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The Tale of Mr. Tod

Beatrix Potter · *1912 · English original, Project Gutenberg #19805*

Potter has made many books about well-behaved people. Now, for a change, she makes a story about two disagreeable people, called Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod. The fox has half a dozen houses and is seldom at home. Sometimes, when he moves out, the badger moves in—without asking leave. One afternoon old Mr. Bouncer invites Tommy Brock into the rabbit hole. The young family goes away in a sack. Peter and Benjamin follow to the house amongst the rocks at the top of Bull Banks.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can the young rabbits be got out of Mr. Tod's oven, while a fox and a badger finish a quarrel of their own?

"sometimes Tommy Brock moved in; (without asking leave)."
Opening

Tommy Brock shuts the babies in the brick oven and goes to bed, in his boots, in Mr. Tod's bed. Peter and Benjamin cannot open the window; they dig a tunnel, then hide in it when they hear the fox. Mr. Tod, in the worst of tempers, finds the badger grinning in his bed and spends a night hanging a pail of water from a hook. Tommy Brock is not asleep. He puts a dressing-gown in his place, lights the fire, and later throws scalding tea all over Mr. Tod. There is a terrific battle. The cousins do not wait for the end of it. They take the warm, wriggling sack and run.

KEY CHARACTERS

Mr. Tod
a wandering, foxey, seldom-at-home householder, never to be called nice

Tommy Brock
a bristly, grinning badger who moves in without asking, and goes to bed in his boots

Benjamin Bunny and Peter Rabbit
the father and the cousin who track, tunnel, and carry the sack home

Old Mr. Bouncer
stricken in years; he invites company, loses the babies, and is forgiven

Flopsy
the mother; she hides the tobacco, and has a complete spring-cleaning

Grades K–3
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01
Two Disagreeable People
OPENING

A wandering fox, a grinning badger, and houses that change hands.

I have made many books about well-behaved people. Now, for a change, I am going to make a story about two disagreeable people, called Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod.

Nobody could call Mr. Tod "nice." The rabbits could not bear him; they could smell him half a mile off. He was of a wandering habit and he had foxey whiskers; they never knew where he would be next. He had half a dozen houses, but he was seldom at home.

The houses were not always empty when Mr. Tod moved out; because sometimes Tommy Brock moved in; (without asking leave). Tommy Brock was a short bristly fat waddling person with a grin. He ate wasp nests and frogs and worms; he always went to bed in his boots; and the bed which he went to bed in, was generally Mr. Tod's.

> *"sometimes Tommy Brock moved in; (without asking leave)."*
> Opening

02
A Glass of Cowslip Wine
THE BURROW

Old Mr. Bouncer is left in charge, and talks too cordially.

Tommy Brock did occasionally eat rabbit-pie; but only very little young ones, when other food was really scarce. He was friendly with old Mr. Bouncer; they agreed in disliking the wicked otters and Mr. Tod. That afternoon Benjamin Bunny and Flopsy had gone out, leaving the old rabbit in charge of the young family.

He sat in the sun, and conversed cordially with Tommy Brock, who accused Mr. Tod of poaching pheasants' eggs. Old Mr. Bouncer laughed, and pressed him to come inside, to taste a slice of seed-cake and a glass of Flopsy's cowslip wine. He gave him a cabbage-leaf cigar so strong that it made Tommy Brock grin more than ever. Then the old rabbit went to sleep.

When Flopsy and Benjamin came back, Tommy Brock had gone, and there were round heavy footmarks in the sand. The young family had gone too, in a sack. Old Mr. Bouncer was in disgrace. Benjamin set off at once after Tommy Brock.

03
The House amongst the Rocks
BULL BANKS

Peter is found; the oven door answers when the window is shaken.

Benjamin tracks the heavy steps, starts at a smell that is not flowers, and sees that, for once, Mr. Tod is at home in the stick-house. He meets cousin Peter: "He's bagged my family—Tommy Brock—in a sack." Peter composes himself, and uses his mind. Because Mr. Tod was at home in the stick-house, the badger has gone to the earth amongst the rocks at the top of Bull Banks, under Oatmeal Crag.

The kitchen fire is not alight, but there are preparations upon the kitchen table that make Benjamin anxious. No person is to be seen, and no young rabbits. At the bedroom window somebody is asleep on Mr. Tod's bed, curled up under the blanket, snoring grunty and regular —in Mr. Tod's bed, and in his boots.

Moonlight shows a little iron door in the wall beside the kitchen fireplace, belonging to a brick oven. Whenever they shook the window, the little door opposite shook in answer. The young family were alive; shut up in the oven! They could not open the window, and the babies were not old enough to crawl. Peter and Benjamin decided to dig a tunnel.

04
A Pail of Water
MR. TOD'S NIGHT

The worst of tempers, a clothes-line, and a grin that is not sleep.

By morning they were under the kitchen floor. Then they heard the angry cry of a jay, and the sharp yelping bark of a fox. They did the most foolish thing that they could have done: they rushed into their short new tunnel, and hid themselves at the top end of it.

Mr. Tod was coming up Bull Banks in the very worst of tempers—a broken china plate, midges, a failed hen pheasant, and now unmistakable marks of badger. The sight in his kitchen made him furious: his table set out for Tommy Brock. A deep slow regular snoring came from his own bed. For twenty minutes he kept creeping in and retreating. Tommy Brock lay on his back with his mouth open, grinning from ear to ear.

Mr. Tod undid the window, pushed out a clothes-line with a hook, and fetched a large heavy pailful of water from the spring, meaning to hang it over the bed and let it fall from outside. "I will wake him up with an unpleasant surprise." The moment he had gone, Tommy Brock got up in a hurry, rolled a dressing-gown into the bed beneath the pail instead of himself, and went into the kitchen—grinning immensely. For the moment he did not trouble himself to cook the baby rabbits.

05
The End They Did Not Wait For
THE CLOSE

Scalding tea, a terrific battle, and a sack brought home.

The knot had dragged so tight that Mr. Tod was obliged to gnaw it with his teeth for more than twenty minutes. The rope gave way with a sudden jerk, and inside the house there was a great crash and splash. He peeped in: a wet flattened something under the blanket, not snoring any longer. He decided that the pail had killed poor old Tommy Brock dead, and went to the kitchen for a shovel, to bury that nasty person in the hole he had dug.

He opened the door. Tommy Brock was sitting at Mr. Tod's kitchen table, pouring out tea from Mr. Tod's tea-pot, quite dry himself and grinning; and he threw the cup of scalding tea all over Mr. Tod. Then there was a terrific battle all over the kitchen—broken crockery, handfuls of sandy whiskers, a foot in raspberry jam, and boiling water upon the tail of Mr. Tod. Tommy Brock rolled him out at the door, and they went worrying down hill. There will never be any love lost between Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod.

As soon as the coast was clear, Peter pushed Benjamin in to the oven. Amongst the wreckage he found something warm and wriggling. They scuttered away down Bull Banks with the sack, bumpetty bump, and reached home safely. The rabbit-babies were rather tumbled and very hungry; they soon recovered. Old Mr. Bouncer was forgiven, and given a long new pipe. Then Peter and Benjamin told their story—but they had not waited long enough to be able to tell the end of the battle between Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod.

Predators · A House Unasked · Rescue · Folly and Wit · Forgiveness

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–3

1. The first sentences tell you the book's change of key: not well-behaved people, but two disagreeable ones. The comedy is darker than the earlier rabbit books, and still exact.
2. Old Mr. Bouncer's hospitality is real, and it is unwise. The cowslip wine, the strong cigar, and the nap are the whole opening disaster. Forgiveness at the end does not unmake the night.
3. Tommy Brock is never quite asleep. The grin, the watching eye, the dressing-gown dummy, and the cup of tea are one character, consistently. Mr. Tod's fury is busy, housewifely, and outwitted.
4. Peter and Benjamin do a foolish thing (hiding in their own tunnel) and a brave one (going back to the oven). They do not stay to see the end of the battle. The story leaves that fight unfinished on purpose.

Quotations are verbatim from the English original, Project Gutenberg #19805, Project Gutenberg #19805, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-tale-of-mr-tod/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.