



## **Waiting for the Train**

Red sandstone of the bridge glowed in the evening sunlight. Shadows lengthened across the almost bare meadows flanking the old railway line. The line had lain unused for many years now. Elders, laden with green fruit, towered over the pink carpet of rosebay willow herb which hid the remains of small platform and wind-stormed workman's shelter.

A large grey rabbit sat up with his paws resting on the wire fencing which contained the encroaching undergrowth. He nibbled at a protruding grass stalk, then lifted one paw to scratch his ear. To a keen observer the scratched grey fur revealed streaks of silver denoting the passing of many seasons. Or was it the sign of a poor diet? He stared towards the bridge, listening.

He had not listened so intently for a while now, but this evening's family deputation had brought him back to the fence. It was the younger does who had approached him. 'We want to move,' they had demanded with a defiant show of white teeth. 'There's nothing tasty left on these pastures. We want the family to move to the field under the wood. We've explored and there are no hostile rabbits there. The grass is the lushest for miles around.'

The silver grey rabbit, patriarch of many generations, heard them out. Then, in his wisest voice he asked, 'And why do you think there are no other rabbits eating the lush grass? I suppose you didn't wait to watch the fox and the stoat coming from the wood? The deputation fell silent, each looking shamefacedly through their whiskers at the ground. 'And I've told you again and again, the patriarch continued. 'We're waiting for the train.'

'What's a train?' One young rabbit plucked up courage to ask the question which occupied all their minds - the question they had all wanted to ask for as long as they could remember.

'It's a huge human thing,' the silver grey rabbit tried to explain. My great, great grandfather told me all about it. It makes a terrific frightening sound. The whole field shakes for ages before and after it comes. It's like a lot of human houses on wheels. You can see the people inside shiny glass holes. When it comes out from under the bridge it shouts with a terrible loud voice.'

'But why are we waiting for it?' the forward rabbit asked again.

Because my great, great, great...oh dear I've forgotten how many greats - grandmother said, 'watch out for the train!' 'Don't go down on the silver rails when the ground shakes. Watch out for the train!' So we've been watching and waiting for it ever since.'

'So where are the silver rails?' A bold brash bunny, all ginger in colour, whose grandparents came from the town, had hopped over to join them. The patriarch gave him a withering look. What did odd coloured, towny in-comers know about anything. And he'd only been here for three generations!

'They're under the trees and grass.'

'So how can the train get on them?'

Another, even more withering look. 'Humans know how to do things. The train will come from under that bridge. All we have to do is wait.'

'How do you know it will come out from the bridge. It may be going the other way!'

The old rabbit thumped hard on the ground with his back paws at which point every other rabbit in the vicinity stopped munching and gathered round. 'We've been waiting all this time for the train. It will come and we will go on waiting.' There was a fearsome defiant note in the patriarch's voice which silenced even the young ginger newcomer, but not for long.

Another rabbit, encouraged by his ginger friend, and eager for a better diet, said, 'I don't believe in trains. I think it's just a story to stop us going across to the river and all that juicy grass.' He patted his stomach with his paw.

A different voice startled them momentarily. 'Trains are real. As real as rabbits and crows.' A crow had settled on the fence post above the patriarch and had been listening to the conversation. 'I've flown over one and alongside one. But there's now way one will ever come along here. Not without rails. Not through the trees. There's never been a train along here in all the time I've been around.'

The patriarch bared his teeth at the crow. 'You don't know. My grandmother told me we must wait for the train. She wouldn't have said that if the train wasn't coming.' And that was the end of the conversation.

Now the large grey rabbit took his paws from the wire fence and sat still watching the sunlight fade across the bridge. 'There wouldn't be a bridge if there wasn't a train, would there?' he said to himself. 'A train's a human's thing. They'll make it come. Humans aren't like rabbits are they? I'll wait. The train will come.'

***Humans aren't like rabbits are they?***

