



The Tales of Beatrix Potter

11: The Tale of Samuel Whiskers

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Once upon a time, a cat called Mrs Tabitha Twitchit lived in an old house with her three kittens, Moppet, Mittens and Tom.

The kittens were always getting up to mischief. 'Into the cupboard with the lot of you,' said Tabitha one day. 'I want some peace and quiet while I'm baking!'

She caught Moppet and Mittens...but Tom was no-where to be found. The house was full of mysterious passages, with strange noises coming from behind the walls, and even things disappearing at night...Tom could be anywhere!

There was a knock at the door. 'Come in Cousin Ribby,' said Tabitha. 'I've lost Tom - and I'm very afraid the rats have got him!'

'I'm not scared of rats,' replied Ribby - 'I'll help you find him.'

The two cats searched high and low - they poked under beds and rummaged in cupboards and even went up to the attic. They couldn't find Tom, but they did hear some rather strange noises.

'Rats! The house is infested with them!' cried Tabitha tearfully.

'What's that strange, roly-poly noise?' asked Ribby. It was all a bit of a mystery...

When they got back to the kitchen Ribby found that Moppet had escaped from the cupboard and was hiding in the flour barrel. 'I saw a huge rat,' she squeaked with fear, 'and she stole some dough!'

Then, in the dairy, they found Mittens, hiding in an empty jar. 'A huge rat was in here too,' he squeaked 'and he stole some butter and the rolling pin.'

'A rolling pin?' said Ribby. 'Didn't we hear a roly-poly noise? I think it was coming from under the attic floor...'

The two cats rushed back to the attic.

'There it is again! We must send for the carpenter so he can saw through the floorboards and we can take a look,' said Ribby.

Meanwhile all this time, Tom Kitten had been hiding from his mother, up the chimney. It was very sooty and Tom felt like a little chimney sweep as he scrambled up and up in the darkness.

Suddenly his paw felt a hole in the wall, with some old, rather nasty smelling bones in it. He squeezed through into a dark, narrow passage, and crawled along...until, all of a sudden, he toppled head over heels down a hole...and landed in a heap in a secret room with lots of cobwebs. Two enormous rats were staring at him!



It was Samuel Whiskers and his wife, Anna Maria. They pounced on Tom and quickly rolled him up with string.

‘A nice kitten dumpling pudding for my dinner,’ said Samuel Whiskers licking his lips. ‘I’ll need dough, butter and a rolling pin,’ said Anna Maria.

Samuel Whiskers headed to the dairy for the butter and rolling pin while Anna Maria went to the kitchen to steal some dough. Neither of them realised that Moppet and Mittens had spotted them.

While they were gone Tom wriggled and tried to call for help, but his mouth was full of soot and cobwebs and he felt very tired.

When the rats returned, they set to work turning Tom into a dumpling pudding. First they smeared him with butter...then they rolled him into the dough.

‘All those stringy knots don’t look very appetising’, complained Samuel Whiskers. ‘Oh never mind,’ replied Anna Maria. ‘And keep still, kitty!’ she hissed as Tom squeaked and wriggled.

‘Look, his tail’s sticking out. You didn’t fetch enough dough’, moaned Samuel. ‘I don’t think it will be a very tasty pudding - he smells too sooty!’

‘Shush! What’s that noise?’ asked Anna Maria.

‘Someone or something has discovered us!’ replied Samuel Whiskers. ‘I fear we must leave our pudding behind - though I wouldn’t have been able to eat the string in any case. I think it’s time to move home. We’ll go to Farmer Potatoes’ barn,’ he continued.

By the time the carpenter got the floorboards up, there was nothing underneath except the rolling pin and Tom Kitten in a very dirty dumpling. Tabitha and Ribby peeled it off him, then they gave Tom a nice hot bath to wash him clean.

There were no more rats for a long time at Tabitha Twitchit’s house after that - though the same could not be said for the house of poor Farmer Potatoes. But no matter, for Moppet and Mittens became very good at catching rats when they got bigger.

As for Tom Kitten, he has never dared to face anything bigger than...a tiny mouse!