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Uncle Wiggily And The Wild Rabbit

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"There he is again!" cried Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy, as she ran to the window of the hollow stump bungalow and looked out. "He's digging up all the nice carrots in your garden, Uncle Wiggily!"

"Who is?" asked the bunny gentleman, laying aside the cabbage-leaf newspaper he was reading, with his glasses perched on his pink, twinkling nose. "Who is taking my carrots, Nurse Jane?"

"That wild rabbit," answered the muskrat lady housekeeper. "He lives in the thick bushes in the middle of the woods. I think he hasn't been here very long, and he doesn't seem to know any of your other animal friends. He's wild and runs the minute I go out. But he has been spoiling your garden lately."

"That isn't nice of him," said Uncle Wiggily. "I'll go out myself and see what he has to say."

But as soon as Uncle Wiggily started down the steps of his hollow stump bungalow, toward where the other bunny was digging up the carrots, the wild rabbit hopped away.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Uncle Wiggily, twinkling his pink nose in a friendly way. "Why are you spoiling my garden?"

"Because I like to!" answered the wild rabbit. "You live in a fine hollow stump bungalow, and all I have is a hole in the ground, or burrow. You're rich and I'm poor, and I'm going to spoil everything you have!"

"Oh, that isn't a good way to feel!" said Uncle Wiggily kindly. "I used to be poor, like you, but I went off to seek my fortune and I found it. I built me this hollow stump bungalow, and, if you like, I'll show you how to make one. Nurse Jane and I will help you!"

"Nope!" cried the wild rabbit. "I'd rather be bad! I'm going to dig in your garden every chance I get, and you can't catch me, either, so there!" And it sounded as if that wild rabbit might be making a funny "face" at Uncle Wiggily. Mind you, I'm not saying for sure, but maybe!

"Dear me!" thought Mr. Longears, as he went back in his house. "That wild rabbit is certainly a queer chap. I don't want to hurt him, but I wish he would get tame.

I'll have to speak to Policeman Dog Percival about him, and set Percival on guard in my carrot patch."

"Did you make that wild rabbit stop his digging?" asked Nurse Jane, as she met Uncle Wiggily coming in.

"No, he says he's going to be bad," sighed the bunny gentleman, as he took his tall, silk hat down off the rubber plant.

"Where are you going?" asked Nurse Jane.

"Out in the woods to look for an adventure," answered Uncle Wiggily. "And perhaps I may find a way to make that wild rabbit tame and good."

"I hope so," sighed Nurse Jane. "It isn't nice to have our garden spoiled."

As Uncle Wiggily was hopping through the woods, over on that side of the forest nearest the village, where the real children lived, the bunny gentleman, all of a sudden, heard the voice of a little girl.

"Oh, Donald!" said the little girl, in sad tones. "You've broken it. You've spoiled my nice little jumping bunny!"

"Well, I didn't mean to," answered a boy's voice. "He jumped all right a minute ago!"

"Yes, but you went and squeezed the rubber ball too hard, that's what you did!" sobbed the little girl. "And now my nice Easter bunny won't hop any more! Boo hoo!"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily to himself. "This is too bad! There's trouble here! I wonder if I can help?"

You see Uncle Wiggily knew what the boy and girl were saying, though the bunny himself could not speak their talk. Uncle Wiggily hopped softly nearer the children. He looked through the bushes, and there he saw a little boy trying to mend a toy bunny for the little girl.

The toy bunny was made to look like a real one, with ears and fur and everything. Fastened to the toy was a little rubber hose and a rubber ball was on the end of the hose.

When the toy rabbit was placed on the ground, and the rubber ball was pressed, some air was squeezed inside the bunny's legs, and he would hop across the floor; and his ears would flop up, too, because he had springs and other things inside him.

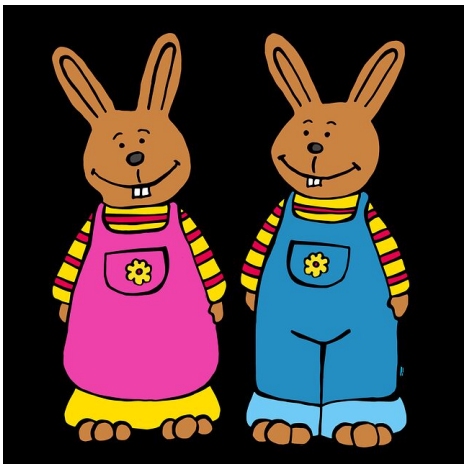
"There's no use squeezing the ball," sadly said the little girl. "My toy bunny is broken, and won't ever hop again! Oh, dear! Boo hoo!"

"My! This is too bad!" said Uncle Wiggily. "I wonder what I can do to make that little girl feel happier? I might get Sammie or Susie Littletail, the rabbit children, to come and stay with the real children for a while. They seem to be kind—this boy and girl. They wouldn't hurt Sammie or Susie. That's what I'll do! I'll go get the Littletail brother and sister, and have them hop over here so this boy and girl can easily catch them and play with them a while."

Uncle Wiggily started off through the woods. The boy and girl sat in a moss-covered dingly dell, trying to mend the broken toy. And Mr. Longears had not gone very far before, all of a sudden, he came to a little hollow place, filled with leaves. There he heard a voice saying:

"Oh dear! Oh what a pain! Oh what trouble I am in!"

"Ha! This seems to be my busy day for trouble!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily, as he looked at the leaf-filled hollow. "Who are you, and what is the matter?" asked the bunny gentleman.



"Oh, I'm the wild rabbit," was the answer. "The wild rabbit who was eating the carrots in your garden. But alas! I can eat no more!"

"Why not?" Uncle Wiggily asked.

"Because I have fallen and broken my leg," was the answer. "I can hop no more, and I suppose I shall have to stay here and starve. I'm sorry I was bad, and tried to spoil your garden, Uncle Wiggily."

"Oh, perhaps you didn't really mean it," the bunny gentleman said. "But wait here a minute. I think I can help you."

"Oh, if you only would!" sighed the wild rabbit with a broken leg.

"I think I see a chance here," said Uncle Wiggily softly to himself, "to help that boy and girl, and also the wild rabbit."

Off hopped Uncle Wiggily through the woods. It did not take him long to reach the place where the boy and girl had been playing with the hippity-hop rabbit toy that was now broken. The children were still there. The little girl had sat down on a log to cry, and the boy was trying to make her a willow whistle so she wouldn't feel so unhappy. The broken toy rabbit lay on a pile of leaves some distance away from the boy and girl. I suppose they had tossed it there, thinking it was of no more use.

"This is just what I want," said Uncle Wiggily. He found a long piece of wild grape vine, like a small rope, and, when the boy and girl weren't looking, Uncle Wiggily

slipped up and fastened one end of the grape-vine cord to the broken toy. Then, hopping off behind the bushes, Uncle Wiggily began pulling the piece of vine. Of course he also pulled the toy rabbit along the ground.

"Oh, look!" suddenly cried the little girl. "Look, Donald! My toy rabbit is all right again! He's hopping off by himself!"

And, surely enough, the toy did seem to be hopping away. But this, as you know, was because Uncle Wiggily was pulling it by the grape-vine string.

"Come on! Help me catch him!" begged the little girl.

"I will!" her brother said. Together they raced on after the toy, which Uncle Wiggily jerked along the forest path. The bunny gentleman kept out of sight behind the bushes, and as the wild grape vine was just the color of the earth and leaves the children did not see it. To them it looked as if the toy was hopping away all by itself.

"I say, Mab!" called Donald. "He hops better than he ever did before! I wonder who is squeezing the rubber ball? I can't see anyone."

"Maybe it's fairies," suggested Mab, in a low voice.

"Pooh! There aren't any fairies!" laughed Donald.

On and on ran the boy and girl after the skipping toy rabbit, and Uncle Wiggily pulled it so fast as he hopped along, out of sight, that Donald and Mab could not get their hands on the toy. It kept ahead of them all the way.

Uncle Wiggily knew what he was doing and, in a little while, he led the boy and girl up to the place where the wild rabbit with a broken leg lay in the bed of leaves. Uncle Wiggily jerked the toy rabbit close to the wild one, and then pulled the toy out of sight behind a clump of ferns.

"Oh, Don! Look!" cried the girl. "Our toy rabbit has changed into a real one!" And she pointed to the wild rabbit, which could not move away, though he wanted to very much, as his heart beat very fast.

"A toy rabbit couldn't change into a real one!" said the boy.

"Well, mine did; else how could this live rabbit be here, and my toy one gone?" asked Mab. For that is what seemed to have happened, all on account of Uncle Wiggily.

"And see, Don," went on the little girl, as she knelt down beside the poor, wild bunny. "His leg is broken, just as my toy rabbit's leg was broken. Oh, it is the same one! My toy has changed into a live rabbit! Oh, you poor, sweet, lovely darling!" cried the little girl, as she cuddled the wild rabbit up in her arms.

"Say! This sure is queer!" exclaimed the boy. "Very queer!"

Uncle Wiggily, peering through the bushes where he was hiding with the broken toy rabbit, looked out and saw the little girl holding the wild rabbit with its broken leg. The wild rabbit would have hopped away if it could, but was not able.

"Oh, Uncle Wiggily! Uncle Wiggily! Is this how you help me?" sadly cried the wild rabbit. Of course, he spoke in rabbit talk, which neither the boy nor girl understood. But Uncle Wiggily, hiding in the bushes, heard and softly answered:

"Don't be afraid, wild rabbit. These children will be kind to you, I know. They will take you home, and mend your broken leg and you will be as stylish as I am."

"Oh, if I'm going to be *stylish*, that's different!" said the wild rabbit. Then he nestled down in the girl's arms, and she and the boy took the bunny home and their father mended the broken leg with splints of wood and soft cloth bandages.

"Well, I guess that wild rabbit won't spoil my carrots any more," laughed Uncle Wiggily as he hopped along. "I'll take this broken toy home to Sammie and Susie."

As for the wild rabbit, he was no longer frightened when he heard Uncle Wiggily say that the children would be kind. And no one could have been more kind than were Donald and Mab. When the wild rabbit had to stay quiet until his leg healed, they brought him, every day, fresh lettuce and carrots, with cool water to drink. And when the leg was all well, the wild rabbit was so tame that he never wanted to leave the boy and girl, and go back to spoil Uncle Wiggily's garden. He lived happily with Donald and Mab all the rest of his life.

Sammie and Susie had fun playing with the broken toy, and they thought Mr. Longears was very clever to think of a way to not only help the wild bunny and the boy and girl, but also to save his carrots from being eaten.

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