

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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Beatrix Potter's Christmas

Story by
Beatrix Potter

Adapted for the Stage by
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Music by
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Cast of Characters :

- Beatrix Potter
- Jane Fowler, the maid
- Miss Mouse
- Mrs. Mouse
- Mouse Maid
- Mouse Butler
- Mouse Cook
- Mr. Mouse
- Mouse Brother
- Mr. Mole
- Bertram Potter
- Cox, the butler
- Mrs. Puddle-Duck
- Mr. Puddle Duck
- Mr. Badger
- Mr. Fox
- Helen Leech Potter
- Rupert Potter
- Mrs. Cat
- Mrs. Hedge-Hog
- Kitten Brothers
- Kitten Sisters
- Squirrels
- Uncle Rabbit
- Bunny Brother
- Bunny Sisters
- Bunny Cousin
- Mrs. Rabbit
- Otters

Ensemble includes: Mice, Kittens, Carolers

Act 1, Scene 1

London 1880. Early afternoon: Christmas Eve. The third-floor nursery of a well-to-do townhome.
Prior to the play's beginning Carolers sing. As house-lights fade, they ascend to the apron of the stage and continue their song under the following. Lights rise on BEATRIX, aged fourteen, seated at her drawing table, intently sketching a mouse which rests on her free hand.

BEATRIX: Please, Miss Mouse – I beg you, do try and keep still. If I'm to make a proper drawing, then you've got to make an effort. *(She sketches for another moment, then lets the pencil drop from her hand, crumples up the drawing and shoves it in the coal stove.)* It's no use! *(She sits, frustrated, on the windowseat. To the mouse.)* No, Miss Mouse; it isn't your fault alone. The people outside – they're as much to blame for spoiling my concentration. Still, I do like the carol. *(She hums along with them for a moment, then picks up the mouse.)* Shall we have ourselves a look? but the windowpane's all covered in frost; if we're to see them, I'll have to open it. Will you give me your word, now, you'll stage very close in my hand? You mustn't get a chill. *(She opens the window.)* Ah, yes! Can you see? To whom are they singing, I wonder? No, Miss Mouse, not to me. They don't know me. And I'm the only one in the world who knows about you. . . *(Putting mouse in the dollhouse, turning to the pets behind the curtained wardrobe.)* . . . except, of course, Mrs. Hedgehog and young Master Rabbit and Tabitha. *(Taking her cat out of a basket.)* Most particularly Tabitha! Yes, my clever kitty, it was you who first

discovered Miss Mouse, and you've been anxious to become better acquainted with her ever since, isn't that so? Well, I'm not about to ever let you have that pleasure, Tabitha, so you'd best give up the wicked notion altogether. (*JANE, the maid, eaters through the door with a luncheon tray. BEATRIX hasn't noticed her entrance.*)

JANE: Miss Beatrix?

BEATRIX: (*Startled.*) Jane!

JANE: You said something?

BEATRIX: No. I mean, yes. But not to you.

JANE: To whom?

BEATRIX: (*Replacing cat in the basket.*) Tabitha.

JANE: Oh. (*She notices the window.*) Now, why in heaven's name is this window ajar?

BEATRIX: I opened it. We were listening to the carolers.

JANE: (*Closing the window.*) "We?" (*BEATRIX doesn't elaborate.*) You and the cat? What nonsense it is! What do your beasts know of Christmas carols? For that matter, what do they know of Christmas? Just another day to them.

BEATRIX: But there were all sorts of creatures at the manger, weren't there? And my Grandmama told me once of a legend that, since then, at the stroke of midnight each Christmas Eve, all the animals in the world can not only reckon but also speak and . . .

JANE: Really, Miss Beatrix! You are fourteen years old, after all. I should think you'd be well past believing in fairy tales.

BEATRIX: But why can't it be so? How can you know -- really know?

JANE: This much I do know -- with such a cold as you've got, it's a foolish girl who's out of bed allowing a bitter wind to blow about her room.

BEATRIX: But I don't feel so very ill.

JANE: How you feel doesn't matter. In truth, you are ill, Miss Beatrix, and I'll not have the Master and Missus blaming me if you catch your death.

BEATRIX: Don't worry. I'll take the blame. What you ought to take is my good advice. If I were you. I'd eat my dinner before it catches cold, then I'd take my medicine and go directly to bed. (*BEATRIX makes no reply, and no action.*) Well. . . ?

BEATRIX: Veal cutlet? Rice pudding?

JANE: Just like every other day.

BEATRIX: I know. but . . . but, Jane -- today's Christmas Eve!

JANE: Yes. . . ?

BEATRIX: I only thought perhaps Cook might have prepared something. . . well, something. . .

JANE: Hmm?

BEATRIX: Different, at least.

JANE: (*Lifting the lid of teapot.*) I believe the tea is different. (*A sniff.*) Yes -- camomile. (*BEATRIX makes a face. JANE clanks down the lid.*) Camomile is most beneficial for a child with a cold, if drunk up warm. Shall I pour?

BEATRIX: I can manage.

JANE: As you wish.

BEATRIX: (*Under her breath.*) Nothing's ever been as I wish, and never will be.

JANE: Miss?

BEATRIX: Nothing.

JANE: Speaking to the animals again?

BEATRIX: There's no one else.

JANE: (A Pause.) Your brother's train was to've arrived at quarter past. I'll wager he's on his way here at this very moment. Mow, isn't that a cheering notion? Young Master Bertram come home for Christmas!

BEATRIX: Come home, yes -- for Christmas, no.

JANE: Yes. . . well. . . you know what I mean.

BEATRIX: You'll be celebrating tonight, Jane?

JANE: Oh, won't I just! Me and all the relations -- gathered round the hearth at my great-Aunt Tiggerty's -- drinking Christmas punch, playing at snapdragon, then the gifts and . . . (*She halts herself.*) Well, I look forward to being with my family, that's all. I'm sure you and Master Bertram will have every bit as wonderful a reunion.

BEATRIX: I do miss his company.

JANE: Of course you do. I'll send him directly up as soon as he arrives.

BEATRIX: Yes, please do, Jane.

JANE: And I understand your parents are expected back at three.

BEATRIX: You needn't send them up.

JANE: With any luck, I'll have finished my chores and be on my way by then. In regards to that, Miss Beatrix, I'd be much obliged if you'd attend to your meal, so's I can take the tray back down ta the kitchen.

BEATRIX: Take it now, if you like. I'm not at all hungry.

JANE: (*Exiting.*) Hungry or no, you'll never be rid of your cold if you starve yourself to death. And don't forget to take your medicine.

BEATRIX: Medicine. What good is it, I'd like to know. It may cure my cold, but what about the rest? (*She has poured herself a spoonful and swallows. She quickly pours a cup of tea and chases the medicine. She coughs at the taste.*) Bitter! All so bitter! I shan't have it! Not today! Today ought to be special! (*Music. She steps to the dollhouse and retrieves the mouse.*) Yes -- special -- like at Jane's family's. Did you hear what she said, Miss Mouse? She's to have Christmas punch and presents and playing of games: snapdragon, she called it. . . (*She has allowed herself: briefly, to get excited. Her smile fades abruptly.*) But I don't know what that is. (*She puts the mouse back in the dollhouse.*) Oh, Miss Mouse -- I am so sorry. Sorry you must spend the holiday in a house such as this. Perhaps somewhere you have a family waiting, as Jane does? One that makes merry at Christmas? I'd set you free, if I were certain that you had. Am I keeping you from some happy celebration? I wish you could tell me what it's like -- Christmas in a mouse house. I can only wonder. . . (*She sits on the windowseat with a sigh and begins to sketch on the frosted windowpane.*) I imagine a nursery room like mine, but decked out with boughs of evergreen and . . . No. Not a nursery. A parlour. . . (*She resumes drawing.*) . . . where people bustle about the day. With a comfy, cushioned sofa too. Yes, there a

mouse might dream a while, cozy and warm, gazing at the
fire . . .

The winter sunlight begins to stream through the drawing onto BEATRIX'S face - - pulsing
gently as the girl closes her eyes, All light but this fades from the nursery as another light - -
from the fireplace in the "Mouse Parlour" - - begins to flicker and pulse in unison with the
sunlight.