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Slaveship Down

The Silver Wire

The 5th Column

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A pinkness swelled over the horizon, and the greyish grass slowly emerged to any eyes awake to see the blades rustling in the morning winds. Over the undulating hills, slightly west of the meadow, was the forest, and a few blue jays welcomed the dawn with their whistles, seeking sustenance for their young ones. A hawk flew high overhead, scanning for something struggling in the grass; a glint of silver caught its eye. It flew on.

Silhouetted by the bright rays of the source of all life was an angular, wooden structure that was well known to the rabbits in the warren, for it was from there that the Two-Legged Creatures came. It had always been there, they thought, a comforting constant, like the wood or the sky, or the warren itself.

Maple sniffed tentatively at the wind, trying to scent where the nicest-tasting clovers would be. It had been a long winter, and, while there was food enough in the warren, it would be nice to be outside and forage for himself.

"Let me out!" Cotton said behind him, pushing him slightly out of the hole. Cotton was a big rabbit, with soft brown fur, pink, alert eyes, and ears that stood up almost at right angles from one another—"So I can hear in four directions at once," he often joked. He and Maple were the same age, only months old, and closer than rabbits from the same litter.

"Hold your horses," Maple muttered—of course, he did not say that *exactly*, as these

rabbits did not know what horses were. "We're not the only ones out here." Maple knew that Cotton's size made him less cautious.

Maple moved out—and stopped cold.

"Let me see!" yelled Cotton, pushing the unresisting Maple out of his way. Both of his ears stiffened when he emerged onto the brown expanse of the down.

There, on the edge of the wood, a creature was struggling, a black-grey rabbit many times their age. It made no sound—perhaps because it knew that noise would attract foxes and hawks, perhaps because of the silver wire round its throat.

"Maple," Cotton whispered, "what do we do?"

Maple did not answer. Something ancient inside him told him to run underground, to disappear into the hole and hide, to save himself from the unknown danger. His muscles tensed.

Maple sprinted across the down toward the grey-black rabbit, under the bright, open sky now dotted with dark birds of prey. An instant later, Cotton raced after him.

They reached the struggling rabbit, its eyes wide with fear, bloodshot with pain, waving its paws frantically trying to rid itself of the silver wire. Maple immediately began digging. *If we could dig under the wire, maybe the rabbit could right itself and escape.*

A shadow covered them.

In a lightning flash, two daggers made of bone stabbed the black-grey rabbit. The fox lifted the rabbit, broke its neck, and then dropped the body, looking around for its other prey.

But they were already gone.

Maple went to the head of his den, a fattish rabbit named Snoweyes. "Sir, there's danger!"

"Calm down, my son," said Snoweyes gently. Once he had been a fierce rabbit, strong enough to win his leadership position. But that was many does and many children ago. "The warren is vibrant, happy—has been since time immemorial. What could worry you?"

Maple described the silver wire and the black-grey rabbit. Snoweyes said nothing, but turned away. "But, sir, what are we going to do?" Snoweyes turned back again.

"Son, would you like some clover?"

Maple blinked.

Wherever Maple went, he told the tale of the silver wire. But no one would listen.

"Isn't it funny," Maple told his friend, "that no one expresses surprise when we tell them about the silver wire? It almost seems as if everyone knows before we've opened our mouths; but then they pretend as if we haven't said anything at all."

"Maybe we should forget it," suggested Cotton, "it happened such a long time ago." It had been seventeen days since they had seen the death-throes of the black-grey rabbit. Maple was his friend, but he could be a bit single-minded at times.

"No," said Maple. "What if another rabbit gets caught? We've got to do something about it!"

"What can we do?" Cotton said, chewing on some yellow petals. A light dawned in Maple's head.

"Follow me."

They went out to the edge of the down, near the forest where shadows moved. It took them awhile, and every so often they had to dart back to the hole as a hawk flew overhead, but eventually they found two wooden stakes with an almost invisible line between them, a flash of silver in the sun.

"Now dig," Maple said. Together the two rabbits dug their paws into the earth, one at each stake. At first the stakes did not budge, but then, slowly, Cotton's begin to tilt. It was almost out when Cotton issued a blood-curdling scream.

"Maple!"

Maple turned. He had not scented it in time. The Creature-with-Two-Legs was almost upon him. He scrambled out of the way of one of its upper paws, but then was lifted off the ground in some type of—some type of— He did not have the word for *net*.

A paw came and touched his fur. Maple shuddered—then bit. Blood came out. *They can be hurt!* thought Maple in surprise. *If they could be hurt, then they could be—* Maple's captor dropped its net. Maple hit the earth with a thud and had the wind knocked out of him; but only for a moment. Once he gained his balance, he bolted.

Into the silver wire.

"Cotton! Cotton! Help me!" he gurgled before the wire tugged too tightly across his throat. As his sight faded, he saw Cotton near the hole, staring at him. But that was not his last sight.

His last sight was the hole itself, down which Cotton had just disappeared, leaving him alone with the Creature; and its silver wire.

The farmer folded up the newspaper and placed it on the kitchen table. Every few weeks he distributed sliced carrots to the rabbits as a way of ensuring they would not come onto his property and steal even more of his vegetables. He enjoyed seeing them come out for the treats.

His wife emerged from the kitchen, an apron around her supple waist, carrying a platter that smelled of freshly-cooked rarebit.

The farmer had never enjoyed a tastier meal.

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Dr. Jonathan David Farley, is the 2004 Harvard Foundation Distinguished Scientist of the Year. He is currently Teaching and Research Fellow teaching mathematics at the Institute für Algebra Johannes Kepler

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