



THE
STORY
REPUBLIC

Thirteen Jollifs & Other Stories

Tales of Liskeard, Looe & Polperro

THE RABBITRIES by Jo Lumber

The Rabbitries of Looe were short-term homes for furry residents. Short-term being due to their somewhat shortened lifespan. Of course they were fed and watered, with a roof over their head and plenty of company. But rabbit bonds were severed abruptly. Without so much as a whisker twitch farewell, a parent, grandparent, cousin or sibling, were whisked away to pastures new. The cottontails liked to imagine their relatives enjoying new lives in the gardens of children, being petted and dressed up. Happy hopes to aspire to.

But the reality was rather different. Yes, they would be loved and cherished, stroked, even. But not as they dined on carrot tops and lettuce leaves. But as they warmed the hands of ladies, graced the collars of gentry folk and dangled their feet in pockets for good luck. No hop, skip and jump for those former bedfellows, for they had reached their three-letter destination, fur.

It was uncertain if the inhabitants, whilst in captivity, ever knew this information. The chalet maids and porters carried out their duties with little conversation with the dwellers. Cleaning cages, topping up water, straw and fodder, were routine and repetitive tasks. Occasionally a watery-eyed worker would offer a scratch behind the ears, or a tickle of the tail. Warm was the touch on their fingers and the sense of life pulsed under softness. Knowledge of the rabbits' fate would put a sharp stop to any cossetting. These creatures had a purpose in life, well, essentially in death. There must be no attachment.

The hour before dawn was generally a quiet time in Looe. Fishermen, mice and rats walked the streets. Most folk were fast asleep in bed, stirring only as sunlight licked their windows. But on this particular morning more feet than usual hit the cobbles. Skipping, tripping and jumping for joy, dozens, scores, hundreds of long-eared, long-footed rabbits discovered the delights of leaping and bounding. As curtains drew open, the townsfolk screamed in terror at the sight of the stampede. 'Bolt the doors!' 'Hide!' 'It's an invasion!' 'Plague!' they cried.

Through the alleys, across the quayside the rabbits ran, beyond buildings to the lure of fields. The stench of fish, and tang of town was replaced by the sweet smell of meadow. Green was the colour and birdsong was the sound. Home was no longer constructed of hard wood and sharp metal, instead the warmth of rich earth, deep underground.

The fashion for fur declined, partly due to the invention of man-made fibres, plus the exposure of standards in animal welfare. And perhaps the actions of one unassuming worker played a small part, one who accidentally, on purpose, unlocked the cage doors.

Oops.



LOOE



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