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The Tale of Timmy Tiptoes

Beatrix Potter · *1911 · English original, Project Gutenberg #572*

Timmy Tiptoes and his little squirrel wife Goody lay up a store of nuts in a woodpecker's hole, like a money box. Silvertail and the other squirrels, set off by a bird that is only singing its natural song, squeeze poor Timmy into the very hole he has been filling. Inside he grows fatter and fatter on his own nuts, until a wind opens the tree, and he walks home with an umbrella.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What becomes of a prudent store—and of a squirrel—when a song is mistaken for an accusation?

"How shall you ever get them out again? It is like a money box!"

Goody Tiptoes · The woodpecker's hole

The little bird means nothing at all; the other squirrels rush upon Timmy and leave him in the tree till he confesses. He has tumbled down upon half a peck of nuts belonging to himself. A striped Chipmunk tices him to eat quantities, until he is too fat to come out to anxious Goody. A fortnight later the wind lets in the rain. Timmy goes home; Chippy Hackee camps on until a bear walks by. They keep their nut store fastened with a little padlock after that.

KEY CHARACTERS

Timmy Tiptoes
a prudent, fat, comfortable grey squirrel, squeezed into his own store

Goody Tiptoes
his little wife, who doubts the money-box hole, and calls him home

Silvertail
the most forgetful squirrel in the wood, who leads the accusation

Chippy Hackee
a striped chipmunk who chuckles downstairs, and comes home in a hurry

Grades K–2

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01

A Store for Spring

OPENING

A thatched nest, a prudent husband, and bags of nuts.

- Once upon a time there was a little fat comfortable grey squirrel, called Timmy Tiptoes. He had a nest thatched with leaves in the top of a tall tree; and he had a little squirrel wife called Goody.
- "Little wife Goody, the nuts are ripe; we must lay up a store for winter and spring." Goody is busy pushing moss under the thatch: they shall be sound asleep all winter. "Then we shall wake up all the thinner, when there is nothing to eat in spring-time," replied prudent Timothy.
- They work quietly by themselves, carry the nuts away in bags, and store them in hollow stumps near the tree.

02

Like a Money Box

THE WOODPECKER'S HOLE

A deep hole, and squirrels who cannot remember.

- When the stumps were full, they began to empty the bags into a hole high up a tree, that had belonged to a woodpecker; the nuts rattled down—down—down inside.
- "How shall you ever get them out again? It is like a money box!" said Goody. "I shall be much thinner before springtime, my love," said Timmy Tiptoes, peeping into the hole.
- They did collect quantities—because they did not lose them. Squirrels who bury their nuts in the ground lose more than half, because they cannot remember the place. The most forgetful squirrel in the wood was called Silvertail. He dug up nuts that did not belong to him; and there was a fight. The whole wood was in commotion.

> *"How shall you ever get them out again? It is like a money box!"*
>
> **Goody Tiptoes** · The woodpecker's hole

03

Who's Been Digging-up My Nuts?

THE THICKET

A bird's natural song, and a crowd that will not hear it so.

- A flock of little birds flew by, searching for green caterpillars and spiders. The first one sang—"Who's bin digging-up MY nuts?" Another sang of a little bit of bread and no cheese.
- The first little bird flew into the bush where Timmy and Goody were quietly tying up their bags, and sang the same song. Timmy went on with his work without replying; indeed, the little bird did not expect an answer. It was only singing its natural song, and it meant nothing at all.
- But when the other squirrels heard that song, they rushed upon Timmy Tiptoes and cuffed and scratched him, and upset his bag of nuts. They caught him, dragged him up the very same tree, and squeezed him through the little round hole. "We will leave him here till he confesses," said Silvertail Squirrel.

04

Downstairs in the Tree

THE CHIPMUNKS

A moss bed, showers of nuts, and a guest who grows fatter.

- Timmy made no reply; he had tumbled down inside the tree, upon half a peck of nuts belonging to himself. He came to his senses tucked up in a little moss bed, very much in the dark, feeling sore. A small striped Chipmunk appeared with a night light, and hoped he felt better.
- It had rained nuts through the top of the tree—"Besides, I found a few buried!" While Timmy was confined to bed, it 'ticed him to eat quantities. "But how shall I ever get out through that hole unless I thin myself? My wife will be anxious!" "Just another nut—or two nuts; let me crack them for you," said the Chipmunk. Timmy Tiptoes grew fatter and fatter.
- Goody, working alone, hid nuts under a tree root. An extra big bagful produced a decided squeak, and Mrs. Chippy Hackee scrambled out: the sitting room is full, and her husband has run away. The two wives listen at the woodpecker's hole, and hear a fat squirrel voice and a thin squirrel voice singing together.

05

Home with an Umbrella

THE CLOSE

A wind, a bear, and a little padlock.

- Goody peeped in and called down—"Timmy Tiptoes! Oh fie, Timmy Tiptoes!" He came up and kissed her through the hole; but he was so fat that he could not get out. Chippy Hackee was not too fat, but he did not want to come; he stayed down below and chuckled.
- And so it went on for a fortnight; till a big wind blew off the top of the tree, and opened up the hole and let in the rain. Then Timmy Tiptoes came out, and went home with an umbrella. Chippy continued to camp out for another week, until a large bear came walking through the wood, perhaps also looking for nuts. Chippy Hackee went home in a hurry, and caught a cold in his head.
- And now Timmy and Goody Tiptoes keep their nut store fastened up with a little padlock. And whenever that little bird sees the Chipmunks, he sings—"Who's-been-digging-up MY-nuts?" But nobody ever answers!

Prudence · False Accusation · A Hidden Store · Loyalty · Homecoming

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The little bird means nothing at all. The violence comes from squirrels who will not distinguish a natural song from a charge. The joke and the injustice are the same sentence.
2. Goody's question—"How shall you ever get them out again?"—is answered first as a joke (he will be thinner), then as a plot: he cannot get out because he has grown fatter on the store itself.
3. Chippy Hackee chuckles and will not come when he could. A bear, not a moral, sends him home. Potter lets consequences be comic and still exact.
4. The little padlock at the end is a small, practical wisdom after a fright. The bird's song goes on; nobody answers.

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