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The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse

Beatrix Potter · *1910 · English original, Project Gutenberg #572*

Mrs. Tittlemouse is a most terribly tidy particular little woodmouse, always sweeping her sandy floors. Beetles, a ladybird, a spider, bees, and at last Mr. Jackson the toad walk in without invitation. After a fortnight's spring cleaning she gives a party to five other little mice—without Mr. Jackson, who can no longer squeeze in at the door, and is not at all offended.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How shall a tidy house be kept, when visitors will not wipe their feet?

"Mrs. Tittlemouse was a most terribly tidy particular little mouse, always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors."
Opening

She bundles out the spider, smells honey, finds Babbitty Bumble lodging in an acorn storeroom, and then must mop after Mr. Jackson, who sits all over a small rocking chair and wants a little dish of honey. He pulls out the bees-nest; the mess is dreadful. She partly closes the front door to make it too small for him, and cleans for a fortnight. At the party they hand him acorn cupfuls of honeydew through the window. Courtesy and a threshold can live together.

KEY CHARACTERS

Mrs. Tittlemouse
a terribly tidy particular woodmouse; hostess at last, with a smaller door

Mr. Jackson
a smiling, dripping toad who never wipes his feet, and is not offended at the window

Babbitty Bumble
a peevish bumble bee who lodges where she has not been asked

Grades K–2
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01
A Tidy House in the Bank
OPENING
Yards of sandy passages, store-rooms, and a little box bed.

- Once upon a time there was a woodmouse, and her name was Mrs. Tittlemouse. She lived in a bank under a hedge.
- There were yards and yards of sandy passages, leading to store-rooms and nut cellars and seed cellars, all amongst the roots of the hedge.
- Mrs. Tittlemouse was a most terribly tidy particular little mouse, always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors.

> *"Mrs. Tittlemouse was a most terribly tidy particular little mouse, always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors."*
> Opening

02
Little Dirty Feet
EARLY VISITORS
A beetle, a ladybird, and a bold bad spider.

- Sometimes a beetle lost its way in the passages. "Shuh! shuh! little dirty feet!" said Mrs. Tittlemouse, clattering her dustpan.
- She warns a ladybird: "Your house is on fire, Mother Ladybird! Fly away home to your children!"
- A big fat spider came in to shelter from the rain. "Go away, you bold bad spider! Leaving ends of cobweb all over my nice clean house!" She bundled him out at a window.

03
Babbitty Bumble
THE STOREROOM
A smell of honey, and lodgers in the acorn room.

- All along the passage she sniffed: "I smell a smell of honey... I am sure I can see the marks of little dirty feet."
- Suddenly she met Babbitty Bumble. "I am not in the habit of letting lodgings; this is an intrusion!" The acorn storeroom was full of untidy dry moss, and other bees buzzed fiercely.
- She decided to leave the bees till after dinner. "I will not have Mr. Jackson; he never wipes his feet."

04
Mr. Jackson Calls
THE PARLOR
A smiling toad, no teeth, and a wish for honey.

- When she got back to the parlor, there sat Mr. Jackson himself, all over a small rocking chair, twiddling his thumbs, with his feet on the fender. He lived in a very dirty wet ditch.
- He refused cherry-stones (no teeth) and blew thistledown seed all over the room. What he really should like would be a little dish of honey. "I can SMELL it; that is why I came to call."
- He walked the cupboards and passages, caught a creepy-crawly, met Babbitty and snapped her up and put her down again. "I do not like bumble bees. They are all over bristles." Mrs. Tittlemouse shut herself in the nut cellar while he pulled out the bees-nest.

05
A Party without Mr. Jackson
THE CLOSE
A smaller door, a fortnight's cleaning, and honeydew at the window.

- When she came out, everybody had gone away, but the untidiness was something dreadful: smears of honey, moss, thistledown, and marks of big and little dirty feet.
- She fetched twigs to partly close up the front door: "I will make it too small for Mr. Jackson!" Next morning she began a spring cleaning which lasted a fortnight.
- When it was all beautifully neat and clean, she gave a party to five other little mice, without Mr. Jackson. He could not squeeze in, so they handed him acorn cupfuls of honeydew through the window, and he was not at all offended.

Order | Uninvited Guests | Industry | A Threshold | Courtesy

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The opening tells you her character in one sentence: a most terribly tidy particular little mouse. The rest of the book tests that particularity.
2. "I will not have Mr. Jackson; he never wipes his feet" is spoken before he appears. The fear is exact, and then he sits down anyway.
3. The smaller door is not cruelty. They still hand him honeydew, and he drinks to her very good health. Watch how a boundary and a kindness are kept together.
4. The dirty feet, the bees-wax, and the fortnight's cleaning are the cost of a hospitable hole in a hedge. Potter lets the work be work.

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