



Here Comes Peter

An Easter Story

By CJ England

A Silk's Vault Electronic Publication, in arrangement with author CJ England.

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Edited by Jewell Mason and Carol Fortado

Silk's Vault Publishing

www.silksvault.com

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Prologue

“But Father Rabbit ... you ... retire? What would we do without you?” The rumpled assistant wrung his paws in distress.

“Don’t whine, Mortimer.” The Easter Bunny shuffled over to his chair and eased his aching body down into it. It was a cool day in Easter Village and Father Rabbit’s seventy year old bones felt every breeze.

“But ... but ... you’ve been the Easter Bunny for fifty years. Who will replace you?”

“That’s why we’re having this little meeting.” Father Rabbit waved his assistant to the other chair by the fire. “To name my successor.”

Mortimer Rabbit dropped his plump white bottom in the overstuffed chair and stared at his boss. “Who?”

“Who’s the best artist in the village?”

“Well ... Peter Cottontail, but --”

“And who has the largest egg farm?”

“Peter Cottontail, sir, but really --”

“And who has consistently produced the best Easter eggs for the last ten years?”

Mortimer huffed, and his glasses slid down on his skinny nose. “You know the answer to that, sir. Peter Cottontail.”

“Then I think we know who the new Easter Bunny should be.” Father Rabbit combed a paw through his black fur and looked smugly at the irritated rabbit across from him.

“Sir.” Mortimer pushed his glasses back up. “I really must protest. Peter Cottontail may be all those things, but he is not Easter Bunny material. To be honest, sir, the boy has the morals of a ... of a rabbit!”

“Indeed?”

Mortimer smoothed his whiskers, knowing he was walking a fine line. “I’m sorry, sir, but it’s the truth. Peter has bedded just about every available female in Easter Village. He calls himself the Welcome Wagon, but everyone else calls him Taxi Driver, because he takes all the does for a spin.”

Father Rabbit turned a chuckle into a cough. It was true. That was just one of the nicknames that Peter went by. Worse ones included, “Peter Cock-in-Tail” or “Peter Get-Some-Tail.”

Mortimer continued, “What type of example will he be to the human children, I ask you, with behavior like that?”

“The human children won’t see that, just his Easter eggs.”

Mortimer sniffed. “How do we know? With morals like that, he may go after a human woman when he’s delivering the eggs.”

“Is that so?”

The Easter Bunny’s voice had gone very cold, and Mortimer blanched when he

remembered that Father Rabbit had once had an affair with a human woman, whom he'd met when he'd delivered eggs to the children that lived next door to her. Their wild, tempestuous love affair had lasted for over five years, and had even produced a child.

Mortimer gulped, but held his ground. "I'm sorry, sir, I didn't mean to bring that up, but Peter is a different breed of rabbit than you are. The whole village knows what he's like."

Father Rabbit sighed. He didn't agree with his assistant completely, but Mortimer was correct in one thing. The inhabitants of Easter Village may like Peter for his happy-go-lucky lifestyle, but they just might not accept him as Easter Bunny ... because of it.

"There are other candidates, sir. My own son, Benjie, for one."

Father Rabbit suppressed a grin. Benjamin Rabbit was an overindulged, slow brained mama's kit who had all the artistic aptitude of a turnip, but Mortimer thought the sun rose and set on his boy.

"If you just gave him a chance ..." Mortimer was saying.

Father Rabbit's ears quivered as an idea came to his mind. He tugged excitedly on his white forelock, the only color on his otherwise black fur. "I like your thinking, Mortimer. A chance is just what I'll give him. A challenge."

Mortimer almost fell off the chair in surprise. "You want to give Benjie a challenge to become Easter Bunny?"

"Not Benjie ... Peter." The Easter Bunny ignored the crestfallen face of his assistant.

“We know that Peter can do the work, but you’re right when you say he may not completely understand the spirit of Easter.”

“So?” Mortimer Rabbit stared at his boss, trying hard to keep the anger from his face. It was his son that deserved the chance to prove himself, not that gigolo rabbit, Peter.

“So, the challenge we give to young Peter will be to teach someone how to have Easter Spirit. If he succeeds, then he will become the new Easter Bunny.”

“He won’t do it. He may make the best eggs, but he has never understood the true meaning behind Easter.”

Father Rabbit narrowed his big eyes at his assistant. “He’ll have the chance to prove you wrong, Mortimer. Only if he fails will I look around for other applicants.” He watched as the chubby white bunny struggled with his anger. “Now ... go find Peter for me. Tell my son I want to see him.”

Chapter One

“Here comes Peter Cottontail ... da da dum da da da dail ...” he hummed as he bent over his work table. His paintbrush twirled and spun over a large glistening egg. Leaning back, he narrowed his eyes as he looked at his fancy work. This egg was a special one, ordered for a young girl in the hospital with a bad heart. If she didn’t get the treatment she needed, this might be the last Easter she’d ever see. He wanted to make sure this egg was one of his best.

The tendons in his neck popped as he stretched his long muscular body. He’d need to spend some time at the gym tonight to make up for sitting at a table all day. He would much rather be out working the fields in the fresh air, but it was that time of year again, and everyone who could paint was inside working. Since his eggs were so highly sought after, he seemed to have to spend more time inside than anyone.

Bending back over the table, he lost himself in his art. His blue eyes narrowed as he touched the tip of his brush into the special gold paint at his elbow. When he used it, the egg would come alive with a swirl of rainbow color.

His face was a study of contrasts as he worked. Hard, sculptured chin and cheek bones played perfectly against suntanned skin and inky brows. His short, raven black hair was messy. He’d forgotten to comb it that morning. Since his chin was covered by dark

morning bristle, combing his hair wasn't the only thing he'd overlooked.

Moving carefully, he put his brush down and lifted the egg. It was finished. When held in the light, the magic pictures came to life. Little Cindy would get an egg that portrayed her beloved dog, Sam, as he chased a ball in unending play. Since Sam wasn't allowed in hospital, this was a gift the little girl would treasure. Thinking about it made his face light up in one of his famous grins.

“Peter!”

Swearing, the man bobbed the precious egg before he caught it and put it down carefully. He turned his best glare on the prissy rabbit who hopped just inside his door. “Damn it, Mortimer! If you had made me drop that egg, I'd have taken it out of your furry hide.”

Mortimer was still too angry to care. “Your father wants to see you.”

Peter could see that the assistant was upset. “Is he all right?” He stood up and walked to the door, his eyes narrowing in concern.

Mortimer sniffed loudly. “Other than going senile ... he's fine. He just wants to talk to you ... immediately.”

Peter frowned at the cranky rabbit's words. “Don't say that about my father or I *will* kick your fuzzy behind.”

Mortimer's lips pressed together so hard that his whiskers all but disappeared. “He's in his den.”

Ten minutes later, Peter strode up to the large tree that housed the village's most famous resident. He knocked once and then let himself in.

"I'm in here, Peter."

Following his father's voice, Peter went down the dark hallway to the study, where Father Rabbit sat enjoying a warm fire. "Good evening, Father. How are you feeling today?"

"A little stiff and a bit tired, but tolerable, son ... tolerable."

Peter sat down in the chair across from his father. "Mortimer said you wanted to see me?"

Father Rabbit folded his paws and looked at his offspring. Peter was the product of his mating with a human female. At the time he'd been the Easter Bunny about twenty years and had still gone by the name of Roger. He'd fallen madly in love with Sarah when she had caught him delivering eggs to the neighbor children. Using Easter magic only available to one in his position, he'd changed himself into a human and had courted her. Since Sarah was a progressive thinking woman, and the knowledge of his special job hadn't bothered her, his love had been returned. They had been blessed almost immediately with little Peter.

But Sarah wasn't comfortable living in Easter Village surrounded by nothing but bunnies, so she'd moved back to the human world. Since Peter was a new breed of rabbit, a shapeshifter who could become either human or rabbit at will, she took him back with her.

Roger had come home to her every night when it had gotten dark enough that no one could see his comings or goings. Then he just commuted to Easter Village for his work. That had gone on for three wonderful years before tragedy struck. Sarah was killed in a car accident.

Broken hearted, Roger brought his young son back to Easter Village, and Peter was raised there surrounded by friends and family. Roger never re-married, but being a rabbit, he'd spread his talents among the does. Peter had his share of half brothers and sisters hopping around the valley.

It was for this reason that Roger really couldn't be too hard on his son. All young rabbits had to sow a few wild carrots.

“Father?”

Pulled back from his memories, Roger blinked and then shook his head. “Pour your old man some carrot juice, will you, boy?”

Obediently, Peter rose and pulled down the decanter of amber liquid. He poured some into a glass and then handed to his father. Roger took a long sip and shuddered. “Ahhh, the good stuff. Today we are celebrating.”

Peter sat down. "Are we?"

His father nodded. "My son, it's time for me to retire."

Peter's brows shot into his hairline. "Retire?"

"I'm an old rabbit, and I want to spend the rest of my years chasing does and drinking carrot juice. Being the Easter Bunny and having all the responsibility that goes along with it is getting to be too much for me."

"Father ..." Peter stared at the old rabbit.

"I have chosen my successor, Peter, and that rabbit is you."

Peter shot to his feet in surprise. "Me? How can I be the Easter Bunny? I'm half human."

Roger frowned at him. "What does that have to do with it? The Easter Bunny can be any species he wants ... whenever he needs to. It's part of the magic."

Peter shook his head. The single white lock of hair on his forehead that showed he was his father's son fell into his eyes. He'd thought that his unique physiology would prevent any chance of him gaining the coveted title. To have it set right in his lap ... "I don't know what to say."

"There is a catch."

Peter jerked his head up and looked into his father's intelligent eyes. "What catch?"

"There are those that think you are too wild to become the Easter Bunny. That your lifestyle doesn't reflect the true Easter Spirit."

“What?”

Roger grinned at his son. “You have the reputation of being quite the doe’s man, my boy. A regular randy rabbit.”

Peter flushed a dark red. “So? What does that have to do with it?”

“Some think that spending too much time in the bushes makes you unprepared to be the Easter Bunny.”

Peter went over and poured himself some carrot juice. “I have the biggest egg ranch, with the top producers in the county. My eggs are requested all over the world. How can they say I’m unprepared?”

Roger sighed. “It’s not the work that is the problem. It’s the attitude.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Waiting until Peter was once more seated; Roger looked seriously into his son’s troubled blue eyes. “We, and I do include myself in this group ... we wonder if you truly understand the meaning behind Easter. Do you have the Easter Spirit necessary to be the Easter Bunny?”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

Roger smiled gently. “I know, and that’s part of the problem. You don’t understand.”

“How can I prove myself worthy if I don’t even get what I’m doing wrong? It doesn’t seem fair.” Peter scratched his bristly chin in frustration.

“Oh, you will have a chance to prove yourself, son. That’s why I called you here.”

Roger smiled at the confused young man. “I have a Challenge for you.”

“A Challenge?”

“If you complete the Challenge successfully, I will know that you have the Easter Spirit required to be the Easter Bunny. I will complete my last season and then turn everything over to you.”

Peter stared at his father. All his life he’d dreamed of being the Easter Bunny, but he’d thought it impossible because he was half human. Now, he was finding out that though that wasn’t a problem ... something more was required. “What do I need to do?”

Roger grinned. “Your Challenge is to teach a human the true meaning of Easter. To show them the real spirit behind the holiday.”

Peter relaxed, thinking of little Cindy. It’d be a cinch to show her the spirit of Easter. This was going to be easy. “Okay. I can do that.”

“Not so fast, son.” His father pulled a large orb from his cavernous pockets. He set it in his furry lap and rubbed it gently. “Part of the Challenge is ... I will dictate who you must take as your student.”

Peter groaned. “But Father ... I know the perfect--”

“No, Peter.” His father shook his head at him. “You can’t stack the game in your favor. You must do this with someone who knows even less of the true spirit of Easter than you do.”

Peter wanted to throw his drink through the window. It was all so unfair! He was a good man and a hard worker, but that didn't seem to matter. So what if he liked to give the ladies a little pleasure? He sighed. What choice did he really have? He brought his temper under control. "I still accept the Challenge. Who is it?"

Roger smiled, as proud of his son as he was the day Peter had been born. He lifted the orb and watched as it filled with white light. "Her name is Bunny O'Hara."

Peter arched a dark brow. "You've got to be kidding me."

Roger chuckled. "Nope. That's her name. And she hates it." He frowned suddenly. "Can't say that I blame her. I understand just what she goes through."

Peter couldn't help but chuckle. "That's right. You haven't gone by Roger since that movie came out, have you?"

His father scowled. "No ... talk about identity theft."

Peter grinned. "It's a good thing that Mom's name was Sarah, and not Jessica."

Roger crooked smile was identical to his son's. "Now ... about Bunny."

"Yeah. What's her story?"

Roger rubbed the orb and the white light changed to a dark landscape. A low building could be seen, surrounded by a dirt parking lot. A neon marquee that said *The Hip Hop Club* flashed on and off in eye-popping red letters.

"*The Hip Hop Club*," Peter chortled. "A bunny at a *Hip Hop Club*?"

Roger narrowed his eyes at his amused offspring. "Now you know part of the

problem. She hates her name and where she works.”

“So what does that have to do with her Easter Spirit?”

Roger set the orb back down on his lap, and its picture faded. “She has been teased ever since she was a child. Easter just makes it worse for her. All the bunny jokes. She hates Easter because it makes her life harder.”

Peter nodded. “What does she look like?”

Smiling to himself, his father put the orb back in his pocket. “I can’t get a good view of inside the place, but she waits tables there. She’ll be easy to find.”

Rising, Peter made his way to the window. He watched as the inhabitants of Easter Village hopped back home from their day’s work. Anticipation rose within him. It had been a while since he’d visited the human world. This Challenge may not be easy, but he’d complete it. He’d find poor little Bunny O’Hara and show her what Easter was all about. He turned back to his expectant father.

“How long do I have?”

“Until Easter day. If you can show Bunny the true meaning of Easter Spirit, then on Easter evening ... I will pass the basket over to you.”

Peter set his jaw, and his blue eyes flashed. “You can count on me, Father.”

Father Rabbit watched from the window as his son morphed into a huge black rabbit and sped off toward his farm, anxious to get to the human world and begin his task.

Roger grinned to himself. He took out the orb again and watched as the inside of *The Hip Hop Club* came into view. He laughed out loud when a hot tempered blonde pulled the chair out from under a drunk who thought he could cop a quick feel under her mini skirt.

Bunny O'Hara wasn't a timid rabbit, that was for sure, and she had a secret problem that Peter just might be able to help her with.

Roger sighed. He'd chosen Bunny just because of her fiery nature. His son needed a woman with heat. All the does in the valley were just too shy to keep his interest for long. But this girl was different. Roger hoped that in trying to charm Bunny into having the right Easter Spirit, Peter himself might be charmed into falling in love.

Outside the study door, Mortimer Rabbit gnashed his teeth. That young upstart wouldn't win this Challenge, some how he'd make sure of it. No matter what he'd have to do, Mortimer J. Rabbit would save Easter Village from the half-breed hare. He hopped off to his own burrow, his fertile mind already planning the downfall of Peter Cottontail.

Chapter Two

“You’re no bunny ... until some bunny loves yeewww ...”

Bunny O’Hara gritted her teeth as the drunken voice caroled the song behind her. She wiped the table furiously, taking her anger out on the cracked and peeling wood. Like she hadn’t heard *that* one before. When the drunk didn’t shut up, she whirled around and treated him to a hot glare. The inebriated customer grinned lopsidedly at her and then quieted, mumbling the song into his beer instead.

Bunny stomped over to the bar to get her next set of drinks. God, she hated the springtime. It was bad enough during the rest of the year, hearing all the jokes, but Easter was the worse. If she had a dime for every time some S.O.B. wanted to know if she was going to *handle* his eggs on Easter morning, she’d never have to work in this dump again.

Behind her, the singing started again, but this time Bunny studiously ignored it. Maybe he’d just drown in his beer. She lifted the tray of drinks and walked over to the next table. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw someone head for the jukebox in the corner.

Good, she thought. Someone else was as tired of that damn song as she was. She placed the drinks on the table, almost knocking one over when she heard Eminem’s “Rabbit Run” come on the jukebox. She swore aloud, making the women she was serving gasp.

Bunny glared over at the grinning man who stood next to the machine. Dex Blake was a real jerk. He knew she hated that song.

“Well, there goes that tip,” Bunny muttered to herself as she walked away from the scandalized women. Just wait until they heard the lyrics to the song, if they thought Bunny was bad. Although the words were pretty close to the way she’d been feeling lately.

*Some days I just wanna up and call it quits,
I feel like I'm surrounded by a wall of bricks,
Every time I go to get up I just fall in piss,
My life's like one great big ball of shit ...*

That pretty much summed up Bunny’s life now. She’d been working at *The Hip Hop Club* for two long years. With her history, it was the only job she could get. The fact that her circumstances weren’t her fault made it even harder to swallow.

She slammed her tray down on the bar and glared at, Chris, the bartender. “Two jack and cokes, and one draft.”

Chris chuckled, as he expertly worked the tap. “Let it go, Bunny. You know the drill.”

She rubbed her eyes. “I know, Chris ... but geez, how much can I take before I lose

it?"

The bartender put her three drinks on her tray. "I know it's hard, kiddo. We both know you're better than this."

Bunny shook her head at him. "We both are. The difference is ... you go away to college in the fall, and on to bigger and better things. I'm stuck here."

Lifting her tray, Bunny went back to work, leaving Chris staring after her. He sighed and wiped the already spotless bar.

He hated to see Bunny in this place. They had been good friends since grammar school, and had even had a short romance, before Chris realized that it wasn't the female anatomy that turned him on. She'd stuck by him through his coming out of the closet, and he'd done the same when her trouble had come on her.

He watched as Bunny worked the room, wiping tables and taking orders. She was good at the job, even though she hated it. It was a far cry from what she'd done two years before.

After working her way through college, Bunny had come home to a great job at the local bank. She was good with numbers and had quickly worked her way up to assistant of the bank manager himself. She'd been in that position for a little over a month when everything came apart around her.

A large sum of money was found missing from one of the accounts, and it was traced back to Bunny's computer terminal. She'd been arrested for embezzling, but when no

money was found in her possession, and no other evidence could be found against her, she was then released.

But to everyone in the community ... she was guilty.

The bank had fired her, and no one else in the town would even think about hiring a suspected thief. The only job she could get was waiting tables at *The Hip Hop Club*, and that was because Chris - who worked there earning money for school - had put in a good word for her.

When Bunny came back with her next drink order, Chris continued the conversation. "I know I've asked you a hundred times before, but why don't you come with me?" He expertly mixed a cocktail. "No one will know you in L.A. Summersville will just be a memory."

Bunny tilted her chin firmly. "I'm not going to let them chase me out of town. You know I have to clear my name."

Chris sighed again. "You are too fucking stubborn, girl. You don't have anything to prove."

Bunny's answer was quiet. "I do, to myself."

Peter pushed his way through the door of *The Hip Hop Club*, almost choking as he hit

a wall of smoke. He waved his hand in front of his face and waited for his eyes to adjust to the low light. It was worse than he'd thought it would be. A real dive. No wonder Bunny O'Hara hadn't any Easter Spirit. A place like this could suck it right out of you.

He looked around the room. The place was packed for a Wednesday night. He frowned suddenly, thinking of all the last minute delays that he'd had to deal with before he'd been able to come to the human world. Mortimer, his father's assistant, had shown up just before he'd been ready to leave with a long list of chores his father needed him to do. Even though he'd protested, Mortimer had been adamant. They needed to be done before he left. It had taken him three days, and now he only had four left to convince Bunny O'Hara that Easter wasn't as bad as she thought.

Peter looked around again. He had to find her first.

He had a picture in his mind of what she'd look like. Mousy brown hair, brown eyes, short and stocky. The type of woman who'd end up working in a joint like this. Probably middle-aged, with kids in school, so she needed the extra money.

Peter grinned as he searched. If he could get this job over quickly, he'd have some time to play before he went back to the village for the Easter rush.

He walked over to the jukebox where a balding man stood holding a half-empty glass. "Excuse me."

The man turned bleary eyes his way. "Yeah?"

Peter backed away from the whiskey fumes. "Ummm, I'm looking for Bunny ...

Bunny O'Hara.”

The man chortled drunkenly. “Gonna chase a little Bunny tail?”

Peter frowned. No wonder Bunny hated her job. “Is she here?”

The drunk motioned with his glass. “Right over there.”

Peter turned, and felt his jaw drop. “Holy shit!”

The other man laughed. “Yeah ... she’s a looker all right, but mean as a rattlesnake.”

Peter quit listening as he walked toward Bunny O'Hara. This was no mousy housewife. This was a sexy, beautiful woman. Peter felt dizzy as he looked at her. She had honey blond hair that she wore piled up on her head, leaving tendrils to escape and curl around a graceful neck. Her face was a perfect oval, with high cheekbones and full lush lips. Her eyes were slightly tilted, and Peter saw that he'd gotten the color right, a light chocolate brown.

His mouth went dry as he saw long legs and a nice ass in a black leather mini skirt. Bunny's breasts were small, but in the tight tank top she wore, they were perfectly shaped.

Peter groaned as she bent over to take a drink order. Her skirt hiked up a bit, and he swore he could see the shadow between her thighs. His cock twitched hard. *Shit*, he thought to himself. *All I need to do is get randy over the woman; I've gotta teach about Easter Spirit.*

As if she'd heard him, Bunny slowly turned, and their eyes met. Peter felt a shock of

recognition spike through him, even though he was sure he'd never set eyes on Bunny O'Hara before. His whole body hardened, and he started to sweat. He shook his head slowly. What the hell was happening to him?

Bunny suddenly knew what a rabbit felt like when caught in the glare of oncoming headlights. The intense stare of the man standing across the room froze her in her tracks. Tall, dark, and handsome ... and built ... he was too good to be true. Her mouth felt like cotton, and her heart started to pound. Then the guy grinned, and she literally went weak in the knees. She shook her head, and had to force herself to turn away from that smile.

This was not good.

Peter smiled wider. He'd seen her reaction. He wasn't the only one caught off guard. Suddenly, this Challenge took on a whole new meaning. Maybe he could teach Bunny O'Hara about more than just Easter Spirit. Finding an empty table, he sat and waited.

Bunny wasn't a coward, but she put off going over to the new guy as long as she could. He unsettled her, and Bunny didn't like that feeling one bit. When Chris motioned her over, she went gladly.

"Did you see that?" Chris husked out. He jerked his head towards the new customer. "Is he hot or what?"

"Why don't you wait on him then," Bunny grumbled. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the man looking at her legs. As she watched, his gaze trailed up her body, and

ended at her face. He grinned slowly and Bunny felt her whole body tingle.

“Oh my God, what a face,” Chris murmured. He sighed in disappointment. “But he’s looking at you, not me. Damn ... he is one fine piece of ...”

“Okay... okay...” Bunny picked up her tray hurriedly, as she felt the place between her legs go damp. “I get the picture.”

She walked over to the table, feeling the guy’s eyes on her all the way. Her traitorous nipples seemed to jut straight through her bra. She swore at herself. What was wrong with her? She didn’t react this way to a man.

Peter saw them too, and his body reacted in kind, his cock stiffening almost painfully. He hadn’t even spoken to her yet, and he wanted to drag her into the bushes and fuck her brains out. This would not help his mission.

“What can I get for you?” Her husky voice fulfilled all his heated musings. Peter bit back the response he wanted to give. *I want you on the table ... now!* “Whatever you have on tap.”

Bunny nodded and walked away, returning moments later with a frothy glass of beer. She set it down. “You want to run a tab, or pay as you go?”

“I’ll run a tab ... Bunny.”

She stiffened. This is where it always came. Some stupid joke. She waited but to her surprise, no taunt was forthcoming.

He smiled at her again and put out his hand. “I’m Peter.”

Bunny automatically extended hers. “Bunny O’Hara.”

They both gasped when as they touched, electricity ran through them as if they’d put their hands on a live wire. Bunny tried to pull away, but Peter held hers tightly, his dark blue eyes narrowing.

“Well,” he said hoarsely. “What do we have here?”

Bunny stared at him, her thoughts in turmoil. With one touch of his hand, he’d almost brought her to her knees. She’d been with a few other men, but never before had one made her so hot she wanted to jump him at first sight. But this guy ... Peter, with his gorgeous blue eyes, and devil-may-care grin, had her almost panting. And that single lock of white hair. Now that was intriguing.

She let her eyes play over him, noting that though he was well built and his arms were muscled, he had the long slender hands of an artist. Bunny’s mouth dried up when she thought of those hands running over her body.

Peter finally let go of her hand. He knew if he held on much longer, he’d toss her over his shoulder and take her outside. The look in her eyes had him as randy as hell. He took a long pull of his beer, hoping to cool himself off. “It’s good,” he managed.

Bunny nodded, still caught in his gaze. It wasn’t until Dex yelled for a drink from across the room that she moved. “Excuse me.”

Peter watched as she made her way over to the whiskey-drinking guy he’d talked to earlier. He frowned when the guy put his hand on Bunny’s ass and gave it a squeeze.

Peter was already out of his seat when Bunny picked up what was left of a beer and poured it on the guy's head. The guy yelled, and Bunny skipped out from under his hand as everyone in the bar laughed.

Peter sank back into his seat as a voice came from behind him.

“She can usually take care of herself, but it was a nice thought.”

A fresh glass of beer was set down in front of him. Peter looked up and saw the bartender standing there with a friendly smile.

Peter shrugged. “Does it happen a lot?”

Chris picked up the empty that Peter had just finished. “Often enough.” His face turned worried. “She just keeps going, though.”

Peter grinned. “Like the energizer bunny?”

The bartender snickered. “Yeah, but don’t let her hear you say that.” He put out his hand. “I’m Chris. You new in town?”

Peter shook his hand firmly, noting that the blond was looking at him in the same way Bunny had. “Ummm, just passing through. Is she seeing anybody?”

“No, she’s pretty careful.”

Ignoring the bartender's obvious interest, Peter repeated what the whiskey guy had said. “And as mean as a rattlesnake.”

Chris hooted in laughter. “Yep, you got it in one.” He sobered quickly. “But she’s got reason to be.”

Peter felt his ears perk up. Maybe he could find out why Bunny was so miserable.

“And why is that?”

Chapter Three

Bunny chewed her lip nervously as she watched the door to *The Hip Hop Club*. This wasn't like her at all. Looking for some guy she'd only met once before.

She'd left him alone last night after their first conversation. Chris had been all buddy-buddy with him, so she hadn't been needed to serve the guy any drinks. But she couldn't shake the feeling that she had been the topic of their conversation. Every time she'd glanced their way, Peter had been staring at her with the same heated look. It had made her nipples tingle and her panties go damp, but he'd never approached her again.

She'd tried to ask Chris about it, but he'd shut up tight as a clam. He'd only say that

Peter was interesting and would probably be back. So that was why she was staring at the stupid door. Waiting for a guy she wasn't even sure was coming.

Bunny groaned as she cleared a table. Maybe she just needed sex. It had been a while. She'd steered clear after the last guy had made it clear that he was only going out with her to get his hands on the money she'd supposedly stolen. Learning that that was the motivation for most of the men in town had shut Bunny's libido down fast.

But Peter was from out of town. He wouldn't even know about the stolen money, or her tattered reputation. Maybe the heat in his eyes was genuine.

A prickle at the back of her neck made her turn. The object of her thoughts had just walked in the door.

He looked around and then seeing her, made his way straight to Bunny. She went still again, her eyes meeting his.

Peter had spent the day in thought. Chris had told him all about Bunny's troubles, and now he knew that this was no easy assignment. Plus, the attraction he felt towards her made it hard for him to concentrate on anything else. After thinking it through, Peter could think of only one way to proceed.

He'd seduce Bunny, and then once she trusted him, he could tell her all about Easter Spirit. Even with her problems, his charisma would make her believe him. It always worked with the does. Then, with his mission accomplished, they could have a little fun.

He grinned. It was a win-win situation.

Now, standing in front of her, he set out to charm. He ran a long finger down her cheek. “Hi there.”

Bunny felt her legs start to tremble. “Hi,” she croaked out.

Peter cut right to the chase. “When do you get off?”

Bunny blinked, suddenly feeling like she was caught in a fast rushing stream. “Uh, about 2:00am.”

Peter nodded, and flashed his grin at her again. “I’ll take you home.”

It was more the heat in his eyes, than the words he said that made Bunny shudder in reaction. He wanted her, but it was all going too fast. “I don’t--”

“Bunny ...” his voice caressed her, and for the first time in her life, she liked her name. “We both want to spend time with each other and we can’t do that here.” He bent and pressed a hard kiss to her astonished mouth. “I’ll wait over here.”

She blinked at him, still feeling the heat of his lips, as he strolled over to an empty table. The smug look on his face had her narrowing her eyes. Turning, she walked to the bar. “I need a draft.”

Chris already had one ready. “I told you he’d be back.”

She took the beer. “He wants to take me home.”

Chris whistled. “Fast mover.” He waggled his eyebrows. “I wish he wanted to take me home.”

Bunny couldn’t help but grin. She took the beer over and set it down. “Is this okay?”

Peter reached out and put a bold hand on her hip. “Almost perfect.”

Her breath caught in her throat as he ran his hand up and down her leg. She didn't want to move away from his touch. “Almost?”

“Yeah.” Peter's eyes twinkled at her. “It would be perfect if you were sharing it with me ... Bunny.”

Her heart pounded so hard, she was sure he could hear it. “I've never had someone say my name the way you do.”

Again, that slow sexy smile came her way. “I bet you get teased a lot. I know how that feels.”

“You do?”

“Oh yeah.” His hand trailed down to the inside of her thigh. “My name is Peter, remember? They can do a lot with that name too.”

Bunny laughed, a little breathlessly. “I guess they can.”

“I won't make fun of your name, Bunny. At least, not yet.”

His fingers tickled the inside of her knee and she fought not to squirm. Her panties were drenched. “Not yet?”

“I will when we get to know each other ... more ... intimately.”

Bunny couldn't speak. The tremors that ran through her made it impossible. She was so damned hot for him, and he'd barely even touched her!

Suddenly nervous, she backed away. “I've got to get back to work.”

Peter waited until she'd walked swiftly away, before he reached down and adjusted his throbbing erection. She'd been so aroused that his rabbit senses could smell her hot juices. He'd gone painfully hard in seconds. It had been all he could do not to reach up and fondle her right here in the club.

He watched as she made her way around the room, getting and filling drink orders. His eyes narrowed every time one of the men put a hand on her, but Bunny always moved away from them. Peter smiled to himself. She hadn't moved away from him. This was going to be easy.

It was a while later before Bunny noticed that Peter needed another beer. As Chris pulled one, she drew little hearts on her tray. "I think he likes me. Not like those other guys."

"See, sweetie." Chris nodded his head. "Not everyone cares about your past."

Bunny's head jerked up. "He knows?"

"Uhhh ..."

"Chris ..."

"Shit." The blond rubbed his chin. "He asked about you last night, and before I knew it, I'd told him everything. I'm sorry."

Bunny felt like her heart was bleeding. Peter was like all the rest, after one thing. And if he could get laid doing it, well that was just an added bonus. Anger swept through her, driving out any lingering passion. "Give me his beer."

Taking a deep breath, she strolled back to Peter's table.

He lifted his eyes to her face with a grin. "I wondered when you'd be back."

"Do you still want to go home with me?" Bunny leaned over, noting how his gaze went straight to her cleavage.

Peter had trouble breathing. Her breasts were so soft and silky looking. "Uhhh, yeah."

"And I suppose you want to get to know me a little better." she murmured while running a finger over his bottom lip.

"Yeah, baby." Peter clenched his fists to keep from touching her. He wasn't sure why she'd changed her tune so fast, but he was more than willing to play the song.

"And afterwards ... we can talk. Really go ... deep ... into what each other is about?" Bunny slid her bottom onto the table so her thigh was pressed up against his arm.

"Deep ... real deep," he managed.

She nodded and ran her free hand through his short black hair, mussing it even more than it was. "You'll probably want to know all about me. All the *intimate* details of my past. The robbery, my arrest ..."

Peter blinked, wondering where she was going with this. But her hands felt so good. "Anything you want, honey.

"So you'll take *anything* I have to give you?"

She smiled down at him, in a way that made him suddenly want to bolt for cover.

He stilled. "Yeah."

"Good." She stood abruptly. "Then let me start with this." Lifting her hand, she dumped his beer on his head. The room exploded in laughter, but Bunny didn't stick around for the applause. She tossed the cup at him and hurried into the back.

Peter swore and wiped the beer from his face. What had happened to turn the sweet little kit into a rabid doe?

"Here." Chris stood in front of him with a towel.

Peter took it and scrubbed his head. "What the fuck was that about?"

"My fault, I'm afraid." Chris sighed. "I made the mistake of telling her you knew about the bank and her arrest."

"So?"

"I told you she's pretty sensitive about it. What I didn't tell you was that all the guys who've come on to her since it happened ... well, they only did it for one reason."

Peter swore ripely. "The money."

"Yep. Thank good ol' Dex over there. When she told him she didn't know where the money was, he told her that was all she was good for. Turned her off of the whole dating thing." He glanced at the back room. "She probably thought that since you were new in town, you'd see her for what she is. A great gal."

Peter thought about all the money he had stored in the Easter Village Savings and

Loan. He was the richest rabbit in the valley. “I don’t need the money. It wasn’t about that.”

“You know that, and I know that, but Bunny ...”

Peter swore again. So much for easy. Standing, he pushed past Chris. “Watch the front for her. I’m gonna go talk to her.”

“Now just a minute ...”

Peter stopped, controlling his rapidly escalating temper. He knew Chris was just trying to protect his friend. “I’m not going to hurt her. I promise.”

Chris narrowed his eyes in a way that made Peter hope the bartender was on his side. Chris was built pretty strong. “I’ll be close by. If I hear anything ...”

Peter lifted his hands. “I’ll be careful.”

Turning, he made his way into the back, ignoring the catcalls of all the bar patrons. His eyes swept over the kitchen, but no Bunny. His sensitive ears heard a noise, and he saw a door slightly cracked open in the corner of the room. When he pushed it open, his heart sank. She leaned against the office wall, her knuckles in her mouth as she fought against tears. She wasn’t being successful; a trail of them slipped down her soft cheeks.

Peter sighed and walked toward her. Bunny’s head shot up in surprise, and her eyes flared hot as she wiped at the tears. “You’re not supposed to be back here.”

“Bunny ...”

“Get out!”

Peter's temper rose again. Her tears had dried, but her anger hadn't lessened. "I'm not going anywhere until you listen to me."

"You have nothing to say that I want to hear." She moved to walk around him.

"I don't want the fucking money ..."

Bunny stopped dead. "Not want ...?" Then her eyes narrowed. "Sure."

Peter swore. "I have more money than I know what to do with. I don't need yours."

Bunny felt like tearing her hair out. "It's not mine!"

"A matter of speech!" Peter roared. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her ... hard. "I didn't know about the money before I got here. I don't care about the money now. What I care about is standing in front of me. If you tell me you didn't take it, I'll believe you."

Bunny blinked at him as her teeth rattled together. His temper did what a thousand words couldn't do. It made her want to trust him. "I didn't take it."

"Fine."

"Fine? Just fine?"

Peter gritted his teeth. "What do you want me to say, damn it?" He shook her again. "I told you before. I don't care about the money. I care about you!" Pushing her back against the wall, he pressed his aroused body against hers. "Thinking of you kept me from sleeping last night." He bent and sniffed along her neck, making her skin shiver in response. "Your scent drives me crazy." He nibbled the exposed part of her shoulder,

and Bunny's knees buckled. "I want to drag you into the bushes and bury myself in you until you scream for mercy."

Oh God, Bunny thought as his hard mouth came down on hers. He kissed her as if he'd done so before. No hesitating or testing the waters. His mouth was hard and deep, and his tongue plunged into her mouth. She had no choice but to open for him, but even that wasn't enough. With a growl deep in his throat, he hitched her up so his groin was even with her crotch. Immediately she felt the throbbing of his cock against her as he moved it, parroting the action with his tongue, deep in her mouth.

Damn, she tasted good. Peter's heightened senses were filled with her taste, her scent, and her touch. His whole body throbbed in time with his cock, and his brain shut down to everything but the feel of Bunny in his arms. He ran his hand up her body and cupped a firm breast, hearing her soft gasp against his mouth. It fanned his lust even higher as he squeezed and massaged the soft bundle through her tank top. When she arched against him, he groaned and quickly slipped his hand under her tank and bra. He took the perked nipple between his fingers and rolled it gently.

Bunny cried out as the heat from what he was doing sliced straight through her to hit between her legs. Her yoni drenched her panties in sudden dew. Hungry and aroused more than she'd ever been before, she pressed against him, bringing her own hand down to grab at the bulge between his legs.

Peter swore, his eyes darkening to black. Her hand worked busily, massaging his

cock through the white cotton pants he wore. He'd thought it was impossible for him to get any harder, but she was proving him wrong. Desperately aroused, he pushed the black mini skirt up around her hips and tore her panties right off her.

Chapter Four

Bunny gasped as Peter's fingers gently stroke down into the soft hair that covered her womanhood. When he pressed one finger deep inside her, her knees gave out completely. Pleasure rolled through her body.

Peter knew that he couldn't take any more. He'd barely touched her, and he was ready to explode. He jerked his pants open, freeing himself, and hissed as Bunny's cool

hand wrapped around his erection. Damn, he was hot for her! She had barely had a chance to stroke him when he had to jerk her hand away from him or lose it completely. Lifting her slightly, Peter rubbed his cock against her, coating the head with her juices. When she moaned, Peter lost any control he had left. He plunged himself deep inside of her.

Bunny screamed into Peter's mouth. The feeling of his cock deep inside her was so delicious; she could barely stand the sensations. As he moved hard, in and out of her, he stroked all of her nerve endings. Her head tossed, and little gasps of pleasure escaped her throat. She clutched him to her, overwhelmed by the heat between them.

With each hard thrust, Peter came closer and closer to his breaking point. He'd never felt so out of control before. Rabbits had a talent for fucking long and hard, but that gift escaped him now. All he wanted was to feel Bunny come apart around him, so he could let go and spend himself deep inside her. He grabbed her bottom and pulled it hard against him, feeling the little tremors that signaled that her release was on the way. Almost savagely, he pushed himself deeper, grinding his hips against her soft flesh.

With a shrill scream Bunny convulsed, her muscles clenching down on him. Peter stiffened and groaned as his own orgasm ripped through him. He tucked his head into her shoulder and just let himself go.

Peter wasn't sure how much time had passed when he came back to himself. His

heart still raced, and he could feel Bunny's still pounding against him, so he figured it hadn't been long. He took a deep breath and nuzzled her neck. "Wow."

Bunny didn't know what to say. Her whole body still shook with the aftermath of the most wonderful climax she'd ever had, and yet she barely knew the man who held her so intimately.

Peter lifted his head and looked down at her, his blue eyes, for the moment, calm. "I should apologize, but I can't. It felt too damn good."

Bunny bit her lip. Hot sex in the back office wasn't something that she normally did, but this time, she'd had no choice. She had been swept up in the moment.

"Are you okay?" Peter frowned, worried at her silence. Before Bunny could answer, the door swung open.

"Hey, Bunny! Are you all ... oops ... shit ... sorry." The door swung back closed behind Chris with a bang.

Peter groaned as Bunny buried her face in his shoulder acting totally embarrassed. The way they were standing – with Bunny's legs still wrapped around Peter's waist – told Chris exactly what they'd been doing.

As Bunny began to shake against him, he felt like a total jerk. He'd wanted to charm the woman, but instead he'd ended up taking her against a wall in a dirty, beat up office. No wonder she was crying.

"Baby," he murmured, rubbing her back and smoothing the hair from her face. "I'm

sorry. I'm so sorry." Peter forced her chin up so he could apologize to her face. "I just couldn't help it ... I ..." He stopped, surprised, as he realized that Bunny wasn't shaking with tears ... but with laughter.

"His face ..." she giggled. "You should have seen his face."

Peter felt himself relax. He kissed her laughing mouth. "You're not upset."

She shook her head. "Working here, I have to have a fine sense of the bizarre, or I'd be dead by now." She snickered again. "Oh, God. Chris is going to be all over me now."

Peter frowned, feeling an alien sense of possessiveness come over him. "I thought he was gay."

Bunny nodded as she uncrossed her ankles and let her feet slide down to the floor. They both gasped as Peter slid from her soft channel. "He is. But now, after seeing this, he'll wanna know about *you*."

Peter's cheeks reddened. He reached into his pocket for a handkerchief. After quickly cleaning himself off, he gave the cloth to Bunny. "Here."

She giggled at the discomfort on his face. "He thinks you're hot." She took the hankie and wiped it between her legs.

Peter stuffed himself back in his pants and then helped Bunny pull the mini skirt back down over her hips. His sense of humor kicked in and he grinned. "Well, now he knows I'm off limits." He pulled her into his arms and kissed her again. "You're more

than enough for this randy rabbit.” When she twined her arms around him and returned the kiss, Peter felt something almost painful move in his chest.

Bunny snickered, thinking he was teasing her about her name. “We better get back out there.”

“Yeah.” Peter let her go and then watched as she tried to smooth her hair. It was pretty much useless. She looked completely and thoroughly fucked. Turning, he made his way to the door, ignoring the strange sensations around his heart. “I’ll go out first. Maybe no one will notice.”

Bunny was still giggling. “Right.” She looked around. “Have you seen my underwear?”

Peter stopped dead in the doorway. Turning around, his eyes swept over her amused face before moving on to search the room. His sharp eyes caught a gentle movement up high. With an easy spring, he reached up and grabbed them, tossing them to her. He kept his face expressionless. “I don’t think they’ll do you much good.”

Bunny stared at the torn panties for a second before she collapsed back against the wall, tears of laughter running down her face. That had to of been quite a picture to walk in on. How many people got to see their best friend getting screwed against the wall while her panties swung lazily from the ceiling fan?

Peter waited outside for Bunny, watching as the last customers left the bar. He struggled to keep himself calm. The short interlude in the office had just whetted his appetite for more. He couldn't wait until he got Bunny back to her house. He'd show her what the term "fucking like rabbits" really meant.

He thought back over the evening. After he had come out of the kitchen, he'd made his way back to his table, ignoring everyone. A few minutes later, Bunny had appeared, stopping long enough to talk to Chris at the bar. When the blond bartender looked over at Peter with a grin, Peter had felt himself turn red. Chris had pulled another draft, and Bunny had walked it over, her hips swaying seductively. When she put it in front of him with a flirtatious wink, he'd felt his heart lurch again.

Not able to help himself, he'd pulled her into his lap for a kiss, knowing he was stepping over some invisible line. When she didn't pull away, but leaned into the kiss instead, Peter knew he was in trouble. This Challenge was becoming personal.

He was startled out of his thoughts when the bar door banged open and Chris and Bunny came out. Chris gave Peter a friendly wave, and then kissed Bunny on the cheek. Eyes downcast, she made her way over to him. Peter's brow furrowed, and he pushed himself off the bar. Something was wrong. His pulse jumped. Had she changed her mind? When she reached him, he acted instinctively, pulling her into the circle of his arms. "What's wrong, honey?"

Bunny's troubled eyes met his. His stomach clenched as he wondered what he'd do if she sent him away. He realized, with a stab of surprise that he didn't want to be without her.

"I didn't think about it before ... 'cause everything happened so fast." Bunny's cheeks pinked, but she held his gaze. "I wasn't protected."

Peter sucked in his breath, alternately relieved and worried. He was glad that she wasn't pushing him away, but as his father had proved, his kind could impregnate a human woman. "And I wasn't either." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I didn't even think."

She looked away. "Neither did I."

"Hey." Peter brought her chin back around with one long finger. He took a deep breath. "How worried should we be?"

Bunny swallowed hard. His eyes were so beautiful; she could lose herself in them. God, he'd probably hate her now. "Fifty-Fifty."

Peter closed his eyes. Even though he loved all his brothers and sisters, he'd made the promise to himself that he wasn't going to do what his father had done and breed indiscriminately. Up until now, he'd kept that promise. Jesus, she'd probably hate him now. "I've always been so careful before." He opened his eyes. "I'm healthy Bunny, I swear. You're the only ... woman I've been with like that."

Bunny searched his eyes. He looked like he was telling the truth. She nodded

slowly. "I'm okay, too. I guess we'll have to just wait and see then." A blush touched her cheeks as she realized she'd said, "We".

Peter bent his head, and kissed her. "Yes ... *we* will." He looked at her again, a bit hesitantly. "Can I still take you home?"

Bunny's smile bloomed as relief coursed through her. He wasn't mad! "Please." Then she grinned bigger. "But you probably should stop at Smither's Drug Store. It's open all night."

Catching her thought, Peter went as hard as stone. "Yes ma'am." The way he was feeling, he'd need to buy every condom in the damn store!

"This is it." Bunny opened the door and slid out of the truck with a yawn. She pointed to the apartment complex across the street.

"You live here?" Peter gazed around at the empty street, noting the boarded up windows and trash strewn all over the yards.

She shrugged. "No choice. I got kicked out of my apartment when I got arrested. This was all I could find." She smiled sadly. "Down here, an accused embezzler is a step up from all the whores and druggies."

Peter stepped close and put his arm around her as they walked across the street. The

thought of her living in a place like this infuriated him. His mind went to the plan that had formed the night before when he couldn't sleep, but when she paused at her door, all his thoughts flew away.

She unlocked the door and pushed it open. "Do you want to come in?" she asked hesitantly.

"Oh yeah, I do," Peter answered, lifting her up and carrying her through the door. He slammed the door shut with his foot as he pressed his hot mouth to the soft flesh that pushed up out of her tank top. Her gasp sent shudders of longing through him. He eased her down along his body until his hot blue eyes looked into hers. "I want you."

Bunny shivered at the look in his eyes. Her whole body trembled with the need to touch him. "I want you, too."

Peter swallowed, seeing the desire on Bunny's face. "Take off your clothes," he rasped. He dropped his arms and let her go. If he didn't touch her for awhile, maybe he'd last longer.

Her eyes widened, but then she stepped back and smiled almost shyly at him as she began her strip tease. Her hands went to the bottom of her tank and, with a quick flick, she pulled it over her head.

Peter's mouth went dry. Her small breasts were displayed in a hot red bra that barely covered her nipples. He groaned as he remembered that the panties he'd destroyed earlier had been a tiny triangle of red lace.

Slowly, Bunny pushed one strap at a time off her shoulder, until they hung enticingly low on her arms. With a teasing smile she turned away and treated Peter to the sight of her undoing the back clasp and then letting the bra drop to the floor.

“Baby, you’re killing me,” he moaned, realizing that he hadn’t seen her breasts naked yet. He wanted to pull her around, but he stopped dead as she sent him a seductive look over her shoulder, and unzipped her mini skirt. Slowly she wriggled her way out of it, gifting Peter with her naked back and rear.

He clenched his fists as his cock jumped hard. His heart pounded in his chest. He groaned again as she turned. She stood before him, totally naked except for the thigh-high stockings and high heels she wore.

Her high breasts were, as he had thought, perfectly formed. Just the right size to fit in a man’s hands. Her body was slender, with a tiny waist, and heart shaped ass that made his mouth water. Long, long legs reached up into slim hips that cradled a mound of blond curls.

“I think you’re overdressed,” Bunny murmured. She stepped towards him and took the waistband of his pants in her hands. Looking up at him, she carefully unzipped them.

Peter had his shirt off in two seconds flat.

Bunny breath caught in her throat as her hands stilled in awe. He was, without a doubt, the most beautiful man she’d ever seen. He had the body of a man who enjoyed working out, with a wide chest and hard, muscular arms. His flat stomach boasted, not a

six pack, but an eight pack, making her mouth water.

His broad chest was furred with the same jet-black hair as was on his head. A line of it traced its way down his body, into his pants. Unable to resist, she bent and ran her tongue down the line of hair, feeling his body contract beneath her wandering mouth. She knelt and kissed the plane of his stomach as she finished undoing his pants, freeing him.

He smelled like male and sex, and something else she couldn't put her finger on. Unhesitatingly she took him in her mouth, wanting to taste everything that he was.

Chapter Five

Peter's eyes rolled back in his head and, for a moment, he almost lost control of his shapeshifting abilities. None of the does would even consider doing what Bunny was doing to him, and his control barely held.

He grabbed at her head. “Bunny!”

She ignored him, enjoying the feel of his hot, thick cock in her mouth. He was huge, and she had trouble taking him all in. When he groaned and thrust against her, she almost choked. Her yoni began to weep as need thundered through her.

Wrapping her hand around him, she moved her mouth up and down his shaft, sucking hard when she got to the big head. She swirled her tongue around it, her body clenching in reaction as he moaned. Reaching one hand lower, she stroked his balls, feeling them draw up even farther as his cock throbbed in her mouth.

Peter’s eyes were squeezed shut, and his jaw ached with the effort it was taking to control himself. He wanted to grab her hair and slam himself down her throat. Her mouth was so hot, so wet; he could already feel the release he needed starting low, down deep in his balls. The more she stroked him, the higher the need flared, until it was all he could do to keep the animal within him caged. When he could stand no more, he growled and pulled her off him.

“On the floor,” he rasped, kicking out of the rest of his clothes. With an unsteady hand, he turned her over so her fine ass faced him. “On your knees and elbows,” Peter rumbled. “We’re gonna do it bunny style.”

Bunny gasped as she felt him move behind her. His teasing words went right out of her head when she felt him spread her butt cheeks and slide his shaft along her wet nether lips. With a snarl that sounded almost inhuman, he grabbed her by the hips and pulled

her back onto his waiting cock.

Their groans blended as their bodies once more became one. Peter leaned forward and wrapped one arm around Bunny's slim waist while grabbing her by the hair to hold her in place. Tucking his head into the back of her neck, he pounded himself into her, releasing some of the animal within him that longed to be free.

Bunny cried out as his strong movements drove her into the carpet. She wondered fleetingly if she'd have rug burns from this joining. Then, as her pleasure rose, she began to push back against him, trying to take him deeper and deeper with every thrust. Her yoni clenched around him as a spiral of pleasure began to unravel deep in her belly.

Peter felt the sweat drip into his eyes. He burned with need, his body heaving against her as he felt himself go over the edge. His vision grayed and still he had to keep on moving against her, the primitive need to mate overwhelming everything. He heard her cry out, and she climaxed around him. His cock swelled, exploding with pent up desire, sending his hot seed spurting deep into her heat. It took forever for the spasms to end, but finally, he sank heavily down on top of her, flattening her beneath him.

Bunny lay still, feeling the racing heartbeat of the man above her. She hadn't realized that sex could be so wild, so primitive, yet so beautiful. Peter had filled her completely, and even though it had been a rough ride, she wanted to purr with satisfaction.

Peter panted on top of her, waiting for his heartbeat to slow and his breath to return to normal. What was it about this woman that made him so hungry, so out of control? He

raised his head, and frowned down at the bite mark he'd left on her shoulder. For a while there, he hadn't been sure who was in charge ... the man or the beast.

Kissing the bite, he rolled them both over so he was spooned against her back. He felt Bunny take a deep breath, and was suddenly shamed by his rough treatment of her. "Did I hurt you?" His voice came out gravely and deep.

She stretched back against him. "Ummm." The sound conveyed all the pleasure she had felt.

Still worried, Peter moved her hair and kissed her curved neck. "This wasn't the way I had it planned, you know. I wanted to show you how slow and sweet I could make it."

Bunny turned her head, and lifted her lips to his. After a long kiss, she rubbed her cheek against his. "I'm not complaining."

Peter relaxed, and his hand cupped her breast. He smiled as he felt her quiver. "You make me lose control." Suddenly he stiffened. "Oh shit, we did it again."

She frowned and turned back to him. "Did what?"

Peter motioned toward the bag that lay by the front door. "At least I brought them in."

When Bunny saw the unopened bag of condoms lying next to the front door, she gasped aloud, "Oh, no!"

Peter kissed the top of her head. "I'm sorry, honey."

Her heart sank. What had they done? Once was bad enough, but twice?

Pulling gently out of her, Peter stood and walked over to grab the bag of condoms. Returning to Bunny, he lifted her up into his strong arms.

“What are we doing?” she questioned as she linked her arms around his neck.

“Trying again,” Peter growled. “And this time we’ll get it right.”

Dawn broke as Peter pulled Bunny into his shoulder. They had spent the rest of the night making a big dent in the number of condoms he’d bought. Hard and fast, slow and sweet, until they were both too sore to move. Peter shook his head at his actions. Even a rabbit had its limits.

He put his chin on Bunny’s head, struggling against emotions he’d never felt before. The reason he was here suddenly leaped to his mind. The Challenge! He remembered his plan to seduce, and then charm. Guilt made his stomach churn as his lifetime ambition struggled with the primitive need to make this woman his own.

He closed his eyes, picturing his Father’s disappointed face if he failed. He cared about Bunny more than he’d expected ... but to be the Easter Bunny was all he’d ever wanted. He had to win the Challenge. And he could help Bunny in the process. He clenched his jaw against the disgust he felt at using her.

Rubbing his chin against her hair, he looked for a way to escape from his troubled

thoughts. His gaze fell upon a ceramic rabbit sitting on the dresser, and he grinned.

“So then, answer a question for me. How did you get the name Bunny?”

Bunny laughed. “My mother was a Kate Hepburn fan. She went into labor as she was watching a tape of “Desk Set” with Tracy and Hepburn. Hepburn played a kick ass woman named Bunny Watson, who finds herself attracted to a mysterious newcomer at her firm. My mom loved the character, so, lucky me ... Bunny it was.”

Peter chuckled, not sure what to say. “So you got teased a lot.”

“Oh yeah!”

“And working at *The Hip Hop Club*?”

Bunny snorted. “My little slice of hell. Although sometimes my name gets me good tips.” She ran her hand down his chest to where his cock lay tumescent on his leg. “And lately, the perks have been great.”

Peter hissed as her fingers stroked him gently. “Good grief, lady, give me a break.” He grinned when Bunny giggled.

“So, with a name like Bunny, you must love Easter.”

When she stiffened in his arms, he tipped her head back to look at her. He saw tears in her eyes. “Hey ...” He had known that she didn’t like Easter, but he hadn’t wanted to make her cry. “I’m sorry.”

She shook her head. “It’s not your fault. I just don’t like Easter.”

“How can anyone not like Easter?” Peter was honestly perplexed. Her name

shouldn't make her so resistant.

"I didn't mind it so much as a kid. I always dressed up as a rabbit." Bunny's smile didn't reach her eyes. "I liked to hunt eggs and all that stuff."

"Yeah?" For some reason, that admission cheered Peter immensely. Maybe she'd gotten one of his eggs.

"But then things changed."

"What happened?"

Bunny shut her eyes. Even two years later she hated thinking about that day. "I was getting ready for church." Unconsciously she snuggled closer, and Peter tightened his arms around her. "I was just about to leave when the doorbell rang."

Peter frowned. He had a feeling he knew where this was going. "Who was it?"

"The Sheriff. He had a warrant for my arrest. Supposedly I had just stolen \$500,000 dollars from the bank."

Peter whistled. Chris had told him about the embezzlement accusation, but not the amount. "But they didn't have any proof."

"No ..." Bunny shook her head, and strands of her hair tickled Peter's chest. "Not that it mattered," she continued. "Even though I was released, no one believed me. My boss fired me as soon as I walked back in the bank door."

Peter narrowed his eyes. That went along with what he'd been thinking last night. "So your boss didn't stick up for you, huh?"

“He was furious with me.” Her eyes showed her bewilderment and frustration. “I couldn’t understand it. I thought Chandler was my friend, but he believed everything they said about me.”

“Hmmm.” Peter slid his fingers through Bunny’s long hair. He had his own thoughts about why this Chandler had reacted as he did. “And they arrested you on Easter?”

Her face burned with remembered humiliation. “They handcuffed me and took me to their car.” She lifted her head and he saw the pain in her eyes. “They walked me right by the church. Everyone saw me.”

“Oh, baby.” Peter kissed away a silver tear. “I’m so sorry.”

Bunny sniffed. “It got worse. You see, the Riley Creek Lumber Mill is the biggest employer in this town. The money everyone thought I’d stolen belonged to its pension fund. It left a lot of people penniless. Once people found out what I had supposedly done, they asked me to leave the church.”

“God, no wonder everyone is so angry.” Frowning, Peter slid out from under her, and hitched himself up on one elbow. “Didn’t they ever find the money?”

Bunny looked up into his handsome, intelligent face. “No. It just disappeared. Every once in a while I get a crank call threatening me if I don’t give it back.”

Peter stiffened. “What do the cops do?”

She shrugged. “Not much. I think they hope if I’m under enough pressure, I’ll return the money.”

“You can’t return money you don’t have.”

Bunny just stared up at him. His unwavering belief in her shocked her right down to her toes. This man, whom she had just met, trusted in her more than the people who had known her all her life did. Reaching up, she took his face in her hands. “Why do you believe me?”

Peter’s eyes met hers, and he found himself drowning in the chocolate brown of her eyes. His heart began to pound as he saw the emotion in her eyes. He bent and brushed his lips over hers; struggling against something, he didn’t understand. “Let’s just say I have an instinct about people. You wouldn’t steal.”

Her eyes filled with tears. “I’ve never talked about this with anyone else before. Chris doesn’t even know all the details.” She ran her hands down his chest, feeling him shudder. “I’ve never trusted anyone enough before.”

Peter pushed away a quick stab of guilt. Now he had the information he needed, and he would use it to help Bunny, *and* win the Challenge. “I want to be here for you. No matter what. Remember that ... okay?”

Needing him, Bunny lifted her arms and pulled Peter down to her. “I won’t forget. I promise.”

As he slanted his hard mouth over hers, he prayed that it would be enough.

Forty-five minutes later, Peter slipped from the bed, and Bunny’s warm arms. She

slept soundly, her face pressed into the pillow. He hated to leave her, but he had work that couldn't wait.

As he showered he thought of what Bunny had said about her boss. The guy's reaction didn't seem quite right to Peter, and he thought he knew why. If Bunny hadn't stolen the money, then there was only one other person who could have.

Chandler.

And ... the man's over the top reaction had made sure that everyone's gaze was focused on Bunny and not him. Peter's eyes sparkled angrily as he rinsed off. If he had anything to do with it ... that was about to change.

Bunny awoke with the knowledge that she was alone. She reached her hand over to where Peter had been sleeping. The sheets were cold, so he'd been gone a long time. Swinging her feet to the floor and grabbing her light robe, she hurried into the living room. Her heart dropped when she realized that Peter was not in the apartment.

Sudden tears filled her eyes. She'd done it again. Believed in a man, and he had walked away from her. And this time it hurt worse. When was she going to learn?

Feeling ten years older, she trudged into the kitchen. Maybe a cup of coffee would make her feel better. She stopped suddenly as the odor of fresh brewed coffee teased her

senses.

Bunny stared at the coffee maker in confusion. He'd made coffee? The timer was set for 12:00 noon, and a quick glance at the clock showed it was half past that now. Maybe that's what had woken her up. But, why would he be sweet and make coffee, and at the same time leave her without a word?

Shrugging in confusion, Bunny poured a cup for herself, and carried it back to her bedroom. Maybe a shower would make her feel better. When she pushed open the door to the bathroom she froze. Her eyes filled with tears.

There ... written on the mirror in her best red lipstick was a note.

Bunny,

Had an errand to run. Be back to pick you up at two. Be ready to go.

Peter

She grinned like a fool, hugging herself in delight. He hadn't walked away from her after all.

Chapter Six

As Peter walked up the walk to the apartment, he felt unaccountably nervous. Bunny was beginning to mean more to him than he'd expected, and the day he had planned for her wouldn't be any easy one.

Peter's errand had gone well. If all went as he planned it, no matter what happened with the Challenge, Bunny's life would be changed for the better, and soon. He glanced around the neighborhood. He hated the thought of her living here.

He knocked on the door, and his breath caught as Bunny opened it. She wore an off-the-shoulder light brown sweater and a pair of tight blue jeans. She smiled at him a little shyly, and Peter grinned. He swept her into his arms for an unmistakably possessive kiss.

When he finished, he kissed the tip of her nose. "Hi."

"Hi, yourself," Bunny giggled. Then she narrowed her eyes and reached down to pinch him on the butt.

Peter yelped and grabbed the offending hand. "What was that for?"

She shook her finger at him. "That was for writing on my mirror in lipstick. Not only was it my best one, but lipstick is hell to get off glass."

He grinned sheepishly. "I couldn't find a pen, and I wanted you to know where I'd gone."

Bunny decided right then that she'd keep her little episode of lack of trust to herself.

“I did appreciate it ... and the coffee.”

Unable to help himself, Peter bent his head and kissed her soft mouth. The same heat flared between them, and suddenly he wished that they could head back to her bed and stay there all day. But he knew that wasn't possible. He had a Challenge to win, and it was only two days until Easter. Tearing his mouth reluctantly from hers, he took a deep breath. “Are you ready to go?”

Bunny blinked at him, slightly surprised that he'd broken off the kiss. She half hoped that he would pull her over to the couch and make love to her. It was one of the few flat surfaces they hadn't tried. “Uh, yeah. Let me get my jacket.”

Quickly, she pulled on her light windbreaker and followed Peter outside, locking the door behind them. He took her by the hand and led her to a black truck sitting at the curb. “Where are we going?” she asked.

Peter grinned as he unlocked the truck and helped her on to the high seat, admiring her butt in the tight jeans. “It's a surprise.” Settling beside her on the bench seat, he started the motor, and then pulled the big truck out into the traffic. “You'll see when we get there.”

She pouted beside him. “Give me a hint.”

Reaching over, Peter ran his thumb over her full lower lip. Then he wrapped an arm around her, and pulled her close to him. “If all goes right, I'm going to be promoted in the next few days. I thought I'd show you one of the places where I'll be working.”

“Promoted?” Bunny leaned over and kissed his whiskered cheek. Apparently, Peter hadn’t found her razor that morning. “Congratulations.”

He shook his head. “It’s not a done deal yet. I’m still working on it.”

Bunny wondered at the shadow that came and went in his eyes. “What kind of job?”

He blinked at the question. “I guess you could call me ... a delivery guy.”

Bunny slid out of the truck and stared at the massive white building. “You work at a hospital?”

Peter shrugged as he pulled a large whicker basket out of the back of the truck. “I don’t work here. I just deliver here.”

She looked askance her lover. He somehow seemed too intelligent and driven to be just a deliveryman. She reached out to open the top of the basket. “What’s in here?”

Slapping her hand away gently, Peter then put his arm around her slim waist. “No peeking. You’ll see soon enough.”

Bunny pouted at him as she playfully sucked on her slapped fingers, looking like a poor injured bunny.

His brow creased, and he reached over and took her hand in his. “Did I hurt you? I’m sorry.”

She laughed and brushed a kiss across his mouth. “No ... but I made you worry. Bet you won’t do it again.” She giggled as Peter’s eyes narrowed.

He shook his head at her in amusement and pulled her against him for a long kiss. When he finally lifted his head, she smiled at the heat in his eyes. She lifted her hand and ran her damp fingers over his lips. “Maybe they’ll have an empty room we can try out.”

Peter groaned as he escorted her across the parking lot and through the lobby doors. He had to keep his mind on the Challenge; otherwise, he might toss her right down here in the parking lot.

Once inside, Peter went over to the reception desk.

Bunny saw immediately that they must have been expecting him. The woman in charge recognized him and her matronly face broke into a huge smile. She watched as they spoke and then the elderly woman nodded and pointed to the elevator.

“Everything okay?” she asked when he returned to her.

Peter looked at her with a curiously intent look. “It’s all good.” He led her into a waiting elevator. “We’re headed for the third floor.”

Once the doors had closed, Bunny turned to him. “What’s on the third floor?”

Peter watched the lights. “It’s the kid’s floor. Pediatrics.”

Bunny stared at him. “Pediatrics?” The door opened as she spoke, revealing a beautifully colored mural on the wall. Pictures of rabbits and ducks, puppies and kittens tumbled down the hallway.

They stepped out of the elevator and Peter looked around. "I need to find the floor nurse."

Bunny gazed at a little girl in a wheelchair at the end of the hall. "I don't understand. What are we doing here?"

"PETER!"

Turning, Bunny saw a dainty, dark haired woman dressed in a nurse's smock come racing down the hall. She threw herself in Peter's arms, hugging him exuberantly. Peter laughed and returned the hug, until he remembered Bunny.

Looking at her, he saw she watched the display mutely, her brow arched in question. He felt guilty, even though he hadn't done anything. Ingrid was a close friend, but nothing more. Pulling away from her, he hoped that Bunny would believe that.

"Peter, it has been too long!" The diminutive Ingrid grinned up at him.

Bunny wrinkled her nose. Ingrid was very pretty.

"I've been busy," he said apologetically. "But I'm here now. Are they ready?"

Ingrid's eyes slid to Bunny. "Yep, ready and waiting."

Peter reached out and pulled Bunny against his side, making it clear that she was with him. "Ingrid, I'd like you to meet a very special lady. This is Bunny."

Ingrid blinked rapidly, the only sign that she was flustered by Bunny's presence. "How do you do?"

Bunny lifted her chin. "Fine, thanks." She leaned against Peter in a way that said

hands off to the woman standing in front of her. Now that she'd found him, she wasn't planning on losing him.

Ingrid turned back to Peter. "They are all in the big ward waiting for you. When I told them the Easter Bunny's helper was coming, they went nuts. I could barely get them to eat their lunches."

Bunny stiffened. The Easter Bunny? What was Ingrid talking about?

Peter noticed her wooden face and spoke rapidly, hoping to forestall any problems. "Why don't you go make sure they are all there? We'll be right behind you."

Ingrid frowned a little, but then nodded. "All right." She left them and disappeared into a set of double doors at the end of the hall.

He turned to Bunny. "Let me explain."

"You brought me here, knowing how I feel about Easter?" Her voice shook. "Why would you do that?"

Peter put down the big basket and took her by the upper arms. "Because I want you to see Easter from another perspective." His hands stroked her skin soothingly. "Easter is a very important holiday to me. I don't want you to hate it anymore."

She snorted. "And you think that bringing me to visit a bunch of sick kids is going to change that?"

Peter pulled her resistant body against his. "I think if you can see Easter through someone else's eyes, you may see it a bit differently, that's all. The kids we're going to

visit all are very sick. They may not have another Easter in them. Each day is precious, and the holiday even more so.”

Bunny felt shame crawl up her cheeks. “I don’t know, Peter.”

He bent and kissed her softly. “Just try, okay? For me? If it’s too much, we’ll leave, I promise.”

“Are you coming?” Ingrid’s voice interrupted them.

Peter looked down at Bunny. “I don’t know. Are we?”

Bunny sighed. His expression looked so hopeful, she couldn’t say no to him. She’d managed to make it through two horrible Easters, so she should be able to manage an afternoon in a sick ward. “All right, Peter. For you.”

He hugged her against him, and planted a quick kiss on her sulky mouth. Bending, he picked up the basket and, taking Bunny by the hand, he led her down the hall and into the ward.

Bunny’s first impression was of lots of light and color. The ward was decorated with more of the bright cheery murals, and soft music could be heard. It looked like a children’s playroom, except for the rows of sterile white beds and the smell of antiseptic in the air. The beds were all empty except for one, where a thin, pale child lay.

“How’s Cindy?” Peter asked Ingrid, nodding at the patient in bed. “Any news on a heart?”

The nurse shook her head sadly. “No. She is running out of time. In fact, I didn’t

think she'd make it until Easter." Her voice hitched. "She said she was going to hold on because the Easter Bunny had promised her something special this year."

Bunny's eyes smarted with tears. The poor little thing had a much better reason to be angry than she did, and yet Cindy still looked forward to Easter. Suddenly Bunny felt petty and small. Her problems were huge, but at least she wasn't going to die.

A tiny girl playing at the end of the ward finally looked up and noticed the adults. Her thin face bloomed with joy, as she cried out, and hobbled towards them. "Mr. Peter!" she shouted. "It's Mr. Peter! The Easter Bunny is here!"

Peter dropped the basket and met the small child halfway. "Not the Easter Bunny, silly. I'm the Easter Bunny's helper." Scooping her up, he hugged her to him. The excited shouts of the other children filled the room, and soon Peter was covered by a mass of happy, clinging children.

Bunny's tears overflowed as she watched them.

Ingrid smiled through her own tears. "He comes as often as he can," she said softly. "He always brings something when he visits, but it's Easter where he really shines. The kids think he is the Easter Bunny. They love him."

Bunny nodded, unable to speak. Her heart beat painfully in her breast. Seeing Peter laughing and teasing the children made something inside her grow soft and warm. When he looked back at her with one of his grins, Bunny's knees almost buckled at the emotion that filled her.

“Bring me the basket, will ya, honey?”

Bunny blinked back the tears. Peter had a child under each arm, and a dozen more clinging to his arms. There was no way he could carry the basket, too. She lifted it and grunted with surprise at how heavy it was. Staggering slightly, she followed Peter and the children to Cindy’s bedside. The little girl opened her eyes and looked at Peter with such adoration that Bunny felt her throat tighten again.

Setting the basket down, she started to back away, but was stopped by a small hand on her hip.

“Who is ooo?”

Bunny looked down and saw a small boy with unruly blond hair and a turned up nose. He patted her again. “Is ooo a fend of Mr. Peter?”

Peter chuckled and set down the children he carried. He took Bunny’s hand, drawing her close to him. “Michael, this is Bunny.”

Michael’s blue eyes widened. “Ooo is a bunny, too?”

Bunny blushed and all the children laughed. Peter ruffled the small boy’s hair. “No, her *name* is Bunny. She’s the Easter Bunny’s helper’s ... helper.”

Michael’s mouth fell open as he thought that through, and he looked at her with awe. “Ooo is Peter’s helper?”

Bunny cleared her throat and knelt down so she could look Michael in the eye. “I guess I am today. See, he surprised me too.”

“Weally?”

“Weall ... I mean really.” Bunny giggled.

The little girl who Peter had picked up first smiled at Bunny. “So, we is a surprise for you, and you is a surprise for us.”

Bunny smiled. “I guess that’s true.”

Michael tugged at her sleeve. “Did ooo bring us something?”

Peter laughed and pulled the basket forward. “Right here.”

The excited children all crowded around until an older boy, a teenager with a bald head and slightly yellow skin, spoke up. “We should let Cindy go first. She gets tired easily.”

“Great idea, Paul.” Peter approved.

He reached into the basket and pulled out a large egg. As he did so, Bunny caught a glimpse of glittering light inside the carrier.

“This is for you, Cindy.” Peter placed the egg carefully in the sick girl’s lap.

Cindy lifted the gift into the light, and caught her breath. The pale yellow egg shimmered with light and life. As they all watched, a perfect picture of a golden retriever raced around the side of the egg and barked up at Cindy. Then he turned and raced away, looking over his shoulder as if he was waiting for his mistress to come play with him.

Cindy’s eyes filled with happy tears. “It’s Sam!” she cried hoarsely. “Mr. Peter has brought my Sam to me.” Holding onto the precious egg, Cindy painfully sat up and

buried her face in Peter's chest. He gently hugged her as she whispered. "I love you, Mr. Peter. You said the Easter Bunny would come, and he did."

Bunny had tears of her own streaking down her cheeks as she watched Peter hold Cindy. When he raised his head and their eyes met over the top of the child, his face split into a wide grin and she could see the pride and love in his eyes. Deep in her chest, her heart began to grow, to expand with so much feeling she felt it would burst. She looked at Peter's handsome, loving face and knew what she had been too afraid to admit to herself.

She had fallen in love with him.

Chapter Seven

Bunny spent the rest of the afternoon watching Peter hand out presents to the children. Cindy had gone back to sleep, her precious egg propped safely on her side table where she could see it easily. The contented smile on her face spoke volumes.

Each of the other kids received a gift as well. No one was forgotten or overlooked. Michael, the tiny cherub with the lisp, received a set of toy trucks; all painted in bright Easter colors. Hannah, the child with the limp, got an egg like Cindy's, but hers had moving pictures of ballerinas on it. Hannah loved to dance.

For Paul, who stood on the precipice of being a man and too old for Easter toys, Peter had brought an art set for the budding artist. Paul touched the wooden case with a reverent hand, and his eyes glistened with joy.

Each time Peter handed one of the smaller children a gift, he brought them into his lap and spoke softly to them. He didn't hurry or rush. It was as if he knew that these moments would need to last in their memories, and he wanted them to be good ones.

Bunny found herself falling a little deeper in love with every precious treasure handed out. Peter was tall, handsome, a wonderful lover, and now she knew he had a beautiful, giving heart as well. What woman wouldn't fall for such a man?

Peter was enjoying himself greatly. Coming to the hospital, even with its sadness, was one of his favorite things to do. These children, with their wide-eyed acceptance of

their lot in life, gave his own a meaning he'd never found anywhere else.

He looked up at Bunny to see her warm chocolate eyes watching him. His heart stuttered at the look in hers. At least he'd never found it anywhere else ... until he'd met her. The emotion in her eyes grabbed at him. He stood and made his way to her after the gifts had been all handed out.

He framed her face in his hands. "Did you enjoy yourself?"

Bunny smiled and rubbed one cheek against his palm. "Yes. They're great kids." Her eyes clouded as she looked over at Cindy. "And so ill."

Peter followed her gaze. "She is the sickest of them all. She needs a new heart."

Bunny blinked back tears. "It's all so unfair."

He hugged her, and together they watched the children play with their new toys. Paul had set up his easel and was doing a rough sketch of Michael, who lay flat on his belly, running his new trucks along the floor.

Ingrid made her way back to them. "Thank you, Peter." She gave him a quick hug. "You know this means the world to them."

"It means the world to me, too." He motioned for Paul, who came over immediately.

"If you look in the basket, I think you'll find one last Easter present."

"Peter!" Ingrid scolded. "You do too much."

"It's not too much. It's never enough."

"Wow, Mr. Peter!" Paul's happy voice cut across their morose thoughts. "DVD's."

The tall boy pulled out an armful of new releases. “These are great!”

“What do you say to Peter, everyone?” A chorus of thank yous filled the room.

Bunny felt a tiny hand patting her leg. Michael raised his arms to her, and instinctively she lifted him up to rest on her hip.

“Is ooo coming back?”

Bunny blushed, not knowing exactly how to answer. She knew she’d come back, with or without Peter. These children had stolen their way into her heart. Before she could open her mouth, she and Michael were pulled against Peter’s hard body.

“Of course she will, Michael,” Peter promised. The sight of the little boy in Bunny’s arms made his chest tighten. “What would I do without my helper?” His eyes met Bunny’s and he hugged both her and the boy. Suddenly the thought of coming back to this place without her was intolerable.

Later that night, Peter parked his truck outside the *Hip Hop Club*. He’d dropped Bunny off earlier, and then run home to Easter Village to check in with his father. Peter frowned as he remembered the smug look on Roger’s face when he’d heard about Bunny’s problems. It was almost as if he’d already known.

After leaving the Village, Peter had made a quick stop at Smither’s Drug Store. He

and Bunny had put a sizable dent in the box of condoms last night. He wasn't about to run out of protection when he finally got her back to her apartment.

When he finally got back to the bar it was late in the evening. As he came through the big door, he saw Bunny working a table in the corner. He made his way to his regular table, nodding at Chris as he walked by the bar. Once seated, he kept his gaze on Bunny until she finally turned and noticed him.

She smiled ... a slow sweet sexy smile that had him wishing they were in her bed right now.

A few minutes later, she carried a fresh pulled draft to him. She leaned a hip against the table as he took his first long drink. "Umm," he said. "That tastes good." His blue eyes slid over her scantily clad body, and he ran a hand up her thigh. "And you look good" He wagged his eyebrows at her. "Why don't you and I get out of here ... right now?"

She giggled, and then bent down and kissed him. "There is nothing I would like better, but I won't be done with my shift until 2:00 am."

Peter pouted a little, making Bunny think of little Michael.

"All right," he sighed. "If I have to share you, I will."

"You shared me with those kids this afternoon," she said softly.

"Did you mind?"

Bunny shook her head. "No, I didn't mind. They are good kids." She met his eyes.

“If your intention was to show me what true Easter Spirit was, you succeeded.”

Peter’s heart leapt in his chest. Did that mean he was winning the Challenge? Then he shook his head, wondering if it really mattered any more. Leaning up, he gave her a kiss. “I’m glad you enjoyed yourself. It’s one of my favorite places to be.”

“Even if you hadn’t told them I would, I was going to go back to visit.” Her face glowed with remembrance. “There was something about that Michael.”

“Weally?” Peter lisped jokingly. They both laughed.

“Hey, Bunny!” someone called from across the room. “I need another beer!”

Peter turned and glared at the offending patron. “Damn it. I want you to myself.”

Bunny touched his cheek. “I want to be with you, too.” She glanced down at her watch. “It’s only a couple more hours. Can you hold out until then?”

He growled under his breath. “I might be able to ... if you meet me in the back room for a minute.”

Her cheeks flamed to scarlet as she remembered their first time together, and Peter’s randy grin didn’t help matters any. Her panties went damp just thinking about the night ahead.

Peter groaned as he saw her chocolate eyes melt. He thought of the box of condoms he’d left in the truck. Oh yeah ... they’d go through this box, too.

Fuming in rage, Peter stomped through the woods outside of Easter Village. He'd been called out of Bunny's warm bed on a wild goose chase. He'd been paged that one of his furnaces had exploded, but once he'd hopped back to the big barn, he'd been met by a very embarrassed Mortimer, wringing his paws in agitation. The fire in the furnace was perfectly normal.

His father's assistant had apologized profoundly for the mistake, but there had been something in his twitchy little face that had bothered Peter. Whatever the reason, Peter was infuriated that he'd been pulled from Bunny's side.

He'd wanted to awaken her this morning with a kiss and some sweet hot lovin', but just like yesterday, he'd had to leave her lying alone in her bed. She'd looked so beautiful laying there, all warm and mussed from their night together. Her eyes had been heavy with sleep, but he'd wanted to make them heavy with desire.

He shook his head. Damn, he loved the way she looked in the morning! Loved the way she felt, loved her scent, her taste, loved the way she made him feel. He loved everything about her. Hell ... he loved her.

Peter came to a dead stop as that thought rocketed through his brain. Loved her? No, that was impossible. He was attracted to her, yes, but love? No way. He was confusing having a good time with something more.

He pushed the thought away and continued through the woods. Bunny had been

disappointed this morning when he'd had to leave, so he wanted to make it up to her. Maybe they could go out to lunch, or better yet, he'd take her on a picnic. He had wanted to play with her in the bushes ever since he'd met her.

Nodding in satisfaction, Peter made his way to the portal between Easter Village and the Human world. Known only to a few, it was the Easter Bunny's regular mode of travel. For Peter it was a handy way to get to Bunny quickly. He thought ahead to when the Challenge was over. He'd have some time off then, and he wanted to take Bunny somewhere far away from the memories that haunted her. Maybe they would go to the beach, or to the mountains. Either way, he was planning some quality time with her.

Once things worked out with the business of the money, he would help her find a place to live. One that was safer and more suited. That way he wouldn't worry about her when he was away. He had a bunch of furniture that he could move in and make it a real home. Then, later on down the line, they could see about buying a place.

Peter stopped in his tracks again. He broke out in a sweat as he realized that he wasn't planning just dates with Bunny any more. He was planning a life. He staggered against a tree, his heart pounding with emotion. Oh, God. It was true.

He *did* love her.

Peter stared unseeingly at the beauty around him. The thought of loving Bunny staggered him. Though he'd cared about the does he'd been with before, he'd known from the first time he saw her that Bunny was different. It hadn't been just that he wanted

to have sex with her. His feelings had been protective, and downright possessive from the first time he'd touched her. Damn! This complicated the hell out of things.

Suddenly, he wished that he'd been upfront with her from the beginning. His stomach churned as he remembered his plan to seduce and charm. Peter groaned. *He'd* been the one who had been seduced and charmed ... with Bunny's touch, her smile. Hell, even her fiery temper had attracted him.

Guilt curled greasily in his stomach. He'd used her. It hadn't been a big deal in the beginning, because he would have walked away from her after making her life a better one. No harm, no foul. He'd win the Challenge, and Bunny would have her old life back. But now ...

Peter scrubbed his hands over his face. He loved Bunny and wanted to make a life with her, but she didn't even know who or what he was, or why they had even met in the first place. Suddenly the Challenge meant nothing. If Bunny wouldn't accept him, or forgive his deception ... none of it would matter.

He had to tell her the truth. About the Challenge, about his world and his place in it. If they were to have a future together, she had to know everything.

For the first time in his life, Peter was afraid. Without Bunny, his life wouldn't be worth living.

Bunny watched Peter with wary eyes as he paced around her apartment. Ever since he'd returned from the emergency he'd been called out on, he had been acting weird. He was nervous and almost angry. When she'd tried to ask him about it, he put her off, saying that it was a business matter. Nothing she needed to worry about.

But it ... or something else, was worrying him. Bunny's heart suddenly turned to ice. What if it wasn't a business problem? What if he was trying to break things off with her? Oh God! What if he was married, and when he'd gone home he'd realized that he couldn't cheat any more?

She bit her lip. Not knowing was killing her.

"Are you going to dump me?" she finally asked.

Peter whirled around from where he'd been staring morosely out the window, and his jaw dropped open. "What?"

Bunny lifted her chin. She wouldn't cry, she promised herself. "Are you gonna dump me? Do you have a wife and kids at home and suddenly the guilt is eating away at you ... so you've decided to break it off with me?"

Peter stared at her as if she had suddenly grown a second head.

Her lips quivered. "Is there a little Peter or Patricia out there, and they need their Daddy, so you aren't going to be coming here any more?"

Peter finally found his voice. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Bunny sniffed back tears. “Something is wrong and you won’t talk to me about it. In my experience, that means you have something to hide. And that usually is a family.”

He would have laughed if he hadn’t been so worried. “Where did you come up with that?” He walked over to her, realizing that it was partially his fault. His reticence had caused her imagination to go wild. And she was right. He *was* hiding something. Just not what she feared.

Peter took her by the arms. “I’m not married, and I’m not dumping you. Hell, that’s the furthest thing from my mind.”

She searched his gorgeous eyes, looking for the truth. “You’re not?”

Kissing her, Peter hoped that what he did have to tell her wouldn’t make her as upset as thinking he was cheating on another family. “No, baby.” He sighed. “But you’re right. I am worried about something.”

She relaxed a little and touched his cheek. “Can I help?”

Peter looked at her intently. “I have something to show you. It’s something about myself that you might find hard to accept, and it scares me.”

Bunny’s eyes widened with trepidation. “What is it?”

He sighed again. “I have to show you.” He backed away from her and pulled a large egg out of his pocket. It had a window on one side, and the whole egg grew before her amazed eyes.

“An egg?” She touched it with a careful finger.

“Not just any egg,” Peter said, as he set it on the floor. He turned to Bunny and wrapped his arms around her. “Do you trust me?”

She stared up at him questioningly. “Of course I do, but I don’t understand.”

Peter closed his eyes and prayed. This was the moment of truth. “Then trust me now.” Gathering her against him, he jumped through the egg’s window.

Chapter Eight

Bunny hit the ground screaming. She couldn’t believe that Peter had thrown her on the floor. She untangled herself from him, swearing profusely. “What do you think you’re doing? We could have been hurt.” She climbed to her feet and brushed the leaves and dirt from her jeans. “Why the hell ...” Her voice trailed off and her eyes widened as she saw they were standing in the middle of a colorful wood.

Peter watched as she sat back down hard, her face utterly white.

“I’m seeing things. I must have hit my head when we fell.”

He crawled over to her. “Bunny ...”

Her eyes widened further and she blinked them slowly at him. “I probably have a concussion. Are my pupils dilated? If you hit your head, a concussion would make you see things.”

Peter chuckled a little, and tried to pull her into his arms. “You aren’t seeing things. I see the forest, too.”

Her mouth dropped. “A shared delusion. This is bad.”

Grinning, even though his heart pounded in fear, Peter pushed her hair back from her face. “It’s not a delusion. Shared or otherwise. I brought us here ... through the egg.”

She stared at him. “You must have hit your head, too.”

He shook his head. “No. The egg is a portal between your world and mine. This is the forest outside of Easter Village.”

“Now I know you hit your head,” Bunny snorted. “Easter Village? Cindy’s hero worship has gone to your head. Who do you think you are? The Easter Bunny?”

Peter took a deep breath. It was now or never. “No, I’m not the Easter Bunny. But I do work for him.”

The incredulous look on her face almost made him laugh. But then her eyes narrowed, and she hopped to her feet.

“You didn’t hit your head. You’re just crazy.” Tears appeared in the chocolate eyes. “What did you do ... drug me so I’d see all this?” She waved her hands around. “If you wanted to dump me, all you had to do was say so. You didn’t have to go to all this trouble to make me think you’re nuts!” Turning, she ran down the dirt path and into the woods, out of sight.

Peter stood where she’d left him, in shock at her twisted reasoning. Damn it, he’d told her the truth and she’d done just what he was afraid of. She had run from him. He swore loudly and started down the path himself. How could he make her understand?

Suddenly, he heard Bunny scream. Fear clawed at him as he raced through the forest, searching for her. When he came around a bend in the path, he found her; back pressed up against a tree, both hands covering her mouth. Her eyes were wide with horror as she stared across the small glade in front of her.

Peter tensed as he followed the direction of her gaze, but then immediately relaxed when he saw Ducky Lucky standing by a small pond. The duck was wringing his feathers in nervousness.

Stepping forward, Peter called out to his friend. “Hi there, Ducky. What’s happening?”

The large duck turned toward Peter and let out a loud squawk. “Peter Cottontail,” he quacked. “There is a human in the woods.”

Peter nodded soothingly as he walked over to his friend. Ducky always had been kind

of a chicken. "I know. She's with me."

Ducky sniffed, and began to preen his ruffled feathers. "She scared me. All I did was say hello, and she screamed her head off. Very rude." He pointed down at himself. "Look what she did. She made me drop some feathers." He shook his head sadly. "And I have a date with Goosey Loosey tonight. I need to look my best." He elbowed Peter with one yellow wing. "Might get lucky tonight." The fowl quacked with laughter.

It was all Peter could do not to roll his eyes. "I'm sorry she scared you, Ducky. She isn't used to all of this yet."

The yellow bird gave a ducky kind of snort as he looked at the still unmoving Bunny. "She better learn quickly, then." He waddled off in the opposite direction, muttering, "It isn't even safe for us respectable creatures to even go for a walk any more. Humans, indeed. Scaring the feathers off a poor, innocent ..." His voice trailed off as he disappeared into the woods.

Peter shook his head, and then turned to Bunny. He rushed to her just as she slid down the tree to sit hard on the ground. He knelt beside her. "You okay, babe?"

Bunny looked at him, her face paper white. "That duck talked to me."

Smoothing her hair back, Peter nodded. "He's a friend of mine. He wouldn't hurt you, I promise."

She grabbed him by the shirt and spoke again, this time slowly, as if dealing with someone of limited intelligence. "That big yellow duck spoke to me, Peter. Words came

out of his mouth ... I mean his bill. That's just not right."

He couldn't help but grin. She sounded so earnest. "I know it may sound strange, honey, but all creatures can talk in Easter Village."

Bunny stared at him in silence until Peter continued. "I'm not lying to you, babe. I'm not trying to dump you. Just the opposite, in fact. I want to be with you, and I knew I couldn't keep this from you anymore. I wanted you to know everything about me."

"You're telling me this is all real. That you work for the Easter Bunny?" When Peter nodded, she took a deep breath. "And the rest of it? That six foot tall duck is hoping to ... to get lucky with a goose of questionable morals?"

Peter chuckled. Goosey Loosey had earned her nickname. "Yep. He'll try, but he probably won't even get in the water. Ducky talks a good game, but other than that ..."

Bunny now knew how Alice felt when she fell down the rabbit hole. "And the egg? How did we get here through the egg?"

He carefully pulled her against him, pleased when she didn't pull away. "The egg is a portal. The Easter Bunny used his magic on it. Since I'm his ..." Peter paused, not ready to go into that part yet. He wanted to show her more of his world first. "Since I'm one of his workers, I can use it too."

She didn't speak, just held onto him, clenching and unclenching her fingers on his shirt. Peter found himself holding his breath, waiting for her reaction. He didn't know what he'd do if she turned from him now.

After several minutes, she sighed deeply and, laying her head on his broad chest, relaxed in his arms. “It’s all true, isn’t it? The proof is all around me.”

He tightened his arms and closed his eyes in relief. She believed him. “It’s true. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before.”

Bunny was still thinking. “The duck said your name was Peter Cottontail. And the kids at the hospital ...? Oh, God! You really are the Easter Bunny’s helper.”

Peter reddened. He went to the hospital on his own, not from orders of his father. He’d been doing it for several years. Ever since he’d been asked to make a special delivery. As far as he knew, Bunny was the only one whom he’d told. He was saved from having to answer when she reached up and took his lips in a long sweet kiss.

No fool, Peter answered the kiss with a long, deep one of his own. He tried to show her without words just what she meant to him. Afterwards, he continued to brush his lips gently over hers, enjoying the feel of her in his arms. For a few horrible moments, he’d thought he would never be able to hold her again.

“I sorry I didn’t believe you,” Bunny whispered.

He kissed her nose. “Can’t say that I blame you. But I didn’t know how to break it to you gently. It seemed better just to show you.”

Bunny felt excitement and curiosity well up inside her. She was in another world. So why was she sitting here whining about it when she had the whole place to explore? Her eyes sparkled as she looked up at Peter. “Will you show me around?”

The sun hung like a bright orange ball in the sky as Bunny leaned on the railing of Peter's front porch. She sighed with contentment. It had been a wonderful day. They had left the woods and Peter has shown her all over the Easter Village territory. It was much bigger than she'd first imagined. This was no small town and a wood. Easter Village encompassed everything; from the high mountain peaks in the distance, to the rushing river that surrounded most of the area, to the village itself.

She'd been impressed when Peter modestly showed her his holdings. Suddenly she knew why he hadn't been interested in the stolen money. He was a rich man himself. He had taken her first to his art studio, where a dozen rabbits worked industriously on designing and painting Easter eggs. Tomorrow was the big day, and everyone labored frantically to be done in time.

Then he'd taken her to his manufacturing plant. Here was where all the Easter toys and baskets were made. Storehouses were filled to the brim with product ready to be delivered to happy boys and girls. What the Easter Bunny didn't use for his deliveries, Peter sold to vendors in the human world.

Next on the list was his egg farm. Rows and rows of spacious barns filled with content hens laying their hearts out for Easter Day. There was even a barn of special

hens, called Araucanas, who laid colored eggs of pink, blue and green. These eggs were then blown out and made into Easter decorations.

He had ended the tour back at his own ranch. The big white farmhouse stood in the middle of acres filled with huge healthy vegetables. Ranch workers hopped, waddled, or strutted--depending on their species--as they worked the rich earth.

Bunny wrapped her arms around herself and took a deep breath, enjoying the scent of fresh clean air. It was so beautiful here. She felt happier than she ever had before. Peter had shared his secret. It must mean that he really cared about her.

She waved at a plump little rabbit who hopped by, her basket filled with fresh carrots, peas and lettuce. The bunny waved shyly back, as if surprised. It made Bunny wonder if she and Peter were the only humans in Easter Village.

Peter stood silently behind her. She looked so perfect standing there. He'd been so nervous about bringing her to his home, but once she'd been standing inside his living room, he'd known. His love for her welled up inside of him. She belonged here ... with him, making a home for all the kits they would have together.

He walked up behind her and wrapped his strong arms around her waist. She jumped slightly, and then snuggled back against him. "Enjoying the view?" he asked.

Bunny nodded. "This is the most beautiful place I have ever seen, Peter. You are so lucky to be a part of it."

He drew in his breath. He'd only feel lucky when Bunny knew the rest of the truth

about him. He'd put off telling her until she saw his world, but now, he knew he couldn't stall any longer.

"Babe, we need to talk--"

"You know, Peter," she said at the same time, interrupting him. She turned in his arms so they were face to face. "I know why you brought me here."

Peter froze. She knew? Had someone pulled the rabbit out of the hat? "You do?" he managed to croak.

She nodded. "It wasn't just about you and I, was it? You wanted me to understand about Easter and why it is important to you."

Peter opened his mouth and then shut it. He'd been so busy worrying about their future that he'd all but forgotten about the Challenge by his father. "Errr ..."

She stood on her toes and kissed him. "I want you to know that it worked. I understand why Easter is so important now. Between meeting the children at the hospital, and then seeing all that you have accomplished here, I think you have succeeded in restoring my Easter Spirit." She kissed him again. "Thank you, Peter."

Peter stood frozen at her words. He'd won! He would be the new Easter Bunny. He waited for the thrill of victory to rise up inside of him, but nothing happened. This victory would be a hollow one if Bunny wasn't at his side.

When Peter remained silent, Bunny kissed his bristly chin. She'd decided he hated to shave, and only did it when absolutely necessary. "Are you okay?"

Peter nodded, as he fought for words. He had to tell her now. It wasn't about the Challenge anymore, it was about them, and their future together.

“Bunny ...”

But she had moved on to more important things. She ran her hand down his chest to the waistline of his light cotton pants, and then dipped her finger just beneath the edge. She felt, rather than heard, his indrawn breath. When she pressed against him, she felt his growing desire.

She nibbled along the line of his chin, causing him to shudder. “No one has ever made me feel like this before,” she whispered.

Peter was having trouble thinking. “And ... and how is that?”

Bunny blushed. “No other guy has even come close to making me act like I do with you. I never thought I'd want someone the way I want you. I'd about given up.” She giggled a little as she kissed his neck. “If I was Catholic, I'd have gone into a convent.”

He blinked, and then grinned. “Get thee to a bunnery?”

She groaned at the pun. “Oh, you are gonna pay for that.” Giving her words truth, she boldly unsnapped his pants and slipped her hand inside.

Peter's knees almost gave out as she took his hardening cock in her warm hand. “Bunny!”

“Do you think anyone will notice if I fuck the boss's brains out on his front porch?” she asked in a sultry voice.

Peter's eyes crossed as she ran her fingernail over the head of his cock. He groaned and grabbed her hand. "So much for the term shy as a bunny."

"Well," Bunny said in a mock-disappointed voice. "If you want me to stop ... ?"

Peter thought about the secrets he still had to share. The truth that had to be told. Maybe it would be easier when she was lying warm and satiated in his arms. "You aren't stopping anything."

Sweeping her up in his arms, he carried her inside the house and up the wide stairs. When he got to his bedroom, he tossed her on the rumpled sheets. "This is where I've wanted you from the first time I saw you."

Chapter Nine

Bunny's mouth went dry when she saw the heat in Peter's eyes. It looked like she'd teased him right out of control. Instead of being frightened by the thought, she gloried in the knowledge that she could bring a strong man like him to such a place of need.

She watched as he tore his clothes off, kicking out of his shoes and pants. His body was hard and strong, and her heart beat faster at the knowledge that this was the man she loved.

She gasped as he roughly stripped her clothes off her, his lust too strong for most of the niceties. When she was naked, he came down on top of her, kneeling her thighs apart. Instead of entering her as she expected, Bunny stiffened as he dropped his face between her legs to run a warm tongue across her already dampened lips.

“Peter!”

“Shhh, baby,” he soothed. His tongue moved gently through her blond curls until he found the sweet nectar of her body. He teased her, flicking his tongue back and forth across the folds, and his body tightened as he heard her moan. Her hands grabbed at his hair, but instead of pulling him away, as he half expected, she pulled him closer, parting her legs even more for him. Peter eagerly took the offered gift, using his tongue to separate her nether lips and stroke between them. When he touched her clit, Bunny cried out and nearly came off the bed.

“Easy honey,” Peter said hoarsely. His body throbbed with his own need, but he wanted ... no needed to taste her pleasure. He went back to tonguing her, feeling her hips rise off the bed to meet his mouth as she became lost to everything but what he was doing to her. Back and forth he went, trading between the throbbing nubbin of flesh and the sweet folds of her lips.

When her thighs tightened around him, Peter shifted so that he could slowly insert a finger into her yoni. He groaned at how hot and wet she was. She clenched down on him, he moved his finger in the same rhythm as his tongue.

Bunny writhed as delight spread through her. His tongue ... the feel of his hands on her, made her whole body shake. She'd never before felt such intense pleasure as this. Suddenly, Peter sucked hard on her clit, and then followed it up with a flick across the distended flesh.

Her eyes widened and she arched up off the bed, screaming. Her world exploded around her, shading her mind in a myriad of rainbow colors. Peter held onto her as she climaxed, his busy tongue never stopping its decadent moves. He brought her to ecstasy twice before he moved up her body and settled himself between her thighs.

He kissed her deeply as she floated down from the clouds of sensation he had sent her to. Her face was so beautiful, her eyes so warm on his, that Peter couldn't help himself. He kissed her again, and then framed her face in his hands.

“I love you, Bunny.”

Bunny's eyes widened. Peter stared at her, his gorgeous blue eyes hot with an emotion she had never seen before. She blinked, wondering if what she had just experienced had knocked her out and she was dreaming. But when he smiled slowly at her, she knew. Tears filled her eyes as she leaned up and held him close. "Oh Peter, I love you, too."

Peter sucked in his breath. He hadn't expected her to say it as well. He thought he would have to talk her into loving him. His body heated with emotion, and his own eyes grew damp. "Oh baby ..." Bending, he met her lips with his own.

Awareness and joy flared between them during this ... their first kiss of real love. Peter wrapped his arms around her, bringing every part of her body flush with his. He needed to touch her, to be even closer to her now. He kneed her thighs farther apart and then guided himself so the crown of his penis nudged at her soft folds.

Peter held back until he felt Bunny open for him. He prodded at her opening, feeling himself slip just inside of her wet, hot yoni. When she moaned deep in her throat, he gritted his teeth and slid slowly down into her hot depths.

Bunny grabbed at Peter's shoulders, her head going back in ecstasy at the feel of his cock deep inside her body.

The look on her face shattered Peter's control, and with a growl, he began to thrust against her, his body taking over his mind.

Bunny just held on. The friction of his cock had re-awoken every nerve ending she

had, and since she was already sensitive from the first climaxes, the pleasure rose quickly inside her. She dug her nails into his strong shoulders as he pounded against her, his shaft swelling as his own orgasm neared.

Peter could feel the sweet tension in Bunny's body, but for the first time he wasn't sure if he would be able to wait for his lady's pleasure. In a part of his mind, he wondered if the knowledge that they loved each other was what had made this lovemaking so wonderfully uncontrollable. Then his mind blanked as he shattered in release, pouring himself into her sweet warmth, barely registering that she had come with him as well.

The sun was low on the horizon when Peter finally stirred. He hadn't fallen asleep, but the heady feeling of holding the woman he loved in his arms had been so wonderful, he hadn't wanted it to end. Now, he reached down and touched his mouth to hers.

"I love you."

Bunny's eyes flickered as she brought herself from the contented trance she'd fallen into. When Peter caressed her lips, she murmured in enjoyment. "Oh Peter ... I can't believe this is happening. We really love each other?"

"Believe it. I think I fell in love with you the first time I met you."

She giggled. "But later I poured a beer on you."

Peter raised himself up on his elbows and grinned. “And look where that got us.” He laughed as Bunny flushed.

“You may be right,” she murmured as she reached up and ran her fingers through his messy hair. “When I first saw you, it’s like I recognized you.”

Peter started, remembering his own feeling of familiarity when he had seen Bunny. He kissed her again. “And when did you know you loved me?”

“At the hospital when you gave Cindy that wonderful egg. You made it for her, didn’t you?” When he nodded, she smiled. “It was more than just a job for you. You cared. How could I not fall in love?”

“Maybe we were two souls, waiting to meet.”

“I’m so glad you came into the bar that night.”

Peter stiffened slightly as he remembered. This was the perfect time to tell her the truth. He was afraid to, but he wasn’t going to keep secrets from her any longer. Especially now that he knew they loved each other. He said a quick prayer that she would accept him in the same way she’d accepted his world. She might be shocked at first, but hopefully she would see all the joy that they could have together.

“Bunny ... there is something I need to tell you.”

She searched his eyes at his serious tone. “I’m listening.”

He opened his mouth to continue, but a loud pounding on the front door interrupted him. Damn it!” he swore. “It’s a conspiracy.” When Bunny giggled, he narrowed his

eyes at her. The pounding grew louder.

“Just a minute!” he shouted as he pulled on his pants. He stared down at where Bunny lay naked in the sheets. “Damn it!” he said again. “Don’t move.”

Bunny ran a single finger down his pant leg. “I’ll be here when you get back.” She smiled when he hesitated, and his eyes went dark. He groaned, then turned on his heel and sped down stairs.

She barely had time to stretch before he was back again, his face as dark as a thundercloud. “What is it?”

Peter’s eyes snapped with anger. “I need to go.”

She sat up, ignoring the fact that the sheet pooled at her hips leaving her upper body bare. “Is everything all right?”

Peter tore his eyes away from her pert breasts. “Yeah, fine. I just need to see someone.” He raked a hand through his hair. “Damned inconvenient since I need to talk to you.”

“Can’t what you need to tell me wait?”

Sighing, Peter sat on the bed and worked to put on his socks and shoes. “It will have to. The messenger said there was an emergency in the village.”

Bunny crawled over to him. “The village? Can I go, too? It’s the one place I haven’t seen yet.”

Peter hesitated. He hadn’t taken her there on purpose, afraid someone might say

something to her about his shifting abilities before he could. But he was afraid to leave her alone here, too. What if someone here told her? He sighed knowing that he wasn't safe either way. "Get dressed, honey. It's time you saw the real Easter Village."

"Oh Peter ..." Bunny enthused. "This is beautiful ... so unique." She slowly spun in a circle in the middle of the narrow street.

Peter smiled indulgently. It had taken him forever to get Bunny to this point. As soon as she'd gotten into town, she had been oohing and ahhing over everything she encountered. It was only when he'd promised to give her the grand tour later, that he was able to get her to the center of town.

Now he was nervous about leaving her, but he wasn't ready to introduce Bunny to his father yet. "Don't go far," he warned. "Just window shop." He pointed across the street. "Flopsy Bunny has some new Easter bonnets in. Go take a look."

"I'll be fine." She put her arms around him and kissed his fuzzy chin. "You didn't say who you were going to see."

Peter sighed. She might as well know. "I have to see the Easter Bunny."

Bunny's eyes grew so large they filled her face. "The Easter Bunny? You are going to talk to the real live Easter Bunny?"

He had to chuckle at her. She sounded so awed. “Yeah, it’s no big deal, believe me.”

She seized his arm. “Then can I meet him? Please?”

“Maybe later.” He disengaged her hands, and gave her a pat on the butt. “Now go window shop and be a good girl.”

“What will you do if I’m not,” she teased. “Tell Santa?”

Peter narrowed his eyes at her as he backed away. “Maybe ... He and the Easter Bunny are good friends.” Blowing her a kiss, Peter disappeared into a door in a huge black oak tree.

Bunny stood frozen. Santa Claus? She blinked as realization hit her. If the Easter Bunny was real, why couldn’t Santa be real? She turned and looked towards the North Pole. Wow. She would remember to be a very good girl from now on.

“Ms. O’Hara?”

Bunny jumped and whirled around. Standing there was a large, chubby white rabbit. He wore a red and black checkered vest, and a watch chain hung from one pocket. Suddenly she wondered if she’d made a wrong turn and ended up in Wonderland. She half expected him to start hopping around and yell ... *I’m late ... I’m late ... For a very important date!* She giggled at the fantasy. “Yes?”

“I am Mortimer Rabbit, assistant to the Easter Bunny. Peter asked me to keep you company while you waited.”

“Oh,” Bunny said tensing a bit. She wasn’t sure why, but something about Mortimer

Rabbit made her hair stand on end. "That was nice."

Mortimer wriggled his whiskers. He'd done everything he could to destroy Peter's chances and nothing had worked. When Ducky Lucky mentioned that Peter had brought a human woman to Easter Village, Mortimer put his final plan in motion.

He had eavesdropped on Peter and Roger when Peter had visited the day before, and he'd noticed the way Peter's voice had roughened whenever Bunny's name was mentioned.

Mortimer had put two and two together, and actually come up with four. Peter had fallen in love with the human, and after spying on them now, he was disgusted to see that the woman loved him as well. But Peter had told his father that Bunny knew nothing of the Challenge or what Peter was. So Mortimer would use that information to destroy them both.

"Have you enjoyed visiting Easter Village?" he asked nicely.

"It is a beautiful place. You must be very proud of it."

"Oh yes." Mortimer's glasses slipped down on his nose as he nodded. "But I must say Ms. O'Hara ... you are taking this all much better than I thought you would. I am proud of you."

Bunny blinked. "Well, it was a shock at first."

He shook his furry head. "I don't know of many girls your age who wouldn't be upset at being used as bait. You are very forgiving. Father Rabbit chose well."

“Excuse me?”

Mortimer gave a fake laugh as he went in for the kill. “Oh, didn’t Peter tell you it was the Easter Bunny who chose you for Peter to use in the Challenge?” He nodded wisely, and then pushed his glasses back up his nose. “He must have seen something in you. Perhaps that is why you were chosen to learn about Easter Spirit.”

Bunny’s heart began to pound in her chest. It hadn’t been an accidental meeting, but a set up? Now she knew why Peter constantly talked about Easter. “Peter didn’t tell me about that part.”

Mortimer saw the confusion in the human’s face and smirked inwardly. “Well, it looks like Peter did a fine job of teaching you. He accepted the Challenge and won. He will be the new Easter Bunny.”

Bunny dimly remembered Peter mentioning he was working on a promotion. Hurt filled her and she could barely breathe. “Are you telling me that the only reason Peter went out with me was so he could show me Easter Spirit and win a Challenge to become the Easter Bunny?”

Mortimer pretended to look worried. “Oh, my dear, I’m sure there were other reasons. You are very attractive, you know.”

Bunny closed her eyes. She’d known it was all too good to be true. A man like Peter wouldn’t go after a girl like her. He’d needed to win her trust, and he done whatever it took to do so. And getting laid in the process ... that was just an extra treat.

“Well,” went on Mortimer, intent on putting the final nail in the coffin. “He was probably a shoe-in anyway.”

“Why is that?” Bunny asked as she fought the tears.

Mortimer smiled nastily. “It *is* the family business.”

She blinked in confusion. The door to the Easter Bunny’s house opened and Peter and a large black rabbit came out. Bunny’s stomach twisted in sudden understanding as she saw them both comb identical white forelocks. All became suddenly clear.

She’d wondered about the fact that she and Peter were the only humans she’d seen. She would wonder no further. There were no humans living in Easter Village.

Peter wasn’t human.

Chapter Ten

Peter took one look at Bunny's face and knew that Mortimer had told her everything. Swearing under his breath, he left his father in mid-sentence and ran over to her. She met him with a slap across the face that left him reeling. An old joke flitted across his mind.

Energizer Bunny arrested ... charged with battery. Somehow, the humor escaped him now.

"You lied to me."

"Bunny ... you have to let me explain."

"Don't bother, Peter." She stared at his beloved face and felt her heart shatter into pieces. She realized that she didn't know him at all. "You lied to me about everything from the very first."

Panic crawled up his spine. She looked at him with utter loathing on her face. "Babe ... I didn't lie. I ... I just didn't tell you everything."

Bunny snorted. "Now who's splitting hares, Peter?"

"Sweetheart, you have to listen. I know it looks bad."

Mortimer hopped closer. "I'm so sorry Peter. I thought you'd been honest with her."

Peter turned on the fat rabbit so swiftly that if it was possible, Mortimer went even whiter. "Get away from us, you son of a bitch. You've ruined everything."

Bunny gasped. "All he did was tell the truth."

“Oh, he did more than that,” Peter snarled. “He’s been sabotaging me from the beginning.” He grabbed the older rabbit by the vest. “All those lists you made me complete, the errands I had to run for my father, even the exploding furnace. It was all you.”

Mortimer squealed in fear. “Let me go. You’ve gone crazy.”

Peter pushed the rabbit away from him. “Get out of here. You make me sick.” He turned back to Bunny, not even watching as the retreating Mortimer scampered over to stand next to his father. “Don’t you see, Bunny? He set this up so you would find out in the worse possible way.”

She shook her head. “What he did doesn’t matter, Peter. It is what *you* did. You lied to me about why you wanted to be with me. It was all planned from the beginning.”

“What I feel for you wasn’t planned,” he argued. “I fell in love with you.” He grabbed her by the arms in his need to make her understand. “Please, baby, hear me out.”

Gasping, Bunny pulled free. “Can you tell me that none of it was planned? Our meeting each other. All the Easter stuff?” She glared at him.

“That part is true,” Peter admitted. “I went to the *Hip Hop Club* to meet you and tell you about Easter. And if I was successful, I would be the new Easter Bunny. But then I got to know you, and I wanted you. And then I loved you.”

Bunny’s eyes filled with tears. He had sounded just as sincere when he talked to her about getting the Easter Spirit too, and it had all been a scam. “I don’t believe you.”

“It’s the truth. Damn it!”

“Can you tell me that you didn’t plan to seduce me so I’d tell you all my problems and start to trust you?”

Peter went as still as a ... rabbit. His jaw clenched tight. His grand plan had come back to haunt him now.

Bunny’s eyes overflowed. “So, you never did want me. It was all a ruse so you could get close enough to talk to me about the Easter Spirit.”

“Not want you?” Peter lost his temper. “How can you say that? Jesus, we went through two boxes of condoms!”

Bunny flushed, knowing that his voice had easily carried to the two rabbits standing by the big oak. Then her eyes widened in sudden realization. She put her hand to her stomach and backed away from him. “You had sex with me. Unprotected sex, and you’re not even human. How could you?”

Peter reared back from her as he got her meaning. He’d never even considered the fact that he was a half breed when he’d made love to Bunny. She’d made him feel all man. “Bunny--” he began.

“No! I’ve heard all I need to.” She wiped the tears from her face. “You won, Peter. You picked a lousy way to do it, but you succeeded. I do understand the truth about Easter. It’s as real as your father, the Easter Bunny is. You get the prize. You will be the next Easter Bunny.” She lifted her chin and stared at him. “I just hope it was worth it.”

Peter's stomach churned. He was losing her. He took a step forward. "No, Bunny ... please."

"Don't touch me," she wept out. "Not ever again. Just take me home!"

"I've lost her," Peter said morosely as he stood in his father's den. He tossed back a glass of carrot juice without even feeling the bite of it. "She doesn't want to see me ever again."

Roger sat in his favorite chair and watched his suffering boy. Peter was learning a painful lesson about being honest with the one you love. "You should have told her, son."

Peter snarled and poured another tall glass of carrot juice, not even noticing his sire's grimace as he drank the expensive aged brew as if it was cheap soda pop. "When was I supposed to do that? When I first met her? I was supposed to go up to her and say 'Hi Bunny, I'm a shapeshifting rabbit who wants to be the Easter Bunny, so I'm here to teach you all about the Easter Spirit.'" He glared at his father. "And ... oh yeah ... I think you're hot and want to have kits with you."

Roger chuckled. He knew Peter wasn't angry at him, but at himself. "You know what I mean."

Peter put down the glass, all the anger draining out of him. He sat down in a chair next to his father. “She wouldn’t even talk to me, Dad.” Peter closed his eyes in pain as he remembered Bunny’s set face on the journey home. She hadn’t spoken a single word to him. When they had arrived back in her apartment, she’d picked up the egg portal and slammed it into the ground, destroying it utterly. Then she had marched to the front door and opened it, asking him without words to leave.

Peter had come straight back to Easter Village intending to rip Mortimer’s throat out, but his father had beat him to punishing his old assistant. He’d banished him from Easter Village, sending him to work in the Easter color dye factory on the far side of the territory. Roger knew that Peter had a temper ... and a right to be angry.

“Do you really love this human, son?”

Staring at his hands, Peter nodded. “More than anything in this world.” He met his father’s eyes. “I understand now why you had hesitations about making me Easter Bunny. I used to think the end justified the means.” He thought of his love’s white face when she had learned the truth. “But not any more.”

Roger smiled, knowing that the experience Peter had gone through had had the intended effect. He’d grown up. “Then your Bunny is right, and you have answered the Challenge. You will be the next Easter Bunny.”

The words gave Peter no joy. “It doesn’t seem to matter any more, Father. Without Bunny ...”

Roger thought back to the time when he'd met and courted Peter's mother, Sarah. He would have done anything to make her see that they could have a life together. It was Peter's bad luck that someone else had told Bunny the truth before he could. "So you are giving up?"

Peter's head jerked up and he glared at his father. "Hell, no!" He hopped to his feet and strode to the window again. "I just have to figure out how to make her listen to me."

Roger smiled. "Good. She is the doe for you. Although, I knew when I chose her for you that it wouldn't be smooth sailing."

Peter turned and stared at him. "You chose Bunny ... for me?"

"I have watched your young lady from the beginning and admired her strength and character. When the embezzlement turned her world upside down, I wished I could help her."

Peter had to return and sit down again. "You knew all this before you sent me? It was all a set up?"

Roger folded his paws in his fluffy lap. "Yep. Doesn't feel so good, does it? Even though I did it with your best intentions at heart."

Peter found he couldn't even be angry with his father. The old rabbit was right. "Damn it, Dad."

"Son, the time I spent with your mother were the happiest years of my life. When I lost her, it almost destroyed me. I wanted you to find that same kind of love, and I knew

it wouldn't be with any of the does in this world."

"So ... this whole thing was about me."

"Yes. Not just you becoming Easter Bunny, but about you finding your destiny."

Roger peered at his son through the lock of white fur on his brow. "So ... did you?"

Peter nodded, his blue eyes glistening with emotion. "I never thought I'd feel this way about a woman. I have to find a way to change her mind about me. I can't live without her." Peter glanced over at his father. "But how?"

Sitting back, Roger thought for a moment. "Do you think she loves you?"

"Yes." It was said without hesitation. What Bunny and he had shared couldn't be faked. "She loves me."

"Then you need to find a way to help her remember that love. Perhaps you can remind her of the moment when she first knew she loved you."

Peter froze in his chair as an idea came to him. "I think I know the very thing. But I'll need your help."

Bunny had just spent the worse night of her life. Even being arrested didn't hold a candle to finding out you were in love with someone not quite human. After Peter had left, she had headed straight to the shower and scrubbed herself raw, wanting to cleanse

herself of the memory of the afternoon. Then she had crawled into bed with a quart of double double chocolate fudge ice cream and cried herself to sleep, trying not to notice that the sheets still smelled of her lover.

She hadn't slept well. Her mind was full of Peter; his face, his touch ... and his duplicity. The fact that he'd managed to use her the way every other man in this town had tried to broke her heart. She wondered if she would ever be able to trust again.

But, no matter what he'd done, it didn't stop her from loving him. That was the tough part. She wanted it all to be a dream, so she could wake up in Peter's arms on Easter morning, finally looking forward again to the celebration. But now? She might get over hating Easter, but she wasn't sure she would ever get over loving Peter.

When Bunny finally awoke, dawn was just breaking, and she was immediately aware of a presence in her room. For a moment her heart thrilled, thinking it was Peter. Then she remembered the events of yesterday.

Opening her eyes in the murky light, Bunny found herself staring straight into the face of a huge black rabbit. She would have been terrified, but the events of yesterday had changed her. When she saw the lock of white hair on the forehead, Bunny knew she was looking at the Easter Bunny himself.

“Good morning, my dear.”

Bunny blinked. The human voice coming out of a big black rabbit, threw her only for a moment. “You’re Peter’s father.”

The big bunny chuckled. “Guilty, I’m afraid.”

“What do you want?” Bunny pushed herself up into a sitting position and tried not to think about the fact she was sitting in bed, talking to a six-foot rabbit.

“To apologize ... mainly.” Roger sat himself on the edge of the bed. “I’m afraid a part of this is my fault.”

“Your fault?” Bunny echoed.

Roger nodded. “I chose you for my son to meet. You see, I once loved a human woman, too.”

“Peter’s mother?” Bunny found herself interested in spite of herself.

“I lost her when Peter was only three. But I never stopped loving her.” He sighed and looked down at the woman in the bed. Her eyes were swollen from crying, but Roger could see why his son thought so much of her. “I wanted Peter to have the same chance at love. And I thought you could be that woman.”

Bunny bottom lip thrust out. “He doesn’t love me. He was only using me. It was all a set-up.”

“Now, Bunny ...” Roger remonstrated. “Setting you up to meet was all my doing. I chose you for him. What happened afterwards was real.”

Her lip trembled. “You don’t lie to someone you love.”

Roger sighed. “That is true, and Peter has learned it the hard way. But he loves you, child. You must believe that.” When she didn’t say anything, and her face turned stubborn, he sighed again. Young people were so difficult sometimes.

“He took you to the hospital, didn’t he? That is a very special place to him.”

Bunny felt herself soften. Could Peter have faked all the emotion she’d seen there? “It’s just another place where he works for you.”

Roger shook his head. “I never asked Peter to go there. He found that place on his own. He made it his own special project.” He leaned in to whisper. “He thinks I don’t know about it.”

“Why would he hide it from you?”

“Peter tries to be a tough guy, but you know as well as I do he’s a marshmallow bunny inside.”

Bunny couldn’t help but join Roger in a grin, but then she sobered. “He used me to get what he wanted. How is that any different than any other man has done?”

Chapter Eleven

Roger smiled inwardly at her words. Though she may not have known it, she had told him exactly what he wanted to hear. She wasn't angry or disgusted about what Peter was, she was hurt and angry because she thought the only reason Peter had been with her was the Challenge. He wondered what she would say if he told her that Peter had decided he wouldn't be Easter Bunny if she wouldn't take him back.

"My son made some mistakes. But if you are the doe I think you are, you will give him a chance to explain."

"I've already heard his explanation."

Roger shook his head. "I don't think so. You were hurt and angry and scared. And you'd found out that the man you love, who isn't really a man after all, had lied to you. Perhaps your emotions were a little bit colored by what had happened."

Bunny shook her head. "I don't know."

"Bunny." Roger's voice was so firm, she found herself stilling and meeting his eyes. "I know my son, and I can tell you he loves you. Give him another chance."

Her eyes filled with tears. "How?"

Roger leaned over and turned on the bedside light. Then, reaching into his basket, he took out a large, perfectly shaped egg. It was the color of the underside of a rainbow, soft and swirling with light.

Bunny gasped as she saw it. On the side was one of those little windows, and she stiffened. She wasn't ready to go back to Easter village, yet.

"It's a diorama," Roger interjected, seeing her hesitation. "There is a message inside for you from Peter." He placed the glistening egg in Bunny's lap and then stood up. "Listen with your heart, child. Give him a chance."

Bending, he pressed a furry kiss to Bunny's forehead. "I would love to have you as a doe-in-law, my dear."

Bunny's eyes filled with sudden tears and she closed them, fighting for control. When she opened them again, the Easter Bunny was gone.

Bunny stared at the egg in her lap for a long time. Part of her wanted to hug it close, knowing Peter had made it especially for her. She recognized his work. The other part of her wanted to dash it to the ground so she didn't have to deal with it. Taking a deep breath, she held it up so the light touched it. The rainbow colors immediately began to dance, and Bunny couldn't help the smile. No matter what, Peter knew how to paint an egg.

She turned it so the window was facing her, and brought it up to her eye. She gasped at the scene laid out before her. Inside was a perfect representation of Peter's art studio, complete with worktable and paints. Bending over the table was the still figure of a man.

As Bunny watched in amazement, the figure jerkily stood and, turning, walked over to

the window. She gasped again when she recognized the figure as Peter. Her heart pounded within her, and the old feelings of love and betrayal welled up simultaneously.

“Peter,” she whispered.

The tiny Peter smiled his heart-stopping smile at her, and Bunny couldn't help but reach out and touch the egg. When the Peter figure spoke, his voice was small and tinny.

“Hey babe,

If you are seeing this, my father has done his part, and has at least gotten you to look at the egg. I guess it's up to me now.

First off, I want to tell you I'm sorry. I should have told you about the Challenge at the beginning, but I honestly didn't think it would matter. I thought I could help you enjoy Easter again, and in the process ... help myself.”

The little figure shook his head, and Bunny could see the regret on his face. Her throat tightened.

“Then I met you. Lord, girl ... you took me by surprise. From the first time I saw you, my life turned upside down. All of a sudden getting to know you was more important to me, and I had to struggle to remember the Challenge. I didn't want to disappoint my father, but what I felt for you became as necessary as breathing.”

Tears rolled down Bunny's cheeks. Peter looked earnestly at her, willing her to believe him.

“I told myself at the beginning that we were just having a good time together, but the longer I was with you, the more I realized that you were becoming more important to me than anything I'd ever known before. Suddenly, I was planning our lives together, and I knew then that it wasn't just attraction. I'd fallen in love with you.”

The tiny Peter began to pace, just like the real Peter did, and Bunny knew that whatever he was going to say next was hard for him.

“As for making love with you ... honey ... I'm so sorry. I swear to you, it never even occurred to me that I wasn't human. When I was with you, you made me feel like such a man, I never even thought about it. But ... I should have told you. Especially before I put you in the position of carrying a child that wasn't fully human. I'm sorry, babe. Blame it on the fact that instinctively I knew I wanted you as my mate. My brain was just a little slower than my body. But I was careless, and I'm sorry for that.”

Bunny thought of the three times they had made love unprotected. At the bar, in her apartment, and at Peter's house. She was just as guilty as he was. She could have stopped too, but her body had known its mate. Now that she thought about it, it wasn't fair to be angry at him for what she herself had done so well. And him not being human didn't really change the fact that they both had been careless.

"I owe you an apology too," she whispered aloud, touching the egg with gentle fingers.

Of course, the tiny Peter couldn't hear her. He just continued his prerecorded monologue.

"You have every right to be angry and not believe me. I did lie to you, and a lie of omission is still a lie. I put off telling you because I was afraid of how you would react. But when I knew that I loved you, I couldn't go on lying any longer. For the sake of any future we could have together, I knew I had to tell you the truth."

Peter stepped up to the window, and his blue eyes searched Bunny's. She held her breath.

"I tried to tell you at the farmhouse, Bunny, I swear it. But ... first you distracted

me on the porch, and then that message from Mortimer came. Then you learned everything, and it was too late for me to explain.”

The figure stepped even closer to the window and pressed one artistic hand to the pane of glass between him and Bunny.

“I don’t know how to convince you of how much I love you. I want to be with you, holding you at night, and waking you up with kisses each morning. I want to teach you, not just about the joys of Easter, but about all the joy we can have just by being together. I want to spend the rest of my life making memories with you, Bunny. I love you so much that the thought of being without you is killing me.”

Tears slid down her cheeks as she listened to Peter’s pleading. Could he really mean it? Did he really love her after all?

“Honey ... Easter is the season of the forgiveness of sins, and I’m asking you to forgive me now. I messed up bad. I am so sorry.

“If loving a half man / half rabbit who works as the Easter Bunny is something you can’t live with ... then I’ll change. I’ll come to you. Leave Easter Village behind, and be a human in your world. You see, baby, if I have to choose between

being the Easter Bunny and you, well then, I choose you. I can do any job there is, including being the Easter Bunny, but I can't love anyone else ... only you. Only my own sweet Bunny rabbit."

Bunny sobbed so hard that she could barely see the figure of Peter anymore. He would give up everything he had worked so hard for, just to be with her. Could this be the truth?

"If you decide that you don't want anything more to do with me, then smash this egg. I will know when you do, and I'll do my best to let you go. I'll never forget you, Bunny, or what we shared. I'm a one doe rabbit, and I can't imagine wanting anyone else.

"But ... if you can find it in your heart to forgive me, I'll be waiting for you, here in Easter Village. I'm at the town square, working. It is Easter, you know. You remember how to get here. Just use the egg.

"Please, Bunny. Remember what we could have together. Give me another chance. I love you. I love you so much."

The tiny figure smiled at her one more time, and she was shocked to see tears on the little Peter's face. He turned and walked back to the bench, picked up his paintbrush, and

began to paint again. Then the egg went still and dark.

She cradled the egg against her chest and lay back down against her pillows, tears streaking her face. She wanted so badly to believe everything she'd just seen, but the memory of the hurt Peter had caused her prevented her from jumping to her feet and diving immediately through the egg. Could she trust that Peter was telling the truth this time?

Bunny wasn't sure how long she lay there, trying to think it through. It all came down to trust, and after everything that had happened, she wasn't sure she could do it. Not again. She was just about to go in and hop in the shower to get rid of some of the cobwebs when a loud knock on the door made her jump.

Frowning, she wrapped her robe around her and smoothed her wild hair. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and shuddered. She was surprised that Roger hadn't taken one look at her and screamed in horror. Binging on tears and double double chocolate ice cream did not make for a good morning after.

When she got to the door, she looked through the peephole and felt her heart drop to the floor. Not again. This had to be a nightmare induced by too much chocolate. She pressed her forehead to the wood and took several, long deep breaths. A horrible sense of déjà vu came over her as she opened her door and looked at the man standing there.

“Good morning, Ms. O'Hara.”

Bunny's chin went up and she started to tremble. “Sheriff.”

The portly man looked as uncomfortable as Bunny felt. He whipped off his hat, and nodded at her. "Happy Easter."

Bunny ignored the salutation. "What do you want, Sheriff?"

Sheriff Drennen wriggled uncomfortably under her gaze. "I wanted to talk to you about the money that was embezzled."

Behind the man, she noted the curious glances of the neighbors. Oh God, it was happening all over again. Her eyes snapped back to his. "We've done this before, Sheriff. Are you going to arrest me again? Is it an Easter tradition for you or something?"

Drennen went red and shuffled his feet. "It's not like that, Ms. O'Hara. It's good news this time."

Bunny blinked in surprise. "Good news?"

The sheriff nodded rapidly. "Yes, ma'am. We caught the guy who embezzled the money."

Her knees went weak, and she stumbled against the doorframe for support. "You found him?"

The sheriff steadied her with one large hand. "Yes. We recovered most of the money as well. Once we force the embezzler to sell his holdings, I think we will get it all back."

Bunny was in shock. "I can't believe it."

Sheriff Drennen cleared his throat and toyed with his hat. "I want to apologize to you,

Ms. O'Hara ... Bunny. We ... the department, this town ... we've put you through hell.

I can't tell you how sorry I am for it."

"Who?" Bunny croaked out. "Who was it?"

The heavy sheriff flushed. "I'm sorry. I should have said immediately. It was the bank manager. Chandler Masters."

Chapter Twelve

Bunny felt her world begin to spin. She swayed and heard Drennen swear as he steadied her one more time. Chandler had stolen the money? A million thoughts raced through her mind. No wonder he had acted so hateful to her. He'd set her up to take the fall from the beginning.

"Bunny? Are you all right?"

She blinked up at the man who had helped turn her world upside down two years ago. She stepped back from him. "I'm fine."

Sheriff Drennen dropped his hands, and replaced his hat on his head. "I wanted you to be the first to know. They'll be announcing it at all the church services this morning. Everyone will know you have been cleared. I thought ..." the portly lawman's eyes finally met hers, "... well, I thought I could erase the memory of another Easter by giving you a happier one."

Emotion clogged Bunny's throat. She could see the regret in his eyes, and suddenly she realized that she needed to forgive the people around her if she truly wanted to be whole. It was like drinking a glass of poison yourself, and waiting for the ones who harmed you to die. She held a shaking hand out to the big man. "Thank you, Sheriff. It does mean a lot to me."

Drennen wrung her hand soundly before tipping his hat and heading back to his patrol car. As she watched him, Bunny realized she'd forgotten to ask him one important thing. She flew down the steps.

"Sheriff ... wait!"

The officer turned around and raised an inquiring brow.

"How did you catch him?" she asked breathlessly. "How did you find the money?"

Chuckling, the sheriff relaxed. "We didn't have to catch him. He turned himself in."

"What?"

“It’s true,” said Drennen shaking his head in amazement. “Walked in the office this morning and gave himself up. Showed us where the money was hidden without even being asked.”

“Wow!” Bunny exhaled sharply. “Why would he suddenly admit everything? A guilty conscience?”

“That’s what the department shrink thinks. Otherwise, he would have never come up with such a crazy story. The doctor thinks the guilt put him right into a breakdown.”

Bunny frowned. “What kind of crazy story?”

The man laughed, his big belly shaking. “Get this. Masters says the Easter Bunny told him to do it ... or else. Can you believe that?”

She froze and her mouth dropped open. “The Easter Bunny?”

Drennen chuckled again as he turned to climb in his car. “Yeah. Apparently, the Easter Bunny visited him and threatened to kill him if he didn’t tell the truth. The Doc says it being so close to Easter again put the guy over the edge, and he came up with this tale so he’d have a reason to give back the money.”

“And you don’t believe he was threatened?” Bunny asked carefully.

The sheriff laughed aloud, and winked at her as he closed the patrol car door. “Hell, no! Even if I did believe he was threatened, it couldn’t have been by the Easter Bunny.”

“Why?”

“Because.” The big man grinned. “He said the Easter Bunny was black, and

everyone knows that the Easter Bunny is a white rabbit.”

With that final comment, he waved and the patrol car pulled away leaving Bunny standing stock still on the sidewalk.

Turning slowly, she made her way back up the sidewalk, not even noticing the curious looks that came her way. She went back into her apartment, and closed the door softly behind her. Making her way into her bedroom, she went straight to the bed, and sank down on it, pulling the beautiful egg into her lap.

Peter was responsible for this. That she knew without a doubt. He'd given her her life back and had said nothing to her of it. Bunny shook her head and ran a shaky finger over the egg. But why? He had already won the contest. There was nothing in it for him.

Her heart pounded in her chest. There was nothing in it for him, but he'd done it anyway. There could be only one reason why. Peter had been telling the truth. He *did* love her. She hugged herself with joy as the truth speared through her. No matter what he had done, she had never stopped loving him.

Jumping to her feet, Bunny ran into the bathroom and took a quick shower. Toweling off quickly, she dressed in a bright colored sweater and a pair of dark slacks. She pulled her wet hair up in a ponytail, in a hurry to get to Peter and be in his arms again. She laughed out loud. She was in love with the Easter Bunny!

She finished with the rest of her makeup in record time and hurried over to the bed to get the egg. She hoped she understood Peter's meaning. She'd hate to jump at this egg

and squash it flat. It was precious to her now.

Pulling down on her sweater, she took a deep breath. "I'm coming, Peter. Don't give up on me yet!" Closing her eyes, Bunny hopped right through the egg's window.

She landed on the other side in a pile of cleaning rags. Hopping to her feet, she saw that she had jumped into Peter's studio. The real one. But here there was no figure of Peter standing by the workbench, and for a moment, she was disappointed. Then she remembered the message that he'd be at the town square doing his Easter duties. She giggled. She'd better get used to sharing Peter on Easter. He was a very important rabbit.

"I thought you might show up!"

Bunny turned quickly at the voice. "Mortimer!"

The chubby bunny stood before her, his vest slightly askew, and his eyes gleaming with an odd light. "You shouldn't have come back here."

"It's all right," Bunny said. "Peter told me to come so we can be together. He really does love me, Mortimer. Isn't it wonderful?"

"But what about the way he used you?"

She smiled. "It was all a misunderstanding. I reacted badly to the whole thing, but it wasn't all his fault."

"But he is a half-breed," Roger protested as he hopped a bit closer to her. "Not human, and not a full rabbit. Are you telling me that that doesn't bother you now?"

“Knowing that my man can grow fur on command may take a little getting used to, but it won’t matter in the long run. We love each other.”

“You would leave your friends and come to live here ... in Easter Village.”

“Yes ... but even if I wouldn’t ... Peter said that he would come to me.” Her eyes filled with happy tears at the memory. “He also said that if he couldn’t have me, he’d give up being Easter Bunny. What do you think of that?”

A mad light appeared in Mortimer’s eyes. “He would give up the role of Easter Bunny?”

“Yes,” Bunny said slowly, suddenly wary. Something was wrong, but she didn’t know what.

The white rabbit snarled and grabbed her arm. “Thank you, human. Now I know just what to do with you.”

“Ow! Mortimer, you’re hurting me.” She tried to pull away, but the big rabbit held her fast. “What are you doing?”

Mortimer giggled, and the sound made Bunny’s flesh crawl. “I’m going to fix it so Peter can never be Easter Bunny.”

She pushed impotently at him. “Why?” she cried. “Why would you want to do that?”

“Because,” the rabbit spit out. “He is an abomination. A half-breed.” His eyes narrowed. “They should have drowned him at birth.”

Bunny gasped in horror. “How can you say that? You work for his father. You

know Peter and what kind of man he is.”

“I do. And I know that he has everyone else in the village fooled. But I’ve seen him go through all the does like they were stale lettuce. He thinks he is too good for a mere rabbit.”

Bunny flushed. That was more information about Peter’s past that she wanted to hear. “If he didn’t love any of them and now he loves me, you should be happy for him.”

Losing his temper, Mortimer shook her hard. “You don’t understand. The only way I will be happy is to see him beaten, crawling away in disgrace. But since he is the village’s favorite son, I’ll have to make due with seeing him broken and destroyed by loss.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You gave me the answer yourself. Without you he won’t be the Easter Bunny. So it is simple.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Why ... I thought it was obvious, my dear.” He bared his long teeth at her. “I’m going to kill you.”

Bunny gaped as fear raced through her. With a sudden burst of adrenaline she jerked away and dodged behind the workbench. “No! You stay away!” She looked around frantically for some sort of weapon.

“It’s no use, you know,” the older bunny said soothingly. “I’m bigger, stronger and

faster than you. And I have the perfect place to get rid of you.” His nose twitched once, and his glasses slipped down his nose. “Peter will think you have left him. Even if he goes back to your world to find you, you will have disappeared.”

“No,” Bunny breathed. Peter would be devastated. Looking around, she picked up one of the cans of paint on the workbench and tossed it at him.

Mortimer ducked, and the paint broke open behind him, staining the floor in violet hues. “You missed.”

“Not this time,” Bunny gritted out. She feinted one direction, and when he moved from where he thought she would throw, she reversed herself and threw the can as hard as she could. It hit Mortimer in the upper shoulder, covering him with a sickly green color and knocking him off balance.

She took advantage of his distraction and raced for the door. But she wasn’t fast enough and he caught her from behind. He spun her around so hard she thought her shoulder would be dislocated. When she screamed, the fat white rabbit slapped her hard in the mouth. Disoriented, she couldn’t even fight as he bound her hands and feet, and gagged her.

Mortimer hopped over and pulled a large canvas storage bag from the pile of rags Bunny had fallen on when she first arrived. He dumped the rags out and then, carrying the bag, hopped back to where she lay helpless on the floor.

“I told you, my dear.” Mortimer sounded almost kindly now as he slipped her into the

canvas bag. "I am stronger than you." He picked up the bag and slung it over his shoulder. When Bunny struggled, he cuffed her on the head. "Now, now. None of that. We have an appointment to keep."

Peter paced up and down the town square, his agitation apparent to everyone. They didn't know why their boss was upset, but they gave him wide berth. He'd been snapping at everybody that morning.

Peter was glad that his people were so well trained that they could do everything on their own. It gave him time to think about Bunny. She had received the egg, he knew that much. And it had been activated, but that was all he could see. That had been hours ago, and still no Bunny.

Every time someone new came around the corner, Peter's heart jumped. Then it would fall back into his shoes when he saw it wasn't her. The wait to see if she'd forgiven him had him slowly going crazy.

Sighing, he glanced at the huge machine that took up the entire square. One of his own inventions, the Egg Gathering Gadget--or E.G.G. as it was popularly called--was what was used to get the eggs, toys and baskets to the Easter Bunny. In the old days, the Easter Bunny had to come back to Easter Village each time his basket was empty.

With this new machine, Peter had taken the attributes of a conveyor belt and the magic of the portals, and blended them together. Now the Easter Bunny's basket was filled magically from the E.G.G. and he didn't have to come home until he was done. It had increased efficiency by 70%. And the labor needed was minimal. It required only five rpm, (rabbits-per-minute) to make it work.

Peter tugged on his white forelock, worried at how late it was getting. Surely if she was coming, Bunny would have been here by now. His thoughts were interrupted as a small brown and white ball of fur came speeding at him.

"Whoa there!" Peter laughed as he lifted his youngest brother into his arms. Little Fru Fru was only five, and Peter teased him that he only had one speed. Full tilt. "What's going on, little bro?"

Fru Fru panted as he looked up at his favorite brother. "I has something to tell you, Peter."

Peter looked over Fru Fru's shoulder, as a shapely rabbit hopped around the corner. Damn it! Not *his* Bunny. "I'm listening."

"I saw your lady human."

Peter froze. "What? Where?"

"She is wif Mr. Mortimer, but he is being mean to her."

Peter looked down at his little brother. His heart began to pound. "Tell me exactly what happened."

“Well,” Fru Fru said, enjoying his adored brother’s attention. “I was doing what I do. You know ... hopping through the forest ... picking up the field mice ... bangin’ ‘em--”

“I know, I know,” Peter interrupted impatiently. Coldness grew in the pit of his stomach. “What about Bunny?”

“He had her in a bag, but she wiggled too much, so he took her out.”

Fear congealed in Peter’s stomach. “Fru Fru, this is very important. Do you know where he was taking her?”

“They were going up the path to Rainbow Falls.” He looked up at Peter. “Did I do good? Was it important?”

Peter hugged the little kit to him. “You did real good. It was very important.” He put the little rabbit down, and morphed into his own rabbit form. “Stay here, Fru Fru. I’m going after them.” Praying he wasn’t too late, Peter raced from the village.

Chapter Thirteen

Bunny heard the rush of water as they got closer and closer to their destination. Mortimer hadn't said anything, but it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what he was planning. A waterfall would be a perfect place to get rid of a body.

Sweat trickled down her back. She had quit struggling, because every time she did, Mortimer knocked her upside the head and she knew she needed to keep all her sensibilities if she was going to free herself. He'd let her out of the bag once they had left the populated areas, and she was glad. She'd been barely able to breathe in there.

She thought of Peter, quickly blinking the tears away. It couldn't end like this. Not when they'd just found each other. She narrowed her eyes against the glare of the sun as they came out of the woods and into a small glade. She swallowed hard at the sight of the mists rising from a chasm on the other side. They were at the top of the waterfall.

Mortimer chuckled as he dragged her closer to the edge. "Welcome to Rainbow Falls. I figure you should know the name of the place where you're going to die."

Bunny pulled back on the ropes, causing the chubby bunny to stumble. She tried to yank the rope from his hands, but with a growl, Mortimer jerked her towards him and, putting out his long furry foot, knocked her to the ground.

She squirmed and fought, but the fat rabbit put one knee on her back, pressing her into the ground. Her breath cut off, she could only gasp as he pulled the gag from her

mouth.

“You can’t get away, girl. But I will listen to you plead for your life.” Mortimer laughed when Bunny just narrowed her eyes. “A brave human. How quaint.”

The rabbit removed his knee and she took in a deep, life giving breath. Pulling her to her feet, he grabbed her pony tail and pushed her toward the chasm’s edge.

“You won’t plead for yourself, but what of the kits you may be carrying?” Mortimer laughed again as Bunny gasped and came to a dead stop. “You forget what big ears we rabbits have. Father Rabbit and I heard everything.” He brushed at his untidy clothing. “When I voiced my disgust, he chastised me. I should have known he wouldn’t mind. He’d slept with a human himself.”

Her eyes filled with tears. Suddenly, she desperately hoped she was carrying Peter’s baby. She loved him. “I’ll plead for my child’s life, if that’s what you want.”

Mortimer’s furry brows rose. “Well, that’s a complete turn around from yesterday.”

Bunny lifted her chin. “I love Peter. I want his babies.”

Mortimer snarled and jerked again on the rope. “Everything you are disgusts me. Plead all you want. If you are carrying Peter’s kits, destroying you will be the best thing I can do!”

Her stomach lurched. The crazy rabbit was going to kill her *because* she might be pregnant. Every instinct within her came alive. With a growl that was most inhuman, she jerked away from Mortimer and kicked him as hard as she could, right in the furry

privates.

He screamed; a high keening sound that made Bunny's hair stand on end. Ignoring him as he dropped to his knees, she grabbed up the rope and ran for the woods. She'd almost made it when she heard a thumping behind her. The fat rabbit tackled her to the ground.

"Not so fast," he panted. "You are going over the falls." Picking her up, he tossed her over his shoulder and hopped toward the misty hole.

Bunny fought for all that she was worth. Since rabbits don't have much in the way of shoulders, she slid off easily. She stayed on the ground, kicking and screaming as he hopped around her, trying to grab a flailing limb.

Suddenly, out of the forest came a furious streak of black fur. It hit Mortimer broadside, knocking the rabbit off his feet. Turning, it attacked, driving the white rabbit farther away from where Bunny lay stunned on the ground.

Mortimer hissed in anger and fear. "Peter! How ...?"

The black rabbit used his strong back legs to kick the older rabbit repeatedly. Bunny blinked in shock as she heard Peter's voice coming out of the rabbit's mouth.

"I have many friends, and thank God, one of them saw you." Peter grabbed Mortimer in his paws and bit down on his shoulder, spitting away the hair he pulled out. "You dare to attack her?"

Mortimer reversed himself with a little flip and kicked Peter in the back, sending the

black bunny sprawling in the dirt. “Both of you will die.”

Bunny struggled to her feet, trying frantically to untie herself. The battle between the two rabbits had the fur flying so thick that she was covered in it. She looked up when she heard Peter yell, and gasped as she saw him hit the ground. He raised himself up just in time to be bashed back down when Mortimer hit him hard with a large branch.

When the heavy rabbit lifted the branch again to hit Peter in the head, Bunny didn't even think, she just reacted. She ran over and flung herself against the older rabbit. Mortimer screamed and swatted at her, catching her shoulder with the branch. The impact sent her flying.

It was all the distraction Peter needed. “You can't even fight fair, can you, Mortimer?” He glanced over at Bunny, who was shaking her head from the blow. “You've gone too far, old buck.”

Launching himself against his enemy, Peter tore into Mortimer with tooth and claw. Bits of fur littered the ground as blood began to flow in a fight to the death.

Bunny watched the battle through bleary eyes. The blow had knocked her senseless, and for a moment she'd thought she would pass out. Her fuzzy mind told her only one thing ... she had to help Peter.

Staggering to her feet, she looked around for some sort of weapon. Seeing the branch that Mortimer had lost, she tottered over to it and picked it up with her tied hands. It was at that moment that Mortimer struggled away from Peter and scrambling back, knocked

right into Bunny. They both went straight over the cliff.

Bunny dropped the stick as her feet went over the edge. She screamed Peter's name. There was a horrid moment of utter weightlessness before she plummeted towards the water and rocks below.

"No!" shouted Peter as he watched his enemy take his lady over the cliff with him. He bounded to the edge, but all he could see was the mist and the tears in his eyes. Blinking rapidly, he shouted her name in despair. "Bunny!"

He leaned over the cliff and his heart fell when he saw the broken body of Mortimer on the rocks beneath the falls. His eyes searched frantically. Where was Bunny? Had she missed the rocks and gone into the water?

"Peter!"

His heart skipped a beat and he wriggled out farther over the side of the chasm. There, far below him, was Bunny, only one thing keeping her from crashing to the rocks below. The strand of rope tied around her wrists had caught in a small gnarled root.

"Baby, don't move," he said, trying to calm her. "I'm going to pull you up."

Bunny went very still, her eyes wide and fearful.

Knowing he couldn't do anything in his rabbit form, Peter morphed back into a human. Lying flat on his stomach, he edged closer to the rim of the precipice. Reaching down as far as he could, his fingers brushed at the top of the length of rope. Sweat beaded on his brow as he stretched himself to his full length, hoping that it would be

enough.

Bunny watched him from below, barely breathing, her heart pounding in fear. Now that she'd seen him in both forms, she found that it didn't bother her in the least. He was the man she loved, whatever he looked like. She just hoped they had a chance to be together. She felt the rope beginning to slip, but she didn't want to break his concentration by telling him. Staring straight into his gorgeous blue eyes, she prayed for a miracle.

As Peter's fingers grasped the rope, he felt the root give. With a shout of desperation, he extended himself out fully, grabbing the line as it came loose from the side of the cliff. His muscles spasmed wildly as the weight of Bunny's body nearly pulled him over the side.

Seeing this, Bunny screamed. "No Peter, don't! Let me go."

Peter blew the hair out of his eyes and glared at her. "No fucking way!" He slowly worked the rope one handed, pulling her up, ignoring the tearing of his flesh as the rope cut into it. Soon, he had brought himself into a position where he could grasp the cord with both hands.

It went easier then, but his strong arms were shaking when he finally was able to take Bunny by the wrists and pull her to safety.

They rolled away from the edge, and Peter groaned in anger and relief as he untied the narrow cord from Bunny's bleeding wrists. She wept openly, and once he had her untied,

he pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly. She was alive.

Bunny buried her head in his chest, taking comfort in his unique scent. Reaction set in and she began to shake.

“Shhh, baby.” Peter closed his eyes and pressed frantic kisses to the top of her head. “It’s over now. Everything is all right.”

Bunny clutched him to her. “I love you, Peter. I love you so much.”

Peter’s eyes flared as hot tears filled his eyes. All his fear and anger exploded into relief and desire, his body shaking with a tension that wouldn’t stop. “God, I love you. I love you.” He kissed her trembling mouth. “I need you ... right now.”

Her eyes shone with her own desire. “Yes, Peter. Oh, yes!”

Tucking her further underneath him, he pulled at her jeans, and she helped him push them down her legs.

Sensing his desperate need, she helped him with his own torn clothing. When he finally got his pants open, he jerked them down and stabbed into her, so huge and hot, that she cried out with the pleasure of it.

He rode her hard, needing the affirmation that they were both alive and together. Bunny’s response was immediate and overwhelming ... her climax overtaking her so fast, she screamed Peter’s name in pleasure. She clung to him as he thrust against her in an agony of need, crying out hoarsely as his orgasm made him shudder uncontrollably, and then collapse on top of her.

When his heart had slowed down enough, he moved to the side of her and pulled her back into his arms. Dropping soft gentle kisses on her face, he breathed in the scent of her perfume and the sex they had shared. The sun beat down on them, yet they were both too comfortable and content to move.

Finally Peter sighed, and rose up on one elbow. "I thought I'd lost you."

The vulnerability in Peter's voice made tears come back into Bunny's eyes. "You saved me." Bunny shuddered as she glanced at the cliff. "I thought I was going to die."

Peter's stomach clenched at the thought of her body shattered on the rocks below. "I didn't even have time to be happy you were here before I thought I might lose you again." He closed his eyes for a moment. "I didn't think you were coming back to me."

Shaking her head, she pulled his forehead down to hers. "It wasn't just your fault, Peter. It was mine, too. I lost myself for a while." She grazed her lips over his. "But I'm back now."

"Are we okay?" Peter searched her eyes anxiously. "Do you forgive me?"

"Yes, of course. I love you." Bunny smiled up at him. "I love everything about you. From the tips of your long pointed ears ... to the soles of your fuzzy big feet."

Peter relaxed and treated her to his devastating grin. "Well, you know what they say about guys with big feet."

Bunny giggled out loud. "I think you just showed me."

Peter brushed back the hair from her face, frowning at the bruise Mortimer had left on

her soft skin. "I'm so sorry. I had no idea he'd go so far. He must have hated me to do all this."

"It wasn't your fault, Peter. There was something wrong with Mortimer Rabbit. I hope the other Easter Village inhabitants aren't like him."

He shook his head. "No, baby. We may have our share of weirdos, but I think we're fresh out of homicidal maniacs."

She smiled, and kissed his bristly chin. He'd forgotten to shave again. "Good, I'd hate to have to watch over my shoulder every time I went shopping."

Peter froze, his hand caught in the motion of stroking her hair. Did she mean what he hoped she meant? "Are you saying that you want to stay in Easter Village ... with me?"

Her eyes widened. "Didn't you ask me to?"

"Oh God, yes." Peter peppered her face with more kisses. He felt like he was going to explode in joy. "I just didn't ... I wasn't sure ..."

"I do love you. Enough to accept you, whatever you are."

He took her face between his hands. "Then marry me. In your world, and in mine. Live with me in that big empty farmhouse and fill it full of our babies." He grinned. "We've probably gotten a jump start on that already. But do me one favor, okay?"

"What?"

"Just don't use the expression 'the rabbit died', when you find out you're pregnant."

Bunny grinned back at him. "And you'll take the job as Easter Bunny?"

Peter looked seriously at her. “Only if I can promote you from helper’s helper, to assistant to the Easter Bunny. I hear there’s an opening.”

“Then I accept ... on both counts!” Their lips met in a deep, loving kiss. Incredibly they felt the hunger between them rise again.

“I love you, Bunny. I can’t tell you how much.”

“You don’t need to, Peter. Just show me. That’s what I really need.”

“Every day for the rest of my life,” he vowed as he kissed her one more time.

Epilogue

“And it is with great honor and pride that I pass to my son, Peter Cottontail, his banner of office.” Roger turned with a big smile, and looked at his son. “The Easter Basket!”

Peter gave Bunny a kiss on the cheek, and then stepped forward to stand next to his father. He turned and winked at her, and then changed into a huge black rabbit. The old Easter Bunny shook the paw of the new Easter Bunny, and Peter slipped the basket onto his forearm.

Bunny clapped along with all the rest of the Easter Village residents. Some of the older rabbits were sniffing and wiping their snouts at the changing of the guard, but no one looked disappointed at the choice.

She listened with half an ear as Peter made his acceptance speech. Her mind was full of everything that had happened that day. After their tryst at the waterfall, she and Peter had come back into the village, and Peter had immediately dispatched someone to retrieve Mortimer’s body. Rather than hurting the dead rabbit’s family, Peter had put out the story that Mortimer had slipped and fallen into Rainbow Falls.

He’d taken Bunny back to his ranch house, where they had both showered, and he’d medicated and bandaged her swollen wrists. Bunny had burst into tears when she’d gotten a good look at his torn and ravaged hands, knowing that he’d risked his life to save

hers.

Since her clothes had been ripped and bloodied in the fight, Peter had sent one of his workers to Flopsy Bunny's for a dress for the celebration. Now she was more cheerful in a deep blue skirt, and off-the-shoulder white lace blouse. Peter was resplendent in a dark pair of slacks and shirt, with matching coat.

Bunny wrinkled her nose as she looked at him. She still couldn't figure out how he could change into a rabbit and then back to human and not worry about the clothes. They just appeared and disappeared when necessary. Shrugging, she decided to let it go. It was probably part of the Easter magic.

Peter ended the speech and turned to her, motioning her forward. Warily, she walked up and stood next to him as he introduced her.

"My fiancé ... Bunny O'Hara." Peter gazed down at her proudly. "We're going to be married as soon as possible, and you're all invited!"

The valley erupted in cheers as Peter pulled Bunny off the stage. "Sorry about that. It just kind of popped out." He frowned down at her hand. "And I don't even have a ring for you."

She giggled. "That's okay. Things have been moving pretty fast around here."

Peter pressed a hard kiss to her smiling mouth. "Well, one thing you don't have to worry about in Easter Village is the size of your engagement ring. We have plenty of carrots ... I mean carats ...around here."

Bunny laughed out loud and wrapped her arms around his neck. From somewhere nearby, music started, and soon everyone around them danced in joyous Easter celebration. Peter swung Bunny off her feet, laughing as she squealed in mock fear.

“I’ll talk to the minister first thing tomorrow morning,” Peter said when they’d slowed their dancing and were circling slowly, holding each other close. “I don’t want to wait another day before you belong to me.”

“We’ll belong to each other,” Bunny corrected as she gave him a quick pinch on the butt.

Peter yelped and grabbed her hand. “Yeah, but I almost lost you twice. I don’t want to lose you again.”

Bunny pressed herself against him. “You won’t. I told you that. I love you.”

Cradling her face gently, Peter slanted his mouth over hers; pouring every bit of feeling he had into the kiss. When he lifted his head, he traced her lips with his finger. “I need to make sure. Besides, it’s not just us I’m thinking off.”

Bunny dropped her hand to her stomach. “It’s way too soon to know about that.”

Pulling her back against him, Peter dropped a kiss into her fragrant hair. The passing of the Easter Bunny title also came with the power of Easter magic. Peter wondered what Bunny would do if he told her that she was indeed pregnant ... with twins.

“Did I tell you the news about Cindy?” he asked, putting the surprise of her pregnancy aside for the moment. He’d wait for a better time to share that talent and news with her.

Bunny looked up at him, fear returning to her eyes. “Oh, no ... she didn’t ...?”

Peter laughed, happy to be able to add to the day’s joy. “They found a match for her. She went into surgery this morning and it went great. She’s going to be a healthy little girl again.”

Burying her face in his chest, Bunny gave him a hard hug. “She will be able to see her Sam again. Oh, Peter, how wonderful.” Pulling back, she stood on tiptoe to give him a soft kiss. “This is the best Easter ever!”

Peter thought about the Easter gift of her love. He had to agree. “Are you sure you don’t want to live out in the world? It wouldn’t have to be in Summerville.”

Bunny shook her head. “No, I like it here in Easter Village.” She grinned. “If I get lonely for human company, I can always take a quick trip to the *Hip Hop Club*.” She looked at him from under her eyelashes. “I’m sure I can get some good conversation there.”

Growling, Peter pulled her hard against him, letting her feel the heat of his body and the hardness meant just for her. “Not on your life, woman. I’ll give you all the conversation you’ll need.”

Snuggling against him, Bunny bit him gently on the chin. “I guess you’ll have to prove it to me. That knock on the head I took has made me forget everything.”

Peter raised an eyebrow as he looked down at her in amusement. “Oh, really?”

“Uhm hum.”

He narrowed his eyes. "Fine. But you're gonna want to hold on."

She frowned. "Hold on?"

"Yep." Peter tossed her over his shoulder and morphed into his rabbit form. When Bunny squealed, he laughed and wagged his ears at her. "Let's go home, baby. I think I need to spend a little more time ... down the rabbit hole. If you know what I mean."

Bunny reached down and squeezed his fuzzy tail. "Oh, yes. And I'll be sure to show you the way."

Peter laughed and, holding tight to his precious cargo, he hopped away down the path, waving at the cheering crowd. Floating on the breeze in Bunny's sweet voice came back the words ...

"Here comes Peter Cottontail. He finally caught his Bunny tail ..."