

A Blue Rabbit Mystery

by Val Dumitrescu

The tall grass moved in the breeze like a sea of green velvet, covering the world of little creatures underneath with a protective blanket. At the edge of the yard, in the tent she had made of leaves and branches, Lily was playing with the puppy she had discovered sleeping there that morning. Her newfound friend was like a toy, soft and fluffy with twitchy ears and a tail that fanned the air without stopping. A dragonfly got inside the tent and the puppy jumped trying to catch it, fell and rolled, got up, and rolled again like a ball of fuzzy yarn. Its constant antics made Lily laugh harder than she had laughed all summer.

Absorbed in play, Lily did not notice the grass in front of the tent parting to reveal a pair of tiny, round eyes, perfectly placed in a small, round head on which two long ears stood at attention. Stopping mid-flip, the puppy bounced to the entrance of the tent as if drawn by a magnet. Following him, Lily stuck her head out of the tent, her face coming inches from a small, wet nose twitching in fast motion, as if trying to communicate a silent message. The puppy was flat on its belly, his ears perked and tail wagging so hard Lily thought it would fly off any second.

The grass rustled noisily and the number of eyes, twitchy noses, and long ears suddenly multiplied. With her eyes and mouth opened wide, Lily did not know what to make of what she saw. Right under her nose stood a large rabbit with three small replicas of itself. The longer she stared, the less she believed her eyes. She had seen rabbits before many times and played with several this summer. But even in her wildest imagination she would not have come up with what was in front of her. The rabbits, perfect in every other way, were *blue!*

As if hypnotized by the color as well, the puppy had stopped moving, his round black eyes fixated on the dreamy creatures. The big rabbit turned his nose up and sniffed the air, the bunnies imitating every move in unison. She then turned and entered Lily's tent with the trail of blue fuzz balls — and the puppy right behind them. Lily moved aside to make room for them, but as she turned to get a better view of them, she saw the big rabbit poke a hole in the leafy wall and bound out the back of the tent. The puppy followed without hesitation, and Lily was left with her mouth still open, more dazzled than ever.

She quickly got out of her tent. The creek that ran along the edge of the yard was swollen from the recent rains, and she was afraid for the puppy. She hurried along the creek, looking through the thick bushes and behind trees. But the tall grass made it difficult for her to walk, much less run. Eventually, she arrived at a narrow wooden bridge. Standing on the bridge, she scanned the banks of the creek up and down stream, but there was no sign of the puppy or the strange rabbit and her bunnies.



Sample-For Review Only

Her strained eyes were starting to fill with tears when she felt a light tap on her shoulder. Startled, she turned to see an old man, just slightly taller than herself. He was resting on a white cane and had a warm smile half hidden under a bushy mustache.

"What are the tears for?" the old man asked softly.

"I've lost . . ." she managed to let out.

". . . your puppy and some blue rabbits," the old man finished her thought.

"How . . . how did you know?" she gasped. "Have you seen them? Where are they? Are they all right?"

The old man listened to the questions without changing his smile and finally whispered, drawing his face close to hers: "They just went back home. They live under the big walnut tree at the edge of the village."

Not yet knowing what to think, Lily ran to the edge of the village. Under the cool shade of an old walnut tree, a wagon was covered in thick canvas. The canvas was brightly painted with images of circus animals and people in fantastic costumes. The old man suddenly appeared at her side and motioned for her to look inside the wagon. She climbed up on the seat and pulled the canvas aside. Lots of boxes with strange writing on colored labels were piled everywhere. Some boxes were open, and powder of many colors was spread all over the floor of the wagon, making it look like a messy painter's canvas.

As her eyes got used to the dim light, she noticed several nicely carved, wooden cages buried underneath some of the boxes. She got closer and saw little furry shapes curled up in each cage. The cages had names carved on the side. The name on the cage closest to her was simply "Green." Another was "Purple." Yet a third one read "Blue," and Lily's heart jumped as she saw the big rabbit and the three bunnies snuggled together.

She grasped the cage by its corners and pulled it up on the seat. She heard the voice of the old man behind her. "You may take them home, if you promise to look after them. And you must keep their cage with you at all times."

"What . . ." she started to ask, but never finished, interrupted by a familiar whimper. Turning her head to where the old man had been standing, Lily saw the bundle of fur and wagging tail that had entertained her so much that morning. The puppy was sitting, his furry face and bright eyes turned up at her expectantly. Lily grabbed the cage and carefully stepped down from the wagon seat. Without invitation, the puppy jumped and lay flat on top of the cage. Her mind still completely preoccupied with the mystery of what she had just seen, Lily walked slowly home with a wooden cage of rabbits and a puppy.



Read the sentence below.

Right under her nose stood a large rabbit with three small replicas of itself.

The word replicas most likely means

- A. colors.
 - B. details.
 - C. copies.
 - D. friends.
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What is the author's **main** purpose for writing the passage?

- A. to describe Lily
 - B. to entertain readers
 - C. to provide information
 - D. to persuade readers
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The story is **mainly** about

- A. Lily's tent.
 - B. the old man.
 - C. Lily and the animals.
 - D. the yard and the creek.
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Where does the story take place?

- A. in a tent
- B. on a bridge
- C. in a village
- D. under a tree

