

YOUNG CANADA SUPPLEMENT

THE POETICAL RABBIT

By ESTELLE M. KERR

DICK started for the woods with his gun—a harmless weapon that fired a cork for about two feet. The cork was tied to a string, so that Dick never ran out of shot. He crossed the pasture and entered a wood where the tall trees met overhead, and the ground was covered with slippery and sweet-smelling pine-needles. After scrambling through the underbrush he came to a little path.

"Here is a runway," thought Dick, "Now I shall lie down and wait for game," and he stretched himself on the ground, with his gun pointing up the path.

At last a plump brown rabbit appeared running towards him. Dick pulled the trigger, and the rabbit leaped several feet into the air, but, seeing Dick, she did not run away.

"Oh, it's only you!" she said. "Dear me, what a start you gave me! You might as well kill me outright as frighten me to death!" and she sat down on a smooth stone and began fanning herself with an oak leaf.

"I must say that boys have a strange idea of sport, and men still less. One day I came so near being shot that my whiskers were singed. You haven't any whiskers?"

"Not yet," said Dick.

"Dear me, how do you feel?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Dick.

"Stupid! I'm not inquiring after your health; how can you feel whether a hole is large enough for you to get through if you haven't any feelers?"

"With my hands, of course."

"Oh, your fore feet. And that only leaves you two for running, poor thing, no wonder you are slow! But, speaking of my narrow escape, I tremble to think what would have become of the children!"

"How many are there?" asked Dick.

"I have had fifty-seven, but most of them are big enough to look after themselves. I have eight little ones, though, just a week old."

"Eight! Good gracious, I never heard of so many," said Dick. "Let me see—two is twins, three is trios, four is quadrupeds, six is sextettes, and eight must be octagons. Is that what you call them?"

"Of course not. They have perfectly lovely names, all of them, and they are all quadrupeds. You don't suppose I could have any two-legged children do you? Oh, I beg your pardon," the rabbit finished in some confusion, suddenly remembering that Dick had only two legs.

"Couldn't their father . . . ?" Dick began.

"Dear me, no!" interrupted Mrs. Rabbit. "Their father could never bring them up. You see he's a poet, and it's very hard to raise a family on poetry, they would so much rather have cabbages! Perhaps their aunt might take them, but she has forty-three of her own. I'm afraid they would have to be sent to an orphan asylum, the angels," and the tender-hearted mother wept at the thought.

"See, here come the orphans now," she cried, as a long procession of little rabbits were seen marching two by two along the nearest runway. Dick counted eighty-four, besides the teachers, who walked at the end of the line. They were all most dejected looking, and walked with an awkward, shuffling gait, with their ears lowered, and their tails between their legs.

"If my pets should come to that!"

As she spoke eight little bunnies scampered out of the woods and covered their mother with kisses. Seeing Dick, they began to whisk about him, and

one, bolder than the rest, extracted a peanut from his pocket and began to eat it.

"You naughty bunny," cried his mother, "come here immediately!"

The youngster approached, hastily swallowing the peanut, shell and all, in case he might be asked to return it.

"Now," said the stern mother, "tell this boy the poem your father wrote about you."

The poor little rabbit hung his head and shuffled his feet, but at last he began in a squeaky little voice:

"They say I'm a naughty young rabbit,
I have a most shocking bad habit;
When I see any food that appears to be good,
I never say 'please,' I just grab it."

Dick clapped his hands—

"Say it again," he cried, but the rabbit had run away.

The mother rabbit meantime had been eyeing Dick closely.

"I was sure I knew your face, and now I re-



"Eight little Bunnies scampered out of the Woods."

collect when I saw you. It was last winter, and you were coasting down a hill."

"I remember seeing a rabbit running across the slide, but that was a white one."

"Naturally, I wasn't wearing the same costume. You don't expect me to wear the same coat for two seasons, even if my husband is a poet, do you? Besides, I never wear brown in winter, it is so conspicuous."

"That's funny," said Dick, "my sister wears brown in the winter and white in the summer."

"Oh, well, for a young girl, but don't you think for me . . . ?" The rabbit regarded her plump figure critically.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be good taste," Dick agreed.

"Taste!" said Mrs. Rabbit. "I don't see what taste has to do with it. As far as that is concerned, green things generally taste the best. But boys are always thinking about eating. Their nursery rhymes are full of it. Just listen to this." She dropped her voice so the children could not hear.

"Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet
Eating her rabbit pie;

Little Jack Horner ate in the corner
And said 'What a good boy am I!'
Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard
And said, 'Rabbit pie! Oh what fun!'
Jack Spratt ate the fat, and his wife ate the lean,
And so the poor dog got none."

"Of course, there are a few about eating," admitted Dick.

"I'd like to hear one that wasn't," grumbled the rabbit.

"There is—

"Bye baby Bunting,
Daddy's gone a-hunting,
Gone to get a . . ."

Dick stopped in dismay. He had almost said "rabbit skin."

"What did I tell you?" said Mrs. Rabbit. "If they're not about eating, it's killing. What did he hunt, I'd like to know?"

"I . . . I forget," stammered Dick.

"Tell me another, then," commanded the rabbit, and Dick began in some confusion:

"Sing a song of spinach,
A pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty rabbits—
(blackbirds, I mean.)

Baked in a pie..

When the pie was opened
The rabbits danced for joy,
Wasn't that a dainty dish
To set before a boy?"

"There you are, pie again, and rabbit pie at that!"

"No it wasn't really," said Dick. "I don't know how I made such a stupid mistake, for I never ate rabbit pie in my life. I've only eaten Welsh Rabbits."

"Cannibal!" hissed Mrs. Rabbit, rising with all the dignity she could command. "Children, come away!"

"But they're not really rabbits. They are made of cheese," explained Dick.

Mrs. Rabbit sat down somewhat mollified.

"Then why do you give it such a ridiculous name? We have cousins in Wales, and naturally I thought—"

"Oh mamma," cried Jack Rabbit, running to her, "I have such a stomach-ache!"

"You shouldn't have eaten that peanut, but lie down and I'll give you a dose of syrup of rhubarb."

"Me too!" cried all the other little rabbits, and they made a rush for Dick and extracted all the peanuts from his pockets. Soon they were all lying on

the ground writhing in agony, while Mrs. Rabbit ladled out doses of sweet medicine in acorn cups until they had all fallen asleep. Then she returned to her seat on the stone beside Dick.

"The trials of a mother, you see," she sighed. "That is but one of my many cares. I have to plan how we can save enough money to buy them all white furs for the winter. We belong to the Snowshoe family, and even if we are poor, we must keep up the family traditions. Owing to my husband's profession it is at times very difficult."

Just then a tall thin rabbit came running through the woods, his hair long and untidy, and his eyes blazing with excitement.

Mrs. Rabbit raised a warning hand.

"Hush, Snowshoe, the children are asleep."

But Mr. Rabbit heedlessly advanced, waving a newspaper above his head.

"I've won it, Maria!" he cried, "I've won the prize offered by the 'Canadian Forest' for the best poem on 'Motherhood.' One hundred dollars, my dear, and you, love, were my inspiration," and he embraced her on the spot.

The practical little housewife was doing some figuring.