



The Tales of Beatrix Potter

4: Tale of Two Bad Mice

adapted by Jan Payne

Once there was a very beautiful doll's house. The walls were made of tiny red bricks; lace curtains fluttered behind little white windows and it had a proper front door and a tall chimney.

The doll's house belonged to two dolls named Lucinda and Jane. Jane was the cook, though she never did any cooking because the meals were always ready to eat on the table. There was a whole chicken and a ham and a fish and some pears and oranges in a bowl. The food wasn't real but it looked real. It looked delicious.

One morning Lucinda and Jane had gone out for a ride in the doll's pram and the room was very quiet. Suddenly, there was a scuffling, scratching noise near the fireplace, and a little mouse popped his head out of a hole at the bottom of the wall. Just as quickly, he popped it in again.

The little mouse's name was Tom Thumb. A minute later, Tom Thumb's wife, Hunka Munka, popped her head out too and when she saw the room was empty, she and Tom squeezed through the hole and went over to the coal box by the fire.

On the other side of the fireplace was the beautiful doll's house. The two mice tip-toed cautiously across the rug in front of the fire to take a closer look.

They pushed at the front door. It was not locked and opened easily. The two mice scampered inside and peeped into the first room they came to, which was the dining room. They squeaked with pleasure with what they saw. A lovely dinner had been laid out on the table and there were plates, spoons, knives and forks to eat it with. There was even two doll's chairs tucked under the table - it was perfect!

Tom Thumb began to carve the ham but the knife was only a toy and it broke, hurting him. He put the hurt finger in his mouth.

'This ham is too hard,' he complained to Hunka Munka. 'It's not cooked enough. You try, Hunka Munka.'

Hunka Munka stood on her chair and chopped at the ham with another toy knife. 'It's harder than wood!' she agreed.

The ham broke off the plate with a jerk and rolled under the table. 'Leave it,' said Tom Thumb. 'Let's have some fish instead.'

Hunka Munka tried every knife, fork and spoon, one after another, but the fish was stuck fast to the dish. Then Tom Thumb really lost his temper. He put the ham in the middle of the floor and hit it with the fire tongs and the shovel - bang, bang, smash, smash!

The ham broke into tiny pieces. Underneath the shiny pink paint it was made of nothing but plaster!



Tom Thumb and Hunka Munka became even angrier. They smashed the pudding, the chicken and the bowl of pears and oranges. They took the fish and threw it in the fire. But the fire wasn't real. It was just red crinkly paper pretending to be a fire. So of course the fish couldn't burn.

Then the two naughty mice set to work to cause as much mischief as they could - especially Tom Thumb. He took Jane's clothes out of all the drawers in her bedroom and threw them out of the top floor window.

Hunka Munka was not so wasteful. After pulling out half the feathers from Lucinda's pillows she decided that she needed a feather bed and, with Tom Thumb's help, carried the pillows downstairs and across the rug. It was difficult squeezing them into the mouse-hole, but they managed it somehow.

After that, Hunka Munka went back to fetch a chair, a book case, a bird cage and other bits and pieces. The book case and the bird cage were too big for the mouse hole, so Hunka Munka left them behind the coal box.

Suddenly she heard talking outside and the two mice rushed back inside their hole just as the dolls came into the room. What a sight for Jane and Lucinda to come home to! Lucinda sat on the upside-down kitchen stove and stared at all the mess.

They found the book case and the bird cage by the coal box, but they never found the pots and pans or the baby's cradle. And Lucinda never found her missing clothes. Hunka Munka had kept them for herself.

Later, Tom Thumb felt guilty for the things he and Hunka Munka had done. So one day, when he found some money under the rug, instead of keeping it, he left it in the doll's house to pay for all the things they had broken or stolen.

Hunka Munka was sorry too. Now, every morning before anyone is awake, she comes with her dust pan and broom to clean up the mess she and Tom made in the beautiful doll's house.

So the two mice weren't so bad after all...