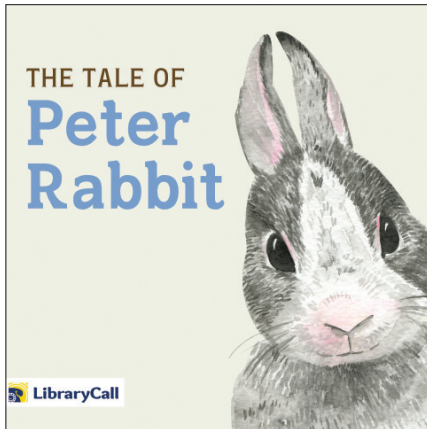


The Tale of Peter Rabbit



By Beatrix Potter

Once upon a time there were four little rabbits, and their names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter. They lived with their mother in a sand-bank, underneath the root of a very big fir-tree.

“Now, my dears,” said Mrs. Rabbit one morning, “you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don’t go into Mr. McGregor’s garden. Your father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor.”

“Now run along, and don’t get into mischief. I am going out.”

Then Mrs. Rabbit took a basket and her umbrella, and went through the woods to the baker’s. She bought a loaf of brown bread and five raisin buns. Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail, who were good little bunnies, went down the lane to gather blackberries: But Peter, who was very naughty, ran straight over to Mr. McGregor’s garden, and squeezed under the gate!

First, he ate some lettuce and some French beans, then he ate some radishes. And then, feeling rather sick, he went to look for some parsley to soothe his stomach. But around the end of a cucumber frame, there he was– Mr. McGregor!

Mr. McGregor was on his hands and knees planting young cabbages. When he saw Peter, he jumped up and ran after him, waving a rake and calling out, “Stop thief!”

Peter was dreadfully frightened. He rushed all over the garden. He had forgotten the way back to the gate. He lost one of his shoes in the cabbages and the other shoe among the potatoes.

Now without shoes, he ran on four paws, taking off faster. I think he might have gotten away if he had not unfortunately run into a net that was protecting blueberries from the birds. The net caught Peter by the large buttons on his jacket. It was a blue jacket with brass buttons and quite new.

Peter gave up all hope of escape and began to shed big tears; but his sobs were overheard by some friendly sparrows, who flew to him in great excitement, and implored him to try harder. Mr. McGregor approached with a bucket, which he intended to pop over Peter's head. But Peter wriggled out just in time, leaving his jacket behind him.

He rushed into the tool shed, and jumped into a watering can. It would have been a beautiful thing to hide in, if it had not had so much water in it. Mr. McGregor was quite sure that Peter was somewhere in the tool shed, perhaps hidden underneath a flower pot. He began to turn over each pot carefully, one-by-one. Suddenly, Peter sneezed: "Ah-Choo!"

Mr. McGregor was after him in no time! He tried to stop Peter with his foot, but Peter jumped out a window, knocking over three flower pots. The window was too small for Mr. McGregor, and he was tired of running after the little rabbit. So, he went back to his work.

Peter sat down to rest. He was out of breath and trembling with fright, and he had no idea which way to go. He was also pretty damp from sitting in that watering can. After a time, he began to wander about, going lippity—lippity—not very fast, looking all around for an exit. He found a door in a wall, but it was locked, and there was no room for a rabbit to squeeze underneath. An old mouse was running in and out over the stone doorstep, carrying peas and beans to her family in the woods.

Peter asked her if she knew the way to the gate, but she had such a large pea in her mouth that she couldn't answer. She only shook her head at him. Peter began to cry. Then he tried to find his way straight across the garden, but he became more and more puzzled.

He came to a pond where Mr. McGregor filled his watering cans. A white cat sat next to the water, staring at some goldfish. She was very, very still, but now and then, the tip of her tail twitched as if it were alive.

Peter thought it best to go away without speaking to her; he had heard about cats from his cousin, little Benjamin Bunny.

He went back towards the tool-shed, but suddenly, quite close to him, he heard the noise of a hoe—scr-r-ritch, scratch, scratch, scritch. Peter scuttered underneath the bushes. But then, as nothing happened, he came out and climbed up onto a wheelbarrow and peered over. The first thing he saw was Mr. McGregor hoeing onions. His back was turned to Peter, and beyond him was the gate!

Peter got down from the wheelbarrow very quietly and started running as fast as he could along a straight path behind some blackberry bushes. Mr. McGregor caught sight of him at the corner, but Peter just kept running. He slipped underneath the gate, and was safe at last in the woods outside the garden.

When Peter was gone, Mr. McGregor hung up his little jacket and shoes to make a scarecrow to frighten away the birds. Peter never stopped running, nor did he look behind him, until he got home to the big fir-tree. He was so tired that he flopped down onto the nice sandy floor of the rabbit-hole and shut his eyes.

His mother was busy cooking; she wondered what he had done with his clothes. It was the second little jacket and pair of shoes that Peter had lost in two weeks! I am sorry to say that Peter was not very well that evening. His mother put him to bed and made him some camomile tea. "One table-spoonful to be taken at bedtime," she said. But Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail had bread and milk and blackberries for supper.