

## Moon Rabbit

Only a few years ago, or maybe it has already been a little more time than that, there was a little boy who lived in a children's home together with his little sister and fifty-four other children. They used to imagine the times when they would be grown up, and they told each other what they planned to do then.

Only the little boy couldn't help dreaming of an escape right now, because the people at the orphanage did not treat the children in friendly ways. The boy had to admit that there was always enough food, and their beds and laundry were always clean, but when the children did things the head of the home did not like, the children were beaten and had to stay in their rooms for the rest of the day.

Once, the boy remembered, he had brought a stray dog and tried to hide it under his bed. The dog looked famished, and his fur was mangy, but it had large brown eyes that smiled at the boy in loving admiration. On the seventh day, however, one of the assistants at the children's home had discovered his pet and taken it away from him. The boy himself had been beaten with the assistant's belt, and he was afraid the dog might be treated badly as well.

Although from the look of the assistant the boy had suspected that he had brought the dog to a new home where it would be safe, the blows had hurt both his body and his soul, and what was more, his sister had cried for hours on end. That was the day when he decided to run away as soon as possible.

He knew exactly what he would do: He would take his little sister and one or two of their friends and build a small log cabin in the woods, just big enough to give space for a bed, a fireplace and his little sister's rocking-horse. And they would have a watchdog to warn them in case somebody should come to take them back. Maybe they would even be reunited with the dog that had been taken away from them.

The little boy was happy each time he imagined his log cabin, because he loved his sister, he enjoyed the scent of wood, and he was very fond of the forest that would give them shelter. And, of course, he knew that his sister loved her rocking-horse. That is why he wanted to take it with them. And if there was one thing he knew for sure, it was that every stray animal that would seek refuge at their cabin would be welcome. Always.

Those were the dreams that kept sweeping through the little boy's mind. You might want to close your eyes for a moment and imagine the cabin... Surely you can smell the wooden logs that form the walls, the fragrance of the forest trees and plants outside, and the wet fur of the watchdog that has just taken a bath in the nearby pond! Yes, this is what the little boy wanted: Living in peace, and turning compassion into actions that helped everybody, including the boy himself.

Now, on the other hand, imagine the little boy walking along a huge cornfield. The green leaves have already grown to be of that certain shade of yellow that announces the height of summer, and the rich odours of harvest time hover in the air. While the boy is strolling along, the sun slowly sets in the west, covering the surface of the earth with a peaceful coat of dark blue on one side and with a flaming sensation of purity on the other. After a while, the boy reaches the edge of a forest, but it is not the forest where his cabin stands.

Suddenly, misty clouds are blowing along the pathway. Has he just perceived an owl crying, or was that strange sound some kind of sensual error, a hallucination? The little boy realizes that all his senses are alarmed and wide awake. Everything around him seems to divide up into small amounts of information, like single pictures he looks at one after another: The fog is getting denser. An owl hoots in the distance, just once. A rabbit with large, gentle eyes crosses his way.

„Well“, the little boy’s thoughts tell him, „the presence of rabbits means that at least there’s no fox around.“ He is afraid of foxes, and he knows well that large populations of rabbits can only exist in foxless areas. Exactly at that moment, however, a fox appears in pursue of the rabbit.

The little boy is frightened to the innermost part of his heart. His fear has passed the final door beneath which the state of complete helplessness begins. The ground seems to tremble, and he starts running blindly through the woods.

His thoughts are running, too: He himself is safe now, but the fox is still going after the rabbit. The boy knows he should help the rabbit, and he wishes to do so from the roots of his humanity. But how is he supposed to help the rabbit? And what will there be for the fox to eat if he does?

Some restless twenty seconds or so later, the little boy decides to help the rabbit, because after all, the fox will always be able to hunt another animal later on, but there must be a reason, the boy keeps thinking, there must definitely be a reason why he is here at this very moment, and why he is the only creature willing to help. Always help the weakest being, a voice from outside and inside alike sings into his heart, and the boy turns around.

All the way back, the voice inside him keeps contradicting itself: It is dangerous to touch a wild animal, do not get near it... But the rabbit will die if I don’t... But if I do, the fox won’t have anything left to eat... The voices spin around so wildly in the little boy’s head that when he finally reaches the place where the fox and the rabbit had been, he is more than glad to see through the fog that the rabbit has reached a rabbit-size hole in the ground and, jumping in, finds shelter there. The fox has obviously given up the chase to look for food somewhere else, since its shadow is still discernible some fifty yards away or so, strolling away from them. With relief, the boy turns around again and continues his journey through the web of wadded waves of watery air, until he reaches a very peculiar place.

In front of the boy, a shining piece of light is lying on the swampy ground. Dust is dancing on the path leading from there up to the moon, and the little boy’s eyes follow it without being ordered to. There, in the middle of the moon, he realizes the form of a rabbit turned upside-down, but looking as if it were alive. When the boy tries hard, really hard, to discern the animal in detail, the rabbit even seems to open its eyes and watch him. The boy takes a deep breath and sighs, thinking, „Now, at least there’s no foxes on the moon. The man in the moon can take care of his rabbit, at least. And my rabbit will be safe tonight, too.“

Exactly at that moment, the little boy’s eyes are caught by a twinkling star that is blinking with its single shining eye. Suddenly feeling a strong desire to tell his little sister about the deep-rooted joy that has begun to fill his heart, the boy starts running again, but he’s unable to move - he struggles, again and again...

And then he woke up.

On the verge of crying, desperately fighting to keep his tears inside for he knew they would become an ocean if they were set free, he sneaked along the endless corridor on the second floor of the children's home. No pictures, no ornaments whatsoever made the empty walls appear a little more friendly. He looked to the left, then looked to the right, and finally he moved the doorknob and opened the door to the girls' dormitory.

Careful not to wake up the other girls, he tiptoed to his sister's bed, then shook her arm gently. She woke up, and he told her of his dream. He put a tiny bit of voice in his speech, for he knew that, at night, whispering can be much louder than a soothing voice.

While he was talking, light fell through the window, for no shutters held it back. The moon was there.

„And then it wasn't true“, the boy suddenly cried, remembering. „I woke up. It was all dreaming.“

„Not true?“, his little sister asked. „Of course it was true. Look at that star over there! - No, not that one. Above it, that one! Look, it's blinking an eye! This must be your star, *our* star, the one that greeted you when you felt glad for the rabbit, don't you think?“

The little boy looked at the star for what seemed to him to be half of eternity, and at the little happy rabbit in the moon, and after that he went back to his room, reassured. His old belief in the wonders of the world had refilled his heart. At least he had one friend in the skies – he, and his sister, and, of course, the dog with the large loving eyes that would be their watchdog once in the little log cabin of his dreams.



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