



ODYSSEY

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The BORROWERS



MARY NORTON

Chapter One

IT WAS Mrs. May who first told me about them. No, not me. How could it have been me—a wild, untidy, self-willed little girl who stared with angry eyes and was said to crunch her teeth? Kate, she should have been called. Yes, that was it—Kate. Not that the name matters much either way: she barely comes into the story.

Mrs. May lived in two rooms in Kate's parents' house in London; she was, I think, some kind of relation. Her bedroom was on the first floor, and her sitting room was a room which, as part of the house, was called "the breakfast-room." Now breakfast-rooms are all right in the morning when the sun streams in on the toast and marmalade, but by afternoon they seem to vanish a little and to fill with a strange silvery light, their own twilight; there is a kind of sadness in them then, but as a child it was a sadness Kate liked. She would creep in to Mrs. May just before tea-time and Mrs. May would teach her to crochet.

Mrs. May was old, her joints were stiff, and she was—not strict exactly, but she had that inner certainty which does

instead. Kate was never “wild” with Mrs. May, nor untidy, nor self-willed; and Mrs. May taught her many things besides crochet: how to wind wool into an egg-shaped ball; how to run-and-fell and plan a darn; how to tidy a drawer and to lay, like a blessing, above the contents, a sheet of rustling tissue against the dust.

“Where’s your work, child?” asked Mrs. May one day, when Kate sat hunched and silent upon the hassock. “You mustn’t sit there dreaming. Have you lost your tongue?”

“No,” said Kate, pulling at her shoe button, “I’ve lost the crochet hook.” They were making a bed-quilt—in woolen squares: there were thirty still to do. “I know where I put it,” she went on hastily; “I put it on the bottom shelf of the bookcase just beside my bed.”

“On the bottom shelf?” repeated Mrs. May, her own needle flicking steadily in the firelight. “Near the floor?”

“Yes,” said Kate, “but I looked on the floor. Under the rug. Everywhere. The wool was still there though. Just where I’d left it.”

“Oh dear,” exclaimed Mrs. May lightly, “don’t say they’re in this house too!”

“That what are?” asked Kate.

“The Borrowers,” said Mrs. May, and in the half light she seemed to smile.

Kate stared a little fearfully. “Are there such things?” she asked after a moment.

“As what?”

“As people, other people, living in a house who . . . borrow things?”

Mrs. May laid down her work. “What do you think?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Kate said, pulling hard at her shoe button. “There can’t be. And yet”—she raised her head—“and yet sometimes I think there must be.”

“Why do you think there must be?” asked Mrs. May.

“Because of all the things that disappear. Safety pins, for instance. Factories go on making safety pins, and every day people go on buying safety pins and yet, somehow, there never is a safety pin just when you want one. Where are they all? Now, at this minute? Where do they go to? Take needles,” she went on, “All the needles my mother ever bought—there must be hundreds—can’t just be lying about this house.”

“Not lying about the house, no,” agreed Mrs. May.

“And all the other things we keep on buying. Again and again and again. Like pencils and match boxes and sealing-wax and hairpins and drawing pins and thimbles—”

“And hat pins,” put in Mrs. May, “and blotting paper.”

“Yes, blotting paper,” agreed Kate, “but not hat pins.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” said Mrs. May, and she picked up her work again. “There was a reason for hat pins.”

Kate stared. “A reason?” she repeated. “I mean—what kind of a reason?”



Underneath the kitchen floor is the world of the Borrowers—Pod and Homily Clock and their daughter, Arrietty. In their tiny home, matchboxes double as roomy dressers and postage stamps hang on the walls like paintings. Whatever the Clocks need they simply “borrow” from the “human beans” who live above them. It’s a comfortable life.

Comfortable—but *boring* if you’re a kid.

Only Pod is allowed to venture into the house above, because the danger of being seen by a human is too great. Borrowers who are seen by humans are never seen again. Yet Arrietty won’t listen. There is a human boy up there, and Arrietty is desperate for a friend. . . .

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