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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS**

**A Full-Length Play**

**Based on the Life and Stories of Beatrix Potter**

**by**

**JOSEPH ROBINETTE**



**Dramatic Publishing**

**Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia**

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

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**This Play is Dedicated to the Memory of  
CHRISTOPHER R. SERGEL, SR.  
Counselor, Confidant, Mentor and Friend  
without whose inspiration and guidance, this play,  
as well as many others, would never have been written**

# THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS

A Full-Length Play  
For 8 Women and 7 Men  
(more if desired, fewer with extensive doubling)\*

## CHARACTERS (In the Life of Beatrix Potter)

BEATRIX POTTER	.....	a writer
HELEN POTTER	.....	her mother
RUPERT POTTER	.....	her father
ANNIE CARTER MOORE	.....	her governess
EDWIN MOORE	.....	Annie's husband
NOEL	}	the Moore children
ERIC		
MARJORIE		
FREDA		
NORAH		
NORMAN WARNE	.....	an editor
HAROLD WARNE	.....	his brother, also an editor
BODKINS	}	members of the Linnean Society
DEXTER		
MASSE		
YVETTE	.....	a maid

\*(A one-act, seven actor—or more—version of this play is available from the publisher.)

THE PLACE: England.  
THE TIME: A few years before and after the turn-of-the century.  
Opening and closing scenes, 1950.

(In the Stories of Beatrix Potter)

THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT

FLOPSY  
MOPSY  
COTTON-TAIL } rabbits  
PETER  
MOTHER RABBIT  
MR. MCGREGOR, a farmer  
TWO SPARROWS, birds

THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER

TAILOR, a poor man  
SIMPKIN, a cat  
THREE (or more) MICE, friends of the Tailor  
FOOTMAN, an aide to the mayor  
MAYOR, a high-ranking official

THE TALE OF TWO BAD MICE

LUCINDA  
JANE } dolls  
TOM THUMB  
HUNCA MUNCA } mice  
POLICEMAN an officer, also a doll

### THE TALE OF MR. JEREMY FISHER

MR. JEREMY FISHER, a frog  
MR. ALDERMAN PTOLEMY TORTOISE, a tortoise  
SIR ISAAC NEWTON, a newt  
JACK SHARP, a spiny fish  
TROUT, a large fish

### THE TALE OF JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK

JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK }  
REBECCA PUDDLE-DUCK } ducks  
FARMER'S WIFE, their mistress  
FOX, a wily fellow  
KEP }  
BARNEY } dogs  
CHUTNEY }

(Also: ANIMALS and TOURISTS at Hill Top Farm in the opening scene.)

*THE ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT AND HIS FRIENDS* was first produced by the Glassboro Summer Children's Theatre at Rowan College of New Jersey with the following cast and role distributions:

<u>1ST ACTOR</u> (f) (Gina Ricci)	<u>2ND ACTOR</u> (f) (Christine Gatto)	<u>3RD ACTOR</u> (f) (Deanna M. Ford)
Beatrix Potter	Annie Carter Moore	Helen Potter

<u>4TH ACTOR</u> (f) (Krystina Morton)	<u>5TH ACTOR</u> (m) (Denis Mercier)	<u>6TH ACTOR</u> (m) (Dominic Sano)
Yvette	Rupert Potter	Noel 1st Sparrow Mouse Policeman Sir Isaac Newton Fox

<u>7TH ACTOR</u> (m) (Jason Sawyer)	<u>8TH ACTOR</u> (m) (John Kucher)	<u>9TH ACTOR</u> (m) (Stephen Heath)
Eric Peter Rabbit Mouse Mr. Jeremy Fisher Barney	Edwin Moore Mayor Tom Thumb Trout Kep	1st Tourist 2nd Sparrow Bodkins Tailor Jack Sharp

<u>10TH ACTOR</u> (m) (Paul Tonden)	<u>11TH ACTOR</u> (m) (William C. Morris)	<u>12TH ACTOR</u> (f) (Gail Albanese)
2nd Tourist Dexter Footman Norman Warne	3rd Tourist Mr. McGregor Massee Harold Warne Mr. Alderman Ptolemy Tortoise	4th Tourist Marjorie Mother Rabbit Mouse Hunca Munca Rebecca Puddle-duck



<u>13TH ACTOR</u> (f)	<u>14TH ACTOR</u> (f)	<u>15TH ACTOR</u> (f)
<i>(Debra Heitmann)</i>	<i>(Jennifer Hearn)</i>	<i>(Andrea Mings)</i>
Freda	Norah	Mopsy
Flopsy	Cotton-tail	Simplkin
Mouse	Mouse	Farmer's Wife
Lucinda	Jane	
Chutney	Jemima Puddle-duck	

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### SETTING

The setting for the play may be as simple or as elaborate as desired. Only two specific locales—the Potter home and the Moore home respectively—are required. The suggestion of a parlor or drawing room at Stage Right might indicate the Potter home, while a living room or kitchen area at Stage Left could represent the Moore home. An open space between the “homes” as well as open spaces in the Downstage areas can be used for other scenes, story enactments and Annie’s narrative speeches.

If desired, simple drops—or a set piece or two—may be utilized to suggest such locales as Hill Top Farm, the outer office of Warne and Company and the hallway at the Linnean Society. However, these scenes may be played in the open spaces without scenery.

Simple set pieces may also be used to denote the locales of the Five Stories. In *Peter Rabbit*, a ground row or two to suggest a garden, a free-standing gate, a bush covered with a net and a scarecrow will set the scene.

A table filled with cloth and sewing materials (and two hidden coats) along with a blanket on the floor to suggest a bed are the basics in *The Tailor Of Gloucester*.

A table, two chairs, a small cupboard and several plastic dishes to which are glued artificial food will suffice in *The Two Bad Mice*. (Two flats resembling the sides of Norman’s dollhouse may be added if desired.)

A simple ground row of “pond flora” such as cattails, lilies and buttercups can suggest the environs of *Mr. Jeremy Fisher*.

And the corner of a cottage and a tree at opposite sides of the stage may represent the Fox’s home and farm respectively in *Jemima Puddle-duck*.

Set pieces, if used for the stories, may be added and struck by the actors or by stagehands attired in dark clothing.

### COSTUMES

The costumes for those actors playing one role only (i.e., Beatrix, Annie, Mr. Potter) may remain the same for each character; however, one or two changes each during the course of the play will help suggest the passage of time. This is especially true of Beatrix who progresses from a teenager to a woman in her late thirties.

During Annie's narration concerning the death of Norman, Beatrix should enter the scene wearing a dark cloak or cape.

The costumes for the animals should be kept simple, especially if each actor plays several different roles. Full masks and/or elaborate costumes may tend to work against the "human" qualities of the animals.

### MUSIC

Recorded—or live—instrumental music is recommended at certain points throughout the play: in the opening, until Annie enters; under the voices of Beatrix and the animals during the final scene; under Annie's narrative regarding the death of Norman; before and after each story; and during some of the transitions between locales.

Musical selections may include classical works for guitar and flute, harp and flute, flute and orchestra and/or chamber orchestra, harpsichord or piano. The music selected should, of course, be in keeping with the mood of the moment and with an overall view of suggesting the period of the play.

## ACT ONE

**SETTING:** *An open space—suggesting a wooded area at Hill Top Farm. 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 TOURIST, carrying a map, enters. He looks at the map as a 2ND TOURIST, peering through binoculars, enters. 1ST TOURIST mimes asking directions. 2ND TOURIST points to offstage and BOTH exit in opposite directions. Two other TOURISTS, a man and a woman, enter glancing at a guide book. A man, NOEL, wheels an elderly woman, ANNIE, sitting in a wheelchair, into the area. ANNIE has a book in her lap. She smiles and nods at 3RD and 4TH TOURISTS who exit.*

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. And there seem to be more visitors every year...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.

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 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.)*

*(The lights come up full to reveal a unit set which includes the Potter home, the Moore home and open spaces for other locales as well as for the enactment of the five stories—see Production Notes for setting suggestions.)*

*MRS. POTTER enters the Potter home, followed by BEATRIX.)*

MRS. POTTER. No, Beatrix. You may not.

BEATRIX. Please, Mother.

MRS. POTTER. No arguing now.

BEATRIX. But I'm tired of being taught by governesses. You let Bertram go to school. Why can't I?

MRS. POTTER. We sent your brother to a fine private academy where wealthy young boys go.

BEATRIX. What about wealthy young girls?

MRS. POTTER. They stay at home to be tutored.

*(YVETTE, a maid, enters.)*

YVETTE. Beg pardon, ma'am, but the new governess is here.

MRS. POTTER. Thank you, Yvette. Tell her I shall be right out.

BEATRIX. Why are governesses always old and look like dried-up prunes?

MRS. POTTER. Shush! Mind your manners. She might hear you.

BEATRIX. I hope she does.

MRS. POTTER. Incidentally, I have instructed her that your sketch pad is to be used strictly for your lessons. You have been forbidden to draw until you have shown more progress in your studies. Do you understand?

BEATRIX *(resigned)*. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. POTTER. I will send in the governess. *(She exits.)*

*(BEATRIX quickly picks up a sketch pad, looks at the top sheet and starts to tear it out as ANNIE enters.)*

ANNIE. Hello. *(BEATRIX hurriedly puts the sketch pad behind her back.)*

BEATRIX. 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. What are you holding behind your back?

BEATRIX (*holding out an empty hand*). Nothing—really.

ANNIE. The other hand, please. (*Reluctantly, BEATRIX hands her the sketch pad.*) It's a drawing.

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

ANNIE. Who taught you to draw?

BEATRIX. No one really. We just picked it up on our own.

ANNIE. We?

BEATRIX. My brother Bertram and I—on our summer vacations in Scotland...the only place where I've ever been truly happy.

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. 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. *Die freundin.*

BEATRIX. *Die freundin?*

ANNIE. It's German—for the friend.



BEATRIX. Oh, hello, *die freundin*, Annie. *(They shake hands.)*

ANNIE. Hello, *die 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. On our nature walks she would tell me the names of wild mushrooms and mosses on the trees. And she would draw pictures of them at every opportunity. *(She exits.)*

*(A moment later, MR. POTTER enters carrying some artwork.)*

MR. POTTER. Beatrix!

BEATRIX'S VOICE *(from offstage)*. Yes, Father?

*(BEATRIX enters.)*

MR. POTTER. I bought these for you today. Some original paintings by a Mr. Caldecott. I think they're perfect for a child's room, don't you?

BEATRIX *(taking the artwork)*. I think they're perfect for my room. Thank you, Father.

MR. POTTER *(starting to leave)*. Oh—and Beatrix. I've decided—to allow you to take art lessons.

BEATRIX. Papa!

MR. POTTER. Your governess has convinced me that you may have a bit of talent.

BEATRIX (*embracing him*). Thank you, Papa. (*MR. POTTER exits.*) Art lessons. At last.

(*ANNIE enters.*)

BEATRIX. Oh, Annie—thank you.

ANNIE. It took me almost two years to convince him.

BEATRIX. Well, 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. Beatrix, 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. Beatrix...(*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. Before I knew it, a whole year had flown by.

*(The scene changes to the Moore home. EDWIN MOORE enters carrying a lunch basket.)*

EDWIN. Well, off to my job. Goodbye, luv. *(He kisses ANNIE.)*

ANNIE. I'll see you when you get home.

EDWIN. Say, you don't still miss *your* old job, do you?

ANNIE. I miss Beatrix, of course. But I like what I have now even better. *(She hugs him, then turns away coyly.)* And what I'm going to get even better yet.

EDWIN *(suspiciously)*. Wait a minute...How do you know what you're going to get? Who told you?

ANNIE. The doctor, of course.

EDWIN. The doctor! Well, bless my soul. How did *he* know I was getting you a brand new kitchen table for your anniversary?

ANNIE. He told me I'm getting a brand new baby for *our* anniversary.

EDWIN. Must have been the carpenter. He lives on the same street as the—doctor told you what?

ANNIE. We're going to have a baby.

EDWIN. A baby! You mean like—like—

ANNIE. A baby.

EDWIN. A baby! *(Whirling ANNIE around.)* Well, why didn't you say so?

ANNIE. I just did.

EDWIN. That's right, you did, didn't you? *(Setting ANNIE on the sofa.)* Look at me behavin' like a gorilla. I got to be gentle with you now.

ANNIE. I'll be fine. The baby won't be here for seven more months. You'd better get to your job. You'll have to work harder than ever now to support a family.

EDWIN. You bet I will. *(He kisses her and starts to leave.)*

ANNIE. By the way, thank you for the new kitchen table.

EDWIN. Now who told you about that?

ANNIE. *You did.*

EDWIN. Oh, yeah, so I did. *(He exits, then yells from offstage.)* 'Morning, Wellaby. Guess what me and Annie's gettin' for our anniversary?

WELLABY'S VOICE *(from offstage)*. A new kitchen table!

EDWIN'S VOICE. Ah, everybody knows that. Guess what else.

ANNIE. Before long the new baby arrived.

*(EDWIN enters carrying a baby bundle and continues walking toward the other side of the stage.)*

ANNIE. He was born on Christmas eve, so we named him Noel.

EDWIN. Should have named him Jingle Bells. *(He exits.)*

ANNIE. Go on with you...Pretty soon, Noel had a little brother. His name was Eric.

*(EDWIN re-enters, carrying another bundle. He is followed by NOEL who tugs at his father.)*

NOEL. Papa, can I hold the new baby? I won't drop him. I promise. Etc. *(They exit.)*

ANNIE. Then came our first daughter—little Marjorie.

*(EDWIN re-enters carrying another bundle. He is followed by NOEL and ERIC who are arguing.)*

NOEL. I want to play with her.

ERIC. I want to play with her. *(They exit as the BOYS continue to argue.)*

ANNIE. Next was our second daughter—Freda.

*(EDWIN re-enters with another bundle, followed by NOEL, ERIC and MARJORIE who argue.)*

CHILDREN. I want to hold her. I want to play with her. She's my sister. Etc. *(They exit.)*

ANNIE. And then came sweet, little Norah.

*(EDWIN re-enters with another bundle. He is followed by NOEL, ERIC, MARJORIE and FREDA who fight among themselves.)*

CHILDREN. You held her yesterday. No, I didn't. I haven't played with her all day. Etc. *(They exit.)*

ANNIE. Yes, it was quite a lively household around here.

*(EDWIN re-enters followed by NOEL, ERIC, MARJORIE, FREDA and NORAH. They are loud and boisterous.)*

CHILDREN. Please, Papa. I'll take care of him. I'll take care of him. We'll all take care of him. Etc.

EDWIN. All right. I'll ask your mother.

ANNIE. What's all the ruckus about this time?

EDWIN. The children were wonderin' if maybe—we might get ourselves a little puppy dog to play with. *(The CHILDREN beg ANNIE.)*

ANNIE. After having five children in six years—I think I would like to have a puppy next time.