

Beyond the Lighthouse, Over the Mountains: A Story of Forgotten Treasure

Tony Steeno

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(64pp)

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Beyond the Lighthouse, Over the Mountains is a unique modern classic with multigenerational appeal.

The lure of mysterious treasure inspires three adventurous friends to journey far from the safety of their homes in Tony Steeno's *Beyond the Lighthouse, Over the Mountains*, a whimsical tale with a heartwarming moral.

When an invitation to unlock a carefully preserved secret arrives in a bubble of rainbows, Nell and her brother Nicklebee immediately pack their bags, deciding that a map and jar of cookies are essential. Joined by Tao Grayhare, an experienced traveler and friend, the two bears and their rabbit guide encounter sights and scenes beyond their wildest dreams.

In a charming blend of bygone times and modern fashion and technology, landscapes and portraiture are created with a mix of ink and watercolor. A quaint village center, with its bell tower, bucket well, thatched rooftops, and gardens, adds to the timeless quality of the setting, and every scene bustles with intricately drawn details that draw the eye and encourage a closer look. The soft color palette is reminiscent of Maurice Sendak's folk art style, especially the ursine features and human clothing and mannerisms that would make Little Bear feel at home with Nell and Nicklebee.

Along with the two bear siblings and rabbit, there are fully clothed dogs, ducks, tigers, deer, and even a lion-caribou hybrid. The animals serve as craftspeople, builders, inventors, lighthouse keepers, and farmers. The bears are enthusiastic, full of energy, and have a sense of wonder that makes them seem young, although their ages are never fully established. Tao Grayhare feels older, more worldly, and knowledgeable, deciding on the spot that "A journey with friends would be good for my soul."

The story unfolds in a meandering way and divides into three parts: "The Journey," "The Village," and "Forgotten Treasure." They can be consumed together, but the separations can also be treated as convenient chapter breaks if needed. Strong themes of friendship, community, and working together are emphasized throughout, particularly in the culminating treasure reveal. It appears to intentionally raise questions, encouraging discussion and varying opinions.

There is suspense surrounding the difficulty of the journey, including rumors of a fire-breathing monster, and around the treasure itself, but the book's conflicts are resolved in a quick, neat fashion. It is surprising that a society capable of producing a pedal-driven dirigible balloon and a solar-powered train engine fueled by the photosynthesis of flowering vines has never before seen a simple water mill for grinding wheat into flour, but its creation causes quite a stir. A sprinkling of magical elements, including the animals-only society, may be enough of an explanation for most audiences, and there is room for multiple interpretations for those keen to debate the book's content.

An imaginative tale with elaborate illustrations, Tony Steeno's *Beyond the Lighthouse, Over the Mountains* is a unique modern classic with multigenerational appeal.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (June 20, 2019)

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