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opening extract from

Tumtum and Nutmeg: A Christmas Adventure

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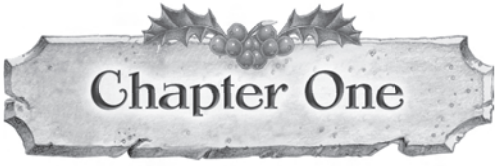
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Christmas was coming, and Nutmouse Hall looked very splendid.

Tumtum and Nutmeg had put up a tree in the library, with a big pile of presents underneath. And the drawing room and the ballroom and the banqueting room had all been adorned with tinsel.

General and Mrs Marchmouse were coming for lunch on Christmas Day, and Nutmeg had been

baking and bottling and pickling since early October.

When Tumtum peeked in the larder, his tummy started to rumble. There was a glazed ham and a pork pie and a plum pudding . . . and there were mince pies and jellied fruits and sugared ants, and a big white cake with chocolate reindeer on top.

He could hardly wait for Christmas Day to come.

'Only two more nights to go,' he said hungrily.

'Yes, and we've still a lot to get through,' Nutmeg fussed.

They had just finished supper, and Nutmeg was sitting at the kitchen table, making a long list of things to do.

'Now let's see . . .' she said, nibbling the end of her pencil. 'We've the Christmas crackers to stuff, and the pears to poach, and the silver to shine, and we must polish the ballroom floor, and hang the mistletoe . . . Oh, and gracious me if I'm not forgetting to glaze the marzipan fruits!'

'I'm sure we'll manage,' Tumtum said. 'Tomorrow's Christmas Eve, so we've still a whole day to get everything ready. And you've been baking for weeks. Just think what a feast it's going to be!'

Tumtum was very excited. But Nutmeg looked worried.

'I hope Arthur and Lucy have a nice Christmas too,' she said. 'When I looked under their tree this morning, there were no presents at all. And their larder was almost bare. Would you believe, I don't

think Mr Mildew's even made a plum pudding!'

'Well I'm sure Father Christmas will bring them something nice,' Tumtum said.

'I do hope so,' Nutmeg replied. 'But I bet their Christmas stockings are full of holes.' She looked anxiously at her watch. 'Let's go up to the attic and I'll see if they need darning,' she said. 'It's nearly ten o'clock – the children are sure to be asleep by now.'

Tumtum agreed, so he took his torch, then they let themselves out of Nutmouse Hall, and tiptoed through their front gates into the Mildews' kitchen.

Tumtum went first, cautiously twitching his nose. But there was nothing to fear. The lights were out, and everything was very quiet. He turned and beckoned Nutmeg to follow.

They ran through to the hall, then clambered upstairs to the landing.

They could hear footsteps in the study as Mr Mildew paced about, trying to think of another silly thing to invent.

They crept past his door, and started heaving themselves up the steep flight of wooden steps to the attic.

Puff! Pant! Wheeze! It was hard work for two little mice.

Finally, they reached the top and crept out on to Arthur and Lucy's bedroom floor.

They could hear the children snoring softly, but everything else was still. The curtains had been left open, and the floor was pale with moonlight.

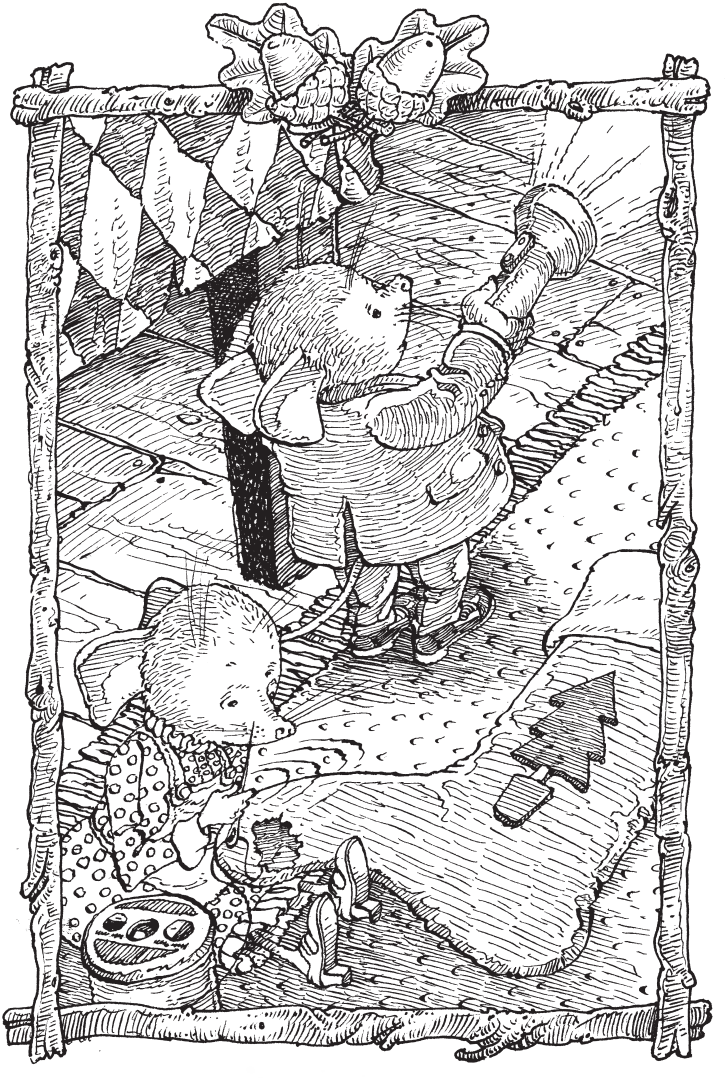
‘Look, there are the stockings!’ Nutmeg said, pointing across the toy train track.

The children had dug them out of the toy chest, ready to hang up on Christmas Eve, and now they were lying in a bundle on the floor.

The mice ran over to them, and stretched them out flat on the carpet. They were very smart stockings. Each was made of red felt, with a white rim, and a Christmas tree embroidered on the front.

‘This one’s got a hole in the toe, just as I suspected,’ Nutmeg tutted. She ran over to the doll’s house, and fetched her sewing basket from the cupboard under the stairs.

Then she sat at the foot of the stocking, and started to darn.



Swoosh! Swish! Swipe!

Nutmeg always darned at lightning speed.

While she was working, Tumtum shone his torch round the room to see if there were any toys that needed to be repaired. Then suddenly he noticed a big white envelope propped up on the chest of drawers.

He stepped back, and craned his neck up to see who it was addressed to. 'Look, dear, they've written a letter to Father Christmas!' he exclaimed. 'I wonder what they've asked him for.'

Nutmeg looked worried. 'Do you think it will reach him in time?' she said. 'Tomorrow's Christmas Eve. If they don't go out straight after breakfast, they'll miss the last post.'

'I think we had better see what it says,'

Tumtum said. 'Then perhaps we could send Father Christmas a separate letter by Royal Mouse Post, telling him what the children want.'

'Good idea.' Nutmeg agreed – for the Royal Mouse Post was very efficient. Even if the Nutmouses posted their letter on Christmas Eve, Father Christmas would be sure to receive it in time.

So Nutmeg abandoned her sewing, then she and Tumtum hurriedly climbed to the top of the chest, scrambling up by a pair of tights hanging from the top drawer.

They carefully prised open the envelope, and tugged out the two letters from inside. Then they stood at the bottom of the page, reading them by the light of Tumtum's torch. The first one said:

Dear Father Christmas,

If you have one on your sledge, please may I have a toy car with lights and a horn and an engine that goes 'Vroom!' – like I wanted last year. I'm sorry you couldn't come then, but I hope you can come this Christmas instead.

Thank you very much.

Love from,

Arthur Mildew.

'Well, I'm sure Father Christmas will be able to give him a car!' Nutmeg said. 'But I wonder why he didn't give him one last time.'

But when they read Lucy's letter everything became clear. It said:

Dear Father Christmas,

I'm very sorry that you couldn't come last year because the chimney was bricked up. We asked Pa to unblock it, so you could get down this time, but he said he couldn't, because if he did the wind would come in and we'd all be very cold. We hope you'll find another way in. And if you do, I'd like a box of magic tricks please – like I asked for last year.

Love,

Lucy Mildew.

'Oh, Tumtum! What are we to do?' Nutmeg cried. 'If Mr Mildew's blocked the chimney, then there's no hope of Father Christmas coming! And the children won't get any presents at all!'

Tumtum looked upset too. He wouldn't enjoy

opening his own presents knowing that the children had none.

Christmas would be spoiled for everyone. Unless . . .

'*We* shall have to find them a toy car and a box of magic tricks,' Nutmeg said.

'But how, dear?' Tumtum asked helplessly. 'It's Christmas Eve tomorrow – and the nearest toy shop is five miles away! And besides, I don't suppose they would serve mice!'

'I wasn't suggesting we should go to the toy shop!' Nutmeg cried. She'd had another idea. But it was such a bold one, it made her paws feel clammy.

'We must go and see Baron Toymouse,' she said.

Tumtum turned very pale. '*Baron Toymouse!*' he stammered. 'Gracious! Do you think that's wise?'

Fireside Flapjacks

Makes 12

Ingredients:

- *200g rolled oats*
- *50g golden caster sugar*
- *150g butter*
- *4 tablespoons of golden syrup*

Cooking Instructions:

1. **Preheat the oven to 190C/375/Gas Mark 5 and grease a shallow, square baking tin with butter.*
2. **Melt the butter, sugar and syrup in a saucepan on a low heat, then remove from the heat and stir in the oats with a wooden spoon.*
3. *Pour the mixture into the tin and pat down gently to make sure it is even.*
4. *Put the tin in the oven for about 20 minutes, until the corners are brown but the middle is soft.*
5. *Leave to cool for 30 minutes then cut into squares.*



Sugared ants

(Makes a large jarful)

Ingredients:

- *100g raisins*
- *50g golden caster sugar*
- *35g ground almonds*
- *70g melted butter*

Cooking Instructions:

1. *Stir the sugar and the ground almonds together in a bowl.*
2. **Melt the butter in a pan and then pour the contents into a separate bowl, and stir in the raisins.*
3. *Transfer the buttery raisins using a skimming ladle to the sugar and almond mixture, and roll them around until they are fully coated.*
4. *Spread the sugared ants out spoonful by spoonful on a baking tray lined with foil. Leave them to crystallise overnight then store in a large jam jar*

