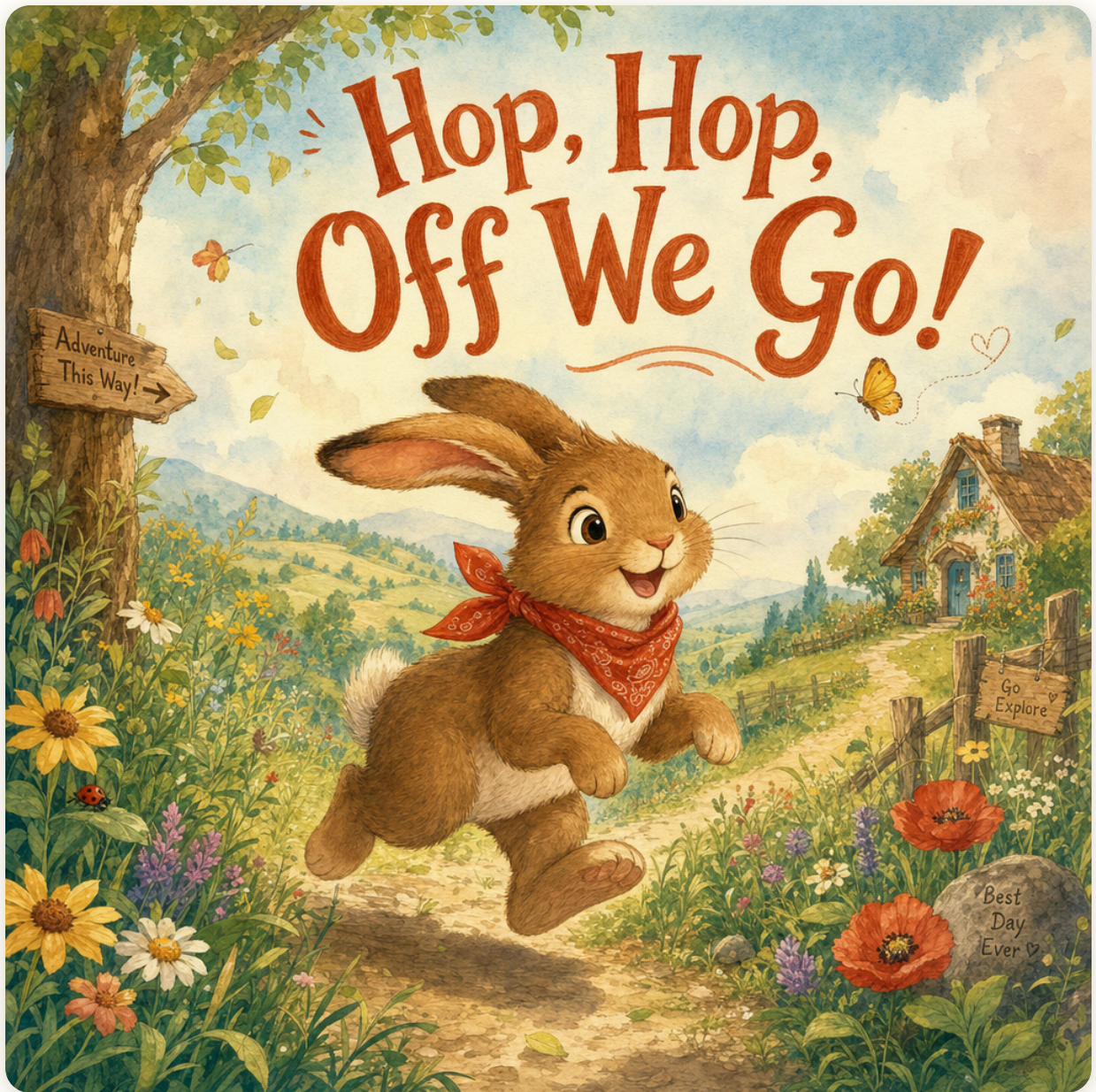


Hop, Hop, Off We Go!





Hop, Hop, Off We Go!

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*For every big brother learning that the best games are the ones
everyone gets to play.*



Beneath the playground, in a warren of sandy tunnels, everyone knew Baxter was the fastest hopper around. He darted between the slide and the sandpit, ears flying. *"Hop, hop, off we go!"* he called, and Clover and Fig scrambled to follow, sand spraying behind their quick zigzags. Only the littlest bunny, toddling far behind, was left to catch up.



That littlest bunny was Pip, Baxter's baby sister. She copied every hop he made, her blue ribbon bouncing. "You're too small to follow," Baxter told her. He, Clover, and Fig zigzagged off in a burst of sand, chanting "*Hop, hop, off we go!*" Pip just watched, humming softly, and hopped after them anyway.



The next day, Baxter dreamed up a brand-new trick — a triple-spin hop, tricky and fast. "No baby sister could ever copy this one!" *"Hop, hop, off we go!"* they shouted, spinning away in a whirl of sand. But when Baxter peeked back, there was Pip, already mid-spin, humming hmm-hop, hmm-hop, matching him move for move.



Determined to lose her for good, Baxter spotted a shadowy gap behind the sandpit — a tunnel none of them had ever explored. "In here! She'll never find this one!" he grinned. Clover giggled, Fig counted his steps, and the three friends ducked inside together, the warm warren light shrinking smaller and smaller behind them.



Deeper they hopped, inventing wilder patterns — double-back, side-shuffle, big flying leap! They laughed so hard Fig lost count of his own hops. The tunnel twisted. It forked. It forked again. Sand walls pressed close on every side, and the cozy, giggly dark began to feel like a different kind of dark — quiet, and a little bit cold.



Clover skidded to a stop. "Which way's home?" Fig's counting trailed off into nothing. Every eye turned to Baxter — the fastest hopper, the one who always knew the way. But for the very first time, Baxter's ears drooped low. He looked left. He looked right. He had absolutely no idea.



They tried hopping backward, but every tunnel looked the same sandy brown, every fork just another guess. "Pip!" Baxter called, his voice wobbling. "Pip, are you there?" Surely she'd kept better track than any of them. But no one answered. The tunnel felt very big, very dark, and very, very quiet — and then—



A small, soft sound drifted around the bend. Hmm-hop, hmm-hop. There was Pip — hopping the triple-spin, the double-back, every silly pattern Baxter had invented all day long, her blue ribbon bobbing like a tiny, patient lantern in the dark.



Baxter's ears popped straight up. He didn't say she was too small — not this time. He watched her small feet, matched her steady rhythm, and turned to Clover and Fig. "Follow Pip," he whispered. "She knows the way." Together, the four bunnies hopped the pattern backward, Pip leading them softly home.



Sandy walls gave way to golden light as they tumbled out into the evening, blinking and safe. At the very last hop, Baxter stepped back and let Pip go first — cheering for her the way he'd always cheered for himself. "*Hop, hop, off we go, Pip!*"



Word spread fast through the warren. By nightfall there was a brand-new game with a brand-new step, called Pip's Hop. Big bunnies and small bunnies bounced together across the sandy trails, calling out the old chant with new warmth: "Hop, hop, here we go!" The sun dipped low, and the whole warren hopped home to sleep.

The End

Sweet dreams.

Hop, hop, off we go!

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Published one at a time for this family.

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