

Well, the schools are back and summer is officially over. I do hope your pets made it through safely. I can remember the end of term battles to be the one chosen to look after the class mice or hamsters over the holidays. One year, when my sister was in charge, little Coffee and Cream managed to escape their temporary refuge in a bucket while she cleaned their cage. My cousin swears blind to this day that Coffee climbed on the back of Cream and then helped him up in their audacious bid for freedom. They spent a good few hours behind the wall before my dad and his toolbox got home from work. If he hadn't rescued them I'm not sure how we would have explained it all to Miss Wilson when we went back in August. In retrospect she did make a very good job the next year of explaining the replacement of Houdini with another hamster that went by the more fortunate name of Lucky.

Who would dare to look after someone else's pets? I have been entrusted with babies, toddlers and teenagers but never with so much as a goldfish. On the other hand, I have in the past recklessly abandoned my own pets with anyone who looks even a little bit keen, far less responsible.

I remember coming home very late one night to discover my stepdaughter in tears as she had 'lost' my two new hens. She had been all around the garden, shining a torch into trees and calling out the names that they wouldn't have known. I then did the same for an hour before deciding that the polecats would have had their tea by then and that the best I could do was leave the door open and a light on in the back porch in the vain hope that they might return at some point in the night. I got up very early the next morning and discovered them roosting in a tiny wee nook in the hen-house roof where they had obviously been driven by the bossier established members of the household.

Maybe that experience is what drove her to the other side of the world; she is heading towards Adelaide on a road trip while we look after her pet rabbit. Bunny (yes that is her name) is a sweet little thing although she does have a tendency to sit on your head during Torchwood.

We head off tomorrow to Skye for our annual sojourn, and yesterday my in-laws arrived to house and pet-sit for us (although they think they are having a holiday). We have instructed them thoroughly in chicken, rabbit, cat and dog care and given instruction in the technical aspects of running our house. I never realised how many things we have that don't quite work until I started to explain the trick to close the front door, the special technique for opening the washing machine and how to keep your bedroom door rabbit-proof.

All was going well until this morning when my husband noticed that Bunny wasn't quite herself. Don't ask me how he knew as rabbits have a habit of looking very much the same all the time. On close inspection he found evidence of something called fly-strike (only look this up if you have a strong stomach) and quickly whisked her off to the vets. The magnificent Mr Fraser noted how quickly he had spotted the trouble, did what vets have to do and sent her home, a little bit shocked and humiliated but absolutely cured. Had we not been so quick off the mark, he told us, Bunny would have died within a few days in the care of said in-laws and with her human mother at the other end of the world.

Tomorrow, as advised, we will do some salt-water cleaning of Bunny's delicate parts and ensure everything is as it should be before we set off on our travels. My mother-in-law is a retired nurse, full of good sense and with a great love of animals. She is far more capable than I am and I know Bunny is in good hands. I so glad that my husband's care saved her from having to cope with breaking the news of Bunny's demise and I wish them all a stress-free fortnight without me.