

The Velveteen Rabbit
by Margery Williams
adapted for radio by Jules de Jongh
Season 1 Episode 19

[opening theme music and strapline]

Nanny Bea: Hello so kind of you to join us. Us being two squirrels, one kitten and hens that I can hypnotise. The squirrels are back for the holidays! Oh and of course my neighbour Jules will be joining us any...

[knock sfx]

Nanny Bea: minute now.

Nanny Bea: Who could that be? Hello?

Jules: Hello Nanny Bea, it's your neighbour Jules with a story?

Nanny Bea: Yes of course you are you. Do come in. We can't wait to find out what you've brought us.

Jules: Well today we'll hear the classic tale of a rabbit who arrives one Christmas morning and desperately wants to become real.

Nanny Bea: I've got our tea and you've got our tale.

Jules: I think it's time. Are you ready for a story?

Nanny Bea: Yes please

Jules: Okay then, The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams

There was once a velveteen rabbit, and in the beginning he was splendid. His coat was spotted brown and white with real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink satin. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.

There were other things in the stocking, chocolate almonds and a clockwork mouse, a toy engine and a skipping rope, but the Rabbit was quite the best of all. For at least two hours the Boy hugged him and loved him, then Aunts and Uncles came to dinner, with a bundle of parcels. There was a great rustling of paper and unravelling of ribbons, in the excitement of it all the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

For a long time he lived in the toy cupboard or on the nursery floor, and no one thought very much about him. He was naturally shy, and being only made of velveteen, some of

the more expensive toys snubbed him. The mechanical toys looked down upon everyone else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real. The model boat caught the tone from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging in technical terms. The Rabbit could not claim to be a model of anything, for he didn't know that real rabbits existed; he thought they were all stuffed with sawdust like himself, and he understood that sawdust was quite out-of-date and should never be mentioned in modern circles. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by injured soldiers, put on airs and pretended he was connected with the Government. Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel very insignificant, and the only ONE who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse.

The Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, then break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise like the Horse understood all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day.

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Horse. "When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"And it doesn't happen all at once," added the Horse. "Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, but that doesn't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Horse might be sensitive. But the Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad.

One evening, when the Boy was going to bed, he couldn't find the toy dog that always slept with him. Nana was in a hurry, and it was too much trouble to hunt for dogs at bedtime, so she simply looked about her, and seeing that the toy cupboard door stood open, she made a swoop.

"Here," she said, "take your old Bunny! He'll do to sleep with you!" And she dragged the Rabbit out by one ear, and put him into the Boy's arms.

That night, and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed. At first he found it rather uncomfortable, for the Boy hugged him very tight, and sometimes he rolled over on him but very soon he grew to like it. The Boy used to talk to him, and made tunnels for him under the bedclothes like the burrows the real rabbits lived in. And

when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down close under his little warm chin and dream, with the Boy's hands clasped close round him all night long.

And so time went on, and the little Rabbit was very happy—so happy that he never noticed how his beautiful velveteen fur was getting shabbier and shabbier, and his tail becoming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy had kissed him.

Spring came, and they had long days in the garden, for wherever the Boy went the Rabbit went too. He had rides in the wheelbarrow, and picnics on the grass, and lovely fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes. And once, when the Boy was called away suddenly to go out to tea, the Rabbit was left out on the lawn, and Nana had to come and look for him with the candle because the Boy couldn't go to sleep unless he was there. He was wet through with the dew and quite earthy from diving into the burrows the Boy had made for him in the flower bed, and Nana grumbled as she rubbed him off with a corner of her apron.

"You must have your old Bunny!" she said. "Fancy all that fuss for a toy!"

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands.

"You mustn't say that," he said. "He isn't a toy. He's REAL!"

When the little Rabbit heard that he was happy, for he knew that what the Horse had said was true at last. The nursery magic had happened to him, and he was a toy no longer. He was Real. The Boy himself had said it.

That night he was almost too happy to sleep, and so much love stirred in his little sawdust heart that it almost burst. And into his boot-button eyes, that had long ago lost their polish, there came a look of wisdom and beauty, so that even Nana noticed it the next morning when she picked him up, and said, "I declare if that old Bunny hasn't got quite a knowing expression!"

That was a wonderful Summer!

Near the house where they lived there was a wood, and in the long June evenings the Boy liked to go there after tea to play. He took the Velveteen Rabbit with him, and before he wandered off to play he made the Rabbit a little nest somewhere among the bracken, it was then he saw two strange beings creep out of the tall bracken near him.

They were rabbits like himself, but quite furry and brand-new. They must have been very well made, for their seams didn't show at all, and they changed shape in an odd way when they moved; one minute they were long and thin, the next minute fat and bunchy, instead of always staying the same like he did. They crept quite close to him, twitching their noses, while the Velveteen Rabbit stared hard to see which side the clockwork stuck out, for he knew that toys who jump generally have something to wind them up. But he couldn't see it.

"Why don't you get up and play with us?" one of them said.

"I don't feel like it," said the Rabbit, for he didn't want to explain that he had no clockwork.

"I don't believe you can!" the furry rabbit said.

"I can!" said the little Rabbit. "I can jump higher than anything!" He meant when the Boy threw him, but of course he didn't want to say so.

"Can you hop on your hind legs?" asked the furry rabbit.

That was a dreadful question, for the Velveteen Rabbit had no hind legs at all! The back of him was made all in one piece, like a pincushion. He sat still in the bracken, and hoped that the other rabbits wouldn't notice.

"I don't want to!" he said again.

But the wild rabbits have very sharp eyes. "He hasn't got any hind legs!" he called out. And he began to laugh.

"I have!" cried the little Rabbit. "I have got hind legs! I am sitting on them!"

"Then stretch them out and show me, like this!" said the wild rabbit. And he began to whirl round and dance, till the little Rabbit got quite dizzy.

"I don't like dancing," he said. "I'd rather sit still!"

But all the while he was longing to dance, for a funny new tickly feeling ran through him, and he felt he would give anything in the world to be able to jump about like these rabbits did.

The strange rabbit stopped dancing, and came quite close, then he wrinkled his nose suddenly and flattened his ears and jumped backwards.

"He doesn't smell right!" he exclaimed. "He isn't a rabbit at all! He isn't real!"

"I am Real!" said the little Rabbit. "The Boy said so!" And he nearly began to cry.

Just then the Boy ran past near them, and with a flash of white tails the two strange rabbits disappeared.

The Velveteen Rabbit was all alone.

For a long time he lay very still, watching the bracken, and hoping that they would come back. But they never returned, and presently the sun sank lower and the Boy came and carried him home.

Weeks passed, and the little Rabbit grew very old and shabby, the Boy loved him so hard all his whiskers fell off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey. He even began to lose his shape, and scarcely looked like a rabbit any more, except to the Boy. To him he was always beautiful, and that was all that the little Rabbit cared about. Because when you're Real shabbiness doesn't matter.

But then, one day, the Boy became ill.

His face grew very flushed, and he talked in his sleep, and his little body was so hot that it burned the Rabbit when he held him close. It was a long weary time, for the Boy was too ill to play. But he snuggled down patiently, and looked forward to the time when the Boy should be well again, and they would go out in the garden like they used to. All sorts of delightful things he planned, and while the Boy lay half asleep he crept up close to the pillow and whispered them in his ear.

At last the fever turned, and the Boy got better. He was able to sit up in bed and, and look at picture-books, while the little Rabbit cuddled close at his side. And one day he got up and dressed. They even planned a trip to the seaside. The doctor gave Nana strict instructions. "The room was to be disinfected, and all the books and toys that the Boy had played with in bed must be burnt."

"How about his old Bunny?" Nana asked.

"That?" said the doctor. "Why, it's a mass of scarlet fever germs!—Burn it at once. Get him a new one!"

And so the Velveteen Rabbit was put into a sack with the old picture-books and a lot of rubbish, and carried out to the end of the garden behind the fowl-house. That was a fine place to make a bonfire, only the gardener was too busy just then, but he promised next morning to come quite early and burn the whole lot.

That night the Boy slept in a different bedroom, and he had a new bunny to sleep with him. It was a splendid bunny, all white plush with real glass eyes, but the Boy was too excited to care very much about it. For tomorrow he was going to the seaside, and that in itself was such a wonderful thing that he could think of nothing else.

And while the Boy was asleep, dreaming of the seaside, the Velveteen Rabbit lay behind the fowl-house, and he felt very lonely. The sack had been left untied, and so by wriggling a bit he was able to get his head through the opening and look out. He was shivering, for he had been used to sleeping in a proper bed, and by this time his coat had worn so thin and threadbare from hugging that it was no longer any protection to him. Near by he could see where they used to play in the garden—and a great sadness came over him. Of what use was it to be loved and become Real if it all ended like this? And a tear, a real tear, trickled down his shabby velvet nose and fell to the ground.

And then a strange thing happened. For where the tear had fallen a flower grew out of the ground, a mysterious flower, not at all like anything that grew in the garden. It had slender green leaves the colour of emeralds, and in the centre of the leaves, a blossom like a golden cup. It was so beautiful that the little Rabbit forgot to cry, and just lay there watching it. Then the blossom opened, and out of it stepped a fairy.

She was quite the loveliest fairy in the whole world. Her dress was of pearl and dew-drops, and there were flowers round her neck and in her hair, and her face was like the most perfect flower of all. And she came close to the little Rabbit and gathered him up in her arms and kissed him on the velveteen nose that was all damp from crying.

"Little Rabbit," she said, "don't you know who I am?"

The Rabbit looked up at her, and it seemed to him that he had seen her face before, but he couldn't think where.

"I am the nursery magic Fairy," she said. "I take care of all the playthings that the children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don't need them any more, then I come and take them away with me and turn them into Real."

"Wasn't I Real before?" asked the little Rabbit.

"You were Real to the Boy," the Fairy said, "because he loved you. Now you shall be Real to everyone."

And she held the little Rabbit close in her arms and flew with him into the wood.

It was light now, for the moon had risen. In the open glade between the trunks the wild rabbits danced with their shadows on the velvet grass, but when they saw the Fairy they all stopped.

"I've brought you a new playfellow," the Fairy said. "You must be very kind to him and teach him all he needs to know in Rabbit-land, for he is going to live with you for ever and ever!"

And she kissed the little Rabbit again and put him down on the grass.

"Run and play, little Rabbit!" she said.

But the little Rabbit sat quite still. For when he saw all the wild rabbits dancing around him he suddenly remembered about his hind legs, and he didn't want them to see that he was made all in one piece. He did not know that when the Fairy kissed him that last time she had changed him altogether. And he might have sat there a long time, too shy to move, if just then something hadn't tickled his nose, and before he thought what he was doing he lifted his hind toe to scratch it.

And he found that he actually had hind legs! Instead of dingy velveteen he had brown fur, soft and shiny, his ears twitched by themselves, and his whiskers were so long they brushed the grass. He gave one leap and the joy of using those hind legs was so great that he went springing about the turf on them, jumping sideways and whirling round as the others did, and he grew so excited that when at last he did stop to look for the Fairy she had gone.

He was a Real Rabbit at last, at home with the other rabbits.

Autumn passed and Winter, and in the Spring, when the days grew warm and sunny, the Boy went out to play in the wood behind the house. And while he was playing, two rabbits crept out from the bracken and peeped at him. One of them was brown all over, but the other had strange markings under his fur, as though long ago he had been spotted, and the spots still showed through. And there was something familiar about his little soft nose and his round black eyes, the Boy thought to himself:

"Why, he looks just like my old Bunny that was lost when I had scarlet fever!"

But he never knew that it really was his own Bunny, come back to look at the child who had first helped him to be Real.

The End

Nanny Bea: Jules it's no wonder that is a classic. Thank you for that story and for bringing back memories of my rabbits when they were young. They too liked to dance especially to my Riverdance dvd, quite an undertaking.

Jules: And quite a sight to behold.

Nanny Bea: Those were precious days, dancing with my bunnies, now they're obsessed with online role playing games but at least I have the memories.

Jules: Well next week's story might make you sentimental as well, another holiday classic.

Thomas: Go to NannyBea.com

Jules: Go there to find out about all our episodes including the stories written out so you can read along and details how to get in touch.

[Be on the Show jingle]

Mr Announcer: This has been a Toad in the Hole production for NannyBea.com.