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The Tale of Benjamin Bunny

Beatrix Potter · *1904 · English original, Project Gutenberg #14407*

Little Benjamin Bunny finds his cousin Peter sitting poorly in a red handkerchief, and leads him back into Mr. McGregor's garden to fetch the lost clothes. They take onions for old Mrs. Rabbit, and then a cat sits upon their basket for five hours. It is old Mr. Benjamin Bunny who jumps off the wall and brings them home.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it cost to go back into the garden for a coat and shoes—and a present of onions?

"Little Benjamin said: "It spoils people's clothes to squeeze under a gate; the proper way to get in is to climb down a pear-tree.""

Little Benjamin · The wall

Benjamin is at home in the garden; Peter is not. They get the clothes off the scarecrow and fill the handkerchief with onions, but the cat sits on the basket until late afternoon. Old Mr. Bunny, who has no opinion whatever of cats, cuffs her off, locks her in the greenhouse, and whips his son. Peter's mother forgives him because he has found his shoes and coat; the onions are hung with the herbs.

KEY CHARACTERS

Little Benjamin Bunny
bold in the garden, and sure about pear-trees

Peter Rabbit
poorly, still shaken, wanting to go home

Old Mr. Benjamin Bunny
no opinion whatever of cats; a pipe, a switch, and a locked greenhouse

Old Mrs. Rabbit
a widow who knits mittens and sells herbs; she forgives Peter

The cat
sits five hours upon the basket

Grades K–2

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01

A Gig on the Road

OPENING

Mr. and Mrs. McGregor drive out; Benjamin goes to call upon his relations.

- One morning a little rabbit sat on a bank and heard the trit-trot of a pony; a gig was driven by Mr. McGregor, and beside him sat Mrs. McGregor in her best bonnet.
- As soon as they had passed, little Benjamin Bunny set off to call upon his relations, who lived in the wood at the back of Mr. McGregor's garden.
- In the neatest, sandiest hole lived Benjamin's aunt and his cousins—Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter.

02

Peter in a Handkerchief

THE WOOD

The scarecrow has Peter's clothes.

- Peter was sitting by himself. He looked poorly, and was dressed in a red cotton pocket-handkerchief.
- "Who has got your clothes?" Peter replied, "The scarecrow in Mr. McGregor's garden."
- Benjamin assured him that Mr. McGregor had gone out in a gig, and Mrs. McGregor also, and certainly for the day, because she was wearing her best bonnet.

03

Down the Pear-Tree

THE GARDEN

Clothes first, then onions for his Aunt.

- They get upon the wall; Peter's coat and shoes are plainly to be seen upon the scarecrow, topped with an old tam-o'-shanter.
- Little Benjamin said the proper way to get in is to climb down a pear-tree. Peter fell down head first into a newly raked lettuce bed.
- They took the clothes off the scarecrow. Then Benjamin suggested that they should fill the pocket-handkerchief with onions, as a little present for his Aunt.

> *"Little Benjamin said: "It spoils people's clothes to squeeze under a gate; the proper way to get in is to climb down a pear-tree.""*
>
> **Little Benjamin** · The wall

04

Five Hours under a Basket

THE CAT

Peter hears noises; Benjamin is perfectly at home—until the corner.

- Peter did not seem to be enjoying himself; he kept hearing noises. Benjamin, on the contrary, was perfectly at home, and ate a lettuce leaf.
- Round a corner they see the cat. Little Benjamin hid himself and Peter and the onions underneath a large basket.
- The cat sat down upon the top of the basket. She sat there for five hours. The smell of onions made Peter Rabbit and little Benjamin cry.

05

Old Mr. Bunny

THE CLOSE

A father on the wall, and onions hung from the kitchen ceiling.

- Old Mr. Benjamin Bunny, smoking a pipe of rabbit-tobacco, with a little switch in his hand, was looking for his son. He had no opinion whatever of cats.
- He jumped onto the cat, cuffed it off the basket, kicked it into the greenhouse, and locked the door. Then he took out Benjamin by the ears and whipped him, and then his nephew Peter, and the handkerchief of onions.
- When Peter got home his mother forgave him, because she was so glad to see that he had found his shoes and coat. The onions were hung from the kitchen ceiling, with the bunches of herbs and the rabbit-tobacco.

Cousinhood | Courage and Fear | A Gift | Patience | A Father's Rescue

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. Benjamin's confidence and Peter's fear run side by side in the same garden. Watch who eats the lettuce leaf, and who drops the onions.
2. The best bonnet is how Benjamin knows the McGregors are out for the day. A small, exact detail does the work of a plan.
3. Five hours under the basket is the cost of the errand. Potter does not hurry it; she says she cannot draw the picture because it was quite dark.
4. Old Mr. Bunny rescues them and also punishes his son. Forgiveness at home is for the found coat and shoes, not for a denial of the danger.

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