vervain remained silent.

-“VERVAI!” he shouted. This brought the bearded rabbit out of his trance, but he remained very confused.

-“General, you're back! I'm sorry I tried to kill you...”

-“Are you seriously still talking about this? Stop these ridiculous confessions, I know it wasn't you. Anyway, where is the prisoner?”

Vervain gulped. The prisoner had escaped, and it was his fault. To make things worse, the prisoner knew the exact location of the outsiders' warren.

-“Who?” he said, feigning ignorance.

-“You know who I'm talking about! The prisoner Granite found on wide patrol. Show me where she is.”

-“...I can't sir.”

-“Why not?”

-“She's not here, sir.”

-“Where is she?”

-“Away, sir.”

-“Away WHERE?”
Woundwort placed one of his front paws on Vervain's head, keeping him pinned to the ground. Vervain would have no choice but to tell the whole truth.

-"Ran away, sir."
-"Why didn't you stop her?"
-"Granite went instead, sir."

Woundwort let out a loud sigh.

-"There is no limit to your incompetence. Such sloppiness must be punished."

Vervain gasped. Woundwort remained silent for a few moments as he thought about the appropriate punishment.

-"The sentence," the General eventually said, "is for you to be placed on your back, a hole dug underneath you, and your ears buried."

-"Wait!" came Orchis' sudden cry.
-"I'm not listening to your ideas again, Orchis," Woundwort said. "I could have executed Silverweed here in Darkhaven, but you convinced me to get him crushed by a hrududu instead. If I hadn't listened to you, he wouldn't have escaped, and the other prisoner wouldn't have escaped either."

-"This method of torture doesn't involve leaving the warren," Orchis clarified. "Hrududu chewing. Like in the old story. There are some motionless hrududil in Darkhaven that would be perfect for this."

Woundwort remained motionless for a few moments, thinking over Orchis' suggestion.

-"That's harsher than what I had in mind, but also easier to carry out. Vervain, you are sentenced to hrududu chewing. Orchis, show Vervain the hrududu. Everyone else, proceed with training as usual."

-"Follow meeee..." Orchis said menacingly.

Vervain worriedly followed Orchis across the warren. He was not familiar with the “old story” Orchis had mentioned, and was afraid of what the “hrududu chewing” would involve. Soon afterwards, they came across a hrududu; it was a bulldozer.

-"Now, Vervain, your task is simple. You have to chew this part of it here." Orchis pointed to one of the continuous tracks.

-"That's it?" Vervain felt relieved; this looked like an easy task.

-"That's it. Chew it all the way from one end to the other. When you're done, report to me."

With that, Orchis hopped away. Vervain was confused. This punishment didn't seem too bad, yet Woundwort had said that it was harsh. As soon as he sank his teeth in the hrududu, however, he understood why Woundwort had said that. The substance was extremely hard to chew; it would take him a long time to finish this.
“Now, still, after these long generations past, they still meet every now and then, and again they meet in battles of epic scale that no one will ever forget, let alone be lucky enough to see.”

--Psyber, *General Woundwort*

The train station was very busy at this time of day and, strangely enough, nearly everyone wanted tickets for the same train.

Among the travellers at the station was a scarred young man. A few days ago, he had been involved in a car accident with a gasoline truck; both drivers involved had been lucky to escape with their lives. However, his driver's license had been suspended indefinitely following the accident. It wasn't the first time this happened. On previous occasions, he drove anyway, but this time, his vehicle had been completely destroyed. To make things worse, the wreckage was filthy, covered with animal blood; no scrap metal could be salvaged. He would have to buy a new vehicle, but until then, he had no choice but to take the train to go to work.

After obtaining the ticket and boarding the train, he had trouble finding a seat: only two were still available. He sat down and glanced at the two passengers in front of him. They appeared to be teenagers; one had a red sweater, while the other was wearing a yellow shirt and a purple skirt. Both of them were wearing sunglasses and staring at him; they didn't seem pleased. He couldn't understand why, but he remained silent.

On the other side of the wagon, there was an old man, holding a book of some sort, clearly absorbed in his reading. A few minutes later, a young blue-haired woman took the last available seat, in front of the reader, and put a suitcase down on the floor next to her seat. He did not react to her arrival, and the train departed soon afterwards.

For the first ten minutes of the journey, things appeared to be going well; the only notable event was when three kids ran across the wagon, jumping on the seats and annoying everyone along the way. The bad driver's face was briefly tickled by one of the kid's tail. Wait what? Why did that kid have a tail? Were they wearing costumes? It didn't make any sense.

Meanwhile, the woman suddenly opened her suitcase and pulled out two wooden sticks.

-"You wanna see a magic trick?"

-"Hmm?" The reader momentarily looked at her. “I'm sorry, I was reading...”

-"Come on, it won't take long!"

She pulled a box of matches out of her vest pocket, and used one to light one of the sticks on fire.

-"Here, hold this.” She threw the stick at the reader before he could react, and he had no choice but to hold it.

A few seats away, the driver could see three teenagers sitting together. He had a bad feeling about them, but he couldn't quite understand it.

-"Uh, should I pull the emergency brake?” one of them, wearing a blue shirt, asked.
"Not yet," the one sitting next to him said. "I want to see how this turns out."

Meanwhile, the woman had lit the second stick on fire, and she carelessly threw the still-lit match out of the window. She then took the lit torch out of the reader's hands, so that she held one in each hand.

"I don't think she's really a witch," another of the three teenagers, the only girl, said. "I think she's faking it, but I don't know what she's trying to accomplish."

The woman held one stick over the other for a few moments, before dropping it. It fell into the other fire, and the two fires merged into one.

"It's fire on fire!" she said with a grin.

"Thanks for the demonstration, now if I can just go back to my book..."

"Am I offending you? Am I inappropriate?"

Still holding the lit torch, she stood up on her seat.

"I really want to pull the brakes..." the teenager in blue said, clearly even more nervous than a few minutes before.

"Not yet," his companion repeated. "This is just getting exciting."

"I certainly didn't expect THAT to happen," the girl added.

The reader looked up at the woman, clearly terrified.

"Your silly little stories are quite laughable!" the amateur magician kept shouting. "You're not using a smartphone or an e-reader to read your stupid book, you're using paper! You're an old joke!"

Clearly losing all traces of sanity, she started laughing loudly.

The car accident survivor had watched the entire scene unfold with increasing fear. By the time the woman started shouting, he was unable to contain himself anymore.

"That's a fire hazard!" he shouted.

Moments later, a young man burst out of nowhere with a fire extinguisher and sprayed both the woman and the man in front of her for almost ten seconds, shouting wildly the whole time. He had a very strong accent, preventing the bad driver from understanding what he was saying, although he made out a few words: "don't play with fire around the kids."

"I just wanted to read my book," the old man said as he tried to wipe the foam off his clothes.

"A highly predictable outcome when you don't respect the privacy of fellow passengers," one of the kids said, pulling a book out from his pocket. "According to the J..."

"That's it, I'm pulling the brakes now," the kid in blue said.

"I'll get it!" the girl shouted. Within moments, she pulled a weirdly-shaped object out from behind her and dashed over the passenger's heads towards the emergency brake.

Suddenly, the green bag next to the two remaining teenagers moved. The bad driver suddenly
realized that it wasn't a bag at all, but a fourth teenager, wearing a hoodie and playing with his smartphone.

-“Why are we stopping?” the teenager said cluelessly.

-“Louie...” one of the others said, “you just missed something very exciting.”

-“Exciting!?” The one in blue clearly didn't agree with this statement.

-“Yeah, meh, whatevs,” Louie replied, not taking his eyes off his phone.

-“Now, time to teach her a lesson!” the girl shouted, as she dashed towards the fake witch. With a few well-aimed kicks at precise locations, she soon stood triumphantly over the fire magician. Only now was the driver able to identify why he had a bad feeling about her and her companions.

-“You look worried,” one of the teenagers in front of him said.

-“You should be,” her boyfriend added.

-“W- w- who are you?” the driver stammered.

As the two teenagers dramatically removed their sunglasses, the man in front of them saw two giant rabbits. The male one had blue fur, while the female one was pink instead, and had ribbons at the tips of her ears.

-”I'm Buster Bunny.”

-”And I'm Babs Bunny.”

-”No relation,” they both said at once.

-”And you,” Buster added, ”are a rabbit killer.”

-”And you thought you could get away with it,” Babs said.

Suddenly, Buster pulled out an anvil from behind his back; Babs produced a wooden mallet.

-”We'll see you again tonight,” they said, before walking away.

The bad driver was petrified by this encounter. He did not notice the arrival of a few police officers, who arrested the woman and cleaned up the mess caused by the fire extinguisher. After their departure, the train resumed its journey toward its destination, and the old man was able to continue reading his book in peace.

Unbeknownst to any of the passengers, the lit match thrown out of the window had landed in a puddle of gasoline next to the tracks, the same puddle Campion had fallen into the previous evening. The gasoline burst into flames, and the fire soon spread into the nearby forest.

Pipkin was at siiflay at Watership Down. He was nearly alone, as most rabbits were in the honeycomb to witness Hazel's interviews. The only other rabbits above ground were Clover and Flora, who appeared to be playing a game of some sort.

Suddenly, he noticed another rabbit further away. He could not recall having seen this rabbit in the past, so he hopped over to him.
"Hello," the stranger said. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," Pipkin replied, slightly taken aback. "You?"

"I'm lonely."

"Sorry about that."

"What's your name?"

"I'm Pipkin. What's yours?"

"You can call me Vesper. Would you want to be my friend?"

Pipkin remained silent for a few moments, thinking it over. He felt uncertain about the stranger.

"Uh, sure?"

"Thank you," Vesper said, as he nuzzled Pipkin.

"So, what brings you here, Vesper?"

"I was looking for a river. You see, I have a boat, but it's useless unless I have a place to use it."

"There is a river nearby. Look for a collapsing stone bridge, and you can't miss it."

"Thank you. I best be going now."

"Leaving so soon? But you just arrived."

"There appears to be a storm on the way, so I don't have long to get to the river. But I suppose I could stay a bit longer."

The two rabbits resumed your silflay.

"Would you be interested in joining the warren?" Pipkin eventually asked.

"Warren? What warren?"

"This warren. It's called Watership Down, the main entrance is right behind me."

A look of nervousness appeared on Vesper's face.

"What's wrong?" Pipkin asked.

"I'm not ready for warren life."

"Why not?"

"I'm really not good at making friends. You're only the second one in seasons who hasn't turned me down. And when it comes to love, it always falls apart. This is why I've been a hlessi for seasons."

"I'm sorry you've gone through this, but we're a friendly bunch. The Doe called Strawberry in particular, seems to be longing for friends. I'm sure you have nothing to worry about."

"Can you give me a few days, to think it over?"
"Of course. But I hope you will decide to join us."

"Thank you. But now, I really have to go. Pleasure meeting you Pipkin, dear friend."

"You too."

Vesper picked up Pipkin and hugged him.

"Ciao," he said, as he put the smaller rabbit back down and hopped away.

Pipkin remained at the bottom of the Down for a while. This encounter with the lonely hlessi had left him shaken. He really hoped Vesper's situation would improve, but there seemed to be little he could do to help, unless the hlessi decided to return to the warren. Eventually, he slowly hopped back to the warren.
"Belief!?" He said in an almost maddening voice, "This has nothing to do with what I think! The only reason why all those things happen is because I was there. Face it, I bring death to all I come across; I'm surprised this place is still standing! If I am allowed to stay here I will bring about your demise, that's why I must leave. I shall leave and rid the world of my presence! Not one shall suffer because of me ever again!"

--Pineapple Girl, Zorn

Crackers, Tumbler and Rosie were travelling from one tree to another. Progress was slow: while the two squirrels were used to making high and long jumps from one tree to another, Rosie, being a hedgehog, was unable to do so. Therefore, the three creatures had to take several detours through smaller trees, in order for Rosie to be able to follow.

After a while, the destination was in sight.

-"Here we are," Crackers said. "This tree is where the competition will take place tonight."

-"It looks far," Rosie said, looking worriedly at the ground.

-"There's a problem though. There is only one way to reach it, and it involves one of the hardest jumps of the entire path."

-"One of us will have to carry you on their back, Rosie," Tumbler said.

-"That will have to be you, Tumbler," Crackers said. "I'm sorry Rosie, but with my paw, I'll have trouble making it even without someone on my back."

-"Sure enough."

Rosie carefully climbed on Tumbler's back and tail, doing her best not to prickle her friend.

-"Let me know when you're ready," Tumbler said.

-"I'm ready whenever you are."

-"All right. Hold tight..."

Tumbler looked closely in front of her, to calculate the best angle from which to jump, while also considering the extra weight. Once she was satisfied with her position, she made the leap.

Tumbler glided through the air for a few seconds, before she managed to grab another branch. It shook dangerously, and a few acorns fell off. She carefully pulled herself onto the branch.

-"You can get off now, Rosie."

"Thanks for the trip," Rosie replied.

-"No problem."

Moments later, Crackers too jumped, and landed on the branch next to Rosie and Tumbler.
Oof! Who did that?” came a sudden voice.

“I guess one of those acorns hit some creature a few branches down,” Tumbler said. “I'll go see if they're hurt.”

Hannah spent a long time sitting on the branch with the leaf on her head. Keaar really could do some ridiculous things sometimes. Now, she was all alone, and while she had said she wanted to go see Tassel, she was unsure how the squirrel could help her. Her thoughts were interrupted as she felt something hit her on the head, and she was knocked off the branch. She landed on a leaf further away.

“Oof! Who did that?” she shouted in anger.

A few moments later, a squirrel suddenly jumped in front of her.

“I'm sorry, did I hurt you?”

“Ye threw sometin on me head. Bit it don hurt too bad.”

“Glad it doesn't hurt. I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were there...”

“It's ma fault, ah had a leaf on me 'ead. I'm Hannah. You are...”

“I'm Tumbler. Since you're all right, I'll be going back to my friends.”

“WET! Iz one of yur friendz Tassel?”

“No, I'm afraid I don't know anyone by that name. Some of my friends might though. Do you want to climb on my back and I can take you to them?”

“Nah, ah can clim on me own.”

“You sure about that?”

“Ye. Less go.”

“Is the creature all right?” Rosie asked as Tumbler returned.

“'She's fine. She's a mouse, she's looking for someone called Tassel.”

“. . . . . that's the one organizing this dance contest,” Crackers said. “She should be here already.”

As if on cue, a shadow appeared overhead, and a third squirrel soon jumped onto the branch.

“Woah, Crackers, you're here early,” Tassel said. “And you brought friends?”

“Rosie, Tumbler, meet Tassel. She's my dance instructor, taught me most of what I know on the subject.”

“And you did a great job teaching her,” Tumbler said, shaking Tassel's paw.

“Thanks. So, Crackers, we should probably wait until a few more contestants arrive, and then we can get started?”

“Sounds good.”
Tassel nodded, and soon scurried away towards a hole in the tree trunk, and went inside.

-“What do we do until then?” Rosie asked.
-“Something I spend way too much time doing,” Crackers said. “We wait.”

The three creatures sat down on the branch, until Hannah returned, and looked at the two squirrels in confusion.

-“Which on o’ ye is Tumblee?”
-“I am,” Tumbler said. “Over there is Crackers.”
-“Ye look so alik. Ar ye siblins?”
-“No, I’m afraid not,” Crackers replied. “But it would be nice if we were.”
-“Anyvay, ’as anyon seen Tassel?”
-“She's down the hole,” Rosie said.
-“Wha ’ole?”
-“The hole over there on the trunk.”

Hannah walked over to the hole, and put her head inside.

-“Hey Taaaasseeell!!” she shouted. She waited a few moments, but no answer came. “Ye sur she's in ’ere, Yonee?”

She received no response; the two squirrels were watching Rosie carve something on the branch with one of her quills.

-“OY WHY YE DON ANSWER MEH?”

This caught everyone’s attention.

-“Didn't realize you were talking to us,” Crackers said. “I thought you were talking to Tassel.”
-“Nah, ah wuz talkin to Yonee ’ere, but she ignored meh!”
-“But there's nobody called Yona here.”
-“Whose da hedgehog behine ye?”
-“Rosie.”
-“Eek, this is confusin...”
-“Hi Hannah!” came the sudden voice of Tassel as she poked her head out of the hole. “What brings you here?”
-“Oof!” Hannah leaped in fear, nearly stepping off the branch in the process. “Ye scard me ’ere for a momen. Anyvay...how's life?”
-“Life is life, and the tree is doing great. I assume you’ve already met Crack...”
"Ye, I met 'er an 'er frends."

"You're unusually impatient, Hannah. Is there something wrong?"

"I'm not vere good a heeding feelins, am I? Ah might as well tell ye."

With that, Hannah explained the events of the past few days, how Blackberry and Primrose had left Watership Down, and how everyone had failed to find them. It took her quite a while, as the squirrels and hedgehog were full of questions.

"I don't know what to say," Tassel finally said once Hannah had finished. "It all seems very complicated."

"Oof, quit an udrstamet."

"I'm afraid I can't help you myself, but I know someone who could."

"Who?"

"The hedgewizard."

"Oooh mysterious!" Rosie said.

Hannah thought back to something that had happened the previous fall. As part of an elaborate scheme to convince Woundwort that Vervain was insane, she had dressed up as a hedgewizard. Basically, she put a flower on her head and petals around her neck, and then cast a few magical "spells". However, there was no actual magic involved: the Watershippers had already arranged the situations to make them look magical. Against all odds, the plan had worked, and Vervain was expelled from the Efrafan owsla. She burst into laughter as she thought about the ridiculousness of the whole situation.

"What's so funny?" Tassel asked.

"Ooh, notin, I just ha a prev dealin wit a hedwizard. It was amazing."

"Weren't you creeped out by her fireflies?"

"Fireflies?"

"Yeah, didn't you see them?"

"Well, Hazel didn say anyting aboot fireflies..."

"Who's Hazel already?"

"The leader of 'em Watership Down bunns."

"Oh him. What does he have to do with the hedgewizard?"

"...I guess we not talkin aboot tha same hegeiward."

"The one I'm talking about is a turtle."

"Oof! Then I don know 'er."

"I think I know who you're talking about," Crackers suddenly said. "Don't trust her, Hannah."
"Why not?"

"She's crazy. What she's saying makes absolutely no sense, and she keeps mixing up the past and the future."

"Perhaps we should help her try to sort out her confusion," Rosie suggested.

"I already tried," Crackers said sadly, "but it didn't work. By the time I left, she was just as confused."

"But if she's magic..."

"She's not. Magic doesn't exist. But it's actually pretty sad. She really believes in it..."

"Could she be right?" Tumbler asked. "If you say she's crazy, you're probably right, but even the craziest creatures are sometimes right."

"That's true. But I've seen so-called 'magic' ruin so many lives, I would still recommend to stay away even if I believed in it."

"I got nofin to lose," Hannah said. "So ah might as weel see zis hezwidar, even if se's faek. Were can I fine 'er, Tassel?"

"She lives on an island some distance from here. There's an old brick road nearby; if you follow it long enough, you will reach the lake and island."

"kay. Ah better be goin. Tanks fo the advic."

Before anyone had the opportunity to reply, Hannah had started to climb down the tree.
The Ultimate Sacrifice

“Have all come and prayed to me

"Please take my life instead" is their plea"

--Patchwork Poltergeist, *The Black Rabbit Makes No Promises* [sic]

Violet cautiously nibbled the carrot, while keeping an eye around her. Despite having been captured by a hawk, she was still alive, and this was not a good thing. Life had become a nightmare for her. The younger hawk stubbornly refused to eat her, much to his mother's dismay. Instead, he frequently flew away, and whenever he came back he brought fresh flayrah with him, no doubt an attempt at fattening her up before eating her. Violet refused to play along with his scheme, eating just enough to stay alive, and only when nobody was watching. Hopefully, this way, they would soon give up and kill her.

Until then, at least she wasn't in too much pain; after the hawk had removed the glass from her paws, she felt much better physically. She remained under intense mental torment, however.

At the end of the branch, she could see the younger hawk, sleeping. He seemed to be doing that a lot. Suddenly, she heard the other hawk approach. She hurriedly kicked the carrot off the branch; it landed in a puddle on the ground.

The mother hawk seemed unusually agitated, and soon woke up her son. The two had a short argument, that ended as they both turned their heads towards the same direction. Violet also looked, and soon saw what had caught their attention: fire. The flames were already consuming several trees a short distance away, and were rapidly coming closer. The older hawk hurriedly flew away; her son, however, remained on the branch, looking at Violet, then at the fire, and back at Violet.

The older hawk returned and shouted at her son again. Despite all this, he stubbornly refused to fly away. In a desperate attempt at saving him from the fire, she pushed him off the branch, hoping he would fly. This had the exact opposite of the intended effect: he simply fell to the ground, and cried in pain. She flew down to take a look at him. His wing was clearly broken; there was no way he would be able to survive. She had tried to save his life, but instead she had essentially killed him. There was nothing more she could do for him. She flew away, before she too were to perish.

Violet had stopped paying attention to the hawks. By that point, she didn't care anymore. They would not kill her, but the fire would; a much more painful death. The flames rapidly came closer, and soon the tree she was in also caught fire. The smoke was making it difficult for her to breathe, and it was only a matter of time before her fur caught fire. She looked down; maybe, if she jumped, she would fall unconscious before burning alive; that would be less painful. She thought back about how she should jumped long ago, before closing her eyes and stepping off the branch.

She suddenly felt a sharp pain in her back, and her paws could not feel the ground. There was only one possible explanation: she had broken several bones, but would remain fully conscious while the inevitable happened. A few moments later, she realized that she could move her paws; if the bones were broken, that wouldn't be possible. She carefully opened her eyes, not sure what to expect. There was fire all around her, and it was moving at an alarming rate. However, there was a shadow overhead. As she raised her head, she saw the younger hawk, holding onto her, flying unevenly between the burning trees. He had grabbed her before she could hit the ground, and was now carrying her away.
There is a limit to how far a hawk can fly through a burning forest, with a broken wing, while carrying another creature. He knew he would not be able to make it much further, so in a desperate attempt at getting clear of the fire, he raised his altitude, and was soon flying over the burning treetops.

After a few minutes, he suddenly lost all his strength. Each flap of his wings brought considerable pain, and the while he was clear of the fire, his lungs were still full of smoke, making it nearly impossible to breathe. His altitude was rapidly decreasing. He would have to make one last attempt at saving Violet's life. Just before he was about to crash, he let her go. She softly landed in the grass, while he painfully collided with a rock further away.

Violet remained motionless on the ground for a long time, attempting to figure out what had happened. The hawk had grabbed her before she hit the ground, and carried her away from the fire. He had saved her life. Why?

Hawks are elil. Why should he risk his life to save that of a creature he was supposed to kill? No matter how hard she tried to think of a logical explanation, there didn't seem to be one. For unknown reasons, this hawk cared about her. This could also explain why he had been trying to feed her. Elil befriending rabbits was not unheard of, but was extremely uncommon, and she had been fortunate enough to be dealing with one of these friendly creatures. Why her, and not another rabbit?

She chased these thoughts away. The hawk had saved her, she would now try to save him. She ran over to the spot where he had crashed, and what she saw was even worse than she expected. He was lying on the ground, one wing folded under himself at an awkward angle, the other trailing further away. His beak had been smashed to pieces by the impact with the rock, and he was bleeding from several parts of his body.

Violet hardly knew anything about healing. To make things worse, all of her limited knowledge was only applicable to rabbits, completely useless for birds. Judging by the way he was breathing, it was nevertheless plain to her that he was dying. He had saved her life, but she was powerless to save his. There was nothing she could to to help him, except keep his wounds clean. She tried licking the wound on his wing, but he let out a dreadful cry of pain; perhaps it would be better not to touch him then.

-"You saved my life," she said. "I shall be eternally grateful."

The hawk slowly turned his head, and stared at her. He remained silent.

-"I'm sorry I judged you wrong."

He still did not reply. Violet wondered whether he understood what she was saying.

-"What's your name?"

Finally, the hawk finally uttered a sound, so low that Violet could barely hear it, but it nevertheless sounded more like a word than any other sound that he had uttered since she had first met him.

-"Skreeeeeeeeeee..."

The sound seemed to keep going forever, until finally it stopped, and so did the hawk's breathing. Violet closed her eyes, and remained besides Skree's body. Apparently that was his name; it was quite an unusual name, by rabbit standards.

She wondered what would happen to him now. Surely hawks must have their own supernatural
figure to harvest their souls. What would the afterlife would be like for him? According to ancient legends, some hawks get the privilege of tormenting rabbits in the shadowlands for eternity, but Skree probably wouldn't be happy doing this. Violet also ignored what would happen to his body; another creature would come and devour him, probably. Until then, she closed his eyes.

-"GET AWAY FROM THAT THING!"

Violet leaped back as she heard the loud voice. It sounded like it came from another rabbit. She slowly turned around, and saw the other rabbit, a buck, standing close to a large grey rock. The rabbit's sudden appearance had left her startled and unable to speak.

-"Come underground, before it attacks you!"

She was still unable to reply. The other rabbit leaped over to her in an attempt to bring her with him, but as he got closer he saw Skree's wounds. He carefully placed his paw on the hawk's back.

-"Oh thank Frith it's dead," he said. “Nasty creatures, aren't they? Look what he did to you.”

As she heard this, Violet was filled with sadness. This rabbit was completely misjudging Skree, just like she had done herself.

-"He didn't do anything to me.”

-"But what about your fur?”

Violet was confused.

-"What's wrong with my fur?” she said defensively.

-"No offence, but it's...falling apart in a few locations.”

-"That wasn't the hawk. It was the fire.”

-"Well, whatever it was, you need rest. Welcome to Redstone Warren. I'm Hickory-rah. Do you want to come underground?”

-"But what about Skree?”

-"Skree? Who's Skree?”

-"The hawk, who...”

-"He has a name?” Hickory could not understand how the doe knew the hawk's name. He eventually came to the conclusion that she had imagined it; it was most likely a side effect of the deep mental strain she had gone through as a result of the attack. “Oh, well Skree...we can just leave him there. There have been many elil around the warren recently, and that's one that won't be causing any problems anymore. You coming underground now?”

Violet did not know how to react. Hickory was so disrespectful...she weakly nodded, and followed him underground. Eventually, she would have to set the record straight, but for now, she was too exhausted.
The Way Forward

“In the end is peace achieved through the hardships? Only a rabbit can tell”

--Dizzy the Freak, Only A Rabbit Can Tell

Hannah was walking through the forest, towards the island where the hedgewizard lived. She finally came across the road Tassel had mentioned; only then did she realize how imprecise the squirrel had been. She had had told her to follow the road, but not in which direction. Hannah sighed, frustrated at how she had forgotten to ask such an obvious question. She decided to go left, and if she didn't come across anything, she would have to reverse course and go right instead.

Hannah spent a while walking along the road, until she was startled by the cry of an eagle. The bird was flying at a low altitude, but thankfully didn't seem to have spotted her. She quickly ran over to the grass next to the path, and hid in a small ditch.

Suddenly, Hannah noticed a rabbit in the middle of the road. Her pale fur was plainly visible against the dark brown of the rocks making up the path; she seemed frozen in fear, and would make an easy prey for the bird. Hannah could not let her die this way.

-“Hey you! Come ‘ere!”

The rabbit turned her head towards Hannah, but remained where she was, and did not reply.

-“C’mon! Ye can hid ’ere!”

The rabbit still remained motionless. After the eagle made another sound, she finally broke out of her trance, and scampered towards Hannah. Soon afterwards, she reached the safety of the ditch; it was barely large enough for her, but she still managed to fit inside. The eagle dove towards the ground, grabbing nothing but thin air. It looked into the ditch; Hannah took a nearby pebble, and threw it at the bird. Clearly not in the mood for a fight, it flew away to find another prey elsewhere.

The two creatures remained huddled together in the ditch for a while, in case the eagle came back. When it became obvious it was really gone, Hannah ran out of the ditch.

-”Ar ye aight?”

-”You saved my life!” the rabbit said, in an unusually high-pitched voice.

-”I wuz...”

-”I'm Nettle!”

-”I'm Hannah, an...”

-”You did something for me, and I won't forget that.”

-”I...”

-”Some day, I'll pay you back, I promise you that. Thank you!”

-”Bu...”

Nettle had already vanished. Hannah remained motionless for a while, trying to figure out exactly
what had just happened, and whether it was a sample of things to come when she would meet the
hedgewizard. She shrugged it off; she had something more important to worry about: finding the
island. Now that the eagle was gone, Nettle could take care of herself.

Meadow was walking along the river. She had been searching for Blackberry and Primrose all
night. Progress had been very slow at first, especially with the fog, although the weather had
thankfully cleared since then. Silverweed had said that the does would be near the river, in a place
that wouldn't be obvious at first sight. This clue was very vague, and she had found many locations
that would fit the description. She had looked in a hollowed-out tree trunk, inside an abandoned fox
den, and many other places, but she had yet to find the does.

After a while, she stopped for a short silflay near a waterfall. It would have to be short though: she
only had until tonight to find them, and this was a long river with many possible hiding spots.

When Blackberry woke up, she was filled with confusion: she couldn't remember falling asleep.
Primrose was still lying next to her, also asleep; the leaves on her tail were peeling off, exposing
the wound. Blackberry would have to replace them. She hopped out of the cavern to go and get
some replacement leaves.

As soon as she made it past the waterfall, Blackberry noticed that the fog had entirely cleared, and
it was day. She and Primrose had been asleep much longer than she thought. The Down was
plainly visible, a short distance away; the trip had lasted long enough, Blackberry was determined
that she and Primrose would make it back to the warren that day.

As she gathered a few leaves, she noticed another rabbit further away, calmly nibbling the grass.
This wasn't Granite, but another rabbit. She was a stranger, and Blackberry was ill at ease: the
stranger might be another hostile Darkhavener. Blackberry would have to sneak back to the
waterfall without attracting the stranger's attention.

Meadow's silflay was interrupted by a soft noise. It was barely audible, but as a captain of owsla
she had been trained to pick up even the slightest sounds. Looking further away, she could see
another rabbit hopping away from her, trying (and failing) to remain silent. The stranger had
silvery-blue fur, just like one of the rabbits Silverweed had described. Could it be...?

-"Blackberry?"

Blackberry was almost back at the waterfall when she heard someone call her name. So much for
not attracting attention...but how did this stranger know her name? It didn't make any sense at all.
She turned around and stared at the stranger.

-"What do you want?"

-"My name's Meadow. I've come to bring you back to Watership Down."

-"How do I know you're telling the truth? I've never seen you at Watership Down before."

-"I'm not from Watership Down, but from the hedge maze warren some rabbits from your warren
visited last Frith's Eve. I've been working with Hazel and Bigwig to find you."

Blackberry thought over the situation for a few seconds. It seemed likely that Meadow was telling
the truth.
"I'll be ready to go soon, I just need to check up on my friend," she said.

"Primrose?"

"Yes. Would you happen to have brought any healing herbs with you? She's in a bad way."

"I'm afraid I haven't...how bad is it?"

"Take a look at her yourself. She's in a cavern behind the waterfall."

Blackberry picked the leaves back up and hopped back to the waterfall, with Meadow closely following. Primrose was still asleep.

"That's a nasty wound she has," Meadow said. "What happened to her?"

"I don't know. We got separated in the fog, and when I found her again, she was like this."

Blackberry carefully took one of the leaves and placed it on Primrose's tail, but this caused the latter to open her eyes and squeal.

"VERVAIN NO!"

"Primrose! Calm down. It's me, Blackberry. Do you recognize me?"

"...Blackberry." Primrose sighed. "Where's...who..."

"Do you think you're able to walk?"

"I...guess..."

"Come on, then. We can make it back to the warren today."

"...Redstone..."

"No, not Redstone, Watership Down."

Primrose got up, and slowly moved forward. Blackberry and Meadow had to help her make it past the waterfall so the current wouldn't sweep her away. Nevertheless, the leaf fell again, and Blackberry had to wrap another one around her tail. Then began the last part of the journey back to Watership Down.
The Bulldozer

“Waggle refused to stop even for a second, he continued going even though he almost tripped over himself.”

--Pineapple Girl, *Follow the Leader*

The car abruptly stopped next to the hole, to avoid hitting a crooked tree hanging over the gravel road. Lionel-Hector got out of his vehicle, and looked at the annoying tree. Every time he saw it, he made a mental note to buy a chainsaw, but he always forgot about it when he went home.

He decided to try something drastic. Down there, in the junkyard, he could see an old bulldozer. Probably not as efficient as a chainsaw, but under the circumstances, it would do. Fredrick might object, but he had called Lionel-Hector earlier that morning to tell him that he wouldn't be at work for a few weeks. Therefore, Lionel-Hector could do whatever he wanted without having to worry about losing his job.

Lionel-Hector ran to the bulldozer, and saw a cute rabbit sitting next to it. He had a cute overgrowth of fur under his chin, it looked really cute. He decided to try to tickle the cute fur, as if he were dealing with a cute dog or a cat.

Vervain took a temporary break from chewing the hrududu when he saw the human approach. However, rather than attacking or chasing him away, the human scratched Vervain's chin. It was actually quite relaxing, although he would never admit this to anyone. He lied down and closed his eyes, enjoying the break from the difficult task.

Lionel-Hector spent almost half an hour with cute Vervain, but his fingers were starting to get sore from all the tickling. Besides, despite all the cuteness overload, he still needed to take care of that tree. He went inside the bulldozer's cabin and honked the horn; the rabbit immediately woke up and bolted in fear. He regretted having to do this, but it was the only way to prevent the cute rabbit from getting killed by the vehicle. He started the engine, and the bulldozer soon started to move towards the path leading out of the junkyard.

Campion was lying in the middle of the river, slowly removing the gasoline from his fur. Finding this spot had been really difficult: the first river Aspen had found had already been claimed by a heron, who quickly chased them away, and it took them a long time to find another. Aspen remained on the riverside, looking out for elil.

-“How are you feeling now, Campion?” he asked.

-“I'm about as clean as I'll ever be, unless it rains. Until then, we might as well keep going.”

-“I hope I didn't lead you too far in the wrong direction when searching for this river...”

It was almost dawn. By the light of the stars, Campion looked at his surroundings. At first sight, the area was virtually unrecognizable, but he quickly noticed one familiar landmark: a drawbridge.

-“No, in fact we're even closer now than when I last died.”

-“You still haven't explained what killed you that time. You weren't even on the hrududu trail, you
were next to it."

-"You're starting to sound like the Black Rabbit. But honestly, it doesn't really matter. If I die one more time, I swear I'll..."

Campion fell silent before finishing his sentence.

-"What will you do?" Aspen asked.

-"You don't want to know. Anyway, let's get going."

The two rabbits continued to travel. After sunrise, they finally reached a large pit; in the middle, there was a large human structure.

-"Here we are," Campion said.

-"This is the place you're supposed to visit?"

-"My destiny has led me here. We need to go down to the bottom."

-"I won't let you. I'm supposed to protect you, and that place is dangerous."

-"I'm still going."

Campion hopped over to the edge of the ditch, and looked down.

-"Don't jump!" Aspen shouted, as he hopped over to Campion.

-"I won't. Assuming, of course, there's another way down."

He started to walk along the edge of the ditch, always looking down to see if there was a passage.

-"Let me search," Aspen eventually said. "I don't like you so close to the edge."

-"There is such a thing as overprotection, you know?" Campion rolled his eyes. "But go ahead. I don't want to die again any more than you want me to."

Aspen nodded, and hopped ahead of Campion. After a while, he stumbled upon a large white rabbit, sitting further away, also contemplating the pit. He approached the stranger, who soon turned his head and looked at him.

-"I don't know who you are, or where you're from," the stranger said, "but take my advice and get out of here. I'll forget I ever saw you."

-"Do you know any way to the bottom? Asking for a friend."

-"You don't want to go there."

-"You're right, I don't, but my friend does."

-"You can cut out that nonsense about your friend. This is such an overused..."

-"No, I really am asking for my friend!" Aspen said desperately. "I'll go get him."

Granite watched Aspen hop away. This entire incident had been really confusing. Moments later, however, Aspen returned, bringing Campion with him.
"I hear you advised Aspen here to leave," Campion said. "Why?"

"No rabbit in their right mind would go down there," Granite replied.

"Is this Darkhaven?"

"You've heard about us then. You fool, do you want to die? Look at yourself; completely scarred. You wouldn't stand a chance in the battle pit. Just go, and forget about this place."

"I'm going in there and you can't stop me."

"Campion," Aspen interjected, "why don't you listen to him? His warnings are very clear. If you go ahead with your plan, this can't end well."

"I'm going. Assuming I can find a way down..."

"Since you refuse to listen to common sense, I'll try to help you. I'll show you the way down. Is your friend coming with you?"

"Yes I am!" Aspen shouted. "I am supposed to protect him."

"Good luck with that. You'll need it."

Granite hopped along the edge, until he came across the lone path to the bottom, and started the descent, with Campion and Aspen following closely. Around halfway through their descent, however, Granite suddenly stopped.

"There's a hrududu further away blocking the trail. We'll have to jump."

With that, he jumped off the path, and landed safely on the ground at the bottom of the pit.

"Come on, you two, before the hrududu gets you."

Campion looked down; he was not very happy with having to jump, but it seemed he had no choice. He carefully scanned the area, looking for the safest landing spot.

Meanwhile, Vervain was still running away after hearing the horn, not looking where he was going, when he suddenly bumped into another rabbit. He then realized, much to his horror, that it was the General.

"What are you doing here, Vervain? Are you not supposed to be chewing the hrududu?"

"I'm sorry sir...the hrududu is moving..."

"Hmm. Very well, Vervain. You shall resume as soon as it has stopped."

Woundwort looked at the hrududu from a distance. It slowly made its way up the trail, when suddenly one of its continuous tracks snapped. The bulldozer started to lean dangerously off the trail. At the last moment, Lionel-Hector opened the cabin's door and jumped out. The bulldozer fell off the trail, striking Campion and Aspen in the process. Campion flew in the air, and didn't come back down; Aspen landed on another rabbit's back.

"It's generally considered good etiquette to tell someone before you challenge them to single combat," Granite said.

"I'm not challenging you," Aspen replied. "Where's Campion?"
-"I don't know. Maybe the hrududu got him."

-"Oh no!" Aspen jumped off Granite's back and frantically looked around him. “He must be dead again! Oh, I have really messed up this time..."

-"...dead AGAIN?"

-"Yes, it's already happened hrair times. Wait, why am I not in the shadowlands with him? Please kill me, so I can go to him. Unless he's not really dead..."

Granite remained silent. He had no idea what Aspen was talking about; the poor rabbit must be insane.

Lionel-Hector spent a long time staring at the bulldozer, on its side at the bottom of the pit. It would only be good for scrap metal now. He took his smartphone out of his pocket and dialled a number.

Three people were sitting around the table, playing a board game when suddenly, the phone rang.

-"I'll get it," one of them, a teenage girl, said.

-"Don't bother, Daisy," an older man said, but it was too late, Daisy had already picked up the handset.

-"Hello?"

-"Um, hey, uh, can I speak to Sir Fredrick?"

-"It's for you, father," Daisy said.

-"Tell them I'm not in, I've gone to another country. Or Antarctica. How about Mars?"

-"It sounds like Mr Appleby from the junkyard."

-"...fine, I'll take it," Fredrick replied with a sigh, as Daisy handed him the handset. “What do you want?"

-"Well, Sir Fred, I made a mess."

-"Again?"

-"I'm afraid so. You see..."

-"Why do you bother me with such trifles?"

-"But Sir Fred...what shall I do? It's the bulldozer."

-"Never mind the bulldozer, get the crane fixed.” With that, he hung up. “That's the most incompetent employee I've ever had.”

-"Why don't you fire him?" the third person, Sir Fredrick's wife, asked.

-"I really should. Until then, whose turn is it?"

It took at least ten seconds for Lionel-Hector to realize that Fredrick had hung up on him. When he finally realized this, however, he felt relieved. Sir Fredrick clearly didn't seem to care what
happened to his bulldozer. Until his boss returned to work, Lionel-Hector decided to try fixing the crane instead.
“We want danger
The thirst has become a need”

--Feather in a Pillow, Efrafa

Campion landed in a bright sandy substance. As he looked around him, he immediately recognized
the area: the Shadowlands. He was dead again. He took one step forward, when suddenly he felt
something tighten around one of his front paws. He looked down, and saw that it was a shadowy
snare. It tightened considerably, and he was unable to move his paw, until the snare suddenly
loosened. Campion awkwardly raised the paw and started to lick it, easing the pain, but he did not
notice that the snare was moving; by the time he realized what was happening, it was tightly
wrapped around his neck. He would have squealed, but he was unable to. The snare dragged
Campion for a long distance, along the ground and into the air, until it finally loosened in mid-air,
causing him to fall to the ground.

Campion could hear a rumbling sound, not unlike that of the train he had encountered the previous
day. He also noticed that he was hovering a short distance above the ground, which seemed to
move under him very fast, faster than he was able to run. He turned around; the Black Rabbit of
Inlé was behind him, also floating and moving, at the same speed as Campion.

-"Hello. What's happening this time?"

-"YOU'RE DEAD AGAIN. SHOULDN'T IT BE OBVIOUS?"

-"Yes, I know that, but why are we moving?"

-"THIS IS AN ELABORATE SYSTEM THAT MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME TO TRAVEL
THROUGH MY OVERWORLDLY EMPIRE. IT CAN BE QUITE USEFUL SOMETIMES, IF I
NEED TO CHECK UP ON SOME REMOTE PARTS THAT I HAVEN'T VISITED IN A
WHILE, OR SIMPLY WHEN I AM STRESSED AND NEED TO CALM DOWN."

-"You're stressed?"

-"THAT'S AN..."

-"I know, it's an oversimplification, but essentially true."

-"ACTUALLY, I WAS GOING TO SAY 'THAT'S AN UNDERSTATEMENT'. OF COURSE I'M
STRESSED. YOU'VE DIED HRAIR TIMES IN THE PAST FEW DAYS."

-"That's not what I meant. I was just surprised to learn that you have emotions."

The two creatures were still moving over the ground, when suddenly they made it over a deep
trench with high cliffs. Campion awkwardly looked down, half-expecting to fall in the river of
blood that flowed at the bottom. As he paid closer attention, however, he noticed that there was a
rabbit in the river, struggling to stay afloat, but unable to make it to shore due to the large groups of
eil of all kinds on both sides. To make things worse, there was an eagle flying over the river, ready
to snatch him should he keep his head above the surface for too long. With that, the path led
Campion and the Black Rabbit away from the trench, before taking a slow turn to the left.
“Are you not going to help him?” Campion asked.

“WHY WOULD I? HE LED A BAD LIFE AND DESERVES EVERYTHING HE’S GOING THROUGH RIGHT NOW.”

“How long will he go through this?”

“FOREVER.”

“Have you no pity?”

“THREE THINGS. ONE: HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE HIS WAYS, BUT HE REFUSED. TWO: I MUST NOT LET FEELINGS INTERFERE WITH MY WORK. THREE...”

“Not let feelings interfere with your work? But you just said that you're stressed over me!”

“AS I WAS SAYING, BEFORE I WAS SO RUEDLY INTERRUPTED. THREE: YES, I AM STRESSED OVER YOU, AND THAT SIMPLY SHOWS JUST HOW MUCH YOU'RE HURTING ME. IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK THAT YOU STAY ALIVE? DID I NOT SEND ASPEN TO PROTECT YOU?”

“I'm sorry you're going through all these problems because of me.”

“YOU SHOULD BE SORRY. NOW WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?”

“I'll try to be more careful.”

“TRYING IS NOT ENOUGH.”

“I promise I'll be more careful.”

“YOU ALREADY MADE SUCH A PROMISE, BUT YOU STILL ENDED UP BREAKING IT.”

By that point, the path had led the two creatures in a tunnel of some sort. Campion could not see anything around him in this darkness, other than the Black Rabbit’s two red eyes in the middle of an endless sea of blackness.

“So what do you expect me to do?”

“YOUR PAIN WITH THE SNARE WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT THE PAIN IS IN THAT RIVER.”

Campion gasped, as he realized what the Black Rabbit was implying.

“You wouldn't throw me in there, would you?”

“I JUST MIGHT. HOPEFULLY THE FEAR OF THIS HAPPENING WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH THE NECESSARY MOTIVATION TO STAY ALIVE.”

At that moment, the two creatures exited the tunnel, and kept travelling. Campion carefully studied the Black Rabbit's position.

“YOU'RE VERY SILENT, ALL OF A SUDDEN,” the Black Rabbit eventually said.

“I've been thinking. And I have reached a decision.”
"AND WHAT DECISION IS THAT?"

"I've had just about enough. I'm not going to deal with this madness anymore."

"YOU MEAN YOU WON'T BE DYING AGAIN?"

"No, I mean I won't be dealing with your emotional manipulation and physical torture anymore."

Before the Black Rabbit could react, Campion had pounced on him, kicking and scratching furiously. The Black Rabbit did surprisingly little to fight back, and soon, his red eyes faded until they were black like the rest of his body.

After a few minutes, Campion hopped off the Black Rabbit. While he was silent and motionless, the transportation system continued to carry him and Campion across the shadowlands. They moved past what looked like a beach, but entirely devoid of colour: the sand, the sea and the trees were all various shades of grey.

"Campion!" came Aspen's voice. "Sorry it took me so long to get to you, but I had trouble making it here, the usual method didn't work. Where's BrofI?"

"Don't worry about it, Aspen," Campion replied. "Who's BrofI though?"

"The Black Rabbit of Inlé."

"Oh him. He's right here behind me."

Aspen cast a quick glance at the Black Rabbit. He hopped closer and touched him.

"What happened here?" he asked, horrified.

"I taught him a lesson," Campion replied.

"You killed him!"

"No I didn't. Any moment now, he'll get back up, insult me, and send us back."

"Campion, what have you done? The Black Rabbit is dead. This has the potential to break reality."

"No, that's impossible. The Black Rabbit is death itself, how can he be killed?"

"I don't know how, but he's still dead."

Campion remained silent, as the knowledge slowly sank in his mind that, yes, the Black Rabbit really was dead.

"Smack my ears," he eventually said.

"Why would you want me to do that?"

"To wake me up. You see, I'm dreaming. There is no other explanation."

Aspen sighed, and did as Campion had ordered.

"Sorry, Campion, but this is reality."

"So, if this is reality...what do we do now?"
"I don't know. I suppose Prince Rainbow will eventually come and sort everything out."

Campion and Aspen waited, as they were transported over a snowy mountain. Unbeknownst to them, another creature further away spotted them, and ran to them. Then, it grabbed the Black Rabbit and ran off, as quickly as it had arrived.

-"What was that?" Aspen asked.

-"I have no idea WHAT that thing was, but I know one thing: it wasn't Prince Rainbow."

Suddenly, the two rabbits found themselves in the midst of a maze of pipes. It did not take long for Campion to be struck by one of the pipes, and Aspen soon followed.

As he travelled through the air, Campion suddenly recognized his surroundings: he was back in Darkhaven. Aspen landed on Granite's back once again; Campion landed on top of Aspen moments later. Granite, with two rabbits on top of him, groaned in pain.

-"What did I ever do to deserve this?"

-"Sorry," Campion said, as he hopped off Granite and moved away; Aspen soon followed.

General Woundwort had observed the bulldozer from a distance away. After it had fallen off the path, he turned to Vervain.

-"You just killed a hrududu, Vervain. That's the first meaningful thing you have accomplished in your life."

-"Really? Thank you sir!"

It was rare for General Woundwort to praise anyone, and Vervain took this comment with great pride, despite Woundwort having also insulted him. The General, meanwhile, slowly approached a white rabbit sitting further away.

-"Ah, Granite. I see you're back. Perhaps you could explain to me what happened with the prisoner?"

-"General, there's something I need to tell you," came the voice of Blueberry from further away.

-"Silence," Woundwort replied. "I'm in the middle of something."

Granite cast an annoyed look at the General. What could he say? He was supposed to bring back the escaped prisoner, but instead he had let her and her friend go free. They did not deserve to be killed. However, it would be very difficult for him to explain this decision to the General, who had said that all prisoners were to be captured and brought back to the warren.

-"I found her. She tried to fight me, and I killed her in self-defence."

-"Liar!" Vervain called out. "There is no way Prim...the prisoner could have defended herself against him."

-"She wasn't alone. She had recruited the help of few other rabbits, and I had to kill them all."

-"Liar! You wouldn't have been able to kill all the outsiders just like that!"

-"What's that you say about the outsiders, Vervain?" Woundwort asked. Vervain gulped.
At that moment, Orchis hopped towards the group of rabbits.

-"It seems to me that someone is keeping secrets from you, General,” Orchis said.

-"Of course they are,” another rabbit suddenly said. Woundwort looked at him closely. This was the same scarred rabbit whom he had met the previous day at Silverweed's execution.

-"Camp...”

-"I thought we were rid of you!” Vervain shouted. “How dare you come back after so long? General Woundwort has done very well without you.”

-"Silence, Vervain,” the General ordered, as he walked closer to his former captain of owsla. “Campion, how did you get these scars? You might have died from these wounds.”

-"I died, but the Black Rabbit sent me back.”

-"The Black Rabbit sent him back? A clear case of insanity,” Orchis said. “And you know what we do with the weak-minded in Darkhaven? We kill them. We put them behind a hrududu, with their mouth around the weird tube. When the hrududu starts making horrible smoke, they inhale it and die.”

-"Why do all your execution and torture methods involve hrududil?” Vervain said.

-"Silence!” Woundwort shouted. Everyone immediately obeyed. “Campion, you've clearly had a hard time. You must rest.”

-"I can't rest now, I have a mission to accomplish.”

-"General...” Blueberry spoke again.

-"SILENCE!” Woundwort shouted, before turning back to Campion. ”Campion, forget about your mission for the moment. You're wounded, raving, you can't accomplish anything this way. You must rest. Vervain, Orchis, get some bedding material for him.”

-"But sir,” Orchis objected, “why should we waste the warren's limited supplies on this rabbit? Look at him, even if his brain functioned correctly, he would never be of any use to the owsla.”

-"The mark of a good owsla officer,” Woundwort explained, “is the ability to obey the orders they receive without questioning them. DO AS I SAY!”

With a sigh, Orchis left to do as he had been ordered, with Vervain following. Meanwhile, Woundwort turned back to Blueberry.

-"What was it you wanted to tell me?”

-"Vervain shoved me down the pit again while you were away,” the kitten replied.

-"Were there any witnesses this time?”

-"Yes, that big white buck.”

-"You mean Granite?”
"Yes, I suppose that's his name."

"I didn't see anything," Granite said. "Well, I did see SOMETHING. Vervain was lying on the kitten's back, it kinda looked like they were training or something."

"No," Blueberry said, "Vervain pushed me and..."

"You really don't like Vervain, do you?" Woundwort said.

"I don't think he likes ME."

Orchis spent a while carrying straw bedding and other supplies to the chamber that would become Campion's burrow. Vervain did little to help: Campion didn't deserve such a comfortable burrow. Nevertheless, to avoid Woundwort's wrath, he had to at least pretend to help Orchis with the task.

After a while, Campion was comfortably installed in the burrow.

"Will there be anything else?" said an annoyed Orchis.

"Not at the moment, you can go," Campion replied.

Orchis stormed out of the burrow. Vervain was about to follow him, when suddenly...

"No, you stay, Vervain."

"What do you want with me?"

"Come closer."

Vervain slowly hopped closer, afraid of what Campion would do to him. His fears were founded, as Campion soon pounced on top of him. He placed one of his hind legs under Vervain's tail.

"You listen to me carefully now. If you try to escape or fight back, I'll rip your tail off."

"I won't fight back! Please don't kill me!"

"Afraid of death, are you? You have nothing to fear. I killed the Black Rabbit, so I don't think anyone is going to die for a while."

Vervain's breathing quickened. As much as he hated to admit it, Orchis was right: Campion was insane. But that only made him even more dangerous.

"I'm not afraid," he lied pitifully.

"Do you seriously expect me to believe that?"

Vervain was stammering incomprehensibly.

"No matter," Campion continued. "I know you tried to kill Woundwort."

Vervain gasped. Had this been any other rabbit, he would have been relieved that someone finally believed him. But this was Campion, his lifelong enemy. To make things worse, he had never confessed to the attempted murder in Campion's presence; how did he know?

"It was the outsiders..." Vervain said.
“That’s what I thought at first. But then the Black Rabbit set me straight.”

“I swear it wasn't me...”

“Are you sure about that?”

Vervain could Campion's claws against his tail. He had no choice but to confess.

“It was me.”

“Good.” Campion hopped off the bearded rabbit. “Now go and leave me alone. If you keep spreading vile rumours about me like you did so many times in Efrafa, I'll make sure everyone knows what you did.”

“You think that scares me? I already tried telling Woundwort, he didn't believe me.”

“Oh, but he'll believe ME. I was there, and I saw you do it.”

“No you didn't! I made sure there was nobody watching when I did it.”

“You're right. I wasn't there, but what matters is whether Woundwort believes me.”

“What makes you so sure he will believe you?”

“Do you really want to risk it?”

This had the desired effect. While Vervain was doubtful of whether Woundwort would believe Campion, he just couldn't risk it. He scurried out of the burrow before Campion could tackle him again.
“Oh really, Loganberry, must we have those ridiculous nicknames still? He's getting on for three months old now, you know - surely he's long past the time of silly games. What's wrong with Worcesterberry, for heaven's sake?”

--Loganberry, *When You're In A Hole, Start Digging*

It took a while for all the newcomers to the Watership Down warren to gather in the Honeycomb. While most of them were at silflay, others were still asleep in their burrows, and Hazel did not want to wake them up. Several were confused, wondering why the Chief wanted to speak with them; Flyairth in particular seemed worried that they were getting kicked out of the warren.

Eventually, nearly everyone was present. The only newcomers missing were Strawberry, who was guarding the kittens, and Blackberry, who was mysteriously absent, although nobody seemed worried. Fiver, Bigwig and several others were also present, watching Hazel as he addressed the group:

-“It has come to my attention that during my absence, several rabbits have joined the warren here at Watership Down. I think it would be a good idea to formally welcome the new arrivals, and get to know them better. Firstly, I wish to clear up what appears to be a common misconception. I don't intend to force anyone to leave. You are all welcome at this warren, and under no circumstances will you be kicked out.”

Hazel hopped closer to the rabbits, and started talking to the one in front; she was also the smallest.

-“Hello. What's your name?”
-“Nyreem, what's yours?”
-“I'm Hazel. How old are you?”
-“Around one set of seasons. You?”
-“Almost three. How...”
-“I hear you're the Chief Rabbit here. How long have you held that position?”
-“Just over a set of seasons, when the warren was first started.”
-“How do you manage with so many responsibilities?”
-“It's not always easy, I can tell you that. But for the most part I enjoy it, and I try to do what I think is best for the warren.”
-“Er, Hazel,” Hawkbit said as he poked Hazel in the back, “you're the one who's supposed to be asking questions here.”
-“There's nothing wrong if she...” Hazel turned to look at Hawkbit, and suddenly fell silent. “What happened to your ears?”
-“Well, you see, it's because of Fly...”
-“I'll have to tell Blackberry to do something about this when she gets back.”
"But..."

"Sorry for the interruption, Nyreem." Hazel turned back to the young doe. "So, is there something you want everyone here to know about you?"

"There is. I may be small, I may be young, but I'm determined to prove my worth and be important to the warren."

"I'm sure you'll do some great things, when the time comes."

With that, Hazel moved on to the next rabbit. It was another doe, and she seemed about the same size he was.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Hyzenthlay."

"Tell me about your past life."

"There isn't much to say. I was born around three sets of seasons ago in another warren, some distance away. About two seasons later, two does, Flyairth and Prake, visited with a few others, hoping to recruit some other rabbits to join the warren they were going to start. I thought it was an interesting offer, so I accepted. Life there was great, and I eventually earned the position of captain of owsla."

"Does in the owsla, eh?" Captain Broom said. "Quite unusual, although there was that one time at old Redstone when..."

"How do you like it here?" Hazel asked, interrupting the elderly captain before he could continue his story.

"From what I've seen so far, it's a great place," Hyzenthlay said. "It has everything a rabbit could ask for."

"I'm glad to hear you like it here. Don't hesitate to reach out if you need anything."

"There's just one thing I would like to know," Bigwig suddenly said. "You say you were a captain of owsla at that old warren. Do you want to be a captain of owsla here?"

"I don't expect you would give me that position so quickly, considering I've only been here for a few days. But I plan to do my best to prove my skills and, if you think I'm worthy, earn the position again."

"Bigwig, can we deal with owsla business later?" Hazel said. "First we should get to know these rabbits."

With that, he went to the third rabbit. She was the largest rabbit of the group, larger even than Bigwig.

"I'm Flyairth," she said.

"So you're the former Chief Rabbit?"

"Yes, me and...Prake..."

"Is Prake here at the warren?"
"No. She died when it was destroyed..."

"I'm really sorry."

"Well what? She's dead. Being sorry won't bring her back. What else do you want to know?"

"I'm sorry if I'm bringing back painful memories..."

"Proceed with the questioning."

"Tell me more about the old warren. Why did you create it?"

"It all started four sets of seasons ago, when I was born. The first few seasons were quite frustrating. It felt like I didn't have any chance at leading a decent life. The warren was called Ivylush, and the owsla was made up entirely of bucks. If you were a doe, you just couldn't expect to earn any important position, or even go on a simple farm raid. So, one day, I just left. Prake had similar complains, and left with me; nobody else did. I never heard from that warren again afterwards."

"Did anyone try to stop you?"

"No, and I think some of them were actually glad to see us leave."

"I see. And after you left the warren, what happened next?"

"We knew we wanted to start a new warren, one that would be free from the problems of the old one. And we knew we couldn't start a new warren just the two of us, so we wandered for a few moons, and stopped at various warrens, trying to convince other rabbits to join us. After a while, we had assembled a large enough group, and that's how the warren was created. That was around two and a half sets of seasons ago."

"How do you like it here, at Watership Down?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"It seems like a nice place, but you have one critical weakness."

"What is this weakness? If it's as bad as you say it is, something will have to be done about it."

"The owsla is horrible. Excluding the captain, there are only three rabbits, and only one of them takes it seriously."

"I'm the captain of owsla," Bigwig said menacingly as he approached Flyairth, "Are you saying I'm not doing a good job?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying at all," Flyairth replied. You're big and strong, and you seem to take the job seriously. But I can't say the same about the others. I had permission from Fiver-rah to train your owsla in your absence, and..."

"Oh, so you trained my owsla? What was it like?"

"Terrible. They didn't listen to me."

Bigwig fell silent for a few moments.
"Then you know what sort of nonsense I have to deal with," he finally said.

"Bigwig," Hawkbit started to say, "while she was training us she..."

"What happened to your ears?" Bigwig suddenly asked. Hawkbit sighed.

"That's what I've been trying to say..."

"Blackberry will have to do something about this if she comes back."

"WHEN she and Primrose come back," Hazel corrected.

"But until that happens," Bigwig continued, "does anyone else here know how to fix his ears?"

"I tried to help him while you were gone," Thethuthinnang said, "but it didn't work."

"I really wish Blackberry was here," Hawkbit said. "She used to get on my nerves with all the talk about digging, but she is useful sometimes..."

"Here I am!" another rabbit suddenly said as he arrived in the Honeycomb. "Sorry I'm late, I was..."

"Who are YOU?" Bigwig asked.

"I'm Blackberry. Didn't you ask for me?"

"You're Blackberry?"

"Yes..."

"There are two Blackberry-s now?" Clover giggled. "That's pretty fun."

Bigwig stared at Blackberry for a while, before finally shaking his head.

"Do you know anything about healing?"

"Not a lot."

"Can you straighten Hawkbit's ears, over there?" Bigwig gestured to the grey buck.

"I'm afraid I can't help you with that."

"Never mind." Bigwig hopped back to the group in the centre of the burrow. "Now what were we talking about?"

"We were talking about the owsla," Flyairth said.

"Right. So, you trained them, but you didn't get anywhere. Considering my own experience, I'm honestly not surprised. If you had reported success, I would have made you captain on the spot."

"Bigwig, no!" Dandelion said.

"The biggest problem is they lack motivation," Flyairth continued. "If they took things seriously, they would be a lot better."

"No!" Hawkbit suddenly said. "The biggest problem is you made us do dangerous things we shouldn't have done. Look what you did to my ears!"
"What happened to your ears is your own fault. If you had paid attention to my instructions, this wouldn't have happened."

Bigwig was torn. From one point of view, it was likely that Hawkbit's accident was his fault, but he couldn't dismiss the possibility that Flyairth had made him do something reckless either.

"A few days from now, you'll have to show me what you did," he told Flyairth. "And I'll see what can be done to improve the owsla."

"Thank you for expressing your concern, Flyairth," Hazel said. "It appears that Bigwig will be taking action."

"I sure hope so!"

"You sure showed that plump rabbit, Chief!" Nelthilta suddenly shouted.

"I don't think we've met already," Hazel said, hopping over to the young doe.

"I'm Nelthilta. And I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to Flyairth-rah."

"I see. What about this...plump rabbit?"

"That's your captain of owsla."

"What did you call me?" Bigwig said angrily, as he hopped over to the doe and looked at her straight in the eyes.

"Plump rabbit. I mean, I'm just stating facts. You ARE very plump."

A look of fury appeared in Bigwig's eyes. It took all his self-control not to cuff Nelthilta in the face.

"We'll have to talk about her later," he whispered to Hazel, before hopping away.

Hazel nodded, and moved on to the next rabbit, who happened to be Myrkin. Before either rabbit could introduce himself, however, they heard loud shouting, and Hazel was tackled by his kittens.

"Oh brambles!" Strawberry said, as she ran into the burrow. "I'm sorry, I tried to keep them under control, but they were too fast for me..."
"Now they all have fled.
I wonder what they're doing here
And where they will go
But I wonder hopelessly
For I shall never know"

--water-lily1, *Spectator*

It was late evening. At the warren of the shining wires, nearly everyone was at silflay. Buckthorn's rotting body remained in the grass near the warren, and the others stayed away from it. It was only a matter of time before the elil (or the farmer) showed up and took him away, and nobody wanted to be there when it happened.

Toadflax had mysteriously vanished earlier that afternoon, and while everyone had noticed his absence, nobody had made any attempt at finding him. If a wire got him, good riddance. However, in the middle of the silflay, he turned up again.

-"I've unravelled...the mystery," he said in an overdramatic tone.

He looked at the others, awaiting a reaction, but none came.

-"Wait wait wait, that's it?" he said in disbelief. "Isn't anyone going to praise my exceptional crime-solving skills? Or even ask me who did it?"

-"All right," came the annoyed voice of Flesca. "Who did it?"

-"The killer...is.........."

-"Enough with the suspense already," Speedwell said, "just tell us who's guilty."

-"Fine! I can't believe how underappreciated I am here. Anyway, Acorn."

Acorn, along with everyone else, remained silent for a few moments, until it dawned on him what Toadflax had said.

-"You think I did it?" he said.

-"Of course you did," Toadflax replied. "The evidence clearly proves it."

-"What evidence?"

-"Of course you deny its existence. Seriously, confess now and I'll go easy on you when it's time for you to be punished."

-"Punished? Can't I even get a fair trial like Prince Rainbow gave El-ahrairah?"

-"I don't think he is guilty," came the voice of Speedwell. "This is just retaliation for his outburst earlier, isn't it?"
"If you look at the evidence," Toadflax explained, "you will come to the exact same conclusion I did."

"But you still haven't told us what the evidence even is," Tindra pointed out.

"The trial is tomorrow morning," Toadflax said, ignoring the doe. "Until then, Acorn, you are confined to the prison burrow. Any attempt to escape will be considered an admission of guilt, and the sentence shall be carried out without any trial."

Toadflax bit Acorn's ear and slowly dragged him underground. After they were gone, Flesca suddenly burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" Tindra asked. "Our friend has been arrested."

"I know he's not guilty. Because I am."

"It's very admirable for you to be willing to sacrifice yourself to save Acorn," Speedwell said, "but I don't think Toadflax will fall for that."

"But...oh, never mind."

"The thing is," Speedwell continued, "is we have to find the true killer."

"That's right," Tindra said. "Toadflax is a really poor investigator. I don't think Acorn is guilty, but if he, I'm sure Toadflax just made a lucky guess."

"It could be any one of us," Flesca added.

"I'm going to talk to Acorn right now," Speedwell said, "to see if he has any theories or other useful information."

Speedwell hopped underground, and searched for the burrow where Acorn was confined. It was one of the smallest and deepest burrows in the warren, near the ancient human well. Toadflax was sitting in front of the entrance.

"What are you doing?"

"I wish to speak to the prisoner," Speedwell explained.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Nobody is to speak with the prisoner until the trial."

"Why not?"

"So you don't conspire against me. You'll speak with him in the morning, just before the trial."

With a sigh, Speedwell hopped away, and made it back above ground.

"That was quick," Flesca pointed out.

"Toadflax is guarding the burrow, and wouldn't let me in," Speedwell explained.

"That's all right," Tindra said. "He can't stay there and guard all night. When he falls asleep, we'll
Acorn remained wide awake the entire night. He knew he was innocent, but Toadflax was completely convinced of his guilt. He didn't know how to prove his innocence, apart from finding the true killer, but how could he do that while kept imprisoned in a dark old burrow?

Suddenly, he noticed a small red light further away. How was this possible? The burrow he was in was so deep underground that it was pitch-black at all times; where did this red come from?

He then remembered a story Silverweed had once told. Many seasons before, the warren had a large chamber filled with mysterious red crystals. Several rabbits kept a crystal between their ears for good luck. However, the burrow eventually collapsed, and the crystals were soon forgotten. Could the collapsed burrow be nearby, hence the crystal sticking out of the dirt?

Only then did he realize that the crystal was moving. Another rabbit appeared to be holding it, and Acorn could see the sharp pointed tip of the crystal approaching. He was soon cornered, but the other rabbit, who remained invisible in the darkness, kept approaching.

"I sense a disturbance," the visitor said. "Do you know what the solution is?"

"What is it?" Acorn said, terrified.

"Simple. You try another version. Then you pretend nothing ever happened."

Then, the visitor lunged.

At Watership Down, it took a long time for the kittens to be brought back under control. Every time one was captured, their siblings helped them escape again. Eventually, Hazel had no choice but to bribe them with flayrah. He also asked Bigwig and Hyzenthlay to work with Strawberry to make sure they stayed in their burrow.

It was mid-afternoon by the time Hazel was able to get back to the interviews. And even then, there was a problem.

"There's someone missing," he said. "I don't know who, but didn't there used to be more rabbits here?"

"Hyzenthlay, Strawberry and Bigwig are with the kittens," Blackberry said.

"I know, but I don't think they're the only ones missing."

"Bluebell," Nyreem said. "He ran off above ground when the kittens showed up and I haven't seen him since."

"Hopefully he hasn't run away from the warren. We've already had too much of that recently."

While Hazel's comment was about Blackberry and Primrose, it also reminded Fiver of Blueberry. He had yet to mention the kitten's existence, or the perilous situation he was in, to Hazel. It had slipped his mind once again, and now that he had remembered, Hazel was busy with something else. It would have to wait until after the interviews were finished.

Hazel, Fiver and Blackberry went above ground. Fortunately, Bluebell had not run away; he simply stood at the edge of the Down, staring in the distance.
"You all right?" Fiver asked.

"Those kittens startled me. I've never seen any rabbit so excited before."

"They can be at times. They're back in their burrow now, there's nothing to worry about."

"Kiss me Blackberry."

"What?" Blackberry made a few steps backwards. "Why?"

"It will make me feel better, following the excitement."

"No. Absolutely not."

Blackberry ran back underground before Bluebell could reply.

"Do you often kiss him?" Hazel asked.

"Sadly no. I often try, but he's never interested. Hopefully, one day, he will change his mind and learn to enjoy the wonders of pressing your nose and whiskers against another rabbit's, especially one as good-looking as me."

The three remaining rabbits went back to the Honeycomb. It appeared that most of the newcomers had started playing bob-stones in their absence, although one of them was simply sitting further away.

"Why are you not playing?" Hazel asked the doe.

"I've already been eliminated," she replied. "Anyway, I'm Thethuthinnang. You're Hazel-rah, right?"

"That's me. Tell me more about yourself."

"There isn't much to tell. I've lived a mostly uneventful life. I used to be captain of owsla at my old warren, along with Hyzenthlay. I don't know how I managed to get the position. I'm not big, strong or pretty like she is. I sometimes sing, and I know a bit about healing, but those talents are not really useful in an owsla."

"These are still very interesting skills. I've never heard a rabbit singing before, could I hear?"

"I would, but considering some rabbits' reactions to the singing cat a few days ago, I have a feeling..."

"The singing cat?"

"It's a long story," Fiver said. "We had a few visitors while you were gone, Hazel."

"Good job Vilthuril," came the voice of Silver, as he raised his paw, revealing the three stones underneath. "You've won the game."

"Congratulations Vilthuril," Fiver said, rather awkwardly. This doe never ceased to amaze him, but he always felt very nervous when talking to her. He hopped closer to his brother, until the two rabbits' fur touched.

"Something wrong, Fiver?" Hazel asked.
"No. I'm fine. Everything is fine."
Return and Revelations

“Can’t run... too much pain.”

--Cherokee Dragonfly, *Too Far to Come Back*

The beech tree was now plainly visible at the top. It was evening, they were so close to the warren, they simply had to make it to the top and the journey would be over. Yet, it felt so far away, a seemingly unachievable goal.

-“Come on, Primrose, we're almost there now,” Blackberry said.

The yellow-furred doe staggered forward, leaning against her friend for balance. With each step she made, she looked like she was going to collapse and tumble back to the bottom.

-“Please don't talk about your warren anymore...”

-“We're almost there now!” Meadow said. “Not much longer to go.”

-“All these seasons in Efrafa...LOST!”

The desperate cry of “lost” rang out over a great distance.

-“Primrose, be careful, you'll attract elil,” Meadow said.

-“Blackavar, be quiet,” she mumbled, “do you want the guards to hear?”

At the warren, Hazel had spent most of the afternoon talking with the new arrivals, and getting to know them better. He had just finished with Silverweed, the only one to have caused any trouble. It took Fiver a long time to convince Hazel that Silverweed wouldn't be using any of the mind tricks he had used at Cowslip's warren.

At that moment, Bigwig entered the Honeycomb.

-“Just got back from silflay,” he said. “Did I miss anything?”

-“I'm afraid you missed quite a lot,” Hazel replied. “There is only one rabbit I haven't talked with yet.”

-“Which one?”

-“This one.” Hazel pointed to Spartina.

-“If you don't mind, I would like to question this rabbit,” Bigwig said.

-“Fire away,” Spartina said. Bigwig turned to her, and spent a while staring at her. For some reason, he found her strangely beautiful.

-“So...we might as well start with the basics. What's your name?”

-“Spartina.”

-“And, uh...where do you come from?”
Spartina grew tense at this question. Her past was still as hazy in her mind as it was when she had first arrived at the warren. She didn't know what to answer: she could either tell the truth, which would make her look suspicious, or invent something, which would be really awkward if she ever regained her memories. But if she remained silent for too long, the others might assume she was hiding something.

-"I don't..."

-"Hey, can someone help me?" Everyone turned to the burrow's entrance, where the voice came from, and saw Meadow, Blackberry and Primrose. While Blackberry was not physically hurt, she remained visibly exhausted. Primrose was even worse: her breathing was slow, and the leaves around her tail had fallen off during the ascent, exposing the wound. Only Meadow appeared unharmed.

-"What happened?" Hazel shouted.

-"I'll explain later," Blackberry answered, “the top priority at the moment is getting her to her burrow.”

Hazel's mind was filled with questions, but he managed to register the urgency of the situation, and hopped over to his mate to support her as she slowly made her way towards the burrow. Until suddenly...

-"Hey mother's back!"

-"YAAAAAAY!"

-"Let's tackle-hug her!"

-"No!" Blackberry cried out desperately. “That's the worst thing that can possibly happen!”

Realizing what was about to happen, Meadow and Fiver jumped in front of Primrose to shield her from the kittens.

-"Pipkin, get your junior owsla under control!" Bigwig ordered.

Pipkin quickly looked at the scene, and realized the danger Primrose was facing.

-"Junior Owsla: attention!" he shouted.

-"Who cares about Junior Owsla business, mother's back!"

-"Yeah! There's a time for training and that's not now."

-"But your mother's got a surprise for you outside,” Pipkin said. He knew there was no surprise, and the kittens would most likely be furious when they found out, but it would hopefully keep them distracted long enough for Primrose to be carried to her burrow.

-"YAAAAAAY!"

-"Let's go check out the surprise!"

The three kittens immediately rushed outside.

-"Where is it?"
"I don't see anything!"

"Did mother trick us?"

"She didn't say anything, it was Pipkin."

"Yeah, Pipkin must be punished!"

"He must be thoroughly tickled!"

"And after we're done with him, we'll tickle mother too, for good measure."

"Wait, what's that over there?"

"Where?"

"There! It smells like lettuce."

"It IS lettuce!"

"Looks like we won't have to tickle them after all..."

"We can tickle them anyway! Not as a punishment, but to thank them."

Pipkin was confused: there was not supposed to be any lettuce above ground. He was about to go investigate when he saw Strawberry arrive.

"Did you bring the flayrah above ground?" he asked.

"I did. You just wanted to help Primrose, and I couldn't let you be tickled for it."

"Thanks Strawberry."

Meanwhile, Hazel, Fiver, Meadow, Primrose and Blackberry had reached the burrow Hazel and Primrose shared; the yellow-furred doe immediately collapsed. Blackberry rushed to her own burrow, and soon came back with a few leaves, which she carefully wrapped around Primrose's tail.

"Open your mouth." As soon as Primrose had done so, Blackberry put a few roots inside. "Now chew. Don't swallow."

Primrose painfully looked at Blackberry, seemingly unaware that Hazel, Fiver and Meadow were also present, and started to chew.

"Will she be all right?" Hazel asked.

"Of course, but she needs absolute rest," Blackberry replied. That was only partially true: she had absolutely no idea if Primrose would survive, and wouldn't know for several more hours. "Nobody is to visit her until I say so. Wake me up fu Inlé so I can check up on her. All of you will have to leave now."

With that, she hopped out of the burrow. Before she could return to her own burrow, however, she collapsed in exhaustion in the Honeycomb, and fell asleep. Hawkbit hopped over to her.

"Hey Blackberry, my ears are..."

"She needs rest," Meadow said, "don't wake her.
"Who are you?" Hawkbit asked. "What's going on?"

"Blackberry and Primrose are back," Bigwig said, "and you are not to disturb them under any circumstances. This is Meadow, she's the one who found them. Now go back to your burrow."

"I'm so confused," Hawkbit said.

"We'll explain later. Now go."

With a groan, Hawkbit went back to his burrow. The other rabbits gradually hopped away, until only Hazel, Fiver, Meadow and sleeping Blackberry remained.

"Why...why must this happen?" Hazel asked his brother.

"Are you not relieved that Meadow found them after all?"

"Yes, but...she's deeply hurt, and I can't help her."

"I'm sure Blackberry knows what she's doing."

"I know, but I still feel so powerless."

With that, Hazel leaned over Fiver, and started to cry.

Primrose slowly opened her eyes and looked around the burrow. Her vision was really blurry, but the burrow seemed vaguely familiar. What was weird, however, was what she heard. There was a faint ringing in her ears, which gradually turned to laughter: loud, sadistic laughter. It was all in her imagination, but it felt horrifyingly real. To her, there was only one possible explanation: nothing had ever happened, she was still imprisoned in Efrafa. Hazel and Watership Down were nothing but a dream.

She squealed as loudly as she could: it was the only valid course of action under the circumstances. This caused the pain in her tail to flare up again.

Everyone in the warren heard the squeal, and several rabbits rushed to see what had happened. Hazel feared the worst: this sounded like the agonizing cry of a dying rabbit. As he arrived at the burrow, he saw Blackberry come out.

"She had a nightmare," she said.

"She's alive?"

"Yes. Try not to worry so much, Hazel."

Hazel was not the only rabbit who had gone to investigate the sound. A few peaked inside the burrow. The rabbit inside looked familiar to Hyzenthlay, and she made her way to the front of the crowd.

Primrose, by that point, had buried her face under her front paws and was crying, when she suddenly smelled another rabbit, and it definitely wasn't Vervain. She carefully removed her front paws and raised her head, to take a look at the dark-furred rabbit who was standing in front of her.

"Hyz?"

"Primrose?"
"Is it really you, or are you just a dream?"

"I'm really here."

Hyzenthlay hopped forward, and nuzzled the other doe, softly to avoid hurting her. Meanwhile outside the burrow, Hazel and Blackberry were still talking.

"It's fine, Hazel. Her situation is slowly improving." This time, Blackberry was telling the truth; Primrose would most likely survive.

"Is there really nothing I can do to help?"

"Not yet. When dawn comes, however, she will need plenty of emotional support. Until then, she needs more rest."

With that, Blackberry hopped away; this time, she was able to reach her burrow to sleep. Most other rabbits also hopped away.

"One of those new does, Hyzenthlay I think, is in there," Bigwig said. "Should I get her out?"

"No," came the sudden voice of Silverweed. "They know each other."

"How is that possible?" Hazel asked. "When Hyzenthlay first arrived here, Primrose was already gone."

"That was before you met either of them, Hazel. It was at old Redstone. They're sisters."

Hazel remained silent for a few moments.

"She never told me she had a sister. In fact, she never talked about any of her relatives."

"So...let her stay inside, then?" Bigwig said.

"Seems like the best option," Fiver replied.

"Fine..."

Bigwig appeared annoyed by the situation, and hopped away; Silverweed soon followed. Soon, the only rabbits left outside the burrow were Hazel and Fiver.

"Are you all right, dear brother?" Fiver asked.

"Well, yes...and no...I mean...I'm shocked...oh I don't make sense..."

"Don't worry, Hazel. I'm sure everything will be all right."

Hazel did not reply, and simply hugged Fiver tightly.

"Do you mind if I breathe?" the smaller rabbit said.
Silverweed suddenly woke up. He had had a very unpleasant dream, in which he found himself transformed into a bird of some sort, although he was unsure which species. Then another bird, with green and black feathers, shot him with a purple gun. As he lay dying in the middle of the field of dandelions, he could see Strawberry trying to fight the bird; the doe didn't seem to be doing well. And suddenly a falcon flew overhead, as the bird Strawberry was fighting mysteriously lost all her feathers.

Was this a sample of things to come, or just a random nightmare? Horrified at the thought of this really happening, he hopped out of his burrow to go to silflay. Along the way, he saw Hazel pacing back and forth in a far corner. Blackberry approached the Chief.

-“What's the matter, Hazel-rah?”

-“I failed,” Hazel replied, without even looking at Blackberry.

-“What did you fail at?”

-“Helping her.”

-“Her?”

-“Yes.”

-“Who is she?”

Hazel did not reply, continuing to pace back and forth. When it became obvious he would not get an answer to his question, Blackberry hopped away. In another corner of the burrow, Bluebell was nibbling a turnip; he lied down next to him.

-“Do you know what's the matter with Hazel?” Blackberry asked.

-“The details are hazy, but from what I managed to figure out, he's worried his mate might die.”

-“Which rabbit is his mate?”

-“Primrose, the one who squealed earlier. Hyzenthlay's sister.”

-“That other doe who checked up on her said it was just a nightmare. Why is he still worried?”

-“Bucks in love can be like that sometimes.” Bluebell winked, but Blackberry did not appear to notice.

-“There seems to be a lot about this situation I don't know. And Hyzenthlay's sister turning up after so long...I'll have to ask everyone some questions in the morning.”

-“Until then, how about a kiss?”

-“The answer is still no.”
"He pinned me to the ground, and told me that if I didn't do as he said he would kill me."

Hyzenthlay was sitting in front of her sister, in the latter's burrow. Primrose was lying in a corner, conscious but plainly weak, and was telling Hyzenthlay about the day Vervain attacked Redstone. Hyzenthlay had quickly realized that her sister's life had been full of suffering.

"I don't want to trigger any painful memories..." Hyzenthlay said.

"No, there is no point in hiding from the past. It happened, you deserve to know."

"You're already in a bad enough shape without thinking back at such horrors."

"You think that's sad? This is just the beginning."

"Are you sure you want to keep going?"

"Are you interested?"

"Yes, but only if you want to tell me. I don't want you to feel forced to tell me if you would rather not."

"In that case I'll tell you everything. Where was I?"

"That buck with the creepy smile is threatening to kill you."

"Oh, Vervain...anyway, I wanted to stay alive, so I followed him. And only a few days later regretted it."

"You regretted obeying him?"

"Yes. I soon learned two things. Firstly, he wouldn't have killed me even if I had disobeyed him, he was just trying to scare me into submission. Secondly, once I was in Efrafa, death was very appealing."

"Efrafa?"

Primrose sighed.

"I'm not making much sense, am I?" she said.

"From what I make out, you suffered so much you wished you were dead."

"At the time, yes, but not anymore. I was rescued from Efrafa, and life became worth living again."

The two does nuzzled.

"It seems to me I went massively off-topic just now," Primrose said. "What was I talking about?"

"How you followed creepy Vervain away from Redstone."

"Oh yes...the trip took a few days, during which everyone was kept under strict surveillance. The guards wouldn't let you go anywhere, although it wasn't as bad as in Efrafa..."

The lake seemed to stretch on forever, and the island was very far away. The road continued on the
island; there used to be a bridge over the lake, but it had collapsed long ago.

-"Oof!" Hannah told no-one in particular. "Hoo am I gonna git to the oter sid?"

Hannah looked around her, trying to think of a way to cross the lake. While Kehaar often got on
her nerves, his ability to fly was quite useful sometimes. She looked at the trees around her;
hopefully the branches would stretch out far enough for her to jump to the island. She climbed a
nearby tree, and made it to the end of one of the branches. It barely made it past the shore; any
attempts at jumping would cause her to land in the lake. However, she noticed a vine overhead:
what if she used it to swing, hopefully giving her enough momentum to reach the island? It was
worth a try.

Hannah grabbed the vine and ran off the branch. She swung a certain distance, but the vine soon
swung back. It kept swinging a few times like a pendulum, before finally stabilizing a short
distance from the shore. Hannah looked down with horror as she seemed trapped in mid-air, unable
to go anywhere. She squirmed, desperately hoping she might be able to swing back to the tree, but
it was of no use. To make things worse, the vine appeared to be slowly breaking off, which would
send her falling into the water.

At the Whitchurch Police Station, there was a woman inside the lone interrogation room. She had
been there for over an hour by the time someone arrived to question her. Two officers entered the
room; the first was holding a file, and according to his badge, his name was “J. Dusty”. The other
had a large bowl of shrimp, which he was chewing noisily; his badge was slightly rusty, rendering
his name unreadable.

-"Sorry to have kept you waiting,” Officer Dusty said. “You know how it is, not enough money
to...”

-"Cut to the chase,” the woman said.

-”Right.” Officer Dusty opened the file and browsed through the pages. “You sure you don't want a
lawyer?”

-”I was a law student, I can take care of myself.”

-”Very well. According to this document, you were arrested for attempted arson, fare evasion, and
littering.”

-”Attempted arson? Seriously? I know I played with matches...”

-”So you do admit to starting a fire.”

-”I was trying to perform a magic trick!”

-”Several of the passengers we talked to said that you were behaving erratically while holding
the...”

-”Also, littering? How?”

-”You threw a match out the window.”

-”No I didn't!”

-”Eyewitnesses say otherwise.”
"I didn't commit fare evasion either. I paid for my ticket, but it was stolen after I boarded."

"I've looked at surveillance camera footage from the station, and there is no evidence of you ever buying a ticket."

"Maybe she's telling the truth," the second officer said, taking a break from his shrimp.

"Nice to see at least one person believes me here," the woman said. "But you're both overlooking the more obvious crime here."

The two officers fell silent.

"And what crime is that?" Officer Dusty eventually asked.

"Assault and battery. I was beaten up on that train."

"What you call assault and battery, I call a brave civilian trying to restrain a violent criminal."

"I'm not the criminal here, I'm the victim. While I'm rotting here in this dirty old building, the real criminals are running free. Aren't you at least going to get my side of the story?"

"She's right, we probably should," the shrimp officer said.

"Fine," Officer Dusty finally said. "What did this person look like?"

"Which one?"

"...the one who attacked you."

"There were several."

"Describe them all."

"Well, the first one was..."

The woman spent several minutes describing those who had attacked her. One of the officers continued to noisily chew his shrimp, paying no attention to her. Officer Dusty seemed to be paying attention at first, but after a while he pulled out his smartphone and started typing.

"Are you even listening to me?" The woman stood up in anger.

"Are these the ones who attacked you?" the officer asked, showing her his phone's screen.

"Yes! This photograph depicts them very accurately. Where did you get it?"

"From an animated cartoon."

"...what?"

"If you want my advice, plead insanity. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some paperwork to file."

With that, Officer Dusty got up and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him. The other officer pushed the bowl of shrimp in front of the woman.

"Want some?"

"Don't mind if I do," she replied, as she picked up one piece.
"So, you got attacked by some cartoon characters? Tsk, tsk, no jury's ever going to believe you..."

"I thought you were on my side!"

"But I am. Call me..." The woman was unable to make out the last word.

"I'm sorry?"

"My name is..."

The woman accidentally knocked the bowl of shrimp off the table; the loud noise prevented her from hearing the officer's name. He looked at the floor, then sighed.

"I can help you beat this rap," he said. "But on one condition."

"What's the catch?"

"Once you're free, you must buy me another bowl of shrimp."
8 Rabbits 2 Nightmares

“Few knew who this was, but for the few who did, it was a frightening sight to behold.”

--Axel Sregor, *El-ahrairah'a [sic] Owsla*

The small boat was on river, the wind carrying it through its lone sail. On the side of the boat, one could read “SV Milfoil”, white on the otherwise black hull.

On the boat, a lone rabbit was sitting, adjusting the sail so it could capture the wind better. Vesper had been thinking about his new friend Pipkin's offer to join his warren. It certainly seemed a better life than aimlessly wandering, and the warren was close enough to the river, so he wouldn't have to give up his boat either. But he remained afraid: would the other rabbits accept him as quickly as Pipkin had?

He looked at the sky. It was getting late, he would have to stop sailing for the night. He gradually lowered the sail until the boat reached the shore. Anchoring it with a broken tree branch, he hopped back on solid ground and set out to dig a scrape for the night. After the hole was large enough for him to lie comfortably inside, he fell asleep.

Vesper's dream was eerily pleasant. He met two foxes, but they were not interested in eating him. Instead, the three creatures decided to work together in order to remove a fallen tree, until suddenly one fox kissed the other. Vesper fell in a state of cuteness overload, unable to move or speak, as the foxes kissed again, and vowed to become mates.

When he woke up, he could hear faint wailing. It took him a few moments to realize that this not part of the dream, but reality. He had no idea what sort of creature could be making this noise. It could be elil (and, sadly, real foxes would most likely try to harm him, rather than befriend him like in his dream). He would have to ready the boat to be able to make an emergency escape on the river, should it be necessary.

After setting up the sail, he remained on the boat, ready to remove the branch anchor at a moment's notice, as the wailing gradually became louder. Eventually, a creature came into view. To his surprise, it was not elil, but another rabbit. Two others soon followed.

Realizing that there was no immediate danger, Vesper quickly anchored the boat again and hopped over to the rabbits. Only then did he realize the dreadful state they were in. One of them appeared to have lost most of the fur on her body. The second one was covered with cuts, and was holding a young kitten, barely a few months old. The third one, the only buck, did not have any visible injuries, but nevertheless appeared exhausted; it was he who was wailing. Vesper was horrified: what had happened to these rabbits?

The rabbit with missing fur appeared to be the first to notice Vesper's presence.

-"Do you have a warren, where we can rest?" she asked, in a barely audible voice.

-"No warren, but you're welcome inside my burrow,” he replied.

Vesper guided the four rabbits to his burrow. While the doe who had spoken was relieved to meet him, the others appeared to be afraid of him, refusing to let him touch them. Clearly, whatever hardships they had encountered was making it hard for them to trust him. Nevertheless, all rabbits were soon inside the scrape; it had been dug with only one rabbit in mind, with four it was really
cramped.

Once in the burrow, the mother started licking her kitten to get it to fall asleep, ignoring the other rabbits. The buck placed his paws around his neck.

-"Is there anything else I could do to help you all?" Vesper asked.

-"No," the other doe replied. "You've already done a lot by giving us a place to rest."

-"I'm Vesper. You are?"

-"I'm Violet. He's Hickory, she's his mate, although I have no idea what her name is. She hasn't said a single word since I met her."

-"What terrible calamity befell you all?"

-"I'm not sure," Violet replied. "I was asleep in my burrow at the warren, when suddenly I was told to run. So I ran, I wasn't paying to my surroundings. By the time I stopped, I was in the middle of the forest, I looked around, and there were only the four of us. They," she glanced at her companions, "might have a better idea of the situation, but they're in no shape to tell their tale."

-"But how did you lose your fur? That must have hurt."

-"Fire. And honestly, by now, the pain on the skin is nothing compared to that of simply existing."

-"Do you want a hug?"

-"If you want to, go ahead, but I don't care."

Vesper nevertheless hugged the doe, before lying down next to her.

Hickory made a few small steps toward Vesper, before collapsing.

-"Cowslip..." he said faintly.

-"What is he talking about?" Vesper asked.

-"I don't know," Violet replied. "He keeps mumbling random words."

-"...wire...ship..."

-"A wire? Where?"

-"I don't think he himself knows. Earlier, it sounded more like 'water' than 'wire'."

Vesper thought back at Pipkin's warren; its name sounded a lot like the words Hickory had said.

-"Watership Down."

-"What was that?" Violet asked.

-"It's a warren. I'll lead you there in the morning."

Campion had spent most of the day aimlessly wandering around Darkhaven. That afternoon, Woundwort had restored him to the rank of captain. Vervain was visibly angry at this, but did not say anything, no doubt afraid that Campion would expose him.
But that was the least of Campion's concerns. The Black Rabbit had tasked him with stopping Woundwort, but now the Black Rabbit was dead. Further complicating matters was Campion's status as a double agent. While he was still mad at Hazel over the events of their last encounter, he just couldn't betray Blackberry and all the others. He needed advice, but who could he ask? Aspen was his only friend in Darkhaven, but he was too simple-minded to provide any useful advice. Virtually everyone else was too loyal to Woundwort to provide an unbiased opinion.

There was only one rabbit left he could talk to. According to Granite, “she's the only sane one around here. And while Woundwort is officially Chief, she's still the true leader of this place”. Campion hopped inside the chamber where she lived.

Granite had not provided any physical description of this rabbit, and when Campion saw her, he was struck by a feeling of horror. She was lying at the far end of the chamber, deeply meditating, and with a weird object on her head. Upon closer examination, he realized that it was a dead rabbit's skull. Additionally, the shape of her head and the fur patterns on her body were distinctly un-rabbit-like.

"Campion,” she said emotionlessly. “I have been waiting for you.”

"Speaker,” Campion replied, “how did you know I was coming?”

"I have my sources. What do you wish to talk about?"

"My life. And my troubles.”

"You may speak.”

And he did. Campion spent a long time explaining his past, his frustrations, and his friendships.

"You have lived a most exciting life,” the Speaker said after he had finished, still in an emotionless tone. “Few rabbits have died and lived to tell the tale.”

"You're the first living rabbit to believe me when I talk about my deaths, rather than say that I'm insane. But can you explain to me what is going on? What is my destiny?”

"First living rabbit? I would not say that. Regardless, I cannot foresee your destiny. I am the Speaker of the Past. Therefore, I deal with the past. I do not know anything about the future until, of course, it becomes the past. In these situations I can know about the future.”

"Could you give me any advice?”

"Both Hazel-rah and General Woundwort have their motivations. It is impossible to know what their motivations are, exactly. I cannot read their minds, and they cannot read mine. Therefore, I do not know what their motivations are. You should ask them.”

"I could try, but I doubt either of them would give me a straight answer,” Campion said. “And what about the others, here in Darkhaven, why do they live this way? They're always fighting for no reason.”

"It is the law. The law says everything there is to know about fighting. And you shall not question the law.”

"Why not?"

"Because the law says you do not question the law.”
"The law seems needlessly complicated."

"The law, complicated or not, remains the law, and all rabbits in Darkhaven have to obey the law, or suffer the punishments prescribed by the law."

Campion sighed in frustration. This conversation was really not going as planned.

"I have one more question," he said. "How do I impress Blackberry?"

"The blackberry is very simple. First you lick it a few times, to experience the sweet taste of morning dew on the fruit, then you sink your teeth in the first quarter of the juicy plant, slowly..."

"Not the fruit! Blackberry is the name of the doe I love. Our last meeting was very awkward for both of us."

"Oh. In that case, define love."

Campion buried his face beneath his front paws. The more the Speaker of the Past spoke, the less sense she made.

"Never mind," he said, before walking towards the exit.

"Wait," the Speaker said before he left. "I have one more fact for you."

"What is it?"

"You will die again today."

"Seriously? I killed the Black Rabbit of Inlé! How is it possible for me to die again? Besides, didn't you say you couldn't see the future?"

"Death will find a way."

Campion shook his head, and walked out of the burrow. It was a quiet evening in Darkhaven, and the human had left for the night. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath to relax, although the scents of all the trash ruined the experience.

"Oh, Campion, there you are," came the voice of the General. "I was looking for you. I wanted to hear your thoughts on the owsla."

"I was having a discussion with the Speaker of the Past. Very enlightening," Campion replied, keeping his eyes closed.

"Oh yes, that reminds me...I've been wanting to have a talk with her."

Campion heard Woundwort's steps fade, as the General walked towards the Speaker's burrow. Campion slowly hopped away, realizing he would never be able to lead a happy life in Darkhaven. But what could he do about it? Even if Hazel had attacked him, he would still protect Watership Down. He had to stop Woundwort: it was his destiny. How exactly he would carry out this plan, however, he had no idea. After a while, the curiosity got the better of him, and he decided to go back to the burrow to listen to the conversation between Woundwort and the Speaker, to see if the doe would be more helpful towards the General than she was with him.

"I am General Woundwort! I am above the law!"

"Nobody is above the law."
"And if I continue with what I am doing right now, what will the consequences be?"

"Campion will die."

"And how, may I ask, will he die?"

"Crushed by a pile of round black human things. I think humans call them tyres."

Woundwort growled.

"You'll see how that won't happen," he said. "My owsla will make sure these piles of so-called tyres are be perfectly stable. Therefore, they won't crush anyone."

With that, Woundwort turned around and hopped towards the exit. Just as he was about to go outside, however...

"You realize that by doing this, you're going to be responsible for Campion's death?" the Speaker said.

As he heard this, Campion thought he had picked up the faintest trace of an emotion in the Speaker's voice. It seemed to him like quiet acceptance, although he wondered whether it was actually there, or if he had just imagined it.

"You have no idea what you're talking about," the General replied.
“They ate and ate the dried out grass, but it gave them nothing in return. The poor rabbits were starving because there was no green nutrition in the dead plants. The warren was a mass of walking skeletons”

--MistressNyx, *Legends of El-ahrairah: Evenings on the Down*

-“My burrow was surprisingly large.”

-“The rare positive thing about Efrafa.”

Primrose was telling Hyzenthlay about her time in Efrafa, starting with her first winter there.

-“That's what I thought at first,” she continued, “but around two moons after I arrived there, I felt differently. The burrow was badly dug, and was extremely cold. It was around that time that they sent another rabbit to live with me. The warren was overcrowded, so for most of my imprisonment, I had to share my burrow with other rabbits.”

-“What were they like?”

-“I honestly don't remember most of them. They changed every few moons. Bucks and does, young and old…nearly all of them failed to make a strong impression on me. That first one was very old, and very ill. He was only with me for two or three days, and he simply stayed there in the corner, moaning, shivering, coughing, before he stopped running.”

-“Didn't they try to help him or anything?”

-“They did absolutely nothing, they just let him die. I tried to help him, but there wasn't much I could do. I hardly knew anything about healing, and I didn't have access to any herbs or anything. I don't know what his disease was, but whatever it was, I got infected too. I survived, but it took me all winter to recover.”

-“That must have been terrible.”

-“It was. Pretty much the only reason why I survived was because of Campion.”

-“Who's Campion?”

-“Didn't I tell you about him already?”

-“No, the only other rabbits you mentioned by name so far were General Woundwort and Creepy Vervain.”

-“Oh…well Campion is another captain. Vervain's archenemy. They were always arguing about everything.”

-“From what you told me about Vervain, it looks like he would argue with pretty much anyone.”

-“And he did. It was much worse with Campion because, while they were both captains, the General seemed to hold Campion in higher regard, and Vervain was jealous. I think we're off-topic again…”

-“I appreciate your explanation, I was a bit confused. Anyway, you were talking about how
Campion saved your life.”

-”He did that several times, actually. Which one was I talking about?”

-”You were ill from the same disease your companion had.”

-”Right...Campion secretly gave me some flayrah so I would stay strong enough until spring. By that time, I could silflay on a regular basis, but I still couldn't get much to eat. The warren was overcrowded, and the guards didn't let us stray too far from the warren during silflay, so the supply of grass was quickly used up.”

Hannah had managed to escape her predicament by climbing back to the top of the vine, onto the tree. However, she would have to find another way to reach the island.

She chewed a small branch off the tree, and brought it to the ground. Then, she built two piles of pebbles; they were not of the exact same height, but it was close enough for what she was trying to do. She then placed the branch over the pebbles, before adding more pebbles on top of it, hopefully anchoring it in place. However, as she put her front paws on the branch, it broke apart, and one of the piles of pebbles collapsed. Hannah sighed; building this slingshot was not going to be as simple as she had hoped.

-”...but perhaps the worst part about it was that you couldn't eat it. You carried it in your mouth, but you weren't allowed to eat it. Not even a single bite. You just had to carry it to the underground chamber where it was kept.”

Primrose was still talking with Hyzenthlay about her time in Efrafa. As a slave, she had been forced to accomplish various tasks, including carrying flayrah for the General.

-”That was really cruel.” Hyzenthlay said. “They should have allowed you to eat at least some of it.”

-”Vervain took great pleasure in shouting at those who did eat some of it, or just weren't fast enough. And since I wasn't getting enough at silflay, I grew underweight. And in his twisted mind, Vervain thought that made me look pretty.”

-”You're beautiful as you are now, Primrose.”

-”You're better-looking than I am.”

-”Doesn't make you any less beautiful today. It's not your fault Vervain was mad.”

Primrose nuzzled her sister.

-”When I wasn't carrying flayrah or performing other tasks,” she continued, “I was in my overly large burrow, and that wasn't much better, because there wasn't anything to do. Those who lived with me had long ago broken down under the strain of the painful living conditions in Efrafa, so they weren't much fun talking to.”

-”How did you spend your days then?”

-”Dreaming, that one day, I would be free, and come back home to Redstone. It was pretty much the only enjoyable thing in life. But it could also be quite depressing, because no matter how convincing the dream would seem, I always woke up in the end.”
"Did you ever make it back to Redstone?"

"I did. Last spring. By that point I had spent over a full cycle of seasons in Efrafa. Hazel brought me to Redstone..."

"Hazel? You mean Hazel-rah from this warren?"

"Yes! Anyway, he brought me home, but..."

Primrose fell silent.

"What happened?" Hyzenthlay asked.

"Oh Hyz...the great sickness...they were all dead. Except captain Broom. But everyone else...all dead!"

With that, Primrose collapsed to the ground and started to cry. Hyzenthlay approached her and hugged her.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry for everything..."

Hannah placed her hing legs on the pliable branch, with her front paws on the newly-rebuilt piles of pebbles. She felt the wind blow through the leaves and feathers she had tied to her back and her front paws. She waited a few moments, starting to question whether this plan was going to work or if she was just doing something incredibly silly. She dismissed these thoughts; she had nothing to lose, and removed her front paws from the pebbles.

The improvised slingshot propelled her high in the air. For a few moments, she thought her crazy plan might actually work, until she started losing altitude. She desperately flapped her “wings”, but it was no use, and she soon landed in the middle of the lake.

Crackers slowly opened her eyes. Her vision was blurry, but she could make out the shape of another creature in front of her.

"Dann?"

"It's Tumbler."

"Ooooh...sorry Tumbler..." Crackers slowly got up, rubbing her head. She looked at her surroundings, and failed to recognize them. “I have a horrible headache. Where are we? What time is it? Where's Rosie?”

"Rosie went to gather berries for you. As for where we are, we're back at the rabbits' warren, and it's morning.”

"Morning? How long have I been out? I really messed up at the contest, didn't I?"

"No, not at all. In fact, you won.” Tumbler held out a multicoloured acorn, the first place prize for the dance contest.

Crackers picked up the acorn and spent several minutes staring at it in amazement.

"If everything went so well...why do I not remember anything?” she eventually asked.
"I'm back!" came Rosie's voice as she re-entered the den, holding various types of berries. "It's great to see you up, Crackers. I was really worried about you."

"Don't worry about me, Rosie. But could either of you please explain what happened last night? My memory draws a complete blank."

"The contest took a while," Tumbler said. "By the time everyone was done dancing, it was past sunset, and then came the lengthy judging process, during which several of the younger squirrels threw tantrums."

"I think I know why I forgot," Crackers said. "I'm intentionally suppressing painful memories of the screamfest."

"I don't think that's it," Rosie said. "You didn't seem to mind it too much when it happened, because you stuffed leaves in your ears so you wouldn't hear the noise."

"Eventually," Tumbler continued, "your victory was announced, and most of the others left. But when you were presented with the award, the acorn here, however, there was a loud noise, the tree shook, and all of us fell off the branch."

"I know what happened," Crackers said. "It's those annoying neighbours again. Nearly every day, they make loud noise, annoy everyone, and scream at us when we politely ask them to stop."

"If they're such a nuisance, can't you report them and get them kicked out?" Tumbler suggested.

"I tried, but their claim to the tree is entirely loophole-free. Fortunately, it expires next spring the day the first leaves start growing on it, but until then I still have to survive their presence. But what I don't understand is, why did I forget all this? I've fallen from trees more times than I can count, but my memory was never affected before."

"I think that's my fault," Rosie said sadly. "When I fell, I landed on top of you and spiked you. I'm sorry."

"Not your fault, Rosie," Crackers said. "It's the neighbours' fault for knocking us down in the first place. I assume you and Tumbler carried me back here afterwards?"

"We had to, it was too dangerous over there," Tumbler explained. "Although, it isn't much safer around here, with the murderer rabbit on the loose."

"Speaking of which," Rosie added, "they almost killed another one in our absence..."

"We need to do something," Crackers said, "before they all die. But that Toadflax fellow won't let us."

"We need to find a way to talk to the others without him finding out," Rosie suggested. "I have a plan."

"Snazz," Tumbler replied. "What does this plan involve?"
“He was tired, and his only remaining follower was just talking too much. 'You know our laws.'”

--Kixstana Boxin, *Hassel [sic] with Hlessi*

Acorn was sitting in front of the warren's main entrance, a crystal through his ear. The mysterious rabbit who had attacked him the previous night had not succeeded in killing him, merely hurting one ear instead. Speedwell was trying to pull the crystal out from the ears, with Tindra and Flesca pushing from the other end. After what felt like forever, they finally succeeded in removing the crystal. Acorn had a big hole in his left ear, but was otherwise unharmed.

-“Now that the crystal is gone,” Toadflax said, “we may proceed with the trial.”
-“Hang on,” Tindra said. “You're not seriously going through with this?”
-“Give me one good reason why not.”
-“Someone tried to kill Acorn. It may be the same rabbit who killed Buckthorn.”

Toadflax fell silent for a few moments. Then, he burst into laughter.

-“You completely fell for it, didn't you?” he said.

-“Fell for what?” Speedwell asked.

-“Acorn's ploy. He obviously stabbed himself in order to draw suspicion away from himself. Besides, I was guarding the burrow all night, there was no way anyone could have sneaked past me to attack him.”

-“That's the dumbest theory I've ever heard,” Flesca said, rolling her eyes.

-“Were there any crystals in the prison burrow before Acorn went there?” Speedwell asked.

-“No,” Toadflax said, “but...”

-“Where did he get the crystal then?”

-“...from another burrow?” Toadflax guessed.

-“And how did he do that? You were supposed to keep an eye on him. Either he left the burrow, or someone else went inside. Either way, you failed to notice anything. So either YOU made the attempt on Acorn's life, or you fell asleep.”

Toadflax gulped, as he realized that his theory had completely fallen apart.

-“I fell asleep,” he confessed.

-“Just as I thought. Acorn really is innocent.”

-“I did my best to stay awake...” Toadflax said, looking like he was about to cry; it was most likely an attempt to earn sympathy, but nobody was falling for it. “I don't know what happened, this never happened before...”
"Thanks everyone," Acorn said, hopping towards his friends. "I really didn't expect it to end this way, but thank you for proving me innocent."

"We're glad to have been of service," Tindra said, "but we're back to the starting point. Your innocence was proven, but we still have to find the true killer."

"Any idea how we could do that?" Acorn asked.

"HEY TOADFLAX!" Flesca shouted. "How about you tell us about the evidence you gathered so far, so we don't have to start our own investigation from scratch!"

But Toadflax was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is he? He was right there moments ago," Tindra said.

"Did he go underground?" Speedwell asked.

Flesca ran through the warren's main entrance. A few moments later, she returned above ground.

"He's not in there."

"I wouldn't worry too much," Acorn said. "For all we know, maybe he is the killer, so he decided to run away before we figured it out."

"That does seem like the most likely explanation," Tindra agreed. "Let's go underground. It will be great to get some sleep after all this madness."

The rabbits' plan of sleeping all day, however, was soon interrupted. In the middle of the afternoon, Speedwell was woken up by a voice coming from above ground. All his companions remained asleep, and the voice didn't sound like Toadflax; who could it be?

He went above ground to investigate. In the middle of the field near the warren stood a lone buck; Speedwell had never seen him before.

"Ah, good to see you," the stranger said. "I was starting to think this place was deserted."

"Who are you?" Speedwell said, getting ready to attack if necessary; Woundwort's training might come in handy after all.

"My name is Scabious. I am the Chief Rabbit of New Sandleford Warren. Who are you?"

"I'm Speedwell. New Sandleford? What happened to Old Sandleford?"

"It was destroyed by..."

"I'm sorry."

"But there were many survivors! A few days before it happened, a group of rabbits lead by a runt called Fiver..."

"All right, I get it, there were survivors." Speedwell did not feel comfortable talking about Fiver, after the previous spring's events. While he no longer approved of the wires, he still had a bad feeling over the whole situation.

"Fiver's gang left and were never seen again," Scabious continued. "But there were other
survivors, who started New Sandleford Warren. It's on the other side of these trees here.”

Speedwell remained silent for a few moments, as he made a shocking realization.

-"You mean there's a warren on the other side of those trees, right next to this one, and nobody here knew about it? How long has it been there?"

-"Around one set of seasons. We've known about you for a while, but we were waiting for you to make first contact. When I became Chief Rabbit just a few days ago, I decided that waiting for you was never going to work out: none of you ever venture far from the warren. So, I captured your Chief."

-"We don't have a Chief,” Speedwell replied matter-of-factly.

-"Really? The rabbit we captured, a buck called Toadflax, said he was your leader.”

-“He was lying.”

-"Regardless. If you want to see him alive again, you must surrender to us, and let us annex your warren.”

-"I don't care.”

-"...what?”

-"You can keep him. Nobody here likes him.”

-"Would you truly turn your back on a fellow rabbit in need?”

-“He deserves whatever you have planned for him. Now, if you'll excuse me, Scabious, I need to be getting back to my nap.”

Before Scabious could reply, Speedwell ran back underground. The Chief of New Sandleford remained in front of the empty tunnel for a while. This encounter had really not gone as planned: he was expecting a quick surrender and a same-day annexation. He eventually hopped away to ponder the next step. Fighting was not an option: his warren's owsla would not be strong enough to come out on top.

-"I can't believe Woundwort is forcing us to share the same burrow.”

Vervain was pacing back and forth across a small chamber in Darkhaven. Earlier that day, Woundwort had announced the new burrow arrangements. Due to the small number of burrows available, most rabbits would have to share. Vervain's roommate was one of the worst rabbits possible.

-"Couldn't he have allowed us to choose who we live with?” Vervain continued his rant.

-"He said we need to put what he calls our 'silly feud' behind us,” Blueberry replied. “Whenever we fight each other, we're not fighting our common enemy, those mysterious outsiders he keeps rambling about. Who ARE those outsiders anyway?”

-"Why don't you ask HIM about the outsiders? He's the one who wants them destroyed.” Vervain scoffed. “Silly feud indeed...”

-"I really don't get why you dislike me, Vervain. You kept shoving me down into the pit. This
could have killed me, you know.”

”You want to know the truth?” Vervain glanced behind Blueberry, at the small object the kitten always carried with him. Then, he hopped to it and sat on it. “This! This is why I don't like you.”

”What's the problem with my Z...”

”It's creepy. It's noisy. It's annoying.”

”I don't see what's so creepy about it. And I really try not to make it too loud...”

”Greetings all!” came a voice of another rabbit who burst into the burrow.

Vervain was startled by the sudden appearance, and pounced on Blueberry's back.

”I think there's more to it than the gadget, Vervain,” Blueberry said. “There's another reason you don't like me, and I really don't get it.”

”Orchis!” Vervain shouted, ignoring the kitten. “What are you doing here?”

”I told Woundwort I thought you two needed help mending your ways. And he agreed. So I'll be living with you two.”

”Three of us in one burrow? It's already cramped enough with that runt...”

”It's not cramped at all,” Blueberry replied. “Look how high the ceiling is, we could hop as high as we could and we still wouldn't reach it.”

”Fine.” Vervain sighed. “You'll live with us, Orchis.”

With a creepy smile, Orchis lied down next to Vervain; Blueberry was on Vervain's other side.

”You know, Vervain,” Orchis said, “I like you.”

Vervain teared up. While he had mixed feelings about Orchis, he was only the second rabbit ever to have told him that he “liked him”; the first was Chibiscuit. He had almost forgotten about her, following Primrose's capture and escape, and Campion's return. It had become obvious to him that as long as he followed Woundwort, there was no way he would see her again. He still hated the outsiders and hoped for their destruction, but reuniting with the doe of his dreams was more important. But his last betrayal of the General had gone horribly wrong, and he didn't feel motivated enough to try again. His thoughts were interrupted by Blueberry:

”Vervain, did you seriously pass hraka on my Z...”

”Just go to sleep already.”
“Everything is different
In this dissembled design
We will never see the light”
--Feather in a Pillow, *Cowslip's Poem*

Hannah was sitting on a lily pad, resting her head on her front paws. After landing in the middle of the lake, she had managed to swim to the nearby lily pad, but now she was trapped: the shore was too far for her to swim. To make things worse, she was soaking wet. She spent a long time thinking about her predicament, staring at the water in front of her. While the current was calm, there was a strong wind blowing.

Suddenly, she saw something dark just beneath the surface of the water, slowly moving closer to her. Then suddenly, when it was right in front of her, it jumped out of the water: it was a large fish, with its mouth wide open. It was mere moments away from swallowing her, leaving her with only one option: jumping off. Drowning would be a less painful death than getting eaten alive. After she jumped, the fish dove back down in the water, without eating anything. Lots of water splashed in all directions, carrying Hannah all the way to the shore.

Hannah remained on the muddy shore for a long time. This adventure had been very weird and extremely tiring, and yet it was just beginning. All this trouble just to get to see the hedgewizard, who may or may not be able to provide useful advice to save two rabbits, who may or may not be alive. Not to mention that she would have to find another way to cross the lake after she was done with the hedgewizard. Was all this actually worth it?

After a while, Hannah got back up. She had already made it this far, there was no reason to stop now. The island was unlike any other place she had ever seen before. As she moved further inland, the vegetation became very dense, blocking nearly all sunlight. Nevertheless, there were several fireflies in the air, providing some faint light. The area was eerily silent, the only audible sound being that of a stream.

Hannah wandered around the island, trying to locate the hedgewizard. Suddenly, as she climbed on top of a rock, a gigantic fire-breathing monster raised its head. Startled, Hannah fell in a nearby puddle. As she got back up to flee, she realized that the “gigantic fire-breathing monster” was actually just a turtle with a few fireflies on its head.

-"Oof, ya had me scawed for a moomin 'ere. Are ye the hegdezizwer?"

-"Ah. I am Hedge."

-"Ar ye tha dehziawar?"

-"I am Hedge the wizard."

-"In 'at case yer the one I'm lookin fer."

-"I assume, Hannah, you wish to learn magic?"

-"I donn wish to lern mahgek, but ah think ye cou...wait! How do ye know me nam?"
"You told me."

"Ah didn't!"

"Now you did."

"I'm confuzzled."

"What is confusion?"

"Aig, never mine, sorry I ever brought up tha soobjec in a frist plass." Hannah sighed. "I 'eard ye know some'ing aboot mahgek, and I though ye might use it to help meh fine two fwiends."

"What is magic?"

"What is ma...yer the hegediwazrd! Ye of all creatures should know th'answer to 'at queshton."

"I know, but what type of magic? Do you want to make a rabbit jump out of a hat? Summon Death itself to destroy your enemies? Create your own personal magical slave, who will eventually turn against you and destroy you? Banish someone to an alternate invisible dimension? Or perhaps take over the wor..."

"Ye, well tanks fo da philosophet dump, but Im no in th mood. Can ya fine me fwiends?"

"Blackberry and Primrose?"

"Ye know so mush ah don tell ya. Ar ye a seer or somefin?"

"Like Fiver? No. I just know because you will tell me."

"And 'ow do ye know 'iver? Oh, neever min...is is gettin needlessly compiled. Are th two buns alive?"

"That is for you to find out."

"Oof how very helpful. How do ah do tha?"

"You need the tool. Follow me."

The turtle got up and very slowly walked towards a thick bush. Hannah followed her, feeling rather annoyed by how long this was taking.

"By that point, it was winter again. I had been in Efraf a full set of seasons. I had given up hope that I would ever get out. And around that time, they sent another rabbit to live with me."

It took a while for Primrose to calm down, after telling Hyzenthlay about Redstone's destruction. But eventually, she was able to continue telling her story.

"His name was Blackavar," she continued, "and I lived with him until I was rescued from Efraf a. In fact, he lives here at Watership Down too, you probably met him."

"I've met many rabbits since I arrived here, but I don't recall anyone by that name...what is he like? Considering his name, I assume he has black fur?"

"No, brown. I don't know why he's called Blackavar. He's around my size, and he has a weird fur
pattern on his head. Not like Bigwig, smaller and weirder."

-"Oh, now I know who you're talking about. He rather creeped me out with his ghost stories."

-"That's weird, I never knew him to tell ghost stories. I'll have to ask him about it. Anyway, he was a nice buck, but he had one massive weakness: he was loud. He was always talking very loudly, even in situations when doing so would endangered our lives. I spent the entire winter with him, and...you know, it feels like I talk too much about myself."

-"I'm interested in everything you have to tell me."

-"Thank you, but still...I've been telling you all about my life since our last meeting, and I don't know anything about what happened to you. Tell me about you."

-"There isn't much to say, honestly. You remember that day, when I left with Flyairth and the others?"

-"I remember. There were dark clouds in the sky, and the storm broke that evening. What happened then?"

-"We travelled all day, and when we realized the storm was going to break, we tried digging some scrapes. They didn't really keep us very dry, because the ground was soft and soon turned to mud. By the time the rain stopped the next morning, we were all covered with dirt."

-"That's terrible, Hyzenthlay..."

-"It was unpleasant, but Flyairth told us all that life wouldn't be easy until we were settled in a new warren, so we all better get a move on. She was very persuasive, and so we kept going. The next day we reached a clearing in the middle of the forest, the perfect place to start a new warren. And we did."

-"What was it like?"

-"It was a nice place. The ground was soft enough to be easy to dig, but not so soft that it would collapse. Everyone, does and bucks alike, helped dig, and by the end of the day, we had a small network of tunnels that would keep us safe from elil and the weather. At first it was small, but it didn't take us long to expand it into a warren of a comfortable size. But it never was truly finished. Over time, more runs and burrows were added, and existing ones were expanded, as the warren grew. We called it Marli-rah."

-"Why that name?"

-"Well, one thing that bothered Flyairth and Prake about their old warren was how it seemed that does didn't have much of a chance in life, and they wanted to try to fix that. We started the warren in the fall, and the next spring they thought it was time to create an owsla. The owsla they chose was made entirely of does."

-"That sounds unusual. I've never heard of it happening before."

-"Neither had I. But the bucks didn't seem to mind, since the owsla was friendly and didn't bully them. Their only real task was to keep the warren safe from elil, really. Flyairth had made it clear that anyone who wasn't happy at the warren could leave, but very few did."

-"Were you in the owsla?"
"Yes, actually I was the captain of owsla. Me and a friend called Thethuthinnang."

"That's amazing. You're amazing."

"You're amazing too Prim."

Primrose blushed.

"How was life at the warren?" she asked.

"It was good. The warren was comfortable, everyone got along very well, we were all free to silflay whenever we wished and choose our own mates…"

"Do you have a mate?"

"No, never."

"Why not? Don't you want someone who loves you, and is always there for you? And kittens?"

"I never really considered it. I made many friends over the seasons, but never anyone I truly loved romantically. If I meet such a rabbit in the future, though, we'll probably become mates."

"I just want to know one thing, Hyz. Are you happy?"

"Yes. It's quite unfair."

"What's unfair about happiness?"

"Primrose...I was living an enjoyable life at Marli-rah, while you suffered for one and a half sets of seasons. I was unaware of all that was happening to you, and unable to do anything about it. I should have stayed with you at Redstone."

"No, of course you shouldn't have. You would have been taken to Efrafa with me."

"But at least this way, we would have had each other's company."

"No. They would have sent us to different marks, and we never would have seen each other again. No, I'm glad you left when you did, just a few days before the Efrafan raiding party came. That saved you a lot of torment."

"I should have tried harder to convince you to come with me. Then you wouldn't have gone through all this."

"You did try, very hard. Don't blame yourself, Hyzenthlay, it's my fault I didn't accept your offer. But if I had accepted...I probably wouldn't have met Hazel."
“I never thought it was possible, but we need to make new rules....ABOUT MAGIC!”

--Spotty-bee, *To Be Young*

-“There...magic.”

After what felt like forever to Hannah, Hedge had reached the darkest place on the island. The vegetation was denser than anywhere else; only a small group of fireflies provided a faint ring of light far above.

-“Vell, Hedgezer, where’s te megik?” Hannah asked.
-“For the magic, you need the magic object.”
-“Where is dis mijoc ojek?”
-“You're standing on it.”

Hannah looked down; there was nothing of particular interest on the ground. Nevertheless, she took a few steps back, and picked up the pebble she was standing on.

-“Zis is the mogic?”
-“Yes.”
-“Bu its... pebble.”
-“This pebble is magic. With it, you can accomplish anything.”
-“But...what do e do?”
-“Just hold it, and recite the magic words.”
-“Maygee woids, eh? Wet ar tha woids?”

Hedge fell silent for a few moments. Hannah was about to ask her again when the turtle suddenly began chanting:

“I call the great master, living in his tower
I beg for his mercy, please give me the power
I know, I'm your servant, for every hour
The force should grant my wish in the flower
And then you say...whatever your wish is.”
-“Oof! Ye expec meh to remembee all 'at?”
-“It's not that hard, once you get used to it. But should you ever forget some of the words, it can be flexible, albeit with less effective spells.”
-“Das some wired moogak.”
-“The inner workings of magic are weird, illogical and, at times, contradictory. It should not be analyzed too much, except by certified witches and wizards.”
-“Like ye?”
-“You may keep the pebble, but be careful. Should anyone else get hold of it, they shall also gain all magic powers associated with it.”
-“Woo dat wuz scaree. Hoo do I protek it?”
-“Just be careful, and try to keep its existence a secret.”
-“Well, tanks a loo, hegziar! Now I'll fine me two fwiends so easy.”
-“Good luck, Hannah. Just one last thing.”
"What?"
"Use a lily pad as a boat to cross the lake. If you try to swim with that pebble, you'll sink."
Hannah stared at Hedge for a few moments, as she realized how easy crossing the lake this way would be. How could she have overlooked something so obvious earlier?
"Tank ye."
With that, she picked up the pebble, and slowly made her way towards the shore. It felt quite heavy, and carrying it was much more difficult than expected.

=========

"But father, why can't we go see mother?"
Hazel was lying in a corner of the Honeycomb. Snowdrop, Mallow and Gilia were jumping on top of him, sliding down his ears, and playfully nipping him.
"She's not well," Hazel said, "you can't see her now."
"But why? I can make her feel better!"
"Yeah, I can too!"
"No, she must have absolute rest..."
"Uh, Hazel, there's something I have to talk to you about..." came the voice of Bigwig.
"Please, Bigwig, not now. I have more important things to worry about."
"Well, I can certainly see that. That's the problem with you, Hazel, you're not a strict enough father. If you were more strict, this wouldn't be happening. If I was their father, I would..."
"But you're not their father, Bigwig," Hazel said sternly. "I am, so I will deal with them my way."
"All right, all right. But as soon as you've finished dealing with them, I've got to talk to you."
With that, Bigwig walked away, leaving Hazel with the kittens, who were rapidly getting impatient.
"Look, we're going to see her now..." Mallow said.
"When did mother come back?" Periwinkle ran up to Hazel and stared angrily at her siblings.
"Why does nobody ever tell me anything?"
"She came back earlier this evening," Hazel said, "but please, nobody can visit her."
"Are you serious?" Gilia said. "I know exactly what would make her feel better: us sleeping with her."
"Please, no, don't do that!" Hazel said desperately. "No! Help!"
But the kittens weren't listening, and dashed out of the Honeycomb, towards the burrow where Hyzenthlay and Primrose were having their discussion. Fortunately, Fiver was able to step in front of the entrance at the last moment, preventing them from going inside.
"How would you like to sleep with Uncle Fiver tonight?" he suggested.
"Will you play bob-stones with us?"
"Tail tag?"
"Tell us a story?"
"Carry us around?"
"Yes, I'll do that, and Uncle Dandelion will tell you a story."
"And when can we see mother?"
"Well...if you're good kittens tonight, you'll see her in the morning."
The kittens cheered, and tackle-hugged Fiver.
"Will you carry us across the Honeycomb, Uncle Fiver?"
"I will, but please, one at a time."
"All righty. Who goes first?"
"How about me?"
"No, me!"
"Meeeeeeyyyyyeee!"
"All right, Periwinkle. You first," Fiver decided.
"Hey, why is it always her first?"
"What are you talking about, I haven't had a ride like this since last Frith's Eve!"
"All four of you will get rides, but she will be the first one," Fiver said, as Periwinkle jumped on
his back, and he hopped towards the Honeycomb; the other three kittens followed him.

The kittens' shouts had the side effect of waking up Blackberry. She was still exhausted following
the journey, but she had to check up on Primrose to see how she was recovering. She picked up a
few leaves, in case she would need to replace those on Primrose's tail. As she hopped out of her
burrow, she found another rabbit waiting for her.

"Nice to see you're awake." Hawkbit said. "Look what happened to my ears, they won't stay
straight."
"How did that happen?"
"It's a long story, but can't you do something about it?"
"I'll take a closer look in the morning. Right now, I'm too tired to really do anything."
With that, she continued to make her way towards her friend's burrow.

"Hey, where are you going?" Hawkbit asked.
"I'm checking up on Primrose."
"You're too tired to take a look at my ears, but you can still look at Primrose?"
"There's one major differences between the two of you. If her wounds get infected, Primrose will
die. Your floppy ears, however, won't kill you."
With that, she continued to hop towards the burrow, while Hawkbit remained silent, ashamed of
his own selfishness.

Meanwhile in the Honeycomb, Fiver was giving the last kitten his ride. Seeing his chance, Bigwig
hopped over to Hazel, who was still lying in a corner of the burrow, with his front paws over his
eyes.

"Well, Hazel, now that you're free, I suppose I can tell you what worries me?"
Without waiting for an answer, he continued:
"About the new rabbits, they seem like a decent bunch, but there are a few of them that worry me.
There's the one with the feather...I forget her name..."
"Spartina," Hazel mumbled.
"That's right, Spartina...I don't know, there's something about her, I don't know how to describe
it...I feel something..."
Realizing he wasn't making any sense, he decided to change the subject.
"There's also the small one, Nelthilia. I don't think she respects your position Hazel. And the big
one, Flyairth, she used to be Chief at her old warren, she might want the rank again."
"Bigwig, I appreciate you telling me your concerns, but I have more important things to worry
about at the moment."
"More important things? Hazel, I'm telling you your leadership is under threat, and you have more
important things to worry about?"
"Prim."
"Oh, never mind. I'll tell you when she's better. Kehaar was right: you ARE crazy with love.
Speaking of Kehaar, where is he? I haven't seen him since we came back."
With that, he hopped above ground, hoping to find the gull there.

"Looks like Bigwig is as angry as a bumblebee that just stung itself."
"Angry as a what?" Hazel asked, as he removed his paws from his eyes to see who had spoken; it
was Bluebell.
"Bluebell, now is not the time for inappropriate jokes!" came Blackberry's voice from the other
end of the burrow.
“A bumblebee that stung itself,” Bluebell repeated, ignoring Blackberry. “And you Hazel, you look like you just saw a flying hedgewizard.”

“‘A flying hedgewizard?’”

“‘Yes. Of course, I never saw one myself, so I don't know how one would react when faced with such an abomination.’” Hazel stared at Bluebell, extremely confused by the jokes. He eventually lied back down and covered his eyes again.

“‘Oh no!’” Bluebell said. “My jokes have failed to cheer up poor, worried Hazel. What have I done?”
“All I’m saying is look around and see what you do have instead of what you don’t have.”

--Come Lady Death, *Good Luck*

-“You should have seen how fearlessly he addressed the General. Nobody had ever dared to try anything like this ever before. He managed to convince him that there was a large owsla surrounding the warren. I heard the officers talking a few days later, and the tracks showed that there was only one rabbit over there. Isn't he amazing?”

Primrose was telling Hyzenthlay about her last days in Efrafa, and how Hazel had managed to trick Woundwort and escape from the warren. She had been telling her sister about her mate's exploits for a while, but did so in a very confusing manner, leaving out several important details, and retelling several events at once. Nevertheless, it was plain to Hyzenthlay that Primrose deeply admired the buck.

-“I'm afraid I'm going to have to interrupt you,” a voice suddenly came from outside the burrow, “but I need to check up on your tail, Primrose.”

Hyzenthlay turned and awkwardly looked at the new arrival, with blue-grey fur, as she entered the burrow and approached her sister.

-“Does it hurt?” Blackberry asked.

-“Yes, but it's not unbearable,” Primrose replied. “I'm feeling better now, than when I woke up.”

Blackberry slowly peeled off the leaves; Primrose winced.

-“The wound seems to be healing nicely, but I'm going to have to replace the leaves. I brought a few with me. This might sting a little, but it's nothing serious.”

-“Don't worry, Hyzenthlay,” Primrose said, seeing her sister's worried look. “This is Blackberry, and I was away from the warren with her for the past few days. She saved my life.”

-“I didn't, really,” Blackberry said. “If it hadn't been for me, she wouldn't have left the warren in the first place.”

-“Without you, I wouldn't have been able to make it back here alive.”

-“I'm really grateful for saving her, Blackberry,” Hyzenthlay said.

-“Thank you, but it's Meadow who deserves the praise. She's the one who guided us back home. Anyway, Primrose, your tail may be healing nicely, but you mustn't strain yourself. You'll have to stay in your burrow for the immediate future.”

With that, Blackberry hopped out of the burrow. Just before exiting, however, she stopped to listen to the conversation.

-“So...what was I talking about?” Primrose asked.

-“You were telling me about Hazel,” Hyzenthlay replied.

-“Oh yes, Hazel. You should have seen him, the day I escaped,” Primrose continued, jumping to yet another of Hazel's heroic deeds. “There he was, standing fearlessly in the field just outside the pit. The guards could have gotten him, but he chose to remain there to be the first to welcome me to freedom.”

Blackberry chuckled as she heard this, and left the burrow. Another rabbit soon ran up to her.

-“How is she?”
"Hazel, calm down, there's no reason to panic..."

"How is she?"

"She'll be all right, but she can't go anywhere in her current state. She has to stay in that burrow. In the morning, someone will have to bring her flayrah there, she can't leave to get it herself."

"I'll do anything. But how is she? Mentally?"

"She was telling Hyzenthlay just how brave you are."

"Really?"

"Everything will be fine, Hazel. I'll be in my burrow, if you have any other concerns."

With that, Blackberry hopped away. Hazel stood by the burrow for a long time. For the past several days, he had assumed the worst, but now it appeared that, against all odds, Primrose would actually survive and recover.

As he returned to the Honeycomb, it was largely deserted, but one rabbit in the corner caught his attention.

"I didn't get the opportunity to thank you earlier, Meadow," Hazel said. "I shall be eternally grateful to you for bringing Primrose and Blackberry back home."

"You should thank Silverweed," Meadow replied. "He's the one who told me where to find them."

"I will, but don't underestimate yourself. Without you to guide them back to the warren, they wouldn't have made it."

"They're good buns, they wouldn't have deserved to die so soon."

"Is there anything I can do to repay you?"

"Thanks, but no. Saving them is its own reward. I'll have to get going now though."

"Leaving so soon?"

"I'm afraid so. It's almost sunrise, and it's a long way to Buttercup-rah's warren. I've already been gone for a few days, and I'll have owsla business to attend to."

"I understand. But remember that you, and everyone else at your warren, is always welcome here."

"You all are welcome at my warren too."

Hazel and Meadow hopped above ground. From a far corner of the burrow, Bluebell observed the scene silently, trying to think of a joke that would cheer up the Chief, unlike last time.

=========

Hannah stood in the middle of the road, with the magic pebble in front of her. She had successfully crossed the lake using the trick Hedge had suggested. Now came the moment of truth: would the magic work? She picked up the pebble with her front paws and raised it over her head.

"Ah call upon the hegeddiwaz in the toowa
To give me the... confusing mahgek wods to remembee
An' I give 'im evertin, and I mean EVERTIN
If he will juss grant meh my wish-flowoo thin
May Blackerry an Primrose reac Watership Down aliv an saf."

Hannah remained silent for a few moments, half-expecting the pebble to start glowing, or shaking; nothing happened.

"Oof! I muss have got half of the woids wroong. I cetrainleh hop mahgek is flexible."

With that, she put the pebble back down, and started to kick it along the road.

=========

Primrose had finished telling Hyzenthlay about her life. The story had continued to get more confusing, but Hyzenthlay still managed to understand most of what her sister had told her.

"You've had quite a life," she said. "There's just one more thing I want to know: are you happy?"

"...yes...I think I am..." Primrose said softly.
"You don't sound very convinced."
Primrose remained silent at Hyzenthlay's comment, but the look on her face plainly showed that it was true.
"You can tell me about it," Hyzenthlay said. "I won't force you to if you would rather not, but if there's something on your mind, I'm available to listen."
"Well..." Primrose sighed. "I told you about Campion, didn't I?"
"He's an Efrafan captain who saved your life a few times, if I remember correctly."
"Yes, that's him. What bothers me is something he told me a few days ago...why did I run away from Efrafia, when I could have mated with him?"
"From what you told me, Efrafia is a terrible place. No rabbit should live in such conditions."
"Yes, but maybe it wouldn't have been that terrible if I had mated with him...mates of owsla officers get some additional privileges."
"That's still not freedom."
"No, but it would have made him happy."
"Would it have made YOU happy?"
"When I was in Efrafia, nobody cared whether I was happy or not, as long as I didn't try to escape."
"You're not in Efrafia anymore. Here, others care about you."
Primrose fell silent; she knew Hyzenthlay was right, but was not yet prepared to admit it. Hyzenthlay would have to try another way.
"From what I understand, Campion loves you?" she asked.
"I think so."
"Do you love him?"
"He saved my life..."
"That's not what I asked. Do you love him?"
"...not really."
"There you go. There's no point in mating with someone you don't love."
"You're right...thank you Hyzenthlay."
Primrose stood up on her hind legs and hugged Hyzenthlay, until suddenly she broke away.
"But what about Hazel?"
"What about him? I thought you loved him?"
"I do love him, but...I'm not worthy to be his mate. He did so much for me, he saved me from Efrafia, from the river, he's given me kittens, he's made me happy, and yet...I've done so little for him."
"You've done more for him than you give yourself credit for."
"What makes you think that?"
"I've been living here at Watership Down for a few days, and I saw him. He spent most of his time waiting for you, so worried about you, hoping you would come back safely."
"Are you sure?"
"I'm absolutely sure. He clearly loves you, and you've had a great impact on him."
The two does hugged each other tightly. After a while, Primrose lied back down.
"I haven't seen Hazel since I came back..." she said. "He must be very worried."
"Do you want to see him now?"
"Yes."
"I'll go tell him."
"A great deal of new strength and energy that she had not felt for many seasons flowed through her body. Something she was not used to. She felt young again [...]"

--janelle1, *When the black rabbit comes*

Aspen had spent most of the day wandering throughout Darkhaven. Such a fascinating place, completely different from Efrafa. He eventually found Campion sitting close to a pile of tyres; two other rabbits were climbing up the tower, and slightly adjusting the position of each tyre.

-"Hello Aspen," Campion said. "How do you like Darkhaven?"
-"It's amazing!"
-"Heh. I'm glad at least one rabbit here appreciates it."
-"What's the matter, Campion? You sound rather depressed. You can confide in me."
-"It's nothing, Aspen. It's just that I'm going to die again."
-"You won't! This time, I will protect you. I know I failed many times already, but this time everything will be fine. How do you know it's going to happen, though?"
-"The Speaker of the Past said so."
-"Oh that crazy old doe... I wouldn't put too much faith in what she says. But all the same, I'll protect you. What else did she say?"
-"She said I was going to get crushed by those things."
Aspen glanced at the pile of tyres, before awkwardly looking at Campion.
-"If those things are going to crush you, why are you sitting right next to them? That defeats common sense."
-"You're absolutely right, but as captain of owsla, it is my duty to supervise these rabbits while they stabilize those things to make sure they don't crush me."
-"That seems like a contradiction."
-"Contradiction or not, Woundwort still ordered me to do it."
-"In that case, I'll help you."
Aspen sat down next to Campion, looking upwards at the pile of tyres. Two rabbits were sitting on top of it, one on each side, attempting to move the top tyre.
-"It's stuck!" one of them said with a grunt.
-"No Shale, just push harder!" the other shouted.
Shale tried pushing again, with all his strength, when suddenly the tyre flew off the top of the pile, carrying the other rabbit with it. Shale desperately tried to maintain his balance; upon realizing how futile this was, he jumped off the pile, which soon completely fell apart.

As he saw the dark shapes of the tyres falling towards him, Aspen jumped on Campion's back to shield him from the falling objects. However, this was of little use: the tyres crushed both of them.

Campion and Aspen remained motionless under the pile of tyres for a long time, until Aspen broke the silence.
-"Are you all right, Campion?"
-"No, Aspen. I'm dead again. This is getting annoying."
"But how can you be dead? I protected you."
"I'm afraid it wasn't enough. Come on, let's go see the Black Rabbit of Inlé. He must be around here somewhere."
"That's impossible. You killed him, then that weird creature ate him. Are you sure you're even dead at all? This doesn't look like the shadowlands."

As Campion looked around him, he saw that Aspen made a valid point. Around them was near complete darkness. He could vaguely see the horizon, far in the distance, but other than that, both the sky and the ground were completely dark. This was completely different from what he had seen during all his previous visits to the shadowlands. He made a few cautious steps forward, struggling to see what lied beyond. Aspen quietly followed him.

Campion continued walking through the area, not knowing where he was going, until he finally saw two red spots light up in front of him. The rest of the Black Rabbit of Inlé's body appeared to be the exact same colour as the sky.

"So, Black Rabbit, it seems you're not dead anymore," Campion said. "I want you to tell you something, about when I killed you. I don't regret it!"

The eyes did not move, and the Black Rabbit did not reply.

"Why are you so silent?" Campion continued.

"That's not the Black Rabbit," Aspen said, hopping towards the "eyes". He clawed at one of them, and it fell to the ground: it was actually an apple, and Aspen took a bite out of it.

Campion lowered his head in embarrassment. Then, he hopped to the other red spot. As he tried to knock it down, however, he realized it wasn't an apple at all, but a hole, and his paw went inside. He tried to remove his paw from inside the portal, but his claws got caught on the edge, further enlarging it. A dark shape appeared deep inside with the portal; with a few strikes of dark lightning, she hopped through the portal and soon stood in front of Campion. The portal dissolved, and the rabbit-shaped figure opened her eyes, just as black as the rest of her body, before quickly nuzzling Campion. A few moments later, he bowed; Aspen, meanwhile, made a few steps backwards in fear.

"Black Rabbit, I'm sorry," Campion said.

"Apology accepted, Campion," the Black Rabbit said softly, stroking Campion's fur. "And I too must apologize, for the torment during previous deaths, and the self-fulfilling prophecy, as well as the interdimensional interference in the shadow realm which has been causing a few magical glitches lately."

"Oh, Black Rabbit, what have I done? No matter how hard I try to stay alive, I still die."

"This time, there is nothing you could have done. General Woundwort is responsible."

"Wasn't he trying to protect me from those tyres?"

"He was trying, but instead, he ended up indirectly causing it. It is called a self-fulfilling prophecy: all attempts at preventing it from happening, end up causing it instead. If you encounter any other prophecies from reliable prophets in the future, you will have to prepare yourself mentally, because the prophecies will happen, even if you try to stop them."

"I'm not sure I understood most of what you just said, Black Rabbit. But thank you for trying to explain the situation to me."

"Always happy to clear up any misunderstandings."

"I have another question, Black Rabbit. Where are we? Why is it so dark?"

"That is a complicated question, Campion. Do you wish to hear the short explanation, or the long one?"

"Let's start with the short one."

"Not your fault."

"In that case, whose fault is it?"

"That would be the long explanation, Campion. Frith provides energy. At first, it may seem infinite, but it is not. It is limited by strings. He gives some of it to be used by his servants: me,
Prince Rainbow, the King of Yesterday, and others. Most of the rest goes to living creatures. The recent invasions, mergers and mass deletions have taken up a lot of energy, which has been a strain. Therefore, certain non-essential features, such as lighting up the sky here, had to be cancelled to preserve the limited energy available. And also to protest against the birds and taxes.”

-"Black Rabbit, I am just an ordinary rabbit. I am unable to understand such complexities."
-"Do not worry, Campion-rah. You must go now. You have a destiny to accomplish. After it is completed, if things go well, you may find yourself experiencing the ultimate final fantasy, at the Eye of Inlé."

A sudden strike of lightning illuminated the area. It lasted only a brief moment, but Campion was amazed by what he saw. Further away, there was a peaceful meadow, with a large and prosperous warren. Many rabbits were at silflay, or simply frolicking through the large open space. The Black Rabbit, appearing transparent, stood proudly in front of the warren. But the ultimate darkness soon returned, rendering everything invisible once again.

-"Hrair!" Campion suddenly said.
-"Fulfil your destiny, and it will all be yours,” the Black Rabbit said, before quietly hopping away, fading in the darkness; Campion, meanwhile, hopped over to Aspen.
-"Why do you look so scared?” he asked. “Won't you finish your apple?”
-"Campion, who was that rabbit you talked with?”
-"BRofI, of course!”
-"No, Campion. That wasn't BRofI.”
-"Of course it was! What makes you think it wasn't?”
-"The rabbit you talked with was a doe.”
-"I noticed, but the old tales never specified the Black Rabbit's gender.”
-"Regardless, that rabbit looked nothing like the one you met in previous deaths.”
-"Really? I didn't notice any difference.”
-"Oh, Campion. I'm sorry, but I'll have to agree with Orchis here: you're insane.”

Campion fell silent. Every rabbit he had spoken with in Darkhaven had considered him insane, and now Aspen thought so too.

-"All of us are insane, Aspen,” he eventually said. “But some of us are less sane than others.”

Campion and Aspen were too absorbed in their discussion to notice the sky gradually lighting up blood red. The colour dripped onto the ground, and soon flooded the land. By the time they realized what was happening, their fur was completely soaked, and they sank into the liquid, until they were no longer visible from the surface.

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Shale got back up and shook the dust out of his fur, before taking a look at the damage he had done. The tower had completely collapsed, and the tyres were spread over a wide area, some of them having rolled all the way to the other end of the pit. Then, his thoughts turned to the rabbit who had been helping him: Feldspar. He could not see him anywhere; what if he had been crushed to death? He would have a hard time explaining that to General Woundwort.

-"Feldspar?” he called out.
-"I'm right here,” came an annoyed voice. “I'm stuck.”

Shale made a few hops towards one of the tyres, before placing his front paws on the edge and peaking inside.

-"Feldspar! Are you all right?” Shale asked.
-"No! I told you, I'm stuck! Get me out, will you?”
-"Oh Feldspar you clumsy fool...”
-"Hey! You're the one who knocked me down!”
-"What's going on around here?” came the General's voice.

Shale and Feldspar abruptly stopped their argument as they heard him. They were too afraid to reply.
"I ordered you two to stabilize the piles of tyres," the General continued, "and now I find that one of them has collapsed. Explain yourselves."
"I- it was an accident," Feldspar stammered.
"Accident or no accident, you failed. Where's Campion?"
"Here I am."
"Oh Campion, you're alive!" Woundwort said. "I'm glad you didn't die, despite those two idiots causing the whole stack to fall on top of you."
Campion was about to reply that he had really died, and the Black Rabbit had brought him back, but decided against it. Everyone, even Aspen, questioned his sanity; perhaps they were right, and he really WAS insane after all. With a sigh, he hopped away.
“This was the moment of truth. The moment that his life could change drastically in one-way or another. [...] This could be the best day of his life... Or perhaps the worse. [sic]“

--Juuhachi, *The Story of Blackavar*

It was dawn. Several rabbits were present in the Honeycomb. Hazel felt exhausted, but sleep appeared impossible to achieve: he still remained worried about his mate. Most of the other rabbits in the burrow were very bored.

-”Cheerful lot, aren't they?” Cornflower said.

-”Regular activities helps keep creatures motivated and in good spirits,” Silverweed replied. “We need to act.”

-”There doesn't seem to be much to do. If you're not sleeping, training for the owsla, or at silflay, pretty much the only activity I've seen you all doing is playing that weird pebble game. Warren life is boring.”

-”There wasn't much to do in the hutch either,” Clover pointed out.

-”You're right,” Cornflower said. “That was even worse. But I still expected warren life to be more exciting than this.”

-”Simply relaxing is an underrated pleasure. You should try it out,” Strawberry suggested.

-”But with Bigwig and his daily owsla training, I don't get many chances to do this,” Hawkbit added. “He's always moving. If that's how he likes his life, fine, but not everyone has to live like him.”

-”Always moving?” Clover repeated.

-”Yes...”

-”Hawkbit, that's brilliant!”

With that, Clover started shaking intensely, and jumping across the burrow.

-”Brilliant?” Hawkbit said in confusion. “What did I do? And what are YOU doing?”

-”I'm dancing!” the doe replied.

-”Dancing?”

-”Yes. In my last winter at the farm, the farmer threw a crazy party in the barn and everyone was
doing this dancing thing. They seemed to be having fun.”

-”You've been living here for a full set of seasons,” Strawberry said, “and I never saw you dance before.”

-”I forgot about it soon after it happened. But Hawkbit's talk about moving reminded me of it.”

-”Actually, I was thinking more about NOT moving,” Hawkbit said.

-”The lop-eared grump saying something intelligent?” Nelthilta said. “That's a rarity!”

Hawkbit looked sharply at the doe.

-”I'm not THAT grumpy! And my ears will be straightened very soon.”

-”That's what YOU think!”

-”You don't have to dance if you don't want to,” Clover said, “but it is pretty fun! Come on, now, everyone who's interested, dance!”

At first, most other rabbits in the burrow struggled to figure out exactly what Clover was doing, but after a while, several others joined her. Strawberry, Strawberry and Nelthilta were among the first to do so, although the latter soon ran out of breath and was forced to stop.

-”Hey Thethuthinnang,” Clover eventually said, “you mind singing? Might give us something exciting to dance to!”

There was one rabbit, however, who did not appear to approve of the situation. To Silverweed, the other rabbits' dancing reminded him of Cowslip's warren, and how the rabbits there often made such weird movements as a greeting. He ran out of the burrow as fast as he could.

Bluebell watched the scene unfold with curiosity. When Thethuthinnang started singing, he realized that this was the perfect solution to his problem. He hopped over to Hazel and nudged his ears.

-”Come on, Hazel, dance!”

-”What are you talking about?” Hazel was plainly confused.

-”Dance, Hazel! It's fun!”

With that, Bluebell started to shake his body and making weird steps, just as most other rabbits in the burrow were doing. Hazel stared at him, unsure what was going on.

-”Come on, Hazel, join me!”

Hazel continued to stare at Bluebell, before finally coming to the conclusion that it did look fun, and he had nothing to lose. He made a few cautious steps forward, shaking as he went. “What am I doing?” he thought. “It will take a while to learn how to do this properly.”

Fiver had given all four kittens the rides he had promised. It had been much harder than expected, and he was happy when he was able to leave them in Dandelion's care for a story. As he entered the Honeycomb, however, he saw that nearly everyone was making weird movements.

-”What's going on?”
"Something crazy," Vilthuril replied, “but it's a good type of crazy.”

"Uh, Hazel-rah?” The Chief Rabbit immediately raised his ears as he heard that. He ran to the rabbit who had just entered the Honeycomb and had spoken; it was Hyzenthlay.

"How is she?” he said.

"Calm down,” Hyzenthlay replied. “She's all right. She wants to see you.”

Hazel kept staring at Hyzenthlay, unsure exactly how to react. He wanted to rush into his burrow to see his mate, but he didn't want to overwhelm her.

"Look Hazel, just go and see her,” Hyzenthlay continued. “You have nothing to worry about.”

"Uh, yes...thanks...”

Hazel ran past Hyzenthlay towards the burrow he shared with his mate. Just before entering, however, he became nervous again. It took him a few moments to calm down once again and peak inside the burrow.

Primrose was lying in a corner, her eyes wide open and staring at him. He slowly made his way into the burrow, without taking his eyes off her.

"Wow, Primrose...” he said rather awkwardly, “you look beautiful.”

"Thank you.”

Hazel lied down in front of her, and continued staring at her, trying to think of what to say.

"How's your tail?”

"It's doing a lot better than when I first arrived here.”

"I'm glad to hear that.”

The two rabbits kept staring at each other in awkward silence, until suddenly, Primrose jumped on Hazel and hugged him tightly. However, she lost her balance, and soon both rabbits were lying on their side.

"Oh, Hazel...I'm sorry.”

"Sorry? What are you sorry for?” Hazel replied, as he returned the hug.

"Leaving the warren. Leaving you.”

"It's all right. We're together again, safe at home.”

Bigwig had returned underground, finding no trace of Kehaar anywhere. Hopefully the gull would be back in the morning, but until then, he still had to talk to Hazel. There was no trace of him in the Honeycomb, so he went to the Chief's burrow. Before he could enter, however, Hyzenthlay approached him.

"I wouldn't go in there if I were you,” she said.

"Why not? I have something important to discuss with him.”
"Don't interrupt two rabbits in love."

Bigwig sighed loudly.

"This is madness, I tell you! Hazel hasn't been himself for a few days, and there's this weird dancing thing going on in the Honeycomb right now! I feel like doing something reckless. Like a solo raid at Nuthanger Farm."

"That's probably a good idea. Since Primrose is to be confined to her burrow for a while, we'll have to bring her flayrah underground. Are you sure you don't want anyone else to come with you?"

"I'll be back by ni-Frith," Bigwig replied, hopping towards the nearest exit.
“And I know you well enough to know that this plan may be the death of us both?”

--Mistymaple, *Elahrairah [sic] And The Hole In The Sky*

It was just after sunrise. Vesper had been the first rabbit to wake up. Violet, Hickory, Marigold and the kitten were still sound asleep; they were clearly exhausted, they needed rest, he had no reason to wake them up just yet.

He hopped out to silflay, but didn't stray too far from the hole, so he could quickly alert his friends should elil come. The Milfoil was still on the riverbank where he had left it the previous evening; it would be very useful to get his companions to the other side of the river, as they were in no shape to swim. But they would still have to walk the rest of the way to Watership Down.

Vesper was deeply absorbed in his silflay, until he noticed a shadow appear in the forest further away. At first, he thought it was elil, but as he took a closer look, he saw who it was. He ran over to them and tackle-hugged them instead.

"Acacia! It's been so long!"

"You're still the best hugger Vespy-bunny,” Acacia said, unable to get up, but nevertheless nuzzling Vesper.

"How have you been doing all these seasons?"

Vesper finally hopped off Acacia, allowing the desert rabbit to get up.

"Busy, so busy,” Acacia replied. “There is so much evil in this world. I do my part, but it still feels very insignificant at times. I wish I could do more to help. Like find out who is responsible for my sister's death.”

"Still no progress in this investigation?” Vesper said sadly, as he hugged his friend once again.

"Nothing. But they can't run forever; one day, I'll get them. But enough about me; how is your water-rabbit training?"

"It's finished. I have my boat, right there on the river.”

Acacia glanced at the river, soon spotting the boat.

"Can I hop on?"

"Go ahead.”

Acacia did so, carefully sniffing the sail and the hull.

"This is awesome.”

"At some point,” Vesper said, “perhaps we could go on a ride together.”

"Yes! We could also bring Nicole, and sail the many seas and storms and waterfalls, it'll be so exciting!”
"Well...maybe not the waterfalls, but yes, it does sound very exciting."

The two rabbits were too absorbed in their discussion to notice Marigold hopping out of the burrow. She was profoundly disoriented, and confused by her surroundings. She had gone above ground to find some soft grass for her kitten, but by the time she was there, she had forgotten about this. Instead, she found herself aimlessly wandering through the woods. After a few minutes of this, she stumbled upon a large group of creatures. She stared at them for a few moments; when she realized they had spotted her, she bolted away.

"EVERYONE GET UP IT'S TRAINING TIME!"

Vervain lowered his ears and covered them with his front paws. He had hardly gotten any sleep at all during the night: Blueberry had spent several hours with his noisy device, practising fighting moves. By the time the kitten had finally stopped, it was fu Inlé. And now, despite the sun being barely visible on the horizon, Woundwort was already up, and ordering everyone to report for training.

Woundwort kept shouting, but Vervain still did not get up. He would ignore the General as long as possible, treasuring his current state of dream-free half-drowsiness. The burrow was much more comfortable than he had expected it would be. It almost felt like another rabbit was lying against him.

Only then did he realize that this was exactly the case. Captain Orchis was pressed tightly against him, his front paws wrapped around him. Vervain abruptly got up and jumped across the chamber, kicking Blueberry away along the way.

"Vervain," the kitten said with a yawn, "I was trying to sleep..."

"What were you doing!?" Vervain shouted, ignoring Blueberry.

"Who, me?" Orchis said, slowly waking up.

"Yes, you!"

"Sleeping, obviously. What did it look like?"

"You were hugging me!"

"The burrow is cold, and your fur is soft and warm."

"You ever hear of personal space?"

"Vervain, you make me sad. What would Chibiscuit think?"

Orchis' words filled Vervain with sadness. Chibiscuit would indeed be disappointed in him. However, these thoughts were soon pushed away by more pressing concerns.

"What do you know about Chibiscuit?" he said accusingly.

"You kept mumbling her name in your sleep."

"Will you three come out already?" came Woundwort's voice; the General entered the burrow moments later. "Everyone else has already reported for duty, except you."

"We're coming," Vervain said with a loud sigh, as he and the other two rabbits slowly hopped out
of the burrow and made their way towards the battle pit. Along the way, Woundwort pulled Vervain aside.

-“What's wrong with you? You look like you haven't slept all night.”

-“How could you expect anything else, sir? Blueberry was...”

-“I know you two will never be good friends, but could you at least tolerate each other's existence? Is that too much to ask?”

-“No sir, but could you at least stop him from training in the burrow?”

-“If we're to defeat the outsiders, my owsla will need all the training they can get.”

-“How can we defeat the outsiders if we're too tired to fight?”

-“Enough excuses. If you don't get enough sleep, there's nothing I can do about it.”

Acacia and Vesper had spent a while discussing the recent events in their lives. Acacia had been particularly excited upon learning that Vesper had been invited to join a warren, and expressed interest in possibly joining too, along with Nicole.

-“Oh, I almost forgot,” Acacia eventually said. “I've got something for you.”

Acacia shook his head. Hanging from his ears had been a necklace; it fell off. He pushed it in front of Vesper.

-“I took care of it just as you asked,” he continued. “I hope it wasn't accidentally damaged.”

-“It hasn't. Thank you so much for protecting it.”

Vesper carefully inserted his head through the string. It was rather tight against his neck, but it didn't hinder his breathing, and the feeling of the gemstone resting against his chest was very relaxing. He eventually held the rock out into the sun; it shone brightly, in many different colours from each angle.

-“It's really beautiful,” Acacia said. “Where does it come from?”

-“I've had it nearly all my life. When I was still a kitten, my guardian went...”

-“Dew!”

Acacia and Vesper were taken aback by the sudden cry. They turned around and saw Marigold, by the scrape's entrance.

-“DDEEEEEEWW!” she shouted again.

Vesper hopped over to her in an attempt at figuring out what she was talking about. Thankfully, she did not appear to have suffered any further injuries. However, this made her sudden change of attitude, from absolute quiet to loud screaming, even more confusing.

-“What happened?” he asked.

Marigold raised her head to look at Vesper. As she did, however, a look of horror appeared on her face, and she fainted.
"Oh no!" Acacia said, as he ran over to the other two rabbits. "What happened to her? Do I need to arrest someone?"

"I honestly don't know. I met her and a few others last night, but none of them were in any shape to tell me anything."

"Who could have done something so cruel to an innocent young doe?"

"If I ever find out who's responsible, I'll let you know, Acacia. Until then, I have to get them to Watership Down safely. That's the warren I told you about earlier."

"I'll come with you. I will protect you all from anyone else who might try to harm you."

Woundwort stood on top of an old car, staring down the battle pit as his owsla trained. He was not very pleased with the results: most of the rabbits, despite their huge size, proved to be highly incompetent fighters. Even the rabbits he had recruited from Cowslip's warren had done better. The only rabbit who had managed to defeat all his opponents was Blueberry, a major accomplishment for a small kitten. Vervain and Orchis had also done surprisingly well, but this revealed more about their opponents' ineptitude than their own skills.

The more Woundwort looked, the more it became obvious to him that further training would most likely be of little use. With a few exceptions, these rabbits would remain horrible fighters, their size being their only advantage. Hopefully that would be enough to defeat the outsiders.

"Enough!" he shouted; everyone immediately stopped fighting and looked at him. "You're done training for today. Now is the time for war!"

This was met by loud cheering, and several of the rabbits started chanting "war!".

"Everyone, follow me!" Woundwort continued. "The outsiders won't stand a chance!"

"The law says you are breaking the law," came a faint voice. Woundwort immediately spotted the rabbit who had spoken: she was standing on a rock at the other end of the pit, staring directly at him.

"You again!?" he shouted. "What do you want now?"

"I just want to remind you that the law..." the Speaker continued, but was cut off by Woundwort.

"Never mind the law, I have a war to win!"

Woundwort jumped off the car, hopping towards the only way out of the pit.

"Speaker, you stay here. Everyone else, follow me," he ordered, before starting the climb. The other rabbits obeyed.

The Speaker remained motionless on top of the rock as the other rabbits slowly left. Eventually, once everyone else was gone, she picked up the skull on her head and threw it as far as she could. There was a heart-shaped patch of deep black fur on her forehead; the skull kept it hidden under ordinary circumstances.

"This is bad news for this dimension," she said, but nobody was around to hear her, or head her warning.
Fiver hopped inside his burrow. The kittens were still listening to Dandelion's story, and Fiver was looking forward to getting some sleep. As he was about to lie down, however, he saw that another rabbit was already present.

-“Silverweed. What are you doing here?”

Silverweed did not reply, instead hopping over to Fiver and hugging him tightly.

-“Thanks...but why?” Fiver asked.

-“Fiver, I've been thinking. I've made some troubling discoveries.”

-“What did you discover?”

-“Several things. Woundwort will be back.”

Fiver shook his head.

-“I know. I've been wanting to tell Hazel about it, but I just can't seem to find a good time. He was busy most of the day with the interviews, and then Primrose came back. But it can't wait much longer.”

-“You're right, Fiver. Until everyone knows, we're all living in a state of false security, believing everything is fine when it most definitely isn't.”

-“I really will have to mention it today. There's just one thing I don't understand: Campion told us he was dead, how can he still be alive?”

-“Campion really believed he was dead. But the truth is while Vervain tried to kill him, he failed.”

-“Vervain? I would never have expected him to do something like this.”

-“Vervain may project the image of a violent and angry rabbit, but deep beneath this shell lies a profoundly unhappy creature.”

Fiver and Silverweed remained silent for a few minutes.

-“You said you discovered several things,” Fiver eventually said. “What else is there?”

-“Woundwort is not the only threat out there. I was outside earlier, looking at the stars, when suddenly a butterfly flew by.”

-“A butterfly? I've never known those to cause any trouble in the past.”

-“Neither have I, but I don't know, Fiver...I still have a bad feeling about this.”

-“I'll make sure to keep a close eye on any butterflies that may fly near the warren, so they don't cause any trouble.”

-“Thank you. But there's something else.”

Silverweed placed his front paws on Fiver's and stared deep into his eyes.

-“There is no easy answer to life and death, Fiver. What can you tell me about the blade of the sky?”
The Last Few Details

"All of this just does not seem real."

"You will find it real, soon enough." Why did he always have to be so harsh?

"I still can not believe it" her voice grew quieter. "That they are all gone."

--Lizella, *Enslavement*

Bigwig slowly made his way to the top of the Down. He had several pieces of lettuce on his back, as well as a turnip in his mouth, and he had to walk slowly to avoid dropping the flayrah.

Hazel was the first rabbit to greet the visitor as he entered the Honeycomb.

-"How did it go, Bigwig?"

-"As you can see, the raid was rather successful." He shook himself, causing the lettuce to fall off his back. “But there's something I don't understand.”

-"What is it?"

-"You remember how recently we went on a raid and we brought what's-his-name with us?"

-"Blackavar. And yes, I remember."

-"Yes, that's him. Well...honestly, Hazel, I'm still confused. We saw Tabitha kill him, and then we buried him. But a few days later, he just showed up at the warren as if none of this had ever happened. It just doesn't make sense."

-"I don't fully understand it myself either, I'm just grateful he's still alive. We haven't lost a single rabbit since we got here, and I hope it stays that way for the foreseeable future."

-"One thing is for sure, however: I'm never taking him out on a raid or patrol again. Never again, not after this. But until then, we have flayrah."

-"I better take some of this to Primrose."

Meanwhile the burrow she shared with Hazel, Primrose was slowly waking up. She recalled how she was reunited with Hazel the previous evening. It was amazing. She could feel another rabbit touching her tail.

-"Hazel, that tickles."

-"Actually, I'm not Hazel, I'm Blackberry."

-"Oh, sorry. Where's Hazel?"

-"Here I am!" Hazel said, hopping into the burrow.

Primrose smiled as her mate entered the burrow.

-"What are you holding?" she asked.

-"This is for you. Here, take it."
Hazel dropped the piece of lettuce in his mouth, allowing his mate to start to nibble it.

"How is she doing, Blackberry?"

"She's recovering very well, but she still needs complete rest," Blackberry replied. "The scar on her tail will linger for a long time, but other than that she should be back to normal within a few days."

"But you'll still be the most beautiful doe in the world," Hazel said, nuzzling his mate.

"I'll leave you two alone," Blackberry said. "I'll be back tonight to change the leaves."

"I'm really grateful for everything you've done for her."

Blackberry smiled, and left the burrow, as Primrose finished the lettuce. Hazel lied down next to her.

"Hazel,..." she started to say, as she turned her head towards her mate, only to fall silent as she struggled to express her feelings. Hazel patiently waited until she finished her sentence. "Hazel...thank you for everything you've done for me."

"Thank you, but what have I done?"

"You saved me from Efrafa. Also from the canal. You gave me kittens. You've made me happy. You've done so much for me. I love you."

"I love you too."

Primrose lied down on her side, close to Hazel.

"Hold me tightly."

Hazel too lied down on his side, and pressed Primrose tightly against him. She sighed in happiness, and fell asleep.

Hazel remained next to his mate for a long time, thinking about how wonderful it was to be with her again, before falling asleep too.

As Blackberry left the burrow, she came face-to-face with another rabbit, his ears on the sides of his head.

"Blackberry, I'm sorry about last night. Do you think you could be able to look at my ears now, or are you still too tired?"

"I'll take care of it soon, Hawkbit, I just need to gather a few supplies. It shouldn't take long, wait for me here."

As Blackberry went above ground, Hawkbit lied down in a corner to watch the events that were happening around him. Some distance away, Clover was nibbling the turnip Bigwig had brought back from the farm. In another corner, Fiver was playing a game of bob-stones with Vilthuril.

"Bob-stone guess is...four."
Vilthuril slowly raised her front paws, revealing only three stones.

-"You win again," Fiver said. “Good job."

-"Thank you."

-"You're really an amazing bob-stones player, and you're amazing and...”

Fiver took a few moments to calm down.

-"Do you want to play again?" he finally asked.

-"At the moment, I'm rather hungry. I'll go to silflay, and then we could play again, if that's all right with you."

-"Oh that's perfectly all right. I think I'll go to silflay too."

-"Before you leave, Fiver,” Hawkbit said, “there's something I want to ask you.”

-"I'll meet you above ground,” Fiver said. Vilthuril nodded, and made her way up the nearest tunnel. Fiver, meanwhile, hopped over to Hawkbit. “What did you want to ask me?"

-"What do you think you're doing? Do you seriously think you're in love?"

Fiver gasped as he heard this question. He really was in love, but he wasn't prepared to admit it yet.

-"Take my advice,” the sarcastic buck continued, “don't do it. The negative aspects of romance outweigh the positive ones.”

-"What negative aspects?"

-"For one thing, she'll just make you dig all day. That's all does seem to care about: digging.”

-"I would dig an entire warren for her.” Fiver realized too late what he had said. In order to avoid prolonging this awkward conversation, he hurriedly made his way out of the Honeycomb through the same run Vilthuril had used. Hawkbit continued to stare at him, and was troubled by what he saw: for a moment, it seemed to him as if there were two Fivers hopping next to each other. It was at that moment that Blackberry returned.

-"I'm ready to take care of your ears whenever you are.”

Hawkbit weakly nodded, and followed her to her burrow. Scattered around them were several piles of herbs, twigs and some mud. Under normal circumstances, Hawkbit would have been worried about what was going to happen to him, but this time he was too worried about Fiver. It did not take Blackberry long to notice his facial expression.

-"You look like you've seen the Black Rabbit of Inlé. Are you all right?"

-"No, I haven't seen him, it's something else...you won't tell Bigwig, won't you?"

-"Everything you tell me will be kept confidential.”

-"Well...in that case I'll tell you...I think I'm hallucinating.”

-"It's probably nothing. Having your ears in this unnatural position can affect your vision. Just lie down, take deep breaths, and don't move. They should be straight again very soon.”
Hannah had been travelling all night. Carrying the magic pebble would have been a trivial task for a rabbit, but it was a massive challenge to a mouse, especially since she didn't have Kehaar to help her.

There came a point where she was unable to keep going, she would have to rest. She made no attempt at finding a safe hiding spot; she simply lied down on top of her pebble and fell asleep instantly.

She didn't know how long she had been asleep, when she was abruptly woken up by the sound of an owl screeching. It was day; what was an owl doing awake? Nevertheless, as she opened her eyes, she saw it diving straight towards her. She jumped out of the way just in time; the owl grabbed something else before flying away. She remained still in the grass for a few moments, catching her breath, until she suddenly realized what the owl had grabbed.

-”Me pebble!” she shouted in frustration. “Ye filfy boid stool me maygeyk!”

Acacia, Vesper, Violet, Hickory, Marigold and her kitten were slowly travelling through the woods. Marigold had still not regained consciousness, forcing Vesper to carry her on his back. Hickory carried the kitten, but seemed reluctant to follow Acacia and Vesper; Violet had to periodically shout at him to get him moving again.

Suddenly, Acacia raised his ears, as he heard Hannah's screams.

-”This sounds like a creature in trouble,” he said. “I'll go take a look.”

-”I'm coming with you,” Vesper said.

-”No. I need you to stay here and get the others to safety if things go wrong. If I don't come back, tell Nicole I'm sorry.”

With that, Acacia ran forwards, until he spotted Hannah in the grass, angrily looking upwards.

-”What's the matter, little mouse?”

-”Ooooof!” Hannah was startled by the rabbit's sudden arrival. “Dat ool stole me puuble!”

Acacia remained silent for a moments, confused by the mouse's comment. Apparently this owl had stolen her pebble? This couldn't be right, he must have misunderstood. The bird had probably grabbed her uncle instead. Nevertheless, the owl was too high in the sky for Acacia to be able to capture it like he had done with the bat; he would have to try something else.

-”Don't worry, I'll get him back.”

Acacia used his string and a nearby twig to quickly build a slingshot. He spent a few moments aiming, before firing a rock. It crashed onto one of the owl's wings; the bird hooted furiously as it dropped the pebble.

-”I'll catch him!” Acacia shouted, as he ran forward, and grabbed the falling object just before it could hit the ground. Only then did he realize that the owl had indeed stolen a pebble. There was no uncle anywhere.

-”Ye got it bach!” Hannah ran over to Acacia and grabbed the pebble. “Tank ye soo mush!”
"No problem," Acacia said, still rather confused by this incident. Without waiting for Hannah to reply, he hopped away, and soon rejoined Vesper and the others.

"You all right?" Vesper asked.

"I just had to help a cute mouse get her pebble back. But now there's an owl on the loose, so we best get going."
“Even his own clairvoyency never would have prepared him for the ultimate feeling of gratitude [sic] he felt towards his companions and his family, or the feeling of warmth that bubbled up inside him whenever he looked out over the World from their home.”

--x Wednesday 13, Bright Eyes

Hazel slowly opened his eyes, and yawned. Against his chest, he could feel the soft warmth of his mate. After an extended separation, he was with her again. He wasn't going to let her go again. He would make the most of every moment he spent with her.

As he tried to get up, however, he felt something hold him back. A quick glance revealed that Primrose's front paws were wrapped around him; he could not move without waking her up. Considering how peacefully asleep she was, after all she had been through, he could not let that happen. He lied back down and pressed her tightly against him.

"Hazel! I need to talk to you!"

The voice sounded painfully loud in the Chief's ears. He awkwardly turned his head, and saw Bigwig standing just outside the burrow with a shocked look on his face.

"Hazel, is this a bad time?" Bigwig continued. "I really need some advice."

"I can do that, but please be quiet. She's asleep."

"All right, I'll keep it down," Bigwig whispered. "Can you come with me? I need to talk to you."

"We'll have to do this here. I can't move."

"Look, Hazel, there's a time for romance and there's a time for duty. Don't let the first one interfere with the second one."

"I really don't see why you're making such a fuss about it. We can discuss things here. I really don't think Primrose's presence would change anything."

"Fine." Bigwig sighed, annoyed at how he was going to have to whisper to Hazel from the entrance of the burrow. This was needlessly complicated. "I was thinking about the new rabbits."

"Yes, we met them yesterday afternoon. What about them?"

"What do you think we should do about them?"

"Let them join the owsla."

"Which ones?"

"All of them, if they wish."

"WHAT?"

"Shh, Bigwig be quiet, please!"

Primrose slightly moved, and squeezed Hazel a bit tighter, but remained asleep.
"Please Bigwig..." Hazel repeated.

"All right, all right! I'll admit that some of them look very strong and could probably do well in the owsla. In fact...don't tell anyone I said this, but they would probably be better than Hawkbit and Dandelion."

"What is the problem then?"

"I have no issues with most of them, but there are a few that worry me. The big one, Flyairth, I think she may want to be Chief Rabbit again. There's also that young doe Nelthilta. Do you know what she called me?"

"What was it?"

"Plump Rabbit. That's the most humiliating name I've ever been called.

Hazel chuckled.

"Well, she makes a valid point."

Bigwig felt humiliated by this comment. It was already bad enough that Nelthilta had called him "Plump Rabbit", but now Hazel of all rabbits agreed with her.

"I'll talk to you again after training."

"Good luck, Bigwig," Hazel replied. "Hopefully, by then, I'll be in a less awkward position."

"Seriously Hazel, just wake her up. She'll fall back asleep."

Before Hazel could reply, Bigwig had left, still furious over the "Plump Rabbit" comments. Nevertheless, he intended to listen to Hazel's advice. The newcomers would participate in training; if they did well enough, they would then be allowed to formally join the owsla. He was determined, however, to make today's training session very difficult.

As he arrived in the Honeycomb, it was almost empty. There were only a few other rabbits there; captain Broom was sitting in the middle of the burrow telling a story about Old Redstone, but nobody was actually paying attention. In a corner, he found one of the does cleaning her ears, and approached her.

"Hey, you're Thethuthinnang, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Find the others from your old warren, and tell them to meet me outside as soon as possible. It's important."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"I'll explain when you're all there!"

She nodded and hopped away; Bigwig cast one last glance around the burrow, before going above ground.

There were many rabbits outside. One of the new does was at silflay a short distance from Fiver; Bigwig approached her.
"Hey you! What's your name?"

"Vilthuril, I..."

"I want you in front of the beech tree as soon as possible, along with all the others. It's important.

"I told Fiver I would play bob-stones with him..."

"It's all right, I understand," Fiver said. "You go see Bigwig, we can play bob-stones later."

"Are you sure?" Vilthuril asked. "I don't want to disappoint you..."

"No, really, it's all right. There's something I need to ask Hazel anyway..."

"If you're sure it's all right...I'll be there Bigwig."

"Good," Bigwig said. "Now help me find the others, and make sure everyone is here."

Fiver hopped away from the other two rabbits. Before going underground, he cast one last glance at the beautiful doe, thinking about the future. He really would have to talk to Hazel about it. His older brother knew more about love than he did, and would probably be able to provide some useful advice.

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After the incident with the owl, Hannah's journey had been uneventful, but extremely slow and tiring. The owl had woken her up before she could get enough rest, and following this incident, she did not feel safe sleeping in the wilderness again.

As she reached the bottom of the Down, however, she realized that there was another challenge ahead: carrying the pebble to the top. While she had previously travelled on mostly even ground, the hill was quite steep and the pebble could easily roll back down. She stood there, considering her options, when suddenly...

"Hello Hannah. I've been looking for you."

"OOOOOFF!"

She jumped in shock, and darted in the undergrowth. She slowly peeked out, to see who the other creature was.

"I'm sorry I frightened you..."

"Don worra aboot it, Pipkin, I'm soo gleed to see ye. I ned yo 'elp."

"Sure! What can I do?"

"Cod ye carreh dat peebble to top?"

"Well, that's an unusual request, but I'll do it. What's so special about this pebble?"

"Its maygeek pebble," Hannah said proudly, forgetting the turtle's advice to keep it secret.

"A magic pebble? I didn't know magic even existed."

"Teh hegeziwad said it wuz a meegak peebble. Besids, din ye use migac to flee in early spwing?"

"I did fly for a few moments, but I doubt the magic had anything to do with it. I'll still carry your
pebble though. You look tired, you can climb on my back."

"Tankee Pipkin."

She jumped on the rabbit's back, as he grabbed the pebble with his teeth and started to climb the Down. Once back at the top, he spat it out, and the mouse jumped off of him.

"Faest twip up thee doon evah. Tank Pipkin. Bideway, wha happen to Plackbeer? Is se 'ere?"

"She came back last night with Primrose, and..."

"Yusss! The mujek woiked! Tank ye Hege! Thak ye Pipkin! Ain is excitin?"

"Um...yes," Pipkin said, rather confused as to why Hannah was so excited all of a sudden. "What hedge?"

"Mugjic is amaizn!" Hannah shouted, before running underground, leaving a baffled Pipkin behind her.

Hannah ran throughout the tunnels; she had no clear destination in mind, she just wanted to run, proudly waving her pebble at all rabbits she crossed along the way. Everyone was were very confused by the mouse's behaviour, except Captain Broom, who did not appear to notice her as she ran past him.

Acorn, Speedwell, Tindra and Flesca were at silflay. All of them had survived the night; it really seemed likely that Toadflax was the killer, but nobody was willing to discuss the painful subject.

"Hey, there was someone else here recently!" Flesca suddenly shouted.

"What are you talking about?" Tindra asked.

"These pawprints over there. They don't belong to any one of us."

"Elil?"

"No, rabbit."

Speedwell was the only one who understood the situation: these pawprints had most likely been left behind by Scabious during the previous day's visit. He would have to explain what had happened before the others got suspicious.

"Yesterday afternoon," he said, “while you were all asleep, we had a visitor. He said he was from New Sandleford Warren."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Acorn said.

"I didn't feel it was important enough to mention it. He just showed up, said he kidnapped Toadflax and then I..."

"He kidnapped Toadflax?"

"Didn't you do anything to save him? They might have killed him!" Flesca said.

"You make that sound like a bad thing," Speedwell replied.
"We can't just turn our back on a fellow rabbit like this," Acorn said. "We must go to this New Sandleford Warren place."

"I agree," Flesca said.

"I don't really want to go, but peer pressure," Tindra mumbled.

"Well, Speedwell," Acorn said, "either you follow us, or you stay here, alone."

Speedwell was saddened by this turn of events. He was hoping everyone else would be glad to see Toadflax gone, but instead they wanted to save him. Hopefully they would realize their mistake before another rabbit died...

"I'm coming," he finally said.

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