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Dramatic Publishing

Peter Rabbit and Me



By
Aurand Harris

Peter Rabbit and Me

First produced at New York University and then
the Harwich Junior Theatre in West Harwich, Mass.

Drama. By Aurand Harris. Some scenes adapted from The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter. Cast: 3m., 6w. Here is a delightfully joyous dramatization of the beloved story of *Peter Rabbit*. Beatrix Potter, age 13, is a poor little rich girl secluded in her top-floor nursery. She creates her own excitement by inventing and illustrating stories about her pet animals. She imagines an adventure for her favorite pet, Peter Rabbit. She becomes Peter and acts out an early version of what becomes her famous *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. All the favorite characters appear in this version: Mother Rabbit, Flopsey, Mopsey, Cottontail, the mouse, the birds and Mr. McGregor. Here is a revealing and charming glimpse of Victorian society in contrast to the antics of the uninhibited animal world. *Peter Rabbit and Me* is filled with humor, adventure, colorful characters and all of the magic of children's theatre. *Two suggested sets. Victorian and animal costumes. Production licensing not available for England and Canada. Approximate running time: 80 minutes. Code: PE4.*
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Dedicated to

Lowell Swortzell who suggested the story;

Nancy Swortzell who directed the premiere at New York
University, 1992

Harwich Junior Theatre which gave a second tryout, 1993,
Jane Staub, director.





CAST:

First Girl	First Bird
Second Girl	Second Bird
Beatrix Potter	Peter
Miss Hammond	Mother Rabbit
Bertrum Potter	Cotton-tail
Mr. Rupert Potter	Mr. McGregor
Baker's Boy	Mr. Mouse
	Flopsy
	Mopsy

SCENES:

The third floor nursery-school room of Beatrix Potter,
Number Two, Bolton Gardens, London;

and

Peter Rabbit's home by a big tree;

and

Mr. McGregor's garden.

TIME:

Victorian England, 1880.



PETER RABBIT AND ME

(Time: 1879. Place: The Potter house. Number 2, Bolton Gardens, London, England. There is English nursery-rhyme music. The curtains open and we see the third floor nursery-school room of Beatrix Potter. By the back wall is an assortment of animal cages, bookshelves, etc. Beatrix Potter, age 13, sits sketching a live rabbit, Peter, who is in a cage on a table. Beatrix is likable, impulsive, imaginative and full of fun and vitality. She hums as she sketches. Music dims out.)

BEATRIX: Peter Rabbit. . .Peter Rabbit. . .funny little bunny. I will draw your ears. . .your eyes. . .your NOSE. . .and your cotton-tail that GOES. . .wiggle wiggle. *(Stops, plays with rabbit in cage, and visualizes.)* I could write a story- - a picture story about- - -YOU. An adventure of Peter Rabbit. What adventure? There are so many adventures you could have. You could- - -fly! Would you like that? Play hide-and-seek with the clouds. *(Rises)* Fly away- - -to a castle- - -and rescue- - -a princess. *(Mimes.)* Fight a dragon- - -with a bow and arrow- - -with a shining sword! *(Poses heroically.)* Peter! Bravest rabbit in the land!

FIRST GIRL: *(She enters, chanting and skipping a rope. She is followed by Second Girl. They stop at side in a lighted area.)*

Queen Victoria, dressed in lace,
Put some powder on her face;
How many puffs did she use?
One. . .two. . .three. . .four.

(Beatrix runs to "window" and looks "down" at the Girls.)





SECOND GIRL: You missed. It is my turn. *(Takes rope and skips.)*
Sugar, salt. . .pepper, cider. . .
How many legs. . .has a bowlegged spider?
One. . .two. . .three. . .four. . .etc.

(Girls exit, skipping and chanting.)

BEATRIX: *(Looks after girls, vicariously enjoying their fun.)* They
are skipping a rope and rhyming. *(Looks at rabbit.)*
Peter Rabbit. . .Peter Rabbit. . .
Hippity hippity hop.
How many hops before you stop?
(She starts skipping an imaginary rope.)
One. . .two. . .three. . .four. . .

MISS HAMMOND: *(Enters the "room," carrying packages. She is a cheerful, busy person, always speaks with great spirit and energy.)* What a crowd on Kensington High.
People, horses, carriages! Oh, Beatrix - - -

BEATRIX: Yes?

MISS HAMMOND: *(Pointedly and happy.)* It is a beautiful day - - a
beautiful day - - to be busy!

BEATRIX: *(Looking out "window".)* Two girls were skipping rope
and rhyming.

MISS HAMMOND: Your father would say, "Young LADIES do not play in
the street."

BEATRIX: From up here, they look like birds. Two little birds,
hopping about.

MISS HAMMOND: Birds?

BEATRIX: Miss Robin and Miss Bobin. I would like to skip - - just
once.





MISS HAMMOND: I dare say- - *(Whispers)* If you could jump on tip-toes, I could- - SMUGGLE you a rope.

BEATRIX: Oh, thank you, Miss Hammond. *(Embraces her.)*

MISS HAMMOND: As your governess, I consider it part of your- - private- - education.

BEATRIX: I have finished drawing the map of England.

MISS HAMMOND: *(Looks at it.)* Very good, BEATRIX. England, 1879. But you have left out your own city. You have left out London.

BEATRIX: Oh. And I am sketching Peter Rabbit. He is going to wear a new coat his mother made him.

MISS HAMMOND: His mother?

BEATRIX: Mrs. Rabbit, in the story I will write. And Mrs. Rabbit will look like you.

MISS HAMMOND: Look like me? *(Laughs.)*

BEATRIX: Peter needs a GOOD mother. Because- - sometimes Peter is a naughty rabbit. Aren't you, Peter?

MISS HAMMOND: Did you feed the mice?

BEATRIX: Yes. But Mr. Lizard won't eat.

(Picks up lizard from cage. His long tail moves rhythmically.)

MISS HAMMOND: I dare say he is tired.

BEATRIX: Or he is sleepy. *(Puts lizard in chair seat.)* There, Mr. Lizard, you can sleep in a nice soft bed. I wonder- - what would a lizard dream?





MISS HAMMOND: That would be another good story for you to write.

BEATRIX: Yes. *(Excited.)* Once there was a lizard who went to sleep and dreamed- -he was- -was- -*(laughs)*- -a WIZARD.

BERTRUM: *(Off.)* Beatrix. Beatrix.

MISS HAMMOND: Your brother.

BERTRUM: *(Off.)* Help. Everything is falling.

BEATRIX: Bertrum!

(She goes to him, as Bertrum enters. He is seven- - played by an older boy- -and at the moment he is struggling with a small bird cage, a cat skin, and a box of bones.)

Let me help you.

BERTRUM: Hold the box of bones and the cat skin. I have decided not to take the upside-down bats.

(She puts box and skins on table. He holds up cage with bats.)

BEATRIX: Why, Bertrum? Bats are your favorite pets.

BERTRUM: Bats don't like to live in the country. You said so.

BEATRIX: I did?

BERTRUM: In the poem you wrote. *(Recites proudly.)*
They stay awake when it is night.
They sleep away the day.
They like to nest in a noisy town,
Not right side up, but upside down.
(Bows.)
By Beatrix Potter.



BEATRIX: Oh, I wish you weren't going away to school.

BERTRUM: *(Stiffly.)* It is proper for boys to go to boarding school.
(Puts cage on table.)

BEATRIX: I know. And it is proper for girls to stay home in the nursery room. And study art and read Shakespeare. *(Quotes dramatically.)* "To be or not to be, that is the question." Hamlet. I have memorized that play from beginning to end.

MISS HAMMOND: Your mother is entertaining this afternoon. Mrs. Comstock, Lady Manners- - -

BEATRIX: They say Lady Manners dotes on CASTOR OIL.

BERTRUM: *(Makes a face.)* Ugh! Castor oil!

BEATRIX: She even puts it on her potatoes!

BERTRUM: *(At cage.)* Peter Rabbit is twitching his nose.

BEATRIX: He is getting ready for a new adventure.

BERTRUM: *(Excited, playing their game of make-believe.)* What- - - what if- - -what if Peter went to- - -a fair?

BEATRIX: Yes! And when he got there- - - He gave the people a scare.

BERTRUM: Why?

BEATRIX: Because- - -he was dressed
In his underwear. *(They laugh.)*

BERTRUM: Papa wouldn't like that. *(Sighs.)* Oh, Beatrix, I get so tired of being proper and being good.

MISS HAMMOND: Did you see the new mouse?





BERTRUM: A new mouse? A BABY mouse? *(Goes to cage.)*

BEATRIX: I am going to draw it first thing. Mr. Mouse, Mrs. Mouse and Baby Mouse.

BERTRUM: *(Holding mouse.)* It is so tiny.

BEATRIX: Oh, Bertrum, I have this irresistible desire to draw everything that is beautiful that I see. And I want to write- -stories and poems.

MR. POTTER: *(Off, shouts.)* Beatrix! Beatrix!

BEATRIX: It's Papa.

BERTRUM: He never comes up to the nursery.

MISS HAMMOND: *(Looks off.)* Your father is coming up the stairs.
(There seems to be a great commotion below.)

MR. POTTER: *(Off.)* Beatrix, I am calling you. Beatrix Potter!

BEATRIX: Yes, Papa.

MR. POTTER: *(Enters.)* Immediately! To the parlor! Oh, such a disgrace. On the table. In the sugar. In the cream. In Lady Manners' lap.

BEATRIX: What, Papa?

MR. POTTER: A frog- - a green slimy frog!

BEATRIX: It's Mr. Jump. Where?

MR. POTTER: Downstairs. Such a commotion! Mrs. Comstock fainted. The maids, the cook, the coachman, everyone is trying to catch him. He is your frog. Get him. Out, out.
(Spells.) O- -u- -t.





BEATRIX: Yes, Papa. *(Starts to exit.)*

MR. POTTER: Catastrophe! Hop. Hop. *(Almost crying.)* In the middle of the tea cake.

BEATRIX: Cake? Frogs can't eat cake. He'll DIE! *(Exits.)*

MR. POTTER: A social disgrace. *(Panting.)* Palpitations. The stairs. Bertrum, your hand.

BERTRUM: Yes, Papa. *(Starts to give him right hand with mouse, changes, offers his left hand.)*

MR. POTTER: Your right hand always.

BERTRUM: Yes, sir. *(With fear, gives hand with mouse.)*

MR. POTTER: Thank you. Something is wiggling in my hand. What?

BERTRUM: A mouse.

MR. POTTER: A mouse? A MOUSE! Take it away. Away. Away.

BERTRUM: Yes, sir. *(Puts mouse in cage.)*

MR. POTTER: I must sit. Disgraced by a frog in the tea pot. *(Starts to sit on lizard in chair.)*

MISS HAMMOND: Mr. Potter, please don't sit- - -

MR. POTTER: Silence. Oh- - -*(He sits with a sigh. Suddenly he sits up straight.)* OH! *(Shakes his hips in chair.)* Oh- -oh- -OH! *(Fearful.)* What am I sitting on?

BERTRUM: Mr. Lizard.

MR. POTTER: A lizard? A LIVE LIZARD! *(Gives a loud yell and jumps up.)* He bit me!





BERTRUM: What would you do, sir, if a fat giant sat on you?

MR. POTTER: Bertrum, mind your tongue.

(Bertrum puts lizard in cage.)

MR. POTTER: Miss Hammond, I thought this was a school room. But I find it is a wild zoo.

BERTRUM: We **STUDY** and **DRAW** the animals. *(Holds up bat cage.)* Look. These bats live upside down.

MR. POTTER: *(Backing away.)* Bats! **BATS!**

BERTRUM: *(Shows box.)* Here is a box of bones from a bird. We cooked the bird and picked the bones- - -

MR. POTTER: Bertrum!

BERTRUM: *(Waves skin at Mr. Potter.)* We skinned a cat.

MR. POTTER: Skinned a cat!

BERTRUM: It was a dead cat.

MR. POTTER: Bertrum. Silence. Go to your room and contemplate the virtues of good behavior. Behavior worthy of the name of Potter. Go. *(Spells.)* G- -o.

BERTRUM: Yes, sir. *(Exits.)*

MR. POTTER: Miss Hammond, the most important point in teaching children is good manners.

MISS HAMMOND: They need to play. Beatrix needs to skip a rope, like the girls out front.

MR. POTTER: Young **LADIES** do not play in the street.





MISS HAMMOND: Today she drew a map of England and left out London. She would like to erase the life she lives here.

MR. POTTER: Miss Hammond, this conversation is at an end. You will remove all the animals from the nursery.

MISS HAMMOND: Oh, no, Mr. Potter. I must be firm. The animals are their only companions. Beatrix studies them, sketches them. She writes stories about them. They are her world.

BEATRIX: *(Enters, holding a stuffed animal frog in a napkin.)* It is all right, Papa. I caught him and Mr. Jump is not hurt at all.

MR. POTTER: Mr. Jump has disgraced the Potter family.

BEATRIX: OO-OO-OO-OO!

(Frog jumps out of her hand. NOTE: she pushes frog with other hand under napkin.)

MR. POTTER: *(Jumps away.)* Beatrix! Control that frog at once.

BEATRIX: Yes, Papa. *(Creeps up on frog, uttering frog sounds with various inflections and rhythms.)*
Croak...croak...croak...etc.

MR. POTTER: Beatrix.

BEATRIX: You have to talk frog talk so he will know you are his friend. Croak...croak...etc.

MR. POTTER: I will catch him. I will CROAK him. *(Grabs napkin, creeps up on frog.)* Croak...croak...CROAK! *(He catches frog.)* There! Take him away. *(Spells)* A- -w- -

BEATRIX: *(Puts frog in box at back. Spells.)* W- -a- -y.



MR. POTTER: Miss Hammond, I repeat, there will be no frogs, rabbits, or lizards hopping about in the parlor. No animals.
(Spells.) N- -o. *(Exits.)*

BEATRIX: It is my fault, I left the top open. It seems I am always out of favor with Mamma and Papa. I think I was born to be a discredit to my family.

BAKER'S BOY: *(Off, calls.)* Muffins. Muffins *(He enters, same area of jumping girls. He carries a basket of muffins and a sign on a stick: MUFFINS. He calls his wares in a singing voice.)* Muffins for sale. Hot honey-sweet muffins. Muffins for sale.

BEATRIX: *(Eagerly goes to "window.")* It is the Baker's Boy.
(Looks "down.")

BAKER BOY: Buy a muffin. Try a muffin. Muffins for sale.

BEATRIX: He looks like a little mouse.

MISS HAMMOND: A mouse?

BEATRIX: His brown coat and cap- -a little brown SINGING mouse.
(Boy does action she describes.)

Look. He has stopped. He is picking up- -a little bird. He's helping it to fly. Surely, he must be a nice- - helpful- - *(Imagining.)* singing mouse.

BAKER'S BOY: *(Singing, exits.)* Hot honey-sweet muffins. Muffins. Muffins for sale.

BEATRIX: Cook never bakes us *(Sings.)* Hot honey-sweet muffins.

BERTRUM: *(Enters.)* I have contemplated what is good behavior for a young gentleman. Silence, or you will have to go out, out, *(Spells.)* O- -u- -t.

