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Opening extract from

Tumtum and Nutmeg: A Circus Adventure

Written by

Emily Bearn

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Tumtum & Nutmeg

A CIRCUS ADVENTURE



by Emily Bearn

Illustrated by Nick Price

EGMONT

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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*

'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*

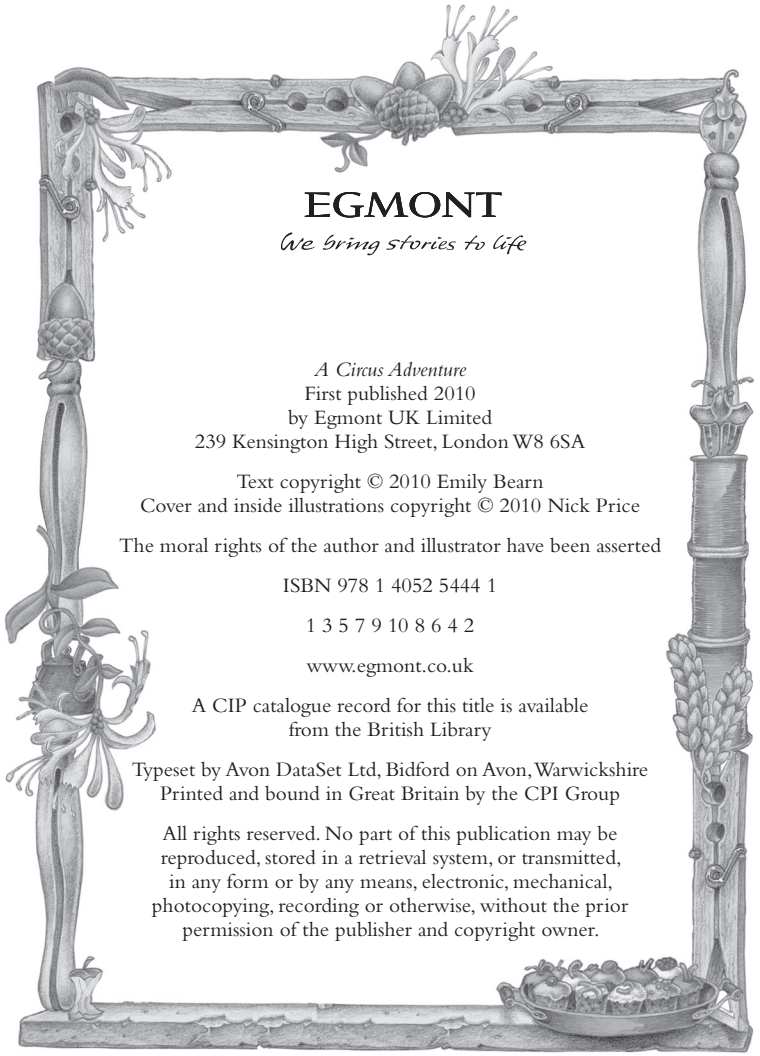
‘A timeless book: charming, witty, intelligent, gentle, kind, and extremely exciting. Like E.B. White with a spider in *Charlotte’s Web*, Emily Bearn has taken those little-loved creatures, mice, and made them adorable and compelling . . . I’d recommend this to all parents of children of reading age.’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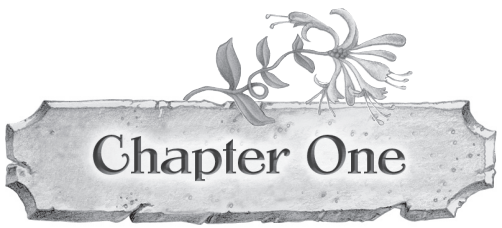
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For Great
Aunt Daphne



Chapter One

General Marchmouse swaggered past the compost heap, with a song rising in his heart. He had good reason to be cheerful. For today was his birthday! And mice do not have nearly as many birthdays as we do, so it was a very special day indeed.

He had been busy since breakfast time, opening his cards and unwrapping his presents.

And now it was almost dark, but the best part of the day was about to come. For tonight his friends Tumtum and Nutmeg had invited him for a birthday feast at Nutmouse Hall.

Perhaps Nutmeg will have made an earwig pie, he thought hungrily. *And a toad-in-the-hole, and a cockroach soufflé, and a strawberry trifle with toasted almonds on top!*

He hurried on under the rose bushes, and clambered down on to the garden path, with his invitation clutched tight in his paw.

It was a cold November evening, and he was glad to see Rose Cottage looming ahead of him. The curtains were still open, and all the windows were brightly lit.

'Hmm. It looks like the Mildews are at home,'

the General muttered. 'I shall have to be very careful – Tumtum will be furious if I give his hiding place away.'

He crept up to the back door, then wriggled under it and peeked his nose into the kitchen. There was a spider dozing on the doormat, and a cockroach scuttling beneath the sink. But there were no humans in sight. So he set off across the floor.

The General had visited Nutmouse Hall many times before, so he knew just where to go. It was a very grand house, built inside the Mildews' broom cupboard. And its front gates were hidden beneath the old wooden dresser that stood against the kitchen wall.

The General marched along, taking his usual route – past the laundry basket, under the vegetable

rack, then round the leg of the kitchen table.

He hadn't far to go, and when he peered under the dresser he could see a tiny bead of light coming from the Nutmouses' gates. He hurried on, wading through a puddle of ketchup on the floor.

But then suddenly he stepped into a dark shadow. And when he looked up, he saw the most astonishing sight:

It was a circus top!

The General froze, and stared at it in astonishment. It was the finest circus top he had ever seen. It had red and blue stripes, and it was bigger than a beach ball. And standing beside it was a little ticket booth with velvet curtains.

The General felt his heart quicken. *It must be*

a mouse circus, he thought, *for everything is mouse sized! Well, whomever it belongs to is a very lucky mouse, that's for sure!*

He stood there a moment, gazing admiringly at the big top. He wondered if there were dancing dragonflies or racing slugs inside, or any of the other wonderful things that mouse circuses usually have.

He decided to go in and see. But when he reached the entrance, he saw a silver card lying on the ground, with the words



written on the front.

'Well I never!' the General said. 'This circus

must be a present for me!'

The birthday card was bigger than he was. He heaved it open, wondering who it was from. But when he read what it said, his face fell:

Dear Arthur

This is a toy circus that I was given long ago, when I was not much older than you are now. I hope you enjoy playing with it as much as I did.

Happy birthday!

Love from Uncle Jeremy.

'Humph!' the General grunted. 'It must be Arthur's birthday too. So it's not a mouse circus after all – it's just a toy!'

The General thought it very unfair that the circus should have been given to Arthur instead of

him. ‘It’s far too good for a boy!’ he said crossly.

He was still curious to see what was inside the big top. So he pulled open the flap, and marched through. And how he stared! For he had entered an enormous stadium, with tiered seats around the edges, and a trapeze up above. And before him was a huge throng of circus animals – wooden horses and leopards, and tigers and elephants, all prancing round the ring.

The General rubbed his eyes in astonishment. The toys looked so real, that for a moment he thought they were! And standing in their midst was a toy ringmaster, dressed in a shining gold suit, and holding a whip.

‘Lucky fellow!’ the General muttered. How he wished that he had a gold suit too! What fun it

would be to stand in the middle of the ring, making the toy animals dance to the crack of his whip!

He stood there a long time, filled with envy. From somewhere in Rose Cottage, he heard the clock chime seven. He knew Tumtum and Nutmeg would be wondering where he was, for he was late for supper. And yet he couldn't tear himself away.

'Surely there can't be any harm in my just trying the suit on and having one tiny crack of the whip,' he reasoned. 'It is my birthday, after all!'

He glanced guiltily over his shoulder. And after a very short period of hesitation, he marched up to the ringmaster and tore off his clothes. He tugged off his own Royal Mouse Army uniform, and tossed it to the floor. Then he pulled on the gold trousers. They were very tight, and he had to

take a big breath in order to do up the button. But the jacket was a perfect fit.

He strutted about the ring, feeling very grand.

Then he snatched the whip, and gave it a hard crack. 'March!' he shouted. The lions shook, and an elephant toppled to the floor. The General whooped with joy – oh, what fun!

On he went, swaggering and shouting and cracking his whip, until soon all the wooden animals had been thrashed to the ground. No creature was spared. An elephant's trunk snapped off, and one of the lions lost a leg.

The General wondered what to do next.

Then he had a daring plan. *I know!* he thought. *I shall go and catch that cockroach I saw scuttling off*



under the sink, and train it to swing on the trapeze!

He tucked the whip under his arm, and ran out of the tent. But as he stepped into the kitchen, he got a terrible fright. Arthur and Lucy had appeared!

The General gulped, and dived back inside the big top. He had been making such a racket he hadn't heard them come downstairs. He knew that Arthur would be furious if he found him here, and saw what he had done to his toys.

He stood trembling, listening to the children's feet thudding on the floor.

'Just look at my circus!' Arthur said proudly. 'Isn't it the most splendid circus you've ever seen! I don't mind one bit that Pa forgot my birthday – this circus makes up for everything. Come on, let's

play with it again.'

'All right,' Lucy replied. 'Wait a second while I put the milk bottles out.'

The General's mind whirled with terror. He heard Lucy open the garden door, and clank the bottles outside. Then he saw the children's shadows looming over the tent . . . There was nowhere he could hide . . .

There was a rustle, then the flap of the tent slowly opened, and a huge pink hand reached inside . . .

'Oh, what am I to do!' the General quivered. 'It's my birthday, and I'm going to be caught!'

But the General was a very lucky mouse. For at that very moment, as if by a miracle, the telephone rang.

‘I bet that’s Uncle Jeremy, calling to check the circus has arrived!’ Arthur said.

The children both jumped up, and ran into the hall.

The General seized his chance to escape. In his haste, he forgot all about his army uniform, and dashed out of the big top wearing the ringmaster’s clothes. Then he turned and hurtled towards Nutmouse Hall.

But as he skirted round the big top, he saw something so completely, utterly dazzling that for a moment it made him forget his fear. It was a bus. But not just any bus. This was, quite simply, the most splendid, most beautiful bus the General had *ever* seen.

It was gleaming red, with grinning headlights,

and silver wheels the size of saucers. He crept up to it, and pressed his nose to the window. There was a fat leather steering wheel, and a gear stick as big as a lollipop. And in the back of the bus were two little camp beds, with green quilts and crisp white pillows.

The General's whiskers twitched. The bus looked very inviting. He could hear Arthur and Lucy talking on the telephone in the hall. He knew they might come back into the kitchen at any moment, but he was too excited to care.

Then suddenly he felt a cold breeze cutting his ankles; and when he looked round he saw to his surprise that the children had left the garden door open.

He stood there a moment, peering out. The sky

had turned black, but he could see the pale outline of the garden path, twisting away in the moonlight.

And suddenly it was as if the moon and the stars were all calling out to him, whispering his name.

With a pounding heart, he pulled open the bus door and clambered into the driver's seat, tossing the whip in beside him. Then he gripped hold of the steering wheel, and flicked on the ignition.

The engine gave a shudder, then a *Vrooom!* and the bus shot forwards across the floor.

'Faster! Faster!' the General cried, slamming his paw on the accelerator. He swerved under the kitchen table, and tore towards the open door.

The spider fled out of his way, and a fly


CIRCUS
CIRCUS

splattered on the windscreen. The General clung tight to his seat as the bus bounced over the doorstep, and crashed on to the garden path. Then, with a shriek of joy, he turned on his headlights, and sped into the night.