

# The Tales of Beatrix Potter

## 6: The Tale of Mrs Tiggy-Winkle

adapted by Tracey Hammett

Once upon a time, in the days when everyone carried a nice cotton handkerchief in their pockets and little girls wore starched pinnies to keep their clothes clean, there was a girl called Lucie.

Lucie lived on a farm called Little-Town. She was a good girl but she was always losing her handkerchiefs.

One day little Lucie came into the farm-yard crying. 'I've lost three of my handkerchiefs...and a pinny. Have you seen them, Tabby Kitten?' But the kitten ignored her and went on washing her white paws.

Lucie saw Cock Robin, sitting on a twig, she asked him the same question. Cock Robin looked sideways at Lucie with his bright black eye and he flew away, over a gate.

Lucie climbed the gate and looked up at the hill...in the distance she thought that she noticed some tiny footprints which led to a little washing line...made from bracken stems and plaited rushes.

Then Lucie noticed something else - a door straight into the hill and behind it she could hear someone singing!

*'Lily-white and clean oh!  
With little drills between, oh!  
Smooth and hot – red rusty spot  
Never here been seen, oh!'*

Lucie knocked once...twice. A little frightened voice called out: 'Who's that?' Lucie opened the door and what do you think she saw? The tiniest kitchen! All neat and clean!

There at the table, with an iron in her hand, stood a very short person in a large apron and cap. Her little black nose went snuffle, snuffle, snuffle; and her eyes went twinkle, twinkle; and underneath her cap – instead of curls she had *prickles*!

'Who are you?' Lucie asked. 'Have you seen my handkerchiefs?'

The little person curtsied. 'Oh yes, if you please ma'am; my name is Mrs Tiggy-Winkle and I'm the best washerwoman in the whole of Cat Bells Hill!' And she took something out of a clothes-basket and started to iron them.

'Is that my handkerchief?' asked Lucie.

'Oh no, if you please ma'am; that's a little scarlet vest belonging to Cock Robin!' And she ironed it and folded it and put it on one side.

Then she took something else off a clothes-horse.

'Is that my pinny?' Lucie asked.

'Oh no, it's a table-cloth belonging to Jenny Wren; look how it's stained with currants! It's very hard to wash!' said Mrs Tiggy-Winkle.



Mrs Tiggy-Winkle's nose went sniffle, sniffle, snuffle; and her eyes went twinkle, twinkle; and she fetched another piece of washing to iron.

'That's one of my handkerchiefs!' cried Lucie – 'and there's my pinny!'

Mrs Tiggy-Winkle ironed it and shook out the frills.

'Oh that is lovely!' said Lucie. 'And what are those long yellow things with fingers like gloves?'

'Oh, that's a pair of stockings belonging to Sally Henny-Penny – look how she's worn the heels out with scratching in the yard!' said Mrs Tiggy-Winkle.

'There's another one of my handkerchiefs,' said Lucie, 'and look, that's the last one!'

When Mrs Tiggy-Winkle had finished ironing she hung out some clothes to air. The small brown coats of the mice and a red tailcoat with no tail belonging to Squirrel Nutkin and a very much shrunk blue jacket belonging to Peter Rabbit... and, at last, the basket was empty!

Then Mrs Tiggy-Winkle made them both a cup of tea. Mrs Tiggy-Winkle's hand holding the cup of tea was very, very wrinkly with soap suds; and all through her apron there were hair pins sticking wrong end out; so Lucie didn't like to get too close.

When they had finished tea they tied up the clothes in bundles and Lucie's handkerchiefs were folded up inside her clean pinny and fastened with a silver safety pin. Then down the hill they went...and all the way down the path little animals came out to meet them.

Mrs Tiggy-Winkle gave them their nice clean clothes and all the little animals and birds were so thankful.

When they came to the gate at the bottom of the hill there was nothing left to carry except Lucie's little bundle.

Lucie climbed the gate with the bundle in her hand and then she turned to say 'Good-night' and to thank the washer-woman. But, Mrs Tiggy-Winkle was running back up the hill – and where was her white frilled cap? And her apron?

And how small she had grown – and how brown – and how covered in prickles!

Why...Mrs Tiggy-Winkle was nothing but a hedgehog!

Now some people say that little Lucie had been asleep on the gate all the time – but then how could she have found three handkerchiefs and a pinny? And besides – I have seen that door in the back of the hill – besides – dear Mrs Tiggy-Winkle is a very good friend of mine!