

The Rabbit



By Raymond Howell

Publisher: theannstories.co.uk

The Rabbit

By Raymond Howell

Published by: theannstories.co.uk

Please respect the copy-right of this material. This copy is intended to be read by the person downloading it and should not be put to any other use. Do not circulate, sell or otherwise reuse the content without appropriate permission from the author, Raymond Howell. You may quote this material but please add the appropriate reference to your source.

The Rabbit

By Raymond Howell

Authors Note

This short story involves an innocent domestic rabbit. It starts off lightly enough, frivolous even and there is a smile or two in there somewhere to be found on the journey, but...

And neither will it be a normal sort of story... simply because the situation the rabbit becomes involved in, is not only realistic but also true.

Oh, the poor, poor, dear rabbit...

The Rabbit - 1

Part 1

A rabbit with the not-so-usual name of Dug was happily doing what a domestic rabbit so often does - eating.

Although it is not all he does and Dug is not his original name.

It used to be Digger until a cheeky rat happened along. “Digger, aye” the rat chortled as he read the rabbit’s name painted clumsily in red on the door frame. “Stuck in there you ain’t a Digger in the present tense are ya? You’re more a Dug past tense!” And that is how the rabbit got the name he uses, Dug Past Tense. Which conveniently nicely shortens to Dug.

Sometimes Dug might be seen peering through the wired cage door at the greater world beyond, his black nose twitching as he samples the air. Which in essence differs little from the air circulating the draughty cage, but, well, why not. It is something to do and it means he can catch the new air before it is tainted by the doings in pooh corner, which is always a welcome change. Then there is the hope that he might note the approach of the food delivery and be prepared for the hay change a second or two earlier. The early alert gives Dug time to hop quickly into pooh corner, to... you know..., pooh, which means, one less delivery to lay around festering for the annoying flies to eagerly explore before it is properly disposed of during the next change...

Quirkily, Dug never uses the left corner to pooh in. It never feels right

somehow and Dug so enjoys feeling right. So, the left is left alone without any regret that the left might be left feeling right out of things. Right? There is of course that middle ground which Dug will explore later.

So therein is the sum of the active moments of his simple life. Dug stares, eats, twitches and poohs, although those events do not always occur singularly. When a certain rebellious mood takes hold, Dug might well do all those things together. And for the heck of it, he might even add into the mix a hop or two or even three. And why not? What else does he have to do, other than sleep?

So, Dug's is a simple life, but he does have an ambition. He would love to take four hops in a row without once bumping into walls or the cage door. But it is not a burning one or necessary. Everything he needs is within easy reach and because he does not strain the garden's resources, the fresh food supply is consistent. So, he has little need to hop about in fearful fret while searching amongst the soiled hay for something or other to nibble on. Although he does nibble on things in the straw, but a rabbit's habit with pellets might be for some repellent so why consider it here, unless there is an urgent wish to join Dug in his cage...

End of part 1

The Rabbit - 2

Part 2

So there you have it and so it went and off it goes for a day, or two, or a week, a month, a year - who knows how long? Dug certainly has no idea. Partly because the cage has no clock, but mainly because he is a bored rabbit who tends to doze a lot. So, in Dug's world, one day might as well be six and night something that happens once a week or a month or a year, or as he often feels, it simply marks the passing of an eternity of eating, staring and poohing, broken only by the occasional hop or the more excitable passing of wind. However, that does not mean Dug is naturally lazy. It merely suggests he is not able to paint, play the guitar, sing or otherwise pass time like a human stuck indoors might. He was after all simply a rabbit locked in a cage, with little of interest to grip his attention for long.

He can smell flowers. He even spots the odd one or three when the kindly breeze nudges them into a sway that briefly fills his limited line of vision. That is not to say he cannot see properly, if anything it's the opposite, he has good eye-sight. It is just that there is so little to look at. The house never moves, the patio is, well, it is a neglected patio, while the shed offers not a single delight. Although the path is occasionally interesting, kind of.

The caring gardener when sauntering along the path occasionally peers over at Dug where spotting the rabbit staring blankly through the wire he might mumble, "You poor ???????..., or whatever his word of choice happens to be for the day, But Dug well, not understanding the moods or speech of

humans merely passively notes it, or simply turns his back, hops and poohs. Unless the gardener happens to pause long enough to poke a carrot through the wire of the cage door. Then Dug takes proper notice, for long enough to snatch the carrot and pull it into the cage.

As such lifestyles have been proven to be for all creatures so thoughtlessly caged by humans it was an easy one. As it is for Dug, until a second carrot is offered. Then life twists and becomes extremely complicated and tense even.

Do I keep eating this...? Or do I grab that...? But if I do, it'll leave this one unguarded... But if I don't take the other it will escape... Oh, what to do...? Do I take it, or not...? Do I...? Or do I not...? Or so Dug dithers.

In the grip of such confusion, Dug has been known to accidentally nip a human's finger... But fortunately for both Dug and humans, such conundrums and sore outcomes are rare.

After exploring his domain as he does frequently, Dug generally settles down in the centre of the floor which in a human sense might be considered his command post.

From there he can easily turn S.S.W or slightly more left to where a bowl of oats sometimes stands, or swivel N.N.E to the poohing corner or directly South to face the cage door. But turning to the boring blank wall of true North which offers no return on any invested time merely encourages Dug to face S.S.W or N.N.E or the more promising South.

There are also a few other spots in-between but they, like the North, offer little interest. Except for the small nesting box which he visits now and then. But it is always boringly empty, so why waste energy going there when the night is not chilly, or filled with the acrid tang of a rampant fox,

especially when everything he needs can be reached easily from the command post?

End of part 2

The Rabbit - 3

Part 3

So in Dug's little world, all his needs are conveniently provided for, just as he indirectly provides for others. All those worms, beetles and tiny flies, a host of insects and the mycelium and bacteria burrowing through or breaking down his discarded bedding. Along with the birds that make use of the old straw and eat those creatures living within the pile or they pick off and deliver to their offspring and of course, all those other creatures that feed off them and so on and so on. Where in time, obligingly, the bedding rots down and the gardener collects it up to cart away to sprinkle around Dug's beloved carrots and cabbages which helps them to grow and him to pooh and the hay to rot, the mycelia to expand and helpful bacteria to flourish and enrich the soil and so on the cycle goes with each little act, process and creature playing their important part.

In that uninterrupted time-honoured way, everyone and everything in Dug's little world is provided with all the things they need to flourish and in their different ways, they were happily content. But then two things occurred which changed it all.

Dug became the focus of a certain young fledgling entrepreneur's calculating attention, but more delightfully for him, soft-eyed, white-furred, pink-nosed Bunny arrived.

Not only was Dug beside himself with joy, almost immediately he was

above Bunny... who having taken to Dug as quickly as he had her, was happy to accommodate Dug's sudden shift in position.

As wonderfully different as that moment was for Dug, the shift in position and the subsequent act had a consequence. The arrival of six kittens was wonderful news for the doting new parents, just as it was for the young entrepreneur. Accommodating the kittens or kits as Dug called them affectionately did not pose any problems. Bunny and her little bunnies as she called them were tucked safely away in the nesting box and allowed to act as they please, so the kits, kittens, or bunnies did not develop difficult complexes and Dug for a while was still able to claim his command centre. But youngsters grow and the cage was only so large. As for Dug and Bunny, well, they were rabbits in every sense who enjoyed all aspects of becoming parents... So...

Soon, there was another six youngsters commanding the nesting box. While three of the first batch shortly after they squeezed into the main compartment with Dug began to swell suspiciously, although none of the younger males ever owned up to doing that awful deed with their sisters... But urges are urges and they had nowhere else to take them... There was also another consequence. The growing swellings claimed even more of their precious space.

In the overcrowded cage, it was now almost impossible for Dug to hop even once, killing any ambition of ever achieving four hops in one continuous flow. He was becoming depressed too. The only time he was able to move almost freely was when he was above Bunny, which temporarily gave everybody else a little more room, but they both knew it had consequences, but what else could they do, then of course they were rabbits.

And rabbits well...

They simply did not know any better, unlike the entrepreneur, but he cared only for one thing and it was not the rabbit's welfare.

End of part 3

The Rabbit - 4

Part 4

Very soon Bunny was swelling again and along with it, the mood within the cage. Fights broke out regularly while depression struck them all. Except for the cage owner. He liked the idea of lots of youngsters so he did nothing to ease the crowding, if anything the boy encouraged it. Soon, there'll be loads to sell and make me lots of money. Where he began to calculate how many more he might squeeze in the cage while wondering if could cut his costs by reducing the food further, only for its supply to suddenly seriously falter.

That awful event might have been avoided, but...

For months those poor put-upon-rabbits have suffered overcrowded conditions and short rations. Not only were they scrawny and tightly packed, they were beyond depressed and fought viciously. Many of the young weakened by the constant in-breeding easily contracted diseases and consequently were always ill or died and left for days to lie and rot. Diseased pooh piled up in the bedding and from there it made its way to the compost heap and all the little creatures, bacteria and mycelia and the birds and their youngsters too. In differing ways, they all sickened. Only for it to make its way via the unsuspecting gardener into the crops. In time the carrots and cabbages failed, while oats for similar human reasons became scarce in the stores. That occasioned the price to shoot up way beyond the reach of the young entrepreneur's pocket. So his solution then was to cut back on the

rabbit's food even more... Which simply fed the rabbit's depression and caused further fights, more sickness and the inevitable collapse of the entrepreneur's kingdom.

To the boy's annoyance, the babies were dying almost as soon as they were born, while Dug and Bunny, his original breeding stock were sick and weak, their eyes and nose constantly running, ears limp and discharging while their pooh was watery and on the rare occasions when they moved it left brown trails behind them.

"Why is it all happening, Father?" The boy yelled in frustration. "I'm only doing what you do! But your pets aren't dying like mine," he moaned as he showed his father the sick rabbits and the overcrowded smelly hutch.

"You've been looking at it all wrong lad, that's why." His Father suggested sagely. "Sure, by all means, squeeze in there as many as you can, but the trick is to know when to stop. Your rabbits are unhappy because they are cramped and underfed. Unhappy rabbits make for sick rabbits and sick rabbits die. And then there is the in-breeding! All of that costs you money both by way of medicines and reduced income from your stock. Ask yourself, who would want to stew a scrawny sick rabbit, or keep one as a pet?"

"Yes, I get all that Father," the boy snapped cockily, "but yours are not dying like mine." He persisted. "So tell me please Father, how do you do it?"

End of part 4

The Rabbit - 5

Part 5

"Ah!" Exclaimed father with a knowing smile. "I see what you mean... Well... Hmmm..." he procrastinated while mulling over the nubby problem of just how much of his businesses philosophy he ought to be revealing to a naive ten-year-old boy.

"Consider this." Father started carefully. "It's a simple matter of perception lad. Mine do die, I just don't tell you or anyone about it. Or when possible, I push the blame elsewhere onto other organisations or climate issues or something. Or I say, mine are just plain stupid and it is to be expected. And dying stock does not affect me as it does you. In my case I can cheaply replace them - you could even say," he offered with a sarcastic laugh, "that I can call on the assistance of weak fencing," where he smiled as his thoughts wandered to an image of his special type of wire cutter, or more realistically, his sharp, red tape, snippers.

"Or you could say, son," he added with a knowing twinkle, "that I can rely on boatloads of reinforcements arriving whenever I need them. There's been at least a million this year alone... With the promise of more to come!" He boasted. "But as for your situation, I agree, it's different to mine. So, I suggest you do as I do for those pets I believe will earn me the most. Look after them. Calculate the space they need to experience a sense of freedom, then give them slightly more so they feel really happy and cared for and important. In my case, I might also build an auditorium or something that

makes me money while keeping them happy. So, if you can do the same for your rabbits, you'll have good healthy stock and you'll be able to sell them for much more. And of course, being happier they will breed. Which is your target, isn't it? Much like mine really," he reflected.

"Yes, it is Father and thank you. I'll get on to extending the cage and I'll increase the food too," the boy said thoughtfully, while hating the idea it was going to cost him money and take effort.

"You do that," Father said, "but not too much mind," he warned. "Keep them reliant on you. Feed them just enough so they stay healthy and interested. And let them play out occasionally, think of it as their 'Sunday walk in the park', but don't let them go off too far, else they will start wondering what lies beyond the hedge and maybe even rebel or escape. And we can't have that now, can we...? And don't forget to groom them. Think of it as bonding. Like I do with mine when I deign to visit them occasionally. But never do too much of any of that, son. Remember, the more you give your pets the more they will want. And be careful. The wider perspective they have of the world the more they will want to explore it and when they can't, or you don't give them what they have learned to want, the blighters will turn on you. By the way, we call that unrest... which is to be avoided at any cost. Give them just enough to believe they are happy and stop them from fighting and dying until you want them to fight and die, that is. And that my son we call war... which is necessary sometimes to help us to keep what we have, or to take more." Where he paused to allow the boy time to think it all through.

End of part 5

The Rabbit - 6

Part 6

"As for the rabbit's food supply..." He went on, satisfied the boy had understood, "You need to plant more carrots and cabbages. Try genetically modified crops and more fertiliser. They may not be much good for you and me to eat, but they are OK for our pets... Believe me, they'll not know the difference."

"But I don't have enough space Father for all that," the boy whined.

"Oh, really? I wouldn't let that little issue stop you. Do what I do. Be bold, go out and get it, son," he said with verve.

"But from where Father?" The boy wondered as he looked about the carefully tended garden ruled over by his commanding Mother.

"Oh, be careful..." Father said as he caught the boy's drift. "Don't let Mother catch you stealing space in her flower beds. They'll be hell to pay... for both of us," he laughed.

"But, there again," he chortled, "you might try tricking her son. That's fair play. Suggest you want to try a planting experiment. Your carrots and cabbages mingled in with the flowers and suggest yours might help hers to grow healthier... Or learn to climb the fence. If you look, you'll see that the people next door grow rather a lot. Just be selective and cover your tracks well and I mean that in every sense."

The boy laughed royally at that idea, only for his Father to admonish sternly. “I’m being serious... Rule number one in business, learn how to exploit others or the natural resources - take bags with you when you go out into the lanes and pick what you can. If you want your rabbit business to do well you must learn to exploit. Have you got that?”

“Yes,” the boy replied while wondering why he had never thought of it. There must be miles of leaves the rabbits will eat growing out there just for me to take. Miles of them... And that will let me have loads more cages... where he almost became lost in the dream, but Father interrupted him for he had not finished yet, if anything he was just warming up.

“Consider the wood backing onto the garden...” he said.

“How might you utilise some of that? Get the gardener to clear space there for you. He’ll not say anything to anyone because I pay his wages. And who around us will miss a few trees anyway? And when they do,” he chuckled, “in my experience, it’s too late to do anything about it. Think of the rainforest son...” Where he smiled at the very idea and what the exploitation of it does for his wallet, but what a pity it’s so far away...

He almost lost control and slobbered as he sighed, “Just imagine the rainforest growing at the end of our garden...”

End of part 6

The Rabbit - 7

Part 7

Pulling himself together and donning the face of a father once more, he urged. "So, go out and take what you need lad, but don't dare tell your mother I told you that. Or anyone. This is your venture remember. Learn to be discreet about what you do, unless you can twist the law to make the land grab legal. For instance, consider. Are there common rights you can exploit? If there aren't any and you have to operate underhandedly - but understand we never use that word openly son..." he said advisedly, "...as it upsets some silly people, then have some good arguments ready. Or be prepared to sweeten things by giving some of your crops away, say it's an experiment and would they like to take part... If they agree and it's your job to make them agree then ask yourself, how can they possibly object then?"

"Wow," the boy exclaimed, "you're so devious, Father..."

Father was pleased by the praise, but it would have been much better had the boy said clever - devious was far too close to underhandedness and the truth to be comfortable - such words he thought with a shudder should never be addressed to a businessman. With a slight raise of bushy eyebrows suggesting he had posted a mental reminder to teach the boy better vocabulary, he continued to explain.

"Or give away a rabbit or two... If you do all that, then you'll get on fine. Remember, it's all about balance. You and I want more rabbits and

people now, don't we? They are the means to our income. So to keep the money rolling in we have to exploit and be cleverer than our neighbours. Then, if you get it right, one day you'll make a good businessman or even maybe a politician," he chortled, delighted at the prospect that one day he might have a direct influence on those in power. And how sweet will that be!

"Thank you," said the boy slowly as he thought it all through. "And I think I understand how everything connects together now, Father."

"Good lad," Father said proudly. "But then I knew you would. After all, you are my son..."

"One more thing Father," the boy wondered as once again he considered the effort needed to build his rabbit empire. "if I do expand the cages that will mean more work for me. So, I wonder, might I get Gregg the gardener to help?"

"Now you're thinking my boy! Father boomed happily which occasioned him to slap the boy's back in a rare moment of affection. "And to help you, I'll persuade the gardener that dealing with the rabbits is part of his contract of employment and that in the past he has been remiss by not helping you. That'll get you your help and regularly too I shouldn't wonder..." he offered smugly.

"Thank you, Father!"

"You're welcome, son... And I think you understand now that even though we businesses compete with each other, we also stick together... Don't we?"

"Yes, I can see the benefits of doing so Father!" The boy declared with an ever-widening smile as he began to quietly count the money he imagined

earning. While considering ways he might hide his new income from Mother to ensure she continues to believe he needs pocket money.

Yes, you'll do well my son, the father thought with pride as he marched up the path on his new mission to tackle Gregg the gardener. You'll do very well indeed.

The End