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The Story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit

Beatrix Potter · *1906 · English original, Project Gutenberg #45265*

A very short picture-tale: a fierce bad rabbit takes a carrot without asking, scratches a gentle rabbit, and then meets a man with a gun. Potter tells it in a handful of plain sentences. The fright is real, but the close is brief: the bad rabbit tears past without any tail or whiskers.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What follows when a creature takes what he wants, and never says please?

"HE doesn't say "Please." He takes it!"
The taking

The good rabbit is hurt and hides, sad, in a hole. A man with a gun mistakes the bad rabbit for a funny bird and shoots. What is left of the fierce rabbit is flight: he tears past without any tail or whiskers. Potter does not preach a sermon; she lets the taking and the bang stand next to each other.

KEY CHARACTERS

The fierce bad Rabbit
savage whiskers, claws, a turned-up tail; he takes and scratches

The nice gentle Rabbit
given a carrot by his mother; creeps away sad, and later peeps out

The man with a gun
takes the sitting shape for a funny bird

Grades K–2
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01
Two Rabbits
OPENING
A fierce bad rabbit, and a nice gentle one with a carrot.

- This is a fierce bad Rabbit; look at his savage whiskers, and his claws and his turned-up tail.
- This is a nice gentle Rabbit. His mother has given him a carrot.
- The contrast is set in two pictures, before anyone takes anything.

02
He Takes It
THE CARROT
Want, without a word of asking.

- The bad Rabbit would like some carrot.
- He doesn't say "Please." He takes it!
- And he scratches the good Rabbit very badly.

> *"HE doesn't say "Please." He takes it!"*
> The taking

03
A Hole to Hide In
THE GOOD RABBIT
The hurt one creeps away.

- The good Rabbit creeps away, and hides in a hole.
- It feels sad.
- Potter stays with that small sadness before the gun appears.

04
A Man with a Gun
THE BENCH
A hunter mistakes a rabbit for a bird.

- This is a man with a gun.
- He sees something sitting on a bench. He thinks it is a very funny bird!
- He comes creeping up behind the trees. And then he shoots—BANG!

05
Without Tail or Whiskers
THE CLOSE
The good rabbit looks out; the bad one tears past.

- This is all he finds on the bench, when he rushes up with his gun.
- The good Rabbit peeps out of its hole.
- And it sees the bad Rabbit tearing past—without any tail or whiskers!

Taking | Please | Hiding | Consequence | A Narrow Escape

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The first taking is a single line: he doesn't say "Please." He takes it. Keep Potter's wording and the exclamation.
2. The good rabbit's sadness is allowed to stand: he creeps away, hides, and feels sad. Do not skip that to get to the bang.
3. The gun is a fright, not a spectacle. Potter shows the shot, then what is found on the bench, then the bad rabbit tearing past.
4. The close is comic and sharp together: without any tail or whiskers. Do not add a moral Potter did not write, and do not linger on the wound.

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