

# Keeping a fluffy, fragile beast alive

They hoped that their rabbit, and their love, would prove resilient

## Modern Love

BY MARK MAYER

Ashley's true love was a rabbit named Judy. We were midway through our coffees at the Java House when I mentioned I had never met the rabbit she so often talked about, and Ashley immediately busied our mugs and hurried us to her apartment.

She'd moved to town four months ago and still hadn't unpacked. Cardboard boxes lined the walls of her apartment, as if making way for the large cage in the center. "It's Judy!" Ashley said, flinging her arms in the cage's direction.

I wasn't sure how to greet a rabbit. "Hiya, Judy," I said in my dog voice. I waved.

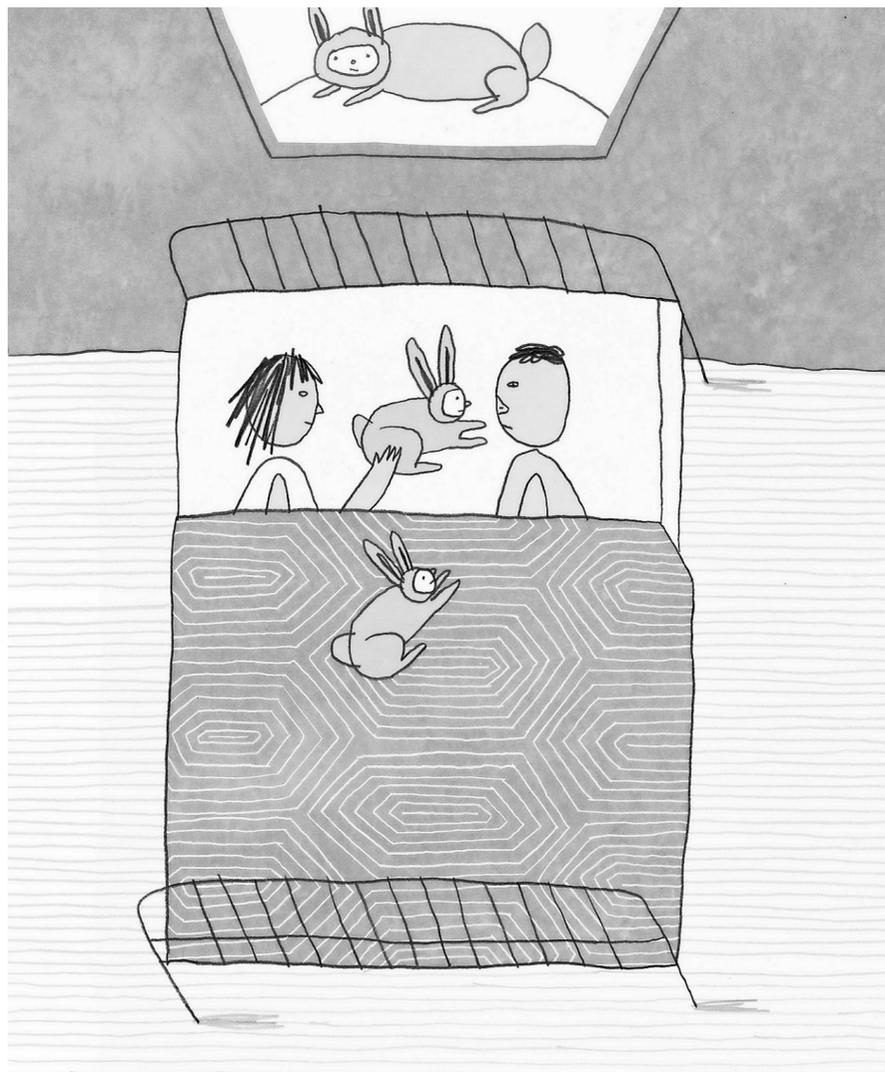
Judy did not seem impressed. She raised her ears from a head that remained at rest atop two rolls of dewlap and twitched her nose as if to swipe me aside.

Layered in her own surfeit of furs, Judy carried herself like a czar in minks. Ashley opened the cage, and Judy allowed me, as if paying obeisance, to touch her spotted coat. "Am I not the softest thing in the world?" she seemed to ask.

I expected things to warm between Judy and me, but I didn't know how to court a rabbit. I rabbit-sat for Ashley (just as a friend) a couple of times over the next months when she was out of town. This entailed providing Judy with kibble, romaine and twice daily hay. I would read on Ashley's couch while Judy hopped around, greasing the legs of the coffee table with her chin, marking her territory against me.

Ashley had told me I would be able to wrangle Judy back into her cage if I made a bloop sound, so I waddled after her bloop-blooming and shooshing the air with my hands, but Judy would not be harried by bloops like mine.

The first day I made the mistake of picking her up, as I had seen Ashley do many times. (Judy allowed herself to be carried like a baby, feet up, in Ashley's arms.) But unworried thigh strength hid beneath Judy's soft pelt, and she immediately bounded off, leaving deep purple scratches on my wrists.



BRIAN REA

Judy eyed me the whole chaste year I spent hanging out at Ashley's apartment, as if questioning what I thought I was doing there.

A few days after Ashley and I finally kissed, she called me in tears. Judy's cage was soaked with blood.

We rushed her to the vet, where they cut her open, removed several afflicted organs and sewed her up again. While we waited, the vet said that rabbits often did not wake from surgery.

Rabbits don't like pain, the vet said. Too much stress and they tend to quit.

I found myself feeling envious of rabbits as the vet explained Judy's fragile physiology. Natural selection hadn't equipped me with a way to grant myself an easy death. But rabbits, apparently, were adept at having quick heart attacks when under mortal threat. I wondered how Judy would decide: Tough it out or fold?

It was spring. The nights I had imagined with Ashley were not set at Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails Veterinary Hospital, but when Judy finally woke, Ashley's joy was all-embracing.

The vet, though, did not seem re-

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lieved. Judy wasn't eating and drinking, and until she did, we had to fear a condition called gastrointestinal stasis, in which a rabbit's digestive system shuts down and the animal slowly bloats to death. I watched Ashley's face go ashen again and wondered if she really wanted me here for this. Something in me said: "Back away."

Good relationships, it seemed to me, were based on mutual niceness, a gentle zone where friends and partners lived out their affections. The rabbit had not been especially nice to me, not compared with golden retrievers I had known, and I didn't feel like being that nice to her, not since she chewed through my MacBook cord. Now the vet was handing me several IV rehydration bags and a mix of mealy food paste we were supposed to force-feed to a rabbit that I doubted even wanted me in her life.

But it was a two-person task to administer her critical-care rabbit food, a powdered blend of timothy grass and soybean hulls to be mixed with warm water and syringed thrice daily past Judy's unfriendly teeth. Listening to

the vet's instructions, I understood I was conscripted.

Judy's mealtimes were small sagas. Ashley would lie on the floor and press her forehead against Judy's to calm her. Judy would then let herself be picked up and swaddled in a bath towel. Ashley would tenderly elevate the bundled rabbit to the couch, where I would hold Judy against the cushion like a football while Ashley tried to get a syringe nib past her lip.

At the first whisker grazing, Judy would hunch powerfully backward, hiding her face in the towel. If the syringe neared again, she would buck and bolt from the couch altogether.

It was infuriating to be angry at a rabbit. Couldn't she understand I was trying to save her life? I could, of course, muscle her down against the couch cushion if I had to, but she fought me so fiercely that I worried she would pull her stitches out.

Ashley and I screamed at each other as we took turns trying to pry up Judy's lip and slip in the pasty nutrients: "You're going to hurt her!" "She'll die if she doesn't eat!" And in

# Is it right to disinherit our heroin-addict son?

## The Ethicist

BY KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

*Our son has been a heroin addict for 10 years. He has drifted in and out of homelessness and prison. We have spent a fortune on rehab, counseling, legal fees and more, which changed nothing. We love our son, but we have also painfully learned that he is an inveterate liar, will steal anything not nailed down and has an incredible capacity for manipulation. We are in the process of updating our wills to reflect this reality, and we are struggling to articulate a fair plan as to inheritances. Our other children are living normal, happy, productive lives. Under other circumstances, we would split everything equally among our children, but for our addicted son, this would be like throwing gasoline on a fire. Even the process of distributing family treasures is fraught, knowing our son would head straight to a pawnshop. We are thinking of putting his share into a trust to be used exclusively for his future health needs, rehab and, hopefully, sobriety. But again, we love our son, and it is heartbreaking to realize we are essentially leaving him nothing tangible. What is the ethical thing for us to do? Name Withheld*

**I AM SORRY** to hear about your son. Knowing that his mistreatment of you and others is a result of an addiction he has not learned to manage can't make his behavior any less painful to experi-

ence. It explains, but it doesn't excuse.

And your reasoning is sound: He would probably spend any money you leave him on doing himself further harm. It's true that the allocations in a will have an expressive aspect as well as a material one, but your love for your son would be conveyed by the consideration you are showing in setting up a trust.

We should respect the autonomy of others. Yet addiction is effectively a disease of autonomy. Treating addicts who are not in recovery as if they can make reasonable decisions is a mistake. Better to ensure that the money will be used for his genuine welfare.

*I am an adjunct instructor at a small art school I will call College A. Because of the financial instability of this position, several of my colleagues and I also teach for a different school online, College B.*

*Throughout my time working for College B, I've been asked to rewrite and develop course content for its online curriculum, a great source of revenue. To do so, I have used my expertise from teaching previous classes, but I have always been careful to change the course so that the students have a unique experience; I believe it is my ethical obligation to create new content if I am being paid to do so.*

*Also, the students we teach at both schools will essentially be one another's competition upon graduation, so it is important to me that each school show distinct projects. It has never been explicitly stated by either school, but I assume that they do not want me taking content I have developed from one college and selling it to another.*



TOMMY

*Several weeks ago, I was grading final portfolios for the students in College B and noticed that their projects looked extremely similar to work I have seen from students in College A. When I looked, I saw that the professor for the class for College B was the same professor who teaches the course at College A. It appears that my colleague developed the curriculum for one college, and instead of developing something new, self-plagiarized and sold duplicate content. My colleague's employment at both colleges precedes mine, so I am not sure which college the colleague originally created the content for and which college received the plagiarized content.*

*To me, there are several ethical issues here: First, self-plagiarism or plagiarism is grounds for expelling a student; I suspect this would also be true for teachers. Second, it is my understanding that what is created for one school belongs to the school, so this is copyright infringement. Third, tuition for each of the schools is different, but students are getting the same product at two different prices. Fourth, when they apply for jobs, students are competing with what they believe is a portfolio of unique projects, but they are not. When we homogenize the curriculum of education for this degree, we lose*

*the diversity of thought that comes from new pedagogical experiences. Finally, online education in my industry is growing, and my colleague seems to be the first one in the door developing course content for all the schools; I suspect this will continue if the colleague is not stopped.*

*What is my ethical obligation here? I have a good rapport with both of my bosses, but if I were to report my colleague, it would be obvious it was me. I have been paid in the past to fix and refine courses that this colleague developed for the online curriculum for College B, content that was also self-plagiarized and raises questions about quality, too. If I were to report this colleague, I would potentially be securing additional employment for myself to rewrite the courses, which could be viewed as self-serving. What's a prof to do? Name Withheld*

**IT ISN'T EASY** to keep clear about issues of intellectual property, as your letter shows. Generally speaking, when teachers at one institution join the faculty of another, whether as a visitor or as a permanent member, they are free to use a curriculum that they have developed, unless the first institution has acquired copyright to it. One college hires a Milton scholar from another college, and the syllabus of the Milton seminar she has developed over the years comes with her. Nobody sees this as a problem. And given that there are some terrific and widely used textbooks, plenty of students study the same curriculum at different institutions.

Indeed, the whole idea of self-plagiarism is distinctly unhelpful. Certainly, there can be issues of property and of contract here. If you create an intellectual product, it may be wrong to sell it to someone because you've already sold it to someone else or because you otherwise agreed not to do so — or simply because there's a settled expect-

the middle of it all, we would start fighting about why it had taken me a year to kiss her.

As I cleaned the spilled rabbit food from the couch cushions, I thought about the couches of my life, all the times I had been wedged between parents to be told about a death or divorce. I could remember the couches more clearly. On this couch, Ashley and I were already having fights grievous enough to ensure I would remember this fabric forever, no matter how short our romance proved to be.

I watched Ashley rolling her forehead against Judy's or barely smoothing the fur between her eyes. Judy didn't hop away or hunch back or even blink. She didn't look comfortable, but she seemed to know she was loved. That didn't mean she had to pretend to enjoy every minute or love the meal paste we were forcing her to eat.

"O.K., it's time," I said after a while, because food had to be followed by drink. Ashley picked Judy back up and pet her while I hung an IV bag from the lamp. The needles were fearsome, wide as cocktail straws. When Judy was ready, Ashley squeezed my hand and nodded. Neither of us could watch as I pinched a tent of skin from Judy's back and jabbed the needle in.

Judy flinched but stayed. We opened our eyes and looked at each other. Then we switched on the drip.

A rehydrated rabbit is a funny thing. We joke about Judy's dromedary days still, how she would drag her fluid-filled lump across the living-room floor, taking uncertain, lopsided hops that audibly sloshed.

Two months ago, we got married, and in thinking about the forever thing, I have been remembering the vet's talk: how, beyond some threshold of pain and stress, rabbits tend to quit. I suppose it remains to be seen whether Judy is invincible. Probably she isn't. But possessed of the ability to stop her heart at any time, she consistently chooses to stick around.

Judy outlived that couch, which got torn up in a move, and another couch, too, which we left behind in Denver when we moved to France, where Ashley has work.

Judy (and Roberta, too, our second rabbit) live in Paris now. The apartment we rented came with a bright red couch, and quite possibly we will have to swaddle Judy and pin her against it to dose her with something she doesn't like. Ashley or I may have to spend an angry solo night on the red couch from time to time. But we like it — for fights or, you know, making up. For watching the rabbits hop around the floor.

To get here, Judy and the rest of us had to drive to Chicago, the closest city where a rabbit-friendly airline flies direct to Paris. We had to clutch Judy and Roberta to our chests and walk through the T.S.A. scanner. We had to coo at them to keep their fragile hearts calm during takeoff and landing.

Our friends and family advised us that international travel with rabbits sounded like an avoidable torment, and of course they were correct. But so what? Love entails plenty of those. Opt out too often and you opt out of the thing itself.

Not us. Our love is a tough little monster. Also the softest thing in the world.

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