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Dedication

I dedicate this play with much affection to all the cherished shabby, threadbare teddy bears, stuffed dogs and rag dolls who have been loved into Real, and to my daughter and wife, who have done the same for me.

QUOTES FROM REVIEWS

“The tale of a toy rabbit made real through a child’s love is both entertaining and genuinely moving thanks to Scott Davidson’s uncloying, graceful adaptation of Margery Williams’ poignant children’s classic… Heart is the keyword here.”
~ Lynne Heffley, LA Times, 1995

“Scott Davidson’s script of Margery Williams’ The Velveteen Rabbit exemplifies the best in the art of adaptation.”
~ Jack Beasley, The Leader

“Adapter Scott Davidson reinforces the central real/make-believe theme by letting the audience know that the play we are seeing can be viewed as both real and make-believe. The Velveteen Rabbit still brings tears; it’s magic... and creates a magical spell that absolutely enchants...”

“The young at heart will warm to this Velveteen Rabbit... a testament to the power of a child’s imagination and to the idea that sentimental value can be attached to an object that others would immediately throw away.”
~ Sheila Woolridge, Austin American Statesman, 2000
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

Adapted by SCOTT DAVIDSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS
ACTOR 1 ...................................VOICE 1/ MOUSE/ MAGIC/ BUNNY 2
ACTOR 2 ...................................VOICE 2/ SKIN HORSE/ BUNNY 1
ACTOR 3 ...................................VOICE 3/ NANA/ TRAIN
ACTOR 4 ...................................VOICE 4/ BOY
ACTOR 5 ...................................VELVETEEN RABBIT

SCENE SYNOPSIS
The play was written to be performed without intermission. However, if the producing group wishes to play it in two acts, the following scene structure will work:

ACT ONE
Scene One: The nursery, Christmas morning.
Scene Two: The nursery, Christmas evening.
Scene Three: The nursery, over time.
Scene Four: A garden in the springtime.

ACT TWO
Scene One: A field in the summertime.
Scene Two: The nursery that same evening.
Scene Three: The nursery, months later.
Scene Four: the nursery, weeks later.
Scene Five: The garden, that same evening.
Scene Six: The forest, later that year.

SETTING
The time period of this piece is intended to be general and not date specific—“not so long ago.” Or maybe “so long ago that no one can remember.” However, in the original production, the boy’s costume and toys were reminiscent of the early 1900s.

The play takes place primarily in two locations: the nursery where the boy sleeps and keeps his toys, and outside in a garden, a field and other places where a boy and his stuffed bunny might play together. For the nursery, the playing area of the stage is primarily a bed—a raked platform covered with a large quilt and dotted with pillows. A few large prop items lay at the peripheral edges of the stage, such as a ball, blocks or toy cabinet and bookshelves. The nursery is transformed
to the outdoors by pulling away or flipping over the quilt. The pillows can be turned to become bushes, plants, rocks, etc. Perhaps the headboard of the bed becomes a fence by removing some slats.

Actors 1-4 remain onstage through the entire play, freely moving in and out of the playing area.

PLAYWRIGHT’S NOTE
Perhaps no piece of literature we experience in our lives will touch us as deeply and profoundly as the classics of childhood. They can be our guide through the turmoil and frustrations of youth, a gentle and reassuring reminder of the joys of life and the touchstone for our warmest memories. Few writers are capable of the simple, direct and affecting prose which communicate so many of life’s mysteries and wonders with so few words. Yet time and time again we can return to these literary gems from our youth only to discover deeper meanings in their magical tales. From Charlotte’s Web to Tuck Everlasting and yes, even Goodnight Moon, we each have our favorite book that still possesses the power to move us with its message. Margery Williams’ The Velveteen Rabbit is one of these timeless stories. It is filled with the joy and pain of childhood and continues to share a mysterious truth that becomes wiser and more meaningful the older we grow—“What is Real?”

The opportunity to adapt this story was a special gift for me. I felt an obligation to find a way to communicate what I believed was the true spirit of Ms. Williams’ tale: “What is Real?” The affirmation that I had achieved this came when, after a production in North Carolina, I received a letter from Ms. Williams’ grandson containing a photograph of Margery Williams and a brief note thanking me for an adaptation he felt finally captured the true spirit of her words. That letter made my adaptation “Real” for me. May you share this journey with Margery Williams’ timeless little hero and discover what is Real—for you.
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

ACT ONE

Scene One

1 In the DARKNESS, we hear one VOICE, which then multiplies into a collage of VOICES.

VOICE 1: (Repeats 10 times.) What is Real?

VOICE 2: (Repeats 9 times.) What is Real?

VOICE 3: (Repeats 8 times.) What is Real?

VOICE 4: (Repeats 7 times.) What is Real? (The VOICES chant randomly in child-like cadences and finally build to one single voice.)

ALL: What is Real? (LIGHTS COME UP to reveal the nursery.)

VOICE 1: We’ll tell you a story...

VOICE 2: A story that’s true...

VOICE 3: A story that tells you what Real is.

VOICE 4: For Real is not something you can see with your eyes...

VOICE 3: Real is something you must feel in your heart.

VOICE 1: Christmas morning, not so long ago...

VOICE 3: …or maybe so long ago...

VOICES 1/2: …that no one can remember...

NANA: Rise and shine. It’s Christmas morning. Time to see what Santa’s left in your stocking.

BOY: Christmas Day finally!

NANA: Oh, no! It looks like coal!

BOY: But I was good this year! Really, I was!

NANA: Well, see for your—

BOY: It’s not coal, you silly. It’s a toy train! Choo choo... and oh, chocolate almonds!

NANA: Ah, ah, ah—not before breakfast. Not even on Christmas.

BOY: Oh, please, Nana, please! Just this once?

NANA: Not another word or your presents may very well turn to coal. Father Christmas is always listening.

BOY: Really?

NANA: Really.

BOY: Oh. (Pause, then loudly toward the sky.) I’m putting them back now. (Fishes in the stocking.) Oh, look, a wind-up mouse! (ACTOR 1, now wearing some representational costume for the mouse, moves toward the BOY.) How funny! And an orange, too!

NANA: Is that all?

BOY: I think so. I’m ready to go downstairs and unwrap my presents.
NANA: Perhaps you should reach down one more time to the very bottom of the stocking.

BOY: I suppose I can... oh!

NANA: What is it, child?

BOY: It's... it's... a bunny! (ACTOR 5 shuffles into view.) Like the one at the penny candy store! A bunny rabbit just like... his ears are so pink and soft.

NANA: They're sateen.

BOY: And he has real thread whiskers and fur that feels just like real fur!

NANA: It's velveteen.

BOY: May I stay and play with him for just a little while?

NANA: A little while, but then it's spit spot and downstairs to greet the relatives and open your real presents. Understood?

BOY: Understood. (NANA EXITS the room.) I wonder how Santa knows so much? You look just like the bunny Nana and I saw. He must have been listening, don't you think? (Waits for RABBIT to respond.) Well, what do you think? (No response.) Oh, I see. You're not supposed to tell. It's all right—you can whisper it in my ear, I promise I won't tell anyone. (Leans close to RABBIT'S mouth.) That's just what I thought. (Pause.) Oh! Now I need to tell you a secret, too, and we can be the best of friends for always, all right?! (Leans close to RABBIT'S ears and whispers something.) Well, what do you think of that?! You do believe me, don't you? (Makes RABBIT nod yes.) I knew you would.

NANA'S VOICE: (From OUT of the playing area.) All right, young man, enough time dawdling in your room. It's time to greet the relatives.

BOY: Aaawwwh!!

NANA: ...and finish opening the rest of your gifts!

BOY: Ooooooh!! (Springs off the bed and OUT of the playing area. The stage is quiet for a moment, then...)

MOUSE: Whiz, whir, squeak. Well!! Whiz, whir, squeak. I never! Abandoned in that deep dark stocking. Whiz. And I'm clearly by far the most advanced toy in this entire nursery! Squeak!

TRAIN: Advanced, perhaps. Chug, chug, chug. But modern, ha! Never! Chug, chug, chug. My highly detailed fittings, my realistic sounds and action are clearly superior to your clock spring mechanics. The boy simply hasn't had enough time to acquaint himself with the limitless playtime possibilities of my ultra sophisticated design. Once he has, he'll tire of you faster than that lop-eared stuffing-filled scrap over there.
MOUSE: Well! Whiz. You needn’t be rude about things. Whir. I suppose you believe your pedigree is better than everyone else’s, too! Squeak!

TRAIN: (Laughs.) Chug, chug, chug. My, aren’t we the big man. And, yet, you probably don’t even know what your lineage is! Chug, chug, chug.

MOUSE: Squeak! Do so!
TRAIN: Do not.
MOUSE: Squeak! Do so!
TRAIN: Do not.
MOUSE: Squeak! Do so!
TRAIN: Don’t.
MOUSE: Do! Squeak!!
TRAIN: Prove it. Chug, chug, chug.

MOUSE: Well, squeak. My clock springs are from Lowell, Massachusetts. And my—

TRAIN: Oh, no! Chug, chug, chug. Not one of those American-made toys!

MOUSE: Well, whiz, whir. What the—

TRAIN: You might have at least said Belgium or Brussels or some place obscure… but America? Chug, chug. How common!

RABBIT: Excuse me, I don’t mean to interrupt, but aren’t we all supposed to be happy today?

TRAIN: And I suppose you were made in Paris! Ha! Chug, chug, chug!

RABBIT: Excuse me, but… I don’t understand.

TRAIN: What a surprise!

MOUSE: He means where you came from. Where were you made?
Squeak!

RABBIT: Oh, that. Well, that’s easy. You see, there’s a little old lady who lives down by the lumber mill, and her husband died not too long ago, so to help make some extra money, she—

TRAIN: Oh, no! A charity case!

MOUSE: He’s not only made with rags, he’s probably stuffed with them, too! Squeak, squeak, squeak!

RABBIT: I am not! She goes to the mill and collects fresh sawdust. I’m filled with good, clean sawdust!

MOUSE: Squeak! He’s not even smart enough to know he should be embarrassed.
TRAIN: My boy. Chug, chug, chug. No metal, no clock springs and you can’t even make a sound… why, you’re positively prehistoric!

MOUSE: And he’s stuffed with sawdust to boot!

TRAIN: Yes… well, it’s not polite to even discuss that. Chug. Clearly, he isn’t real like we are. Chug. Come, let us seek out more of our own kind. (TRAIN and MOUSE EXIT the playing area, leaving only RABBIT and SKIN HORSE in the nursery.)

VOICE 1: The room fell silent.

VOICE 4: The little rabbit felt so alone.

VOICE 3: He longed to be back at the old woman’s in a basket full of toys like himself or sitting on one of the shelves in the candy store, listening to the busy chatter of children and parents.

VOICE 1: Suddenly, out of a dark corner of the room, he saw a glint of light that seemed to rock in and out of view… and he heard...

SKIN HORSE: Naaaay!

RABBIT: Who... who... who's there?

SKIN HORSE: Don’t be afraid.

RABBIT: I’m not afraid. You just startled me.

SKIN HORSE: I’m sorry.

RABBIT: It’s all right. Have you been here long?

SKIN HORSE: Fifty years.

RABBIT: Oh, my! That must be a very long time, I suppose.

SKIN HORSE: Very long, indeed.

RABBIT: Oh, then I suppose you probably heard what the others were saying to me.

SKIN HORSE: Don’t let it bother you.

RABBIT: I don’t, I suppose.

SKIN HORSE: I’ve seen too many of their kind boast and swagger like that only to break their mainsprings and pass away long before they could ever be loved enough to become Real.

RABBIT: Oh! But I thought they were already real? That’s what they say.

SKIN HORSE: That’s what they would like to believe, but Real isn’t just a hat you can put on or a label someone can press across your chest.

RABBIT: Oh. Well, I suppose you should know. (Pause.) You must have been here longer than any of the other toys, I suppose. (There is no response.) So, it must stand to reason that you know much more than any of the others, I suppose? (Again, no response.) Are you...
upset with me? Have I asked you too many questions? Is that why you’ve stopped talking to me?

**SKIN HORSE:** No, I’m simply waiting until you ask the right one.

**RABBIT:** Oh. (Pause.) And what might that be?

**SKIN HORSE:** The answer you most want to know.

**RABBIT:** Ohhh. (Thinks, then looks up.) What is... Real? (VOICES 1, 3 and 4 echo the question from OUT of the playing area in a gentle whisper.)

**SKIN HORSE:** (Repeats the question thoughtfully.) What... is... Real?

Real isn’t how you are made or what you are made of. Real... is a thing that happens to you. (Thinks.) When a child loves you for a long, long time—not just to play with, but really loves you—then... you become Real.

**RABBIT:** (With understanding and thought.) Oh. (Pause.) Does it hurt?

**SKIN HORSE:** Sometimes. (Pause, then simply and truthfully.) But when you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt... as long as you are loved.

**RABBIT:** Does it happen all at once, like being wound up, or bit by bit?

**SKIN HORSE:** It doesn’t happen all at once. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to toys who break easily or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.

**RABBIT:** I suppose you are Real?

**SKIN HORSE:** The boy’s uncle made me Real. That was a great many years ago—but once you are Real, you can’t become unreal again. It lasts for always.

**RABBIT:** You don’t suppose it’s possible to become Real without all those uncomfortable things happening to you, do you? (No response.) Oh, well, I didn’t think so. And besides, I don’t know that anyone could ever love me that much. (There is a knowing silence from the SKIN HORSE. OPTIONAL LIGHTS DIM.)

End of Scene One

ACT ONE

Scene Two

**VOICE 1:** As the day drew to a close...
VOICE 2: The distant din of the party guests began to fade away.

VOICE 3: All around the house, preparations for bedtime were beginning...

VOICE 4: And all the nursery shook with fear because they knew soon...

VOICES 1-4: She would come.

RABBIT: (LIGHTS UP on the nursery.) What is it? What's happening?!
(There seems to be random panicked chatter coming from all around him.)

MOUSE: It's time! It's time!

TRAIN: Yes, it is. It's time. You're quite right, it's time!

RABBIT: Time for what?

ALL BUT RABBIT: Tidying up!!

MOUSE: Yes, that's it. Tidying up. Quite right, tidying up.

SKIN HORSE: It's dreadfully painful.

TRAIN: Especially if you're metal or tin.

SKIN HORSE: Yes, quite right. It's—

NANA: (Stands at the nursery doorway.) Oh my, oh my. Such a mess. We must... tidy up!

ALL TOYS: (Including RABBIT. Scream.) AAAAAHH!! (One ACTOR has a fabric panel on a stick. Images of toys and books are painted on the panel, and s/he spins and manipulates it to create the action of “tidying up.”)

VOICE 1: Nana began to spin around the room like a top!

VOICE 2: Whipping up a cyclone of toys around her.

NANA: Now, you go here...

VOICE 4: Toy blocks fell like confetti...

NANA: And these belong up here...

VOICE 1: While books flew like illustrated birds onto the shelves.

VOICE 2: It was terribly difficult for the toys who were heavy or hard.

NANA: And you can live in the toy box.

VOICE 4: But the velveteen rabbit didn’t really seem to mind.

VOICE 1: For he was soft and seemed to land...

VOICE 2: ...comfortably wherever he was thrown.

NANA: (Calls OFF.) And that is that! All right, young man, it's time for bed.

BOY: Already? (Drags his feet.) I wish today wasn’t over yet.

NANA: No dawdling, Up and into bed. Spit spot.
BOY: Christmas is over with too soon. I wish it was Christmas every day, and then it would never have to be over.

NANA: If it was Christmas every day, we wouldn’t have much to look forward to the rest of the year, now would we?

BOY: I guess.

NANA: Now, straight to sleep, all right?

BOY: All right. (NANA starts to go.) Nana, wait!

NANA: What is it?

BOY: My china dog! I can’t go to sleep without my china dog!

NANA: Oh, yes. Oh, my... you see, I just... now where could he... Oh... oh, here, take your bunny. He’ll do to sleep with you. (Scoops RABBIT up and puts it into bed with him.) You can sleep with the china dog tomorrow night. All right?

BOY: (Dreamily.) All right. (NANA EXITS playing area.)

VOICE 1: But the boy would never ask for the china dog again.

VOICE 2: For that night, and all nights thereafter, the rabbit would sleep in the boy’s bed.

VOICE 1: (The following description is acted out during the narration.) At first the rabbit found it rather...

RABBIT: …uncomfortable!

VOICE 2: For the boy hugged him very...

RABBIT: (Choking.) ...tightly!

VOICE 3: And he would push him so far under the pillow that he could scarcely...

RABBIT: (Gasps for breath.) ...breathe!

VOICES 1-3: And sometimes he... (They ALL cover their eyes in fear.)

RABBIT: (Screams as he sees what is about to happen.) Eeeeek!

VOICE 3: (Sad.) ...rolled over on him. (Slowly, the BOY readjusts to a comfortable position with RABBIT. LIGHTS DIM.)

End of Scene Two

ACT ONE
Scene Three

LIGHTS UP on the nursery. BOY and RABBIT play on the bed. ACTOR 2 is on the rocking unit as SKIN HORSE.

VOICE 1: But over time the velveteen rabbit grew to like it, for the boy used to talk to him.

BOY: Hello, bunny. Shall we dig a burrow in the bedclothes? (Begins to pull the blanket up into interesting shapes.) Now that Nana’s gone off to supper, we can make a nice cozy warren in the blankets, just
like real rabbits. You like that, don't you? (Nods RABBIT'S head yes.)

SKIN HORSE: And they would play splendid games together...

BOY: Now you be the farmer, and I'll be Peter Rabbit. Now my trousers are caught on the fence, and you're chasing after me with the hoe! And just when you're about to catch me, my button pops off, and I go skittering back to the warren. And now you have to be my brother and tell our parents how bad I was... (Getting sleepier and sleepier. Yawn.) ...and how I went to Farmer McGregor's even though I wasn't supposed to and how... (Yawn.) ...and how it's time to curl up and go to bed without our supper. (He is asleep now, and he snuggles RABBIT up and under his chin.)

VOICE 3: And so time went by, and the little rabbit was very happy.

VOICE 1: So happy that he never noticed...

VOICE 3: ...his beautiful velveteen fur getting...

SKIN HORSE: ...shabbier and shabbier.

VOICE 1: And how his tail was...

NANA'S VOICE: (From OFFSTAGE.) ...coming all unsewn!

SKIN HORSE: And that all the pink had come off his nose... where the boy had kissed it. (The BOY gently places a kiss on RABBIT'S nose. LIGHTS DIM.)

End of Scene Three

ACT ONE

Scene Four

ALL VOICES: In the spring, they had long days in the garden. (LIGHTS UP! The ACTORS work together to pull down the quilt and turn over the pillows to reveal the garden.)

VOICE 4: For wherever the boy went, the rabbit went, too. (ACTORS 1 and 2 become a wheelbarrow.)

BOY: Look, they've left the wheelbarrow. We can play automobile and go for a ride. (Tries to crank-start an imaginary car but it will not go. Kicks the imaginary car.) That's what Daddy always does! (Makes noises of a car starting.) Vroom, putt putt putt. And it works! (Pretends to get into the car.) Would you like to drive? Look, there's the milkman with his old horse, Mo. Oh, oh, the ice man! There's Mrs. Cullen! She makes the best cookies, so we have to be nice to her. Hello, Mrs. Cullen. And— oh, look! A butterfly! (Becomes absorbed in the butterfly, steps out of the imaginary car and follows it UPSTAGE, leaving RABBIT behind.)
NANA’S VOICE: (From OFFSTAGE.) Tea time! Collect your things and hurry in! Hurry in, dear! (The BOY runs and stops just as he is about to EXIT the playing area.)

NANA: (ENTERS.) And where do you think you’re going?

BOY: Back!

NANA: But you haven’t had your tea yet!

BOY: I can’t go to tea without my bunny!

NANA: Oh dear, oh dear. You must have your old bunny, mustn’t you? Well, you go on, and I’ll collect him for you. Go on now. (Turns to go, but he doesn’t move. She crosses and “picks up” RABBIT.) Oh my, such a mess now, too! All earthy and damp. My, oh my, fancy all this fuss for a toy!

BOY: You mustn’t say that. He isn’t a toy. He’s Real!

NANA: Tsk. Tsk. Now, off to tea with you. Such fancies. But I must declare that old bunny has got quite a knowing expression. (The ACTORS step forward into neutral postures.)

VOICE 1: When the rabbit heard that, he was happy, truly happy for the first time in his life.

VOICE 2: For he knew what the Skin Horse said was true—there was nursery magic.

VOICE 3: And he felt certain it had happened to him at last!

VOICE 4: He was a toy no longer!

ALL VOICES: He was...

VOICES/RABBIT: …Real!

VOICE 4: The boy himself had said so...

RABBIT: …so it must be true! (BLACKOUT.)

END OF ACT ONE

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

Scene One

In the DARKNESS, we hear VOICES.

VOICE 1: That was a wonderful summer. Filled with bright clear days.

VOICE 4: Games and adventures.

VOICE 3: And cool moonlit nights.

VOICE 2: One afternoon...

VOICE 4: …while adventuring in the woods...

VOICE 2: …the rabbit was left in a cozy nest of bracken... (LIGHTS UP and we see the outdoor set rearranged to suggest a field.)
VOICE 4: ...while the boy went off to pick flowers and play soldiers among the trees.

RABBIT: (Stares and counts something invisible on his paws.) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Or eight. Oh, no! Who is eight? There are getting to be too many of you for me to count and... why must ants run about so? Practicing numbers is awfully hard work. (As he looks around, he spies TWO BUNNY RABBITS coming cautiously across the STAGE to him.) Oh, I wonder who they— (Pause.) They look just like me! Oh, but they must be very well made. They look brand new and quite furry and... and look how their seams don’t show at all. (They come closer to him.) And how they can change shape. How very strange. I wonder where their clockworks stick out at. (The TWO BUNNIES examine RABBIT very carefully. They sniff, noses twitching and starting at the least hint of danger until they seem to feel very comfortable with him.)

BUNNY 1: Why don’t you get up and play with us?

RABBIT: (Panicked.) What?

BUNNY 2: He said, why don’t you get up and play with us? Is there something the matter with your ears? (They both laugh and roll merrily about after their joke.)

RABBIT: No, there's nothing the matter with my ears! I... I... I just don't feel like it.

BUNNY 1: Oh. (Ready to leave.)

BUNNY 2: Aw, come on now! Look, it's as easy as anything! Look! (Hops up and down and stands on her hind legs to demonstrate.)

RABBIT: Oh, I know... I just don’t... feel like it today, that’s all.

BUNNY 1: Oh. (Now he is really ready to leave.)

BUNNY 2: Hey! Wait a minute. We don’t believe you.

BUNNY 1: (To BUNNY 2.) Come on. Let’s go.

BUNNY 2: I don’t believe you can hop at all!

RABBIT: I can too!

BUNNY 2: Cannot!

RABBIT: Can too!

BUNNY 2: Cannot!!

RABBIT: Can too!

BUNNY 1: Cannot!

RABBIT: Can! Can! Can! I can jump higher than anything!

BUNNY 2: Prove it!

BUNNY 1: Yeah, prove it!

RABBIT: I can... I... I... just don’t want to! (Very near tears.)
BUNNY 1: (Much more interested now.) Let me have a look at you then. (Walks around RABBIT.)

RABBIT: Stop it! Go away!

BUNNY 1: Look at this, he hasn’t got any hind legs!

BUNNY 2: A rabbit without hind legs?!

RABBIT: I have, too! I’ve got hind legs. I’m just… ah… I’m sitting on them!

BUNNY 1: Then stretch them out and show them to me. Like this! (Begins to jump and hop around the stage. Eventually BUNNY 2 joins in with an elaborately choreographed game. They continue to taunt RABBIT by demonstrating a move and saying “Like this,” “Do this” etc.)

RABBIT: I just don’t like dancing about like that! I’d rather sit still and think, that’s all. (The BUNNIES have finished their game and have landed in resting positions very close to him.)

BUNNY 1: (Sniffs.) Hey, he doesn’t smell right. Sniff. Sniff. He smells like a wet pin cushion.

BUNNY 2: (Also sniffs now.) Why, you’re not a rabbit at all! You’re nothing but an old toy.

BUNNY 1: (Sniffs now.) He isn’t even REAL! (They laugh about their mistake.)

RABBIT: (Desperate.) I am so!

BUNNY 2: (To BUNNY 1.) You thought he was real!!

RABBIT: I am Real!!

BUNNY 1: (To BUNNY 2.) I did not! You thought he was real! (They continue to banter back and forth as RABBIT pleads desperately, “I am Real! I am! The boy said so!” etc. There is stamping and laughter from OFFSTAGE, signaling the approaching BOY.)

BOY’S VOICE: (From OFFSTAGE.) Bunny. Oh, Bunny. (The TWO BUNNIES startle and start to hop OFF in a flash. The BOY runs ON and chases across the STAGE after them. (EXITS after BUNNIES.)

RABBIT: (Calls after them.) Wait! Come back! Come back and play with me! Please, come back! I know I’m Real. I know I am.

End of Scene One

ACT TWO
Scene Two

VOICE 1: But no one answered his call until finally the boy returned just before sunset to take him home. (The outdoor set is transformed back to the nursery during the following two lines. ACTOR 2 is on the rocking unit.)
1 BOY:  *(ENTERS. To RABBIT.)* That's where you’ve gone to! Come on, Nana is waiting.

VOICE 1/3:  Late that night, as the light of the moon fell softly about the room, the Velveteen Rabbit turned to the Skin Horse for consolation and understanding.

RABBIT:  But why would they say that to me if it wasn’t true?

SKIN HORSE:  Those who cannot see with their hearts often say things that are not true.

RABBIT:  But why can’t I…

SKIN HORSE:  Nursery Magic is a very mysterious and powerful thing. It takes time to weave its magic and patience from those under its spell. Do you trust me?

RABBIT:  Yes.

SKIN HORSE:  Do you trust the boy?

RABBIT:  Yes.

SKIN HORSE:  And what did I tell you?

RABBIT:  Once you are Real you can never be unreal again.

SKIN HORSE:  Then you must learn to see with your heart now, too. Be patient.

RABBIT:  But what if…

SKIN HORSE:  It is enough to know that you are loved. Go to sleep now, little one.

VOICE 1:  Time passed and the little rabbit grew very old and shabby indeed.

VOICE 2:  The boy loved him so hard that…

VOICE 4:  He loved all his whiskers off!

VOICE 2:  The pink lining in his ears turned…

ALL THREE VOICES:  …grey!

VOICE 2:  And, he began to lose his shape.

VOICE 1:  He scarcely looked like a rabbit anymore.

VOICE 4:  Except to the boy.

VOICE 2:  To him, he was always beautiful. *(BLACKOUT.)*

End of Scene Two

ACT TWO
Scene Three

In the DARKNESS, we hear a VOICE.

VOICE 3:  Then, late one night, the rabbit noticed something strange. *(LIGHTS UP DIMLY on the nursery, where the BOY is sleeping, RABBIT snuggled next to him.)*
RABBIT: Skin Horse! Skin Horse! Are you there?
SKIN HORSE: Yes, what do you want?
RABBIT: It’s my boy. There’s something terribly wrong. He’s so warm it burns when he holds me close. And he keeps crying and making strange sounds. Something is wrong. Something is terribly wrong. You’ve got to help me. I don’t know what to do.
SKIN HORSE: First, you must remain calm. They say that is always best in these situations.
RABBIT: Yes, yes and what next?
SKIN HORSE: Well, it sounds as though he has a terrible fever.
RABBIT: Oh, no. Oh, no! (Pause.) What’s that?!
SKIN HORSE: Now remember, keep your head.
RABBIT: Yes, yes, by all means, stay calm.
SKIN HORSE: We must find a way to summon Nana.
RABBIT: But she won’t be up until morning!
SKIN HORSE: Then you must wake her up now!
RABBIT: Tell me what to do.
SKIN HORSE: Throw the water basin by the bed onto the floor.
RABBIT: Oh, but that will make a terrible— Oh, I see! (Throws the basin onto the floor by knocking over ACTOR 1, who has become the basin. Makes a terrible noise, and NANA ENTERS a few moments later. LIGHTS UP FULL.)
NANA: What in heaven’s name is…?! (Sees the mess, then sees the BOY. She feels his forehead and becomes alarmed. Begins to move him out of the bed.) Oh, gracious, we must send for the doctor at once! But first a cool bath to bring the fever down. Come along. Easy now, just come with Nana. (Leads the BOY OFF.)
RABBIT: Will he be all right?
SKIN HORSE: We must wait and see. (NANA brings the BOY back ON and tucks him in bed.)
VOICE 1: When the boy was returned to his bed, a strange parade of doctors began to come and go through the nursery, and a light was kept burning all night. (ACTORS 1-3 become a surreal, moving collage of doctors and specialists examining the BOY. They create a constant low hum of unintelligible commentary like the ominous sound of discussion just beyond a sick room. Only occasional and random phrases can be picked out of the low rumble.)
VOICE 2: Very grave...
VOICE 3: Scarlet fever, you know...
VOICE 1: His temperature...
1 **VOICE 2**: Terribly high...
**VOICE 3**: Worst I’ve seen...
**VOICE 1**: Certainly...
**VOICE 2**: Expect the worst...
**VOICE 3**: Perhaps...
**VOICE 1**: Can’t say...
**VOICE 2**: Perhaps...
**VOICE 3**: But, you understand...

**ALL VOICES**: Only time will tell. *(ACTORS 1 and 3 EXIT the playing area.)*

**ACTOR 2** becomes **SKIN HORSE**.

**SKIN HORSE**: Why have you hidden yourself in amongst the pillows up there?

**RABBIT**: I’m afraid they might find me and make me leave.

**SKIN HORSE**: I see.

**RABBIT**: I know that he needs me now more than ever.

**SKIN HORSE**: Quite right.

**RABBIT**: Besides, in the evening once everyone has gone, I can creep down next to him and whisper all the lovely things we shall do again as soon as he is well. *(As he describes these things, he creeps down next to the **BOY** to snuggle in and go to sleep.)* Like picnics in the garden and fairy huts in the flowerbed. Oh, and digging that wonderful rabbit hole in Nana’s little vegetable patch. And so many other new adventures we’ll have together… *(Yawn.*) It makes me tired just to think of all of them. *(The **BOY** puts his arm around **RABBIT**, and they go to sleep. LIGHTS DIM.)*

**End of Scene Three**

**ACT TWO**

**Scene Four**

In the **DARKNESS**, we hear **VOICES**.

**VOICE 1**: Days and weeks passed. After the fever finally broke…
**VOICE 2**: …the boy was allowed to… *(LIGHTS UP on the nursery. The **BOY** is propped up in bed reading books, **RABBIT** next to him.)*

**BOY**: …sit up and look at picture books...
**VOICE 2**: …while he got better.
**VOICE 1**: And the little rabbit always…
**RABBIT**: …cuddled close by his side.
**NANA**: Rise and shine, young man. Rise and shine.

**BOY**: *(Flat.)* Good morning, Nana.
NANA: Well, you don’t seem very excited, my boy.

BOY: Why should I be? I’m just going to spend another day in bed. No adventures in the woods, no picnics in the garden, no—

NANA: No, no, none of that, I’m afraid. You’re going to have to settle for… sand castles and great rolling waves and little crabs and—

BOY: Settle for…? What? What are you talking about?

NANA: I’m talking about your visit to the seaside! (As NANA begins this peculiar discussion, the BOY’S curiosity is slowly aroused, and he is drawn from the bed toward NANA. As he moves away from the bed, RABBIT is left in a hopeless tangle of bedclothes.)

RABBIT: The seaside!

BOY: But I’ve never been to the seaside.

NANA: Well, then I should think today is the perfect day to go, don’t you?

RABBIT: What a wonderful idea! What an adventure!

BOY: What fun!

RABBIT: Yes!

BOY: Really?

NANA: Really.

RABBIT: Oh my! Oh my!!

BOY: I’m really going to the seaside?!

NANA: (As the BOY comes to her, she wraps him up in a large shawl.) Yes, you are. A lovely, long vacation. Doctor’s orders!

RABBIT: Really?!

BOY: Doctor’s orders?

NANA: That’s right. You see, they aren’t such awful men after all. Now, downstairs to Mummy and Daddy, spit spot. They’re waiting with your bags by the car to take you straight away! Run along, now, while I take care of some doctor’s orders of my own.

BOY: Yes, Nana. (Turns to EXIT.)

RABBIT: No! No! Wait for me!

BOY: (Runs back to NANA as she is reaching for RABBIT. She covers up RABBIT quickly so the BOY doesn’t notice.) Thank you, Nana! (Gives her a big hug and runs back to the door.)

RABBIT: No! Wait! Pleeease!

BOY: (Stops at the door to salute NANA as he leaves.) Doctor’s orders!!

NANA: Yes, dear.

RABBIT: No! Wait! Pleeease!

BOY: (Stops at the door to salute NANA as he leaves.) Doctor’s orders!!

NANA: Yes, dear, doctor’s orders. (The BOY is OUT. NANA begins to move about the room collecting things and muttering to herself...
as she goes.) Doctor's orders. Such a shame, such a shame. All these toys and books have to be burned. But the doctor says that's the way it must be, so that's the way it must be. "All the toys he played with in bed while he was ill are nothing but a mass of scarlet fever germs. Do you hear?" says he. "Burn them at once and disinfect everything else in the room immediately." So, that's what I've done... (As she talks to herself, she collects a blanket and other odds and ends and stuffs them into a large burlap sack. She turns the quilt and pillows around and transforms the room back into the garden. The only item left is RABBIT, who waits patiently CENTER STAGE. BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene Four

ACT TWO
Scene Five

LIGHTS UP on an outdoor scene. A pile of items from the nursery are heaped in a burlap sack near NANA. RABBIT lays nearby.

NANA: Collected everything and left it here by the fowl house for the gardener to make a bonfire of it. (To RABBIT.) Well, now I suppose you are the last thing to go. I hardly have the heart to do it. How the little one will miss you! We're just lucky he was so excited about his holiday. If he'd tried to take you along, I don't know what I'd have done. (Places RABBIT in the top of the bag. Speaks pragmatically and without sentiment now.) But we mustn't fret. We must be thankful he's well. And besides, his parents have promised to buy him a new bunny, so he won't lack company on his holiday. (Turns and starts to EXIT the playing area.) Oh my, such a dreadfully hard job. Such a day! (She's OUT.)

VOICE 1: The rabbit sat atop the old books and playthings, and as night drew near, he began to feel lonely.

RABBIT: How I shall miss Skin Horse and our wonderful discussions!

VOICE 2: He was shivering a little...

VOICE 3: For he had always slept in a proper bed.

VOICE 4: And by this time, his coat had worn so thin and threadbare from hugging...

VOICE 2: ...that it was no longer any protection to him.

RABBIT: I can see the raspberry canes from here. We had such fun playing jungle amongst them.

VOICE 4: He thought of those long sunlit hours in the garden...

RABBIT: (Truly happy.) How happy they were!

ALL VOICES: ...and a great sadness came over him.
VOICE 2: He seemed to see them all pass before him, each more beautiful than the other... (As the VOICES say these lines, they create images, pictures or poses that look like quick flashes of the rabbit’s memories. The VOICES should gain speed and almost begin to overlap as they draw to the close, like a flood of memories washing over one. These are truly exciting and happy memories.)

VOICE 3: The fairy huts in the flowerbed...
VOICE 4: Quiet evenings in the woods...
VOICE 2: Lying in the bracken with the little ants running over his paws...
VOICE 3: Picnics in the garden...
VOICE 4: Digging the rabbit hole in Nana’s vegetable patch...
VOICE 2: The Skin Horse, so wise and gentle...
VOICE 3: And that wonderful day when he first knew he was...

ALL VOICES: (In a gentle whisper.) Real. (ACTORS 1-4 move OFF underneath a trap door.)

RABBIT: What use is it to be loved and lose your beauty and become Real if it all ends... like this?
VOICE 4: And just then, a tear...
RABBIT: A real tear?!
VOICE 2: Trickled down his shabby velvet nose and fell to the ground. (The VOICES create a whirlwind of motion and sound underneath a trap door where the tear drop fell.)

VOICE 2: What is Real?
VOICE 3: What is Real?
VOICE 4: What is Real?
VOICE 2: Real.
VOICE 3: Real.
VOICE 4: Real.
VOICE 2: Real.
VOICE 3: Real.

ALL VOICES: REAL! (The TRAP DOOR FLIES OPEN, and MAGIC pops IN as an intense SPECIAL SHINES DOWN.)

RABBIT: Who are you?
MAGIC: Don’t you know who I am, little rabbit? (RABBIT shakes his head “no” timidly.) I am Nursery Magic! I take care of all the playthings that children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don’t need them any more, I come and make them Real!

RABBIT: Wasn’t I Real before?
MAGIC: You were Real to the boy because he loves you. Now you shall be Real to everyone. (Kisses him on the nose and ACTOR 3 lifts RABBIT so that he begins to “fly.” RABBIT does not notice that his jumpsuit has been removed, and he now has legs. MAGIC leads them to another part of the STAGE.)

RABBIT: Where are we going?

MAGIC: You shall see. (They land in the garden by BUNNY 1.) I’ve brought you a new playfellow. You must be very kind to him and teach him all he needs to know, for he is going to live with you now. (Kisses RABBIT on the nose once more, and he begins to squirm in a rabbit-like fashion. MAGIC indicates for ACTOR 3 to set him down near BUNNY 1. He FREEZES as soon as he is set down.) Run and play now, little rabbit! (He does not move.) What’s the matter?

RABBIT: I’m afraid.

MAGIC: Afraid of what?

RABBIT: (In a whisper.) Afraid he’ll laugh at me again.

MAGIC: Why would he do that?

RABBIT: (Looks at her in a perplexed fashion.) Because I don’t have— (Thumps his right foot as if to scratch. He discovers the foot and stares at it as if transfixed.) Feet! I have feet!

MAGIC: Of course.

RABBIT: And legs. I have legs! I can run and jump! And hop! (Makes one giant supported leap straight up in the air. As he lands, he throws his arms up in an expression of sheer joy and shouts for everyone to hear.) I’m REAL!!

MAGIC: Of course you are. (And with that, she DISAPPEARS. RABBIT joins hands with BUNNY 1, and they dance in a circle beneath the LIGHT OF THE MOON. LIGHTS DIM.)

End of Scene Five

ACT TWO

Scene Six

VOICE 1: He was a real rabbit at last, at home with other rabbits.

VOICE 2: Autumn passed, and winter, and in the spring the boy went out to play... (LIGHTS UP on a forest scene.)

BOY: ...in the wood behind the house. (Prowls about the stage with his pop gun when he spots RABBIT and the two BUNNIES hopping about. He creeps closer, but the two BUNNIES shy away and keep their distance. RABBIT and the BOY move closer and closer until they are nearly nose to nose.) Why, you look just... like... my old rabbit. But he disappeared after my fever. (RABBIT quickly kisses the BOY on the nose. They both stare at each other for a moment,
one with love and one with surprise. Then RABBIT scurries away with the other BUNNIES.)

VOICE 1: And in that moment, the boy felt something...
VOICE 2: Something in his heart he knew had to be true...
VOICE 3: For truth is sometimes very mysterious to grownups...
VOICE 1: Yet very clear to children.
VOICE 2: He knew all along...
VOICE 4: That his rabbit wasn’t lost forever...
VOICE 1: As the grownups had insisted.
VOICE 2: For he had always known...
VOICE 4: In his heart...

RABBIT: (He and the BOY join hands.) What Real is. (BLACKOUT. CURTAIN.)

END OF PLAY
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Raked platform covered by large quilt and pillows, other nursery items such as a ball, blocks, a toy cabinet, bookshelves, etc.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One:
Christmas stocking (NANA or ONSTAGE)

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two:
Fabric panel on a stick (ACTOR 1 or 2)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Three:
Stethoscope, doctor’s jacket, etc. (ACTORS 1-3)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Four:
Picture books (BOY)
Shawl, burlap sack (NANA)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Six
Items from the nursery in a burlap sack (ONSTAGE)
Pop gun (BOY)

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The presentation of this play should not be literal but rather come alive like a painting in front of the audience’s eyes. All costumes and set pieces should be suggestive and representative, not exact. In the original production, ACTORS 1-4 wore pajamas with feet and assumed the simplest of accessories to suggest their specific characters: mouse ears and a giant key coming out of the back for the wind-up mouse, an apron for NANA, fairy wings for MAGIC, etc. All costume changes took place out of the playing area, but in full view of the audience.

To create SKIN HORSE, the original production had ACTOR 2 climb onto a rocking unit onstage which supported both his hands and feet. You might choose to design a horse’s head for this unit.

VELVETEEN RABBIT’S costume consists of a brown jumpsuit that encloses the feet, rendering the actor fairly immobile and needing to be “carried” around. During ACT TWO, Scene Five, this jumpsuit is removed to reveal a similar costume, except that the actor’s feet are now free and the “fur” is thicker and looks less worn.

If you wish to extend the vision of “transformations,” you might consider having NANA played by a puppet that is assembled and disassembled in full view of the audience.
ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The Velveteen Rabbit received its world premiere at The Freud Playhouse at UCLA on April 15, 1995. It was produced by the Serendipity Theatre Co. with the following production team and performers:

Director ....................................Jody Johnston Davidson
Set Design/ Construction ........Bob Mumm/Mummdesign
Costume Design..........................Linda Garen Smith
Lighting Design ..........................J.D. Jordan
Stage Manager ............................Jeremy Scott*
Production Assistant...............Karen Hughes
Original Artwork.........................Ellis Pryce-Jones

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE SKIN HORSE/VOICE 2 .......Diane Benedict*
NANA/VOICE 3 ..........................Mary Coleston*
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT ..........Annie Preis/ L. R. Davidson*
THE MOUSE/VOICE 1 ................Patricia Ayame Thomson*
THE BOY/VOICE 4 .....................Erick Weiss*

*denotes members of Actor’s Equity Association
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