

The Little Boy Who Wasn't Lost

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Once upon a time there was a boy named Peter, who lived on a farm in the country. Not a very big farm, but a pleasant one, with fields and brooks and a river, and woods near enough to have fun in.

One day in the late summer, Peter said to his mother, “Mother, this afternoon I want to pick blackberries in Mr. Buck's woods.”

“Very well,” said his mother.”
There's nothing your daddy loves better than a blackberry pie. Run along, but don't go too far in the woods and come home in time for supper.”

So Peter took a berry pail and off he went toward Mr. Buck's woods. First he crossed the road, looking very carefully in both directions to make sure there was no truck or tractor or hay-wagon coming. Next he trudged across Mr. Jensen's big oat field, hot and rough and full of stiff stubble left after the tall oats had been cut. Then he squeezed, very carefully, under the barbed wire fence, and there he was at last, at the edge of Mr. Buck's woods.

Then he saw the blackberries, dark and ripe." Plup!" went each fat berry as it slipped neatly from its greenish-white stem." Pling!"

went each fat berry as it bounced merrily into the tin berry pail. Sometimes there wasn't any "Pling!" because the berry went into Peter's mouth, instead. The pail grew heavy and the sun was hot. Peter looked around for a place to cool off.

Down at the bottom of the slope, the brook twisted and flashed in the sun. Down he raced. Quickly he pulled off his shoes and socks and scrunched his toes in the sandy bottom of the cool water.

Finally he went back to get his berry pail." I have enough berries for the biggest pie in the world," he thought. Suddenly he heard a

rustle behind him. Out of the bushes marched five baby pheasants. They were going for a walk all by themselves." Look at that!" breathed Peter." They haven't even grown their tail-feathers." He picked up his berry pail and followed the pheasants into the woods.

But baby pheasants can run fast. In a few minutes Peter was deep in the pine woods, and too tired to take another step. He threw himself down on some soft moss under a big tree and soon he was fast asleep.

When he opened his eyes again, it was almost dark. The birds had

stopped chirping. The woods were very still. Peter felt around for his berry pail.

He took a few steps one way; then he took a few steps another way, but he really did not know which way to go. Down he sat under the big tree again.

"There is no sense in walking in the woods at night," he thought." I'll just have to wait here for Daddy to come and take me home."

Being a sensible boy, he was really not the least bit afraid. He had lost his way, but he himself was not lost. He knew exactly where he was. He was in Mr. Buck's

woods —which were at one end of Mr. Jensen's oat field —which were across the highway —which ran along in front of his own farmhouse. That's where he was, all right, and his mother knew it and would tell his daddy, who would soon come and get him if he didn't come home for supper.

Just the same, Peter began to feel hungry. He thought of the blackberry pie his mother was going to make. Then he began to think of all the other beautiful things to eat in the world.

"Maybe, if I say them out loud," he said to himself, "it will make

me feel more cheerful." So he took a deep breath and began.

"Hamburgers," he said, "in crunchy buns; orange-pop, like at the circus.

"Spaghetti," he said, "with lots of cheese and tomatoes; and baked potatoes, bursting in the middle." His tummy gave a little groan, and he hurried to cheer it up some more.

"Corn on the cob," he said, in a louder voice, "and lamb chops that you eat with your fingers; and peach ice cream; and oatmeal in the winter time; and devil's food cake; and thick vegetable

soup; and carrots, with oodles of butter...”

“Carrots?” said a curious voice not two inches away from Peter's ear.” Did I hear somebody mention carrots?”

“Yes,” said Peter in surprise, trying hard to see who was speaking to him, “I mentioned carrots, with lots of butter and salt.”

“Waste of time,” said the voice, this time close to Peter's other ear, “putting anything on 'em. Eat 'em the way they grow; the more the better. Shall we go and get some now? I was just about to start when I saw you sitting here.”

“Who are you?” asked Peter, more surprised than ever. But he need not have asked, for at that very moment, the big, round, cherry-colored moon rose full above the edge of the world and Peter could see who it was.

It was a big, gray rabbit.

”Why, you're a rabbit!” said Peter in amazement. But the rabbit did not seem amazed at all.

“Of course, I'm a rabbit,” he said rather scornfully, “And you're a boy. Anybody can see that. Now shall we go for those carrots? I can't wait all night.”



“Well... I'm not sure that I'd better go with you,” said Peter slowly.” You see, I'm waiting for somebody to come and find me.”

“What do you mean, 'find you'? I found you, didn't I? And besides,” said the rabbit, “why do you have

to be found? You know where you are, don't you?”

“Oh yes, I know where I am. I'm just not sure where my home is,” Peter explained.” You see, I came to the woods to pick blackberries, and...”

“Boys are silly,” the rabbit interrupted rather rudely.” If they ate more carrots and less blackberries they could see much better in the dark. And if they weren't so particular, they could find any number of good homes right here in these woods. I do. Oh, I have nothing against blackberries. Their bushes and briars make about the best kind of

house that a rabbit could ask for; but I'd never waste a minute on the berries themselves. Carrots, now; there's something you can really put your teeth in."

The rabbit looked at Peter, and Peter looked at the rabbit, and for a moment neither one spoke. The moon was climbing steadily up the sky, not quite so close and friendly now, but pinky-silver and cool. The woods were lighter, and the lighter they became, the bigger the rabbit seemed to become, too. Peter began to feel he would miss the rabbit very much if he went without him. Besides, he rather thought the

rabbit really wanted him to come along. So...

"All right," said Peter, and he smiled at the rabbit." Thank you very much. I will come with you and I do like carrots just as they grow, particularly if they're good ones."

"Good ones? These carrots are the best carrots in the country; and I should know. I've tasted a lot of carrots in my days and nights, and I think I can positively say that, for crispness and sweetness and size and color, the carrots I'll take you to right now would take a prize at Rabbit Hill itself. Come along. Follow me!"

With a jump and a turn and a twist the big, gray rabbit streaked away into the shadows so fast that Peter didn't even see which way he went.

"Wait!" he cried. "Wait for me! I must get my berry pail and I can't go as fast as you."

"Oh, of course," said the rabbit, bouncing back into a patch of moonlight, "I forgot. You're only a boy. I'll try to go more slowly."

"Fence here!" shouted the rabbit over his shoulder a minute later, without slowing up. "Slide under fast." And he was through in a flash.

"Oh, I can't" cried Peter. "Wait! Wait for me! I must push the berry pail through first, and then step down on this bottom wire, and lift up the next one, like this, and squeeze between very slowly- -Oh, dear, I almost caught my shirt on one of these sharp points."

"Boys!" snorted the rabbit. "I suppose I'll never understand them." And off he went through the plowed field that stretched out ahead in the moonlight.

The plowed field was very long, and really, Peter thought, very plowed. He never could seem to find one furrow to walk in, but

had to walk crossways over the deep ridges, and up and down, stumbling and dropping unexpectedly from a high spot to a low spot.

The rabbit, however, scooted like lightning ahead of him, and hardly seemed to touch the ground.

Peter hated to ask him to wait or to stop to rest and did his best to keep up, but finally his shoes were so full of dirt and stones and sandy stuff that he felt he simply could not walk any further.

“Wait!” he called to the rabbit.”

Oh, please wait just once more.

You see, my shoes are full of stones and dirt and I think I'll just

have to stop a minute to take them off and dump them out.” I'll try not to be very long.” And he sat right down and struggled with the knots in his shoelaces and tugged and tugged and finally got his shoes off and poured simply buckets of stuff out of them. The gray rabbit meanwhile sat and looked at him and seemed to grow bigger every minute. But all he said was “Boys!”

After that, it wasn't so bad. They reached the end of the field and walked on solid grass for a while and then, for some reason, they stopped. Only this time, it was the rabbit who stopped.

“Now here,” said the rabbit, and his voice, for the first time, sounded rather scared, “this is really the most dangerous place on the whole trip. Right here--on this enormous, hard path--there are monsters roaming.”

“Monsters?” said Peter.

“Monsters,” repeated the rabbit.” Tremendous monsters with eyes as big as moons that shoot fiery lights as they look for you. Monsters with voices that sometimes roar and sometimes bellow. Look out! Here comes one now!”

Peter looked and what he saw made him grin and then giggle

and then pretty soon he was shouting with laughter until there were tears in his eyes.

“Silly!” he said, when he could get his breath.” Those aren't monsters. Those are automobiles. Those are not eyes shooting fire; they're headlights to keep the driver from hitting you. They don't roar or bellow. They just sound a horn to tell you to get out of the way.” And Peter looked at the rabbit as though he really liked him for the first time and the rabbit looked back the same way.

But all Peter said was, “Rabbits!” and he grinned.

When they had crossed the road, with Peter's help, the rabbit said, "Well, we're here at last, and I, for one, think it's about time. Just follow me, now and don't make a noise, and in a few minutes we'll be in clover. Or rather, carrots. I can smell them already. Isn't it heavenly? Look! There they are, just waiting for us. I'll take this row and you can take the next. Well, here goes." And the only thing Peter heard after that was a pawing and a nibbling and a munching, as the hungry gray rabbit settled down to his feast.

But Peter didn't so much as bend down and pull on crisp, sweet

carrot. Peter just stood there and looked all around and strained his eyes to see in the pale moonlight.

"Rabbit," he said softly, "Rabbit, are there, by any chance, beans growing in the next row to this?"

"Don't bother with them," said the rabbit, with his mouth full. "They're old and woody and the new ones are just coming along."

"Rabbit," went on Peter, and he began to sound very excited, "Rabbit, are there big Spanish onions in the row next to that? Are there?"

"Onions? Yes, there are," said the rabbit without raising his head,

“but who in the world want onions?”

“I would OH, I would!” shouted Peter.” I would want onions and beans and carrots. Because I planted them and this is my very own garden and I am home!”

And he began to run as fast as he could toward the pretty white hours gleaming in the moonlight. Just as he reached the front steps, the door swung open wide and there stood his mother and daddy, and his daddy had a big lantern in his hand.

“Mother,” said Peter, and the words came so fast he could hardly say them, “I didn't mean to

go too far or stay too late, and I brought the blackberries for Daddy's pie, and a rabbit brought me home and is eating carrots this very minute in my garden.”

“I know,” said his mother softly.” I know. And when he gets through with the carrots in your garden, he's welcome to the carrots in mine.”

“I like blackberry pie much better, anyway,” said his daddy. And they all went into Peter's warm, pleasant house and closed the door behind them.

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