

#PERSPECTIVE

# “The Velveteen Rabbit” — On love, loss and life

In a nutshell, “The Velveteen Rabbit” is the story of a stuffed rabbit made of velveteen who, through the love of a boy, become real in the end of the story.

When I first read Margery Williams’ “The Velveteen Rabbit” as a child of seven years, I found within myself having a certain kind of empathy for the boy because just like the boy in the movie I had a stuffed animal I truly loved — a blue bear named Snowy, and just like the boy had to part with the rabbit in his early days I had to part with Snowy for Jet Blue Airline had misplaced it in the Christmas rush.

Another reason I truly love “The Velveteen Rabbit” was because just like the rabbit had become real and returned to the boy, it gave me faith that Snowy would one day return to me too, in another form.

Six years later, when I was 13, I realised that coming across a blur polar bear in the middle of Dhaka City was quite impossible; and even if it were possible, I would not want a blue bear to be here, for without doubt the heat would make it ill even in the coldest of Dhaka weathers. Therefore, with this new found loss and along with the



despair of partially losing my childhood I opened “The Velveteen Rabbit” again.

To my surprise, this time I found myself empathising with the Rabbit this time. How badly he wanted to be real and longed for unconditional love from which he was denied time after time!

The ripe teenage wisdom of my heart deduced that although the rabbit was real: as in it existed and had feelings, it was not Real as the horse had described “Real” to be, meaning the rabbit was unable to express her true emotions and feelings just like myself.

**According to the story:**

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real!”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen often to people 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.”

**Margery Williams Bianco, The Velveteen Rabbit**

The little page struck a blow over my little heart and I knew that just like the rabbit, all I wanted was to be Real. However, along with that realisation came a bitter truth: to be real I must be loved unconditionally. Another page that truly had an effect on me at the time was the page where all the real garden rabbits bullied the rabbit for not being able to jump and dance, for she had no hind legs. The rabbit also got ignored and teased because she was a stuffed rabbit, she was nothing fancy as the other toys. However, the rabbit learned to ignore the haters and value his true friends: the boy and the Skin Horse; and through the rabbit I learned the same.

Therefore, I was a teenager ignoring almost my entire world (for I thought them to be haters) and valuing only the fictional characters in my books; waiting for someone to love me unconditionally so I could become real. Almost too soon, I grew up. This time actually grew up. (At least that’s what I think.) I am 18 years now and on my 18th birthday I reread “The Velveteen Rabbit” while preparing some class material for my student who was struggling in English.

By this time, my younger consusness had probably thought that I would not only see a blue polar bear in Dhaka City but I would also find the boy who would love me unconditionally and make Snowy and I real. Let us first wrap our heads around the fact that none of that, NONE OF THAT happened.

Having past denial, I looked at my student and realised that he too must be empathising with the rabbit; dying to

become real through love and once again I found myself intertwined with the boy with a long red string of fate. I came to the realisation that all of us, everyone in this world is the Rabbit: waiting to be loved so they can become Real but only few of us are the boy who has the audacity to love someone or something regardless of all the flaws they may have. All of us are willing to become the Rabbit who needs love but few of us are willing to be faded and torn down by it, as the rabbit was slowly worn out by the boy’s kisses and hugs.

The classic moral of the story to this day stands: To become one’s true self one must



be loved unconditionally. (But one must also be willing to love unconditionally.)

Having gone through this 11-year roller coaster ride and a five second epiphany, I looked at my student and asked: “Do you see yourself as the boy or the Rabbit?”

“The Skin Horse, Miss.” My student replied.

**By Disha Tananze Ekram**  
**Photo: Collected**



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