Introduction

If we had eyes able to pierce the darkness of night—the feeding time of the timid little furry creatures—we could see an astonishing number of interesting wild folk in places where their presence had never before even been suspected. Who, for example, would guess that in summer many flower gardens in the very heart of large cities are nightly the playground of mice which come for seeds, of screech owls which come for the mice, and of bats which fly there to catch insects?

Of course, the nearer we live to woods and to open country, the more little animals we can find. The mole, in spite of the value of his wonderful fur, still lives to push tunnels about our otherwise neat lawns. His underground galleries serve as runways for lively little shrews and for the short-tailed meadow mice which delight in eating garden bulbs, and in allowing the blame for this to rest on the good-natured "old mole, who much prefers a diet of earthworms and grubs.

Red squirrels, gray squirrels, and chipmunks, which are nearly sure to appear if a wood of good size is nearby, give place at dusk to flying squirrels, and rabbits are likely to raise whole families in the strawberry beds or in the orchards, visiting the young ones only after nightfall.

If there is a brook, look for muskrats, brown weasels, and for an occasional 'coon. They, too, generally hide most carefully by day, but leave footprints in soft mud which show where they wander after dark.
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

A 'possum or even a skunk may pay friendly visits to the garbage cans to share the scraps with half-wild house cats, and beyond the stables a fox is just as likely as not to slink by on nightly rambles.

Sometimes there are many animals of one kind about. Then the revels become very merry; there are games of hide-and-seek, of catch-me-if-you-can, and many other kinds. How exciting some of these games are is shown by the racket flying squirrels can make in the ceilings or in the garret of an old house they have found some way to enter. They think they are safe there, and so romp over our heads at will.

The time to study the four-footed wood folk, as well as birds, is while they are still able to live at our very doors. It is fascinating work, for they are the shyest things in the world. Success in watching them, however, requires a knowledge of when to look, where to look, and what to look for. This is the reason for the present series of books describing some of them as actually seen in the wild state and when caught to serve as pets.

The cottontail rabbit is the natural choice as theme for volume one. Cottontails are so plentiful in nearly all parts of the country that they are probably seen more often than any others of the true wood folk, with the exception, perhaps, of the gray squirrel. Their life stories are very closely linked with those of the other little creatures, and their clever tricks have never failed to interest boys and girls.

As no two animals are exactly alike, it occasionally happens that one with unusual size, speed, or cunning will be found. Such a one quickly becomes famous.

Occasionally, too, an animal that is caught and kept as a pet learns many things that help it if later it escapes. A pet that is free again is likely to grow wild very quickly, but equally likely always to be a little different from his wild friends.

Writing a complete biography of any wild rabbit would prove a hopeless task. Too many things happen when no one is there to see. Therefore, to prepare a story really representative of the numerous and varied happenings in a rabbit's life, it has been found necessary to weave together incidents covered by years of observation of rabbits in general.

The many kinds of animals spoken of in this story of Bun still live in their wild state within the limits of the third largest city in the United States. Dogs and cats and traps are always threatening them, but those that are left are wise and may escape their enemies as long as they have a few friends who understand them and allow woods and briar patches to stay uncut.

THE AUTHOR.
CHAPTER I

BUN FINDS FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

"THERE he goes! Hurrah!" shouted a man seated near me in the train, and I looked out the window just in time to see a brown rabbit, wildly pursued by a black and white hound four times his size, dash out of the woods near the station, stop short when he found the train in his path, and then go skipping down the main street of the little Georgia town.

In a wonderful way he dodged mule teams, boys and cur dogs, and in spite of all pursuers safely vanished in a hole under the porch of an empty house. "Holed up!" enthusiastically cried the same outspoken person in my car. "Hand it to a cottontail for getting away every time!"

This exciting incident on the journey south greatly pleased Jimmie, a lad who was traveling with me. "How did the rabbit know the hole was there?" he asked. I explained that a rabbit has so many enemies that he is ever on the lookout for just such places of refuge. Poor little animal, he has to run or hide nearly all the time. He cannot climb trees, he cannot burrow under ground to escape—but how he can run! Faster than a dog, faster than the woodland wind goes bunny; and how he can hide! The game of hide and seek is really his game, but he is always the one who hides while the other animals seek.
Although Jimmie now talked about little except rabbits, it was not until the day we began the slow journey north that the real fun with them began. We were at the station waiting for the train when up the road came running breathlessly a boy from the plantation. He waved his big felt hat until he reached the platform, where he dropped panting beside Jimmie.

"It's rabbits," he gasped as everyone clustered around, not knowing what calamity had made him follow in such haste. Then, after these magic words, out from one pocket he hauled two balls of brown fur with eyes like bright beads. These he deposited in his hat. Two more came out of the same pocket and then four out of the corresponding pocket on the other side. Here were rabbits indeed. The rascal had discovered a nest and carried off all the little cottontails it contained with the expectation that Jimmie would wish to take them with him on the journey. Jimmie, of course, did wish to. He just ached to fill up his pockets with all eight.

At last we arranged the matter by allowing Jimmie to take one and getting the plantation boy's promise to put the other seven back in their nest for the mother rabbit to take care of. And so one little Georgia cottontail started, very much against his will, for Pennsylvania.
He was exceedingly small and looked ridiculous in his new home, a dry goods box; in fact, he was about the size of a tennis ball, but his big eyes sparkled knowingly and the end of his little nose worked up and down in a lively manner whenever milk was put before him and carrots tossed into his box, so I began to think he really had a good chance to live in captivity.

And live he did, for he was a very extraordinary little rabbit, as his later exploits showed. His body grew and his ears grew, but nothing grew like his legs. Jimmie took good care of him and played with him a lot, because he did not scratch or bite; but Bun soon learned to run so fast that he could not easily be caught. He did not often show fear, but ran away just the same, because, after all, he was a little creature from the woods.

Perhaps it was the practice his legs got in jumping out of the dry goods box that started their unusual development. At any rate, nothing could keep him in that box, and when warm May came Bun, whose favorite place was the kitchen window-sill, where he could watch the people outside, one day found the window open and jumped out. It was only about three feet to the ground, so he was not hurt, but, as luck would have it, the gardener and his dog, Shep, just then came around the corner of the house, and with a howl of glee at seeing a rabbit drop from the sky like that, the dog started after him.

Bun's long legs stretched out and he instinctively skipped for the woodpile. Shep came barking and snapping, and was not more than two feet behind when the rabbit's white tail vanished between the logs. But poor Bun got such a fright that no one saw him come out all day. He had always been afraid of the gray cat, but in Shep he had encountered something new, a "cat" that barked loudly and could run too fast to suit him, although, happily, it could not follow him into holes.

And then began chapters in the little rabbit's life that I set down only by carefully weaving together all the bits of information I could gather from men on the farm, from tracks and other signs, and glimpses of rabbits during many trips through the woods and fields that spring and summer.

**CHAPTER II**

**THE DASH FOR FREEDOM**

BUN had, of course, seen the woodpile from the kitchen window, but the rest of the world was new to him. Toward evening he came shyly out, drawn by the pleasant smell of clover in the pasture, and here he came face to face with a huge creature which looked at him and blew loudly through wide, moist nostrils. If Bun's mother had been there she might have said, "Don't run, Bun, that is only a cow." But Bun was so surprised and scared he could not run away, so he did what has saved the life of every rabbit many times, he "froze," that is, he remained motionless, so that he might have been
taken for a clod of earth or a brown stone. The cow sniffed in his direction and then, to his great relief, walked solemnly away, for it was milking time.

Bun squatted there till it was so dark the stars began to shine and night insects to chirp and hum. He was lonely and so very afraid of meeting some new creature. At last he hopped far enough down the pasture to find clover, and as it was now laden with drops of night dew his thirst was soon quenched. He snuffed at the butter-cups, pricked his nose on a low briar, tasted a piece of the bitter skunk cabbage leaf, and altogether felt that he was learning much.

Other rabbits came to feed in the pasture, but avoided Bun because he was something new and smelled of the kitchen and of man. One young rabbit, half-grown like himself, but smaller, did, however, hop slowly up. Bun wished he could run back to the woodpile, but plucked up courage to "freeze" until he and the newcomer touched whiskers in a friendly way. After that they ate some clover leaves together, but the newcomer soon had enough and, without any warning, sprang into the air, kicking her heels in front of Bun's nose. Bun was surprised and very angry, but the other leaped again and frolicked around him until Bun caught the fun of it and leaped too; and he could leap a lot higher than his friend, and also kick farther.
Perhaps the other little rabbit admired him for this, at any rate when the glow of the rising sun began to spread in the sky and the moment came when all rabbits run to safe places for the day, into the woodpile she followed Bun, and found a comfortable place near him.

These two, however, were not to rest long undisturbed, for later in the morning all the maids from the house and the men from the stables were called out to help find the pet rabbit that was lost. As one man had the day before seen Shep chase Bun into the woodpile, it was there that they first looked.

Bun was really a wild rabbit. He did not wish to be caught again; so he squatted down flat among some leaves the wind had blown there and felt scared clear through when someone, peeping through the crevices, saw him and gave a shout.

Bun was troubled about where he should run. He felt he would surely be caught and he was afraid, yet in his little wild heart which now beat so hard against his ribs was the determination to run until he dropped. The other little rabbit felt just the same, but knew where to run, and was ready when the big logs were nearly all pulled away, and the maids, with much laughter at the fun, waited with their aprons held down to serve as a fence.

Another log was moved. "Now!" signaled Bun's friend, and dashed out, with Bun close behind.

"There's two of him!" screeched the maids, very much scared, and waved their aprons frantically, but when Bun's little brown friend ran headlong for their skirts, just like a rat, they shied to one side, screaming more, and the rabbit dashed through; and Bun was close behind.

"After them," cried everybody, and all ran down the pasture shouting. First came Bun's friend, and then little Bun with his brown ears back and his legs hopping for all they were worth, and then came the stable man and the gardener and Jimmie, the boy who had brought Bun from the South, then two kitchen maids, and last of all the cook, who was too fat from eating her own well-baked pies to run, anyway.

Down the pasture they dashed, and all except the rabbits soon got caught again and again by the blackberry briars, until their ankles were well scratched and they stopped very much disgusted. Only the cook kept on, for it was really her fault that Bun got away in the first place, and she, being especially heavy, slipped into a very soft bog, got muddy to her knees, and had to be pulled out by everybody. So the hunt ended there and then, and Bun was safe.

At least he was safe for the present. There are so many creatures in the woods and fields ready to pounce on a young rabbit that its life is always in danger. First of all there are the big hawks. Bun, resting with his friend under some thick briars, heard one give a
shrill screech, as it circled overhead. He instinctively shivered and was glad he was hidden. He was soon to learn about the other enemies.

CHAPTER III

RED SQUIRREL LOSES A RACE

RABBITS have ways of telling each other whatever they think. Theirs, however, is the language of signs and signals. Quick thumps with their hind feet on the ground mean "look out" or "danger coming." Sudden running, with short jumps and tail flat and white like a little flag against the brown body, also means danger.

The rabbits' tails are brown on top and white underneath. When they are hopping about contentedly or trying to slip away from someone without being seen the tails are held down and do not show the white at all. That is one reason why we do not see rabbits oftener; their color, without the white flag, matches the color of the dry grass and leaves in the woods, and when they sit down on the white flag and keep very still only the brightest eyes in the world can see them.

Cottontails do not talk out loud; it would be too dangerous. A head raised to listen, the motion of an ear, and a hundred other little actions are understood by every rabbit and mean something which we should express in words. The baby rabbit copies everything its mother does. When she eats, he examines her lips and eats what he finds she has been nibbling. He is always watching her and learning. And yet, unlike the mother hen of our barn-yard, she rarely utters a sound. She can squeak, she also can scream shrilly when terrified. One never forgets that cry for help. But how seldom it is heard!

Bun quickly found that neither Shep, nor the gray cat, nor the red, sharp-nosed foxes he soon learned about, nor the ring-tailed coons that ambled down the stream beds every night hunting crayfish and frogs, nor the sleepy looking opossums, could find him except by accident if he left no fresh tracks and kept entirely still until they passed.

Tracks, that is, footprints, are dangerous things. Brown Weasel taught him that. Bun had been in the briar patch watching Red Squirrel, a noisy, irritating, but usually harmless little nut eater, scampering to and fro over the stone wall, when all at once he saw Red Squirrel stop and look down at the ground. Bun stood on his hind legs so that he could peep over a fern bed and see too, and there he spied a slender reddish-brown creature with a black tip on the end of a furry little tail. It sniffed about
the clump of weeds where Red Squirrel had been playing and soon began to climb the old wall just where Red Squirrel had run up. Quickly seeing Red Squirrel, it crouched there, looking with wicked eyes.

Red Squirrel did not feel quite safe, and so rushed at full speed along the top of the wall. Brown Weasel, however, could run too. He fairly flew after him. Then Red Squirrel frantically leaped to the ground and dashed helter skelter through the ferns right beside Bun, Brown Weasel not very far behind. Bun, frightened though he was, did not miss a thing. He even noticed that some of the time Brown Weasel could not see Red Squirrel at all in the high weeds, but followed by smelling the footprints he left.

The poor little nut eater thought he was safe when he reached a hole under a stump. He knew all about this hole, for it was there that he stored nice cherry stones he collected under a tree at the far end of the wall. In he scampered with something like a chuckle, but out he popped at the other end when Brown Weasel showed that no ordinary hole was too small for him. Over to the wall they then ran, Red Squirrel chattering loudly with fright and evidently hoping to reach the big wood, which was really not very far away. But suddenly he remembered where there was another especially snug hole in the wall itself, and to this he went instead.

Brown Weasel followed his trail by the scent or smell he left on the ground at each step, and reached the hole just as Red Squirrel remembered there was no other outlet and that he had to get out the way he came in or be caught in a corner. Too late he turned. Brown Weasel came in time to turn him back, then slipped in too. After a minute he came out, but Bun never again saw Red Squirrel. He then and there decided that it would never do to "hole up" if little Brown Weasel chased him.

How did Bun know that the squirrels, hop-toads, mice, and little birds could not harm him? With them all he was on friendly terms almost from the first. It was not size in the weasel that awed him, for he himself was the larger. What then but instinct, that strange sixth sense, the power of which the wild things so often show? It was well, however, that Brown Weasel was later caught in a trap after a raid on the ducks of a neighboring farm, for Bun with all his speed was not old enough to hold his own with such a vicious, swift little beast.

The brown rabbit that had first greeted Bun taught him many things while these two explored together the hidden paths through the briars and bushes. She somehow had learned that the dwarf laurel was poisonous, that the water hemlock, deadly nightshade, Jimpson weed, and the death cup toadstool were also to be dreaded, and that in the wild choke cherry leaves there was a bitter tang which meant danger.

Together these two found all the holes that could be used as hiding places when just running away A proved useless. The woods and the briar patch soon became to Bun like a great castle full of passages and leafy rooms and gardens filled with things to eat.
The rabbits made paths by biting off the twigs and vines in the way. These paths would lead in all directions, but be understood by every rabbit. A dog, however, or other enemy would be lost in them and torn by the briars. Other wild folk had their own paths, too, and where theirs crossed the favorite trail of the fox that came regularly from the river swamp, they would stop, look, and listen just as Jimmie would at the railroad crossing before hurrying to the other side. They, however, also used their keen noses.

**CHAPTER IV**

**BUN DESERTS THE BRIAR PATCH**

By following his friend's white flag Bun was led at night to the farm gardens, where lettuce, cabbage, and other good things grew on all sides. The hay fields were another delight. Paths could be made through them with such ease, and it was so pleasant to wander and play all night and rest all day among masses of food and flowers.

One day, while he was lying in the long grass comfortably sprawled out, a new sound reached him. He leaped erect and turned his sensitive ears in that direction. It was the cut, cut of a mowing machine, but he had never seen one, and did not know about its long row of knives that snip off the grass stalks and anything else in their path. Around and around the field the machine was driven, each time nearer to Bun, and each time leaving less of his lovely grass with the paths that had taken so much labor to lay out.

Bun was furious, but he was also afraid, and so he lay low while the knives cut and cut. Scared rabbits ran past him, red winged blackbirds, bobolinks, and larks flew about protesting because their nests and young ones were in danger, brown and yellow striped garter snakes hurried by, even mice, grasshoppers, and black beetles, but still Bun crouched there hoping that the queer thing drawn by the two gray horses would pass without seeing him. A land turtle stayed too, but Bun did not notice that he drew his head and legs into the cover of his hard shell.

At last the hay was toppling over behind him in a long strip. Cut, cut, cut—and then there was a mighty squeal! The keen knives had passed over Bun, but had caught his long ears and torn a little of the tender skin.

In his pain and terror he only knew of one thing to do, and that was run; so run he did, over the rough new stubble. Shep was there digging for meadow mice, and gave him a sharp chase, but Bun's legs went as if they had wings and he was soon in the runways of the cool woods, where the smart in his ears grew less severe. The jagged scars,
however, never left him, and so ever afterward he was easily recognized no matter where he was seen.

That night a drenching, roaring thunderstorm made both Bun and his friend, Brownie, feel miserable until they found a way to worm themselves under the pile of hotbed sashes which stood on the edge of the farm garden and shed off all water.

Shep later discovered them there and tried to chase them out, but he clumsily broke some of the glass and sneaked away to avoid a scolding from the gardener.

Their fine shelter was not, however, to be enjoyed many days undisputed. Another rabbit, a cross old fellow, with many scars on his nose and ears, happened to find them during the next storm, and instantly wanted to claim this wonderful spot as his own.

He crawled under the sash pile and began cleaning out the place by biting and scratching the young rabbits until they were lucky to get away with their lives. After that day the old tyrant followed them wherever he could and meanly took everything else that suited his tastes. He became so troublesome that Bun, whom he especially hated, had to desert the briar patch. All alone he went exploring, and made his home several fields beyond, where an old stone quarry now overgrown with weeds and bushes gave him protection enough from the ever-watchful hawks and owls.

It was an immense, weird place, lined with rock piles and wet mossy spots where water dripped all day. A tangle of rusty barbed wire, thrown into the quarry after a fence had been cleaned away, made a good retreat or dog stop, and if this failed, there were two places to "hole up" in. One was a drain that took spring water from the quarry to the farm stables. In exploring this Bun encountered a bullfrog nearly as large as himself, and some big furry muskrats that looked fierce, but preferred plain grass and roots to a diet of rabbit.

These animals had a peculiar musky scent, but Bun put up with that and became rather friendly with the whole queer family. They were not half so bad as the skunk family nearby in the rock pile, nor so disagreeable as the old woodchuck which had possession of the only burrow between the quarry and the woods. The woodchuck ate grass too, but the fat old fellow had twice bitten Bun when two dogs had forced the rabbit to seek shelter in his home.

One might think that by this time Bun would be covered with scars from his many encounters, but the only ones he ever showed were those on his ears. His ears, like those of all rabbits, were funnel shaped and flattened at the tip to catch every sound that might be in the air. If he had not had these long ears and his big eyes, as well as his strong legs, his enemies would surely have been able to slip up to him. Bun could hear a man walking fifty yards away. He could almost hear things that did not make a sound and see things before they were visible; that is why he was able to live through that first long summer when he was young and just learning.
CHAPTER V

QUEER NEIGHBORS

WHEN Bun was resting during the day in some shady place he dozed pleasantly most of the time, because he knew that the squirrels or the birds would give him warning of an enemy approaching. Watchful crows nearly always attacked the hawks when they appeared, and also cawed angrily when a man, a fox, a dog, or even a belated old 'possum came in their direction. The blue-jays also spread alarms. Bun disliked their harsh cries, but he always heeded them. What, however, could he find to give him helpful warning at night time?

The big horned owls keep tireless watch, and fly down noiselessly on their padded wings, the animals that are abroad everywhere after nightfall hardly make a sound on the dew-soaked grass. They slip about stealthily, with only an occasional gleam of eyes or dark shadow to show their whereabouts. Why could there not be sharp-eyed blue-jays or crows to sound alarms at night when they are so much needed? But Bun found other friends.
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

Over the quarry leaned a giant poplar tree. It bore yellowish flowers in the spring, the seed from which helped to feed the two gray squirrels and several pert chipmunks all through the late summer and autumn. The gray squirrels came to the quarry by way of a rail fence that led from a group of trees on the hill a hundred yards away; their real home was a hole a woodpecker had drilled high up in a partly dead buttonball tree.

Bun thought they took big chances when they came all that distance along the fence in day time, and one day he saw a hawk dash for one of them. It was the swift Cooper's Hawk, who was wiser than the big Red Tail and the smaller but fiercer little Sharp Shin.

Cooper's Hawk headed off Gray Squirrel, and then hovered over him with talons ready. Bun stood up in terror, feeling that nothing could save the squirrel, but Gray Squirrel was not there any more; at least he could not be seen from above, for he had dodged under the top board of the fence. Cooper's Hawk flew down at one side of the fence and Gray Squirrel quickly crawled to the opposite side of the board, so that it was still between them. Around and around the board crawled the squirrel as the hawk tried all sorts of tricks to get at him.

Cooper's Hawk at last screamed for his mate to come to help him, but she was far away after young chickens and did not hear, and so he just settled on a post and looked across while Gray Squirrel edged along nearer to the poplar tree, and soon was close enough to make a run for it.

The poplar had a hollow place part way up, in which a brood of barn owls lived, but Gray Squirrel did not wait to find out whether the parent owls were at home; he just jumped into the hole and then chattered and scolded Cooper's Hawk until the big bird angrily flew away. Gray Squirrel then came out and collected seeds from the ground, for why be afraid after danger has passed?

Bun had been very much in awe of the big winged, ghostlike barn owls, but this incident set him thinking. He remembered he had never seen them catch anything except mice. Even the record of little Screech Owl was poor in comparison, for Screech Owl occasionally caught birds. So the next time one of the barn owls flew over him Bun kept on eating, though he was out in the open. The owl went by and gave a long screech to awaken the three nestlings in the poplar. They answered with many weird, rasping cries.

"It's a queer family," mused Bun, "but it evidently means no harm. Perhaps it will be useful." Soon after that one of the young ones flopped out of the hollow and lit on a lone fence post. Almost instantly a shadow slipped along the ground toward the post. It was one of the foxes that sometimes roamed from the river swamp a mile away. He had been stalking Bun until this new prey appeared. Once he had come upon him in the moonlight, and on that occasion had made Bun run for his life.
The two parent owls saw the shadow too, and with screeches swooped down from the poplar. They confused the fox; he was a young one and very much afraid that such a fuss meant trouble for him, so away he sneaked, thinking all the time that this was not half so nice a place to hunt in as the dark river swamp, where big owls did not shout at him and try to pick out his eyes. Thus Bun escaped the persecution of one enemy.

He also found that flying squirrels lived in the quarry. They moved around at night and gave timid squeaks whenever danger came near. At first they were even afraid of him and of the muskrats, but after a time they became so trustful as to play their games of tag and hide and seek right around him when he hopped under the poplar. He was surprised to find how many of the wild things in and around the quarry were friendly, and a great love of the place grew in his heart.
CHAPTER VI

A NIGHT OF HARD RUNNING

AND now approached the most trying time of Bun's life; autumn—the days of the hound and the gun, poor food, sparse cover, and cold weather. He had unconsciously been preparing for it. His muscles were hardened by many long runs at night. His habits were changing too. As the leaves yellowed and dropped from the bushes and left less cover he became more timid. What could he do against hawks, owls, foxes, men, and all the long list of his other enemies when there was no friendly cover to hide in?

He thought of living in the muskrats' drain and coming out only to feed, but a boy had made this unsafe by setting a jump trap at the entrance which caught by the leg whatever went in or out, including two of the poor furry ones. The same boy had also trapped one of the skunks, and had been punished by having his clothes covered with a terrible odor. This odor, clung about the quarry for weeks and brought there to investigate more animals than Bun had ever seen before. Among them were two hounds. Barn Owl saw them coming one evening and rasped a warning, but already Bun had heard their footfalls and was on the alert.

They trotted along the edge of the quarry, sniffing inquiringly at everything, and, as luck would have it, crossed the trail Bun had left as he hopped out of the thicket on his way into the field.

Bun squatted flat against the ground as one of the hounds stopped to sniff at his tracks. They were fairly fresh, and the hound began to wag his tail joyously as he sniffed along them. Then he raised his head in the air and gave one long thrilling bark—"Woo-oo-oo."

The other hound joined him and began to wag his tail too. Yes, there was surely a rabbit nearby. "Wipe-ki-ipe," shouted this other one. Then they both followed the tracks just as Brown Weasel had once followed those left by poor Red Squirrel.

Bun's heart beat fast, but he kept crouched and fixed his long hind legs so that he could start off with one mighty leap. They were only a few feet from him now—"Woo-oo" began the first hound, and then ended with an "oop, oo-oop" as he saw Bun and jumped for him.

Up flew Bun and away, both hounds closely following his white tail. Down the stony side of the quarry he turned and then around the thicket until he had reached the barbed wire tangle. Here he waited and watched the hounds flounder down the rocks and then come crashing through the bushes.

It was a fresh hot scent they followed, and they both blundered straight into the barbed wire.
The sharp points jabbed and tore them until both howled an entirely new tune.

They crawled out of the wire very quickly and sat down to lick their hurts and sadly shake their sore ears while Bun watched them and felt mighty proud of himself. He did not feel afraid now. He was sure that his legs and tricks were a match for any dog.

Thud, thud, went his hind feet in a challenge to the hounds. Thud, thud—and he was actually running in front of them, courting another chase.

"Woo-oo-oo" spoke up the larger hound, and started after him once more, the other trailing along behind, keeping a sharp lookout for more barbed wire traps. But Bun did not hunt for more wire, he just felt like running!

All the night folk were out feeding, and, of course, the disturbance around the quarry upset all within hearing. When Bun led the hounds to the rail fence, then back across the meadow to the quarry, he nearly ran into an old 'possum; but 'possum was good natured about it, and to escape trouble climbed a "No Trespassing" sign. There he sat with a wise look on his face until the chase had safely passed him. 'Possum is always that way: anything to save trouble.

A raccoon that had wandered up from the river swamp early in the evening was now sitting on a high limb of a dead hickory, very much disgusted over the trick Bun had played on him in leading the hounds to interrupt his walk. He looked down and growled furiously—he was afraid that the hounds would discover him and keep him up there until men came with guns in the morning.

"All the woods people are getting angry at me," thought Bun. "But what can I do? The hounds, big, slow fools that they are, won't leave my trail." Indeed, they were now coming bellowing up the field, exultant over having worked out a tangle in the scent line.

Bun slipped away to the quarry and once more headed for the barbed wire. He was getting worried. And right in the narrow path was the old skunk that lived in the stone pile all alone now that his mate had been trapped.

He seemed in an awful temper. His black and white fur stood on end and his teeth gleamed in the starlight. Everything about him said, "Get back! Keep out of here," but Bun could not go back then. The hounds were coming over the edge of the quarry.

"Woo-oo-oo, wipe-ki-ipe," the trail was straight and hot.

Bun all at once thought of the days when he was penned in the dry goods box. Jump to get out of trouble had been what he learned then, and now just in the nick of time he tightened under him those great legs of his and gave one leap. Right over the bristling
skunk he flew and safely away to the wire, while behind him he heard two roars as the hounds met the skunk. There was growling and there was thumping and then crashing of brush and "ki-ipes" galore, and oh, such a smell!

Bun did not get over it for days. Neither did the hounds' owner after they returned with a plentiful supply of perfume. But now the den behind the rock pile was without a tenant and Bun could move in whenever he chose. However, he let it air for a long time.

CHAPTER VII

BUN MEETS A RIVAL

NOT another rabbit had come to the quarry all through the summer. Bun had almost forgotten what one looked like. But with September came men to train young hounds, and this meant such persecution in the briar patch that one old rabbit who knew about the drain in the quarry ran all the way there when pursued.

Bun, sitting on a sunny ledge of rock, watched it come and saw the hounds stringing along the trail. Here was trouble for sure! But the hounds were tired and left the place just as soon as they found that the trail ended in the drain. The men remained at a distance, but made a mental note of the fact that the quarry was a "rabbity" place.

The new rabbit was a large one. To Bun it looked the same size as the big tyrant that drove him out of the briar patch. Would he be driven out of his beloved quarry? He worried over this until night, and then nervously ran into the field where the big rabbit could not sneak up to him unawares and tear him with its powerful blows. He did not dare to eat.

Finally he saw a shadow and knew the stranger was coming. It saw or smelled him and stopped. Then, though rabbits rarely fight in the autumn, it thumped a challenge. Bun's heart leaped, but he challenged back—thump, thump. Then he and the stranger sidled closer, the stranger fiercely smacking his lips. And as they neared each other Bun noticed a queer thing. He himself was as large, yes, larger, than the other rabbit! He had grown all through the summer. Perhaps his parents down in southern Georgia had been larger than the rabbits around the briar patch, or perhaps the change from the South had given him some advantage. But be this as it may, he was truly a very big fellow now.

Thud, thud, went his feet—and then fiercely he charged, and the other made a rush at the same moment, so that they met in the air, kicking each other with hind feet for all each was worth. Back to the ground and then up again for another kick. Bun lost tufts of hair, but every time he struck he managed to do it a little harder, and at last he knocked the stranger head over heels and landed on top of him, kicking and tearing as fiercely as he could.
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

The big stranger had had enough. He ran—ran from Bun, who once was as little as a tennis ball and afraid of his own shadow. And Bun ran after him, not fast, but steadily, for, unafraid now, he was on his way to the old briar patch where his little friend, Brownie, had been left and where, before the big tyrant rabbit appeared, all his baby games had been played in the paths through the briar tangles.

As at last he neared its shadows he felt almost afraid to look around. Was it changed? No, here was the centre path and over there the cross cut and the skunk cabbage leaves he had once tasted, and the bog hole into which the cook had fallen. To be sure, the briars and bushes had grown in places, but the old landmarks were there, and Bun sniffed them joyfully.

The moon was high and full. The rabbit could see everything plainly, and so kept on exploring his good old haunts. He was uneasy, always looking for something, and up by the pasture fence he found it, the trail of Brownie, the little rabbit he had played with all through the early spring.

Bun leaped for joy and kicked out those great hind legs of his just as he had done there in the pasture months before. Down the trail he struck, hopping carefully to keep the line and always looking out for enemies. The little brown bats dipped at him and squeaked. Their feeding being over, playtime had come, they thought, but Bun hardly noticed them or the fat toads or the white-footed wood-mice under the trees.

Once he crouched flat as a great owl flew silently from the wood, and once he gave a snarling 'possum the path, but Brownie he must find, so he pushed on.

It was in the woods that he came across another rabbit scent. He stopped short. The old bully of his younger days had passed here. He had rubbed against a sapling and left several long brown hairs in the bark. Every bit of fur on Bun's back tingled. In a rage he reared up against the sapling and, reaching as high as he could, rubbed against it with a force that left his own scent and bits of his own light colored fur clinging to the tree. This amounted to a challenge to the other rabbit. It meant that one had come to his briar patch who felt strong enough to dispute possession.

Brownie had traveled quite a distance that evening, so it was not until daylight was spreading over the land that her old playmate found her. In the protecting angle of a giant chestnut tree’s roots Brownie had settled herself comfortably for the day. Bun did not see her at once, but when he cautiously hopped around the tree they were suddenly face to face.

Was this large soft eyed cottontail Brownie? Bun stood there frozen with surprise, while Brownie, not recognizing him, leaped up in alarm and scurried off. The breezes whispered to him, "It's Brownie, your old playmate," and Bun's heart thrilled and then turned sick within him because she had run away.
Brownie was only obeying the law of her kind. In the autumn every rabbit lives alone for safety's sake, even mates shun each other, and brothers and sisters pass coldly if they meet at all. Bun would gradually learn this, but the first lesson was severe, for never was rabbit more lonely. Yes, Brownie had shunned him; the only real friend he had ever known had turned her back.

He drifted slowly back to the briars and hid himself for the day beneath a pile of brushwood. There he crouched, still unhappy, while the sun rose and then sank again, leaving cool shadows and just enough reflection in the sky to light the way for the rabbits until the moon appeared. A rabbit can get along somehow on the darkest night, but not with any satisfaction.

Just as Bun hopped from the briars and tested the wind very carefully with his sensitive nose and ears, there was wafted to him the odor that he had so feared and hated, the odor of the big tyrant. Now, indeed, he was on the alert. Each night sound was analyzed, every movement near him studied.

At last he decided that his old enemy was on the other side of the pasture fence, and there he hopped very quietly, but very full of purpose. Yes, there sat a rabbit among the
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

grass clumps, a rabbit with scratched ears and the broad, cruel head he could never forget. He looked large and very strong, but Bun did not hesitate; his chance had come to match strength with the bully. He thumped the challenge, and anger flaring up at the other's insolent reply, he charged like a bullet.

The big fellow dodged, and then, furious all through, stood on his tip toes and dared Bun to come again. He came, and the two met like furies two feet in the air. With the first clash of feet Bun knew he was the stronger. He drove down with his hind legs, bumped and pummelled and scratched, caring not how his own body suffered. At last he rolled the other over and over, all the breath beaten out of him.

Every time the rabbit rallied he was pummelled again, until, like the coward he was, he squealed at the top of his harsh voice so loudly that Bun stopped his punishing. This gave the tyrant his chance to escape, and he took it. Down those paths he rushed through which he had once chased Bun and little Brownie. He had often dodged dogs here, but no big clumsy hound was behind him on this race. It was a younger, stronger, bigger rabbit than he, who could run the narrow paths just as quickly and turn when he turned.

The big bully's nerve was entirely gone, and now he resorted to the most dangerous trick ever used by the wild things in their efforts to escape each other—he sought man.

In the stable the two red cows were being milked. The door was partly open to let in air, and beside the hired man and his milk pail sat Gray Cat waiting for her saucerful of milk. Past them all ran the big rabbit, first into one of the spare stalls and then to the far end of the stable, where some straw made a hiding place.

Gray Cat started stealthily after him, but was soon stopped by the hired man and chased outside. When the door slammed Gray Cat began to meow and then to look around for an open window by which to get in. She walked around the stable and suddenly met Bun, who was still looking for his enemy and in a rage at having lost sight of him.

Here was luck for Gray Cat, who was so hungry that she made up her mind to have this rabbit no matter what happened. She crouched close to the ground all ready for a spring, and fixed her yellow eyes on the top of Bun's shoulder, where she knew she must strike and then hold on. She slipped a little closer and then still closer, while poor Bun just sat there in the path as if charmed and unable to get away.

And then Bun thumped his hind legs against the ground and began to shift his weight from one foot to the other as he grew more and more excited. Just as Gray Cat gathered together all her muscles for the leap, he hit her. Before she could turn he shot over her
again and kicked furiously as he passed. Gray Cat clawed the air and spit and then ran up a tree, all courage gone, her hair bristling with fear and rage.

And so Bun, following the way of the wild things, was now showing his old enemies that "the worm will turn," and doing it very thoroughly. But with all his new strength he never did anything foolish. He was king of rabbit land, but he did not forget the one great rabbit rule—when danger threatens, run and hide.

He did not forget Brownie, but he never followed her. He took care, however, always to know where she was and to make sure that he was near enough to signal when danger appeared. And these were dangerous times. The winds were blowing more strongly; more leaves were falling, and with the hordes of little migrating birds came many hawks by day and owls by night. All the wild things that seek the warm South for the winter were on the move, and the animals that stay in the North were restless and hunting safe, warm dens.

Only good runners like the wild deer and the rabbits scorned dens, but now that the briars and bushes were leafless no rabbit dared stir from his bed while daylight lasted. He would be too likely to be seen at once and chased. On fine days the rabbits remained hidden in the open meadows. The grass might be only three inches long, but by a few digs with his front feet and a little stamping with his hind legs each rabbit could make a bed just the right length and just the right depth to bring his back below the level of the grass tops so that he could be seen only from above; and from above he looked like brown earth.

Bun made a deeper bed than the others, but, like them, he fixed things so that he could see all around without even raising his head. His legs were always tucked under him ready for a great leap, and he knew where it was safest to run if danger came. It was not entirely his fault that he got into trouble the day the Lampton beagle hounds visited the farm.

CHAPTER VIII

BUN AND BROWNIE IN DANGER

NOW began getting more than occasional glimpses of Bun. This began when a gentleman who lived in another county, Mr. Lampton by name, boasted to me about his little beagles and what they could do. I, perhaps unwisely, told him there was a rabbit on my farm that would laugh at anything he could bring to chase it. Of course, I meant Bun. I had every confidence in his ability to get away, and knew that Lampton never let his hounds really catch a rabbit if he could stop them.

Lampton responded to what he considered a challenge by coming on a Friday afternoon with fifteen fine little beagles. Some were brown and white, some had black spots, but
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

one was especially well marked. He had black on his back like a saddle and tan on his long ears. He was Ranger, an old hound of great fame as a hunter.

The beagles were tumbled out of the automobile by two boys and led in a pack to the pasture where Lampton with a good blast on his silver horn gave them the signal to leave him and hunt.

They were a merry lot and did not work very hard at first, but, as luck would have it, one found the trail left by Brownie during her night ramble. This beagle had a keen nose, and although the scent was stale he followed it, and by his yelping brought all the others to the place.

Brownie soon had to run, and then what a howling and yelping we heard! The beagles raced after her until she struck a rabbit path through the briars, then they had to go slowly until past the tangle. She had doubled back, so back came the beagles too, making the whole woods resound. They made such music that Brownie at once lost her head and tried to hole up; that is, she rushed to the garden drain pipe. Alas, the entrance was stopped up with stones.

I did not know that the drain was not open and was surprised when I saw her run back to the briars and then on to another hole. She did not go in, for that too was freshly stopped up. The last resort was a hollow log far down the woods. Could she reach it? Away she raced, the pack in full cry not far behind.

But from the bushes now came Bun. The noise had startled him from his bed.

Brownie saw him and put forth one great effort. The excited beagles came leaping into sight, their one idea being to catch a glimpse of the tired rabbit. And there, right ahead, scornful of them all, ambled big Bun.

The foremost saw him and changed their yelps to the excited view cry. The others joyfully took it up and followed madly, no longer nosing the trail. But what is this they see? The tired out rabbit begins to run, to soar away, twelve, fifteen feet at a leap—the scent is a new one. Yes, too late the pack sees it has been tricked by another rabbit. But now rage fills every heart, they settle down to the new scent with sullen determination.

Lampton and I saw Bun clearly, and the stable men who had gathered on the hill cheered loudly. They had looked forward to the hunt, and, as I found out afterward, were the ones who meanly stopped the drains so that the chase would be longer.

We saw that the beagles were puzzled when they came to Bun's first turn, but they were not so foolish as other hounds he had dealt with. Their circling with noses to the earth caught the trail again and forced him to leave the briars. He dashed across the woods, forded a stream, made a quick turn to mix up the trail, and then led away to his old hiding place, the quarry. He followed the fence lines, but it was a long, hard run and tired him. Happily though, it tired the beagles too.
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

They were not nearly so fast as he, but they never left the trail, the trail that always must lead to the rabbit if it can be followed.

When Bun was sliding down the slippery bank of the quarry we thought he was safe; the barbed-wire tangle was there, and so were the skunk and the muskrat dens.

"He's holed now," I shouted to Lampton as I reached the quarry, "that pack of yours is good, but not good enough for a rabbit like that. I guess you're beaten."

Then I saw Bun run to the muskrat hole to make sure it was all right. Horrors! It was newly closed with big stones. He ran over to the rock pile where the skunk had lived—it too was closed. Like myself, he did not know that the stable men had also stopped up these holes.

Nothing was left but the wire, and as the excited beagles came scrambling down he hid in its prickly center. In another moment the quarry seemed filled with dogs and their howling. They ran everywhere. Some circled the wire, some tried to go into it, and Ranger, the infallible old hound, scented Bun and dashed between the barbed coils. What mattered it if the wire points tore his ears and feet here was the rabbit.

Bun seemed surrounded, trapped. But it was not like him to lose heart. Before Lampton came, he rushed into the nearest hound so suddenly that he got by him. He dodged another, jumped a third, and then was away before half the fifteen knew what happened.

I shouted joyfully.

"Don't crow yet," advised my companion. "He didn't hole up. I'll surely win. We had better be ready to stop the hounds."

Bun's ears did look loose with fatigue, his hops seemed lagging. He was going back toward the farm, and not twenty yards behind were three of the beagle pack. Strong runners these three, and very eager.

"There's no chance for him to hide," I cried. "I can't stand seeing any more of this. I'll say you won. We must save him!"

We were both already out of breath from following the fast chase, but now ran up the meadow shouting to the hounds. As well try to stop the rolling ocean; the hounds were beyond control, they could not be stopped.

"Get between," gasped Lampton. "Here, take my whip, I can't run another step." But the chase led straight away, and I could not catch up. I saw Bun still a considerable distance ahead of the dogs, his great legs faithfully driving him.

He stopped for a moment in a bunch of tall grass, then leaped to one side, and ran holding himself low with flag down so that the hounds, noses on the trail, would not view him. He knew what he was doing.
Then a very strange thing happened. No sooner did the first beagles reach the bunch of grass than there were piercing yelps.

But these were yelps of pain, yelps of fear. The other hounds came up and added their voices to the new music. Several rolled on the ground, others pawed their ears, two put their tails between their legs and ran off howling.

It was as if a plague had struck them, and I suspected what had happened. Bun's trail had crossed a yellow jackets' nest, and the pack had found hundreds of the bad-tempered insects at home. Oh, what medicine for an enemy!

Bun was putting a whole broad field behind him, while the beagles rolled and yelped and scratched yellow jackets, those little fellows with stings that work as fast and furious as a sewing machine's needles.

Lampton came up puffing hard and very red in the face. He called and blew his horn and wildly slapped yellow jackets right and left. When at length he had the panting beagles collected at a safe distance he sat down on the grass, mopped his brow, and laughed ruefully. It certainly seemed as if Bun had won.

"Where's Ranger?" I asked, looking around. Lampton jumped up and looked too.

"Why, there he goes down the field. He's on the trail again!"

Sure enough, Ranger, the old champion, had not given up. It was a race now between a wonderful rabbit and a renowned dog. Which would win?

From the hill we watched Ranger running on and on until he was only a dot. We could not see Bun. To the pasture went the hound, then up to the farm buildings. Then to the very rear of the house.

"The hound's going home!" I cried.

"Then the rabbit is too," said Lampton. "Something's happened there, look, quick!" The black and white speck was jumping up and down against the side of the house.

Jimmie ran to meet us before we reached the pasture fence. His round face was all smiles and his voice shrill from excitement.

"I've got my rabbit again. He came back! Jumped in the kitchen window and went to the corner where his box used to be. And he's grown awful big now!"

Ranger, tired but determined, was still trying to get in the window. He looked at us and leaped again, almost succeeding. It was Lampton, owner of the hound, who went up and closed the window, thus shutting out the dog. Good sport that he was, he laughed in his hearty way. "You and the big rabbit win," he said to me.
CHAPTER IX

BROWNIE'S TRAIL IN THE SNOW

THUS Bun came back. He gave up freedom, the power to roam at will over his favorite fields and woods—but only when he knew his life was at stake.

Jimmie had no trouble in catching him. He found the big rabbit unresisting—resigned to his fate. All that day and the next Jimmie worked over a roomy pen or runway of wire netting. When this and a comfortable shelter box were finished he put Bun there, so that he could enjoy the fresh air but not escape, nor be reached by prowling dogs and cats.

Several weeks passed and Bun seemed content in his new quarters. He tolerated all the fuss visitors made over him, and he greatly enjoyed hay, grain, celery, and winter apples. But with the first days of March came thawing weather and a change in him. He wanted to get out.

When no one was watching he would hop up to the wire and try to gnaw it through, then he would restlessly circle the pen and try the gnawing again. Sometimes he made great leaps against the wire, only to fall back. He cracked his long front teeth, he rubbed some of the soft fur from his nose and body and even injured his slender feet, but what did he care? He wanted to get out!

And one day we found out why. It had snowed the night before, a soft snow scarcely two inches deep which did not discourage the night travels of the wild things. Back of the barn were tracks of mice that had come from the corn crib, also tracks of Gray Cat as she made her rounds in search of prey; but near Bun's pen was a different track. The footmarks were in fours: two large marks in front, side by side, and right behind them two smaller ones in line, like a rudder. Each set of four marks showed one hop made by the animal—a rabbit. There had been many hops around Bun's pen during the night, all made by one rabbit, for there was only one track leading there and one going back to the woods. Was the rabbit Brownie? Bun alone knew, and he was lonely.

"Suppose we catch the other rabbit," I suggested to Jimmie, "then Bun needn't be lonely anymore." Of course he was delighted, and wished to begin the chase at once; so we hurried along the track leading to the woods. As we climbed the pasture fence I glanced back and could see Bun standing on his hind legs interestingly watching us; he looked as if he knew all about our plans.
Bun: A Wild Rabbit

The tracks soon led to a clump of low willows where from the fresh scars on the young shoots it was evident the hungry rabbit had gnawed bark and other tender parts above the snow. It had then made a bed under some loose brush, only to leave it as too cold or too dangerous.

While we walked Jimmie made me tell him all about the little animals. In winter a rabbit endures great hardships. The icy blasts are bad enough in daytime, but often terrible at night. Woe to the one who has not found a brush pile to crouch under or a hole to run into when the north wind howls through the frozen woods. Strangely enough, snow is warm in comparison. Bunny can let it fall like a blanket about him, shutting off the wind entirely, but he cannot burrow under it like the muskrat and the meadow mouse, who both delight in snow because they can make tunnels and be hidden from owls and other enemies.

When snow solidly covers the grass, bunny, being built for running and not for digging, has hard work to find enough grass blades and weed leaves sticking above the crust. He soon begins on all the kinds of tender twigs he finds in his path. Little oaks, chestnuts, dogwoods—briars and even poison ivy form a part of the menu, but fruit trees seem to be especially delicious.

Of course, only buds and tender, young bark can be eaten, and where these grow higher than bunny can reach when standing on tiptoe on the snow the trees are safe, but poor bunny goes hungry.

How many days and nights must go by without a cottontail getting anything to eat! If the snow is deep as well as soft, even though he spread his toes he cannot travel without leaving big, dangerous tracks, and so, to keep enemies from finding him, he must sit in his bed enduring hunger until the sun forms a crust on the snow or melts it in places. No wonder he then tries to eat everything in sight.

Jimmie pointed out some tall twigs that had been gnawed through so that when they fell to the ground the rabbit could get the buds growing on their tips. This was a clever trick that all rabbits soon learn.

It was exciting sport, pushing through the snow-laden tangles, trying not to lose the tracks and wondering whether we would come upon the rabbit. We went with great caution and kept a sharp watch ahead. Other rabbits had crossed the trail, squirrels' tracks often misled us for a moment, and little birds, such as juncoes, chickadees, and downy woodpeckers, who also braved the late cold, took attention from the delicate marks in the snow; but at last like a bomb shell the rabbit burst from a snug bed that anyone would have passed without seeing had it not been for the telltale tracks.

Off bounded bunny like a big oak leaf wind driven over the snow; surely none but Brownie had such a dark coat, such a trim form, and saucy way of running. We felt we must catch her.
Out of sight behind the hill she stopped under some briars, only, however, to dash off once more just as soon as we came near. This happened several times without the slightest chance to catch her. Then suddenly, when she began to tire, the trail ended as completely as if she had flown away like a bird.

There was a dead tree nearby a suspiciously rotten looking tree, and sure enough, it was hollow and had a good-sized hole at the foot, a hole with brown rabbit hairs sticking to its rough sides.

By kneeling and reaching my hand into the hollow I found that it ran far up and was so narrow that a rabbit, though unable to climb like a squirrel, could force a way up bracing its back against one side and kicking against the other. No doubt this hollow, which bore tooth and claw marks of many animals, had often saved the lives of cottontails.

There was nothing for us to do but smoke Brownie out. This meant building a fire on the snowy ground. Fortunately, though, we found plenty of dry wood. Limbs that have died but have not yet fallen are wind dried and always make wonderful fires.

So as not to scorch the tree and perhaps the rabbit too the twigs were heaped a foot away from the hole, and the smoke led into it by a funnel of bark stripped from the small limbs of a rotting chestnut tree.

For a minute or two smoke went up, but nothing happened; so we put damp leaves on the fire and sent more suffocating clouds into the hollow. Then slap bang went the smoke funnel out of our hands and down came the rabbit with dust, smoke, and a great scramble.

We caught her, but more through luck than anything else, for she jumped into Jimmie's coat, where all her kicks came too late to free her. There is only one way to hold a lively cottontail, and that is with one hand encircling its neck and the other tightly around both hind legs. Poor frightened rabbit, when we picked her up she screamed as if sure her end had come. But when at last she was gently set down in Jimmie's pen she seemed almost tame, as if having learned our good intentions.

Bun sat immovable at one end, and she hopped over to a corner and crouched there as long as we were in sight. Bun's wild disposition would not at first permit him to give the slightest sign that he was glad, but no sooner did we move behind the barn than he crossed to where Brownie sat and by way of greeting solemnly but affectionately began to nibble her nose. Once more the two playmates were together.
CHAPTER X

ADVENTURES NEAR THE QUARRY

WHEN April brought luscious new grass and warmth that softened even the night air, Jimmie and I opened the door of Bun's snug pen and offered him and Brownie their former freedom. At first they would not stir from the enclosure where they had been so well protected and fed, but when the sun sank in the west both suddenly appeared in the pasture, running to the woods as fast as they could go, and on the following morning their pen was still deserted.

After that I often wondered where they went and whether they were still safe, but had not time to look for them. At length, however, certain work on fences near the old quarry brought me in that direction, and in walking over a field I scared up a cottontail. It ran a little distance and, seeing I did not follow, stopped under a bush to watch me.

"Ho, ho," said I to myself, "this is springtime, and that rabbit's young ones must be nearby or she would have run out of sight." I went over to the fence, but kept thinking about the rabbit, and how much it looked like Brownie. So on the way back I walked up and down the field, searching for a rabbit nest and for any sign of either Brownie or Bun.

The old rabbit was actually still crouching under the bush an watching my every move. A nearer look showed a scar on her nose, a scar I immediately recognized, for on the second day after Brownie was caught she became frightened at feeding time and hurt her nose in a leap against the wire of the pen. So here was Brownie, once more as wild as the most untamed cottontail on the farm. But where was Bun, and where was the nest full of young rabbits she seemed afraid I would find?

There are several rules to remember when you hunt for little rabbits, and this time I followed all of them with little success. To begin with, take care not to step on the hidden nest or on any young rabbit that may have strayed from it and crouched in the grass. The little fellow will not move out of the way. Keep looking in sunny places for tufts of fur and for any spot bluish in color; for when Mollie Cottontail digs the snug little hole in the ground that is just deep and wide enough to properly hold the youngsters, she uses as a lining and covering, besides some dry grass and leaves, a quantity of soft fur plucked from her sides. This fur is bluish in color.

The top of the nest is level with the ground, all the dirt Mollie removes being carefully scattered where it will not be noticed by enemies. Over the little youngsters comes the blanket of fur and over this a covering of grass or straw or whatever trash lies nearby and looks natural; but since Mollie, who hides somewhere near in the daytime, visits the nest at least twice each night for the two weeks the young are there, and has to open the cover and close it after her each time, it usually happens that a little of the blue fur lining is pulled out. The little rabbits are so lively and so eager to be fed that they help to
scatter the covering. The last thing to remember is that no animal or person who is not a friend should see you find a nest.

The nest I hunted, Brownie's nest, was so well hidden that I gave up finding it and left the field by climbing over an old rail fence. But then something happened; Shep, who had evidently sighted me from the barn, now rushed up, barking and leaping with joy. He had scarcely quieted down when a rabbit, evidently Brownie again, appeared as if by magic and ran along the fence, fairly daring him to chase her. Of course he started off at full speed after her little white flag, which seemed so easy to catch, yet somehow always kept well ahead. And then I, sure that the nest was now very near, looked again and this time found it!

On the sunny side of the fence, right in the clover and grass, was the telltale bluish patch. With one finger I quickly lifted the covering and saw the bed of fur and the moving mass of small pink and gray bodies, ears, and even legs. There were eight, still too young to have their eyes open and to boast of hair, but all very much alive. That was enough for the present, so back went all of the covering and away I strode, whistling for Shep.

A week later Jimmie and I took a cautious look at the nest and found the eight little rabbits, nearly twice as large as before, and very shy. One that seemed larger than the others I took out for a closer look. His eyes were open, and he was now a perfect rabbit, ready to run from the nest when a few more warm days had brought out enough new leaves and grass around the old quarry to give secure hiding places to such a little thing whenever he needed it.

But not one of them was patient enough to wait many days; one week more they spent under the fur cover, and then when next the mother came they followed her white flag to the quarry, where the friendly briars and brush heaps were. No doubt they nibbled the luscious grass on the way, no doubt too they kicked their little heels in the air and rejoiced at being out in the great world, but born in them as in Brownie and Bun was the instinct to look and listen, to run and to hide.

They did not return to the nest, which promptly was made use of by a family of short-tailed meadow mice, whose well-worn little paths spread through the grass on all sides. The mice did not mind a few rabbit fleas. Then the nest was taken by a queen bumblebee who needed just such a snug dry place for her summer broods of workers. After that Jimmie and I left it very much alone.

Bun, big and strong and wiser than ever, was seen near the quarry many times during the long afternoons in late May and June. He and Brownie and the young ones were at such times nearly always together feeding, but ever on the watch.

Once I found three of the youngsters playing a rollicking game of tag around their father, while not far away sat Brownie watching them and other little fellows that
frisked among the grass clumps in the meadow. It was chase and leap and kick just as in
the days Bun first knew Brownie. Why did he not ignore or avoid his young offspring as
did other fathers in the rabbit world—who knows?

He and Brownie together kept the youngsters out of all kinds of dangers until a pair of
red-tail hawks located the family. After that there was scarcely an hour of the day that
one of these birds could not be seen watching from a limb of the poplar tree or sailing
over the quarry. They caught the runt of the family and bore him off in triumph to their
young ones, and they very nearly succeeded in getting one of the others. It was up to
Bun to do something quickly, and he did.

The gardener was the first to find out about it. He was cutting rhubarb in the kitchen
garden when he scared up a little rabbit. It ran to the raspberry patch nearby. He raised
another rhubarb leaf, and found a second little rabbit. Then he saw a third. Everywhere
he walked he saw little rabbits, until he began to rub his eyes and to wonder whether he
had eaten too much dinner.

Bun's seven remaining children were all in the garden, running from place to place when
they were disturbed, until there seemed to be at least twenty of them. Here, back of the
house, the redtails would not dare come, so here Bun and Brownie had come and
brought the family.

I suspect it was entirely Bun's idea, for he had been partly raised in the kitchen, and
from his window had looked at the garden many times a day. Now he brought the little
ones to be raised near the same safe place. It was interesting to have the rabbits around
the house, especially because of Bun, for whom everyone had a certain affection. And
Bun was almost always up to something.

The chickens were among the first to notice him. They did not seem quite to understand
what this big furry thing was which they found hiding in the parsley bed. They gathered
around him to stare and to say unpleasant things in chicken language.

No wonder Bun became annoyed and chased the old rooster. Of course the hens set up
a great cackling, which brought Jimmie and several other people there in time to see the
much surprised old ruler of the barnyard go skipping down the path on his gouty old
feet, while Bun ambled along behind, just fast enough to keep him going at top speed.

Bun grew more fearless every day and spent much of his time on the lawn in full view of
the house. But now and then he would grow homesick for his beloved quarry and go to
spend dreamy summer days, where he could hear only the soothing croak of the old
quarry bullfrog, the rustle and twitter of birds, and the purr of countless insects. Then
back to the house he would come again, as if he knew that we had missed him and that
we would expect him, as long as he lived, to feel that it was his home.

THE END