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opening extract from

Titch and Mitch 2: The Trolls of Sugar Loaf Wood

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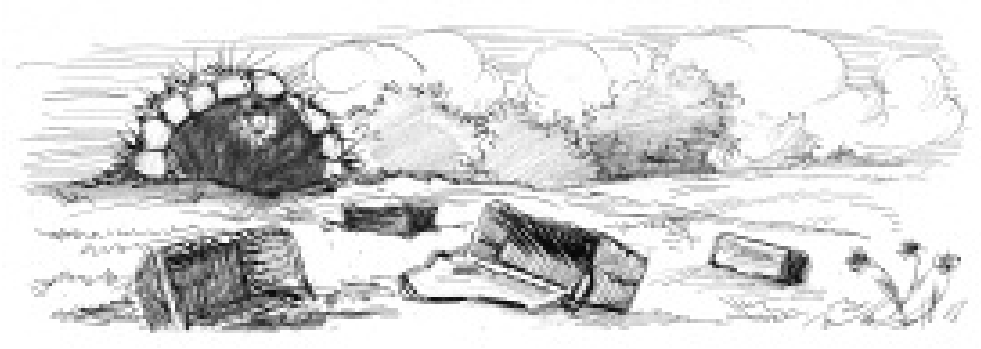
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The *Trolls* of Sugar Loaf Wood



TITCH AND MITCH WERE ON THEIR WAY TO see their friend Misty in Fairy Valley. It was a lovely sunny morning and the two brothers were riding their magic bicycle over meadows, fields and the tops of trees. They were hoping to arrive in Fairy Valley in time for lunch, when Mitch spotted somebody waving to them from the top of a tree.

"Look Titch, down there, I see a small person in a red hat waving to us. Should we fly the bicycle a bit lower and make sure he's all right?"

"Yes, I see him. Hold tight, I'm going down."

Titch managed to hover the bicycle right over the top of a big tree, just a few feet from the figure in the

red, pointed hat.

"It's a gnome!" called out Mitch.

Sure enough, just beneath them, a small gnome clung to the very top branch of the tree. He wore a black tunic, red trousers and his face was half covered with a huge white beard.



"Look!" exclaimed Titch. "There, on the ground! What are those creatures and why are they setting fire to the tree?"

Mitch stared hard at the creatures for a few moments. They appeared to be short, fat, little men with long arms, just a bit bigger than the gnome who was clinging to the treetop and staring at them.



"I don't know who they are, but they don't seem very nice. Fancy burning a tree down!"

The voice of the gnome floated up from the top of the tree.

"They are Trolls! Ugly, horrid, vicious, nasty monsters! Setting fire to the tree is the only way to make me come down. Help me, please!"

"We can't," called back Titch. "We can only carry two people on this bicycle and as you can see, there are already two of us here."

The gnome started to wail. "Oh no, they'll catch me and send me down the mine."

Mitch suggested to Titch, "Why don't you drop me off over there on that grassy bank? Then, when you've rescued the gnome, you can come back and collect me. It won't take a minute."

Titch zoomed down to the grassy bank. After Mitch had climbed off the bicycle, he waved to his brother who promptly took off again and headed for the big tree. With a lot of difficulty he managed to hover the bicycle right next to the gnome, who had stopped wailing, but now had tears running down his bright red cheeks.

"Come on," said Titch. "Climb onto the seat behind me."

"I'm too frightened," said the gnome and he clutched at his tree even more firmly. A pall of smoke drifted up to them. "All right," said Titch. "I'll leave you for the trolls. I'm off now, goodbye."

Immediately the gnome loosened his grip on the tree and grabbed at the bicycle before Titch could leave him behind. In a moment, he clambered on to Mitch's seat and hugged Titch round the waist. He then leaned over and shouted down to the watching trolls, "Yah boo, can't catch me. Trolls are horrid, fat monsters and I'm a clever gnome."

Flying the bicycle as fast as he could, Titch landed



on the grassy bank. "Where are you Mitch?" he called out. "We shouldn't hang around here while those trolls are about." Stepping off the bicycle, he looked around.

"Oh dear," said the gnome. "The trolls have probably taken him; there are a lot of them you know. They're all around here and not just under my tree."

"Why do they want Mitch? I don't like to say it, but he can't be much use to them."

Looking at him curiously, the gnome said, "You don't live around here then, do you?"

"No, we live on an island out at sea. I've never even heard of a troll, let alone met one. Who are they?"

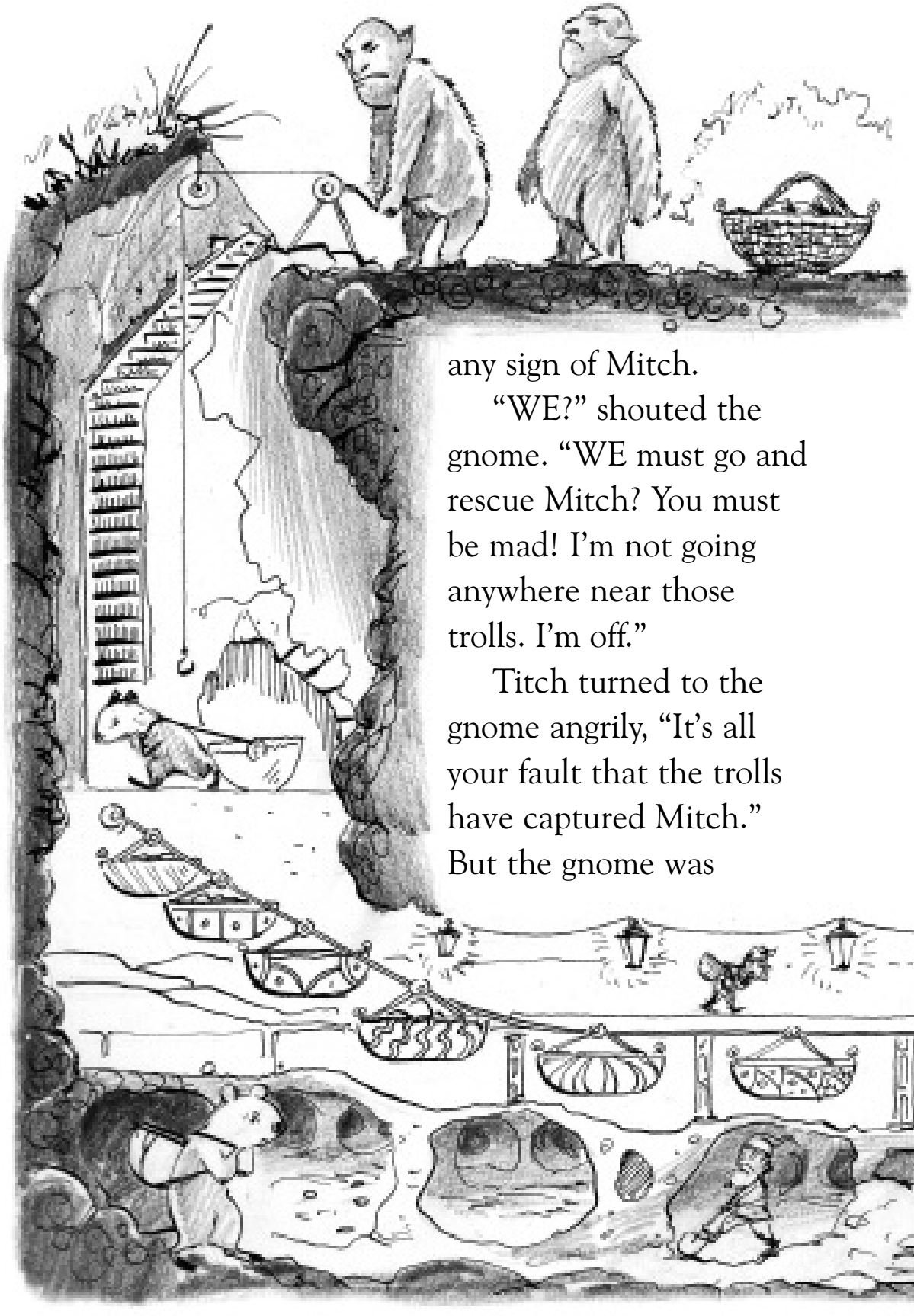
"These are the trolls from Sugar Loaf Wood. They are short and fat with long arms and stubby legs. Horrid, ugly things they are."

"Why do they want Mitch?"

"It's not just Mitch. They capture lots of creatures, especially those who can dig."

Sitting down on a rock to rest his aching legs, the gnome explained a little more. "In Sugar Loaf Wood there is a mine called the Sugar Bread Mine. The trolls love to eat sugar bread. That's why they are so fat, it's all they ever eat. The mines are very narrow and the trolls are so fat, they can't squeeze themselves into the mine at all, so they force other creatures to dig out the sugar bread for them. They make the prisoners stay down all the time and only let them out for a glass of water, and before they can drink, they have to give the trolls lots of sugar bread. They really are cruel, those trolls."

Titch was horrified. "Mitch is going down a mine to dig for sugar bread? They can't do that! We must rescue him. Which way did they go?" Titch turned his back on the gnome to look in all directions for



any sign of Mitch.

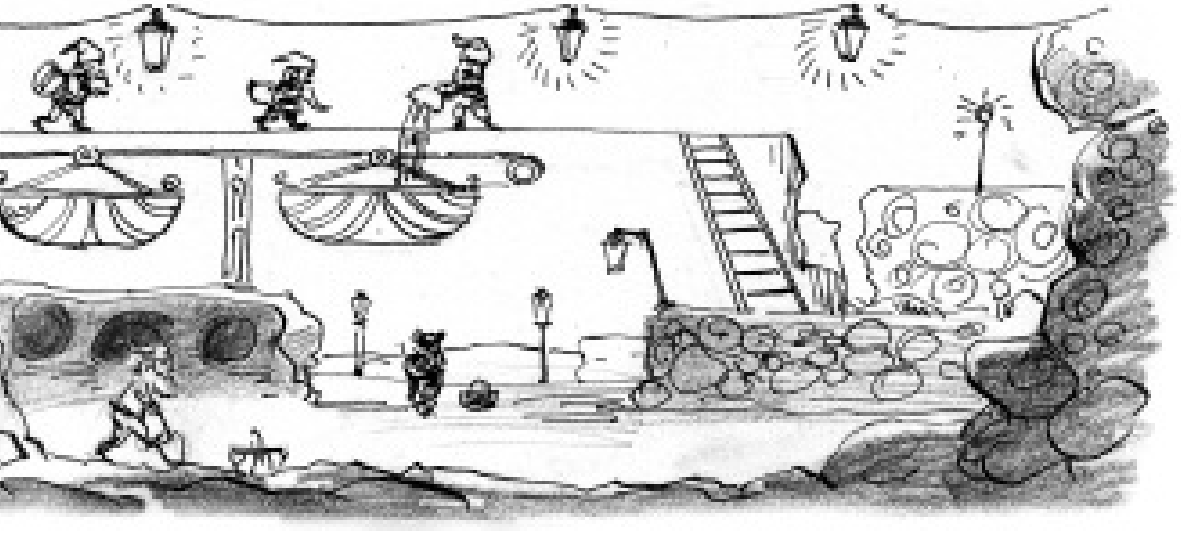
"WE?" shouted the gnome. "WE must go and rescue Mitch? You must be mad! I'm not going anywhere near those trolls. I'm off."

Titch turned to the gnome angrily, "It's all your fault that the trolls have captured Mitch." But the gnome was



already running down the hill with his red hat bobbing as he went, faster and faster, until he darted into the wood at the bottom of the hill and disappeared for ever.

Titch looked all around him for some sign of the trolls, but there was nothing moving and nobody to be seen anywhere. However, a few metres down the



slope he saw the magic feather that Mitch always wore in his hat. "That confirms it," he said to himself. "Mitch must have been taken by surprise before he could use the feather to defend himself." It was a special feather from a hawk's tail that gave out a bright, scary light when it was waved. Titch put it safely into his pocket and, scratching his head in despair, wondered what to do next.



"Well," he thought, "if the gnome was so frightened of the trolls then he would run as far away from them as he could. So, if I fly in the opposite direction to the gnome, then I'm probably going in the same direction as the trolls." Satisfied with this reasoning, Titch jumped on to the bicycle and called

out, "Up, up and away."

Once he was flying as high as he could, he found he could see a long way in every direction. There were fields and woods and streams and hills, but no sign of the trolls. "They can't have travelled very far," he thought. "Perhaps I should fly over the nearest wood, because the trolls might be hidden from view."

Zooming the bicycle low over the nearest wood, Titch peered over the handlebars as he skimmed the treetops. Right in the middle of the wood he came across a clearing with a big hole, like a cave, at one side of it. "Wait a minute," he thought, "that hole could be the entrance to a mine, and that mine could be the Sugar Bread Mine."

He was just about to zoom down and land, when a line of trolls marched into the clearing. A particularly large troll led the way. He swung his long arms as he walked so that his fingers brushed the ground. Titch saw that none of the trolls wore any clothes, but they were covered in thick fur and had big tummies, so they looked like little barrels on short fat legs as they marched along.

The trolls surrounded a group of other creatures who had also been captured. Titch could see another gnome, a beaver, a water rat and a fairy with green



wings and there, amongst the captives, he saw a pointed green hat.

"There's only one hat like that in the whole world," he said to himself. "It must be Mitch."

Indeed it was, for as the procession got closer, he could quite clearly see Mitch himself, underneath the hat, looking very miserable indeed.

He watched with horror as the trolls, who all had sharp sticks, poked and jabbed at the prisoners until they all disappeared down the big hole.

"Oh, my goodness, what shall I do?" he whispered



to himself. Then an idea occurred to him. He needed help and the only creatures he knew for miles around were Misty, who had chickenpox, and Trusty, who would take ages to get here. Then, there was also Wiffen and Perry, who were not far away at all. If Wiffen was supposed to be an intelligent turkey, then he might think of some way to rescue Mitch, and certainly Perry was very big and could be very fierce if he wanted to be. So, turning the bicycle around, he raced away to find the little stone cottage, where Wiffen and Perry lived.