

THE SISTER SERAPHINA MYSTERIES

The Strange Sound by the Sea

by Haley Stewart

Crimp



Illustrated by
Betsy Wallin

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Chapter One

Summer Holiday!

The sun sparkled on the choppy sea. The Viking longship silently approached the shoreline. Warriors stepped onto the sandy beach, ready to attack the unsuspecting villagers beyond the cliffs . . .

Just then, a paper airplane bumped an unsuspecting Marigold Mouseweather's left ear, startling her out of a daydream about the adventure story she was writing. She turned to look at the launcher of the airplane and saw her best friend, Dominic Whiskerbright, smiling at her.

"I knew you weren't paying attention, Goldie," he whispered with a chuckle.

Goldie grinned and pulled an eraser out of her desk that soon met the tip of her friend's nose. He sneezed loudly.

"Honestly, Goldie and Dom! A little more attentiveness for the last five minutes of the school year, if you please," insisted Sister Seraphina, the literature teacher at Saint Wulfhilda's School for young mice.

Just as she turned back to the chalkboard, Terence Whistletop dropped his lunch pail, and it rolled noisily along the floor of the classroom all the way to Sister Seraphina's desk.



“Well,” laughed the good-natured teacher, “perhaps we’re not going to get anything else productive done when you all have the summer holiday wiggles! Have a wonderful summer, mice. And if you’re joining the student trip to the seaside, *don’t forget* to have your trunks all packed tonight so you can be ready bright and early tomorrow morning! Class dismissed!”

In seconds, her students were racing out of the classroom, cheering the break from school with whoops and hurrahs.

“A trip to the *seaside*, Goldie! A trip to Lyme Regis! This is the best summer ever!” shouted Dom, on their way out the door of the abbey. As he walked Goldie and her little sister, Lena, home from school, the students chatted eagerly about the adventure ahead.

“The last time we went to the seaside, we took the train. I’ve never ridden in a motorcar before, Dom,” said Goldie. “How exciting it will be!” Goldie *was* excited, but what she didn’t mention to Dom was that along

with her excitement, the idea of traveling to the seaside in a motorcar also made her a little nervous. Would it be scary? Could a mouse fall out of the motorcar into the lane? Goldie liked plenty of adventure in the stories she wrote, but not necessarily in her own life.

“Lena,” continued Dom, stooping to talk to the shy little mouse, “is this the first year you’re old enough to go on the school trip?”

“Oh yes!” squeaked Lena in a thrilled little voice. “I’ve never seen the seaside before! What is it like, Goldie?”

“Sandy!” answered Goldie. “And windy! And it smells like salt.”

“You’re going to love it, Lena,” added Dom. “I hear that at Lyme Regis you can find shells and even fossils on the beach.”

“And Mother told me the church of Saint Michael and Saint George is *beautiful*,” Goldie told her little sister.

“How come the church is named after *two* saints instead of just one?” Lena asked Goldie as she skipped with glee.

“Heavens, Lena. I have no idea! I do know we’re going to stay in the mouse guest house in the boarding school behind the church! The students there are on summer holiday, too, so it will be empty.”

Lena squealed, “*And* Sister Seraphina and Sister Alberta are coming with us. And they’re everyone’s favorite teachers.”

“My father’s coming, too!” added Dominic. “He’s so excited to chaperone, you know! Mother Alphonsa told him that he’s been working too hard in the abbey garden. She said, ‘The garden is meticulously managed and a hardworking





mouse deserves a holiday just as much as the students do.”

Mother Alphonsa was the abbess of Saint Wulfhilda’s, and Dom and Goldie were very fond of her. She was so warm and kind, it was hard *not* to be fond of her!

She had offered Dominic’s father a job as the abbey gardener during a difficult time for the Whiskerbright family, soon after Dominic’s mother had died.

As they approached the Whiskerbright home, Dom’s father was outside, sweeping their front stoop. “Lena! Goldie! Good to see you!” he said in greeting as the troop of merry mice marched inside. “Now I hear it’s *someone’s* first trip to the seaside!” he remarked in a jolly voice.

Lena grinned, and Mr. Whiskerbright reached for her paw and shook it in a congratulatory way. He said, “You are in for a treat, young lady! Lyme Regis is full of history. The Saxons settled it before Roman times; then the Normans invaded.”

“Who?” asked Lena, her eyes wide with interest.

“The Normans, the descendants of the Vikings, Lena!” answered Mr. Whiskerbright. “There is so much to see there. And lucky for us that the upstairs neighbors decided to make a visit—it’s too far for our bicycles, I’m afraid.”

“I love when the Chestertons go on holiday and we go along,” said Dom. “They always seem to be having such fun no matter where they are!”

Gilbert and Frances Chesterton lived in the house above Saint Wulfhilda’s Abbey. Now that the abbey roof was repaired, the only way



to observe the upstairs neighbors was the hole across from their fireplace. From that spot the mice of Saint Wulfhilda's could listen to Mr. Chesterton (who was a writer) read aloud his new stories to Mrs. Chesterton. And at Christmas, they had the perfect view of the Chestertons' famous parties for children.

"Oh yes! We are lucky to have neighbors with such a wonderful sense of adventure to tag along with! I have the twins packed to stay with your family this week while I'm chaperoning the school trip, Goldie. Your mother was so kind to offer to mind them."

"Can I walk Rosy and Lily to the Mouseweathers' tonight and get them settled, Father?" Dom asked.

"Well, yes, of course. Be sure to give Mr. and Mrs. Mouseweather my thanks! But don't dilly-dally, son. You still need to pack your own trunk tonight before bed so we can leave first thing!"

Dom carried Rosy on his shoulders and Goldie held Lily's paw while Lena skipped ahead, chattering about the seaside.

“Do you think Sister Alberta will want to do some science lessons on the beach?” Goldie asked Dom.

“Can you imagine Sister Alberta at the seaside failing to tell us about oceans and fossil formation?” he replied, laughing.

Goldie smiled. The fact that it was summer holiday from classes would be no match for Sister Alberta’s enthusiasm for teaching.

With the arrival of long summer days, the sun was still shining merrily through the trees as they made their way to Goldie and Lena’s.

Goldie opened the door, carved into a tree trunk, and the happy crew was met by her parents.

“Hullo, Mr. and Mrs. Mouseweather!” greeted Dom. “My father says thank you so much for watching Rosy and Lily.”

“Oh, it’s our pleasure, Dominic,” smiled Mrs. Mouseweather.

Dominic lifted Rosy off his shoulders and gathered his little sisters into a warm hug. “I’m going to miss you, Rosy and Lily! We’ll be back soon, and I promise to bring a surprise from the seaside!”

The twins jumped up and down with excitement, shouting, “Dom bwinging us a tweek fwom the seaside!”



Seeing that Dom was hesitant to say goodbye, Mrs. Mouseweather said in a reassuring voice, “Don’t worry a bit, Dom. We’ll take good care of them. Have a wonderful time in Lyme Regis! We’ll send Goldie and Lena to the meeting spot first thing in the morning.”

The friends waved goodbye for the night, thrilled at the prospect that the seaside was only one sleep away.







Chapter Two

Motorcars and Mysteries

“Hurry, mice! You must all get in your places in the motorcar before the upstairs neighbors finish packing. Not a moment to lose!” urged the abbess, Mother Alphonsa, as Sister Seraphina, Sister Alberta, and Mr. Whiskerbright herded overexcited young mice toward the shiny black vehicle. “If you are safely stowed away in the traveling compartment Sister Alberta has contrived, then you’ll be safe from human eyes. The Chestertons are quite friendly with mice, but there’s no need to take unnecessary risks!”

“That’s right!” Sister Alberta bellowed. “All mice in your positions *on the double!* There is no time to be lost! The upstairs neighbors may start loading the motorcar at any moment. But do not fear! We will embark on this brave journey and not one mouse shall we lose!”

Mother Alphonsa, worried that Sister Alberta’s enthusiasm might alarm the young mice, entrusted her with the task of loading trunks and put calm Sister Seraphina in charge of leading the students to their places.

Sister Seraphina gently led Lena and some of the other youngest students up over the tire and into the open back window of the motorcar.



Sister Alberta had carefully cut a large square into the fabric at the foot of the backseat so that it served as a little flap. There was plenty of room for the trunks, and the mice used pillows to sit comfortably inside this hidey hole. Sister Alberta had sewn strings to the edges of the flap so that the travelers could secure them and no one would be the wiser that ten young mice and their three chaperones were stowing away in the backseat!

Just when every mouse was safely settled, Mother Alphonsa called out, “The upstairs neighbors are arriving! Bon voyage, my dear ones! Have a lovely time in Lyme Regis.”

Goldie and Dom could hear the Chestertons settling into the motorcar and trunks being loaded on the seat above them.

When the engine started, Lena jumped in alarm. Goldie squeezed her paw and, despite being a bit nervous herself, whispered, “Don’t worry! It’s a bit loud, but we’re perfectly safe.”

The motorcar began to move. Bright summer sunlight shone in through the windows and warmed their traveling compartment. The students’ merry laughter was joined by that of the Chestertons, who were laughing together in the front seat.

“Do you think the Chestertons would mind that we’re . . . well . . . *uninvited* companions on their trip?” Goldie asked Dom.

“Not a chance, Goldie! They’re so jolly—they would think it the best joke in the world to know they were chauffeuring a mouse holiday!”