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Opening extract from

Ordinary Basil and the Island of the Volcano Monkeys

Written by

Wiley Miller

Published by

Bloomsbury

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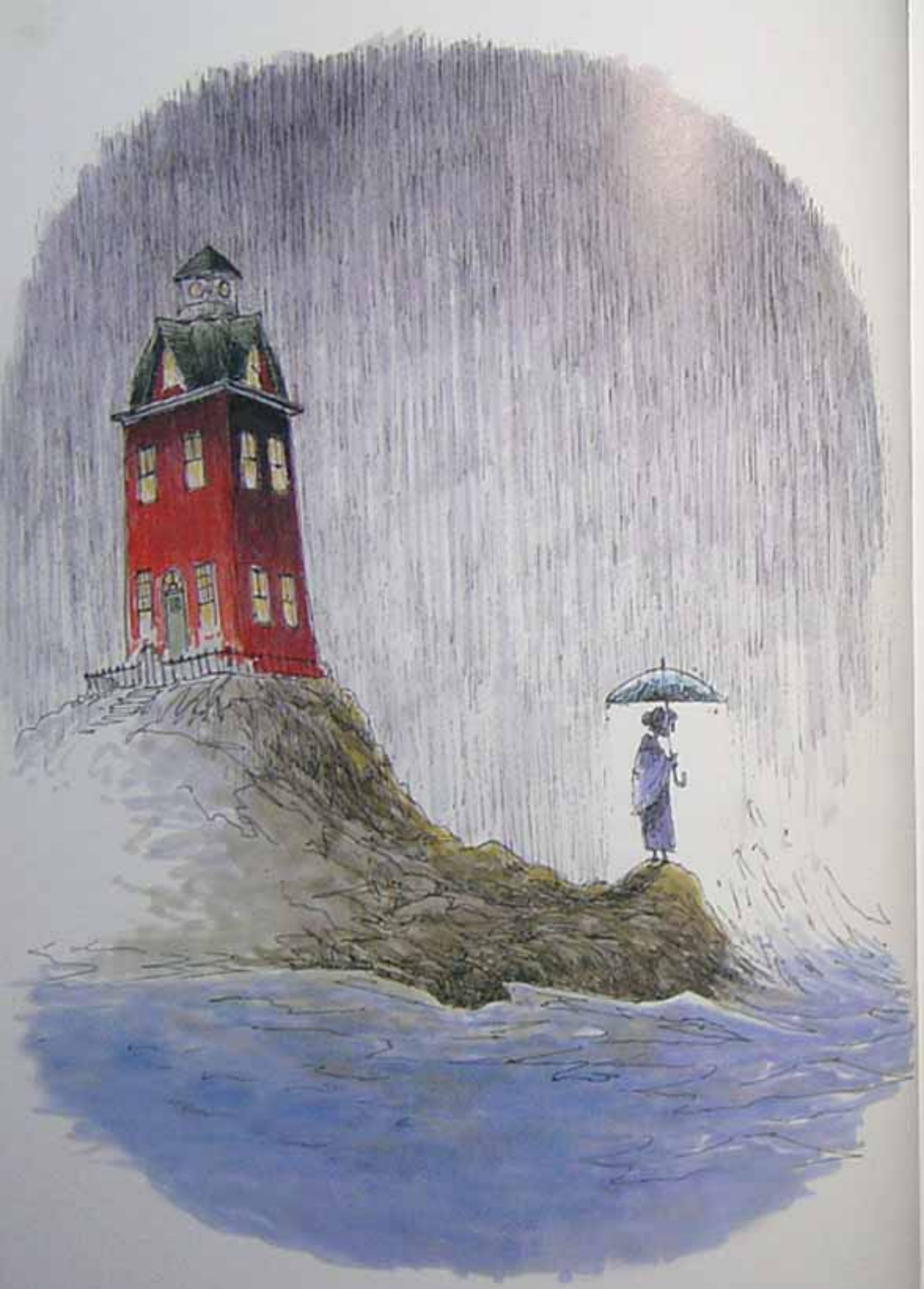


CHAPTER ONE

Missing

THE SPRING OF 1899 was a miserable time in the Pepperells' lighthouse. Twelve-year-old Basil was missing.

"How long has it been, ma'am?" the town constable asked as a light rain bounced off his cap.

"Two weeks, three days, and fourteen hours," replied Mrs. Pepperell. Tears filled her red-rimmed eyes.

"I've seen this a hundred times, ma'am," the constable said. "Boys his age want more adventure. They think they're spreading their wings by running off on a schooner.

They always come home—knocked down a peg or two, and wiser for it in the long run."

"Always?" Mrs. Pepperell seemed unconvinced.

"Well," the constable sheepishly replied, "most times."

"But it's not like Basil to do that," Mrs. Pepperell said. "Oh, I know what you're thinking. His crazy great-uncle Arthur set off in a boat and never came back. But Basil's just an ordinary boy, not one given to run off like that."

"Had Basil been acting any differently lately?" The constable pulled out his notepad. "Or did he mention anything about meeting strangers?"

"Well . . ." Mrs. Pepperell hesitated. "He talked about an adventure he had during the winter. . . ."

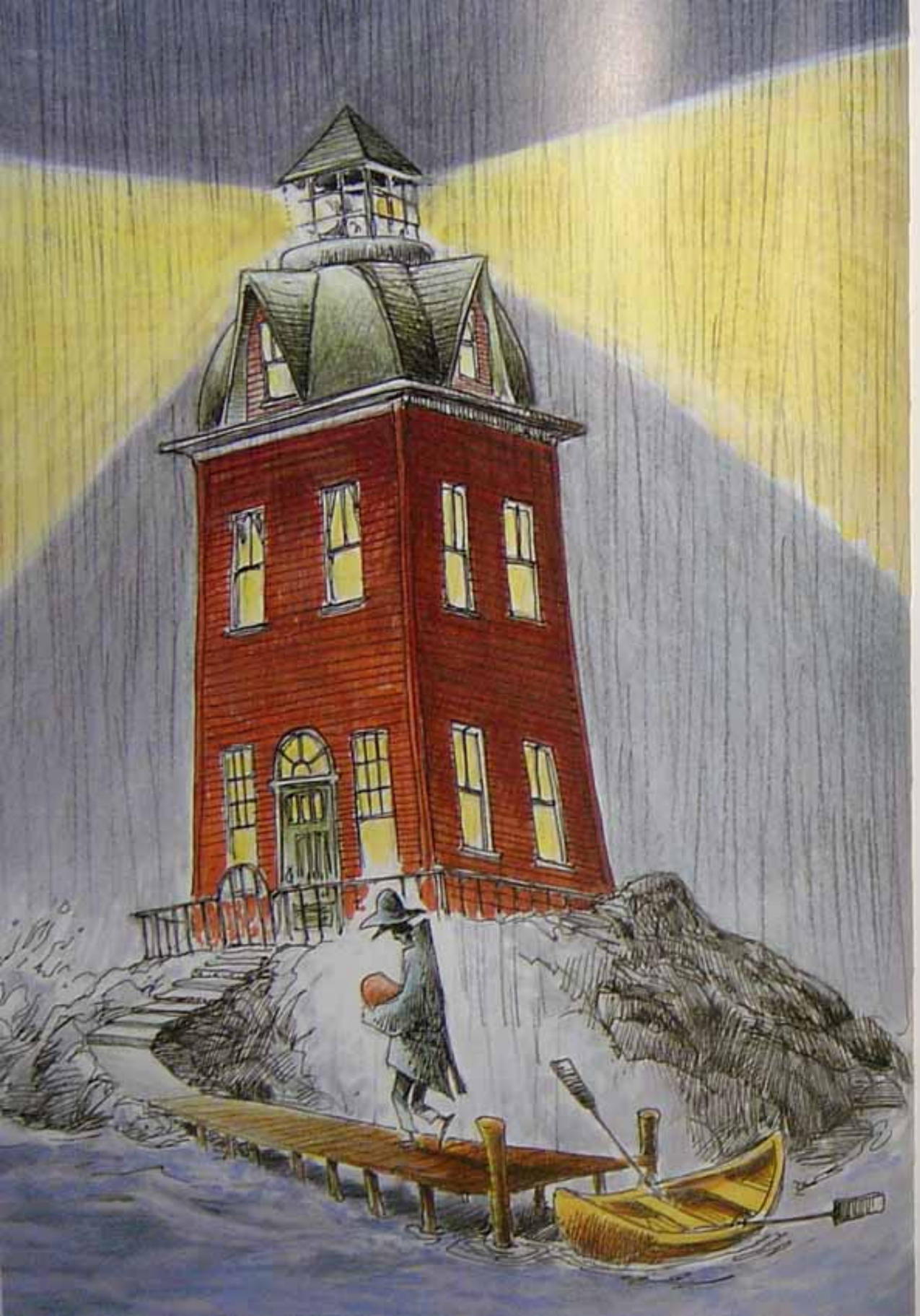
"Ah!" the constable said excitedly. He began taking notes. "Tell me about it!"

"It was something about a man taking him off in a flying boat. He said they went to Helios, a city of geniuses up in the clouds. Then he met a girl with a giant flying reptile, and . . ." Mrs. Pepperell stopped. The constable was smirking. He put his pen away.

"It was just a dream, of course," Mrs. Pepperell said quickly.

"Hmm . . ." the constable muttered. "Well, I'd better be getting back now." He tipped his cap and then headed off in a small skiff. He heaved a sigh. It didn't look good.

As Mrs. Pepperell walked up the twisting staircase, something in the lighthouse window caught her eye. A small boat was rowing toward the island. "The constable must have forgotten something." She hurried back downstairs.



The boat pulled up to the dock, and a very tall, shadowy figure emerged. He carefully picked up a bundle and carried it to the front door. Then he gently put it down.

His long, thin fingers reached inside his drenched overcoat and pulled out an envelope. He placed it on the bundle before he returned to the boat.

As the man walked away, Mrs. Pepperell opened the door. She didn't recognize the impossibly tall figure. "Who are you? What do you want?" she shouted through the din of pouring rain.

The man slowly turned. All Mrs. Pepperell could see was a red eye peering out from the shadow of a broad hat.

"Just tell him zis," the man said in a thick Germanic accent. "Now ve are even." Then he disappeared into the darkness.

Mrs. Pepperell looked down and pulled back the blanket covering the bundle on her doorstep.

"BASIL!" she screamed.

CHAPTER TWO

Monkey Island

AS THE SUN ROSE, a shaft of light lit Basil's bedroom. In the chair next to his bed, Mrs. Pepperell sat beside her ailing boy.

Slowly Basil opened his eyes. "How . . . how did I get back?" he asked.

"A tall man brought you home. I've never seen him before, and I don't think I want to see him again. There was something sinister about him—something . . . evil."

"Von Röttweil . . ." Basil sat up straight in both surprise and fear.

"Do you know him?" his mother asked softly.

"Sort of," Basil said, trying to be truthful.

Then, reaching into a pocket of her robe, Mrs. Pepperell pulled out an envelope, still damp from the rain. "He left this note for you. He said you're even now. What does that mean, dear?" She spoke as calmly as she could, trying not to show her distress.