



# **The Three Robbers**

Tomi Ungerer

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The Three Robbers has been translated into sixteen languages and has sold millions of copies in the 45 years since it was first published. However, it has been unavailable in English for years, depriving English-speaking children around the world of one of the most memorable, entertaining, and beautiful storybooks ever published, in which good triumphs over evil in a delightfully unexpected way.

Tomi Ungerer has been described as 'the direct natural descendent of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen' and, like all the best fairy tales, *The Three Robbers* is by turns scary, charming, and surprising. The book tells the story of three fierce black-clad robbers who terrorize and plunder the countryside, armed with a blunderbuss, a pepper blower, and a huge red axe. One night, they meet a small girl called Tiffany, who is on her way to live with a wicked aunt. Tiffany is delighted to meet the robbers, and they take her back to their hideout in place of their usual haul of gold and jewels. Tiffany asks what they plan to do with their riches, but the robbers had never thought about spending money before. They soon find themselves embarking on a completely new career: they gather all of the lost, unhappy, and abandoned children that they can find, and then they buy a big castle so they can give all of the children a happy home.

Hailed by the *New York Times Book Review* as 'one of the most brilliant illustrators at work today,' Tomi Ungerer writes and illustrates unique books that have been the mainstay of children's libraries around the world for almost five decades. This book was first published in 1962, the same year as Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. After the publication of these two groundbreaking titles, both of which are far removed from the cute, safe, nursery world of cuddly toys and fluffy bunnies, storybooks for children would never be the same again. In 1990, Sendak wrote: "Some adults look at [Ungerer's] work, then rush to drag out the bromide that explains how easy it is to make a picture book: 'Just a handful of sentences and a lot of blazing pictures.' These critics fail to see that a successful picture book is a visual poem." In only 300 words and 20 unforgettable pictures, Ungerer creates an entertaining, wry modern morality tale in which good overcomes evil in the end.

Ungerer's little blonde orphan Tiffany is far from helpless -- she is not afraid of the robbers and instead reforms them, converting their evil into goodness. By the end of the story, the robbers are using their illgotten gains to create a kinder, better world for other unhappy children who have been neglected by a thoughtless society. At the time of the book's first publication, Tomi Ungerer summed up the moral of the story as, 'Whatever the color of money, it is never too late to make good use of it,' an intriguingly ambivalent statement that serves as a good indication of the playful, unconventional, sometimes provocative and always entertaining nature of this author.



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