

Adventures
with
Theophilus Pott

ROGER LONG

Adventures
with
Theophilus Pott

REDEMPTION
PRESS 

© 2018 by Roger Long. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022

Toll Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

Redemption Press is honored to present this title in partnership with the author. The views expressed or implied in this work are those of the author. Redemption Press provides our imprint seal representing design excellence, creative content, and high quality production.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-488-5 (Paperback)

978-1-68314-489-2 (ePub)

978-1-68314-490-8 (mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2018933291

*To my wife, Juanita,
for making this book possible*

-and-

*To my sister-in-law, Margaret Long,
for the cover concept art.*

Contents

Tea and Biscuits	7
Tigers in the Carpet	19
Valley of the Soldier Trees.	31
Through the Crystal Cave.	49
Strange New Friends	55
Castle Island.	69
The Journey Begins	95
The Hall of Mysteries.	103
The Forest of Twilight.	123
The Dark Forest	137

The Lost Book	147
Mer City	161
Mount Sky and the Dragon	179
The True Light	191
Into the Night	199
Going Home	211

Tea and Biscuits

“Felicia, wake up, dear, or you’ll be late. You must arrive at Mr. Pott’s by nine o’clock this morning for early biscuits and tea.”

“Yes, Mother.”

“And don’t forget your walking shoes. Dress for the country, dear.”

“For biscuits and tea, Mother?” Felicia asked, very much confused by her mother’s instructions.

“Don’t forget, Felicia, Mr. Pott will also be telling you a story. The shoes will make you so much more comfortable. Now hurry, dear. The other children will be here in just a very few minutes.”

“More comfortable?” Felicia spoke out loud but to herself. How could walking shoes make her more comfortable as she listened to a story? But, there was a mystery here and Felicia loved a good mystery. She rose from her nice warm bed and made her way to the bathroom. In moments she had washed her lovely ebony face and dressed as her mother had directed. As she tied her walking shoes, she wondered what it all could mean.

When her mother had first taken her to the strange little book shop, she watched the owner, Mr. Pott, from a distance. Felicia wasn’t sure

what to make of him. He was an odd sort of man, as if he were somehow out of place. It seemed to Felicia that he really belonged somewhere else. She had no idea where that somewhere might be but it made her very curious just to think about such a place. She wasn't afraid exactly, but she wasn't sure she really wanted to meet him. She, well, could not make all the pieces of this puzzle fit together as she thought they should. Today would be the first time that she would actually talk to Mr. Pott. Her mother was excited and very anxious that Felicia go to the book shop and meet him, so she would go. There was this mystery, you see.

The other children arrived just as Felicia walked down the stairs. Her mother held the door open so she could go out to meet them. Felicia noticed that they, too, were dressed for the country and each wore hiking shoes.

Her mother bent down to give Felicia a kiss on the cheek. Felicia was not a little child any longer and kisses were for little children. But before she could pull away, her mother touched her cheek softly with her lips. Felicia smiled. Maybe kisses weren't just for little children. She could feel her mother's love in that brief touch and it felt very comforting.

With that kiss still warm on her cheek, Felicia collected the younger children and began the walk of six blocks to the old book shop. No one could remember when the book shop had not been on the corner of Oak and St. Vincent streets; and no one could remember, not even old Mr. Ferguson at the city library, any other proprietor but Mr. Pott. Why no one thought that odd was yet another unanswered question that pricked Felicia's thoughts.

Felicia kept the children close together as they made their way to Mr. Pott's. Sisters Sara and Mallery talked in excited whispers. Their mother had told them just enough about their visit with Mr. Pott as to make them very curious, and just a little nervous. James and Jeremy

talked only of the biscuits and tea. Mr. Pott's biscuits were famous, and the boys had not yet eaten breakfast.

Soon the walk ended, and the children gathered in a tight little circle before the two doors of the ancient book store. One door led directly into the shop. The other opened into Mr. Pott's sitting room. The sign that swung freely above the two doors pictured a tiger standing next to a lovely young girl dressed in very fine clothes. In Old English script the sign proclaimed,

**T. Pott, Esq.
Book Seller
London**

Just as Big Ben, the famous clock in London, struck the last of the nine chimes, Mr. Pott swung open the door to the sitting room and looked down on the five children. "Theophilus Pott at your service. Come in. Come in," he said with just the slightest hint of a smile. The small, balding man wore a faded brown suit with a checkered green vest. The suit was only slightly too large for his slender frame. Theophilus sported a somewhat bushy gray mustache that seemed to come alive when he spoke; and his thick, round spectacles made his eyes look two sizes too large for his head. He wore a gold chain stretched across the front of his vest that was fastened to a watch fob attached to a most unusual watch. The face of the watch was an actual face. And when the watch told the time it actually *told* the time, with a snippish little voice that echoed an annoyance at being disturbed from its time keeping duties.

"Theophilus T. Pott," repeated the book shop proprietor. "T. Pott for the short of it. It makes one think of tea. Well, don't just stand there. Come in. Come in." His thin lips still held that tease of a smile that told the children they need not be afraid of him. After all, their parents had

sent them in the first place because Mr. Pott told the most remarkable stories and served the most delicious biscuits and tea.

The children entered into the sitting room and sat in a lopsided circle around a small table. Just a few feet away a large stone fireplace crackled and snapped as the fire consumed a large round slice of an oak log. The flames danced like ballet dancers, twisting and turning, while the light from the fireplace shone from the polished timber beams that supported Mr. Pott's ceiling. The light also produced curious shadows that danced menacingly around the room. These shadows caused the children to look about them to see who or what else might also be in the shop with them.

Mr. Pott kept some of his most prized books in a large walnut bookcase opposite the fireplace. The books' shiny leather bindings and gold lettering gleamed from the twisting, spinning light of the dancing flames. Felicia thought it to be a very comfortable place—a perfect place for reading her favorite books—except for the presence of the constantly shifting shadows.

Eight-year-old Sara and nine-year-old Mallery sat across from one another in soft, flowery arm chairs that almost swallowed them up. Felicia, the oldest at thirteen, sat very prim and proper on a well-worn couch covered with a bear paw quilt that hid the shiny patches on the cushions. Mr. Pott directed the twins, James and Jeremy, to two large rocking horses that had real horse hair manes and real leather saddles. The horses looked so real that the boys began to stroke their mains. Was that a whinny they heard?

The whole atmosphere of the place made James and Jeremy very uneasy, even a little frightened. The shadows, the slightly darkened room and the strange Mr. Pott was just too different, too much like being alone at home when the night sky is full of thunder and lightening. They wrapped their arms around their horses' necks and felt a comforting sense of peace. And Mr. Pott did give a sort of a smile—just a little

one—but it was a smile. Maybe they would give the strange old man a chance before they decided to go home.

A carpet that had been woven in India covered the floor encircled by the children. The tigers woven into the carpet looked so real that the children were afraid to step on them. They looked very much like the tiger painted on the sign that swung over Mr. Pott's door. Felicia thought that she had heard one of the tigers growl and turned to see if anyone else had heard the sound. But how could it growl? It couldn't possibly, could it? The other children didn't act as if they had heard anything, so she sat quietly, with her feet pulled up close to the couch. Still, every time she glanced down at the carpet the tigers were in different places and there were more or less of them lying under an odd purple tree. *I was right about there being a mystery*, she thought to herself. *Mr. Pott, the shop, the fireplace and the carpet all seem to add up to one slightly frightening unanswered question. I hope I like the answer.*

"So, why have you come today?" Mr. Pott asked with that hint of a smile still on his lips. "Oh, yes. You have come to tell me a story."

"Oh, no, sir," Jeremy spoke more boldly than he knew he could because he was very hungry. "We have come for tea and biscuits and for you to tell *us* a story."

"For me to tell a story? Well, I must say. Now I shall have to find a story to tell. Are you sure I am to tell the story?"

"Yes please, sir," James replied while combing the mane of his rocking horse with his fingers. And, again, he thought he heard the horse neigh ever so quietly at the touch. What was he to think of that? But right then the only thing on his mind was breakfast. "And the biscuits and tea please, sir."

"You brought biscuits and tea? Well, how nice. I am very fond of biscuits and tea."

"But, sir," Felicia spoke with an almost grownup annoyance at how confused things had become, "Mother said that *you* would tell the story

and that *you* would serve the biscuits and tea.” At that moment she felt something scratch her shoe. As she once again glanced down at the carpet she was alarmed to see that one of the tigers now stood very close to her right foot. Felicia had relax briefly and allowed her foot to again touch the carpet. She moved quickly to the far end of the couch and watched to see if the tiger followed. It did not, much to her relief. Then she silently chided herself. *Tigers made of wool in a carpet can't scratch or move or growl. You are thirteen. Stop behaving like a child.* But she did move her foot from the carpet.

As Felicia pondered the possibility of tigers actually being able to move in a carpet, Sara spent her time looking intently at Mr. Pott. Even though he appeared to be just a bit more than odd, Sara could see in his eyes and from the weak little smile that he was a very caring man, full of love and, and, yes, wisdom. To Sara, it was like looking into the eyes of her grandfather and seeing the wisdom that was there. Only Mr. Pott seemed much older somehow, maybe like a great grandfather, or even older than that! That thought startled her and she shivered just a little. Who was this Mr. Pott?

“Yes, well, I see. I am to tell the story. What shall it be about? How shall we begin?”

“Once upon a time,” Sara and Mallery spoke in unison, which they often did. They always seemed to know what the other was thinking or was about to say. Their father found it quite amusing, but their mother always seemed a little concerned by it. “All stories begin with, ‘Once upon a time.’”

“The time, the time,” a small, snippish voice spoke from inside Mr. Pott’s vest pocket. “The time!” Mr. Pott carefully removed the watch and looked at its face. Its eyes were drawn close together in an impatient stare. “It is ten minutes past tea time,” said the watch. “Must you always be late? Serve the biscuits and tea!”

“Did your watch just talk to you, Mr. Pott?” asked a very curious Sara. But everyone wanted to know the answer to her question. They were sure they had just heard a watch speak!

“I should say so,” said an embarrassed Mr. Pott. “Well!” he said with a gruff. No one likes to be chided by a snippish watch, you see. “Well!” he said again, rising from the wooden arm chair he had occupied since the children had first arrived. “Well!”

Mr. Pott moved quickly (as he always did, as if he were late for something, which he always was) and disappeared from the sitting room through a small door. He returned just as quickly with a large silver tray heaped with iced biscuits. Some of the biscuits were topped with strawberries. Some had raspberry icing, some chocolate, some fluffy white icing with bits of candy sprinkled in. They were all warm and filled the room with the tempting aroma of a sweetshop on a Saturday morning. At each end of the tray Mr. Pott had balanced a tea pot whose china base reached over the edge of the tray as if it would fall at the slightest opportunity. Felicia just knew the tea would spill out at any moment and ruin the biscuits; but somehow the pots remained balanced dangerously on the tray.

Carefully, Mr. Pott placed the wondrous tray of tempting treats on the small table. James and Jeremy had to pull back on the reigns of their rocking horses to keep them from running up to the sweets, or so they imagined. The children waited politely for Mr. Pott to offer them a biscuit, but they found it very difficult to do so. Their mouths watered at the thought of their very first taste.

“What is it? What is it?” said Mr. Pott aloud but to himself. “Oh yes. I have forgotten the cups and saucers and spoons.” Then he pressed his hands again the pockets of his old brown coat. “No,” he said with a satisfied smile. “Here they are.”

The children could see clearly that he had nothing so large as cups and saucers and spoons in his pockets. Indeed, the pockets were much

too small to hold cups and saucers and spoons. But when he reached into his right pocket they heard the tinkle and clatter of china. They watched in amazement as he pulled three cups, three saucers and three spoons from each pocket. He placed a set before each child and kept one for himself.

“What kind of tea would you like, Sara?” Mr. Pott asked while holding the pot over her cup. Sara was amazed by what she had just seen, so amazed that she didn’t find it odd that someone she had never met before knew her name. But Felicia found that fact very interesting, and a little unnerving.

“Raspberry, if you please, sir.”

“Ah, my favorite!” said Mr. Pott as he poured the tea.

“And you, Felicia, what would you like?” He knew her name, as well. Well, of course her mother must have told him her name.

“Earl Grey, sir, if it’s no trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” said Mr. Pott as he poured Felicia’s tea from the same pot from which he had just poured Sara’s. Felicia, aware of the confusion she had already witnessed in Mr. Pott, decided the grownup thing to do (she was thirteen you know) was to simply smile and sip her tea. After all, the biscuits would more than make up for drinking the wrong tea.

“How is your tea, Sara?” asked the bespectacled Mr. Pott.

“Oh, very good, sir. And I think I can see the raspberries floating in my cup.” She could see them but when she tried to touch them with her spoon she saw that they weren’t really there. What does this mean, she wondered.

“And, Felicia, how is your tea?”

Every so politely, so as not to offend Mr. Pott, she said, “I’m sure it is very good, sir.” Then she took a sip from the cup. Earl Grey? How odd that he could pour two different teas from the same pot, she thought!

“And, Mallery, what shall you have?”

“Well,” Mallery smiled and blushed just a little, “I have always wanted to try a chocolate mint.”

“Oooo,” said Mr. Pott. “That sounds delicious.” And he poured tea into Mallery’s cup. “How is it, my dear?”

As Mallery sipped her tea, her eyes widened in delight. “It’s wonderful, sir, but . . .”

“That is a very strange way to end a sentence. Was there even a period?” asked Mr. Pott.

“It’s just that, well . . . how many different teas can come out of the same pot?”

“A very interesting question. How many can you imagine?”

“How about orange-strawberry?” asked James.

“Oh, dear. Are you sure, James?”

“Yes, sir. May I try it?”

Well, James’ tea required two teaspoons of sugar to get it just right. Jeremy asked for pineapple tea and said that he liked it very much.

“Please help yourself to the biscuits. They mustn’t get cold.”

With the greatest of delight, the children took the biscuit they had already chosen and a napkin. When they took their first bites no one was disappointed, and all finished off two of the biscuits in very short order.

“Enjoy your biscuits and I shall begin our story. Let’s see, we said to begin with ‘Once upon a time.’ Is that correct?”

“Time! Time!” The tiny voice of the watch rose from Mr. Pott’s pocket. Again Mr. Pott removed the watch and looked at it. He seemed slightly annoyed by another interruption to his story. You see, Mr. Pott was still a little embarrassed about the last things the watch had said to him. “Must we always begin with, ‘Once upon a time?’ Would it be so very difficult to begin with, ‘Once upon a morning?’ It is still morning, you know.” said the watch. It was obvious to Mr. Pott that the watch needed a lesson in courtesy, and he would find the time to give it one in the very near future.

“Well, I shall ask the children. Children how shall we begin the story?”

How does one speak to a watch, Felicia wondered to herself as she kicked at the scratching on her shoe. She had forgotten all about the tiger because of the lovely biscuits and had placed her feet back on the carpet. She quickly drew her feet up underneath her on the couch and stared in disbelief and confusion at the tigers woven in the carpet.

But Sara and Mallery had not been disturbed by the tigers and were now reconsidering, in a whispered conversation across the table, their original suggestion as to how a story should begin. Suddenly they giggled and said together, “Once upon a morning!”

“Excellent. Excellent. Now, where shall we begin?”

“Doesn’t one always start at the . . .” Felicia started to say, “at the beginning” but thought better of it. Nothing was as it should be this morning and she was becoming unsure about all that she had experienced. She sat back and waited to see what the other children might say. And by this time James and Jeremy were beginning to see things a little differently, too.

“Well,” said James, “if we usually begin at the beginning . . .”

“Why not begin at the end?” Jeremy finished James’s sentence as he wiped strawberry icing from his nose.

“The end,” repeated Mr. Pott. He looked cautiously at his vest pocket, waiting just briefly to see if the watch had anything further to say. “Good. We shall begin at the end,” agreed Mr. Pott. “Now, you must finish all of the biscuits. You may become very hungry before we finish our story.”

“But, Mr. Pott, isn’t it just a story?” asked Jeremy.

“We shall see,” smiled Mr. Pott. It was a very real smile this time that twinkled in his eyes. “We shall see. Now, once upon a morning the five children watched as the guards of the princess closed the great

bronze doors behind them. Then the children turned and followed the tigers as they led the children back home. The End.”

Tigers? wondered Felicia as she looked closely at the carpet. One of the powerful creatures slept peacefully in the place where her foot had been. Mallery, her eyes opened wide, slid to the edge of the great, soft chair and asked, “Walked with tigers to find their way home? Oh, Mr. Pott, why were they walking with tigers?” Felicia knew there were five of them, so she began to think, to wonder, maybe they were the children in the story. But . . .

“Maybe we should ask the tigers. Shall we?” asked Mr. Pott as he stood up from his chair. “Please take another biscuit. It is time for us to begin at the beginning.”

Sara was not the only one of the children to wonder what Mr. Pott meant when he said they should ask the tigers. Who can talk to tigers? This was becoming a very curious morning of biscuits and tea.

“The book! The book!” Watch cried out from the vest pocket. “Do not forget the book!”

“Oh, thank you, Watch. I mustn’t forget the book.” Mr. Pott reached into his right coat pocket and pulled out a beautifully leather-bound book about the size of a child’s diary. The leather had been dyed a brilliant red. The embossed letters on the cover were a glimmering gold. The words said, *This is Felicia’s Book. How did they know?* wondered Felicia. Who . . . ? She stopped in mid sentence, not knowing how to finish her own question. It was all so very strange. “This, Felicia, is for you.” He handed the book toward the astonished Felicia who was reluctant to take it from him. The book seemed to pulse with life in the way that it glowed. “You must take it, Felicia. Without it we will not be able to finish the story. And that would be a very terrible thing. You will be called upon from time to time to use the book to help us as we continue the story. This is your part, Felicia. You must be faithful to your part in the story.”

“I don’t understand.” Felicia spoke so quietly that it was very difficult to understand her. She was becoming more and more afraid.

“There is nothing to worry about, Felicia. You will have many friends to help you, and we must begin. You see, time is running out and we must hurry. Here you are, child. This is your part.”

“Running out? What do you mean, Mr. Pott? And why must we hurry? I thought this was just a story.”

“Ah, yes, a great many questions and no time to answer them all just now. Felicia, be patient. All will be shown to you in time. Now, you must take the book. Many people are waiting.”

Felicia had no way to respond to the strange little man. He had said too much that had already confused and frightened her. Who was waiting? Why were they waiting? With a shaking hand, she took the book from Mr. Pott and immediately felt the warmth, the life within it. Yet, it did not frighten her any longer. It somehow brought her a sense of comfort, of peace.

The tigers in the carpet now awoke. With one mighty roar the carpet tigers stretched their powerful muscles. The children all leaped from their chairs in surprise and fear, all except the two boys. Their rocking horses neighed loudly and began to rock rapidly back and forth. James and Jeremy wrapped their arms around the horses’ necks and held on tightly as the horses rocked themselves completely free of their rockers and then stood on their own four legs. *What next?* wondered Mallery.