

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin

by Beatrix Potter adapted by EveryReader

Adapted to Lexile Level 600





This is a tale about a tail.
The tail belonged to a little red squirrel
named Nutkin.



He had a brother named Twinkleberry and many cousins.

They lived in a wood at the edge of a lake.



In the middle of the lake was an island covered with trees and nut bushes. In one hollow oak tree on the island lived an owl called Old Brown.



It was autumn.

The nuts were ripe, and the hazel leaves were gold and green.

Nutkin, Twinkleberry, and all the other little squirrels came out of the wood and went down to the lake.



They made small rafts from twigs and paddled across the water to Owl Island to gather nuts.

Each squirrel had a small sack and a large oar. They also spread out their tails like sails.



They brought three fat mice as a gift for Old Brown and set them on his doorstep. Twinkleberry and the other squirrels bowed and said politely, "Old Mr. Brown, will you please give us permission to gather nuts on your island?"



But Nutkin was very rude.

He bounced like a little red cherry and sang a riddle.

"Riddle me, riddle me,

A tiny man in a red coat,

A stick in his hand, a stone in his throat.

If you tell me the answer, I will give you a coin."



This was an old riddle.
Mr. Brown did not answer Nutkin.
He shut his eyes and went to sleep.



The squirrels filled their sacks with nuts and sailed home in the evening.

The next morning they came back to Owl Island.



Twinkleberry and the others brought a fine fat mole and set it on the stone in front of Old Brown's door.

They said, "Mr. Brown, will you please give us permission to gather more nuts?"



But Nutkin, who had no respect, began to dance.

He tickled Old Mr. Brown with a nettle and sang.

"Old Mr. B! Riddle-me-ree!

Hitty Pitty within the wall,

Hitty Pitty without the wall.

If you touch Hitty Pitty,

Hitty Pitty will bite you!"



Mr. Brown woke up, carried the mole into his house, and shut the door in Nutkin's face. Soon a thin thread of blue smoke rose from the top of the tree. Nutkin peeped through the keyhole and sang. "A house full, a hole full, And you cannot fill a bowl full!"



The squirrels searched the island and filled their sacks with nuts.

But Nutkin gathered yellow and red oak apples.

He sat on a beech stump, played marbles, and watched Old Mr. Brown's door.



On the third day the squirrels got up very early and went fishing.

They caught seven fat minnows for Old Brown.

They paddled across the lake and landed under a crooked chestnut tree on Owl Island.



Twinkleberry and six other squirrels each carried a fat minnow.

Nutkin, who had bad manners, brought no gift.

He ran ahead and sang.

"The man in the wilderness said to me,
'How many strawberries grow in the sea?'

I answered him as I thought good,

'As many red herrings as grow in the wood.'"



Old Mr. Brown did not care about riddles, not even when the answer was given to him. On the fourth day the squirrels brought six fat beetles.



They were as good as plums in a plum pudding for Old Brown.

Each beetle was wrapped in a dock leaf and pinned with a pine needle.



But Nutkin was still rude.

He sang.

"Old Mr. B! Riddle-me-ree!

Flour of England, fruit of Spain,

Met together in a shower of rain.

Put in a bag and tied with string—

If you tell me the riddle, I will give you a ring!"

This was silly, because Nutkin did not have a ring to give.



The other squirrels hunted up and down the nut bushes.

But Nutkin picked robin's pincushions from a briar and stuck them full of pine-needle pins.



On the fifth day the squirrels brought wild honey.

It was so sweet and sticky that they licked their fingers as they set it on the stone.

They had taken it from a bumblebees' nest at the very top of the hill.



Nutkin skipped and sang.
"Hum-a-bum! Buzz! Buzz!
As I went over Tipple-tine,
I met a flock of bonny swine—
Some yellow-necked, some yellow-backed—
The finest swine on Tipple-tine!"
Old Mr. Brown rolled up his eyes at Nutkin's
rudeness.
But he ate the honey.



The squirrels filled their sacks with nuts.
Nutkin sat on a big flat rock and played
ninepins with a crab apple and green fir
cones.



On the sixth day, which was Saturday, the squirrels came for the last time. They brought a fresh egg in a little rush basket as a parting gift for Old Brown.



Nutkin ran ahead, laughing and shouting.
"Humpty Dumpty lies in the beck,
With a white cover round his neck.
Forty doctors and forty wrights
Cannot set Humpty Dumpty right!"



Old Mr. Brown liked eggs.
He opened one eye and shut it again.
Still he did not speak.



Nutkin grew even ruder.

"Old Mr. B! Old Mr. B!

Hickamore, Hackamore, on the King's kitchen
door.

All the King's horses and all the King's men
Could not drive Hickamore, Hackamore,
Off the King's kitchen door."



Nutkin danced like a sunbeam, but Old Brown
said nothing.

Nutkin began again.

"Arthur O'Bower has broken his band.
He comes roaring over the land!
The King of Scots, with all his power,
Cannot turn Arthur of the Bower!"



Nutkin made a whirring sound like the wind.
Then he took a running jump and landed right
on Old Brown's head.



All at once there was a flutter and a scuffle
and a loud squeak.

The other squirrels ran away into the bushes.



When they came back, they peeped around the tree.

Old Brown was sitting on his doorstep, very still, with his eyes closed, as if nothing had happened.

But Nutkin was in his waistcoat pocket!



This seems like the end of the story, but it is not.

Old Brown carried Nutkin into his house.

He held him up by the tail and meant to skin him.



Nutkin pulled so hard that his tail broke in two.

He dashed up the stairs and escaped out of the attic window.



To this day, if you meet Nutkin in a tree and ask him a riddle, he will throw sticks, stamp his feet, scold, and shout.

"Cuck-cuck-cuck-cur-r-r-cuck-k-k!"



The End.