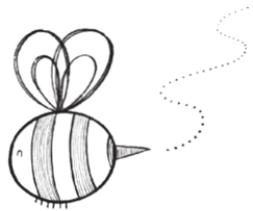


HONEY MOUNTAIN

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KERFLUMDRA



SYLFA



Chapter 1



On the other side of the great forest called Mulberry Wood are meadows and fields which stretch for pleasant miles until they turn into the murky Mushy Marsh and the stinking Slushy Swamp. These two damp features in the landscape have to be crossed before you can go down onto the banks of the Great Rumbling River. Crossing this wide and dangerous river is difficult and the traveller will endure great perils to get across.

On the opposite North Bank, the land rises and the country turns wild. First there is the Windy Heath, often known as the Howling Heath, and then, at higher altitudes, this turns into the Moaning Moor. Finally the traveller comes, full of fear and foreboding, to the foothills of the Blackscarp Mountains with their black, brooding peaks rising far above them. Bulzaban is the highest of these mountains and is reached by a steep climb up a path that is strewn with rocks and boulders.

All along this track there are precipitous vertical drops

on either side and at the end there is a windswept rocky outcrop called Cut-throat Crag where no trees grow and no birds sing. No birds sing songs, that is, but fierce black crows fill the air with their cawing and rasping croaks. They feed on debris thrown out by the unseen inhabitants of the mountain who dwell in the mysterious caverns beneath.

Lummock, the troll, lifted the sack curtain at the window hole of his hovel. He had been able to construct his simple home from some of the small boulders that litter the mountain side because trolls are good at dry stone walling. He was looking out because he had heard that rumbling sound again and, sure enough, another black metal wagon came clanking up the track. Like all the others, it was covered with padlocks, had no windows and was pulled by six enormous black rats with chains around their necks. The driver was an old gnome with an evil, knobby face and a scowl that would make cheese turn mouldy. He smoked an old pipe, the noxious fumes from which made the rats' eyes water and he spat green slime onto the sides of the path. The boils on his face leaked their own putrid liquid which, once dry, encrusted his brown leathery skin with scabs and made him look even more fearsome.

At the top of the track the wagon stopped because the mountain side rose up in front as an impenetrable rocky mass. The gnome tapped out his foul-smelling pipe and jumped down from the driver's seat. He coughed loudly which was not difficult for one addicted to smoking

such a vile pipe. His cough could be heard in the valley below. In response to this hacking sound, words appeared in a tidy square on the rock face. They were illuminated by an eerie green glow from within and they read, "NOCK HEER FOR ASSISSTUNS". The old gnome sighed deeply and banged hard on the square of rock. In response to his knocking a slate door, high above his head, scraped to one side but no face appeared. Instead a crackly voice called out, "Password?"

The gnome shouted back, "I dunno. Ya never tell me it."

There was a pause. Then the disembodied voice called out again.

"That's true. So, what's yer name?"

"Pustular!"

"That is correct." The voice sounded very smug.

"We knew it was you because of the smell! So what ya got this time? Wild or tame, unborn or hatched?"

"I got a nice consignment of bumblebees for ya. 'Nough to keep me in the luxury to which I could very easily become accustomed," the knobbly gnome shouted up at the hole.

"We'll see 'bout that. Ya need the second portal on the right, then".

There was a grinding and scraping sound in the mountain side and a huge slab slid to one side to reveal an entrance in the cliff face.

Pustular muttered some abuse that outlined the limited nature of the gatekeeper's intelligence, flicked the chains over the backs of the rats and reined them

into the blackness. His insults and curses rang in the air drowning out the squeaking of the rats as he brought down the metal links of the chain on the thin flesh of their backs.

When he had rumbled into the darkness the slab slid back and scraped into place with a sickening groan. No sign of life remained and the cold, echoing mountain-side returned to normal.

Lummock frowned, dropped his raggedy curtain and went back to the wooden bench which served as his bed. He buried his bulk once again among the tattered sacks that acted as his bed linen and pondered on what he had seen. However, his rather slow brain cells were soon exhausted and he fell back into troll slumber, dreaming of a goat pie that ran with thick onion gravy and was topped with crispy, golden brown pastry. He dribbled and drooled in his sleep.



It is a well known fact that a fairy who has been up all night at the Grand Spring Ball in Mulberry Wood must be in want of a place to sleep and that is why Tansy had snuggled inside a buttercup flower in Dingle Dell and was about to snatch a much needed forty winks. Feeling very weary, but extremely contented, she curled her delicate frame into the cup of yellow petals and let the gently

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