

THE SISTER SERAPHINA MYSTERIES

# The Pursuit of the Pilfered Cheese

by Haley Stewart



Illustrated by  
Betsy Wallin

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To Benjamin, Lucy, Gwen, and Hildie,  
who provide so much love and scope for the imagination.







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## Chapter One

# Friends Old and New

“Marigold Mouseweather and Dominic Whiskerbright, please stay after class. Everyone else is dismissed!”

Marigold’s sigh could barely be heard over the clanging of lunch pails and the sound of students running out the door. “We’re in trouble, Dom,” she whispered to the young mouse packing up his books at the desk next to hers. “Sister Seraphina knows we were talking during class.”

“I hope she doesn’t make us change seats,” replied Dominic nonchalantly as he stuffed his copy of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* into his satchel.

Change seats! Marigold hadn’t even thought of that! She had been too upset at the thought of disappointing Sister Seraphina, her favorite teacher at Saint Wulfhilda’s School, to even consider that she might not get to sit next to her best friend anymore.

Dominic and Marigold walked up to Sister Seraphina’s desk. Their literature teacher in her robin’s-egg-blue habit (the distinctive dress and veil all the Sisters of Our Lady Star of the Sea wore) locked eyes with them. “Miss Mouseweather and Mr. Whiskerbright,” the grey mouse sighed. “I know you’re good friends—”

“—Best friends!” Dominic corrected her.

“Yes, best friends, Mr. Whiskerbright, with a great deal to say to each other, but I cannot allow you to talk during class. Dominic, I know you prefer science to literature, but you are here to learn and if you are whispering instead of listening then I cannot do my job—which is to teach you. And Marigold,” she added reprovngly, “I thought you liked *Sir Gawain!*”

“I do! I love stories about King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table! This is my very favorite class, Sister! It’s just . . . well, Dom is working at the Cheese Shop after school now and we don’t get to play together like we used to after class and . . . and . . .” the young mouse stammered remorsefully, “. . . it won’t happen again, Sister Seraphina. I’m so sorry.” Marigold hung her head.

“It’s really my fault, Sister,” said Dominic. “I was telling Goldie all about my baby sisters learning to walk *and* my father’s new job working for Lord Reginald Whitebone *and* how if you write in lemon juice it’s like a secret message until you hold it up to a heat source, then BOOM! It appears like magic! Did you know that, Sister? And I distracted Goldie. She would be paying attention if it weren’t for me. I *promise* to be good if you let us keep sitting next to each other!”

Sister Seraphina paused and looked at each of them in turn. “Very well, Dominic. No seating changes today. But come to class tomorrow ready to *listen*.”





“Thank you, Sister! We promise, Sister!” yelled Dom as he practically dragged Marigold by the elbow and ran out the door of the classroom.

“See, Goldie!?! Sister Seraphina’s a brick. She didn’t even make us change seats! Let’s go find Lena.” Sister Seraphina could hear Dominic’s cheery voice echoing in the now nearly deserted hallway leading outside. She watched out the window as her unruly students ran across the schoolyard into the sunny lane and Marigold grabbed the paw of Magdalena, her little sister and the youngest Mouseweather, for the walk home.

“What am I going to do with those silly mice?” Sister Seraphina chuckled to herself.

There was a light knock on the classroom door and Mother Alphonsa, the abbess of Saint Wulfhilda's Abbey, peeked in. "Sister, can you greet the new chemistry teacher when she arrives? I'm afraid I have a meeting about the fundraiser for the school's new roof and I know you can make her feel right at home."

"Yes, of course!" said Sister Seraphina, rising from her desk and gathering her things.

The old abbess continued, "Her name is Sister Alberta. She's coming to us from the motherhouse in London, so she'll need a strong cup of tea

when she arrives and a tour of the school and abbey—especially the chemistry lab. Thank you, Sister. I leave the matter in your capable hands." Mother Alphonsa quickly walked down the hall. The abbess always moved quickly, but never hurried. Sister Seraphina wasn't quite sure how she managed it. She moved with intention and a pinch of liveliness unusual for a mouse of her age. Her fur was the color of deep silver and it sparkled against her blue habit, which swirled as she marched down the hallway.

Sister Seraphina walked into the hallway, past the Latin classroom and the chemistry laboratory, her shoes making a clapping sound on the wood floor. Saint Wulfhilda's School



was ancient (as the decaying wooden roof reminded them). The Sisters of Our Lady Star of the Sea, or the Stella Marisians as they were sometimes called, were known by their bright blue habits like the ocean waves on a sunny day at the seaside (“And our Lady’s favorite color!” as Mother Alphonsa liked to remind them).

The order was founded in London long ago and sisters were sent to build Saint Wulfhilda’s Abbey in Beaconsfield hundreds of years back. The Stella Marisians started the school for the village mice soon after they arrived. Sister Seraphina loved the beautiful abbey—the intricate stonework of its Gothic windows, the paintings and statues made by nuns of the past on display in the corridors. And most of all, the garden! After a long train ride from foggy London, it would surely be a welcome sight for the new chemistry teacher.

“I wonder what she will be like,” mused Sister Seraphina. The young nun had joined Saint Wulfhilda’s three years ago. It was home and she loved her fellow nuns. Sister Catherine, Sister Sabina, Sister Adelaide, Sister Margaret, and the other sisters were her *family*. But (and she felt almost guilty for thinking it) the other nuns had been at the abbey for decades. It would be so lovely to have someone at the abbey *her* age, a friend.





Sister Seraphina grabbed a basket from one of the hooks on the wall between the kitchen and the garden door. She would gather some rosemary for Sister Margaret, the cellarer, while she waited for Sister Alberta. From there she'd have a good view of the lane and could greet the new teacher as soon as she arrived. Whenever she needed a restful spot to think, Sister

Seraphina came to the garden. It had become a bit overgrown of late because Old Scamperton, the gardener, had recently retired.

As she clipped green bunches of rosemary, the strong scent of the herb filled her sensitive nose and she started worrying about the school roof. The garden was not the only thing at Saint Wulfhilda's that needed tending to. Thank goodness, Mother Alphonsa was organizing a fundraiser so that the decaying roof could be repaired! It surely wasn't safe to have students in a school when boards might fall unexpectedly or, heaven forbid, the upstairs cat could reach down and snatch a little mouse! Sister Seraphina shivered at the very idea. She was so lost in her own thoughts that she jumped at the sound of a boisterous voice calling to her from the lane.

"Hulloooo, hullooooo!" belted a light brown bespectacled mouse in her brown traveling cape. The mouse, who must be Sister Alberta, was . . .

well . . . *bounding* (there was no other way to describe it) up the lane with a brown leather traveling bag and a black umbrella over her arm.

Sister Seraphina composed herself and smiled. “Welcome to—”

“Sister Alberta!” interrupted the brown mouse, introducing herself and thrusting a friendly paw into Sister Seraphina’s. “Can’t tell you how delighted I am to be at Saint Wulfhilda’s. A long train ride but *lovely* country. And *what* a garden, Sister . . . pardon me, I can’t recall what you said your name was?”

Sister Seraphina was amazed at how many words Sister Alberta managed to get out of her mouth without taking a breath. “I . . . I . . . didn’t say,” she replied, sounding slightly stunned.

“Well, *do* tell, Sister. I must admit I was hoping there might be a young sister close to my age, and I’m just dying to get to know you!” said the exuberant Sister Alberta with a huge grin.

The grey mouse returned her smile and warmly shook the new arrival’s paw. “I’m Sister Seraphina. Nice to make your acquaintance, Sister Alberta, and welcome to Saint Wulfhilda’s.”

They turned toward the large abbey doors and entered. Sister Seraphina offered to help carry the luggage but was cheerfully rebuffed.

“*You* mind the basket of rosemary, Sister, and I’ll mind this old case—it has my lab

