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Lower Grades

# The Tailor of Gloucester

Good deeds are rewarded when mice help a tailor finish a fancy coat just in time for the Mayor's wedding on Christmas Day. . . .

by Beatrix Potter and adapted by Carol D. Wise

## Characters

BEATRIX

FREDA, *her niece*

TAILOR, *a bent old man in spectacles*

SIMPKIN, *his fat cat*

MIMI, *mother mouse*

POPPY, *papa mouse*

SQUEAKY } *baby mice*  
PUMPKIN }

**BEFORE RISE:** *FREDA is sitting on a sofa, right, and BEATRIX enters and sits next to her.*

**BEATRIX:** My dear Freda, it is well past your bedtime. You have been ill, and you need your rest.

**FREDA:** I know, Auntie, but I can't sleep. I'm too excited. It is almost Christmas. If you tell me a story, I might be able to fall asleep.

**BEATRIX** (*Laughing*): You little minx! You are trying to bribe me!

**FREDA:** Please, Aunt Beatrix. You tell such good stories. I love the one about Peter Rabbit and Mr. McGregor's garden.

**BEATRIX:** All right. ONE story and then off to bed.

**FREDA:** I promise.

**BEATRIX:** This story is about a tailor who lived in Gloucester. And it's all true. I heard it myself in Gloucestershire—at least the part about the tailor, the waistcoat, and the “no more twist.”

**FREDA:** What is twist?

**BEATRIX:** Thread. Now, let me begin the story. It happened a long time ago just before Christmas. . . (*Lights fade and curtain opens.*)

\* \* \*

**SETTING:** *Stage is divided into two parts: 1) the tailor's workshop with a*

chair and a table covered with scraps of cloth—yellow, green, and cherry—and 2) a small bedroom with a cot. A wall and door separate the rooms.

**AT RISE:** *TAILOR* sits carefully cutting his cloth and talking to *SIMPKIN*, who sits beside him.

**TAILOR** (*Holding up cloth*): Ah! Such fine silk cloth, Simpkin! But never for me. While my neighbors parade around in beautiful silks and satins, I must wear coarse burlaps.

**SIMPKIN** (*Yawning*): Meow! (*He begins to preen himself.*)

**TAILOR:** This will be a beautiful coat of cherry-colored corded silk embroidered with pansies and roses, and a cream-colored satin waistcoat trimmed with green worsted chenille. It will be my greatest achievement and will bring us some money for Christmas. Simpkin, more cream for you!

**SIMPKIN** (*Happily*): Meow.

**TAILOR** (*Smoothing the cloth*): I must cut the cloth very closely so that there will be only enough left to clothe a mouse! (*At the word "mouse," SIMPKIN looks up.*) No, Simpkin. No mouse! It's only an expression. (*SIMPKIN puts his head down again and resumes his rest.*) Ah, this will be such a grand coat for the Mayor of Gloucester to wear on his wedding day! A wedding on Christmas Day! Imagine that, Simpkin! I must work hard to finish it on time. There are only two days before Christmas.

**SIMPKIN** (*Indifferently*): Meow. (*Starts to fall asleep again, but then some tapping is heard left. SIMPKIN sits up, suddenly alert.*)

**SOUND:** Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip!

**TAILOR** (*Laughing*): It is only mice, Simpkin. They do us no harm. I always try to leave some crumbs out to feed them. (*SIMPKIN gets up and begins to sniff stage left.*) In all the old houses in Gloucester, there are little mouse staircases and secret trap-doors, and the mice run from house to house through those long narrow passages; unlike us, they can run all over the town without going into the cold air. Surely, they would catch their death in this snow.

**SIMPKIN** (*Settling down to sleep*): Me...ow. (*Rolls over with paws in the air*)

**TAILOR** (*Looking around*): Ah, but I need just one single skein of cherry-colored twisted silk. Simpkin, I am worn to a raveling.

**SIMPKIN** (*Looking at him skeptically*): Meeeeee-owwwww.

**TAILOR:** Take this goat, which is our last fourpence, and buy some bread, milk, and sausages. (*Hands SIMPKIN the coin*) And—oh, Simpkin, with the last penny of our fourpence, buy me one penn'orth of cherry-colored silk. (*Shakes a finger in warning*) But do not lose the last penny of the fourpence, Simpkin, for I have no more twist. I cannot finish the mayor's waistcoat without this thread.

**SIMPKIN** (*Pretending to be confused*): Meow?

**TAILOR:** Simpkin, you cannot pretend with me. I know that you understand every word I say. Yes, it is indeed cold outside, but you have a fur coat to keep you warm. I have nothing. Besides, I am not feeling well tonight. It would not do for me to be ill and not finish the mayor's waistcoat. I will give you some of the sausage for your supper. (*SIMPKIN grudgingly gets up.*)

**SIMPKIN** (*Meowing plaintively*): Meowwwwww. (*TAILOR walks SIMPKIN to stage left; SIMPKIN exits.*)

**TAILOR** (*Smiling to himself*): I shall make my fortune with the mayor's coat. When others see how grand it is, they will want me to make one for them as well.

**SOUND**: Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip!

**TAILOR**: Ah! It appears I have a visitor. (*MIMI enters and curtseys to him and then scurries over to the pieces of waistcoat laid out on table.*) Good evening to you! What a cheerful little mouse you are! I hope you will not mind my working on the mayor's waistcoat for his wedding on Christmas Day.

**MIMI**: Squeak! Squeak!

**TAILOR** (*Laughing*): I take that to mean a no! You don't mind! Then with your permission, I shall continue. (*Begins cutting*) The waistcoat is cut out from peach-colored satin—tambour stitch and rose-buds in beautiful floss silk. The mayor will be so pleased.

**MIMI**: Squeak! Squeak!

**TAILOR**: You act as though you understand every word I say. There is a legend that at Christmas animals can speak. Simpkin can't speak, but he understands me—when he wants to. Do you understand me?

**MIMI**: Squeak! Squeak!

**TAILOR** (*Pondering*): Was I wise to entrust my last fourpence to Simpkin? I must have one-and-twenty button-holes of cherry-colored twist!

**SOUND**: Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip! (*POPPY steps out from stage left and bows to TAILOR.*)

**POPPY**: Squeak! Squeak!

**TAILOR** (*Surprised*): Another mouse! This is extraordinary!

**SOUND**: Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip! (*SQUEAKY and PUMPKIN appear.*)

**TAILOR**: Ah! It appears that we have a family of mice here!

**SQUEAKY, PUMPKIN**: Squeak! Squeak!

**TAILOR**: You seem very interested in my work. I'm afraid that I do not have time to entertain you. (*Focuses on cloth*) I must be finished by noon on Christmas Day. (*Looks around*) Alack, I am undone, for I have no more twist! I hope that Simpkin will be diligent about buying it.

**MIMI, POPPY, SQUEAKY, PUMPKIN** (*Whispering to each other*): Squeak...Squeak...Squeak...Squeak. (*They are nodding and squeaking together excitedly and then suddenly rush off left.*)

**TAILOR**: I wonder at their hurry! (*Sound of scratching left*) Ah! Perhaps it is because of Simpkin's return! (*Gets up and admits SIMPKIN, who carries a small container of milk, bread, and sausages. He slips a small packet of twist into a corner of the room where it is unseen by TAILOR.*)

**SIMPKIN** (*Angrily shaking off snow*): Grrr. . .meow! (*Dumps milk, sausage, and bread at TAILOR's feet*)

**TAILOR**: Yes, Simpkin. I know that you do not like the snow. You've made your feelings quite clear. I will fix you your supper—(*Becomes startled*) But where is my twist? You know that I must have my twist to finish this coat.

**SIMPKIN** (*Indifferently*): Meow.