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The Tale of Two Bad Mice

Beatrix Potter · *1904 · English original, Project Gutenberg #45264*

Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca find a beautiful doll's-house dinner that will not come off the plates. Rage and disappointment lead to mischief; then Hunca Munca's frugal mind carries off a bolster and a cradle. The close is not only naughtiness: Tom Thumb pays for what he broke, and Hunca Munca comes every morning to sweep the Dollies' house.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can two mice who smash a plaster feast still make some amends?

"SO that is the story of the two Bad Mice,—but they were not so very very naughty after all, because Tom Thumb paid for everything he broke."

The close

The ham is plaster under shiny paint; the canisters hold beads; the fire will not burn the glued fish. They do real mischief. And yet Tom Thumb finds a crooked sixpence and stuffs it into a stocking on Christmas Eve, and Hunca Munca comes with her dust-pan and broom before anybody is awake. Potter calls them bad, and then will not leave them there.

KEY CHARACTERS

Tom Thumb
a mouse who loses his temper, and later pays for what he broke

Hunca Munca
his wife; a frugal mind, a cradle, and a morning broom

Lucinda and Jane
the dolls who own the house and never cook the ready-made dinner

The nurse
will set a mouse-trap

Grades K–2

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01

A Beautiful Doll's-House

OPENING

Red brick, muslin curtains, and a dinner bought ready-made.

- Once upon a time there was a very beautiful doll's-house; it was red brick with white windows, and it had real muslin curtains and a front door and a chimney.
- It belonged to two Dolls called Lucinda and Jane; Jane was the Cook, but she never did any cooking, because the dinner had been bought ready-made.
- There were two red lobsters and a ham, a fish, a pudding, and some pears and oranges. They would not come off the plates, but they were extremely beautiful.

02

The Mice Come Out

THE NURSERY

The dolls have gone for a drive; the house is quiet.

- One morning Lucinda and Jane had gone out for a drive in the doll's perambulator.
- Tom Thumb put out his head from a hole under the skirting-board; then Hunca Munca, his wife, ventured out on the oilcloth under the coal-box.
- They pushed the front door—it was not fast—and went upstairs and peeped into the dining-room. Then they squeaked with joy!

03

Hard as Plaster

THE DINNER

The lovely dinner will not be eaten.

- Tom Thumb set to work at once to carve the ham; the knife crumpled up and hurt him.
- The ham broke off the plate and rolled under the table; underneath the shiny paint it was made of nothing but plaster!
- Hunca Munca found canisters labelled Rice, Coffee, Sago—and when she turned them upside down, there was nothing inside except red and blue beads.

04

Mischief, and a Frugal Mind

THE HOUSE

Rage, and then a feather bed.

- Then those mice set to work to do all the mischief they could—especially Tom Thumb, who threw Jane's clothes out of the top floor window.
- But Hunca Munca had a frugal mind. After pulling half the feathers out of Lucinda's bolster, she remembered that she herself was in want of a feather bed.
- They carry off the bolster and a cradle; the book-case and the bird-cage will not go into the mouse-hole.

05

Not So Very Naughty

THE CLOSE

A sixpence at Christmas, and a broom in the morning.

- The dolls come home to a sight; the little girl says she will get a doll dressed like a policeman, but the nurse will set a mouse-trap.
- They were not so very very naughty after all, because Tom Thumb paid for everything he broke.
- He found a crooked sixpence under the hearthrug; upon Christmas Eve he and Hunca Munca stuffed it into a stocking, and every morning Hunca Munca comes to sweep the Dollies' house.

> *"SO that is the story of the two Bad Mice,—but they were not so very very naughty after all, because Tom Thumb paid for everything he broke."*
>
> The close

Desire | Disappointment | Mischief | Thrift | Amends

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The beauty of the dinner is real, and so is its uselessness: the food will not come off the plates. Watch the moment the ham is only plaster.
2. "Hunca Munca had a frugal mind" turns the raid. She wants a feather bed, not only smashings. Keep Potter's word frugal.
3. The last page refuses a simple verdict: they are called bad, and then they pay and sweep. Christmas Eve and the morning broom belong to the tale.
4. Do not turn the dolls into a sermon, and do not excuse the broken pudding. Potter holds both the naughtiness and the amends.

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