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opening extract from

Tumtum and Nutmeg: A Seaside Adventure

written by

Emily Bearn

published by

Egmont Books

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'Told simply, with charming detail, this old-fashioned and well-published story . . . will delight children who are of an age to relish secret friends and a cosy world in miniature.' *Sunday Times*

'Bearn is a fine writer and her tale . . . is a gently humorous page-turner full of little details . . . Highly recommended.' *Financial Times*

'A stunning debut . . . This is most definitely a candidate for a classic of the future.' LoveReading4Kids

'Bearn's style is as crisp and warm as a home-baked biscuit.' Amanda Craig, *The Times*

'I bought this to give to my god-daughter . . . but wanting to make sure it was suitable I checked by reading the first few pages. I can only say it was glued to my hand until two hours later when I'd reached the end . . . Old-fashioned in the best sense of the word, it's charmingly illustrated and a wonderful story.' *The Oldie*

‘A timeless book: charming, witty, intelligent, gentle, kind, and extremely exciting. Like E.B. White with a spider in *Charlotte’s Web*, Emily Bearn has taken those little-loved creatures, mice, and made them adorable and compelling . . . I’d recommend this to all parents of children of reading age.’ Amazon

‘A wonderfully sweet and charmingly illustrated novel for younger readers which put me in mind of the *Brambly Hedge* stories . . . This is a warm and gentle story.’ Askews Library Service

‘This is a brilliant, engaging story full of wonderful characters.’ *Primary Times*

‘This is an extremely well written book that reminds me of Beatrix Potter. The illustrations are superb.’ writeaway.org.uk

‘Gentle humour and old fashioned wisdom combine to create an instant classic that will be loved for years to come?’ *Evening Express Aberdeen*

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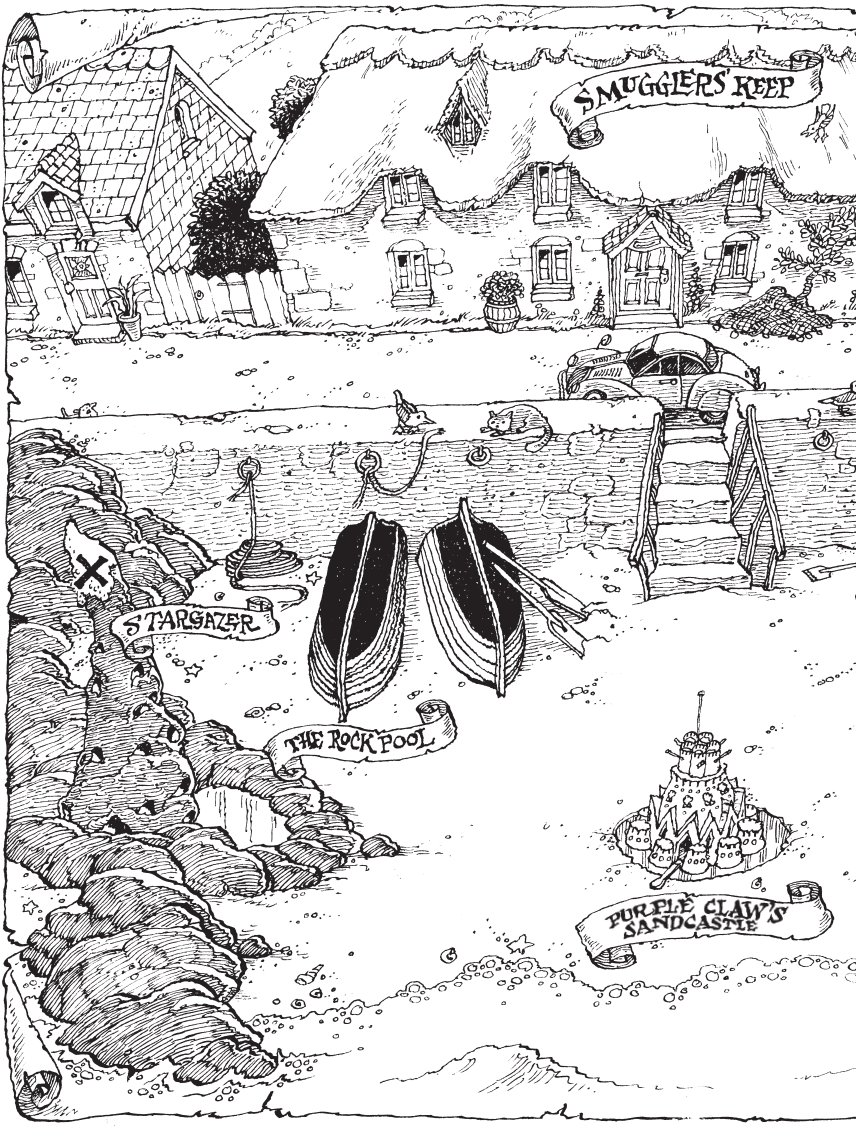
For Mark


SMUGGLERS' KEEP
STARGAZER
THE ROCK POOL
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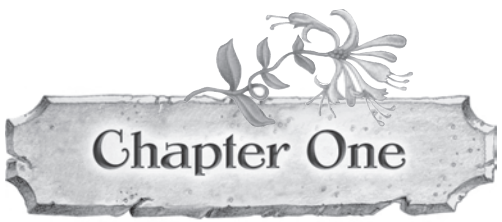
X MARKS WHERE THE TREASURE IS BURIED



Tumtum was sitting at the kitchen table, with his head slumped in his paws. '*The seaside?* But we can't possibly go to the seaside,' he groaned. 'We might be chased by a crab!'

Tumtum had heard very frightening things about the seaside. He didn't like the sound of it at all.

But Nutmeg's mind was already made up. 'If Arthur and Lucy are going to the seaside, then we

are going too,' she said firmly.

'When are they leaving?' Tumtum asked miserably.

'Tomorrow morning,' Nutmeg replied. 'I must say, I wish they'd given us a little more warning!'

She had only learned of the trip a few minutes ago, when she had poked her head into the kitchen and heard the children discussing it.

'They're going to stay with their Uncle Jeremy,' she went on. 'And would you believe it, Mr Mildew is going to let them travel by train *all on their own*! We shall have to stow away in one of their rucksacks and keep an eye on them.'

Tumtum scowled. The last time he'd stowed away in a rucksack it had been very uncomfortable.

'How long are they going for?' he asked.

'A week,' Nutmeg replied.

'*A week!*' Tumtum cried. A week is a long time in a mouse's life. 'Who will look after Nutmouse Hall?' he asked.

'I shall ask Mrs Marchmouse to come and keep an eye on things,' Nutmeg said busily. 'Now don't look so glum, dear. The sea air will do us good. And a week will go by in a flash. You shall love it once you're there!'

'No I shan't!' Tumtum muttered. The very thought of the seaside made him shudder. He knew he wouldn't like it one bit.

'I hope this doesn't turn into another adventure,' he said glumly.

'Of course it won't, dear,' Nutmeg replied.

But Tumtum wasn't so sure.

The following day, towards teatime, there was a sudden *Toot! Toot!* then a loud clatter of brakes, as the express train drew into Mousewall-on-Sea.

'Hooray! We're here!' Arthur shouted, leaping from his seat. They had been cooped up in the train carriage for hours, and he was longing to get out.

Lucy sat up, looking a little startled. She had been asleep, and her toes were full of pins and needles.

'Can you see him?' Arthur asked, pulling down their bags from the luggage rack.

Lucy pressed her nose to the window, and peered into the throng of faces on the platform.

'There he is!' she cried.

She had only met Uncle Jeremy once before, and that had been ages ago, when she was only seven. But she spotted him at once, for he looked quite different to anyone else. He was round and comfortable, with a red nose, and a waistcoat stretched so tightly over his stomach that the buttons looked as if they were about to go *Ping!*

'Here's your bag,' Arthur said, heaving down Lucy's rucksack. 'Crikey! What did you pack in it? It weighs a ton!'

'Well at least I didn't bring four pairs of shoes like you did,' Lucy replied.

But Arthur was right – when she pulled her rucksack on to her back it did feel rather heavy. It was curious, for she was sure she hadn't packed much.

But as soon as they got off the train she forgot

all about it, because there was so much else to think about.

The children had never been to Mousewall before, and it all felt very strange. Uncle Jeremy drove them home through a maze of little wriggling lanes, with hedges so high you couldn't see over them.

Then finally they came to the top of a very tall hill – and when they looked down, they could see the sea, spread out like a big sheet of silver.

Uncle Jeremy stopped the car a moment so they could have a look.

In front of them was a thin road, twisting down to a crescent-shaped bay circled by green cliffs. In the middle of the bay there was a little beach, and a cluster of cottages.

'That would be a nice place to live,' Arthur said enviously.

'Well, I'm glad you think so,' Uncle Jeremy replied.

'Is that where *you* live?' the children cried. 'Oh, how wonderful!'

Uncle Jeremy looked very pleased. Then he started the car again, and drove all the way down the hill, until they came to a white cottage with fishing nets piled in front of it, and a sign saying

on the door.

The children piled out of the car and looked around in delight. The cottage was on a narrow lane, and just on the other side of the lane was a tall

SMUGGLERS
KEEP

stone wall, with steps leading down to the beach. They had known that Uncle Jeremy's house was by the sea – but they hadn't expected it to be as close as this.

And Smugglers' Keep was such a mysterious name for a cottage, they felt something exciting was sure to happen to them there.

'Come in and I'll show you your room,' Uncle Jeremy said, hauling their bags out of the car. He opened the front door, and the children ran inside to explore.

Smugglers' Keep was very old. The furniture was dark and dusty, and the floorboards creaked. The children's bedroom was at the top of the house, and it had tall wooden beds and a pointed window looking out to sea.

'Well, you sort yourselves out, then we can have supper,' Uncle Jeremy said, dropping their bags on the floor. 'Mrs Blythe's made a fish pie.'

Uncle Jeremy had already told the children about Mrs Blythe. She was his housekeeper, and she did everything for him – or at least everything that Uncle Jeremy felt he couldn't do himself, such as cooking and cleaning, and making beds.

'We'll be down in a minute,' Arthur said. He hadn't eaten anything since lunch, and his stomach was rumbling.

'I'll have this bed,' he said, claiming the one nearest the window.

'All right,' Lucy said, thinking it wasn't worth arguing about. She tossed her rucksack on to the other bed, nearest the door – and as it landed, she

heard something squeak. 'Goodness, doesn't this room feel funny,' she said. 'Everything creaks!'

Arthur ran to open the window, and that creaked too.

Then – 'Wow!' Lucy said. 'Look at that!' For tucked beside the wardrobe was a big doll's house, with pale pink walls and peppermint shutters. Lucy thought it was the prettiest doll's house she had ever seen. And yet when she peeked inside it was quite empty. There was not a stick of furniture, not even a bed. 'I wonder whose it is,' she said. 'It's odd that it doesn't have anything in it.'

'Oh, I don't know. Maybe it belonged to Uncle Jeremy when he was a little boy,' Arthur said. He wasn't interested in doll's houses. He wanted to explore the beach.

But Lucy thought it was rather mysterious. 'If only we were here longer, I could make some furniture for it,' she said. She was still gazing at it as she pulled open the strings of her rucksack, and started tugging the contents out on to the bed.

'Oh, come on,' Arthur said impatiently. 'We can unpack later. Let's have tea first.'

'Hang on. It won't take long,' Lucy said.

'But I'm starving!' Arthur groaned, hovering at the doorway.

'Oh, all right,' Lucy sighed. Then she dropped the rucksack back on her bed, and ran after him downstairs. And it was just as well she didn't finish unpacking, or she would have found something most unexpected hidden among her clothes.