

The Tales of Beatrix Potter

10: The Tale of Tom Kitten adapted by Tracey Hammett

Once upon a time there were three little kittens. Their names were Mittens, Tom Kitten, and Moppet.

The kittens had a happy life. They lived on a farm with their mother - Mrs Tabitha Twitchit - and every day they played together, climbed together and tumbled together. They didn't have a care in the world. Their mother loved them very much and did everything she could to bring them up to be polite and well behaved.

One day, Mrs Tabitha had friends coming to tea and wanted to show off her little kittens. 'You are to wear your finest clothes,' she told them as they sat in a row in front of her. 'And you must be on your best behaviour.'

She washed their faces and brushed their fur. She combed their tails and smoothed their whiskers. She dressed Moppet and Mittens in their prettiest dresses and pinafores. Tom wore his smartest jacket and trousers.

Tom didn't like being dressed up. He couldn't keep still. He was a plump little kitten and the jacket was quite tight. He fidgeted so much that the buttons burst off and his mother had to sew them back on again.

'You may go out and play,' said Mrs Tabitha when they were ready. 'But please keep away from the pig-sty and the hen house and those Puddle-ducks. And make sure you walk on your back legs to keep your clothes clean.'

The three kittens went out into the garden. They found it difficult to walk on their back legs and kept falling on their noses. Their clothes were soon covered in green smears from the grass.

'I know! Let's climb up the rocks and sit on the garden wall,' said Moppet.

So they all climbed up with a skip and a jump. As they did Moppet's pinafore came off and fell on the dusty road.

Tom Kitten couldn't jump or skip with his tight clothes, so Moppet and Mittens tried to pull him up. But, by the time he reached the top, his hat had fallen off and the buttons had come off his jacket again.

While the kittens were sitting on the wall along came the three Puddle-ducks down the road. They marched one behind the other. Pit pat paddle pat! Pit pat waddle pat!

As they passed they stopped and stared up at the kittens. Then Rebecca and Jemima Puddle-duck picked up the hat and pinafore and put them on.

What a sight! Mittens laughed so much that she fell off the wall. The other kittens half fell and half clambered after her. All Tom Kitten's smart clothes had come off before he reached the bottom.

'Let's put them on Mr Drake Puddle-duck,' laughed Moppet.



Mr Drake Puddle-duck looked very silly in Tom's clothes. They didn't fit him at all. But Mr Drake Puddle-duck didn't mind. 'It's a very fine morning,' he said grandly and set off up the road, keeping in step with Jemima and Rebeccah. Pit pat paddle pat! Pit pat waddle pat!

The three Puddle-ducks went straight to the pond and jumped in. Almost immediately the clothes that the kittens had put on them fell off and disappeared under the water.

Meanwhile, worried where they had got to, Mrs Tabitha Twitchit came looking for her little kittens. When she saw them sitting on the garden wall without any of their clothes on she was very cross.

'My friends will be here at any minute,' she shouted. 'And you are not fit to be seen. Go straight to your bedroom and stay there!'

The kittens looked at each other and with their heads bowed trooped back to the house and did as they were told.

'You are to stay there until I say you can come down,' said their mother angrily.

When Mrs Tabitha's friends arrived they were surprised not to see the kittens.

'I'm afraid they are not well enough to leave their room,' said their mother lying. 'They have the measles and are in bed, resting.'

The guests looked saddened by the news. 'Do sit down and have something to eat and drink,' continued Mrs Twitchit. 'I have made a delicious sponge cake which I know you will all enjoy.'

Upstairs the kittens listened to the guests having a good time below.

'It isn't fair that we are not allowed to have any sponge cake,' said Tom Kitten. 'I am going to make a lot of noise so they will have to let me downstairs.'

Mitten and Moppet looked at him. 'Mother will be cross with you,' they said.

'I don't care about that,' said naughty Tom Kitten and he proceeded to run backwards and forwards across the room stamping his feet. Then he called out in a loud voice and climbed up the curtains and scratched his claws on the furniture.

The guests below heard the noise. 'I think the kittens are feeling better,' they said smiling.

Mrs Tabitha Twitchit didn't feel like smiling though. When the guests had gone she went up to speak to Tom Kitten.

'Tonight you will go to bed without any supper,' she told him sounding disappointed.

After that Tom Kitten behaved himself...for a while...a very short while!