

Bella Bunny's Penalty Shoot-Out © Claire Booker

Bella lived with her mother in a small hutch in the O'Grady's garden. Although she loved carrots tops and cabbage and scratching behind her ears, Bella didn't want to be just an ordinary rabbit. She wanted to play football.

Bella watched the O'Grady children kicking the ball about with envy.

"I wish they'd let me join in," she squeaked to her mother. "I'm sure I'd be very good at it."

Sally and little James often missed the ball or kicked it into their neighbour's garden. This really annoyed their elder brother, Tim, who was already in the school football team. He wore special boots with studs in and practised every day, kicking the ball as hard as he could between the rabbit hutch and the compost bin. That part of the wall was goal. Tim loved scoring goals.

Bella sat with her nose pressed against the wire of the hutch, twitching with excitement.

"If only I wasn't stuck inside this hutch," she squeaked.

"You're a rabbit, Bella," said her mother. "Rabbits don't play football."

"Then why are we so good at kicking?"

One day, Tim got so fed up with Sally and James losing his ball and getting in his way, he decided on a clever plan to stop them.

"I bet you can't stop me scoring ten goals in a row," he said.

"I bet we can!" answered Sally.

"I'll give you all my pocket money for the next month if you do."

"All your pocket money?" James was amazed.

"But if I do score ten goals in a row . . . then you both agree never ever to play football with me again".

Sally and James looked at each other. One month's pocket money! If they saved just one of the ten goals, they'd be able to buy sweets and chocolate until it came out of their ears. And there'd be enough left over to buy their own football.

"Is it a bet, then?" asked Tim.

"Yes!" shouted Sally and James enthusiastically.

Bella watched from her hutch as Tim placed his football on the special spot in front of goal. Sally and James took it in turns to be goalkeeper.

Tim scored his first goal . . . and then he scored another . . . and then another and another and another. He really was very good.

Thud, THUD! Round as the moon, and fast as a shooting star, the ball shot past James yet again and hit the wall.

"Goal!" shouted Tim, throwing up his arms in triumph. "Eight nil - to me!"

"That's not fair," cried James. "You were too fast."

"Of course, I'm too fast. That's why you're going to lose the bet."

James burst into tears. He felt so stupid.

"I'm going to play with Bella", he said, running over to the hutch.

"We're not allowed to get the rabbits out. Not while we're playing football."

"Then you'll just have to stop playing," answered James angrily.

"That's cheating," said Tim. "We've got a bet on."

James opened the hutch door defiantly and pulled Bella out.

"If Bella gets hit, it'll be YOUR fault," said Tim. "I've got two more penalties to take."

Bella loved being out of doors. She thumped her hind legs with pure joy. Right in front of her nose was a beautiful silver and white football. It was so near, she could smell the leather. She pushed

the ball with her nose. It was heavier than she imagined, but it moved. She pushed it again, and again . .

"Look!" said James. "Look at Bella!"

Bella was pushing the football round and round the flower pots at the bottom of the garden.

"She's dribbling!"

Bella decided to try something new. She hopped right over the ball and kicked out with her hind legs. It went flying, and hit Tim on the knee.

"Ouch!"

"Nice shot, Bella!" laughed Sally.

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