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The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle

Beatrix Potter · *1905 · English original, Project Gutenberg #572*

Little Lucie of Little-town has lost three handkerchiefs and a pinafore. She climbs the hill, finds a door straight into the rock, and meets a very stout short washer-woman whose nose goes sniffle, sniffle, snuffle, and who has prickles under her cap. The clothes are returned; at the stile Lucie turns to thank her—and Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is nothing but a hedgehog.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Who has been keeping the lost handkerchiefs clean—and what is she, when the hill door is left behind?

"Why! Mrs. Tiggy-winkle was nothing but a HEDGEHOG!"
The stile

Inside the hill there is a flagged kitchen, a hot singey smell, and an excellent clear-starcher named Mrs. Tiggy-winkle. She irons Cock Robin's waistcoat, Jenny Wren's table-cloth, Sally Henny-penny's stockings, old Mrs. Rabbit's oniony handkerchief, and Lucie's own pinny and handkins. At the bottom of the hill the animals receive their clean clothes. Lucie turns to say good-night, and the washer-woman is running up the hill, grown small and brown and covered with prickles. Some people say Lucie had been asleep upon the stile—but then how could she have found three clean pocket-handkins, pinned with a silver safety-pin?

KEY CHARACTERS

Lucie
a good little girl of Little-town, always losing handkerchiefs

Mrs. Tiggy-winkle
an excellent clear-starcher inside the hill; a hedgehog when looked at plainly

Peter and Benjamin
among the neighbours who receive their clean clothes

Grades K–2
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01
Three Handkins and a Pinny
LITTLE-TOWN
A good little girl, always losing her pocket-handkerchiefs.

- Once upon a time there was a little girl called Lucie, who lived at a farm called Little-town. She was a good little girl—only she was always losing her pocket-handkerchiefs!
- She came into the farm-yard crying: "I've lost my pocket-handkin! Three handkins and a pinny!"
- Tabby Kitten went on washing her paws; Sally Henny-penny ran into a barn; Cock Robin flew over a stile and away.

02
A Door into the Hill
THE PATH
White things on the grass, a tiny spring, and someone singing.

- A great way up the hillside Lucie thought she saw some white things spread upon the grass, and she scrambled up as fast as her short legs would carry her.
- The path ended under a big rock: clothes-props cut from bracken stems, lines of plaited rushes, a heap of tiny clothes pins—and a door, straight into the hill.
- Inside, someone was singing of lily-white and clean things. Lucie knocked, and a little frightened voice called out "Who's that?"

03
An Excellent Clear-Starcher
THE KITCHEN
A flagged floor, a low ceiling, and prickles under a cap.

- Inside the hill was a nice clean kitchen with a flagged floor and wooden beams, only so low that Lucie's head nearly touched it.
- At the table, with an iron in her hand, stood a very stout short person. Her little black nose went sniffle, sniffle, snuffle, and underneath her cap—where Lucie had yellow curls—that little person had PRICKLES!
- She made a bob-curtsey: "Oh yes, if you please'm; my name is Mrs. Tiggy-winkle; oh yes if you please'm, I'm an excellent clear-starcher!"

> *"Oh yes, if you please'm; my name is Mrs. Tiggy-winkle"*
> **Mrs. Tiggy-winkle** · The kitchen

04
A Basket of Neighbours' Clothes
THE IRONING
Robin, Jenny Wren, hens, rabbits, kittens—and Lucie's own.

- She irons a little scarlet waist-coat belonging to Cock Robin, and a damask table-cloth of Jenny Wren's stained with currant wine.
- There are Sally Henny-penny's stockings, worn at the heels; old Mrs. Rabbit's red handkerchief that smelled of onions; Tabby Kitten's mittens; Tom Titmouse's shirt-fronts; and woolly coats of the little lambs.
- Lucie finds her pinny and her pocket-handkins one by one. At last the basket is empty, and Mrs. Tiggy-winkle makes tea.

05
Nothing but a Hedgehog
THE STILE
The bundles go down the hill; thanks come too late.

- They tied up the clothes, hid the key under the door-sill, and trotted down the hill. Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny were the first to meet them, and all the little animals were much obliged to dear Mrs. Tiggy-winkle.
- At the stile Lucie turned to say "Good-night," and to thank the washer-woman. But Mrs. Tiggy-winkle had not waited either for thanks or for the washing bill!
- She was running up the hill, and how small she had grown—and how brown—and covered with PRICKLES! Why! Mrs. Tiggy-winkle was nothing but a HEDGEHOG!

Lost and Found · Industry · Neighbourliness · Wonder · Thanks

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–2

1. The prickles are shown early, under the cap, long before the last disclosure. Watch how Lucie sees and does not yet name what she sees.
2. The ironing is a roll-call of the farm and wood: Robin, Jenny Wren, Mrs. Rabbit's oniony handkerchief (from Benjamin's garden errand). The world of the other tales is being kept clean.
3. Mrs. Tiggy-winkle does not wait for thanks or for the washing bill. The work is done; the mystery is left at the stile.
4. Potter herself answers the sleepy-stile explanation: then how could Lucie have found three clean handkins, pinned with a silver safety-pin? And she is very well acquainted with dear Mrs. Tiggy-winkle.

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