

No way out

Elizabeth Shove

Rabbit: I was busy in a small nesting chamber at the end of one of the tunnels. Our warren is built with many entrances and exits and we can almost always make an escape if one of the holes is obstructed, or under attack. But on this occasion, I was trapped. The nearest junction was a few feet away and my path was blocked. I could smell the intruder and hear its frantic yapping and clawing. I was sure it could smell me too. I turned round a few times, but I refused to panic. In any case there was no where to go. The scrabbling sound was right ahead.

Dog: Rabbits, I just love rabbits. I can pick out the scent from afar and my master and I often walk past the warren on the sandy heath. On this particular day I was off the lead and free to run around on my own. I couldn't resist peeking into a burrow, and of course one peek wasn't enough. I went in a bit further. The smell was overpowering. Just a bit further and ... I pushed and pushed.

To begin with, I didn't realise I was stuck. I couldn't move forwards because of a root, but neither could I back out of the tunnel. I whined a bit. Surely my master would miss me, and then what? I suppose he'd have to dig me out. I am not claustrophobic by nature. But I began to worry a bit: what if something came towards me. I'd have no escape. A rabbit could saunter up to me and snigger in my face. The shame of it. The very thought made me struggle a bit more. Perhaps I could free my back legs a bit, or wiggle sideways.

Man: There used to be a hole in the fence at the back of the heath, out towards the field and the farm track that led to the car park. I'd walked there with Bunty (that's my dog) dozens of times, but someone had put strands of barbed wire across the gap. There was no way out. I turned back and looked for Bunty. She had vanished. I called her, but there was no reassuring bark.

It would soon be dark. I retraced my steps, calling as I went. I searched for what must have been an hour. I was back at the warren when I finally heard a small whimper. 'Bunty', I called again. I got down on my hands and knees and listened. It was definitely her. The sound was coming from a rabbit hole.

Oh no, she's stuck. What now? It wasn't far to the car, and from there, a short drive home. I'd have to dig her out, and for that I'd need a spade. I spoke to Bunty and explained my plan. But my plan was thwarted. The car park gates were locked at dusk. The sign saying 'way out' was wrong, there was no way out. It had started to rain.

I unlocked the car and reached for my phone. I didn't want to ring Mary, but I couldn't leave Bunty alone in the dark, stuck down a rabbit hole. Mary wasn't happy: 'you are what?' 'she's where?' 'how did that happen?' 'didn't you have her on a lead?'. 'Well you'll have to walk home. I can't help it if it's raining now, it's not my fault.' I slid the phone back in the glove compartment and got out of the car. It was raining heavily now. I rummaged around in the boot. Alongside the spare wheel, there was a rusty snow shovel. That would have to do. I set off into the wet and the dark.

Dog: I can't understand human speech, even though I pretend to. So when my master spoke with me, I had no idea what he was saying. Then he was gone leaving me stuck fast in the tunnel. I struggled a bit more, and finally gave up. I went to sleep, dreaming of rabbits.

Rabbit: The yapping had stopped. In fact, I think I heard snoring: but what about my family? They'd know there was a DOG in the warren, and they'd know I was missing. I had to find a way out. My only option was to dig. We doe rabbits can sense the distance to the surface of the earth, and we

know which way to go. The chamber was quite deep, and there were tree roots in the way – but I had no option. I set to work scraping at the sandy soil.

Man: The snow shovel was a flimsy affair, but it was better than nothing. I set to work scraping at the sandy soil. I called to Bunty, but there was no sound. Had I got the right hole? it was hard to tell, and I'm not as steady on my feet as I used to be. I listened again. I was sure I heard a faint yap. After a while, I'd dug quite a good hole of my own. I paused and as I did so, the ground beneath me gave way and I fell into what must have been a large underground chamber. I tried to move but I felt a sharp pain in my knee. I couldn't free myself. My shovel was just out of reach. The phone was back in the car.

Rabbit: As all rabbits know, the problem with digging underground is what to do with the spoil. There was room for some loose earth in the dead-end tunnel and the chamber. I estimated distance and volume and figured that if I was careful I'd be able to dig my way up to the surface. I set to work and eventually bit through the last few roots. I eased myself out into the cold damp air, brushed my ears and sniffed. Human. I couldn't see him, but I could hear his shallow breath. The moon had not yet risen. I edged closer. The man had fallen through the roof of our living room and couldn't get out.



I hopped past the digging tool lying on the ground and made my way to the safety of the thorn bushes on the far side of the warren. That's when the flash-lights came into view. More humans.

Rangers: 'Wait there: we've caught you in the act. Don't run, there is no way out. Poaching. You'll get a heavy sentence for that. Look, he's got a shovel and a dog lead' .

Man: At first, I was pleased to have been found: wet, cold and immobilised in the hole. The Rangers got me out and I managed to limp over to the car park. It gradually dawned on me that I was in quite some bother, and not just because of my gammy knee.

Dog: When I woke, I had no idea where I was. Then I remembered: I was stuck in a rabbit hole on the warren. But there was no rabbit. Instead, I could smell fresh air ahead. If I could just get through this narrow section, I'd be able to escape. As it turned out, it wasn't that difficult. The obstruction had been dislodged and I inched forwards into the soft earth. A few moments later I scrabbled out of the hole, alive but covered in mud.

My master was nowhere to be seen. I went back to the car, but he wasn't there either. I know my way home from the warren, and I set off, looking forward to a rapturous welcome and a good breakfast. Dawn was approaching and the rain had stopped. I scratched at the back door, barked a bit, and looked up appealingly. After what seemed like an age, the door opened. It was Mary. She took one look at me: wet, filthy and bedraggled.

Woman: 'No way' she said. 'Out!'