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Dramatic Publishing



The Adventures of Peter Rabbit and His Friends

A One-act Play
Based on the life and stories of Beatrix Potter

Adapted especially for small casts and touring groups
by
Joseph Robinette

Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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JOSEPH ROBINETTE
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(THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS)

THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS

A Play for 3 M and 4 F (or more, if desired)*

Cast of Characters
(In the Life of Beatrix Potter)

Beatrix Potter.A Writer
Annie Carter Moore.Her Governess
5 Children (including NOEL and FREDA)Members of the Moore
(May be played by adults) Household

(In the Stories of Beatrix Potter)

THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT

Flopsy	Rabbits
Mopsy		
Cotton-tail		
Peter		
Mother Rabbit		

Mr. McGregor.A Farmer
SparrowA Bird

THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER

Tailor.A Poor Man
SimpkinA Cat
3 (or more) Mice.Friends of the
Tailor
FootmanAn Aide to the Mayor
MayorA High-ranking
Official

*See page iii for suggested role distribution for a cast of seven

THE TALE OF TWO BAD MICE

Lucinda —Dolls
Jane
Tom Thumb —Mice
Hunca Munca
PolicemanAn Officer, Also a
Doll

THE TALE OF MR. JEREMY FISHER

Mr. Jeremy FisherA Frog
Mr. Alderman Ptolemy TortoiseA Tortoise
Sir Isaac Newton.A Newt
Jack Sharp.A Spiny Fish
TroutA Large Fish

THE TALE OF JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK

Jemima Puddle-duck —Ducks
Rebecca Puddle-duck
Farmer's WifeTheir Mistress
FoxA Wily Fellow
Kep
Barney —Dogs
Chutney

The Place - England

The Time - A Few Years Before and After the Turn-of-the-Century
(The opening and closing scenes take place in 1950)

SUGGESTED ROLE DISTRIBUTION
FOR A CAST OF SEVEN
(3 Males, 4 Females)*

1st Actor (F)
Beatrice Potter
Sparrow
Mouse
Chutney

2nd Actor (F)
Annie Carter Moore
Mother Rabbit
Mouse
Hunca Munca
Farmer's Wife

3rd Actor (F)
3rd Child (Freda)
Flopsy
Mouse
Lucinda
Sir Isaac Newton
Jemima Puddle-
duck

4th Actor (F)
5th Child
Cotton-tail
Simpkin
Jane
Jack Sharp
Rebecca
Puddle-duck

5th Actor (M)
1st Child (Noel)
Mr. McGregor
Mayor
Sir Alderman
Ptolemy Tortoise
Fox

6th Actor (M)
2nd Child
Peter
Footman
Tom Thumb
Trout
Barney

7th Actor (M)
4th Child
Mopsy
Tailor
Policeman
Mr. Jeremy Fisher
Kep

*The play may also be performed with 2M, 5F or 4M, 3F.

(Setting: An open space - suggesting a wooded area.* The lights come up slowly as the sounds of forest animals, birds and insects are heard softly in the distance - perhaps created by offstage actors.

A RABBIT enters, looks about, and exits. A DUCK enters, also observing the surroundings, and exits. A MOUSE enters sniffing about, not seeing a CAT who has stealthily entered. The CAT chases the MOUSE as they exit.

The lights come up fuller as a man, NOEL, wheels an elderly woman, ANNIE, sitting in a wheelchair, into the area. ANNIE has a book in her lap.)

NOEL

Here we are, Mother.

ANNIE

Thank you, Noel.

(She looks out into the distance.)

London seems so far away.

NOEL

Yet it's only a few hours drive from here.

ANNIE

The view is even lovelier than I had remembered.

NOEL

The view is always lovely from Hill Top Farm. . .It's a bit chilly today, Mum. Shall I get your coat from the car?

ANNIE

My shawl perhaps. Thank you.

NOEL

While you're up here reading and reminiscing, I'm going to walk down to the pond.

*See Production Notes on p. 73 for setting suggestions.

ANNIE

Your favorite spot.

NOEL

Why not? That's where I first met Jemima Puddle-duck.

(They laugh.)

ANNIE

How long ago was that, Noel?

NOEL

This is 1950. So it was at least forty years ago.

(A pause as they both look into the distance)

I'll get your shawl.

(He exits. ANNIE opens the book on which is printed THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS.)

ANNIE

"The Adventures of Peter Rabbit and His Friends" by Beatrix Potter.

(Looking at the audience)

I know what you're thinking. But no - I'm not Beatrix Potter.

(Laughing)

And I'm not Peter Rabbit either. But I am one of Peter's friends. And I was one of Beatrix Potter's friends, too. In fact, I was her best friend.

(NOEL enters carrying a shawl.)

NOEL

(Putting the shawl around ANNIE)

Here you are, Mum. You know, while I'm down at the pond, I think I'll visit the barn and sheds as well. See you in a bit.

(He kisses her and exits.)

ANNIE

Have a nice visit, Noel.

(A pause)

That was Noel. He was Peter Rabbit's best friend. In fact, if it weren't for Noel, there might not be a Peter Rabbit. Truth to tell, if it weren't for my children, there might not be any stories about Peter and ---

(Turning the pages of the book)

--- The Tailor of Gloucester, the Two Bad Mice, Jeremy Fisher, Jemima Puddle-duck. . . You know, since you're visiting here at the farm today, I think I'll tell you about these wonderful animals - and about my children - and about Beatrix Potter herself. But I just realized I haven't told you who I am. My name is Annie - Annie Moore. When I first met Beatrix Potter, I was Annie Carter. I wasn't married then - and I was much younger, of course.

(She stands unsteadily and takes off her shawl.)

I didn't need a wrap to keep me warm in those days. And I didn't need glasses either.

(She removes her glasses.)

My hair was long and shiny.

(She quickly takes her hair down.)

And if you don't mind my saying so, I was right pretty. At least that's what my mama and papa told me.

(She straightens up, now looking years younger.)

Yes, I was a young woman then - ready to make my way into the world. I studied hard, worked long hours and at the ripe old age of nineteen, I became a licensed governess, a little like Mary Poppins, you might say - except I couldn't fly. That was way back in 1883. Oh, and I certainly didn't need a wheelchair back then, did I?

(She pushes the wheelchair offstage and exits. A moment later BEATRIX enters holding a sketch pad and pencil. She calls to the offstage area from where she has just entered.)

BEATRIX

But Mother, I don't want another governess. I'm tired of governesses.

MRS. POTTER'S VOICE
(From offstage)

Mind your manners, Beatrix. She'll hear you. Now go on out and wait for her.

BEATRIX
(To herself)

If we weren't so wealthy, I could go to school instead of staying at home and being tutored by governesses.

(She begins to sketch on the pad. ANNIE enters quietly, unnoticed by BEATRIX.)

I wonder why governesses are always old and look like dried-up prunes.

ANNIE
(Clearing her throat)

Hello.

BEATRIX
(Hurriedly putting the sketch pad behind her back)

Oh. . .Hello. Who are you?

ANNIE

My name is Annie. Annie Carter.

BEATRIX

But - I was expecting my new governess.

ANNIE

I am your new governess.

BEATRIX

But - you're not much older than I. And you don't look like a -
a -

ANNIE

A dried-up prune?

(She laughs as does BEATRIX.)

BEATRIX

Not at all. But you do look like - like I might like you.

ANNIE

Let's hope so. May I see what you are holding behind your back?

(BEATRIX reluctantly hands her the sketch pad.)

BEATRIX

It's nothing really. Just a sketch of a rabbit.

ANNIE

I was told you are not allowed to draw until your studies improve.

BEATRIX

Are you going to tell my parents?

ANNIE

I'm afraid so.

BEATRIX

Oh, no.

ANNIE

(Studying the drawing)

I'm going to tell them their daughter is a fine artist who should be encouraged to continue her work.

BEATRIX
(Beaming)

Oh, I am going to like you, Miss. . .Annie.

ANNIE

You may change your mind when you find out what I have to teach you first - German.

(She takes out a book.)

BEATRIX

German? . . .I'll never learn German. . .Oh well, I still predict we'll be best friends.

ANNIE

Der freundin.

BEATRIX

Der freundin?

ANNIE

It's German - for friend.

BEATRIX

Oh, hello, der freundin Annie.

(They shake hands.)

ANNIE

Hello, der freundin Beatrix. And you said you'd never learn German. You're speaking it already.

(They laugh.)

BEATRIX

Come, let's have tea before we begin.

(She exits as ANNIE remains on stage.)

ANNIE

Beatrix's prediction came true. She and I became best friends. After our lessons we would take walks, have talks and share secrets with one another. I felt more like her sister than her governess. And as the months went by, I learned things from her as well, especially on our nature walks. Beatrix became a first-rate student, and I encouraged her in her artwork as well.

(Beatrix enters.)

BEATRIX

Annie. . .Thank you!

ANNIE

For what?

BEATRIX

Father is going to let me take art lessons. He said it was your idea.

ANNIE
(Laughing)

Well, it took me almost two years to convince him.

BEATRIX

He is a bit stubborn, you know. But he's a good heart - and so is Mum. Though I do wish they would stop thinking of me as a child.

ANNIE

Beatrice, there's something else I spoke to your father about.

BEATRIX

Oh?

ANNIE

I told him. . .I shall be leaving soon.

BEATRIX

Annie - no!

ANNIE

I've met a wonderful man. His name is Edwin Moore. He has asked me to marry him.

BEATRIX

But - but what about me? Who'll go on walks with me? Who will I tell my secrets to?

ANNIE

Your friends.

BEATRIX

I have no friends - just you. . .I want to get married, too.

ANNIE

You will - someday.

BEATRIX

How can I? My parents keep me cooped up in this house all the time. Oh, I'm so miserable I could die.

(She exits in tears.)

ANNIE

Beatrice. . .

(To the audience)

She didn't die, of course. But she did become quite ill for a time. The doctors didn't know what was wrong with her, but she recovered in a month or two. In the meantime, I was settling into my new home with my new husband, Edwin Moore. Before I knew it, a whole year had flown by. And with it came our first child. He was born on Christmas eve, so we named him Noel. And, before long, there was a new baby to keep Noel company.

(NOEL, looking considerably younger than in the opening scene, enters carrying a baby bundle.)

Be careful with him (her), Noel.

NOEL

I will.

(As he crosses)

Look, Mum, he (she) has a new tooth.

(Putting his finger into the baby's unseen mouth)

Ouch, he (she) has two new teeth.

(He exits as ANNIE laughs.)

ANNIE

A year later, there was another new baby for the first two children to play with.

(NOEL enters carrying another baby bundle. He is followed by the 2ND CHILD who is pestering him.)

2ND CHILD and NOEL

I want to hold her (him). You held her (him) yesterday. Did not! Did, too! Etc.

(They exit.)

ANNIE
(Calling after them)

Be careful, you two!

(To the audience)

Well, it wasn't long till we had yet another child to add to the mix.

(NOEL enters carrying another bundle. He is followed by the 2ND CHILD and 3RD CHILD who argue.)

1ST CHILD, 2ND CHILD and NOEL

It's my turn to carry her (him). You fed her (him). No, I didn't. I had to change her (his) diapers. You carried her (him) yesterday. I haven't carried her (him) at all. Etc.

(They exit as ANNIE calls after them.)

ANNIE

Careful, children, don't drop her (him)!

(To the audience)

And if that wasn't enough, a short time later our fifth child arrived.

(NOEL enters carrying another bundle. He is followed by the 2ND, 3RD and 4TH CHILD who bicker among themselves.)

1ST CHILD, 2ND CHILD, 3RD CHILD and NOEL

Why does Noel always get to carry the baby? Because I'm the oldest. Well, I'm the smartest. . .I'm the carefulest. No you're not. Yes, I am. Etc.

(They exit as ANNIE smiles.)

ANNIE

I was beginning to feel like the old woman who lived in a shoe. It was indeed a lively household around here.

(The five CHILDREN enter noisily and animatedly.)

CHILDREN

I'll take care of it. . .I'll take care of it. We'll all take care of it. You ask her. You ask her. Etc.

ANNIE

What's all the ruckus about this time?

CHILDREN

(Each in turn, after a pause)

We were wondering. . .if maybe. . .we might get ourselves. . .a little puppy dog to play with. . .down at the dog pound.

(They are motionless with anticipation.)

ANNIE

(After a pause)

Well. . .After having five children in six years -- I think a puppy would be a welcome relief around here.

(The CHILDREN cheer and exit excitedly.
ANNIE calls after them.)

But you'll have to wait till your father gets home from work!

(She laughs, then to the audience.)

The new puppy fit right into the family. . .We had quite a house full all right. But it was a happy house. There were the usual spats and bumps and bruises, of course, but everything went pretty well until a scarlet fever epidemic descended on London and the whole countryside.

(NOEL enters slowly.)

NOEL

Mum.

ANNIE

Yes, Noel?

NOEL

I don't feel very well.

ANNIE

Let me see.

(She feels his forehead.)

You have a fever.

NOEL

My head aches.

ANNIE

(Somewhat alarmed)

I think I'd better get you to bed right away. I'll send your father for the doctor.

(Calling offstage)

Edwin! Edwin!

(She and NOEL exit. A moment later BEATRIX enters carrying her sketch pad and pencil. She is reading a letter.)

BEATRIX

Oh, no. . .This is terrible. Little Noel has the scarlet fever. Poor Annie. I wish I could go help her. But I know my parents would forbid it. The disease is so contagious. And they don't like me leaving home anyway.

(A pause)

I know. Maybe I could send Noel a letter to cheer him up - and perhaps include a few drawings.

(She begins to write)

"My dear Noel. . ."

(She stops writing and looks up.)

I've never written to a child before. . .What should I say?

(Reading)

"My dear Noel. . ."

(Writing again)

"I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits whose names were -"

(Three rabbits - FLOPSY, MOPSY and COTTON-TAIL - enter.)

FLOPSY

Flopsy.

MOPSY

Mopsy.

COTTON-TAIL

Cotton-tail.

(PETER, another rabbit, enters.)

PETER

Annnnd Peter!

(They strike a momentary pose as the scene shifts to The Tale of Peter Rabbit.)

BEATRIX

(Continuing to write)

"They lived with their mother underneath the root of a very big fir-tree. . ."

(She exits, still writing as MOTHER RABBIT enters.)

MOTHER RABBIT

Now my dears, you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden. Your father had an accident there. He was put into a pie by Mrs. McGregor.

(They bow their heads for a moment. A snuffle or two are heard.)

Now I'm going to market to get some brown bread and five current buns. Goodbye.

(She exits.)

FLOPSY

Flopsy -

MOPSY

Mopsy -

COTTON-TAIL

And Cotton-tail -

FLOPSY

- who were good little bunnies -

FLOPSY and MOPSY

- went down the lane -

FLOPSY, MOPSY and COTTON-TAIL

- to gather blackberries.

(They exit.)

PETER

But Peter, who was very naughty, ran straight to Mr. McGregor's garden and squeezed under the gate. . .

(He runs in a large circle or two and crawls under a gate.)

PETER

Ah, lettuce. . .ah, beans. . .ah, radishes. . .

(MCGREGOR enters carrying a hoe and glares at PETER.)

Ah, Mr. McGregor!

(PETER runs as MCGREGOR chases him.)

MCGREGOR

Stop, thief.

(PETER loses his shoes as he runs.)

PETER

Help! Help!

(He exits.)

MCGREGOR

The little rascal lost his shoes. He won't get very far without these.

(He picks up the shoes.)

Now which way did he go? . . . Come back here, thief!

(He exits, not seeing PETER who re-enters.)

PETER

Now, I'll head for the gate.

(As he looks over his shoulder in the direction of MCGREGOR, he runs into a gooseberry net and is caught by his jacket.)

Oh, no! My jacket is caught in the gooseberry net. I'm sure to be made into a pie - just like my father. Oh, I should have listened to my mother.

(A SPARROW enters flapping her wings.)

Oh, hello, little sparrow, can you help me?

SPARROW

You must exert yourself, Peter.