

THE BROWN RABBIT

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I stopped by the meadow because I was tired after hiking as far as I had through the woods that day. The place itself did not interest me. Its tall grass sagged in clumps, some brown though it was still May; hulks of ugly rock showed amid them. The weather did little to encourage me in the spot. The air was stifling. The sun gave a dull, pale light and the passing gray clouds appeared ready to spoil even that. Bowing my head, I remembered hearing earlier that the field had belonged to some old farmer. The man had died and the land never sold after him.

It seemed a place to forget in all honesty.

I had resolved to leave the spot when I saw a brown rabbit emerge from the woods and stop at the meadow's edge. He made an attractive, trim figure as he sat upright by the grass, head raised and alert. His dark eyes looked far into the field and its corners. He seemed to be reflecting on the place, if rabbits ever did. The idea that he was had fixed in my mind when I saw him crouch and speed into the meadow. I turned, interested to see where he went.

I spotted him soon in a clump of grass that had wilted in the heat. Only a furry patch of him stuck forth, no head or limb, with the green-tan blades between us like the bars of a cage. After a second or two, his brown fur shifted and the grass bowed, curtaining him; when it rose, the rabbit had disappeared. I looked onward for him, roused. The meadow rustled a couple of yards up-- moved by some large creature it seemed. I knew it had to be the rabbit: no other animal had come to the place since my arrival. I watched the golden grass heads bob once, twice, as if to prove he was among them. Then they were still. I waited, eager for the rabbit to make some sign he was there.

When I spotted him finally, it was only his long ears sticking through a patch of green, yards away. Flesh pink on the inside, those ears twitched, catching at the many, small sounds in the field around us. He gave the place some attention and I fell to considering the meadow more seriously myself for it. I discovered many, small lupines in the tall grass which I had not noticed earlier. I caught the scent that rose from their purple petals and fresh leaves. Above the field, I scanned the sweet air that was warming in the afternoon sun. And I heard crickets chirp quietly in the grass ahead.

Everything around and in the meadow had this intimacy. It felt a great thing, beautiful and peaceful. The sense was still new to me when I saw the rabbit's ears slip behind a tall, green tuft. The grass rustled and the next thing, the rabbit emerged from the side of the meadow. Without a pause, he sped into the wood from where I had come.

He did not return.

I walked back toward the trail I had meant earlier to take and thought over my rabbit. He must have somewhere to go, I knew as I stepped along. Someplace that called him. I listened as I went now for the call of birds overhead, eager suddenly to remember their names. I scanned the air for insects--gnats, bees--so I might follow the tangle of their flights. I had decided to trust in one or two of them as companions for the next part of my journey. Their company would help me pass into the woods, feeling not empty like when I had come to the grassy spot, but full and alive.

The idea of the rabbit working through the meadow convinced me it was worth doing. My heart warmed with faith in the spring day. I went, in fact, with a glad, easy stride, hearing the bees buzz in the heat.