

TO J, WHO TAUGHT ME THAT EVEN THE  
SIMPLEST OF THINGS CAN BE A TREASURE

R.C.K.

TO MY ADVENTURE PARTNER, DIEGO  
L.C.

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EU Authorized Representative: HackettFlynn Ltd, 36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K32 C942, Ireland. EU@walkerpublishinggroup.com

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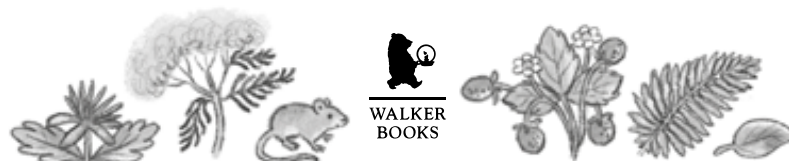
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**RACHEL CHIVERS KHOO**

Illustrated by Laura Catalán



  
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# Silverthorn Forest



OLD GREY'S  
BURROW

UMBRELLA  
TREE

TREASURE  
BURROW

TUFT'S  
TREEHOUSE

PICKWICK  
COTTAGE



## THE SEVENTY-FIRST TREASURE OF TUFTORIOUS SNOOK

Tuftorious Snook tied a neat knot in his blue-checked bindle bag and fastened it to a stick. He hoisted it over his shoulder and held the end in a single furred paw. The woods were quiet and still. It was a perfect day for finding; exactly the sort of afternoon when a fortunate Finder might discover a lost treasure or two.

Tuft took a deep breath of summer air, his chest filled with optimism. His long whiskers twitched this way and that, searching for a trace of a lost object, before finally settling in a south-easterly direction.

The small Finder walked briskly but with a lolloping gait, due in no small part to his mismatched shoes. On his left foot was a red wellington. It was far too big, but had been comprehensively stuffed with moss. On his right foot he wore a small blue slipper, which was rather damp and worse for wear. Tuft hoped to find a better shoe soon; one that was more befitting an explorer, such as himself.

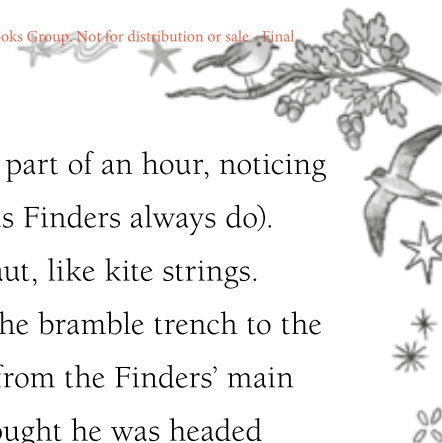
He rummaged in the front pocket of his dungarees and pulled out a fruit pastel. He'd found a half-full packet last month. Tuft gently tucked the sweet into the pouch of his cheek; the trick was to make one sweet last the whole journey, however long that might be. But, of course, that was nearly impossible, since Tuft could never tell how near or far he was from a lost treasure. His whiskers could only tell him that he was headed in the right direction.



Tuft walked for the best part of an hour, noticing everything along the way (as Finders always do). His whiskers were pulled taut, like kite strings. They steered him through the bramble trench to the outskirts of the woods, far from the Finders' main settlement. At first, Tuft thought he was headed to the picnic clearing by the roadside, where busy families often discarded umbrellas, cutlery or old tennis balls. That was where Tuft had found his much-prized fruit pastels. But instead he was pulled towards the stream. Tuft tried his best to hop over to the other side, but he lost his footing and ended up with both feet in the water.

"Botheration," he muttered as he scrambled up the bank. "Botheration, botheration, botheration!" He pulled off his saturated slipper and wrung it out as best he could.

Deciding he had no choice but to make do with one shoe, Tuft soldiered on. Soon the undergrowth





around him was gone and he emerged onto hard ground. Tuft looked down. He saw tarmac and a yellow line of warning under his bare foot.

It was *the road*.

The roar of an engine was upon him. Tuft sprang back as a horn blared. The car swerved. Tuft fell, snapping the stick of his bundle bag and almost choking on the fruit pastel. Instinctively, he curled into a ball.

There was the sound of a car door opening and closing. Then footsteps approaching. Tuft forced his eyes open and peered through the leaves that surrounded him. The car was only metres away. It was too late to run. Instead, he burrowed down into the earth, tucking his head as low as he could.



There was a cluster of nettles between him and the car. Old Grey Snook had once told him that humans were afraid of nettles.

A boy with chestnut hair walked along the roadside. He was short, maybe only two-thirds of the height of a full-grown human, but he was still easily twice the height of Tuft. His eyes were fixed on the edge of the woods.

“Where did you see it, Mum?” the boy called out.

The woman in the driving seat opened her window and pointed in Tuft’s direction.

The boy stepped closer and peered into the nettles. His eyes moved over the place where Tuft was hiding.

“I can’t see anything!” he shouted. “Are you sure it was a dog?”

“It was quite small for a dog. It could have been a cat,” she replied.

“It must have been a squirrel, Mum.”



“I’m telling you, it wasn’t a—”

“Wait,” the boy cried. “There is something here.”

He bent down, his hands moving towards Tuft, skilfully avoiding the nettles. Tuft squeezed his eyes shut, expecting to be hoisted into the air at any moment.

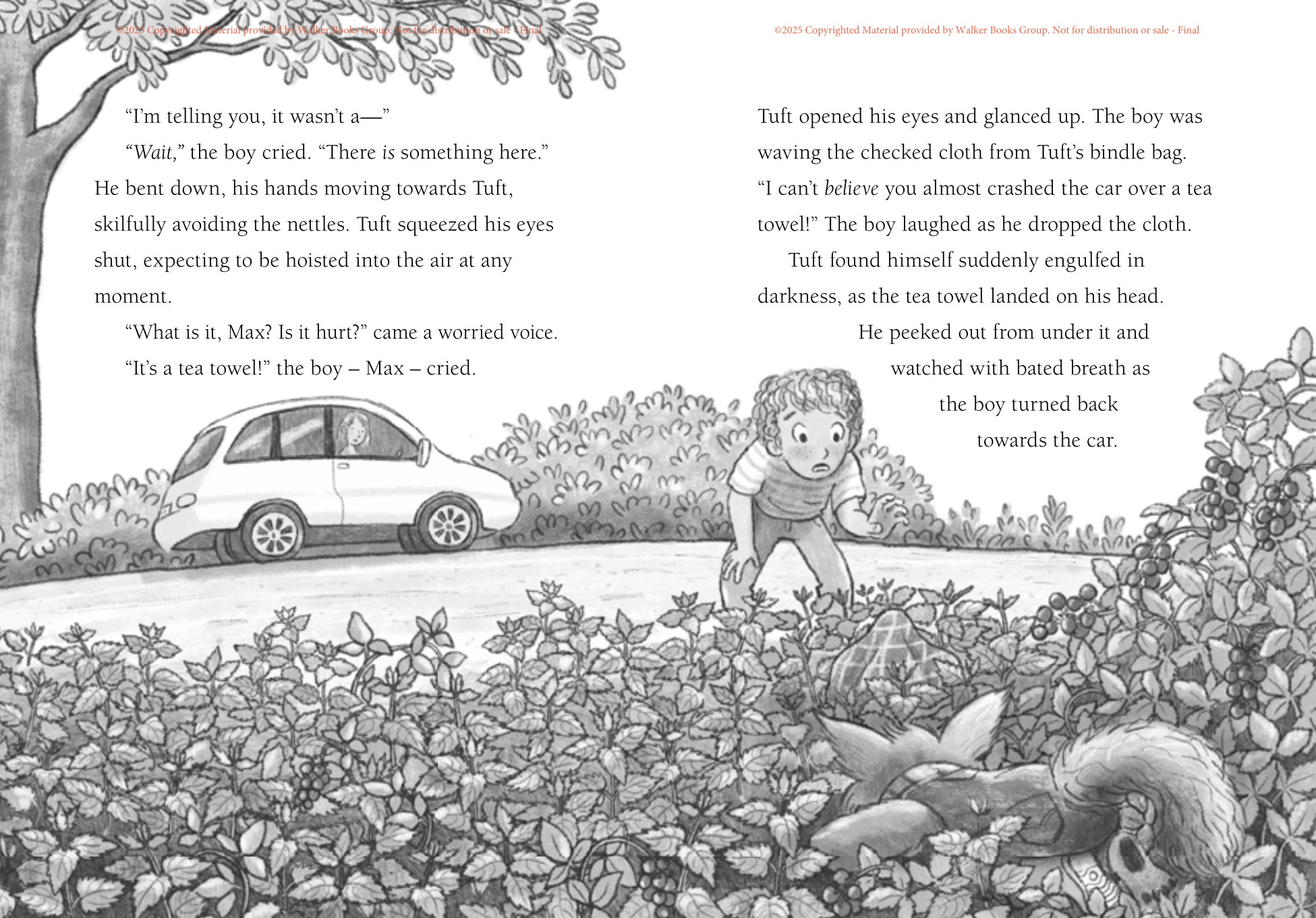
“What is it, Max? Is it hurt?” came a worried voice.

“It’s a tea towel!” the boy – Max – cried.


Tuft opened his eyes and glanced up. The boy was waving the checked cloth from Tuft’s bindle bag. “I can’t *believe* you almost crashed the car over a tea towel!” The boy laughed as he dropped the cloth.

Tuft found himself suddenly engulfed in darkness, as the tea towel landed on his head.

He peeked out from under it and watched with bated breath as the boy turned back towards the car.









His trainers squeaked as he walked away. Tuft noticed something small and round drop from the boy's back pocket. It rolled along the road, glinting in the sunlight. The small Finder didn't dare move a muscle until the car had rumbled away and the noise of the engine had faded into silence.

Never in his whole life had Tuft seen a human up close. The boy had been barely a whisker's length away. Of all the creatures in the world, Tuft had been raised to fear humans the most. Humans with their thunderous cars, and their roads which sliced forests and woodlands in half. Humans who didn't understand the ways of Finders. Humans who wouldn't hesitate to plunder the Treasure Burrow, should they ever discover it.

Tuft sat in half-darkness under the checked cloth, feeling relief and puzzlement in equal measure. He recalled his aunt, Timodora Snook's, most ruinous misadventure. It had happened before



Tuft was born, but he'd heard the solemn tale many a time under the Umbrella Tree. Aunt Timodora had been missing for a month before her anorak was found by the side of a road not far from here. That was all that was left of her. Whether she'd been taken by a human or flattened by a car, no one knew. But she had never returned. Tuft swallowed hard as he realized he'd almost met the same fate.

The boy hadn't appeared quite as dangerous as Tuft had imagined a human would. Even more unexpectedly, he hadn't taken the bindle bag cloth. Or the *tea towel*, as he had called it.

"Why on earth would tea ever need a towel?" Tuft muttered to himself, as he emerged from under the cloth.

What a tale this would be, to tell under the Umbrella Tree later on. Tuft had brushed with a human and walked away unscathed. And what's more: the human had left something behind.

