

Tilly Mint Tales

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About the Book

When Tilly's mum goes out to work, Mrs Hardcastle from up the street pops in to look after her. There are two special things about Mrs Hardcastle. The first thing is that she's always dropping off to sleep (she snores too, sometimes). The second special thing is that whenever she goes to sleep, something magic always seems to happen to Tilly Mint!

Carnegie Medal winner Berlie Doherty's enchanting Tilly Mint tales are at last available in one complete collection with brand-new illustrations from Tony Ross.

Tilly Mint Tales

Berlie Doherty

Illustrated by Tony Ross



RHCP DIGITAL

For Jean and Alan, Ian, Beverley and Charlotte

TILLY MINT TALES

Tilly Mint and the Leaf-lords

I DON'T KNOW if you've ever met Tilly Mint. She lives in one of those houses just up the hill from the park. She's about as old as you, I should think.

When Tilly's mum goes out to work, Mrs Hardcastle from up the street pops in to look after her. You must have seen *her*. She has curly, white hair and pink cheeks. She has shiny, blue, remember-y sort of eyes, and fidgety, talky sort of hands, and she's very old. Very old. She once told Tilly that she was the oldest woman in the world.

Now, there are two special things about Mrs Hardcastle that you ought to know. The first thing is, she's always dropping off to sleep. Always. Easy as winking. She just closes her eyes, and opens her mouth, and off she goes. She snores too, sometimes. You should hear her. And the second special thing is this: when she goes to sleep, something magic always seems to happen to Tilly Mint. Tilly never says very much about it to Mrs Hardcastle, and Mrs Hardcastle never says very much about it to Tilly. It just happens, and that's that. It's magic.

Like the time Tilly Mint saw the leaf-lords. It happened on October the fifth.

Tilly was staring out of the window, daydreaming, and waiting for her mum to come home, when Mrs Hardcastle said:

"Well, Tilly Mint. Are you coming or not?"

Tilly jumped from her chair and pulled on her duffel coat. "Where to, Mrs Hardcastle?" she asked. "Where are we going?"

“Don’t you ever listen, child? We’re going down to the park till your mum gets home from work. Though how I’m going to get that far in these new shoes I don’t know. You might have to give me a piggy-back, Tilly Mint.”

They walked down the hill towards the park, and as they got away from the road and into the trees, the piles of dead leaves grew higher and higher. Tilly scrunched through them. The noise her feet made in the leaves sounded like fifty fires burning. They sounded like a hundred horses munching hay.

“It sounds as if you’re walking through a bag of broken biscuits, Tilly,” said Mrs Hardcastle. “What a row. Ah, but will you look at those leaves dancing.”

And as they stood under the trees, the brown and green and golden and red and orange and yellow leaves floated down around them. Tilly thought it was one of the best days ever. But for some reason, Mrs Hardcastle thought it was one of the saddest days she could remember.

“I shall have to have a lie down, Tilly Mint,” she said. “It’s no good. I’m feeling right dopey.” Mrs Hardcastle often felt dopey before her tea.

There was a bench nearby, and she sat herself down on it. She undid her new shoes, and took them off, and put them next to a pile of dead leaves. Then she lay down on the bench, with her handbag under her head, and her feet sticking over the end.

“I’ll just have five minutes,” she promised, yawning.

Tilly sighed. “But what shall I do, Mrs Hardcastle?” she asked.

“You could look for the leaf-lords,” Mrs Hardcastle yawned. “Only don’t tread on them, will you, love? And see if you can find some of their treasure . . .”

And then, as she said that, her voice sort of fizzled out into an enormous yawn, and then into a snore, and then into a lovely long whistle. Mrs Hardcastle was fast asleep. And Tilly Mint was bored.

Leaf-lords? she thought. What are they? She sat for a long time listening to Mrs Hardcastle whistling away like a blackbird, and watching the leaves, and she said:

“What a lovely day it would be, if only something would happen!”

It was then that she thought she heard a whispery sort of voice saying,

*“Spin around, swing around,
Float and flutter down,
Swirl around, twirl around . . .”*

over and over again, in a crackly sort of crunched-up-paper-bag way.

It couldn't have been Mrs Hardcastle, could it, talking in her sleep? No. She was much too busy snoring and whistling to say anything like that. It couldn't have been the blackbird, could it, hiding in the branches at the top of the tree? No. He was much too busy singing up to the sunshine to say anything like that.

Tilly listened. There it was again!

*“Spin around, swing around,
Float and flutter down,
Swirl around, twirl around . . .”*

Tilly jumped off her bench in great excitement. It couldn't be the leaf-lords, could it? Could it?

She followed the sound of the paper-bag voice to the pile of dead leaves that were at the side of Mrs Hardcastle's bench, and just underneath her sticking-out feet. She poked about in them, and then pushed them to one side, and it was there, in the middle of the pile, that she found the leaf-lords.

Do you know what they looked like? They were seven little men; one in a brown cloak and one in a red one; one in an

orange cloak and one in a green one; one in a golden cloak; one in a yellow cloak, and the littlest one of all was in a cloak of all these colours.

“Are you the leaf-lords?” whispered Tilly.

For an answer they leapt up, one by one, and as Tilly lifted the dead leaves away from them they began to dance, and they danced and sang to a wonderful whistling tune, and the amazing thing was that the wonderful whistling tune seemed to be coming from Mrs Hardcastle, lying there fast asleep in the bench.

*“Leaf-lords leaping,
Spin around, swing around.
Leaf-lords leaping,
Float and flutter down.
Leaf-lords leaping,
Swirl around, twirl around.
Lovely leap-lords leap.”*

Tilly wanted to dance and sing with them! Then she noticed that the leaf-lords were dancing in a ring round Mrs Hardcastle’s new, brown, lace-up shoes. Tilly put them on, without even taking her own off, and before she’d had time to fasten them she was leaping and jumping round with the leaf-lords, as high as them, and as fast as them, and singing the leaf-lords’ song to the wonderful whistling tune that seemed to be coming from Mrs Hardcastle’s mouth. Spinning and swinging and dancing and prancing and swirling and twirling and whizzing and whirling . . .

Tilly noticed that everywhere the leaf-lords danced there were little prickly balls in the grass, like spiky apples, like tiny, round, green hedgehogs, and every green spiky hedgehoggy ball had a slit in it, and something as brown and warm and shiny as an eye gleamed inside the slit.

“Lovely!” said Tilly, bending down to have a closer look, and as she did so an ice-cold shadow fell across her. She

looked up, shivering.



The leaf-lords were still dancing, but in a tearing, miserable, hunched-up sort of way. The whistle still whistled, but in a sharp, shrill, howling sort of way. The sun still shone, but it was as cold as winter. And all the colours of the sky and the trees and the leaves and the grass seemed to have slipped away into grey.

“What’s happened?” asked Tilly. “Where’s the lovely day gone to?”

The leaf-lords scurried round Tilly’s feet.

“The Cold Queen of Winter!” they screamed. “Too early! Too soon! Send her away! Send her away!”

Tilly could hear the Cold Queen of Winter cackling like broken twigs. She could feel her icy fingers and the chill of her damp breath on her skin.

“Too early! Too early!” the leaf-lords screamed. Tilly could feel all the brown eyes in the grass watching her.

“Don’t worry, leaf-lords!” she said. “I’ll get rid of her for you!”

She saw the Cold Queen of Winter's shadow flickering towards the trees, sending all the birds away in fright. Tilly bent down quickly and scooped up handfuls of the prickly green balls and flung them at the shadow.

"Scram!" she shouted. "We don't want you here yet!"

The leaf-lords danced round her, guiding her to where more of the green prickly balls lay. The Queen's shadow dodged through the trees, growing smaller and smaller as Tilly pelted her.

"And don't come back till November!" Tilly cried.

One by one, the birds flew back into the trees, and began to sing again. The sun and the sky and the trees and the leaves and the grass glowed with colour. As the howls of the banished Queen grew fainter and fainter, the lovely whistly tune started up, and the leaf-lords danced with joy. And everywhere on the grass, wherever Tilly had thrown them, all the prickly balls had split right open. Inside every one of them was another ball, gleaming brown and bright and beautiful.

Tilly danced round, scooping them up to put in her pockets, when suddenly . . . the wonderful whistle turned into a snore. Then a yawn. Mrs Hardcastle sat up on the bench. Tilly stood still. The leaf-lords lay like old brown leaves on the ground. Not a sound. Not a sound.

"Tilly Mint! Just what do you think you're doing in my shoes?" said Mrs Hardcastle. "Just look at my toes! They're like a bunch of frozen sausages!"

Tilly took the shoes off, and gave them to Mrs Hardcastle.

"I saw the leaf-lords, Mrs Hardcastle," she said, as they trudged back across the grass to the park gates.

"Course you did." Mrs Hardcastle held Tilly's hand very tightly. "Come on, Tilly Mint. Your mum will be wondering where we've got to, won't she?"

They climbed slowly back up the hill, and Tilly thought it was one of the nicest days she'd ever had. But Mrs