

The Emperor Who Was Afraid of Bunny Rabbits

A Story for All Ages by Aaron McEmrys

About two hundred years ago there was a powerful Emperor named Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon started out by taking over France, built a huge army and soon ruled over most of Europe. This is a story about him, and I'll tell you right now that it is mostly true – I will leave it to you to figure out which parts are made up and which are not.¹

Napoleon was just a little guy, not much taller than some of you here today, but he had very big dreams, and most of them were about taking over more and more countries. Napoleon dreamed of someday being the most powerful person in the whole world, and so he built his army bigger and bigger all the time.

Soon millions of men had been forced to put on a blue uniform and march all over Europe fighting, fighting and fighting. The Emperor did not see his soldiers as people so much as things that he could move around a map of Europe like chessmen, as if it was all just a big game.

It was very important to Napoleon that everyone thought he was the best at everything, so he was always showing off and trying to be better than everyone. He also cheated at almost every game he played, but his Generals were so afraid of him that they pretended not to notice.

One day, the Emperor decided he wanted to go rabbit hunting, but they couldn't find any rabbits for him to shoot. He got angrier and angrier and started screaming, "I want rabbits!" Finally his most loyal General, Berthier, went off to see if he could find any.

He did find some, a whole bunch in fact, and so the Emperor went back to his palace to get dressed for the hunt. But in his excitement the Emperor forgot his coat, and it was very cold outside. Standing in the empty field where he would soon be shooting rabbits, Napoleon noticed that one man was dressed in a very warm and comfy looking coat. "I want that coat", he demanded, and a few of his generals went over and ripped the coat off the poor man and threw him down into the snow. Napoleon put on the warm and comfy coat and felt much better. He didn't even notice that now the poor man was turning blue with cold.

Finally General Berthier showed up with a huge cart full of rabbits – hundreds and hundreds of them. Napoleon rubbed his hands together eagerly – soon he would be shooting them – he could hardly wait!

¹ Or, if you really want to know, check out [The Campaigns of Napoleon](#), by David Chandler (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966) p. 593

Berthier opened the cart and all the rabbits hippety-hopped down into the meadow in a big herd. But then something odd happened – or rather didn't happen. The rabbits, you see, didn't run away. They just sat there twitching their rabbit noses and staring at the Emperor. Napoleon aimed his gun at them and yelled, "You better run, silly rabbits, because I am going to shoot every single one of you!" But they didn't run. Napoleon's eyes widened in surprise.

Not only did the rabbits not run away, but they started staring at the Emperor even more intently with a remarkably unafraid look in their little black eyes! And then, as the Emperor huffed and puffed with anger and surprise, the whole herd of rabbits started to hop, not away from the Emperor and his big gun – but right AT HIM!

Faster and faster they hopped toward the Emperor in a huge furry wave. You see it turned out that the man Napoleon had taken the warm and comfy coat from was actually the owner of all those rabbits! General Berthier had not been able to find any wild rabbits, so, afraid of the Emperor's temper – he had bought several hundred tame rabbits.

When the rabbits saw Napoleon in that warm and comfy coat it made him look exactly like the nice man who fed them their carrots and lettuce every day. And so they hippety-hopped toward the Emperor for their usual breakfast.

Napoleon didn't know this of course, all he knew was that he was being chased by several hundred rabbits with sharp pointy teeth! He turned and ran, throwing his gun down as he went, with the rabbits hot on his heels.

Into his carriage he jumped, screaming for the driver to drive. But some of the rabbits even managed to jump into the carriage with him and his Generals could hear him screaming in terror. They had to try very hard not to laugh.

Soon Napoleon, Emperor of France and half of Europe, was gone, his carriage fading into the distance with a rattle. Poor General Berthier knew he was going to be in really hot water with the Emperor and he turned back to the meadow wondering how on earth he was going to gather up so many rabbits.

But it wasn't hard at all. The rabbits, sensing that he was a good man, hippety-hopped on over, hoping that maybe he would be polite enough to give them their breakfast. Berthier, dropped to his knees and started petting and hugging them. They were soft and warm and it felt so good to bury his face in their fur.

In then something inside that brave General shifted. He stood up, took off his sword belt and through his sword far into the woods. He took off his big plumed hat and kicked it like a soccer ball. He ripped off his fancy gold medals and gave them to the man whose coat Napoleon had stolen. And then he picked up a beautiful grey bunny named Emily, tucked her under his arm – and walked away to start a new life.

You see, Berthier had learned something very important. He learned that just as rabbits are not just furry little robots put on this earth to be hunted for our amusement, neither are human beings mere toys to be moved and sacrificed like chess pieces in some stupid game. And so he walked away.

Oh, if only the Emperor would have been brave enough to stop and pet those bunnies! Maybe he too would have learned something important, and so much pain and loss could have been avoided.