

When I was growing up, the only rabbits I ever usually saw were those kept by friends as pets. The rabbits were kept in hutches, with a wire mesh at the front. These furry animals with their strange eyes and their big ears always fascinated me. They looked so adorable, but at the same time there was something slightly unsettling about them. They were not like dogs or cats that you could stroke and tickle. I always felt sorry for them being cooped up in such cramped cages, but my friends told me the rabbits would escape if let out to play.

When I was about thirteen, I was waiting for a lift by the side of a busy road. I was standing next to a large field not far from a river. It was early evening and the sun was shining. Bored by the constant stream of passing cars, I glanced at the field and thought how nice it would be to play football there. All of a sudden, something moved. At first I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. I blinked and looked again, more carefully this time. Something was definitely moving about. And then the scene came into focus; the field was full of rabbits, dozens of them. Most of them were quietly sitting, watching the traffic go by, as if waiting for something. Every now and again one or two would hop about.

In Beatrix Potter's "The Tale of Benjamin Bunny" a little rabbit sits on a bank by the side of a road. It is not a busy road. It is a quiet country lane, and the only sounds to be heard are the sounds of the forest. Then, pricking his ears, the little rabbit hears the trit-trot, trit-trot of a pony. Benjamin Bunny (for it is he) watches carefully as the gig of Mr. and Mrs. McGregor comes along the lane. Benjamin is a clever little rabbit; he notices that Mrs. McGregor is wearing her best bonnet. He realizes what this means: that she and her husband are going out for the day. He rushes to find his cousin, Peter Rabbit, who is sitting all by himself in what looks like a very small rabbit-hole. There is no wire mesh at the front, but even so, it looks as if Peter is cooped up and cannot go out to play.

Thanks to Benjamin's kind words of encouragement, Peter finds the strength to get up out of his rabbit-hole and embark on an adventure: with his cousin he sets off to retrieve the coat and shoes he left behind him the previous day in the McGregors' garden.

And if you want to find out just what happens next, you'll have to read the story yourself. I hope you enjoy it!