

## **The Man and The Rabbit**

**by Annie Ghrist**

Once upon a time, a man was walking through the woods. He could not remember how or when he had arrived at the wood, nor how long he had been walking through it. As he thought about it, he found that he didn't really care. Yet still, he kept walking. As he walked, he fancied he heard another walking close by. He turned around and beheld an old woman, hobbling along the path behind him.

"Good day," he said to the old woman, for his situation had not made him forget his manners. "I've been wandering around here for a good long while. Do you happen to know the way out?"

The old woman looked at him for a minute, with sad eyes that seemed to grow sadder the longer she gazed. Then she said, "You shall meet an evil creature in your path, one who has led many along the road to destruction. You shall think him a friend and follow the advice he gives. You shall trust him with your life. But in the end, he shall take you too." And with those words she turned and walked off the path into the forest, immediately disappearing from view.

"Well," thought the man. "That certainly was odd. What could that old hag have meant, that I should become friends with such an evil creature as has ruined so many?" Still thinking, he resumed walking.

Suddenly, a snow-white rabbit bounded into the track. It startled the man so much that he stopped walking. Then the rabbit turned to him and said, in a melodious voice, "Hello! Are you lost? No one ever comes this way. Where are you from? Where are you going? No one ever comes this way."

"I suppose I might be lost," replied the man, "and I have no idea when and how I came to be here, or where I'm going or where I've come from. I—"

"Well then, I can help you there. I can show you the way out." And with that, he began scampering along the path. The man followed, desiring to be rid of the trees, whose closeness he felt more and more as he went on.

"Surely this rabbit can't be the false friend the woman spoke of. Who ever heard of an evil rabbit?" After some time he asked the rabbit, "Where exactly are we going?"

"To the edge to the forest. It's not so very far, but we have to pass by some rather unpleasant people along the way. Pay no heed to their words. They do not want you to leave. They wish you to stay a prisoner of the trees forever." They

were silent for a while, until the rabbit said, "There is a clearing up ahead. Beware of the creatures within it and their lying words." As they approached the clearing, the man saw a fox loitering near an ancient tree stump.

"Beware! Turn back!" said the fox. Again and again, he repeated his warning, but they fell on unheeding ears. "Ha!" thought the man. "That fox meant to trick me into staying forever in this awful place. I won't be fooled by such a paltry attack as this!"

"The end is not far off," said the rabbit. "I'm glad that you didn't listen to the fox back there. So many turn aside and are lost forever."

The man then told the rabbit about the old woman's words. "And that's how I knew not to trust the fox," he concluded. Again the rabbit commended him for his perceptiveness. On and on they walked. At length, the man noticed that the trees were thinning out a little bit. "Are we nearly there?" he inquired of the rabbit.

"We are getting closer, but still have a ways to go," replied the rabbit. As they walked on, they passed through a second clearing, this one containing a huge black bear who was employed in digging the honey out of a hollow tree. As soon as he laid eyes on the man, he too began admonishing him to turn back and go no further. Again, the man ignored the urgent cautioning and walked on. The man noticed that now the trees were thinner than ever.

"Are we nearly there?" he asked for the second time.

"We are nearing the edge. Just a bit longer now." Replied the rabbit. On and on they walked. At length they came to a third clearing, where a group of chipmunks and squirrels were all chattering together. As the travelers entered the clearing, the animals fell silent, their eyes following the pair as one. After they had left the clearing, the man wondered, "Why were they suddenly silent as we passed? And why were they all looking at me? Surely they weren't the false friends the woman spoke of. Perhaps she was mistaken." To the rabbit he said, "We're almost to the edge, aren't we? I'm quite tired, and I'm not sure how much farther I can go."

"Yes, we are." replied the rabbit in a rather odd tone in its voice.

Just then, they came out of the wood and into the sunlight, onto the edge of a cliff. Blinded for a moment by the sudden brightness, and so used to walking that his legs were slow to stop their movement, the man was unable to perceive that he moved closer and closer to the cliff's edge. Finally looking up, he quickly backed

away, only to trip over the rabbit, who had come up behind him. Losing his footing, the man began sliding towards the edge, frantically grasping at the bare rock. "Help me!" he frantically cried. At his words, the rabbit turned back. The man was startled to see a sinisterly triumphant gleam in its eye

"Fool," said the rabbit in a harsh tone. "No one has ever left this forest alive, and no one ever will, no matter what anyone says to them. They cannot discern the truth: that the only way out is death.

"So you are the evil one the old woman spoke of!" said the man, who had gotten a hold of a small crack near the very edge, and was desperately trying to haul himself over the lip of the cliff.

"I am not evil. I am merely a shepherd leading lost ones to the truth." The rabbit replied. And with those words he gently, almost tenderly, pried away the man's fingers

As he fell, the man thought, "I really have been a fool." Then everything went black.