

opening extract from

Finn Family Moomintroll

written by

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ONE grey morning the first snow began to fall in the Valley of the Moomins. It fell softly and quietly, and in a few hours everything was white.

Moomintroll stood on his doorstep and watched the valley nestle beneath its winter blanket. 'Tonight,' he thought, 'we shall settle down for our long winter's sleep.' (All Moomintrolls go to sleep about November. This is a good idea, too, if you don't like the cold and the long winter darkness.) Shutting the door behind him, Moomintroll stole in to his mother and said:

'The snow has come!'

'I know,' said Moominmamma. 'I have already

made up all your beds with the warmest blankets. You're to sleep in the little room under the eaves with Sniff.'

'But Sniff snores so horribly,' said Moomintroll. 'Couldn't I sleep with Snufkin instead?'

'As you like, dear,' said Moominmamma. 'Sniff can sleep in the room that faces east.'

So the Moomin family, their friends, and all their acquaintances began solemnly and with great ceremony to prepare for the long winter. Moominmamma laid the table for them on the veranda but they only had pine-needles for supper. (It's important to have your tummy full of pine if you intend to sleep all the winter.) When the meal was over, and I'm afraid it didn't taste very nice, they all said good-night to each other, rather more carefully than usual, and Moominmamma encouraged them to clean their teeth.

Then Moominpappa went round and shut all the doors and shutters and hung a mosquito net over the chandelier so that it wouldn't get dusty.

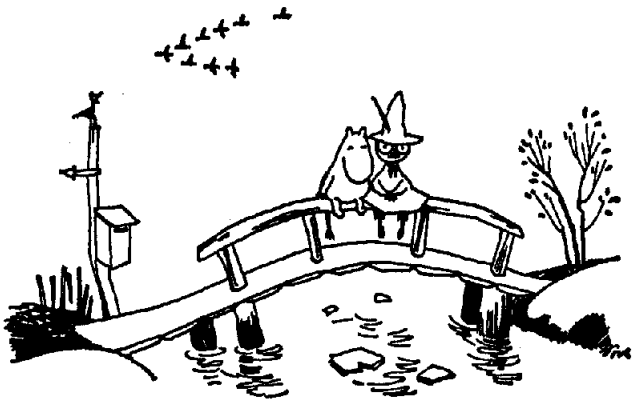
Then everyone crept into his bed and, making a cosy nest for himself, pulled his blanket over his ears and thought of something nice. But Moomintroll sighed a little and said:

'I'm afraid we shall waste an awful lot of time.'

'Don't worry,' answered Snufkin, 'we shall have wonderful dreams, and when we wake up it'll be spring.'

'Mm-m,' mumbled Moomintroll sleepily, but he had already drifted away into a hazy dream world.

Outside the snow fell, thick and soft. It already covered the steps and hung heavily from the roofs and eaves. Soon Moominhouse would be nothing but a big, round snowball. The clocks stopped ticking one by one. Winter had come.



Chapter one

In which Moomintroll, Snufkin, and Sniff find the Hobgoblin's Hat; how five small clouds unexpectedly appear, and how the Hemulen finds himself a new hobby.

ONE spring morning at four o'clock the first cuckoo arrived in the Valley of the Moomins. He perched on the blue roof of Moominhouse and cuckooed eight times – rather hoarsely to be sure, for it was still a bit early in the spring.

Then he flew away to the east.

Moomintroll woke up and lay a long time looking at the ceiling before he realized where he was. He had slept a hundred nights and a hundred days, and his dreams still thronged about his head trying to coax him back to sleep.

But as he was wriggling round trying to find a cosy new spot to sleep he caught sight of something that made him quite wide awake – Snufkin's bed was empty!

Moomintroll sat up. Yes, Snufkin's hat had gone, too. 'Goodness gracious me!' he said, tiptoeing to the open window. Ah-ha, Snufkin had been using the rope-ladder. Moomintroll scrambled over the windowsill and climbed cautiously down on his short legs. He could see Snufkin's footprints plainly in the wet earth, wandering here and there and rather difficult to follow, until suddenly they did a long jump and crossed over themselves. 'He must have been very happy,' decided Moomintroll. 'He did a somersault here – that's clear enough.'

Suddenly Moomintroll lifted his nose and listened. Far away Snufkin was playing his gayest song: 'All small beasts should have bows in their tails'. And Moomintroll began to run towards the music.

Down by the river he came upon Snufkin who was sitting on the bridge with his legs dangling over the water, his old hat pulled down over his ears.

'Hello,' said Moomintroll sitting down beside him.

'Hello to you,' said Snufkin, and went on playing.

The sun was up now and shone straight into their eyes, making them blink. They sat swinging their legs over the running water, feeling happy and carefree.

They had had many strange adventures on this river and had brought home many new friends.

Moomintroll's mother and father always welcomed all their friends in the same quiet way, just adding another bed and putting another leaf in the dining-room table. And so Moominhouse was rather full – a place where everyone did what they liked and seldom worried about tomorrow. Very often unexpected and disturbing things used to happen, but nobody ever had time to be bored, and that is always a good thing.

When Snufkin came to the last verse of his spring song he put his mouth-organ in his pocket and said:

'Is Sniff awake yet?'

'I don't think so,' answered Moomintroll. 'He always sleeps a week longer than the others.'

'Then we must certainly wake him up,' said Snufkin as he jumped down. 'We must do something special today because it's going to be fine.'

So Moomintroll made their secret signal under Sniff's window: three ordinary whistles first and then a long one through his paws, and it meant: 'There's something doing.' They heard Sniff stop snoring, but nothing moved up above.

'Once more,' said Snufkin. And they signalled even louder than before.

Then the window banged up.

'I'm asleep,' shouted a cross voice.

'Come on down and don't be angry,' said Snufkin. 'We're going to do something very special.'

Then Sniff smoothed out his sleep-crinkled ears

and clambered down the rope-ladder. (I should perhaps mention that they had rope-ladders under all the windows because it took so long to use the stairs.)

It certainly promised to be a fine day. Everywhere befuddled little creatures just woken from their long winter sleep poked about rediscovering old haunts, and busied themselves airing clothes, brushing out their moustaches and getting their houses ready for the spring.

Many were building new homes and I am afraid some were quarrelling. (You can wake up in a very bad temper after such a long sleep.)

The Spirits that haunted the trees sat combing their long hair, and on the north side of the tree trunks, baby mice dug tunnels amongst the snow-flakes.

'Happy spring!' said an elderly Earth-Worm. 'And how was the winter with you?'

'Very nice, thank you,' said Moomintroll. 'Did you sleep well, sir?'

'Fine,' said the Worm. 'Remember me to your father and mother.'

So they walked on, talking to a lot of people in this way, but the higher up the hill they went the less people there were, and at last they only saw one or two mother mice sniffing around and spring-cleaning.

It was wet everywhere.

'Ugh – how nasty,' said Moomintroll, picking his way gingerly through the melting snow. 'So much snow is never good for a Moomin. Mother said so.' And he sneezed.

'Listen Moomintroll,' said Snufkin. 'I have an idea. What about going to the top of the mountain and making a pile of stones to show that we were the first to get there?'

'Yes, let's,' said Sniff, and set off at once so as to get there before the others.

When they reached the top the March wind gambolled around them, and the blue distance lay at their feet. To the west was the sea; to the east the river looped round the Lonely Mountains; to the north the great forest spread its green carpet, and to the south the smoke rose from Moomintroll's chimney, for Moominmamma was cooking the breakfast. But Sniff saw none of these things because on the top of the mountain lay a hat – a tall, black hat.

'Someone has been here before!' he said.

Moomintroll picked up the hat and looked at it. 'It's a *rarey* hat,' he said. 'Perhaps it will fit you, Snufkin.'

'No, no,' said Snufkin, who loved his old green hat. 'It's much too new.'

'Perhaps father would like it,' mused Moomintroll.

'Well, anyway we'll take it with us,' said Sniff. 'But now I want to go home – I'm dying for some breakfast, aren't you?'

'I should just say I am,' said Snufkin.

And that was how they found the Hobgoblin's Hat and took it home with them, without guessing for one moment that this would cast a spell on the Valley of the Moomins, and that before long they would all see strange things . . .



When Moomintroll, Snufkin, and Sniff went out on to the veranda the others had already had their breakfast and gone off in various directions. Moominpappa was alone reading the newspaper.

'Well, well! So you have woken up, too,' he said.

'Remarkably little in the paper today. A stream burst its dam and swamped a lot of ants. All saved. The first cuckoo arrived in the valley at four o'clock and then flew off to the east.' (This is a good omen, but a cuckoo flying west is still better . . .)

'Look what we've found,' interrupted Moomintroll, proudly. 'A beautiful new top hat for you!'

Moominpappa put aside his paper and examined the hat very thoroughly. Then he put it on in front of the long mirror. It was rather too big for him – in fact it nearly covered his eyes, and the effect was very curious.

'Mother,' screamed Moomintroll. 'Come and look at father.'

Moominmamma opened the kitchen door and looked at him with amazement.

'How do I look?' asked Moominpappa.

'It's all right,' said Moominmamma. 'Yes, you look very handsome in it, but it's just a tiny bit too big.'

'Is it better like this?' asked Moominpappa, pushing the hat onto the back of his head.

'Hm,' said Moominmamma. 'That's smart, too, but I almost think you look more dignified without a hat.'

Moominpappa looked at himself in front, behind and from both sides, and then he put the hat on the table with a sigh.

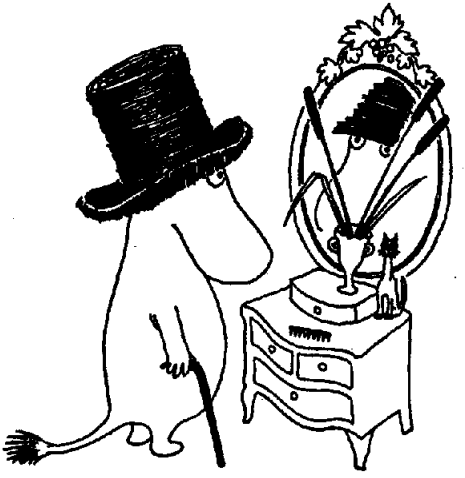
'You're right,' he said. 'Some people look better without hats.'

'Of course, dear,' said Moominmamma kindly. 'Now eat up your eggs, children, you need feeding up after living on pine needles all the winter.' And she disappeared into the kitchen again.

'But what shall we do with the hat?' asked Sniff. 'It's such a fine one.'

'Use it as a waste-paper basket,' said Moominpappa, and thereupon he took himself upstairs to go on writing his life story. (The heavy volume about his stormy youth.)

Snufkin put the hat down on the floor between the table and the kitchen door. 'Now you've got a new piece of furniture again,' he said, grinning, for Snufkin could never understand why people liked to *have* things. He was quite happy wearing the old suit he had had since he was born (nobody knows when



and where that happened), and the only possession he didn't give away was his mouth-organ.

'If you've finished breakfast we'll go and see how the Snorks are getting on,' said Moomintroll. But before going out into the garden he threw his eggshell into the waste-paper basket, for he was (sometimes) a well brought up Moomin.

The dining-room was now empty.

In the corner between the table and the kitchen door stood the Hobgoblin's Hat with the eggshell in the bottom. And then something really strange happened. The eggshell began to change its shape.

(This is what happens, you see. If something lies long enough in the Hobgoblin's Hat it begins to change into something quite different – what that will be you never know beforehand. It was lucky that the hat hadn't fitted Moominpappa because the-Protector-of-all-Small-Beasts knows what would have become of him if he had worn it a bit longer. As it was he only got a slight headache – and that was over after dinner.)

Meanwhile the eggshell had become soft and woolly, although it still stayed white, and after a time it filled the hat completely. Then five small clouds broke away from the brim of the hat, sailed out on to the veranda, thudded softly down the steps and hung there just above the ground. The Hat was empty.

'Goodness gracious me,' said Moomintroll.

'Is the house on fire?' asked the Snork Maiden, anxiously.

The clouds were hanging in front of them without moving or changing shape, as if they were waiting for something, and the Snork Maiden put out her paw very cautiously and patted the nearest one. 'It feels like cotton-wool,' she said, in a surprised voice. The others came nearer and felt it, too.

'Just like a little pillow,' said Sniff.

Snufkin gave one of the clouds a gentle push. It floated on a bit and then stopped again.

'Whose are they?' asked Sniff. 'How did they get on to the veranda?'

Moomintroll shook his head. 'It's the queerest thing I've ever come across,' he said. 'Perhaps we ought to go in and fetch mother.'

'No, no,' said the Snork Maiden. 'We'll try them out ourselves,' and she dragged a cloud on to the ground and smoothed it out with her paw. 'So soft!' said the Snork Maiden, and the next minute she was rocking up and down on the cloud with loud giggles.

'Can I have one, too?' squealed Sniff jumping on to another cloud. 'Hup-si-daisy!' But when he said 'hup' the cloud rose and made an elegant little curve over the ground.

'Golly!' burst out Sniff. 'It moved!'

Then they all threw themselves on to the clouds and shouted 'Hup! hup, hup-si-daisy.' The clouds bounded wildly about until the Snork discovered

how to steer them. By pressing a little with one foot you could turn the cloud. If you pressed with both feet it went forward, and if you rocked gently the cloud slowed up.

They had terrific fun, even floating up to the treetops and to the roof of Moominhouse.

Moomintroll hovered outside Moominpappa's window and shouted: 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' (He was so excited he couldn't think of anything more intelligent.)

Moominpappa dropped his memoir-pen and rushed to the window.

'Bless my tail!' he burst out. 'Whatever next!'

'It will make a good chapter for your story,' said Moomintroll, steering his cloud to the kitchen window where he shouted to his mother. But Moominmamma was in a great hurry and went on making rissoles. 'What have you found now, dear?' she said. 'Just be careful you don't fall down!'

But down in the garden the Snork Maiden and Snufkin had discovered a new game. They steered at each other at full speed and collided with a soft bump. Then the first to fall off had lost.

'Now we'll see!' cried Snufkin urging his cloud forward. But the Snork Maiden dodged cleverly to the side and then attacked him from underneath.

Snufkin's cloud capsized, and he fell on his head in the flower-bed and his hat fell over his eyes.

'Third round,' squeaked Sniff, who was referee

and was flying a bit above the others. 'That's two: one! Ready, steady, go!'

'Shall we go on a little flying tour together?' Moomintroll asked the Snork Maiden.

'Certainly,' she answered, steering her cloud up beside his. 'Where shall we go?'

'Let's hunt up the Hemulen and surprise him,' suggested Moomintroll.

They made a tour of the garden, but the Hemulen wasn't in any of his usual haunts.

'He can't have gone far,' said the Snork Maiden. 'Last time I saw him he was sorting his stamps.'

'But that was six months ago,' said Moomintroll.

'Oh, so it was,' she agreed. 'We've slept since then, haven't we?'

'Did you sleep well, by-the-way?' asked Moomintroll.

The Snork Maiden flew elegantly over a treetop and considered a little before answering. 'I had an awful dream,' she said at last. 'About a nasty man in a high, black hat who grinned at me.'

'How funny,' said Moomintroll. 'I had exactly the same dream. Had he got white gloves on, too?'

The Snork Maiden nodded, and slowly gliding through the forest they pondered this awhile. Suddenly they caught sight of the Hemulen, who was wandering along with his hands behind his back and his eyes on the ground. Moomintroll and the Snork Maiden made perfect three-point landings on

either side of him and called out brightly: 'Good-morning!'

'Ouch! Oh!' gasped the Hemulen. 'How you frightened me! You shouldn't jump at me suddenly like that.'

'Oh, sorry,' said the Snork Maiden. 'Look what we're riding on.'

'That's most extraordinary,' said the Hemulen. 'But I'm so used to your doing extraordinary things that nothing surprises me. Besides I'm feeling melancholy just now.'

'Why is that?' asked the Snork Maiden sympathetically. 'On such a fine day, too.'

'You wouldn't understand anyway,' said the Hemulen shaking his head.

'We'll try,' said Moomintroll. 'Have you lost a rare stamp again?'



'On the contrary,' answered the Hemulen, gloomily. 'I have them all: every single one. My stamp collection is complete. There is nothing missing.'

'Well, isn't that nice?' said the Snork Maiden, encouragingly.

'I said you'd never understand me, didn't I?' moaned the Hemulen.

Moomintroll looked anxiously at the Snork Maiden and they drew back their clouds a little out of consideration for the Hemulen's sorrow. He wandered on and they waited respectfully for him to unburden his soul.

At last he burst out:

'How hopeless it all is!' And after another pause he added: 'What's the use? You can have my stamp collection for the next paperchase.'

'But Hemulen!' said the Snork Maiden, horrified, 'that would be awful! Your stamp collection is the finest in the world!'

'That's just it,' said the Hemulen in despair. 'It's finished. There isn't a stamp, or an error that I haven't collected. Not one. What shall I do now?'

'I think I'm beginning to understand,' said Moomintroll slowly. 'You aren't a collector any more, you're only an owner, and that isn't nearly so much fun.'

'No,' said the heartbroken Hemulen, 'not nearly.' He stopped and turned his puckered-up face towards them.

'Dear Hemulen,' said the Snork Maiden, taking him gently by the hand, 'I have an idea. What about your collecting something different – something quite new?'

'That's an idea,' admitted the Hemulen, but he continued to look worried because he thought he oughtn't to look happy after such a big sorrow.

'Butterflies for example?' suggested Moomintroll. 'Impossible,' said the Hemulen and became gloomy again. 'One of my second cousins collects them, and I can't stand him.'

'Film stars then?' said the Snork Maiden.

The Hemulen only sniffed.

'Ornaments?' Moomintroll said hopefully. 'They're never finished.'

But the Hemulen pooh-poohed that too.

'Well, then I really don't know,' said the Snork Maiden.

'We'll think of something for you,' said Moomintroll, consolingly. 'Mother's sure to know. By the way, have you seen the Muskrat?'

'He's still asleep,' the Hemulen answered sadly. 'He says that it's unnecessary to get up so early, and I think he's right.' And with that he continued his lonely wanderings, while Moomintroll and the Snork Maiden steered their clouds right up over the tree-tops and rested there, rocking slowly in the sunshine. They considered the problem of the Hemulen's new collection.

'What about shells?' the Snork Maiden proposed.

'Or rarey buttons,' said Moomintroll.

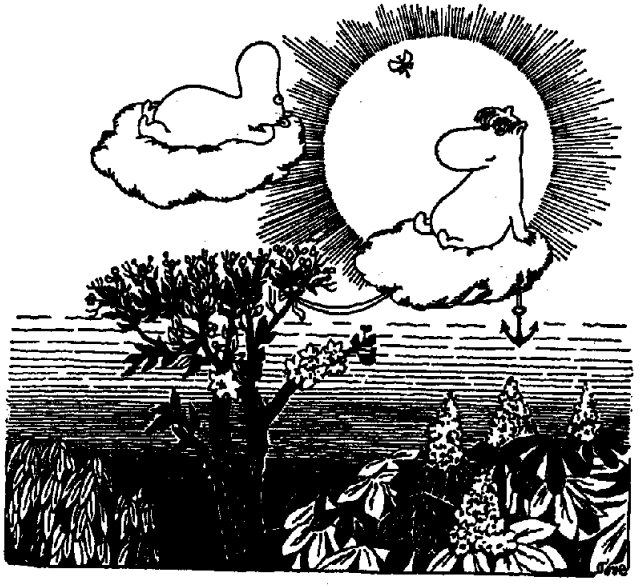
But the warmth made them sleepy and didn't encourage thinking, so they lay on their backs on the clouds and looked up at the spring sky where the larks were singing.

And suddenly they caught sight of the first butterfly. (As everyone knows, if the first butterfly you see is yellow the summer will be a happy one. If it is white then you will just have a quiet summer. Black and brown butterflies should never be talked about – they are much too sad.)

But this butterfly was golden.

'What can that mean?' said Moomintroll. 'I've never seen a golden butterfly before.'

'Gold is even better than yellow,' said the Snork Maiden. 'You wait and see!'



*

When they got home to dinner they met the Hemulen on the steps. He was beaming with happiness.

'Well?' said Moomintroll. 'What is it?'

'Nature study!' shouted the Hemulen. 'I shall botanize. The Snork thought of it. I shall collect the world's finest herbarium!' And the Hemulen spread out his skirt* to show them his first find. Among the earth and leaves lay a very small spring-onion.

'*Gagea lutea*,' said the Hemulen proudly. 'Number one in the collection. A perfect specimen.' And he went in and dumped the whole lot on the dining-table.

'Put it in the corner, Hemul dear,' said Moominmamma, 'because I want to put the soup there. Is everybody in? Is the Muskrat still sleeping?'

'Like a pig,' said Sniff.

'Have you had a good time today?' asked Moominmamma when she had filled all the plates.

'Wonderful,' cried the whole family.

*

Next morning when Moomintroll went to the woodshed to let out the clouds they had all disappeared; every one of them. And nobody imagined that it had anything to do with the eggshell which was once again lying in the Hobgoblin's Hat.

* The Hemulen always wore a dress that he had inherited from his aunt. I believe all Hemulens wear dresses. It seems strange, but there you are. – *Author's note.*