



The Tales of Beatrix Potter

3: The Tailor of Gloucester

adapted by Kate Stonham

Long ago, a very old and very poor tailor worked in a little shop in a town called Gloucester.

One day he began to make a fine silk coat, embroidered with pansies and roses and a satin waistcoat. His fingers were old and crooked and so his progress was slow. The clothes were for the Mayor of Gloucester to wear on his wedding day and the tailor hoped they would make him a rich man.

By nightfall all the pieces of material and buttons were neatly laid on the table, ready to be sewn together in the morning and the tailor set off home, leaving the empty shop to the little brown mice, for behind the wooden panels of the houses of Gloucester was a maze of secret passages, staircases and trap-doors that the mice used to travel from house to house. The tailor was fond of the mice and always left snippets of material for them to make clothes of their own.

When he arrived home Simpkin, the tailor's cat, was there to greet him. Simpkin, too, was fond of mice - though he preferred them for his supper.

'I have just four last pennies,' the tailor told Simpkin. 'Take them to buy bread, milk, sausages - and most important of all, silk thread for the button-holes of the Mayor's wedding clothes.'

Simpkin set off and the exhausted tailor sat by the fire to rest but, after a short while, he heard a strange tip-tap-tapping sound...

It seemed to be coming from an upside-down tea cup on the kitchen drawers and when he lifted it up...out popped a little lady mouse! She curtseyed to the tailor and scampered away.

'Simpkin! Up to your tricks again,' muttered the tailor, for he knew his cat had trapped the little mouse on purpose.

Suddenly there was tapping from every tea cup, bowl and basin on the drawers!

Out popped mouse after mouse. 'Oh dear, Simpkin won't be very pleased I've freed them all,' fretted the tailor.

When Simpkin returned he was ready for a nice fat mouse for his supper. But when he saw the upturned tea cups and bowls, he knew something wasn't right at all.

'Simpkin' pleaded the tailor, 'where is the silk thread?'

'And where are my mice?' thought Simpkin, as he hid the thread he had bought inside a teapot.

The tailor went to bed in despair, for without the thread, he was doomed.

Simpkin, meanwhile, spent the night hunting his lost mice - but could not find a single one.

The next day, the tailor felt too worried to work... and the next...and the next.



As the clock struck midnight the night before the Mayor of Gloucester's wedding, Simpkin prowled the silent streets, still trying to find the mice.

As he passed the tailor's shop he saw candle light shining from the windows...and heard the little voices of singing...mice!

Simpkin scratched at the door to get in, but it was locked fast. But he could hear the mice inside and was baffled as to why they were crying out 'No more thread! No more thread!'

Suddenly he realised why. The mice must have been so grateful to the tailor for setting them free they were making the mayor's clothes for him - and had run out of silk thread for the button-holes. What a nice thing for the mice to do for the poor old tailor. Simpkin suddenly felt rather ashamed of his bad behaviour.

When the tailor woke up next day he was very surprised to find the silk thread he had asked his cat to buy sitting on his bed along with a sorry looking Simpkin.

'At last!' he cried, 'but it's the day of the Mayor's wedding - and I have no time to complete his clothes!'

The tailor and Simpkin ran as fast as they could to the shop.

There wasn't a mouse in sight - but on the table lay the most beautiful silk coat and satin waistcoat. Everything was finished, except for a single button-hole. Attached to it was a tiny scrap of paper on which were written the words 'No more thread.'

'Ah, but there is,' said the tailor, 'thanks to you, Simpkin!'

From that day on the tailor's luck began to change. He became very rich, because everybody wanted to wear his fine clothes with button-hole stitches so neat that people wondered how they could have been made by such an old man with such crooked fingers. Why, they were so dainty, they looked as if they had been made... by tiny mice!