

Patrick Rabbit and Peter (by Ute Maria Sproule)

Patrick Rabbit was Peter Rabbit's cousin and he didn't like it one little bit.

Peter Rabbit was always getting more attention than the other rabbits with his hopping higher and looking so cute. He even had a book written about him: The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Surely it should be: The Tail of Peter Rabbit? That would fit with that cute little tail of his which he was always bobbing. And he got more carrots, too.

Patrick could look cute, too, if he wanted. He just didn't want to. Peter had sweet, floppy ears; Patrick had long, droopy ears. And he liked them that way.

One day Patrick decided to leave the burrow and hop off to explore. He hopped across fields and jumped over low hedges and wiggled through holes in fences. He was free of Peter and he was happy. He was going to look for new friends, nice friends.

Suddenly in front of him sat an animal with a snout, waving bristles that didn't look friendly at all.

"Hello -o -o," said Patrick cautiously, ready to leap away. "Who, who are you?"

"Harvey. Harvey Hedgehog," replied the creature grumpily.

"Nice to meet you," said Patrick, still a bit worried. But it was best to be polite.

"I'm sure it is." Again the grumpy voice. "Now what do you want? You're not here to steal my food, are you?"

"No, no, not at all," Patrick quickly replied. He was, though, actually quite hungry. "By the way, what do you eat?"

"Dog food."

"No, seriously. Dog food?" Patrick was beginning to feel sick. But he was still quite hungry. He tried not to look it.

"Do you want some?" Humphrey asked grudgingly. Maybe he should be nicer to this rabbit with the droopy ears. He shuffled towards his den, swaying back and forth. "So, what's your name?"

"Patrick. Patrick Rabbit."

"Any relation to Peter?"

Patrick's ears drooped even more. "You know my cousin?"

"Ran into him a few times. Not a nice rabbit. Always stealing my food."

"Peter eats dog food?"

"You bet. Loves the stuff," Harvey said as they reached his den.

Patrick wanted to laugh, roll around in the mud, jump up and down and sing. Dog food! Wait 'til the other rabbits heard about this. They wouldn't think he was so cute. Peter Rabbit wouldn't be top rabbit for long.

"Here," said Harvey, pointing to his dish. "Have some. The gardener puts it out for me every night. Nice human. As humans go."

Patrick thought he should be polite and try the disgusting-looking muck. He nibbled, he swallowed, he spat it out. Yuck! How could a hedgehog eat this stuff? Where was a nice, juicy carrot when you wanted one?

"Well, thank you very much," said Patrick hurriedly, "but I must be hopping along."

"Ok. See you around." Harvey snuggled back into his twiggy, leafy den.

Patrick wiggled through the hole in the fence, jumped back over the hedge and hopped across the field. He couldn't wait to tell the others about Peter eating dog food. Dog food!

Back at the burrow, the rabbits were mooching about, some sleeping, some digging, some munching when Patrick arrived.

Peter Rabbit hopped over to him. "Hey, cousin! Where you been? Did you have a good time? Here, have a carrot. You must be hungry."

Patrick looked at Peter, he looked at the carrot. His cousin was actually being nice to him?

"Here," offered Peter again. "Have it. I've got plenty."

Patrick took the carrot. He was very hungry after all his exploring.

"Thanks, cousin," Patrick said. He nibbled, he munched, he swallowed. He did not mention the dog food.