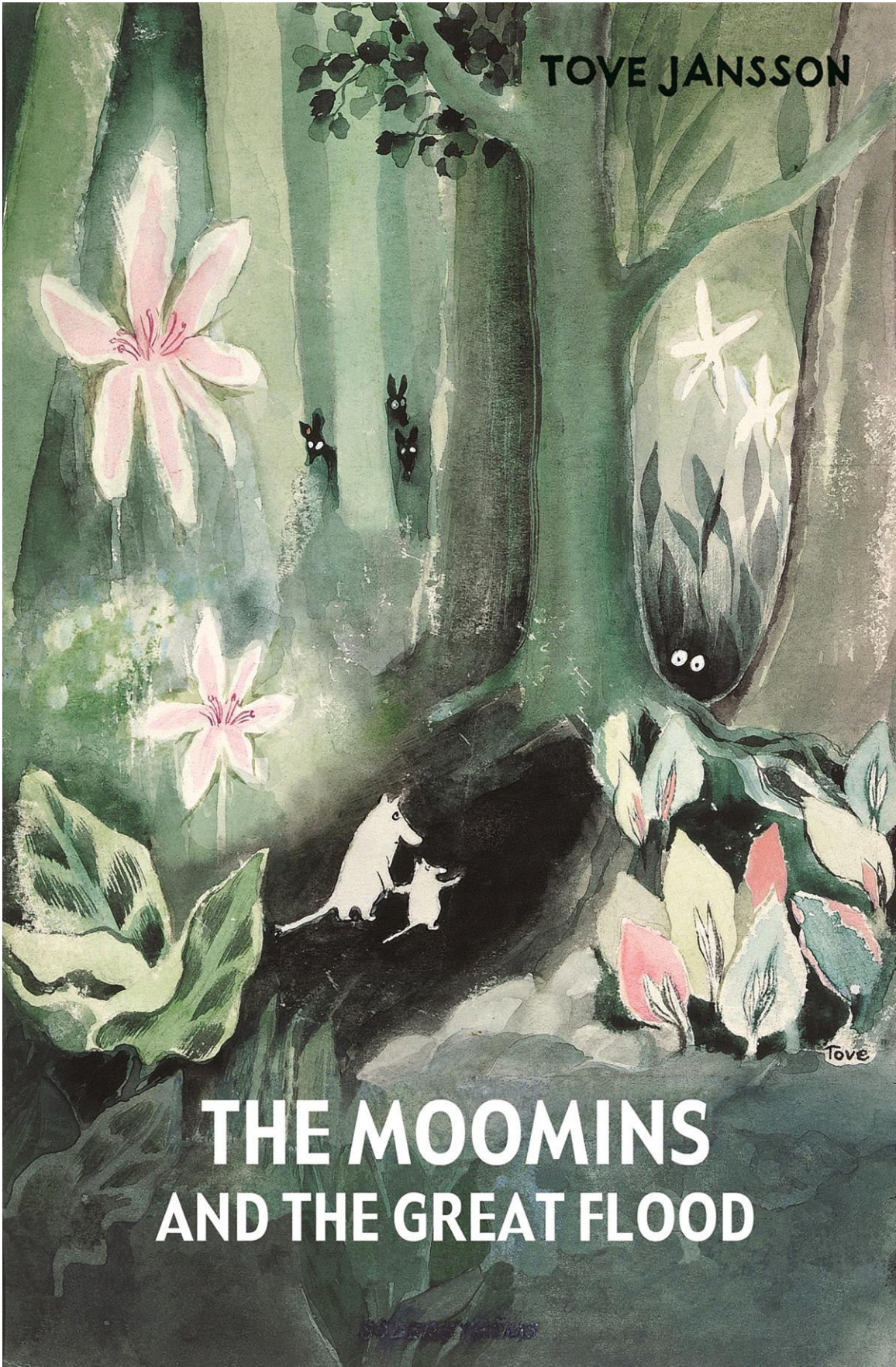




TOVE JANSSON

THE MOOMINS AND THE GREAT FLOOD

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The Moomins and the Great Flood, by Tove Jansson

It must have been late in the afternoon one day at the end of August when Moomintroll and his mother arrived at the deepest part of the great forest. It was completely quiet, and so dim between the trees that it was as though twilight had already fallen. Here and there giant flowers grew, glowing with a peculiar light like flickering lamps, and furthest in among the shadows small, cold green points moved.

‘Glow-worms,’ said Moominmamma, but they had no time to stop and take a closer look at them. They were searching for a nice, warm place where they could build a house to crawl into when winter came. Moomins cannot stand the cold at all, so the house would have to be ready by October at the latest.

So they walked on, further and further into the silence and the darkness. Little by little, Moomintroll began to feel anxious, and he asked his mother if she thought there were any dangerous creatures in there. ‘Hardly,’ she said, ‘though we’d perhaps better go a little faster, anyway. But I hope we’re so small that we won’t be noticed if something dangerous should come along.’

Suddenly Moomintroll gripped his mother tightly by the arm. ‘Look!’ he said, so frightened that his tail stuck straight out. From the shadows behind a tree-trunk two eyes were staring at them. At first Moominmamma was frightened, too, but then she calmed down: ‘I think it’s a very small creature. Wait, and I’ll shine a light on it. Everything looks worse in the dark, you know.’

And she picked one of the big flower-lamps and shone it into the shadow. Then they saw that there really was a very small creature sitting there, and that it looked friendly and a little startled. ‘There, you see,’ said Moominmamma.

‘What are you?’ asked the small creature.

‘I’m a moomintroll,’ answered Moomintroll, who had got his courage back. ‘And this is my mother. I hope we didn’t disturb you.’ (You can see that his mother had taught him to be polite.)

‘That’s all right,’ said the small creature. ‘I was sitting there feeling very sad and was longing for company. Are you in a great hurry?’ ‘Yes,’ said Moominmamma. ‘You see, we’re looking for a nice, sunny place to build a house in. But perhaps you’d like to come with us?’ ‘Rather!’ said the small creature, leaping out towards them. ‘I’d got lost and thought I would never see the sun again!’

So they continued, all three of them, taking a large tulip with them to light the way. But around them the darkness was growing deeper and deeper, the flowers glowed more faintly beneath the trees, and eventually the very last one went out. In front of them gleamed a black stretch of water, and the air was heavy and cold. ‘How dreadful,’ said the small creature. ‘That’s the swamp. I don’t dare go there.’

'Why is that?' asked Moominmamma.

'Oh, because that's where the Great Serpent lives,' said the small creature in a very low voice, looking about him in all directions.

'Pah!' said Moomintroll, wanting to show how brave he was. 'We are so small that we probably won't be noticed. How will we ever find the sunshine if we don't dare to go across? Now come with us.' 'Perhaps a bit of the way,' said the small creature. 'But be careful. It's for your account and risk.'

So they stepped as quietly as they could from tussock to tussock. The black mud bubbled and whispered all around them, but as long as the tulip lamp burned they felt calm. At one moment, Moomintroll slipped and nearly fell in, but his mother caught hold of him at the last moment.

'We shall have to continue by boat,' she said. 'Now your feet are all wet. Why, you'll catch cold.' Then she got out a pair of dry socks for him from her handbag, and lifted him and the small creature up on to a big, round water-lily leaf. They all three stuck their tails in the water like paddles and then they steered straight out on to the swamp. Beneath them they glimpsed dark creatures that swam out and in between the roots of the trees, there was a splashing and a ducking, and the mist came stealing over them. Suddenly the small creature said: 'I want to go home now!' 'Don't be afraid, small creature,' said Moomintroll in a quavering voice. 'We'll sing something cheerful and...'

At that very moment their tulip went out and it was completely dark. And from the darkness they heard a hissing, and felt the water-lily leaf swaying. 'Quick, quick!' cried Moominmamma. 'The Great Serpent is coming!'

They stuck their tails in deeper, and paddled with all their might so that the water gushed at the prow. Now they could see the Serpent swimming behind them. It looked nasty, and its eyes were cruel and yellow.

They paddled as hard as they could, but it kept gaining on them, and was already opening its mouth, with its long, quivering tongue. Moomintroll put his hands in front of his eyes and cried: 'Mamma!' and then he waited to be eaten.

But nothing happened. Then he looked cautiously between his fingers. Something very remarkable had happened. Their tulip was glowing again, it had opened all its petals and in the midst of them stood a girl with bright blue hair that reached all the way down to her feet.

Brighter and brighter glowed the tulip. The Serpent began to blink, and suddenly it turned right round with an angry hissing and slid down into the mud.

Moomintroll, his mother and the small creature were so agitated and surprised that for a long time they were unable to say anything.

At last Moominmamma said solemnly: 'Thank you very much for your help, madam.' And Moomintroll bowed more deeply than he had ever done before, for the blue-haired girl was the most beautiful he had seen in all his life. 'Were you inside the tulip all the time?' asked the small creature, shyly. 'It's my house,' she said. 'You may call me Tulippa.'

And so they paddled slowly over to the other side of the swamp. Here the ferns were thick, and below them Moominmamma made a nest in the moss for them to sleep in. Moomintroll lay close to his mother, listening to the song of the frogs out on the swamp. The night was full of strange, desolate sounds, and it was a long time before he fell asleep.

Next morning Tulippa led the way for them, and her blue hair shone like the brightest ultra-violet lamp. The path climbed steeper and steeper, and at last the mountain rose straight up, so high that they could not see where it ended. 'I expect there's sunshine up there,' the small creature said, longingly. 'I'm so dreadfully cold.' 'So am I,' said Moomintroll. And then he sneezed. 'What did I tell you?' said his mother. 'Now you've got a cold. Please sit here while I make a fire.' And then she gathered together an enormous heap of dry branches and lit it with a spark from Tulippa's blue hair. They sat, all four of them, looking into the fire while Moominmamma told them stories. She told them about what it was like when she was young, when moomintrolls did not need to travel through fearsome forests and swamps in order to find a place to live in.

In those days they lived together with the house-trolls in the houses of human beings, mostly behind their stoves. 'Some of us still live there now,' said Moominmamma. 'But only where people still have stoves. We don't like central heating.'

'Did the people know we were there?' asked Moomintroll.

'Some of them did,' said his mother. 'They felt us mostly as a cold draught in the backs of their necks sometimes – when they were alone.'

'Tell us something about Moominpappa,' asked Moomintroll.

'He was an unusual Moomintroll,' said his mother, thoughtfully and sadly. 'He was always wanting to move, from one stove to the next. He was never happy where he was. And then he disappeared – took off with the Hattifatteners, those little wanderers.'

'What sort of folk are they?' asked the small creature.

'Little troll-creatures,' explained Moominmamma. 'They're mostly invisible. Sometimes they can be found under people's floors, and you can hear them pattering about in there when it's quiet in the evenings. But mostly they wander round the world, don't stay anywhere and don't care about anything. You can never tell if a Hattifattener is happy or angry, sad or surprised. I am sure that they have no feelings at all.'

'And is Moominpappa a Hattifattener now?' asked Moomintroll.

'No, of course not!' said his mother. 'Surely you realize that they simply tricked him into going along with them.'

'Imagine if we were to meet him one day!' said Tulippa. 'He'd be pleased, wouldn't he?'

'Of course,' said Moominmamma. 'But I don't expect we shall.' And then she cried. It sounded so sad that they all began to sob, and as they cried they began to think about a lot of other things that were

sad, too, and that made them cry more and more. Tulippa's hair turned pale with sorrow and lost all its shine. When they had gone on like this for a good while, a stern voice suddenly rang out, saying: 'What are you howling for down there?' They stopped at once and looked around them in all directions, but could not discover who it was who was talking to them.

At the same time a rope-ladder came dangling down the rock face. High up there, an old gentleman stuck his head out through a door in the mountain. 'Well?' he shouted. 'Pardon me,' said Tulippa, curtsying. 'But you see, sir, it's really all very sad. Moominpappa has disappeared, and we're cold and can't get over this mountain to find the sunshine, and we haven't anywhere to live.'

'I see,' said the old gentleman. 'You'd better come up to my place, then. My sunshine is the finest you could imagine.'

It was quite hard to climb up the rope-ladder, especially for Moomintroll and his mother, as they had such short legs. 'Now you must dry your feet,' said the old gentleman, and drew the ladder up after them. Then he closed the door very carefully, so that nothing harmful could sneak inside. They all went up a moving staircase that carried them right inside the mountain. 'Are you sure this gentleman is to be trusted?' whispered the small creature. 'Remember, on your own heads be it.' And then he made himself as small as he could and hid behind Moominmamma. Then a bright light shone towards them, and the moving staircase took them straight into a wonderful landscape. The trees sparkled with colour and were full of fruits and flowers they had never seen before, and below them in the grass lay gleaming white patches of snow. 'Hurrah!' cried Moomintroll, and ran out to make a snowball. 'Be careful, it's cold!' called his mother. But when he ran his hands through the snow he noticed that it was not snow at all, but ice-cream. And the green grass that gave way under his feet was made of fine-spun sugar. Criss-cross over the meadows ran brooks of every colour, foaming and bubbling over the golden sand. 'Green lemonade!' cried the small creature, who had stooped down to drink. 'It's not water at all, it's lemonade!' Moominmamma went straight over to a brook that was completely white, since she had always been very fond of milk. (Most moomintrolls are, at least when they get a bit older.) Tulippa ran from tree to tree picking armfuls of chocolate creams and candies, and as soon as she had plucked one of the glowing fruits, another grew at once. They forgot their sorrows and ran further and further into the enchanted garden. The old gentleman slowly followed them and seemed very pleased by their amazement and admiration. 'I made all this myself,' he said. 'The sun, too.' And when they looked at the sun, they noticed that it really was not the real sun but a big lamp with fringes of gold paper. 'I see,' said the small creature, and was disappointed. 'I thought it was the real sun. Now I can see that it has a slightly peculiar light.'

'Well, that was the best I could do,' said the old gentleman, offended. 'But you like the garden, don't you?'

'Oh yes,' said Moomintroll, whose mouth was full of pebbles just then. (They were actually made of marzipan.) 'If you would like to stay here, I will build you a cake-house to live in,' said the old gentleman. 'I get a bit bored here sometimes all on my own.'

'That would be very nice,' said Moominmamma, 'but if you won't be hurt, I think we must be on our way. We were actually thinking of building a house in the real sunshine.'

‘No, let’s stay!’ cried Moomintroll, the small creature and Tulippa. ‘Well, children,’ said Moominmamma. ‘We’ll see.’ And she lay down to sleep under a chocolate bush.

When she woke up again she heard a fearful moaning, and realized at once that it was her Moomintroll, who had a sore stomach. (Moomins get sore stomachs very easily). It had become quite round from all he had eaten, and it was dreadfully sore. Beside him sat the small creature, who had got toothache from all the sweets, and was moaning even worse. Moominmamma did not scold, but took two powders from her handbag and gave them each one, and then she asked the old gentleman if he had a bowl of nice, hot porridge.

‘No, I’m afraid not,’ he said. ‘But there’s a bowl of whipped cream, and another one of jam.’

‘Hm,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Porridge is good for them, you see: hot food is what they need. Where’s Tulippa?’

‘She says she can’t get to sleep because the sun never goes down,’ said the old gentleman, looking unhappy. ‘I’m truly sorry that you don’t like it here.’

‘We’ll come back again,’ Moominmamma consoled him. ‘But now I think I must see to it that we get out in the fresh air again.’ And then she took Moomintroll by one hand, and the small creature by the other, and called for Tulippa. ‘You’ll do best to take the switch-back railway,’ said the old gentleman politely. ‘It goes right through the mountain and comes out in the middle of the sunshine.’

‘Thank you,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Goodbye then.’ ‘Goodbye then,’ said Tulippa. (Moomintroll and the small creature were not able to say anything, as they felt so horribly sick.) ‘Don’t mention it,’ said the old gentleman.

And then they took the switch-back railway through the whole mountain at a dizzying speed. When they came out on the other side they were quite giddy and sat on the ground for a long time, recovering. Then they looked around them.

Before them lay the sea, glittering in the sunshine. ‘I want to go for a bathe!’ cried Moomintroll, for now he felt all right again. ‘Me too,’ said the small creature, and then they ran right out into the sun’s beam on the water. Tulippa tied her hair up so it would not go out, and then she followed them and stepped in very cautiously.

‘Phooh, it’s so cold,’ she said.

‘Don’t stay in too long,’ called Moominmamma, and then she lay down to sun herself, for she was still quite tired.

All at once an ant-lion came strolling across the sand. He looked very cross and said: ‘This is my beach! You must go away!’

‘We certainly shan’t,’ said Moominmamma. ‘So there!’ Then the ant-lion began to kick sand in her eyes, he kicked and scratched until she could not see a thing. Closer and closer he came, and suddenly he began to dig himself into the sand, making the hole deeper and deeper around him. At last only his eyes

could be seen at the bottom of the hole, and all the while he continued to throw sand at Moominmamma. She had begun to slide down into the hole, and was trying desperately to climb up again. 'Help, help!' she cried, spitting sand. 'Rescue me!'

Moomintroll heard her and came rushing up out of the water. He managed to catch hold of her ears and pulled and struggled with all his might while he shouted rude names at the ant-lion. The small creature and Tulippa came and helped too, and then, at last, they managed to haul Moominmamma over the edge, and she was rescued. (The ant-lion continued to dig himself in out of pure annoyance, and no one knows if he ever found the way up again.) It was a long while until they got the sand out of their eyes and managed to calm down a little. But by then they had lost all their desire to bathe, and instead went on their way along the seashore in order to look for a boat. The sun was already going down and behind the horizon threatening black clouds were gathering. It looked as though there was going to be a storm. Suddenly they caught sight of something moving further along the shore.

It was a mass of small, pale creatures, pushing a sail-boat out. Moominmamma looked at them for a long time, and then she called loudly: 'Those are the wanderers! Those are the Hattifatteners!' and began to run towards them as fast as she was able. When Moomintroll, the small creature and Tulippa got there, Moominmamma was standing in the midst of the Hattifatteners (who only came up to her waist), talking and asking questions and waving her arms, and very excited. She asked over and over again if they really had not seen Moominpappa, but the Hattifatteners only looked at her for a moment with their round, colourless eyes and then went on pulling the boat towards the water. 'Oh dear,' Moominmamma exclaimed, 'I was in such a hurry that I forgot they can't speak, or hear anything!' And she drew a handsome Moomintroll in the sand with a big question-mark after him. But the Hattifatteners did not care about her at all, they had got the boat down into the sea and were busy hoisting the sails. (It is also possible that they did not understand what she meant, for Hattifatteners are very stupid.)

The black bank of cloud had now risen higher, and waves were beginning to move on the sea.

'There's nothing for it, we shall have to go with them,' said Moominmamma, at last. 'The shore looks gloomy and deserted, and I don't feel like meeting another ant-lion. Jump into the boat, children!'

'Well, it's not on my head!' mumbled the small creature, but he climbed on board after the others all the same. The boat steered out to sea with a Hattifattener at the helm. The sky grew darker and darker all around, the tops of the waves had white foam on them, and far away thunder was rumbling. As it fluttered in the gale, Tulippa's hair glowed with a very faint light.

'Now I'm frightened again,' said the small creature. 'I'm almost beginning to wish I hadn't come with you.'

'Phooh,' said Moomintroll, but then he lost the desire to say any more and crept down beside his mother. Now and then came a wave that was bigger than all the others and splashed in over the prow. The boat sailed on with stretched sails at a furious speed. Sometimes they saw a mermaid dance by on the crests of the waves, sometimes they glimpsed a whole flock of little sea-trolls. The thunder rumbled louder and the lightning ran criss-cross over the sky. 'Now I'm sea-sick, too,' said the small creature, and then he was sick while Moominmamma held his head. The sun had set long ago, but in the gleam of the

lightning they noticed a sea-troll that kept trying to keep abreast of the boat. 'Hello there!' cried Moomintroll through the storm, to show that he was not afraid. 'Hello, hello,' said the sea-troll. 'You look as though you might be a relation.'

'That would be nice,' cried Moomintroll, politely. (But he thought it was probably a very distant relation, because Moomintrolls are a much species than sea-trolls.)

'Jump into the boat,' Tulippa called to the sea-troll, 'otherwise you'll be left behind!'

The sea-troll took a leap over the edge of the boat and shook the water off himself like a dog. 'Grand weather,' he said. 'Where are you bound for?'

'Anywhere, as long as we can go ashore,' groaned the small creature, who was quite green in the face with sea-sickness.

'In that case I had better take the helm for a bit,' said the sea-troll. 'If you keep to this course, you'll go straight out to sea.'

And then he took over from the Hattifattener who sat at the helm, and made the boat alter course. It was strange how much easier it was now that they had the sea-troll with them. The boat danced along, and sometimes it made long leaps over the tops of the waves.

The small creature began to look more cheerful, and Moomintroll shouted with delight. Only the Hattifatteners sat staring indifferently at the horizon. They did not care about anything except travelling on from one strange place to the other.

'I know a fine harbour,' said the sea-troll. 'But the entrance is so narrow that only superior navigators like myself can manage it.' He laughed loudly and made the boat make a mighty leap over the waves. Then they saw land rising out of the sea under the forked lightning. Moominmamma thought it was a wild and dismal land. 'Is there anything to eat?' she asked.

'There's anything you like,' said the sea-troll. 'Hold on, now, for we're going to sail right into the harbour now!'

At that same moment the boat rushed into a black ravine where the storm howled between the enormously high faces of rock. The sea foamed white against the rocks and it looked as though the boat was plunging straight towards them. But it flew light as a bird into a large harbour where the transparent water was calm and green as in a lagoon.

'Thank goodness,' said Moominmamma, for she had not really trusted the sea-troll. 'It certainly looks nice here.'

'It depends on how you judge it,' said the sea-troll. 'I suppose I like it more when a storm is raging. I'd best be off out there again before the waves get smaller.' And then he somersaulted down into the sea, and was gone.

When the Hattifatteners saw an unknown land before them, they livened up; some began to furl the

slack sails and others put out the oars and rowed eagerly towards the flowering green shore. The boat put in at a meadow that was full of wild flowers, and Moomintroll jumped ashore with the mooring-rope.

‘Now bow and thank the Hattifatteners for the voyage,’ said Moominmamma. And Moomintroll made a deep bow, and the small creature wagged his tail gratefully.

‘Thank you very much,’ said Moominmamma and Tulippa, and they curtsied down to the ground. But when they all looked up again, the Hattifatteners had gone on their way. ‘I expect they made themselves invisible,’ said the small creature. ‘Funny folk.’

Then all four of them went in among the flowers. The sun was rising now, and there was a glittering and gleaming in the dew. ‘I should like to live here,’ said Tulippa. ‘These flowers are even more beautiful than my old tulip. Besides, my hair never really matched it properly.’ ‘Look, a house made of real gold!’ shouted the small creature suddenly, pointing. In the middle of the meadow stood a tower with the sun reflecting itself in its long row of windows. The top storey was made entirely of glass, and the sunlight gleamed in it like burning red gold. ‘I wonder who lives there,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Perhaps it’s too early to wake them.’

‘But I’m so horribly hungry,’ said Moomintroll. ‘Me too,’ said the small creature and Tulippa, and then they all looked at Moominmamma. ‘Well – all right, then,’ she said, and then she went up to the tower and knocked on the door. After a little while a hatch in the door opened and a boy with completely red hair looked out. ‘Have you been shipwrecked?’ he asked. ‘Almost,’ said Moominmamma. ‘But we’re quite certainly hungry.’ Then the boy opened the door wide and invited them to come in. And when he caught sight of Tulippa, he made a deep bow, for he had never seen such beautiful blue hair before. And Tulippa curtsied just as deeply, for she thought his red hair was quite charming. Then they all followed him up the spiral staircase, all the way to the top storey made of glass, where they could see out over the sea in all directions. In the midst of the tower-room was a table on which there was an enormous, steaming sea-pudding.

‘Is it really for us?’ asked Moominmamma. ‘Of course,’ said the boy. ‘I keep look-out here when there’s a storm out at sea, and all who escape into my harbour are invited to sea-pudding. That’s how it’s always been.’ Then they sat round the table and after a very short while the whole basin was empty. (The small creature, who sometimes did not have very good manners, took the bowl with him under the table and licked it completely clean.)

‘Thank you very, very much,’ said Moominmamma. ‘You must have invited a lot of people up here for sea-pudding, I should think.’

‘Oh yes,’ said the boy. ‘People from every corner of the world. Snufkins, Sea-ghosts, Little Creeps and Big Folk, Snorks and Hemulens. And the odd angler fish, too.’

‘I suppose you haven’t seen any Moomins, by any chance?’ asked Moominmamma, and she was so excited that her voice quivered.

‘Yes, one,’ said the boy. ‘That was after the cyclone last Monday.’ ‘I wonder if that could have been

Papa?’ cried Moomintroll. ‘Did he keep putting his tail in his pocket?’

‘Yes, he did, actually,’ said the boy. ‘I remember it quite particularly, because it looked so funny.’ Then Moomintroll and his mother were so happy that they fell into each other’s arms, and the small creature jumped up and down and cried ‘hurrah’.

‘Where did he go?’ asked Moominmamma. ‘Did he say anything particular? Where is he? How was he?’

‘Fine,’ said the boy. ‘He took the road to the south.’

‘Then we must go after him at once,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Perhaps we’ll catch up with him. Hurry, children. Where’s my handbag?’ And then she rushed down the spiral staircase so fast that they could scarcely follow her.

‘Wait!’ cried the boy. ‘Wait a bit!’ He caught up with them in the doorway. ‘You must forgive us for not saying goodbye properly,’ said Moominmamma, who was hopping with impatience. ‘But you see...’

‘It’s not that,’ said the boy. ‘Fair Tulippa, I suppose you wouldn’t like to stay with me, would you?’

‘Oh yes,’ replied Tulippa at once, and looked happy. ‘All the time I was sitting up there, I was thinking how well my hair might shine for seafarers in your glass tower. And I’m very good at making sea-pudding.’ But then she became a little anxious, and looked at Moominmamma. ‘Of course I would terribly like to help you to look, as well...’ she said. ‘Oh, we’ll manage, I expect,’ said Moominmamma. ‘We’ll send you both a letter and tell you what happened.’

Then they all hugged one another goodbye and Moomintroll went on his way southwards with his mother and the small creature. All day they walked through the flowering landscape, which Moomintroll would have liked to explore on his own. But his mother was in a hurry and would not let him stop. ‘Have you ever seen such funny trees?’ asked the small creature. ‘They’ve got such terribly long trunks and then a little puff on top. I think it they look silly.’

‘It’s you who’s silly,’ said Moominmamma, who was nervous. ‘Actually, they’re palm trees and they always look like that.’ ‘By all means!’ said the small creature, and was offended.

It had become very hot late in the afternoon. Everywhere the plants drooped, and the sun shone down with a dismal red light. Even though Moomins are very fond of warmth, they felt quite limp and would have liked to rest under one of the large cactuses that grew everywhere. But Moominmamma would not stop until they had found some trace of Moomintroll’s Papa. They continued on their way, even though it was already beginning to get dark, always straight southward. Suddenly the small creature stopped and listened. ‘What’s that pattering around us?’ he asked.

And now they could hear a whispering and a rustling among the leaves. ‘It’s only the rain,’ said Moominmamma. ‘All the same, we must crawl in under the cactuses.’

All night it rained, and in the morning it was simply pouring down in bucketfuls. When they looked out, everything was grey and melancholy.

‘It’s no good, we must go on,’ said Moominmamma. ‘But here is something for you which I’ve been saving until it was really needed.’ And then she produced a large bar of chocolate from her handbag. She had taken it with her from the old gentleman’s wonderful garden. She split it in two and gave them each a piece. ‘Aren’t you going to have some?’ asked Moomintroll.

‘No,’ said his mother. ‘I don’t like chocolate.’

Then they walked on in the pouring rain all that day and all the next day, too. All they found to eat was a few sopping wet yams and one or two figs. On the third day it rained even harder than ever and each little rivulet had become a foaming torrent. It became more and more difficult to make any progress, the water rose ceaselessly, and at last they had to climb up on to a small rock so as not to be snatched away by the current. There they sat, watching the rushing eddies come closer and closer to them, and feeling that they were catching cold. Floating around everywhere were furniture and houses and big trees that the flood had carried with it.

‘I think I want to go home!’ said the small creature, but no one listened to him. The others had caught sight of something strange that was dancing and whirling towards them in the water. ‘They’ve been shipwrecked!’ cried Moomintroll, who had sharp eyes. ‘A whole family! Mamma, we must rescue them!’ The thing that was lurching towards them was an upholstered armchair; sometimes it got caught in the tree-tops that stuck up out of the water, but was pulled free by the current and went drifting on. In the chair sat a wet cat with five equally wet kittens around her. ‘Poor mother!’ cried Moominmamma, and she jumped out into the water all the way up to her waist. ‘Hold on to me, and I’ll try to catch them with my tail!’

Moomintroll took a steady hold of his mother, and the small creature was so excited that it did not manage to do anything at all. Now the armchair was eddying by; Moominmamma tied her tail lightning fast in a half-hitch round one of the armrests, and then she pulled. ‘Heave-ho!’ she cried. ‘Heave-ho!’ cried Moomintroll. ‘Hey, hey!’ squeaked the small creature. ‘Don’t let go!’ Slowly the chair swayed in towards the rock, and then a helpful wave came and guided it up on to the land. The cat picked up her kittens by the scruff of their necks, one by one, and put them in a row to dry.

‘Thank you for your kind help,’ she said. ‘This is the worst scrape I’ve ever been in. By all the cats in hell!’

And then she began to lick her children.

‘I think the weather’s clearing up,’ said the small creature, who wanted to make them think about something else. (He was embarrassed because he had not managed to help in the rescue.) And it was true – the clouds were moving apart and one shaft of sunlight flew straight down, and then another – and all of a sudden the sun was shining over the enormous, steaming surface of the water.

‘Hurrah!’ cried Moomintroll. ‘Now everything will be all right, you’ll see!’

A small breeze arose and chased the clouds away and shook the tree-tops that were heavy with rain. The agitated water calmed down, somewhere a bird began to chirp and the cat purred in the sunshine. ‘Now we can go on,’ said Moominmamma, firmly. ‘We don’t have time to wait until the water sinks away. Get up into the armchair, children, and then I’ll push it out into the lake.’ ‘I think I’ll stay here,’ said the cat,

and yawned. 'One should never get involved in needless fuss. When the ground is dry I'll walk home again.' And her five kittens, who had recovered in the sunshine sat up and yawned, too.

Then Moominmamma pushed the armchair out from the shore. 'Go carefully!' cried the small creature. He was sitting on the backrest and looking around, for it had occurred to him that they might find something valuable floating in the water after the flood. For example, a casket full of jewels. Why not? He kept a sharp watch, and when he suddenly saw something gleaming in the water, he shouted loudly with excitement. 'Go that way,' he cried. 'There's something shining over there!'

'We haven't got time to fish up everything that's floating around,' said Moominmamma, but she paddled that way all the same, because she was a nice Mamma.

'It's just an old bottle,' said the small creature, disappointed, when he had hauled it up with his tail. 'And no nice sweet drink in it either,' said Moomintroll.

'But don't you see?' said his mother, seriously. 'It's something very interesting, it's a message in a bottle. There's a letter inside.' And then she took a corkscrew out of her handbag and uncorked the bottle. With trembling hands she spread out the letter on her knee and read aloud:

'Dear finder, please do what you can to rescue me! My beautiful house has been swept away by the flood and now I am sitting hungry and cold in a tree while the water rises higher and higher.

An unhappy Moomin.'

'Lonely and hungry and cold,' said Moominmamma, and she cried. 'Oh, my poor dear Moomintroll, your father probably drowned long ago!'

'Don't cry,' said Moomintroll. 'He may be sitting in a tree somewhere very close. After all, the water is subsiding as fast as can be.' And so it was.

Here and there hillocks and fences and roofs were already sticking up above the surface of the water, and now the birds were singing at the tops of their voices.

The armchair bobbed slowly along towards a hill where a lot of people were running about, pulling their belongings out of the water. 'Why, there's my armchair,' cried a big Hemulen who was gathering his dining-room furniture together on the shore. 'What do you think you're doing sailing around in my armchair?'

'And a rotten boat it made, too!' said Moominmamma, crossly, and she stepped ashore. 'I wouldn't have it for anything in the world!'

'Don't annoy him,' whispered the small creature. 'He may bite!' 'Rubbish,' said Moominmamma. 'Come along now, children.' And on they walked along the shore, while the Hemulen examined the wet stuffing in his chair.

'Look!' said Moomintroll, pointing to a marabou stork who was walking around, scolding to himself. 'I wonder what he's lost – he looks even angrier than the Hemulen!'

‘My dear impudent child,’ said the marabou stork, for he had good ears. ‘If you were nearly a hundred years old and had lost your spectacles, you wouldn’t exactly look pleased, either.’ And then he turned his back to them and continued his search. ‘Come along now,’ said Moominmamma. ‘We must look for your father.’

She took Moomintroll and the small creature by the hand and hurried on. After a while they saw something gleaming in the grass where the water had subsided. ‘I bet it’s a diamond!’ cried the small creature. But when they looked more closely, they saw that it was only a pair of spectacles.

‘Do you think they’re the marabou stork’s, mother?’ asked Moomintroll. ‘Of course,’ she said. ‘I suppose you had better run back and give them to him. But hurry up, for your poor father is sitting somewhere hungry and wet and all alone.’

Moomintroll ran as fast as he could on his short legs, and far away he saw the marabou stork poking about in the water. ‘Hallo, hallo!’ he cried. ‘Here are your spectacles, Uncle Stork!’

‘Really?’ said the marabou stork, very pleased. ‘Perhaps you are not such an impossible little child after all.’ And then he put on his spectacles and turned his head this way and that.

‘I’m afraid I must go at once,’ said Moomintroll. ‘You see, we’re out looking too.’ ‘Well, well, I see,’ said the marabou stork in a friendly voice. ‘What are you looking for?’

‘My father,’ said Moomintroll. ‘He’s up a tree somewhere.’

The marabou stork thought for a long time. Then he said firmly: ‘You will never manage it alone. But I will help you, because you found my spectacles.’

Then he picked up Moomintroll in his beak, very carefully, and put him on his back, flapped his wings a few times and sailed away over the shore.

Moomintroll had never flown before, and he thought it was tremendous fun, and a little uncanny. He was also quite proud when the marabou stork landed beside his mother and the small creature.

‘I am most indebted to you for your inquiries, madam,’ said the marabou stork, bowing to Moominmamma. ‘If the family will climb on board we shall effect our departure at once. And then he lifted first her and then the small creature, who squeaked with excitement. ‘Hold on tight,’ said the marabou stork. ‘We’re going to fly out over the water now.’

‘I think this is the most wonderful thing we’ve been through so far,’ said Moominmamma. ‘Why, flying is not nearly as frightening as I thought. Now keep a good look out for Moominpappa in all directions!’ The marabou stork flew in wide circles and came in low over each treetop. They saw a lot of people sitting amidst the branches, but none of them was who they were looking for. ‘I shall have to rescue those creeps over there later on,’ said the marabou stork, whom the rescue expedition had made positively cheerful. He flew to and fro above the water for a long time, the sun began to set, and everything seemed quite hopeless. Suddenly Moominmamma cried: ‘There he is!’ and began to wave her arms so wildly that she nearly fell off.

'Papa!' shouted Moomintroll, and the small creature cried out too, just to keep him company.

There, on one of the highest branches of an enormous tree sat a wet, sad Moominpappa, staring out over the water. Beside him he had tied a distress flag. He was so amazed and delighted when the marabou stork landed in the tree, and the whole of his family climbed down on to the branches, that he could not say a word. 'Now we shall never be separated again,' sobbed Moominmamma, and took him in her arms. 'How are you? Have you got a cold? Where have you been all this time? Was the house you built a very fine one? Did you think of us often?'

'It was a very fine house, alas,' said Moominpappa. 'My dear little boy, how you have grown!'

'Well, well,' said the marabou stork, who was beginning to feel touched. 'I think I had better put you down on dry land and try to rescue a few more until the sun goes down. It's very pleasant, rescuing people.' And then he took them back to the shore while they all talked at the same time about all the dreadful things they had been through. All along the shore people had lit fires at which they were warming themselves and cooking food, for most had lost their homes. The marabou stork put down Moomintroll, his father and mother and the small creature at one of the bonfires, and with a hasty farewell he flew out over the water again. 'Good evening,' said the two angler fish who had lit the fire. 'Please sit down, the soup will be ready in a moment.'

'Thank you very much,' said Moominpappa. 'You have no idea what a fine house I had before the flood. Built it all by myself. But if I get a new one, you will be welcome there any time.'

'How big was it?' asked the small creature.

'Three rooms,' said Moominpappa. 'One sky-blue, one sunshine-yellow and one spotted. And a guest room in the attic for you, small creature.' 'Did you really mean us to live there too?' asked Moominmamma, very pleased. 'Of course,' he said. 'I looked for you always, everywhere. I could never forget our dear old stove.'

Then they sat and told one another about their experiences and ate soup until the moon had risen and the fires began to go out along the shore. Then they borrowed a blanket from the angler fish and curled up close next to one another and fell asleep.

Next morning the water had subsided a good way, and they all went out into the sunshine in a very good mood. The small creature danced in front of them and tied a bow in his tail because he was so happy. All day they walked, and wherever they went it was beautiful, for after the rain the most wonderful flowers had come out everywhere and the trees had both flowers and fruits. They only needed to shake a tree slightly, and the fruits fell down among them. At last they came to a small valley that was more beautiful than any they had seen earlier in the day. And there, in the midst of the meadow, stood a house that almost looked like a stove, very elegant and painted blue. 'Why, that's my house!' cried Moominpappa, quite beside himself with joy. 'It must have floated here, and here it is!'

'Hurrah!' shouted the small creature, and then they all rushed down into the valley to admire the house. The small creature even climbed up on the roof, and there he shouted even louder, for up on the chimney hung a necklace of real, large pearls that had lodged there during the flood.

‘Now we are rich!’ he cried. ‘We can buy a car and an even bigger house!’ ‘No,’ said Moominmamma. ‘This house is the most beautiful one we shall ever have.’

And then she took Moomintroll by the hand and went into the sky-blue room. And there in the valley they spent the whole of their lives, apart from a few times when they left it and travelled for a change.

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