

THE HARE AND THE FLOWER

By Lynne Reid Banks

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ONE NIGHT the Magic hare was dancing and jumping about more energetically even than usual. The moon was full, and that was when he danced his best, so he was hurling himself about, trying to resist the temptation to use a bit of magic to enable him to jump that little bit higher than he could by himself. He managed not to, and did a really spectacular leap just the same, which carried him four or five feet above the grass that was whispering in the night wind.

He landed again, panting, and shouted, “That’s the finest jump I’ve ever jumped, and I didn’t use magic a bit! What a rotten shame nobody was here to see me”—and suddenly he heard a tinkling sound.

It was like bells—very small, silvery ones.

He looked this way and that. He jumped a few ordinary jumps to get his head clear of the top of the grass, to see what had made that sound. But he couldn’t see anything. There are lots of little noises in nature that only small animals would hear or notice. The hare’s world, down near the ground, was full of such noises. But he’d never heard one like that tinkling bell sound.

The fact was, in the hare’s ears, the ringing had sounded like applause. Applause for his Big Jump. Well, it was a mystery—that was all. Life was full of them.

The next night he was strolling down a lane when he saw a bright light. It was a car’s headlight, left on by mistake. A number of moths were battering themselves against the hot glass.

“Stop that,” said the hare. “You’ll bruise yourselves.”

“We can’t stop!” they cried in frantic little voices. “We have to reach it!”

He couldn’t persuade them, so he worked a small spell on the light, switching it off. The moths breathed sighs of relief and fluttered away safely, forgetting to thank him. The hare, feeling a bit miffed, was about to hop off when . . .

There it was again! That tinkling sound, a little fainter than last night, but quite definite—like somebody, or something, saying, “Well done!”

This time the hare was determined to find it. He searched through the grass along the verge, he jumped, he bounced, he called out, “Who made that tinkling noise? Come on, out with it, who are you?”

No reply. The hare went to bed in a very puzzled mood.

The next day there was more work to be done.

Down by the river that ran past the hare's home field, he heard a crying, and rushed down to find a poor little cat with its leg torn open by a ferret.

Well, I say "poor little cat"—of course, the cat wasn't entirely the innocent victim, it had probably been trying to kill the ferret, but nevertheless it was a poor thing now. Its leg was bleeding and it couldn't drag itself along.

The hare had to do some magic pretty quickly to help it home, or it would have died there, and the hare really could not stand animals dying and did his best to save them whenever he could. He'd have saved the ferret, too, if it had been getting the worst of it with the cat.

After the cat was safely back with its owner, the hare (who was always a bit tired after a big output of magic) lay down in the sun. He had just stretched out when he heard that tinkling sound again.

This time he was on a clear bit of ground and it was broad daylight, so he could see much better. He snapped his head toward the sound, and suddenly he saw what was making it.

A pathetic little colorless flower was shaking its bells.

The hare hopped up to it.

"Hallo, Flower," he said.

The flower had never been spoken to before. Its bells stopped ringing, and it seemed to shrink down toward the ground.

"What's your Latin name?" asked the hare politely and importantly. He *loved* the long names of plants and showed off with them.

"Haven't got one," whispered the flower.

"Your common-or-garden name, then," said the hare kindly.

The flower shook its bells sadly.

"*No name at all?*" said the hare, shocked. "But everything has a name!"

"Not me," whispered the flower. "Nobody's ever bothered. I'm not in any of the garden centers or catalogs. No one ever picks me. I suppose I'm a nothing-flower."

"No, you jolly well are not!" exclaimed the hare robustly. "Your bells make the prettiest sound I've ever heard! Tell me," he went on, trying to sound casual, "why were you ringing them just now—and the other night? Were they for me?"

"You did such lovely jumps," whispered the flower. "And you helped those silly moths. And then, just now. . ."

"Yes?" pressed the hare, who loved to hear himself praised.

"You helped that little cat. You're always helping," it went on in its shy, whispering voice.

“I do my best, of course,” said the hare, scratching his ear. “I didn’t think anyone had noticed, particularly.”

“I did,” murmured the flower.

“Well, that’s very nice,” said the hare. “I mean, one likes to be appreciated.”

“What’s that?” asked the flower.

“You know—when people notice what you do and give you a word of praise occasionally.”

The flower was silent. The hare realized, with a jolt, that it had never been appreciated, ever.

He felt terribly sad suddenly. To go through life never being appreciated—and without even a common-or-garden name!

“Listen,” said the hare suddenly. “I’m going to give you a name.”

The flower seemed to straighten its stem, and its bells perked up and stood out instead of hanging limply. “Are you?” it said in a louder whisper.

“Yes!” said the hare decisively. “I’m going to name you after me. You are a *harebell*.”

At this the flower grew much taller. It stood up above many of the grasses now, and—the hare blinked: was he imagining it? —its flowers took on a brighter color. They were definitely blue now.

“Fantastic!” it exclaimed, and then added, “I suppose I couldn’t have a Latin name, too, like other plants?”

“Of course you could!” said the hare, who was full of invention. “Your Latin name is...er...*Campanula rotundifolia*.” He thought that sounded pretty good, and repeated it with a flourish, “Yes. *Campanula rotundifolia*.”

“Wow,” said the harebell in a voice shaking with awe. “Is that really me?”

“That’s you,” said the hare firmly.

“What does it mean?”

“‘Campanula’ means bells. ‘Rotund’ means round. ‘Folia’ means leaf. So it means a bell flower with round leaves.”

The harebell shook its bells, which rang out a peal like happy laughter, and turned pink, then white, then blue again.

“See you around, then!” said the hare.

“You bet!” shouted the harebell.