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## **The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter**

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# The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin

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THE TALE OF SQUIRREL NUTKIN

*By*

*Beatrix Potter*

*Author of "The Tale of Peter Rabbit"*

[Illustration]

FREDERICK WARNE

[Illustration]

FREDERICK WARNE

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A STORY FOR NORAH

[Illustration]

This is a Tale about a tail---a tail that belonged to a little red squirrel, and his name was Nutkin.

He had a brother called Twinkleberry, and a great many cousins: they lived in a wood at the edge of a lake.

[Illustration]

In the middle of the lake there is an island covered with trees and nut bushes; and amongst those trees stands a hollow oak-tree, which is the house of an owl who is called Old Brown.

[Illustration]

One autumn when the nuts were ripe, and the leaves on the hazel bushes were golden and green---Nutkin and Twinkleberry and all the other little squirrels came out of the wood, and down to the edge of the lake.

[Illustration]

They made little rafts out of twigs, and they paddled away over the water to Owl Island to gather nuts.

Each squirrel had a little sack and a large oar, and spread out his tail for a sail.

[Illustration]

They also took with them an offering of three fat mice as a present for Old Brown, and put them down upon his door-step.

Then Twinkleberry and the other little squirrels each made a low bow, and said politely---

"Old Mr. Brown, will you favour us with permission to gather nuts upon your island?"

[Illustration]

But Nutkin was excessively impertinent in his manners. He bobbed up and down like a little red *cherry*, singing---

"Riddle me, riddle me, rot-tot-tote!  
A little wee man, in a red red coat!  
A staff in his hand, and a stone in his throat;  
If you'll tell me this riddle, I'll give you a groat."

Now this riddle is as old as the hills; Mr. Brown paid no attention whatever to Nutkin.

He shut his eyes obstinately and went to sleep.

[Illustration]

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

[Illustration]

But next morning they all came back again to Owl Island; and Twinkleberry and the others brought a fine fat mole, and laid it on the stone in front of Old Brown's doorway, and said---

"Mr. Brown, will you favour us with your gracious permission to gather some more nuts?"

[Illustration]

But Nutkin, who had no respect, began to dance up and down, tickling old Mr. Brown with a *nettle* and singing---

"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 suddenly and carried the mole into his house.

[Illustration]

He shut the door in Nutkin's face. Presently a little thread of blue *smoke* from a wood fire came up from the top of the tree, and Nutkin peeped through the key-hole and sang---

"A house full, a hole full!  
And you cannot gather a bowl-full!"

[Illustration]

The squirrels searched for nuts all over the island and filled their little sacks.

But Nutkin gathered oak-apples---yellow and scarlet---and sat upon a beech-stump playing marbles, and watching the door of old Mr. Brown.

[Illustration]

On the third day the squirrels got up very early and went fishing; they caught seven fat minnows as a present for Old Brown.

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

[Illustration]

Twinkleberry and six other little squirrels each carried a fat minnow; but Nutkin, who had no nice manners, brought no present at all. He ran in front, singing---

"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.'"

But old Mr. Brown took no interest in riddles---not even when the answer was provided for him.

[Illustration]

On the fourth day the squirrels brought a present of six fat beetles, which were as good as plums in *plum-pudding* for Old Brown. Each beetle was wrapped up carefully in a dock-leaf, fastened with a pine-needle pin.

But Nutkin sang as rudely as ever---

"Old Mr. B! riddle-me-ree  
Flour of England, fruit of Spain,  
Met together in a shower of rain;  
Put in a bag tied round with a string,  
If you'll tell me this riddle, I'll give you a ring!"

Which was ridiculous of Nutkin, because he had not got any ring to give to Old Brown.

[Illustration]

The other squirrels hunted up and down the nut bushes; but Nutkin gathered robin's pincushions off a briar bush, and stuck them full of pine-needle pins.

[Illustration]

On the fifth day the squirrels brought a present of wild honey; it was so sweet and sticky that they licked their fingers as they put it down upon the stone. They had stolen it out of a bumble *bees'* nest on the tippitty top of the hill.

But Nutkin skipped up and down, singing---

"Hum-a-bum! buzz! buzz! Hum-a-bum buzz!  
As I went over Tipple-tine  
I met a flock of bonny swine;  
Some yellow-nacked, some yellow backed!  
They were the very bonniest swine  
That e'er went over Tipple-tine."

[Illustration]

Old Mr. Brown turned up his eyes in disgust at the impertinence of Nutkin.

But he ate up the honey!

[Illustration]

The squirrels filled their little sacks with nuts.

But Nutkin sat upon a big flat rock, and played ninepins with a crab apple and green fir-cones.

[Illustration]

On the sixth day, which was Saturday, the squirrels came again for the last time; they brought a new-laid *egg* in a little rush basket as a last parting present for Old Brown.

But Nutkin ran in front laughing, and shouting---

"Humpty Dumpty lies in the beck,  
With a white counterpane round his neck,  
Forty doctors and forty wrights,  
Cannot put Humpty Dumpty to rights!"

[Illustration]

Now old Mr. Brown took an interest in eggs; he opened one eye and shut it again. But still he did not speak.

[Illustration]

Nutkin became more and more impertinent---

"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,  
Couldn't drive Hickamore, Hackamore,  
Off the King's kitchen door."

Nutkin danced up and down like a *sunbeam*; but still Old Brown said nothing at all.

[Illustration]

Nutkin began again---

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

Nutkin made a whirring noise to sound like the *wind*, and he took a running jump right onto the head of Old Brown!...

Then all at once there was a flutterment and a scufflement and a loud "Squeak!"

The other squirrels scattered away into the bushes.

[Illustration]

When they came back very cautiously, peeping round the tree---there was Old Brown sitting on his door-step, quite still, with his eyes closed, as if nothing had happened.

\* \* \* \* \*

*But Nutkin was in his waistcoat pocket!*

[Illustration]

This looks like the end of the story; but it isn't.

[Illustration]

Old Brown carried Nutkin into his house, and held him up by the tail, intending to skin him; but Nutkin pulled so very hard that his tail broke in two, and he dashed up the staircase and escaped out of the attic window.

[Illustration]

And to this day, if you meet Nutkin up a tree and ask him a riddle, he will throw sticks at you, and stamp his feet and scold, and shout---

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

THE END