

# Bunnies

*by* Michael Boylan

"There's another one," I said, tapping my wife's knee and gesturing quickly out the passenger side window of my car. "What's that, like, eight, in the past three days?"

I had just seen a little, wild rabbit standing on the side of the road. We had seen a lot of them lately. It was cute, at first, but I had to admit I was starting to become greatly unsettled by their presence. "So cute," Linda said with a sigh.

"I guess," I agreed, in a disagreeable tone. "Don't you think it's a little strange though?"

"How so?"

I had been thinking about this since early that morning during one of those patches of summer insomnia. The clock read 4:30 and I was just trying to bore myself to sleep by 5 a.m.. To reach the maximum state of boredom, I started to recount the previous day from start to finish. The drowsy insomnia was jolted awake by a large bucket of cold fear when I realized I had seen four tiny rabbits on the side of the road that day.

"Rabbits should not be so close to the road," I said to Linda, finally, ready to lay out the flimsy thesis I had created while nursing a much too strong cup of coffee in our breakfast nook that morning. "They have to know that it is dangerous."

"It's only dangerous if they cross the street," Linda pointed out. "And they probably do know it, they just don't remember until it is too late."

She was referring to these cute, little bunnies ending up as roadkill, but I had stumbled across something else that sent chills up my spine during those dawn hours - for all the rabbits we had seen lately, I hadn't seen any dead on the road.

"You're assuming that rabbits have low intelligence," I stated, realizing that this was starting to sound like a lecture, something she had clearly mentioned not liking about me when we first started dating. "Rabbits communicate with each other about approaching

predators very ably. There is no reason that a message hasn't been sent out to all the bunnies in the warren to stay away from the roads."

We drove on in silence for a moment. Linda stared out the window, presumably trying to see where this conversation was going and why she should care. I, of course, kept combing the area for rabbits. "So, Roger, what does it all mean," Linda asked, in a way that I could tell meant she hoped I would just drop it, or at least end it after a few sentences. I obliged her.

"I don't know."

It was the truth. I didn't know. I had thought a lot about what it could mean, but none of the answers I came up with rang true. The rabbits could be getting closer to the roads because they felt as if they had to cross it. I wondered if perhaps they were being pursued by predators or maybe there were better food sources or mates across the way. I had to dismiss this though because we had seen rabbits on roadsides all over the county. We could possibly be seeing a species take an evolutionary step. The bunnies, after having lived with traffic in the area for so long, were no longer afraid of the loud noises and wanted to see just what the big deal was. This theory was a possibility, but, and I know this makes me sound very strange, I got the sense that there was something more sinister about the whole thing.

Maybe it was just because I found the idea of so many rabbits so close to the road to be just plain wrong, but a part of me (my gut?) was practically screaming at me that it was something else, something larger. I felt like they were waiting for something and were observing us in the interim. I laughed maniacally in my head at the thought, but I kept picking at it all the same, the bunnies had plans for us.

We saw no more that night on our way home and the discussion was long forgotten as Linda and I slipped into bed with a nightcap and kind words and touches. Thankfully, I was not awoken by any rabbit-related cold dread that night and I woke up feeling rested and refreshed.

The next morning was a vision of shimmering gold cascading through breaks in the trees and lighting up drops of dew on the lawn. I had opened the windows to let the cool morning air and its fresh scent work its magic on us before we both headed into work. Linda stood behind my chair as I browsed the news on-line on my laptop. She tousled my hair and kissed my cheek.

"I'll see you tonight," she cooed.

"No breakfast?"

"I'll eat in the car," she said. "I have a meeting with Pendleton to prepare for."

I nodded.

"Have a good day," I called out, shoving another cream-cheese smothered bite of bagel in my mouth and kissing the excess topping off my finger before scrolling to another page.

After a leisurely breakfast and some puttering around the house in my pajama pants and slippers, I got dressed and decided to head into my office. It is good to be the boss and to know that there is no one at R. Adams Consulting looking at my time card or standing at my desk each morning waiting impatiently for me to start my work day. To be honest, business wasn't booming, but I felt refreshed that morning, like things could turn around at any moment.

I opened my garage door, cringing a little at the metallic screeches and whistles that have gotten worse with the aging opener, and looked out towards the end of the driveway and the street. I saw something move, possibly a rabbit, but just as easily a chipmunk, squirrel, stray cat or shadow. I stood still and watched some more, waiting to see if whatever it was would pass back the other way or if others, just like it, would follow. I felt silly fairly quickly and got in my car, starting it and slowly backing out of the driveway. At the edge, right before rolling back out into the street, I, being the conscientious driver that I am, glanced in the rearview mirror to see if anyone was coming. We live on a quiet cul-de-sac in a very rural part of a small town, but those Driver's Ed courses and the grindhouse-like films we watched in class had stuck with me. I didn't see anyone coming, so I continued. Just as I was about to put the car

in drive, I glanced backwards one more time and was horror-struck by what I saw.

I went to get out of the car immediately, forgetting at first to place the car in park, and had to lean back in to the slow rolling vehicle and awkwardly hit the brake to stop the car. On the front lawn of my neighbor's house were easily a dozen rabbits. Tiny, little things with coats in varying degrees of brown. A few were nibbling at the grass, their heads down and their ears back, relaxed, but the others stood at attention and looked directly at me. Was it because they considered me a threat, a predator encroaching on their breakfast, or had they been watching me the entire time? I stood and watched them watch me for close to a minute, the drone of talk radio buzzing from the open door of my vehicle, before getting back in and driving away.

My blood was running cold and shivers pulsed through me, making my shoulders convulse. I wasn't imagining the rabbits, they were there, but was I imagining the nefariousness of it all? Was it even possible for bunny rabbits to be wicked and evil, to have dark plans for humanity? I chortled a bit at the thought but I couldn't dismiss it either. I put on my headset and dialed Linda's number, thinking it would settle me down a bit and that her dismissiveness of the phenomena I thought I was witnessing would tether me back to the real world.

Her phone rang and rang.

That's right, I thought, she had a meeting this morning with Pendleton, the graying old fart who held the purse strings of his company's ever increasing wealth in his bony, talon-like hands. Her voice mail message ended and I spoke with a shaky voice that betrayed how calm I wanted to appear.

"Hey, Linda, It's me. Just wanted to check in....see if you saw any more rabbits this morning. It's crazy, I know, but I just saw a number of them on Winston's lawn. Ha-ha, I think we're under attack."

I hung up and peeled off my headset, tossing it on to the passenger seat.

There it was. There was a major part of me that felt like we, Linda

and I at the least and the entire county at the most, were under attack by small, soft, cute, fuzzy, brown, twitchy-nosed bunnies. I decided in that instant that I could not possibly go into the office that day. I turned off River Mist Dr. and on to the highway. I was going to drive, out of the city and out of the damn state if I had to, and I was going to pull myself together. I switched the radio station from talk radio to classic rock and nodded my head to the driving blues of The Doors, getting lost in the the steady rhythm of the guitar until I saw the flashing lights a mile or so ahead. A tiny moan escaped from my mouth. It could have been anybody, but I knew it was Linda.

I ground my foot into the gas pedal and accelerated up the road, the roar of my engine drowning out Jim Morrison's vocals. I was approaching the scene quickly and weaving in and out of the cars who had slowed to pass the accident safely. As my car began to drift back to the left lane, three rabbits hopped out of the tall grass in the median and raced across the street. My instinct to swerve and avoid them was still intact, though not for long, and the car careened off the road. Several officers who were working the accident noticed my errant driving and began to shout at me.

I tried to get a look at the destroyed car that was surrounded by emergency vehicles and personnel, but I was traveling too fast and rage, white-hot anger, was squeezing my vision into a tight tunnel. I pulled the car out of the middle of the road and headed back down the highway towards my home. Woe to any cuddly bunny that crossed my path that morning.

They must have sensed a change in the atmosphere, known that I had declared war on their kind, because they began to attack, as much as miniscule rodents can against a rapidly moving, thousand pound car. They began to pour out of the woods in waves, flooding the highway and hoping to get me to jerk my car out of the way, like my poor, good-hearted wife did, but I was too far gone.

Subconsciously I had been preparing myself for this moment for weeks and I just drove over them. The sound of their bodies being run over by my wheels sounded like snowballs softly hitting the car,

whoomp, whoomp, whoomp.

I could hear tiny bones snapping like dried twigs or thin carrot sticks and mewling, high-pitched screams. Looking back, I'm sure I imagined these sounds, because not only was I laughing like a madman and taunting them (Take that, you little bunny assholes!!) I had turned the radio up loud and the sirens of numerous police cars were getting closer and closer.

Little rabbits tend to hop close to the ground. They skitter to and fro as they frolic from one patch of grass to another. Their bodies are built for leaping though and the next wave of rabbits that came at me were now hurling themselves at my windshield, trying to blind me. I'll admit, it was a bit of a surprise at first, and it did make me lose control of the car for a few moments. I ran into the other lane and nicked a side mirror off a vehicle who honked his disapproval at me.

"Sorry! But can't you see I'm a little preoccupied right now," I yelled, even though the other driver couldn't possibly have heard me. "There's a fucking shield of bunny rabbits blocking my view. No need to help me though. I'm fine."

Somebody bumped me from behind and my neck snapped forward. I assume it was a police officer trying to stop me, but that didn't seem like a good idea at the time. If I stopped, I'm sure I would have drowned, choking beneath a mass of warm, squirming bunny fur. I activated my windshield wipers and knocked a few rabbits off the car, but there were still a lot of them. I pressed the button to release windshield wiper fluid and that was enough to shock another couple off my car.

"You're all wet, you little sons of bitches," I snickered.

I needed a plan. I couldn't go on like this much longer and the police, who were of no use despite my being under attack (I made a note to write a letter to the chief of police when this was all over), seemed to be trying to stop me. Perhaps they thought they could protect me better if I was stopped, but I knew the rabbits would never let that happen. Not now. I had gone from someone to keep an eye on for being suspicious of their activities to their number one

enemy, an aggressor who would do anything to thwart their quest for world domination.

The odds were definitely stacked against me because this wouldn't be over until either I was dead or every last rabbit in the world had been eliminated.

I slammed on my brakes and the car behind me (a cop car?) hit his brakes too, nicking my bumper and spinning into the next lane of traffic. Two more bunnies slid off my windshield and under my wheels. I pressed down on the gas and spun my wheels on their corpses before driving across the highway. I was headed into on-coming traffic but I assumed they had been witnessing this high-speed chase and were proceeding with caution.

I needed to get back to my house. There I would barricade the doors and windows, if it wasn't too late and if they weren't already there waiting for me, and I would be ready to defend myself. I had plenty of food in the pantry and refrigerator (now that I was living by myself - Linda, I'm so sorry) and there was a gun and three boxes of shells in a locked box in my bedroom closet. Maybe I could make it until the government dropped a bomb full of bunny-killing gas on the town.

The rabbits had decided not to attack me in the car anymore but they ran alongside me, racing towards my house. Their plan was to intercept me before I made it inside. It was going to be close. I would have to open the garage door, (couldn't fumble with my front door keys with all of these bunnies nipping at my heels), but that would mean that a number of them would make it inside the garage with me. Luckily, I had a plan.

I cruised back into my cul-de-sac, weaving gently back and forth in an attempt to crush even more of my little, furry enemies beneath my wheels and accelerated as I neared my home. I raised the garage door at the last possible second and sped forward, slamming on my brakes as the windshield nudged the tennis ball letting me know I had pulled forward far enough. I closed the garage door and shut the car off. Bouncing bunny bodies sprung up and down outside the four windows of the car, bumping the doors and running their claws

on the metal. I glanced out the window, trying to get a count, but they kept scampering under the car and out the other side. There could have been four and there could have been forty. I would just have to take my chances.

I saw the large, rusty metal rake hanging on the wall and tried to predict how many steps it would take before I reached it. I thought I could make it in two, turn my back into a corner and just start swinging. I should have known that nothing today would go as planned.

I opened my door and heard the loud whispers of the rabbits claws scratching around the floor of the garage. Focused on the rake on the wall, I wouldn't look down at the ground but I could see flashes of movement in my peripheral vision. I slammed the car door shut quickly and heard the crunch of a rabbit's neck snap. My hand grasped the rake but I couldn't pry it loose from the two nails holding it in place. I could feel sharp bunny teeth pinching at my legs through my pants and I kicked out backwards trying to get them off of me.

The rake would not budge and the bites become more insistent, forcing tiny rivers of my blood to cascade down my legs. I needed to find another plan or work my way to the door to the house fast. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to stop several rabbits from getting in though and once that happened, I feared the flood gates would be open. One particularly large rabbit sprung up and landed briefly on my chest, scratching me with his claws as he fell back to the ground. I started to worry about disease. If these rabbits had in fact been exposed to something that made them so crazy and dangerous, it might affect me too. In fact, it might have already been too late. I knew what I had to do. I started stomping my feet, smushing the bunnies that got in my way, and fought my way back to the car. I jumped in, nudging the corpse of the rabbit whose neck I snapped out of the way, and shut the door. The noises I heard in the garage were still there, permeating the car. I started the engine and cracked my windows just enough for the exhaust to come in and lull me into a deathly slumber. I would kill all of the rabbits in the

garage with the fumes and make sure that I wouldn't be out spreading a human version of this disease as well. It may have already been too late. They may have infected Linda or the troopers and EMTs who tried to help her, but I couldn't worry about that now. I wouldn't worry about any of this anymore. I would just sleep and there would be no rabbits in my dreams.

