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The Tailor of Gloucester

Beatrix Potter · *1903 · English original, Project Gutenberg #14868*

In the time of swords and periwigs, a very poor tailor in Westgate Street cuts out a cherry-coloured coat and a cream satin waistcoat for the Mayor of Gloucester, who is to be married on Christmas Day in the morning. One skein of cherry-coloured twist is wanting. The tailor falls ill; Simpkin the cat hides the twist in a teapot. Between Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, little brown mice finish the sewing—all but one button-hole, and a scrap of paper: NO MORE TWIST.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Who can finish the Mayor's coat, when the tailor is worn to a ravelling and has no more twist?

"No more twist!"

The dedication, and the fever

The last fourpence buys bread, milk, sausages, and a penn'orth of cherry-coloured silk. Simpkin, vexed that the tailor has let the mice out from under the tea-cups, hides that twist in the tea-pot. For three days the tailor raves of the wanting skein. In the old story, all the beasts can talk between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the morning. The mice sew through the night in the locked shop. On Christmas morning Simpkin is ashamed, and lays the skein on the quilt. The coat is finished except one button-hole, with a scrap of paper in little teeny weeny writing. From then began the luck of the Tailor of Gloucester.

KEY CHARACTERS

The Tailor of Gloucester
a very poor, skilful old man in spectacles, worn to a ravelling

Simpkin
his cat; he hides the twist, and is ashamed at last

The little brown mice
they run without keys, and finish the Mayor's coat

The Mayor of Gloucester
to be married at noon on Christmas Day

Grades K–2
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01
Westgate Street
THE CUTTING-OUT

A poor man, expensive stuffs, and a coat for the Mayor.

- In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lappets—when gentlemen wore ruffles, and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta—there lived a tailor in Gloucester.
- He sat in the window of a little shop in Westgate Street, cross-legged on a table, from morning till dark. Although he sewed fine silk for his neighbours, he himself was very, very poor—a little old man in spectacles, with a pinched face, old crooked fingers, and a suit of thread-bare clothes.
- One bitter cold day near Christmastime he began a coat of cherry-coloured corded silk embroidered with pansies and roses, and a cream coloured satin waistcoat, for the Mayor of Gloucester. Everything was measured and sufficient—except that there was wanting just one single skein of cherry-coloured twisted silk.

02
The Last Fourpence
COLLEGE COURT

Simpkin is sent out; tip-taps answer from under the tea-cups.

- No one lived there at night but little brown mice, who run in and out without any keys, through mouse staircases and secret trap-doors behind the wooden wainscots of all the old houses in Gloucester.
- The tailor shuffled home through the snow to a rented kitchen in College Court, and lived alone with his cat, Simpkin. "Take this groat (which is our last fourpence)... buy a penn'orth of bread, a penn'orth of milk and a penn'orth of sausages. And oh, Simpkin, with the last penny of our fourpence buy me one penn'orth of cherry-coloured silk. But do not lose the last penny of the fourpence, Simpkin, or I am undone and worn to a thread-paper, for I have NO MORE TWIST."
- Left alone, and beginning to be ill, he hears tip tap, tip tap from the dresser. Under the upside-down tea-cups are little live mice, who curtsey and bow, and listen to him lamenting one-and-twenty button-holes, to be finished by noon of Saturday. When Simpkin comes back, they have all run away behind the wainscot.

> *"for I have NO MORE TWIST."*
> **the tailor** · The last fourpence

03
Where Is My Twist?
THE FEVER

A parcel in the tea-pot, and three days of illness.

- "Simpkin, where is my twist?" But Simpkin hid a little parcel privately in the tea-pot, and spit and growled at the tailor; and if Simpkin had been able to talk, he would have asked: "Where is my MOUSE?"
- The poor old tailor was very ill with a fever, tossing and turning in his four-post bed; and still in his dreams he mumbled—"No more twist! no more twist!" He lay ill for three days and nights. In the shop the embroidered silk and satin lay cut out upon the table—and who should come to sew them, when the window was barred, and the door was fast locked?
- But that does not hinder the little brown mice; they run in and out without any keys through all the old houses in Gloucester. There would be no Christmas dinner for Simpkin and the poor old Tailor of Gloucester.

04
Christmas Eve in the Morning
THE LOCKED SHOP

All the beasts can talk; the mice sew by candle-light.

- It is in the old story that all the beasts can talk, in the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the morning (though there are very few folk that can hear them, or know what it is that they say).
- When the Cathedral clock struck twelve, a thousand merry voices sang from the roofs and gables. Simpkin wandered in the snow, hungry and left out. From the tailor's shop in Westgate came a glow of light. When he peeped in, it was full of candles: a snippeting of scissors, a snappeting of thread, and little mouse voices singing loudly and gaily.
- He scratched at the door, but the key was under the tailor's pillow. The mice only laughed, then barred the shutters, still clicking their thimbles and singing "No more twist! No more twist!" Simpkin went home, considering in his mind, and found the tailor without fever, sleeping peacefully.

05
A Scrap of Paper
CHRISTMAS DAY

The skein on the quilt, and the luck of the tailor.

- Then Simpkin went on tip-toe and took a little parcel of silk out of the tea-pot, and looked at it in the moonlight; and he felt quite ashamed of his badness compared with those good little mice! When the tailor awoke, the first thing he saw upon the patchwork quilt was a skein of cherry-coloured twisted silk, and beside his bed stood the repentant Simpkin.
- "Alack, I am worn to a ravelling, but I have my twist!" He has no more strength nor time than will serve to make one single button-hole, and this is Christmas Day in the Morning. He unlocks the shop—and there, where he had left plain cuttings of silk, lay the most beautifullest coat and embroidered satin waistcoat that ever were worn by a Mayor of Gloucester.
- Everything was finished except just one single cherry-coloured button-hole, and where that button-hole was wanting there was pinned a scrap of paper with these words—in little teeny weeny writing—NO MORE TWIST. From then began the luck of the Tailor of Gloucester; he grew quite stout, and he grew quite rich. The stitches of those button-holes were so small they looked as if they had been made by little mice!

Christmas · Poverty and Craft · Mercy · Repentance · Hidden Help

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The dedication, written at Christmas, 1901, already gives the queerest true thing: the tailor, the waistcoat, and the "No more twist!" The phrase governs the whole book.
2. The tailor lets the mice out, though they are "undoubtedly the property of Simpkin." That mercy costs him the hidden skein, and then it is repaid in the locked shop.
3. Simpkin is not a simple villain. He is vexed, hungry, shut out of the songs, and at last ashamed. The twist is returned before the shop is opened.
4. The unfinished button-hole is left on purpose, with its scrap of paper. The luck that follows does not erase the mice's work, or the one thing still wanting.

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