

The Tale of Samuel Whiskers or The Roly-Poly Pudding

by Beatrix Potter adapted by EveryReader

Adapted to Lexile Level 400





There was an old cat named Mrs. Tabitha Twitchit.
She was a very worried mother.
She often lost her kittens.
When they were lost, they always made trouble.



One baking day, she shut them in a cupboard.
She caught Moppet and Mittens.
But she could not find Tom.



Mrs. Tabitha went all over the house, mewing for Tom.
She looked in the pantry under the stairs.
She searched the spare bedroom and the top rooms.
She could not find him anywhere.



It was a very old house with many cupboards and long halls.
Some walls were thick, and there were odd little doors.
At night, food like cheese and bacon disappeared.
Mrs. Tabitha heard strange sounds in the walls.
It seemed there might be a hidden stair.



Mrs. Tabitha grew more upset and mewed and mewed.
While their mother searched, Moppet and Mittens made mischief.
The cupboard door was not locked, so they pushed it open and came out.



They went straight to the pan of dough by the fire.

The dough was set to rise.

They patted the soft dough with their little paws.

"Shall we make small muffins?" asked Mittens.



Just then someone knocked at the door.
Moppet jumped into the flour barrel in fright.
Mittens ran to the milk room and hid in an empty jar.



The visitor was their neighbor, Mrs. Ribby.

She came to borrow some yeast.

Mrs. Tabitha came downstairs, mewling sadly.

"Come in, Cousin Ribby," she said.

"I have lost my dear Tom. I am afraid the rats have got him."



"He is a naughty kitten," said Ribby.

"Last time he made a cat's cradle with my best bonnet."

"Where have you looked?"

"All over the house," said Mrs. Tabitha.

"There are too many rats. It is hard to manage a wild family!"



"I am not afraid of rats," said Ribby.

"I will help you find him and scold him too."

"What is all that soot by the fire?"

"The chimney needs sweeping," said Tabitha.

"Oh dear! Now Moppet and Mittens are gone as well!"



"They have both come out of the cupboard!"

Ribby and Tabitha started to search again.

They poked under the beds with Ribby's umbrella.

They looked in cupboards and in a chest with a candle.

They found nothing.



Once they heard a door slam and someone run downstairs.

"Yes, the house is full of rats," said Tabitha with tears.

"I caught seven young ones last Saturday."

"I saw the old father rat. He was very big."

"He showed his yellow teeth and whisked down a hole."



"The rats make me nervous," said Tabitha.
They searched and searched.
They heard a rolling noise under the attic floor.
But they could not see anything.



They went back to the kitchen.

"Here is one of your kittens," said Ribby.

She pulled Moppet out of the flour barrel.

They shook off the flour and set Moppet on the floor.



Moppet shook with fright.

"Oh, Mother!" she said.

"An old lady rat was in the kitchen."

"She stole some dough!"



The cats ran to look at the dough pan.
They saw little scratch marks.
A lump of dough was gone.
"Which way did she go?" asked Ribby.
Moppet had been too scared to peep out again.



Ribby and Tabitha took Moppet with them.
They wanted to keep her safe while they searched.
They went to the milk room.
First they found Mittens hiding in an empty jar.



They tipped up the jar, and Mittens scrambled out.

"Oh, Mother!" said Mittens.

"An old man rat was in the milk room."

"He was very big."

"He stole a pat of butter and the rolling pin!"



Ribby and Tabitha looked at each other.

"Butter and a rolling pin! Oh, my poor Tom!" cried Tabitha.

"A rolling pin?" said Ribby.

"Did we not hear a rolling noise under the attic floor?"



Ribby and Tabitha rushed upstairs.

The rolling noise still went on under the attic floor.

"This is serious," said Ribby.

"We must send for John Joiner with a saw at once."



Now this is what happened to Tom.
It is not wise to climb up a chimney in a very old house.
It is worse if there are very big rats.



Tom did not want to be shut in a cupboard.
When he saw his mother was going to bake, he hid.
He chose the chimney.



The fire had just been lit, and it was not hot yet.
White smoke rose from the green sticks.
It was a big old fireplace.
The chimney was wide inside.
There was plenty of room for small Tom.



He jumped up into the fireplace.

He balanced on the iron bar where the kettle hangs.

Then he jumped again to a high ledge.

Soot fell down.



Tom coughed and choked in the smoke.

He heard the sticks crackle below.

He decided to climb to the top.

He would get out on the roof and try to catch sparrows.



"I cannot go back," he thought.

"I might slip and fall into the fire."

"I might burn my tail and my blue jacket."



The chimney was very old and very big.
It was built when people burned logs on the hearth.
The chimney top stood like a little stone tower.
Daylight shone down from the top.



Tom grew very frightened.
He climbed up and up.
He stepped sideways through inches of soot.
He looked like a little sweep.



It was dark and confusing.
One small passage led into another.
There was less smoke now, but Tom felt lost.



He climbed higher.

Before he reached the top, he came to a loose stone.

He saw some bones on the floor.

"This is strange," said Tom.



"Who has been gnawing bones up here?"

"I wish I had never come!"

"What is that smell?"

"It is like mouse, but very strong."

"It makes me sneeze."



He squeezed through the hole.

He crawled along a tight, dark passage.

There was hardly any light.

He felt his way behind the attic wall.



All at once he fell head over heels in the dark.
He landed on a heap of very dirty rags.
Tom sat up and looked around.
He had never seen this place before.



It was a small, stuffy room with boards and cobwebs.

Across from him sat an enormous rat.

"Why did you fall into my bed all covered with soot?" said the rat.

"Please, sir, the chimney needs sweeping," said Tom.



"Anna Maria! Anna Maria!" squeaked the rat.
An old lady rat poked her head around a beam.
She rushed at Tom.
She pulled off his coat.



She rolled him in a bundle.

She tied him with string in very hard knots.

The old rat watched her.

When she was done, both rats stared at Tom.



"Anna Maria," said the old rat, "make me a kitten dumpling."

"Make a roly-poly pudding for dinner."

"It needs dough, butter, and a rolling pin," said Anna Maria.

"No," said the rat. "Use breadcrumbs."

"Nonsense," said Anna Maria. "Butter and dough."



They talked for a few minutes.

Then they went away.

The old rat went through a hole in the wood.



He went boldly down to the milk room to get butter.

He did not meet anyone.

He went again for the rolling pin.

He pushed it like a man rolling a barrel.



He could hear Ribby and Tabitha talking.
They were busy lighting a candle to look into a chest.
They did not see him.



Anna Maria went down a crack in the wall to the kitchen.
She borrowed a small saucer.
She scooped up the dough with her paws.
She did not notice Moppet.



Tom was left alone under the attic floor.
He wriggled and tried to mew for help.
But his mouth was full of soot and cobwebs.
The knots were very tight.



No one could hear him.

Only a spider came out of a crack and looked at the knots.

It knew knots because it tied up flies.

It did not help him.

Tom squirmed until he was very tired.



Soon the rats came back.

They began to make him into a dumpling.

First they smeared him with butter.

Then they rolled him in the dough.



"Will the string be hard to digest?" asked the rat.

Anna Maria said it did not matter.

She wished Tom would hold his head still.

She held his ears.



Tom bit and spat and mewed and wriggled.
The rolling pin went roly-poly, roly-poly.
The rat held it.
"His tail is sticking out," said the rat.



"You did not fetch enough dough, Anna Maria," he said.

"I brought as much as I could carry," she said.

"I do not think it will be a good pudding," said the rat.

"It smells sooty."



Anna Maria was about to answer.
Then they heard the rasp of a saw.
A little dog scratched and yelped above them.
The rats dropped the rolling pin and listened.



"We are found out," said the old rat.

"Let us take our things and go."

"We must leave this pudding," said Anna Maria.

"Come help me tie up some bones in a blanket."

"I have half a smoked ham in the chimney."



John Joiner had sawn up the floorboard.

Under the floor he found only the rolling pin and Tom in a dirty dumpling.

But the smell of rats was strong.

The little dog sniffed and whined and wagged his tail.



John Joiner nailed the board down.
He put his tools in his bag and came downstairs.
The cat family felt better.
They asked him to stay to dinner.



They peeled the dough off Tom.

They made the dough into a bag pudding.

They put currants in it to hide the smuts.

They gave Tom a hot bath to wash off the butter.



John Joiner smelled the pudding, but he could not stay.
He had just finished a wheelbarrow for Miss Potter.
She had ordered two hen coops.



Later that afternoon I went to the post.

I looked up the lane.

I saw Mr. Samuel Whiskers and his wife running with big bundles.

They pushed a small wheelbarrow.

It looked like mine.



They turned in at Farmer Potatoes's barn.
Samuel Whiskers was puffing and out of breath.
Anna Maria talked in a sharp voice.
She seemed to know the way.
She had a lot of luggage.



I am sure I never said she could borrow my wheelbarrow.

They went into the barn.

They pulled their parcels up to the top of the hay with a bit of string.



After that, there were no rats at Mrs. Tabitha's house for a long time.

But Farmer Potatoes was almost driven mad.

There were rats and rats and more rats in his barn.

They ate the chicken food and stole oats and bran.

They made holes in the meal bags.



They were all the children and grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Whiskers.

There were great-grandchildren too.

There was no end of them!



Moppet and Mittens grew up to be very good rat catchers.
They went out to catch rats in the village.
They had plenty of work.
They charged by the dozen and earned a good living.



They hung the rats' tails in a row on the barn door.
It showed how many they had caught, dozens and dozens.
But Tom Kitten was always afraid of a rat.
He never dared to face anything bigger than a mouse.