

The Tale of Two Bad Mice

by Beatrix Potter adapted by EveryReader

Adapted to Lexile Level 600





Once there was a very beautiful dollhouse. It was made of red brick with white windows. It had real muslin curtains, a front door, and a chimney.



The dollhouse belonged to two dolls named Lucinda and Jane. It really belonged to Lucinda, but she never ordered meals. Jane was the cook, but she never cooked. The dinner had been bought ready-made in a box filled with shavings.



There were two red lobsters, a ham, a fish, a pudding, and some pears and oranges. The food would not come off the plates, but it looked very pretty.



One morning, Lucinda and Jane went out for a ride in the doll's baby carriage. No one was in the nursery, and it was very quiet. Soon there was a soft scratching sound in the corner near the fireplace, where a hole stood under the baseboard.



Tom Thumb poked out his head for a moment, then pulled it back. Tom Thumb was a mouse. A minute later, Hunca Munca, his wife, put out her head too. When she saw the nursery was empty, she crept out onto the oilcloth near the coal-box.



The dollhouse stood on the other side of the fireplace. Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca went carefully across the hearth rug. They pushed the front door. It was not locked.



They went upstairs and peeped into the dining room. Then they squeaked with joy. A lovely dinner was set out on the table! There were tin spoons, little metal knives and forks, and two small chairs—so convenient!



Tom Thumb began to carve the ham at once. It was shiny yellow with red streaks. The knife bent and hurt his paw. He put his finger in his mouth.



“It is not cooked enough. It is too hard. You try, Hunca Munca.” Hunca Munca stood on her chair and chopped at the ham with another small knife. “It is as hard as the hams at the cheese shop,” she said.



The ham broke off the plate with a jerk and rolled under the table. "Let it be," said Tom Thumb. "Give me some fish, Hunca Munca!" Hunca Munca tried every tin spoon, one by one. The fish was stuck fast to the dish.



Then Tom Thumb lost his temper. He put the ham in the middle of the floor and hit it with the tongs and the shovel—bang, bang, smash, smash! The ham flew into pieces. Under the shiny paint, it was only plaster.



Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca were very angry and very disappointed. They broke the pudding, the lobsters, the pears, and the oranges. Because the fish would not come off the plate, they put it in the red-hot crinkly paper fire in the kitchen. It would not burn either.



Tom Thumb climbed up the kitchen chimney and looked out at the top. There was no soot. While Tom Thumb was in the chimney, Hunca Munca had another disappointment. She found tiny tins on the dresser, labeled Rice, Coffee, and Sago. When she turned them upside down, nothing came out except red and blue beads.



Then the mice decided to make as much mischief as they could—especially Tom Thumb! He took Jane's clothes out of the chest of drawers in her bedroom and threw them out of the top-floor window. But Hunca Munca was careful and thrifty. After pulling out half the feathers from Lucinda's bolster, she remembered that she needed a feather bed.



With Tom Thumb's help, she carried the bolster downstairs and across the hearth rug. It was hard to squeeze the bolster into the mouse-hole, but they managed it at last. Then Hunca Munca went back and fetched a chair, a bookcase, a birdcage, and several small things. The bookcase and the birdcage would not fit into the mouse-hole.



Hunca Munca left them behind the coal-box and went to fetch a cradle. She was just returning with another chair when they heard voices outside on the landing. The mice rushed back to their hole, and the dolls came into the nursery.



What a sight met the eyes of Jane and Lucinda! Lucinda sat on the overturned kitchen stove and stared. Jane leaned against the dresser and smiled. But neither of them said a word.



The bookcase and the birdcage were rescued from under the coal-box. But Hunca Munca kept the cradle and some of Lucinda's clothes. She also kept some useful pots and pans and several other things. The little girl who owned the dollhouse said, "I will get a doll dressed like a policeman!" But the nurse said, "I will set a mousetrap!"



So that is the story of the two bad mice—but they were not so very naughty after all, because Tom Thumb paid for everything he broke. He found a crooked sixpence under the hearth rug. On Christmas Eve, he and Hunca Munca stuffed it into one of Lucinda and Jane's stockings.



And very early every morning—before anyone wakes up—Hunca Munca comes with her dustpan and broom to sweep the dollies' house. The end.