

The Rabbit Story: An Imaginary Tale Part III: The Stranger

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The stranger walked down a path through the woods. Each day at this time he found a way to sneak away from the town to explore the woods. He knew these paths intimately, and they traveled well in his mind during the times he could not get away. The woods were his quite place to reflect.

He held a somewhat important position in the town, an administrator known by many for his title, his judgment, and his generosity. However, in his heart he longed for more and sought these woods as his refuge. He wished to escape the demands of his position and the endless parade of well wishers. Each wanted something from him - a favorable judgement, an introduction, a favor for their family. He felt their smiles transparent and their words hollow. So much deceit made him feel lonely. His world so lacked honesty that he grew weary and tired of his life.

So, he sought a respite in these woods - a chance to get away and refresh himself, even if for a short while. He learned that if he changed his suit for a set of loose fitting clothes and donned a hat, that people would cease to recognize him and actually look at him differently. They would judge him unimportant and leave him alone. During this time he felt free to explore the woods without worry that someone would recognize him and want something from his position.

Today there was another reason for his visit. He was eager to find two new "friends." They were not really friends, just fellow travelers on his journey through the woods. But both interested him and made him long for a connection and something more.

The first traveler was a rabbit! A small cottontail rabbit he chanced upon in the woods. This rabbit was different than other animals in the woods. He sensed that she was intelligent and wise, much more than was expected from a simple rabbit. He could see it in her eyes and her movements - there was depth and presence that offered more to those who could see and were patient. He knew she was a cautious rabbit, but also one of great worth. He longed to befriend her and gain her trust.

The first time he saw her, she did not notice him at all. He was sitting quietly along a brook. He had taken off his shoes and dangled his toes in the water. The rabbit hopped into a small clearing, unaware of the stranger's presence. The rabbit sang a rabbit song, happy and safe for the moment. He watched the rabbit rub her nose and wiggle her ears in a playful way. He saw her with her guard down, unaware he or any danger was near. She was so cute, so vulnerable, and so playful!

He dared not move or make a sound for fear he would startle her and lose the moment. He wanted only to watch and enjoy. So, he sat quietly for a long time before the rabbit finally moved on.

After that he saw the rabbit many times in the woods, but never for long. Although it was a curious rabbit, she was always on her guard, ever alert, ever watchful, ever vigilant. When she saw him she ran away and he was left watching her white cottontail as it disappeared into the bushes.

“Do not run, little rabbit,” he thought to himself. “I will not harm you or make you feel unsafe.” But how does one assure a rabbit that it is safe? Only time and patience are useful in this endeavor.

There was one time that was different, and he remembered the incident well. The stranger was walking along a familiar path when suddenly the rabbit darted in front of him. Instinctively the rabbit froze, as did the stranger. The evening air was still, and the moment silent, as both of them remained motionless. They stared at one another for the longest time.

The rabbit is looking straight at me” thought the stranger. He did not expect this. “Perhaps she is frightened,” He wanted to assure the rabbit that e would not harm her, so he tried to make his expression as soft and inviting as possible. To his surprise, he noticed the rabbit’s eyes soften and give way to another emotion.

“Was it compassion? Understanding? A trust?” The stranger could not say, but he felt something shared between them. He wanted to explore it further, but the rabbit sensed something was not right and pulled away. In a flash she left the path, darting into the cover of bushes.

The stranger never forgot this chance meeting. He vowed never to underestimate the rabbit again and looked for her on every walk. The next time he would seek to share more and gain her trust. He always brought dried fruits and carrots to offer the rabbit, and he was prepared to wait quietly until she felt safe.

The other “friend” in the woods was also familiar, but still more a stranger than a friend. It was a beautiful lady who frequented these woods. The lady had taken to a particular bench in a particular grove of trees in a quiet section of the woods. She seemed to like the quiet and seclusion of that place and she sat and read her book. When he passed her he only had the briefest of moments to look at her. Even so, he noticed her eyes were dark brown, and deep and expressive. Her hair was long, dark and silky, at times wild and free and at other times pulled back in a bun. He rarely saw her smile, but when she did it light up her face.

He had seen her in town, but knew little about her. Her heard bits and pieces of people’s gossip about her:

*She was mostly alone;
She wasn't friendly;
She was too intelligent for a woman;
She had a sadness about her;
She kept to herself too much and wasn't comfortable around others.*

"People in town are cruel and judgmental," he thought. "They do not take the time to know her. They cannot see her beauty, the wisdom in her eyes, and the depth of her feelings."

He wanted to know her better, but they never spoke. He was too shy to speak to her in the woods. And besides, in his walking clothes she might take him for a beggar. But if he approached her in town he was afraid that she would only see his position, and not who he really was. He could only hope and wait.

On this particular day, much to his surprise, he saw both the lady and the rabbit on the path before him. He was far enough away that they didn't notice him, so he slowed his pace and watched. They were staring at each other intently, and every once in a while the lady would speak to the rabbit! He was too far away to hear her words, but he could tell they were talking to one another. What an unexpected sight! It made him smile.

"What could they be talking about?" he wondered.

He tired imagined their conversation. "Where they talking about something they shared, perhaps the love of this woods?" He tried to think, but who could imagine a conversation between a beautiful lady and a cute little rabbit?

Even at a slower pace, he grew closer and closer to the lady and the rabbit. Not wanting to surprise them, he decided to make an obvious noise to announce his presence. At that he quickened his step so as not to appear suspicious. Upon hearing the noise, the rabbit darted into the bushes. The lady was startled as well, but only for a moment and quickly lowered her eyes onto the pages of her book.

The stranger smiled ever slightly. He noticed her book was upside down! "She pretends not to notice me, but maybe there is hope," he thought. Perhaps there would a chance to speak one day. But not today, and he kept walking past her and out of sight.

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The lady also smiled when she realized she was pretending to read a book that was upside down. "Did he notice?" she wondered, "Did I see him smile, ever so slightly?"

She watched him as he disappeared from view. She did not dare to speak or show her feelings, but in her heart she was excited. Each day she waited for the stranger to pass. She longed to be able to speak to him and to trust, but trusting was a long way off. For now she waited and wondered about him. She could see he was kind and gentle, not like the people in town. She wondered about where he lived and what he did for a living. She sensed there was more to him than first appearances.

The lady straightened her book and began to read. A single tear welled up in her eye and began to roll down her face, somewhere in between her cheek and falling.