**“Close Encounters of the Bun Kind”** by Tomasz Brymora [tomekpilot@gmail.com](mailto:tomekpilot@gmail.com)

Sunshine flooded the porch on a clear blue mid-December afternoon as Apricot and Peach arrived on the scene. Peach took a quick hop around the porch, inspected the perimeter, and found two humans. They wore muzzles made of cloth or a strange paper and kept away from each other. One of them smelled of strangeness and other rabbits, and Peach couldn't recognize him. But all seemed well enough.

"Hey, Appy, all's clear here, but there is a weirdo sitting on the floor looking at us. He's not doing anything. We can go back now," said Peach. Apricot looked around cautiously from behind the wicker chair in a corner and nodded, "Yeah, let's go back; I don't even know why we came out here in the first place."

That's when their human, Susan, picked up Peach and set him down on a wicker couch, on the west side of the porch. Before Peach could blink, Apricot was sitting next to him.

"Now what?!" exclaimed Apricot, none too pleased by this turn of events. They both looked at the human, horrified by his proximity, and tried not to show their distress. Their mouths betrayed no trepidation, cloaked in the permafrost of disapproval.

Apricot and her brother, Peach, sat up, keeping one eye on the human and one on the door into the house. As the sunshine washed over them, their coats glowed like amber and honey. They stared down at the stranger in from of them. The human reached out and tried to rub Peach's nose. Peach ducked at first but then relented a little.

"Hey, Appy? Maybe this lunk ain't so bad?" mumbled Peach, trying not to grit his teeth or to show that he enjoyed the nose rub. But when the human offered them a digestive cookie, they knew better than to touch it.

"Peach, are we just gonna sit here, or are we gonna make a run for it?!" whispered Apricot. She was getting impatient while Peach, warming in the sun, got drowsy watching the human.

"Peach! Peach!" Apricot sounded alarmed.

Peach perked up. "What's wrong?"

"What if he's gonna take us away? Did you know Susan has us listed as 'looking for their forever home'? I'm telling you, I'm worried. I didn't want to say anything before, but I don't like this, Peach."

Peach became quiet and furrowed his brows. After a while, he thumped and said, "Oh no, no sir, no way. That's crazy; why would she do that?! Do you think this guy here will abduct us or something? This guy only wants to sit here and stare at us."

"Appy, do you see one of those carrier things anywhere? Because I don't," said Peach, telescoping to look around.

The human picked up a small, black contraption. He pointed it at Peach and Appy and made occasional clicking sounds with it.

"What the thump?! Peach, what is that? What's he doing now?" asked Apricot.

"Um, I don't—wait! He's scanning us! He's scanning us, I tell you! I bet you a mint leaf it's for our spacesuits!" Peach said excitedly.

"Peach, you're off your rocker." Apricot sighed. "I know what he's doing. He's just taking pictures," Apricot said, trying to calm her brother.

"I'm serious, Appy. Humans fly rockets to space—a hundred miles to the east from here. Alpha Centauri, here we come!"

"Oh, Peach, do you need a nap? Are you hungry?" asked Apricot, transforming into the perfect loaf and resting against the back of the couch.

The human kept on clicking, sometimes leaning toward them, then backing away or shifting right or left. This went on and on like that, making minutes feel like hours. At least it was nice and warm, sitting outdoors in the sunlight, yet not getting too hot.

"Peach, ignore him and try napping," said Apricot with her eyes closed. But Peach, whipped into an adventurous frenzy, couldn't sit still and tried climbing all over the couch.

Apricot kept quiet about the human. She realized he was the one that chatted with Susan about coming over, and there was nothing to worry about. Keeping tabs on Susan's phone was paying off now.

She knew the human was only taking pictures and would turn them over to Susan and the rescue. Yes, Susan was indeed trying to find them a new forever home, and this guy was trying to help. Thump! Apricot was hoping all this would be for naught. He was a bun servant; that's true. Over time, buns grew on him more and more. He had a website—a just-for-fun kind of thing, attributing unhealthy amounts of sarcasm to lagomorphs from all hops of life. They were random buns at first, but then he would feature rescue buns looking for forever homes or rescue success stories. Before the pandemic, he would go to those meet-and-greet events that two local rescues were organizing. He would prostrate himself in the x-pens, pretending to beat the ground with his thick forehead. But when no bun was looking, he would sneak in those clicks and steal the buns' expressions when they were at their cutest. He would make up stories about how the buns fly through space and live free of humans and other maladies.

Here he was again, pointing the clicky thing up at the buns, making them look greater than life, grander, taller, sky-bound. Peach—he took a particular liking to Peach. Is it because Peach is missing his right front leg? Is it because that doesn't slow him down one bit? That is Peach—he adapted very well. He bikies on, he overbuns, and if you give him half a chance, he will set out for Alpha Centauri in a heartbeat!

Appy looked at Susan, their faithful servant. She's been with the rescue forever and carries on with the day-to-day grind, the caring routine only a few can handle. Take Binks, for example, the elder bun in residence. One day, he had a good forever home, and the next, he didn't. It all changed when he arrived at Susan's. She slept on the floor next to him when he was going through some rough patches and saved him from the great beyond.

The clicking stopped; the human set his apparatus on the ground. Apricot, disturbed by the silence, woke up from her nap in the sun.

"What's he doing, Peach?" asked Appy.

"I don't know. The humans are yakking away again. I can't read their lips through those muzzles, you know," said Peach, pretending not to pay attention to the humans.

Out of the blue, Susan got up and whisked away Peach and Appy one by one. You could barely hear Appy briefing the other buns about the encounter, "No, don't worry, AJ; they sit and look at you. What? No, you silly bun! They're not gonna kidnap you; they're not from Alpha Centauri. They're just humans."

A moment later, AJ Cannon, a dashing, permanent resident, took over the couch on the porch and basked in the late afternoon sun, whiskers twitching in the breeze.