

# A Rabbit's Love

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There once was a brick house at the corner of a street. The street was sometimes very quiet, especially evenings and nights. Other times big trucks would roar loudly on their way to deliver soda and fruit and meat to the supermarket two blocks away. A girl and her mother and father lived in the brick house. The girl's mother thought it would be nice to have a garden on the front

lawn, where the sun shone all afternoon. She thought lots of flowers and trees would make the noise of the trucks less noticeable. So the lawn of the house on the corner was bright with flower beds and borders of roses.

One day, as the mother was working in her garden, the girl, who was taking pictures of the beautiful flowers with her new camera, said, "Look! Look!" She pointed to a little brown patch under a yew bush close to the house. The mother looked up. She saw it, too. They ran to the house and called the father, who came out and saw it, too. It was a small rabbit, not quite a baby, but far from grown. It was alone.

The girl began to worry about the rabbit. She didn't know if the rabbit would know how to take care of itself. It was so small she could have held it in her hands, palms together. She would have liked to hold it. She wondered if the rabbit knew about cars, and how fast they went, and how heavy they were. She wanted to put out carrots for it, but her mother told her that rabbits were not so partial to carrots as people thought. Rabbits liked clover and pansy flowers and even grass if it was new and tender. The people in the brick house had lots of clover in their lawn. They liked the little white blooms of the clover, and they watched as honeybees and bumble bees came to gather clover nectar and make honey. The flowers were so sweet that the rabbit ate them for dessert, after filling up on new grass.

Sometimes they didn't see the rabbit for days. They worried about it. Was it still alive? Then the mother would find traces of rabbit dung, little pellets left in the flower beds, and she would point to them and say, "You see? It's still here."

What they didn't know for a long time was that the rabbit had fallen in love. Not with another rabbit, as grown rabbits do. Their rabbit (they liked to think of it as theirs) had fallen in love with a rose.

The mother who lived in the brick house and who loved flowers had planted a spreading rose bush that bloomed all summer long. It kept blooming into fall, sometimes even after the first snowfall, as if to say, I may look delicate, but I'm tough. It had sprays of tiny pink buds and tiny fluffy blooms swaying on ends of branches. It had shiny small leaves. It made such a pleasant blooming, green thicket on the front lawn. The rabbit loved it. Whenever it looked for shade from the hot afternoon sun, it would hide in the thicket of the rose bush. Whenever it was afraid and running away from danger—like a dog walking, or children coming home from school— it hid beneath the thick, thorny bush. Whenever it was cold in the night, it huddled under the small leaves growing together like a green blanket, which made the air under the bush sweet and

warm. Whenever the rabbit was hungry, it would eat the new grass peeping under the thick shade of the rose.

So the summer passed, with the rabbit visiting the rose every day. The people in the brick house didn't always see the rabbit. They thought the rabbit had gone away or was eating in neighbors' gardens. But the rabbit often stood so still under the rose bush on the front lawn that lots of people, and trucks, and cars, and even the mother gardening a few feet away couldn't tell it was there, in the dark shade of its love. For the rabbit loved the rose. It didn't just love the rose because the bush gave it shelter, or because in its shade it found food. The rabbit loved the rose. It was as simple as that.

The rabbit did not know—what rabbit does?—that the rose had a name. In fact, the mother had picked the rose for its name, the Fairy. The mother knew Fairy roses were tough. They didn't need to be tenderly taken care of like the other roses. They took care of themselves. Of course, when the mother bought the rose and planted it, she didn't know that the rose would take care of other things, too.

One moonlit night toward the end of the summer, the mother and father, who were still up talking about the things grown people talk about, heard loud, fierce animal yells outside. They seemed to be coming from the front lawn. The mother and father looked out the window. They couldn't see anything, although the yard was silver with moonlight. They stepped out on the front porch. They still could make out nothing in the night. They worried that the noise they heard might have been the yell of a cat who'd caught the little rabbit. They knew some people let their cats out at night to roam, and a little rabbit would make a very nice meal for a cat. They didn't tell the girl anything about the noise late at night. When the mother went to look at the garden the next day, she did see what looked like a bit of cat fur caught in some low, thorny branches of the Fairy rose.

For the rest of the summer, there was no sign of the rabbit. The girl kept looking for it. The mother and father stopped talking about it. They were sure that their rabbit had been caught by a cat.

As the weather got colder, the mother began to ready the garden for winter. That meant she would rake fallen leaves away. She would pack dirt around the roots of the roses, so they would be warm in the long winter nights. She would bury new bulbs, which looked like smooth onions, in the flower beds so the garden would have flowers in spring. She cut away fading flowers and gathered seeds from seed pods in envelopes marked with the names of the plants that made them. These would go in the ground next spring, after the sun warmed the earth again.



One fall day, the mother lifted a branch of the Fairy to rake the dead leaves that the wind had blown under the bush. There were fresh rabbit pellets on the ground! The mother wanted to tell her family that their rabbit was still around, but she wondered if it was the same rabbit. So she waited. A few days later, the girl, her mother, and her father decided to take a walk in the crisp fall afternoon. As they turned the corner, they saw a familiar brown movement, a streak from the rose bush across the lawn to the yew bush next to the brick house. They all saw it. "It's our rabbit!"

It was. It was a little bigger, a little heavier, but still not full-grown. It still spent as much time as it could near the Fairy, who, too, was getting ready for fall by changing some of its pink fluffy flowers to red berry-like fruit. The rosehips, as the rose fruit is called, are very, very sweet. The family who lived in the brick house on the corner thought the rabbit had come back for the hips. But the rabbit had never really left, just got more careful after its brush with the cat. Why should the rabbit leave the garden in front of the house on the corner? Didn't the Fairy give that cat a good scratch? Wasn't the rabbit in love with the rose?

