FOR THE CHILDREN

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For the Children by Linda Germond Baker

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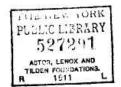
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



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CONTENTS

•

o. 32

1.1

									PAGE
The Rabbit	8	æ.,	33	•		.	10		7
Checrily	٠					•			13
Sally Beanpot							×.		91
The Berry Pickers .	20	÷	52	32	ΞŸ		2		97
The Trout Party .			2	322	3 1 0	÷			33
The Pin			S.	16 2	5.5	63	1 2	36	37
The Automobile Ride						•	•	•	41
The Trip	۲	×		3 4	•	-	•		45
The Overcoat	•		8			•	8		58
A Happy Christmas				١.				•	59

÷0

THE RABBIT



UT of the old stone house there tumbled five boys and girls (the old people thought there were twenty of them). Tin pails were clattering, children were laughing, the sun was shining and everything seemed happy, even the

sparkling mill-pond at the foot of the hill.

Back across the plowed field, behind the barn, across the lonesome road to the fields beyond, the youngsters sauntered, till they reached the lovely woods. Nature was very inviting that day. A beautiful daisy nodded courteously to Belle, and she ran to pick it. Bess spied a bird's nest in the grass. Jim "fired" a stone "just to

FOR THE CHILDREN

do something "; indeed, Captain Gill, aged sixteen, had a hard task to keep his little company together.

For several hours they wandered through the woods. The dignity of the grand old trees almost checked the childish laughter. Bess went tip-toey until Jim laughed at her. At last they reached the open field where the huckleberries grew. Five pairs of hands soon cleaned the patch; not a berry was left for the birds.

Captain Gill called his company to order and they started back along the shady path which wound deeper and deeper among the trees. Suddenly a frolicking little stream sprang from behind a clump of bushes. Gill shouted: "I see it! I knew it was there, because I found it last year. I'll beat you to it." Immediately they all rushed down the slope. Of course Jim fell in, but it was a warm day and his clothes soon dried, while the children ate their lunch, and the leader told wonderful tales of his adventures. Once he

8

THE RABBIT

had caught an eel five feet long; another time he had picked ten quarts of blackberries in an hour, and once he had run away from school. (He didn't tell what happened when he reached home.) Bess crept close to his side. She was proud to be the cousin of such a hero.

Perhaps for half an hour the little people paid the closest attention, then they heard a noise in the bushes. Gill's eyes, sharper than the others, spied the cause first. He put his finger on his . mouth to warn them all to keep quiet. They had only to wait a few minutes for a tiny rabbit to jump out. The poor little thing was expecting to find its mother; instead, it found itself among these strange creatures; it was so surprised that it stood quite still and Gill quickly threw his cap over it.

With one accord they started for home. Jim forgot his berries. Each one had a different plan for Bunny. Belle gave it her new doll's bed. Jim proposed to sell him. John ran ahead

9

FOR THE CHILDREN

to build a pen for it. Gill was going to have a rabbit pie, and the rabbit—well, it was crying for its mother.

No one thought what the children's mother would say, although when they neared the barns Bess did question whether Aunt Ella would think them kind; what she did say was: "Take that dear little thing right out in the field and let it go."

The children's eyes filled with tears, but five pairs of feet turned to obey. With great care Gill put Bunny down. Hop, skip, and he was gone! For a little while they watched the opening into which Bunny had run. Jim saw Bess crying, so he suggested a race. Away they flew; the boys shouting: "Grandmother, Daddy, I spent my money for candy," and the girls chasing them up in the hay-mow, down the other side, up the ladder, down the rope, into the house for supper, for Aunt Ella was ringing the big dinner-bell.

10