

# The Tailor of Gloucester

by Beatrix Potter adapted by EveryReader

Adapted to Lexile Level 600





A long time ago in Gloucester, England, there lived a tailor.

He was a small, thin old man who wore spectacles.

Every day he sat cross-legged in the window of his tiny shop on Westgate Street.

From morning until dark he sewed for other people.

The cloth was rich and costly, but the tailor was very poor.

His clothes were worn thin, and his fingers were crooked from work.



He cut his cloth very carefully so he would not waste a bit.

Only the smallest scraps were left on his table.

"These pieces are too narrow for anything," he would say.

"Unless they are waistcoats for mice!"



One very cold day near Christmas, the tailor began a special job.

He started to make a coat for the Mayor of Gloucester.

The Mayor would be married on Christmas Day at noon.

The coat was cherry-red silk with little cords.

It would be embroidered with pansies and roses.



The vest, or waistcoat, would be cream satin.  
It would be trimmed with gauze and soft  
green thread.

It was to match the fine red coat.



The tailor worked and worked.  
He measured the silk and turned it this way  
and that.  
He cut it into shape with his shears.  
The table was covered with tiny cherry-red  
snippets.



Snowflakes began to tap the small window as the light faded.

His day's work was done.

All the silk and satin lay cut out on the table.

There were twelve pieces for the coat and four pieces for the vest.

The pocket flaps, cuffs, buttons, and lining were set in neat order.



The lining for the coat was fine yellow silk.  
The buttonholes for the vest were to be  
sewn with cherry-red silk thread.  
Everything was ready to sew in the morning.



Everything was ready—except for one thing. He needed one skein of cherry-red twisted silk.

Without it, he could not finish the buttonholes.



The tailor did not sleep in his shop.  
He locked the door and took the key.  
No one was there at night but the little  
brown mice.  
In old Gloucester houses, there were wooden  
wall panels, tiny doors, and secret mouse  
stairways.



The tailor shuffled home through the snow.  
He lived close by in a very small place, just  
the kitchen of a house in College Court.  
He lived alone with his cat, Simpkin.



All day while the tailor worked, Simpkin stayed at home.

He liked mice very much, but not to sew with.  
He liked them for his supper.



"Miaow?" said Simpkin when the tailor came in.

"Simpkin," said the tailor, "we shall make our fortune, but I am worn out."

"Take our last four pennies and a little china pot."

"Buy some bread, some milk, and some sausages."

"And with the last penny, buy me one penny's worth of cherry-red silk thread."

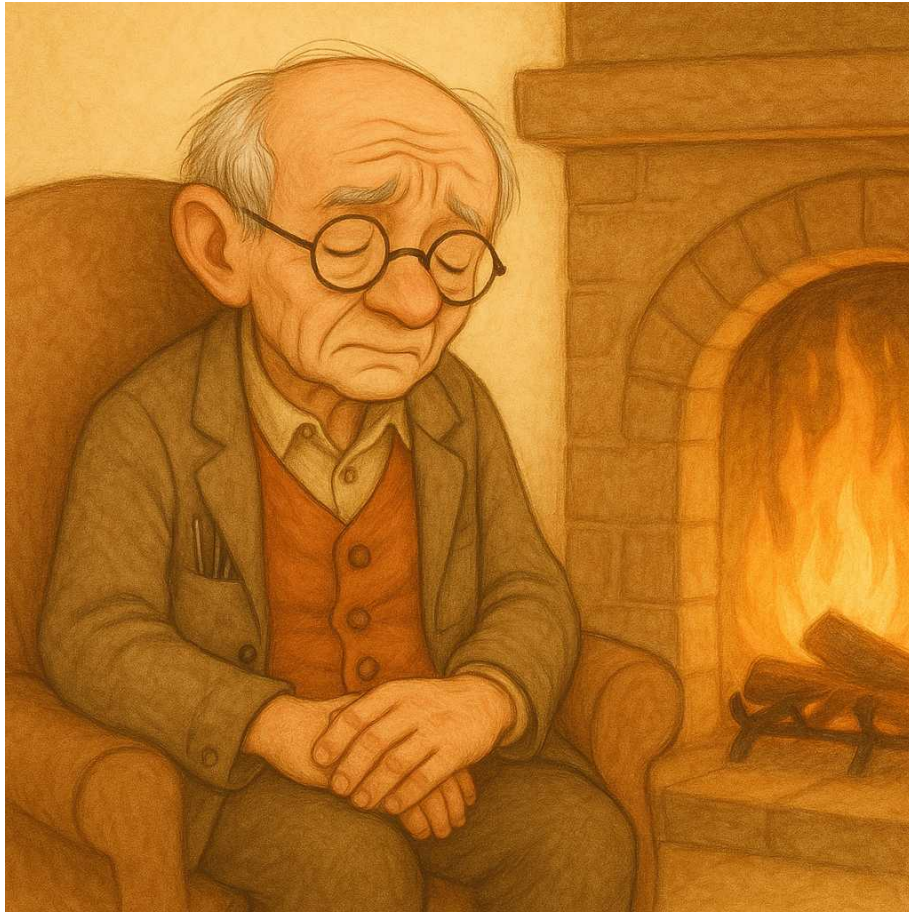


"Do not lose that last penny, Simpkin, or I am ruined."

"I have no more thread."

"Miaow," said Simpkin again.

He took the coins and the pot and went out into the snowy night.



The tailor felt very tired and a little ill.  
He sat by the hearth and thought about the wonderful coat and vest.  
"The Mayor will be married on Christmas morning," he murmured.  
"There are not even scraps left over, except for tippets for mice."  
"One-and-twenty buttonholes with cherry-red thread!"



Just then he heard tiny sounds from the dresser.

Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip.

"What can that be?" he said.

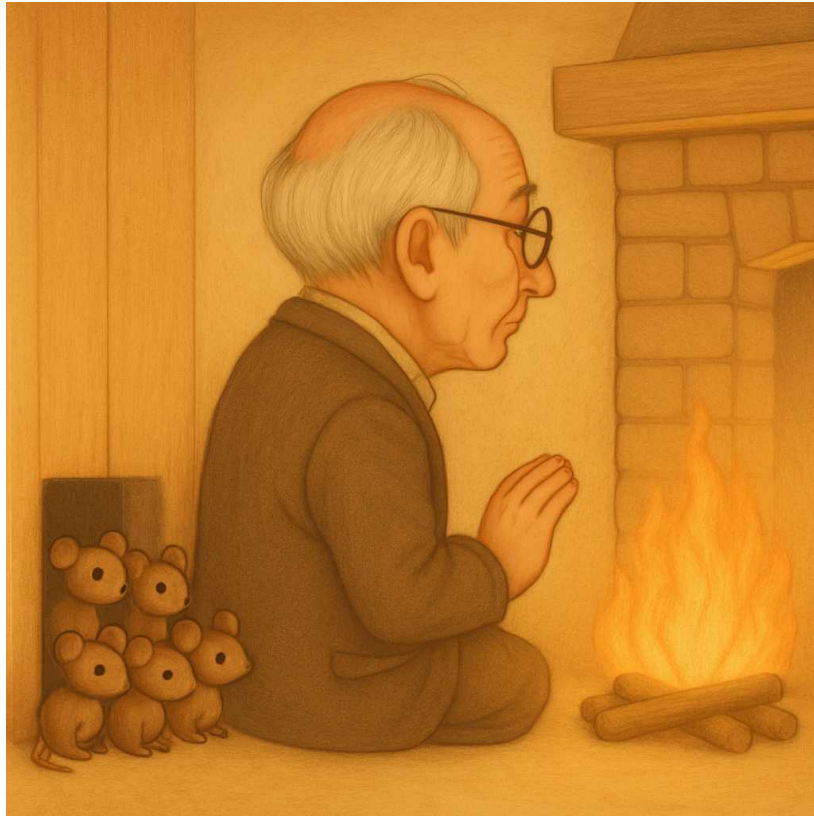
He lifted an upside-down teacup.

Out stepped a little lady mouse.

She made a small curtsy and slipped into a crack in the wooden wall.



Again the small sounds came.  
Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip.  
He turned over another teacup.  
Out stepped a little gentleman mouse.  
He bowed and ran away.  
More tiny tappings came from under bowls  
and basins.



Many little mice popped out and slipped under the wooden wall.

The tailor warmed his cold hands and mumbled about the vest of peach-colored satin.

"One-and-twenty buttonholes of cherry-red silk," he said again.

He bent close to the fire and worried.

"Was it right to let those mice go? Simpkin will be angry. And I have no more thread."



But the little mice had listened to him.  
They had seen the pattern of the coat and  
the yellow lining.  
They whispered about tiny mouse-sized  
tippets.  
Then they scurried away through the secret  
paths inside the walls, squeaking from house  
to house.



Not a single mouse was left in the kitchen when Simpkin came back with the milk.

He burst in, angry at the snow caught in his ears and collar.

"Simpkin," asked the tailor, "where is my thread?"

Simpkin stared hard at the teacups and hid a small parcel of silk thread inside the teapot.

He spat and growled, wishing for a fat little mouse.

"Alas, I am undone," said the tailor, and he went sadly to bed.



All night long, Simpkin hunted for mice.  
He peeked into cupboards and under the wall  
panels.  
He even looked into the teapot, where he had  
hidden the thread.  
He found no mice at all.



The poor tailor grew very ill with a fever.  
In his sleep he tossed and muttered, "No more thread! No more thread!"  
He stayed ill the next day, and the next, and the next.  
In the locked shop on Westgate Street, the cut pieces waited on the table.  
There were one-and-twenty buttonholes to sew.  
Who would stitch them?



But locks did not stop the mice.  
They ran through hidden ways in the walls all  
over Gloucester.  
Outside, people trudged through the snow,  
buying geese and turkeys and baking pies.  
There was no Christmas dinner for Simpkin  
and the poor sick tailor.



At last it was Christmas Eve, late at night.  
The moon rose over the roofs and chimneys  
and shone into College Court.  
The town was quiet and still under the snow.  
Simpkin sat by the bed and mewed for his  
mice.



There is an old tale that on the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, animals can speak.

When the cathedral clock struck twelve, the sound echoed over the roofs.

Simpkin slipped out and wandered in the snow.



Voices rose from old timbered houses and steep roofs.

Birds and beasts seemed to sing Christmas songs.

Lights and music came from a garret, and cats gathered and danced.

"Hey, diddle, diddle," seemed to say the fiddles and paws.

Poor hungry Simpkin thought it was very unfair.



A warm glow shone from the tailor's shop.  
Simpkin crept to the window and peeped  
inside.

The room was bright with candles.  
He heard the snip of scissors and the pull of  
thread.

Little mouse voices sang as they worked.



They were busy at the table, sewing the cherry-red coat and the cream satin vest. Simpkin scratched at the door and cried, "Mew! Mew!"

But the key was under the tailor's pillow, and he could not get in.



The mice laughed and sang and stitched.  
They clicked their thimbles to keep time.  
When Simpkin scratched at the window, they  
shut the shutters.  
Through the cracks he could still hear their  
voices calling, "No more thread! No more  
thread!"



Simpkin went away, thinking hard.  
He returned home and found the tailor  
sleeping more peacefully.  
Quietly, he tiptoed to the teapot and took  
out the cherry-red silk thread.  
In the moonlight he felt ashamed.  
He set the skein on the tailor's patchwork  
quilt and stood by the bed, sorry for his  
mischief.



In the morning the tailor woke up.  
The first thing he saw on his quilt was the  
skein of cherry-red twisted silk.  
Simpkin stood beside the bed, looking sorry.  
"I am worn to a raveling," said the tailor, "but  
I have my thread!"



The sun shone on the snow outside.

The tailor got dressed and went into the street, with Simpkin running ahead.

"I have my thread," said the tailor, "but no more strength than to make one single buttonhole."

"It is Christmas morning. The Mayor will be married at noon."

"Where is his cherry-red coat?"



He unlocked the door of the shop.  
Simpkin slipped in like a cat that expects something.  
But no one was there.  
The floor was swept clean.  
The scraps of silk and bits of thread were gone.



On the table lay a wonder.

Where the tailor had left plain cut pieces,  
there now rested the most beautiful coat and  
vest.

The roses and pansies were stitched on the  
coat facings.

The vest was embroidered with poppies and  
cornflowers.

Everything was finished—except for one  
cherry-red buttonhole.

Beside it lay a tiny scrap of paper that said,  
"NO MORE TWIST."



The tailor smiled.

He had just enough strength, and now he had the thread.

He sat down, threaded his needle, and carefully sewed the last buttonhole.

The coat and vest were ready in time.



From that day on, the tailor's luck changed.  
He grew healthier and no longer went hungry.  
He made wonderful vests for rich merchants  
and fine gentlemen.  
His ruffles, cuffs, and lapels were famous.  
Best of all were his buttonholes.  
The stitches were so neat and small that  
people wondered how an old man with crooked  
fingers could sew them.  
They looked almost as if they had been made  
by little mice.  
The End.