

UNIT 10

The Borrowers

The Borrowers are a race of tiny people living, hidden, in houses – or wherever they can find a safe, convenient place – who own nothing except what they borrow from ‘human beans’.

“I’ve lost the crochet hook...” (they were making a bed-quilt – in woollen squares: there were thirty still to do), “I know where I put it,” she went on hastily; “I put it on the bottom shelf of the book-case just beside my bed.”

“On the bottom shelf?” repeated Mrs May, her own needle flicking steadily in the firelight. “Near the floor?”

“Yes,” said Kate, “But I looked on the floor. Under the rug. Everywhere. The wool was still there though. Just where I’d left it.”

“Oh dear,” exclaimed Mrs May lightly, “don’t say they’re in this house too!”

“That what are?” asked Kate.

“The Borrowers,” said Mrs May, and in the half light she seemed to smile.

Kate stared a little fearfully.

“Are there such things?” she asked after a moment.

“As what?”

Kate blinked her eyelids.

“As people, other people, living in a house who... borrow things?”

Mrs May laid down her work.

“What do you think?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” said Kate looking away and pulling hard at her shoe button. “There can’t be. And yet” – she raised her head – “and yet sometimes I think there must be.”

“Why do you think there must be?” asked Mrs May.

“Because of all the things that disappear. Safety-pins, for instance. Factories go on making safety-pins, and every day people go on buying safety-pins and yet,



somehow, there is never a safety-pin just when you want one. Where are they all? Now, at this minute? Where do they all go? Take needles," she went on. "All the needles my mother ever bought – there must be hundreds – can't just be lying around this house."

"Not lying about this house, no," agreed Mrs May. "And all the other things we keep on buying. Again and again and again. Like pencils and match-boxes and sealing wax and hair slides and drawing pins and thimbles –"

"And hatpins," put in Mrs May, "and blotting-paper."

"Yes, blotting-paper," agreed Kate, "but not hatpins."

"That's where you're wrong," said Mrs May, and she picked up her work again. "There was a reason for hatpins."

Kate stared. "A reason?" she repeated. "I mean – what kind of a reason?"

"Well, there are two reasons really. A hatpin is a very useful weapon and" – Mrs May laughed suddenly – "but it all sounds such nonsense and" – she hesitated – "it was so very long ago!"

"But tell me" said Kate, "tell me how you *know* about the hatpin. Did you ever see one?"

Mrs May threw her a startled glance. "Well, yes –" she began.

"Not a hatpin," exclaimed Kate impatiently, "a – what-ever-do-you-call-them, a Borrower?"

Mrs May drew a sharp breath. "No," she said quickly, "I never saw one."

"But someone else saw one," cried Kate, "and you know about it. I can see you do!"

"Hush," said Mrs May, "no need to shout!" She gazed downwards at the upturned face and then she smiled and her eyes slid away into the distance.



Mary Norton

Do you remember?

1. Write a sentence to answer each question.
 - a) Who are the Borrowers?
 - b) Where do they live?
 - c) What were Mrs May and Kate making?
 - d) What had Kate lost?
 - e) Where did she think she had put the crochet hook?

2. Read these sentences about the story.
Copy only the ones that are true.

The crochet hook was missing, but the wool was still there.

Kate told Mrs May about the Borrowers.

Their name for people was 'human beans'.

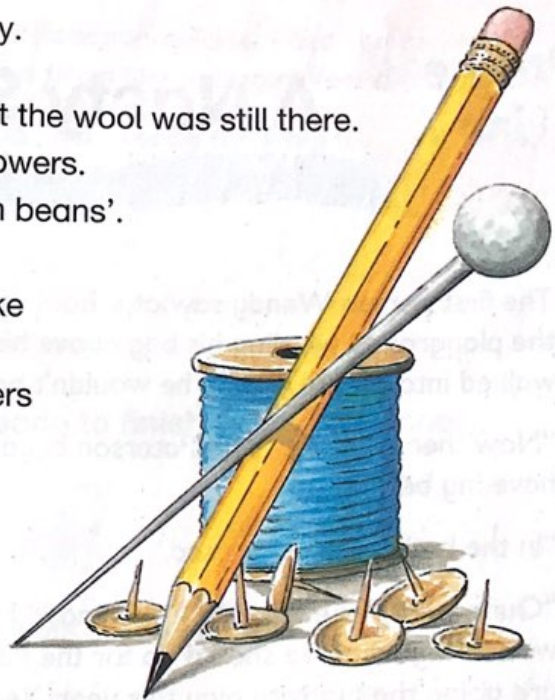
Kate wore lace-up shoes.

The little people collected things like pencils, hair slides, drawing pins.

According to Mrs May the Borrowers weren't interested in hatpins.

Mrs May had seen the Borrowers on several occasions.

Mrs May knew someone who had met the Borrowers.



More to think about

1. Write a sentence to answer each question.
 - a) Why was the race of little people called the Borrowers?
 - b) Why did the Borrowers call people 'human beans'?
 - c) What time of the day, and at what time of the year, is the story probably taking place? How can you tell?
 - d) How did Kate feel when Mrs May first mentioned the Borrowers?
 - e) Why did Kate begin to feel impatient with Mrs May?
2. Make a list of the clues in the passage that tell us *The Borrowers* was written about 50 years ago.

Now try these

1. Whenever strange things happen people look for reasons. Do you think it is possible that there could be, or could ever have been, a race of tiny people like the Borrowers? Give your reasons.
2. Imagine that you were accidentally given a spoonful of medicine that had the unexpected effect of shrinking you. Write about some of the dangers, but also about some of the things you could do if you were tiny that you can't do at your usual size.
3. Does this passage from *The Borrowers* make you feel you would like to read the whole book? Give your reasons.