

# Obviously Arthur

*Dian Saderup*

“YOU ARE A MAMMAL, AND SO IS A RABBIT.” This bit of wisdom is contained in the introduction to *Enjoy Your Rabbit*. The book further explains that consequently a rabbit has more in common with a human than does, say, an alligator. I looked at the gray mound on my kitchen table. Its nose had a perpetual twitch, its ears were pink antennas, and its tail was the best evidence I had ever encountered that even God, creator of heaven and earth, couldn’t resist a cute idea. It was quite plain, even to my untrained eye, that no one would ever mistake this creature for an alligator. I was soon to discover, however, that the line between one species of mammal and another can become, well, blurred.

I had bought my rabbit three hours earlier at the American Fork Training School. When I entered the 4-H barn I’d found a high school girl, two mentally handicapped boys, and about a hundred cages of big rabbits, baby rabbits, and every other kind of rabbit. I had had rabbits on my mind for quite some time because I had been sad for a number of weeks. Whenever I get sad I begin to think about rabbits. I attribute this to a bout of melancholia I suffered as a young girl. A member of my ward brought me a rabbit to cheer me up, and it did. Since then, whenever a glum mood besets me, a host of rabbits is not far behind. They hop endlessly in and out of my consciousness like soft balloons rising into a slate sky. I mentioned this to a friend once, and she suggested I had a “fixation” and should seek professional counseling. I considered her advice and concluded that what we all needed was not fewer rabbits, but fewer psychologists helping people get over rabbits.

When I told the girl at the 4-H barn what I wanted, she said, “Oh yeah, you called. Don put a couple back here for you to choose from.” I wondered how it was possible to be surrounded by so many rabbits and still sound as bored as she did. The girl showed me to a cage that held two adolescent rabbits, rocketing around their enclosure.

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"Do I have to pick one of these?" I asked.

"That's just what Don told me. Something wrong with them, or what?"

"No. They're fine rabbits, I'm sure. It's just . . . er, neither one is the rabbit I need." I didn't know how to explain myself. It was a matter of the heart.

One of the handicapped youths said, "They all taste the same once you put 'em in the pot. Ha ha. They all taste the same, don't they Julie?"

I was horrified when I looked around at the hundreds of rabbits in the huge barn and realized there weren't enough people in the whole state of Utah who'd want them as pets. And I had thought the school raised rabbits because they liked them!

"Can I please look around at some of these other ones?" I asked anxiously. "It can't hurt if I get one of them instead, can it?"

"I just know what Don told me."

"Well, can't you call Don?" I felt certain the rabbit I wanted was somewhere in that barn; if it wasn't my three dollars, it would be somebody else's.

She shrugged and said, "I'll see what I can do," then walked away.

I wandered down the long center aisle of cages. There were mother rabbits with newborns. There were toddler rabbits. There were bucks. There were white ones, brown ones, ones with black spots ringing their eyes. There were dwarfs and giants. Then I saw him. In a cage with eight other toddlers and a doe. His brothers and sisters were all in a restless heap in one corner of the cage. He was lying across from them, perfectly still. He was gray and looked small enough to fit cupped in my palms. I began to feel very excited. Out of the millions, maybe even billions, of rabbits in the world, I had found the one meant for me. It was quite miraculous. Some people never in their whole lives get so lucky as to find the one creature meant just for them.

Julie returned. "Don says you can have any of the babies along this row, as long as it's a male."

"Would you please check this cage?" I asked, afraid to betray my specific hope.

She went through the heap. "Male, male, female, male, female, female, female, female."

"Could you check this one?"

She picked him up. "Male."

"That's him. Could I please buy that one?" My voice almost trembled.

"Okay."

I fumbled in my pocket for my three dollars. She handed me my rabbit.

That afternoon I alternately read *Enjoy Your Rabbit* and looked at my new pet. The book told me that rabbits could be "easily" housetrained and that because of this and their attractive personalities, they were "rapidly approaching dogs and cats in popularity in the everyday American household." My phone rang. It was a girlfriend to whom I had never confided my fixation.

"I got a new pet."

"I thought your landlord didn't allow dogs or cats."

Clearly, she had never read *Enjoy Your Rabbit*. My landlord was similarly naive. "It's not a dog or a cat."

“What is it? A fish?”

“A rabbit.”

Laugh. Laugh, laugh.

From that day forward I have repeatedly observed that the surest way to evoke laughter in even the most dour of individuals is to tell them you have a pet rabbit. The very word *rabbit* seems to be fixed in the guffaw-cough-ho-ho department of our collective unconscious. Have you ever heard anybody giggle at an alligator? At a housefly even? I am convinced that 99 percent of all people do not take rabbits seriously. Historically speaking, the miracle is not that Noah built the ark, but that he included my pet's forebears in its cargo.

“What could have possessed you to get a rabbit?”

“I guess the Holy Ghost.”

She regaled herself with that one. Just the Sunday before, in testimony meeting, a man had told the congregation that when he'd needed a car for his sales work, the Lord had directed him to an ad in the *Daily Herald*. Within two hours this person had become the owner of a '76 Ford Pinto, complete with air conditioning, the whole thing costing less than \$350. I thought it was difficult to say where God's hand was or wasn't at any given time, but if by chance he was into finding inexpensive automobiles for needy salesmen, it seemed he wouldn't begrudge locating a three-dollar rabbit for a melancholy mammal.

“Have you named it?” she asked, twittering.

I had not. I looked at my rabbit in his wire cage on the center of the table. Though he was only an infant, he was calm and dignified and sat motionless, his white chin resting on his two front paws. His eyes were gray and deep. His name obviously was Arthur.

I told her this.

To mention her response would be redundant. We soon hung up.

At the time I got Arthur, I lived in a studio apartment in the upper story of an old house. In my room I had a double bed that did not hide away into a couch, a chest of drawers, a single table for eating and working, a small refrigerator, and a cabinet with a miniature sink and one gas burner. The floor was carpeted. I gave Arthur dominion over the one tabletop in our quarters; his cage became an Eden surrounded by an expanse of *Daily Herald*s.

After reading *Enjoy Your Rabbit* I was confident that this arrangement would soon be obsolete anyhow. All a rabbit keeper had to do was let his charge loose a few times, and it would naturally choose a spot to do its business. It would return to that spot henceforth and forever, despite the intrusion of a plastic pan filled with sand. When I let Arthur out to play on the floor for the first time, he immediately emptied his bladder in the center of the room. I wasn't particularly keen on the idea of a rabbit toilet in the middle of my small living area, but I supposed if it had to be there we'd learn to live with it. Arthur explored his new home while I scrubbed the carpet with a bucket of water and Lysol. He sniffed my hands and wrists. He perched himself on his hind feet to examine the contents of my bucket but couldn't quite see over the top. He nuzzled the sweater I'd discarded on the floor.

Suddenly he leapt a foot into the air, made a ninety-degree turn, landed, and in astonishing bursts of flight, zigzagged around the entire circumference of the room. I dropped my scrub brush to watch. When he was done, he casually resumed his study of my discarded sweater, then turned around upon it, and emptied his bladder again. (The author of *EYR* apparently hadn't interviewed Arthur when he had conducted his research.) My pet seemed satisfied with this demonstration and now settled himself on the floor. He sat utterly still, his ears two tiny billowed sails forming a V above his gray head. I was content just to stare.

That night in the dark, I could hear him stirring about his cage: his paws on the wire floor when he hopped; his nose when he sneezed (which he did fairly often); his teeth when he chewed his alfalfa pellets; his tongue as it lapped his water; and, his pee when it hit the newspapers. Each of his rabbit sounds was equally comforting to me, and I fell asleep listening to them.

Arthur and I quickly fell into a normal living routine. Whenever I left the apartment, I took him with me if possible. I had a large straw handbag for my schoolbooks that I converted into a discreet rabbit carrier — I saw no need to advertise Arthur's presence in places like the grocery store, for instance. I did learn quite soon, however, that it would not be possible to take Arthur everywhere. I hadn't been studying more than ten minutes at the Brigham Young University library when he decided to conduct an investigation of his own. I'd set the bag on my lap and was petting him as I read an English lit text. He insisted on climbing onto the table. Several patrons walked by and laughed loudly (what else?). I put him under the table and tried to hold him in place with one foot while petting his back with the other. He was more interested in the stacks than in my Nikes.

Then I made my second mistake of the day. I read ten lines of Walter Scott. When I looked down, Arthur was nowhere. Alarmed, I searched the row of tables where I had been sitting and checked the aisles of the stacks as well. It was no good. Frustrated, I crawled from table to table to see if he'd stowed himself beneath the feet of some unsuspecting student. "Excuse me," I said when my head knocked a book from the edge of one table onto the floor, "I don't suppose you've seen anything unusual in the past two minutes?" The student simply stared. I grimaced and quickly continued on, scanning every inch of floor space. For the first time I could see the advantages of owning an alligator. It would hardly fit in a handbag, and even if it did it was highly unlikely to become lost in a library. An alligator had a way of making its presence known. Arthur, at least at this moment, seemed content with anonymity.

Yet I was to discover many times in the coming weeks and months that it wasn't really anonymity Arthur loved but a stimulating game of hide-and-seek. For example, about six months after the library incident, when he was full-grown and I had made him a little fenced area outdoors, he chewed through the pickets and escaped one evening. I found this out at midnight when I went to check on him before retiring. For thirty minutes I crept barefoot, in my nightgown, through the front and back yards of all my neighbors, loudly whispering, "Arthur. Here, Arthur." When I finally acknowledged defeat,

my flashlight dangling uselessly by my side, I felt the warm wetness of his nose on my ankle and turned around to see my pet nestling into a self-satisfied ball on the lawn. This scene repeated itself twice in as many nights.

But I am getting ahead of myself. That day in the library, Arthur was hardly more than an infant, and I had not yet come to know his ways. So there I was apologetically crawling past scholars, lovers, and every other manner of creature apt to be found in the seclusion of a library but still unable to locate the one creature there who was not apt to be so found. Eventually I emerged in an open area with four large tables. The occupants looked at me as I passed. Then suddenly they began to giggle. I gingerly craned my head to scan the entire scene. There was Arthur, six inches behind my feet, settling into the sphinx position. He had the nerve to yawn.

The following Saturday I carted my rabbit to a Relief Society Homemaking meeting. He seemed sleepy and tractable enough, and besides I was feeling a bit glum. While one sister carefully explained how to make an adorable tube sock (function unknown), I let my eyes droop. As if on cue, another woman suddenly exclaimed, "She's got a rabbit in her purse!" Jolted, I clutched the carryall to my bosom. My pet peered over the top directly into my face.

I smiled at the sisters. "Yes, I do, don't I."

Despite the teacher's pleading, the class was unable to concentrate on tube socks for the greater part of five minutes. This episode, following hard upon the library incident, convinced me that Arthur's place was, most likely, in the home.

This doesn't mean he stayed there all the time. When outdoor activities came up, he always went along. I took him camping up North Fork Canyon with me and three friends. With a thirty-pound pack on my back and Arthur's cage cutting into my thighs in front, the stepping stones of the river we crossed were especially formidable. I took him to the driving range when I went to practice golf three times a week. With my clubs slung over one shoulder, a canteen hooked to my belt, two buckets of balls in one hand, and a rabbit carryall in the other, I was as heavily laden as a camel among a party of rich Bedouins. Arthur wore a red collar. When we went golfing, I attached a long, frayed rope to it and tied him to a fence. My pet enjoyed nibbling on the high grass next to the fence where the mower couldn't reach and making sudden sporadic forays onto the wider green, stabbing this way and that, kicking his heels and wheeling his hindquarters in sharp horizontal arcs through the air. I kept a strict watch on him, though: the boy driving the mechanical ball scooper-upper liked watching golf better than he liked watching where he was going.

This brings me to another point. As my fondness for Arthur grew weekly, daily, hourly, I began to fear for his safety. Mammals can be terribly fragile, and rabbits are no exception. In fact, I suspect they lead the whole pack. My first rabbit had lived with me for only six months when one day he began acting sickly and twelve hours later died. When I took Arthur as a toddler to a church picnic and tied his rope to a tree where his presence could be enjoyed

by all, I left him unattended for a few minutes while I crossed the lawn to chat with a friend. Glancing his way a few moments later, I saw the bishop's four-year-old son swinging him by the neck at the end of his rope, like a lasso. I screamed and raced to Arthur's side as other ward members, alerted by my cries, converged on the spot.

By that time, I had already discovered Arthur's fascination with electrical cords. When released from his cage, his general habit was to urinate, then go immediately to the nearest light cord and begin chewing on it. I tried buying wide masking tape to seal all cords against the walls, but inevitably he would find that inch-and-a-half length of exposed cord that stuck out to accommodate the plug.

Once, after the nearly full-grown Arthur had discovered how to unlatch his cage, a thud woke me in the early morning hours. Normally, I sleep so soundly a brontosaurus passing through my bedroom wouldn't wake me, but somewhere in my sleepbound consciousness that thud registered itself as significant. I awoke instantaneously. Arthur was sprawled on the floor — stunned — having leapt from his cage on the table. It became obvious to me that a young rabbit, if not injured through human mishap or error, would, some way or another, compensate for this omission on his own.

I hefted Arthur from the floor and crawled back under my covers to curl up with him at my side. He peed. (Someday I'd like very much to speak with the author of *EYR*.) Hopelessly awake, I then stripped the sheets from my bed and pondered the perils of rabbit raising. Arthur was a robust rabbit, having grown stronger and bigger with each passing week. When I'd first gotten him, he was barely five inches long and weighed twenty-one ounces. By the end of summer, he was nearly two feet when he stretched full length and weighed over twelve pounds. His fur was pale gray around his face and shoulders but darkened to a deeper gray on his back. His stomach and paws were white, and so was the fur under his chin.

When he would wash his face and his delicately shaded pink ears, he'd sit up on his flat hind feet, lick his front paws, and rub them over the area needing cleaning, like a cat. He'd bat his ears down to bathe them, invariably fastidious about every inch of his appearance. His round white stomach was a pouch that rested on his big back feet whenever he sat up like this. I thought that his underside with all its roundness and white fur looked like the belly of a very small polar bear. And now the peril: in a mortal world such perfection is as transitory as the seasons. It reaches a zenith then is obliged to decline, if not cut off outright by the vagaries of chance. Infirmity (or worse!) is the final reality, beauty and vigor the initial illusion. Change and decay in all around I see. . . . It was all rather grim stuff.

Not long after this moody meditation, Arthur stopped eating his alfalfa pellets. I had just bought him a new sackload. Two days passed. He didn't consume a one, though he seemed reasonably perky. The afternoon of the second day I went to my English grammar class. When the lecture was over, I looked at my notes. The top of the page was marked: GERUNDS. Beneath this declaration were pencil sketches of rabbits: a rabbit on his haunches, a

rabbit on its side, two rabbits asleep, one rabbit eating. I pulled on my sweater and hurried out of the building. My rabbit wasn't eating.

Overhead, the sky was boiling with black clouds. As I bent my way homeward, huge drops of rain splashed my forehead and sandaled feet. There was an age when men read portents in the sky and omens in the roar of the elements. When Jesus died there were earthquakes, and the sun refused its shining. By the time I reached our house, my worst fears had bloomed into demons. I took the stairs two at a time. When I opened Arthur's cage, he didn't jump up and press his nose into my palm for pats. He just lay there. It was a Friday afternoon. The only vet I trusted — the one my mother took her three cats and dog to — was in Salt Lake City, an hour's drive away. When I called, the receptionist said if I had a lethargic rabbit who wasn't eating I'd better bring him in. The clinic would be open for another hour and fifteen minutes, then would close for the weekend.

In those days I drove a red '66 Mustang convertible that I'd named Jack. I'd had Jack's top down all week. When I raced out to the driveway, the seats and carpet were already soaked by the downpour. I hauled the convertible top out of its fold-away bed behind the back seat and tried to latch it into position above the windshield. The white vinyl had shrunk from that afternoon's sharp temperature drop. For five minutes I umphed and humphed without success. My hands got raw from trying. I knocked at my neighbors' houses on either side and across the street. Nobody was home to help. Just down the road was the social security office. I ran and found an elderly man leaning against the wall of the building, taking cover from the storm under an overhang. He was trying to light a cigarette. His thin cold hands could hardly hold the match.

"Excuse me," I called, "could you help me a minute? My rabbit's sick and I've got to take him to the vet in Salt Lake and my car's top is down and I can't get it to stay up because I'm not strong enough by myself and I need somebody to help me do it. I know it's raining but the vet's going to go home in an hour and I hate to ask you to do this but could you please come hurry and help me?"

He dropped his match onto the wet cement. The cigarette dangled from his bottom lip. "Sick rabbit, you say? Oh, I don't know what I can do, but I figure I can get a sick rabbit out of a locked car. Got a coat hanger?"

I grabbed hold of his thin shirt sleeve and pulled him along after me. We worked on Jack's top for another five minutes, me pulling, him tugging. He was huffing so hard his unlit cigarette dropped from his lips. The forces above were heaving water down on us by the tubful. My anxiety escalated to near panic. Why wasn't I like those mothers who, when seized by adrenalin, could lift a station wagon off a child? Where was the strong arm of the Lord when I needed it?

In a General Motors Gremlin heading up the street. I saw the car, and without thinking ran into the road, my arms two frantic flags above my head. The driver stopped. He looked like a university student and was wearing a tie: an angel incognito. I looked like I had just crossed Niagara Falls. On foot.

I would hate to have to tell those two Samaritans that all their efforts, in the end, were for nothing more significant than a sack of alfalfa pellets. You see, we latched the roof. I drove to the animal hospital. The vet was somewhat mystified. He could find nothing whatsoever wrong with my rabbit. He told me to buy Arthur some spinach as a dietary supplement. I did so forthwith. Arthur consumed a half pound of spinach in less than ten minutes. It was then I suspected the pellets. I'd bought a new brand precisely when Arthur had stopped eating. When I picked up some Pillsbury's Best Feed the day after our visit to the vet, Arthur ravished an entire bowlful. I have always said that I would rather starve than eat mayonnaise. Apparently I had transferred some of that same general disposition to my pet. It was a revelation to me that I could live so intimately with a rabbit for four months and not know there were causes for which he would waste away.

But then I was beginning to suspect there were lots of things I didn't know about this creature who had come to inhabit my heart as well as my house. Just being the steward of a mammal doesn't give you absolute access into the secrets of its soul. Even an amphibian such as a frog is — in some fashion — the final sovereign of itself, the keeper of whatever mysterious matter marks it as individual. If two hundred sparrows fell as a flock from heaven, God would still be constrained to note the occurrence in two hundred separate journal entries. I suppose that when Arthur had grown too big for his cage on the kitchen table and I had commissioned my father to build him a hutch for out-of-doors, I was not only saving my carpet from ruination but acknowledging my rabbit's own individuality and ultimate independence from me. Ours were two distinct personalities.

And I was under the distinct impression that Arthur's was a personality that wasn't saying everything it knew. He had the appearance of a sage. When he slept, his tiny black eyelashes would only droop halfway shut, and his antennas would each be cocked in a different direction — eyes that saw and ears that heard, even while at rest. His mouth, which you could only see from underneath him, would be absolutely sober, a firm inverted U. I am convinced that in his heart of hearts, despite his natural playfulness, Arthur always retained an uncommon sense of personal dignity.

Once, just prior to his move outdoors, I sat watching him drift toward sleep. He was positioned exactly like the sphinx, that ancient repository of secrets, when his head began to droop to one side. Further and further it drooped, as my mother's had long ago in church when, as the organist for our congregation, she had sat next to the bishop and had fallen asleep, her head eventually dropping onto his shoulder. When Arthur's head finally nodded against the floor of his cage, like my mother, he jolted awake — quite aghast — and hurriedly mustered his body into a more dignified posture.

One may say this merely shows us that Arthur, like most mammals, possessed an ego. Undeniably so. Nevertheless, it was when he was resting, upright or otherwise, that I felt most certain the wisdom of the ages was locked somewhere inside his silent, perfect form. He was the embodiment of some-



thing bigger than a bunny, though I would have been hard pressed to say just what. Whenever I tried to express this belief to friends, I came out sounding like one of those people who think the secret of the universe can be found in a pebble. I didn't bring up the subject very often.

But I pondered it when I was alone. The night of a lunar eclipse, I was out on my porch for several hours watching the progress of the earth's shadow across the moon. When the eclipse reached totality, the moon — instead of looking, as it usually did, like a luminescent cutout taped to the black sky — suddenly leapt into three-dimensionality. It resembled a large orange Christmas ornament hung upon the expansive limbs of space. For the first time in my life I became aware of the universe not just as a vague infinitude, but as an infinitude of relationships between actual objects — planets, moons, stars. Everything that *was* had a specific place to be.

It was then that Arthur, whose hutch sat across the lawn from me, began drinking from his Rabbit Oasis, his tongue jangling the ball bearing at the end of the spout. I couldn't see him but could only hear the sound of his tiny tongue on the metal ball. He was drinking because he was thirsty. He was thirsty because his body was working as it should. He was a rabbit living in his rabbit house in the backyard of a hundred-year-old home in Provo, Utah, the North American continent. The three-dimensional moon was in its place. Arthur was in his place. The moon was revolving around the earth as it should. Arthur was drinking as he should. All of us were located at specific points in a colossal cosmic design.

I can't explain why I should have felt so comforted by the sound of a three-dollar rabbit drinking from a five-dollar Rabbit Oasis bought at Hailstone Pet Store. That my rabbit should be, and that he should be — like most everything else in creation — in his appointed sphere, seemed to me a great and greatly reassuring mystery. That's all. Maybe it wasn't that Arthur knew so much but that through him I knew so much. Maybe that's why I thought he seemed to hold some ancient secret. Or maybe he really did.

This lofty speculation is far removed from the everyday reality of pee. Within a week of my acquiring him, my pet had proven *EYR's* optimism on the housetrainability of rabbits insupportable to the point of absurdity. When let out of his cage, Arthur not only failed to choose a single spot in our apartment for the voiding of urine, he selected — with unaffected nonchalance — as many points as possible for this activity. Any kind of motion at all on his part — whether crossing the room, hopping onto my bed, or taking up residence under the table — seemed to trip off some primitive mechanism within him associated with the making of water. When he finally moved outdoors, though I would miss his constant presence, I would not miss the constant smell of Mr. Clean.

Then I had a great idea. I don't know why it hadn't occurred to me sooner. My next visit to Albertson's supermarket was momentous: I planned to examine the relative merits of Pampers and Kimbies. I soon selected Kimbies as the superlative, accident-free diaper due to its gathered legs. Kimbies came in three sizes: newborn, infant, and toddler. Though I knew Arthur was

large for a rabbit, it didn't occur to me that he could be larger than a newborn human, so I bought the smallest size. I might just as well have tried to diaper a dinosaur with a dishtowel. I tried the next size up. Another \$3.75 — piff — gone. When I finally bought the toddler Kimbies, it was with deep apprehension: I couldn't imagine my pet's hindquarters were as large as a child's "two years or over," but then again what if they were?

The diaper fit perfectly. For a full minute after fastening it on him I was ecstatic. Though he would live in his big new hutch, Arthur could still come indoors, without any unpleasant consequences, when we liked. I set him on the floor. Then, when he began to hop wearing the cumbersome item, I did an inconsiderate thing. I laughed. It was really entirely impossible not to, though I realize that is no excuse. Perhaps that is why my plan failed so quickly. Arthur sensed his dignity was being impinged upon and would have none of it. It took him scarcely thirty seconds to disengage the offending article. There was no keeping it on him. I ended up using the thirty-six variously sized diapers as dustcloths, dishtowels, pillow stuffing, packing filler for breakables, and, a year later when we moved from the place, blotters for ice-box melt when I defrosted the refrigerator. Even then, I still had thirteen left over.

So Arthur moved out into the lone and dreary world, permanently. Neither of us was entirely pleased with this arrangement, but by this time he had grown so large that his, ahem, problem could be effectively managed no other way, Mr. Clean notwithstanding. That's when I constructed the fence. If he wasn't going to have as much company as he was used to, he might as well have more freedom. As earlier explained, he readily found a way to thwart the enclosure by burrowing under the pickets or chewing through them. I plugged the holes he made with rocks, and, when I ran out of those, with big #2 cans of peaches or pork and beans. The fence became a monument not only to his cunning but to my ingenuity.

I kept him in his hutch when I wasn't home, but even when I was I couldn't keep a watch on him every minute. One evening after he had escaped his yard, he failed to come to my calls. After an hour's searching I could find him under none of his favorite bushes. He had never carried a game of hide-and-seek to this extreme — he was too fond of my affection and the wilted lettuce leaves I brought as presents. I began to be worried. I looked for nearly two hours. When I went to bed that night, it was the first time I had done so without knowing where he was. I told myself he would turn up by morning, ready for his broccoli to start the day. Broccoli was his second favorite food.

But morning came, and Arthur did not. I worried myself at school until 1:00 P.M., then came home and ransacked every plot of foliage in the neighborhood. Another evening went by and still I did not know my rabbit's whereabouts. When I told a friend on the phone about Arthur's disappearance, he said, "No way he could still be alive with all the dogs and cats around. Might as well go and get another one right now." I suppose had my friend a hundred sheep and should lose one of them, he'd be content with the ninety and nine. The next morning I embarked on a still more ambitious campaign, going up

and down the streets in our neighborhood, knocking on doors, inquiring if anybody had seen my missing mammal. By this time, though, I was so heavy-hearted my veins seemed to run with cement. If I didn't find him soon, I would have to take to my bed.

I came to one yard with a man in a wheelchair and another man sitting by him on the lawn.

"Excuse me," I said, "I was wondering if by any chance you've seen a big gray rabbit." I waited for the usual, No, sorry.

"Big gray rabbit?" the one who wasn't in the wheelchair said. "Yeah, I seen a big gray rabbit this morning — a great big honking sucker." People had always been impressed with Arthur's size.

"You have!? Where was he?"

"On the road to Edgemont." Edgemont was at least four miles from where we lived. For Arthur to have gotten there in three days, he would have had to make a beeline down University Avenue. It seemed someone would have noticed him and stopped to pick him up on such a busy street.

"Where on the road to Edgemont?" I asked.

"At the bend. You know."

I did. "What was he doing? Was he just going along?"

"No."

"Was he sitting there?"

"No."

"Well, what then?"

"He was *on* the road."

It was a moment before I understood his meaning. When I did, it was like a boulder had just been heaved out of the sky on top of me. I could hardly bring myself to ask my next question but finally summoned the breath to do so. "Was this big gray rabbit wearing a red collar?"

He almost choked laughing when he answered, "I didn't really notice."

"Oh," I said. "Thanks." I turned toward home, the landscape blurring around me. I tried to think what I should do. It was too obvious. I had to get in Jack and go find my rabbit. I couldn't live not knowing his fate, and if he was lying dead on the road to Edgemont, he had to be properly buried. I put a shovel and a cardboard box in Jack's trunk. I was going to be strong. I was going to do the necessary thing. But as I drove down University Avenue and got closer and closer to Edgemont, it was too much. I began to bargain: "If this big gray rabbit can just not be Arthur . . ." By the time I reached the fateful curve in the road, I had begged divine capital with every bit of spiritual collateral I possessed. I had even suggested a full-time mission might not be beyond feasibility.

Yet the field remains white already to harvest, my sickle having not been thrust in. I don't know how I could renege on so many promises. I guess I simply forgot them, until now. Arthur was not the big gray rabbit on the road to Edgemont. I could find no rabbit at all, despite cruising that strip of pavement at least five times, holding up a pack of audibly annoyed vehicles with each pass I made.

Then it occurred to me that the sanitation crew might have already come and shoveled him up, shipping him off to the oblivion of the incinerator. I was thrown into a panic almost as severe as my initial one: I might *never* know what had become of my rabbit. He could well be up in smoke — or he might be miles from the road to Edgemont, having fallen into kinder hands than those of the Provo City Public Works Department. On my way home I stopped at a 7-Eleven and bought two Hershey bars with almonds. I ate them in the time it took to cover the distance between two traffic lights. At that moment, life seemed singularly terrifying to me and the fate of all mammals unbearably cruel. Around every bend in the road lurked death or perhaps nothing more significant than the bluebells nodding their heads along the soft shoulder. It took great faith simply to step out of bed in the morning, let alone get in a car and drive.

It also took faith to post twenty-five flyers advertising Arthur's disappearance on telephone poles throughout Provo:

LOST RABBIT  
Large, Gray, Tame  
if you have seen this rabbit  
PLEASE Call  
374-8113  
REWARD  
for his return alive or dead even

Within sixty seconds (no kidding) of my walking in the door from this expedition, a woman six blocks from where I lived called. She had seen one of my signs. Yes, the big gray rabbit she had found was wearing a red collar. I was at her doorstep two minutes later. She took me round back. There was Arthur — sitting quietly in a big hutch with four other rabbits!

At the sight of me he became a flurry of animation, chasing first to one end of the hutch, then to the other, pawing the wire windows. She opened the cage, and I lifted him from it. He plastered my face with licks as I kissed his mobile nose a dozen times. It wasn't until we had calmed down that the woman, who adamantly refused any reward, saying that Arthur was one of the most delightfully gregarious rabbits she had ever met, told me how my pet had found his way into her yard. It was then I realized he had not simply wandered off and gotten lost: he had actively gone looking for playmates and had discovered the only rabbits within two miles. Arthur had grown up in ways I had never before acknowledged. He wanted a wife.

As I drove home, Arthur sat on my lap, nibbling on my finger. I spoke to him solemnly, promising to get him a companion. But that night I lay in bed pondering the difficulties of fulfilling this vow: I could handle two rabbits, but not two hundred. I considered the option of having the female spayed but worried that that would alter her hormonal chemistry and make her unresponsive to Arthur's attentions. I didn't want my pet to suffer the pangs of unrequited love, nor the loss of self-confidence so intimately connected with sexual

rejection. I thought about getting him a male friend. Unfortunately, though this may have satisfied Arthur's biological urges, I couldn't countenance the thought. Castration seemed cruel, and the only other alternative I could come up with sounded rather ridiculous: vasectomy. The more I thought about it, though, the less far-fetched it appeared. People have it done. Why not rabbits? That night my mother called from Salt Lake City. The very next day she was going to take her dachshund to the doctor to have a nasty tooth pulled. She agreed immediately to ask Dr. Mosteller about the feasibility of my plan.

The following day I anxiously awaited her report. I wondered if the vet would think it funny, or if perhaps he did this kind of thing more often than anyone would suspect. This particular veterinary center was the Mayo Clinic of animal hospitals. If anyone could be expected to take the idea of a rabbit vasectomy seriously, it was these guys. When my mother phoned she said Dr. Mosteller had appeared to suppress a smile when she proposed my plan, and then, saying that he would need to confer with a colleague, had hastily excused himself from the room. When he returned he was sober-faced enough. He told her it was doubtful the procedure had ever been done, though he would be willing to try. He couldn't promise it would be successful, but the attempt would cost me \$110.

I felt terrible when I had to tell Arthur I couldn't afford a \$110 rabbit vasectomy that might not work. It seemed that getting him a spouse was, at the moment, simply impracticable. He was going to have to wait. I look back on that period and think I could have exerted greater effort — gotten him a spayed wife, for example, and hoped for the best — but the truth is I didn't really want a second rabbit. A single splendid one was sufficient for my needs. So, selfishly, I put my promise to Arthur on hold and doomed him to suffer the same lack of romantic love which afflicts 97 percent of all the mammals I know.

Arthur never got a wife. He also never got an inescapable fenced yard and hence spent a great portion of his life in his hutch. I would put him out on a long chain attached to a heavy brick (I didn't want to endure the agony of losing him again), but this measure of freedom did not, I am certain, compensate for that larger portion of which he had been deprived. I would dream of one day being able to afford a house with a cinder block fence he could not undermine, but that day never came.

If the truth be known, there was a host of dreams I had for Arthur that was never fulfilled. There are also regrets: affection I failed to give at times when my school and work schedules were pressing; carrot skins and cabbage I sometimes put down the garbage disposal because I was too tired or lazy to take them out to his cage. There was the time I went to campus, leaving him unsupervised on his brick because I didn't want to pick him up and get fur on my navy dress putting him into his hutch — and came home to hear from a neighborhood child that three boys had been kicking him. There were *two* times I left him in his house for several days while I went to Salt Lake and arrived back to find he'd knocked his water over and was perishing of thirst —

it would have been little bother to ask a friend to come check on him. There are the suspenders I never engineered to hold a diaper on him; though he might have been embarrassed to wear them, the fun of visits indoors would have quickly offset his reluctance, I am sure.

Oddly, it is regret, I think, that sometimes makes a person understand the nature and depth of his love for a mammal. Regret is the shadow that throws the world of our hearts into three dimensionality, making us not paper cutouts but rounded creatures of flesh and bone. Yet, praise be to God, it need not cancel our gentler joys, merely burnish them.

I suppose the gentle ritual I enjoyed most of all in caring for Arthur occurred at bedtime. Every night before turning in (or almost every night — sometimes I'd give in to fatigue), I would go outside and make sure he had everything necessary for his nocturnal comfort. In his desire to be stroked, he would often hamper my efforts to fill his bowl or bottle by pressing his head into my hands, following every movement I made. But I was careful to make certain he had plenty of Pillsbury's Best Feed and that his Rabbit Oasis was full and securely hooked to the wire mesh of his hutch window, before indulging him. During winter, I also had to replenish the dry leaves I kept in his cage hoping he'd build himself a warm nest — he seemed to much prefer eating them to sitting upon them.

Then I would stand in my nightgown or robe — my feet bare or shoved without socks into loafers — and pet his forehead, cheeks, and nose. He loved having his face caressed and would sit with enormous patience each night while I did so. No matter how cold the night air, he was always a soft warmth beneath my touch. The sudden warm, rough, wetness of his tongue licking my wrist would be like some secret intimacy exchanged between the only waking creatures in a world that all around them lay darkly sleeping.

Those nighttime encounters ended abruptly last May. One morning Arthur appeared listless and wouldn't eat a bite of apple, his favorite food. His eyes seemed slightly cloudy. When he was no better by afternoon, I took him to the vet. The doctor gave him a shot and some antibiotics for me to put in his water. He thought Arthur had some type of respiratory infection. For the first time in a long while, I moved my rabbit back indoors. When I went to bed that night he was sitting quietly in his portable cage on the kitchen floor of the house we had recently moved into. The next morning, when he sat on his hind feet to bathe himself I was cheered. He still had energy to worry about his appearance. One edge of the apple slice in his cage had been nibbled, another good sign.

But I waited all day long for him to nibble some more. He didn't. And the *Daily Herald*s under his cage were still readable: he hadn't peed in over twenty-four hours. By afternoon, I was so concerned that his kidneys might be damaged if he didn't pee that I put him on my bed. In the past, he had never once failed to pee when given access to a bed. Nothing happened. I picked him up and cradled him for a long time. He was limp in my arms. At midnight, I gave him a lettuce leaf. He took a tentative bite.

An hour later Arthur died.

A friend and I buried him that night. I swaddled him snugly in the white dress I had worn in the Days of '47 pioneer parade and my first time through the Salt Lake Temple. I hesitated before covering his face, last. It was raining hard. My friend dug a deep hole in the garden patch behind the house. When the hole was ready, I knelt in the mud and lowered my bundle into it. The bottom was slightly uneven, and I couldn't get Arthur's head to lie flat. I didn't like the idea of him having a crook in his neck even if he was dead, but finally I gave him up to the uneven earth. I watched as my friend shoveled the mud back into the hole and the last piece of white fabric disappeared beneath the heavy soil. I had done the necessary thing. The rain came down on us like millions of tears.

My friends indulge me now when I talk about Arthur, my fixation having long ago come into the open. But few of them, except a girlfriend named Suzanne who had a parakeet that died, seem to understand the peculiar fascination my late rabbit holds for me. I feel lucky to be a Latter-day Saint in this respect, because our prophets have always taught that all mammals will be resurrected at the last day. When animals dwell in heaven, they will sit near God and be full of vision and power, even rabbits. Yes, I realize, when all rabbits are resurrected, they will make a pretty sizable herd surrounding the throne, but for this we can be grateful: infinity is a big place. It is a comfort to me in times of melancholy to think of mammals of every kind filling the streets of the celestial city, taking care of one another, making sure that everyone's food dish is always full of apples, broccoli, or other nourishing things: oats for the horse, corn for the ox, wheat for man.

Sometimes I think back on the night Arthur died. He lay on the kitchen floor. I huddled next to him, stroking his perfectness to the last. He was long and wide and flat against the floor, like some small boat, and his big back feet stuck straight out behind him like white paddles. Before my friend arrived, I carefully stowed those comical feet back beneath Arthur's white belly, as befit his dignity and as, I am sure, he would have wished. Since then, though, I have imagined him as he left this world for a different one. I have seen his spirit paddling up through the open sky, on that strange journey we will all eventually make. There he is, sailing upon the broad air, finding out the place where angels live.