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The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies

Beatrix Potter · *1909 · English original, Project Gutenberg #572*

Benjamin Bunny has grown up, married Flopsy, and has a large, improvident family. Too much lettuce proves soporific; Mr. McGregor finds six sleeping children and bags them. It is Thomasina Tittlemouse who nibbles a hole in the sack. The rabbits stuff it with marrows and turnips, and next Christmas the little mouse is rewarded with wool.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Who can undo a string when sleep and a sack have already done their work?

"But Mrs. Tittlemouse was a resourceful person. She nibbled a hole in the bottom corner of the sack."

The rescue

Benjamin and Flopsy are in despair; they cannot undo the string. The woodmouse who picked over the rubbish heap nibbles a hole, the children are pulled out, and the sack is stuffed with rotten vegetables. Mr. McGregor still counts six—until Mrs. McGregor puts her hand inside. The tale ends not with the gardener's anger, but with a Christmas present of rabbit wool for the mouse who helped.

KEY CHARACTERS

Benjamin and Flopsy
grown, married, improvident and cheerful; they cannot undo the string

The Flopsy Bunnies
the children, unnamed separately, who sleep through their own capture

Mr. and Mrs. McGregor
he counts six into a sack; she finds vegetables

Thomasina Tittlemouse
a resourceful woodmouse, later rewarded at Christmas

Peter Rabbit
keeps a nursery garden, and has not always cabbages to spare

Grades K–2

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01

Improvident and Cheerful

OPENING

A large family, and not always quite enough to eat.

- When Benjamin Bunny grew up, he married his Cousin Flopsy. They had a large family, and they were very improvident and cheerful.
- Benjamin used to borrow cabbages from Flopsy's brother, Peter Rabbit, who kept a nursery garden.
- When Peter had no cabbages to spare, the Flopsy Bunnies went to the rubbish heap in the ditch outside Mr. McGregor's garden.

02

Soporific Lettuces

THE RUBBISH HEAP

Too much lettuce, and a paper bag for the flies.

- It is said that the effect of eating too much lettuce is "soporific."
- One day there were overgrown lettuces which had shot into flower; the Flopsy Bunnies stuffed themselves, and one after another they were overcome with slumber.
- Benjamin was not so much overcome as his children; before going to sleep he put a paper bag over his head to keep off the flies.

03

Six Leetle Rabbits

THE SACK

Mr. McGregor empties lawn mowings, and counts as he bags them.

- Thomasina Tittlemouse, a woodmouse with a long tail, rustled across the paper bag and awakened Benjamin.
- Mr. McGregor emptied a sackful of lawn mowings right upon the sleeping children; they did not awake because the lettuces had been so soporific.
- He saw the tips of ears, climbed down, and dropped them into his sack: "One, two, three, four! five! six leetle rabbits!"

04

A Resourceful Mouse

THE WALL

Flopsy comes; the string will not yield; teeth will.

- While Mr. McGregor puts away the mowing machine, Mrs. Flopsy Bunny comes across the field and looks suspiciously at the sack.
- Benjamin and Flopsy were in despair, they could not undo the string.
- But Mrs. Tittlemouse was a resourceful person. She nibbled a hole in the bottom corner of the sack; the little rabbits were pulled out and pinched to wake them.

> *"But Mrs. Tittlemouse was a resourceful person. She nibbled a hole in the bottom corner of the sack."*
>
> The rescue

05

Rabbit Wool at Christmas

THE CLOSE

A sack of vegetables, an angry kitchen, and a present for the mouse.

- Their parents stuffed the empty sack with three rotten vegetable marrows, an old blacking-brush and two decayed turnips.
- Mr. McGregor still counts six; Mrs. McGregor feels them, and finds they are not fit to eat. One of the rotten marrows comes flying through the window.
- Next Christmas Thomasina Tittlemouse got a present of enough rabbit wool to make herself a cloak and a hood, and a handsome muff and a pair of warm mittens.

Family | Sleep | Resourcefulness | Rescue | Reward

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The first word of the book is a joke about "soporific," and that joke becomes the plot: the children do not wake under the grass or in the sack.
2. Benjamin and Flopsy cannot undo the string. The helper is a small mouse who happened to be picking over the rubbish. Watch who is actually resourceful.
3. Mr. McGregor's counting is repeated, before and after the swap. The second counting is of marrows and turnips.
4. The close is a Christmas present of rabbit wool for Thomasina. The danger in the kitchen is real (skins, tobacco), but Potter does not linger on it; she ends with thanks.

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