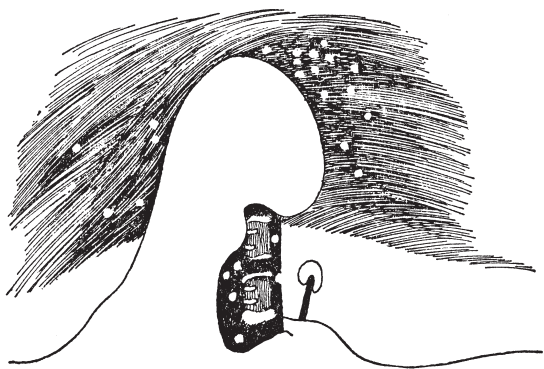




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PREFACE

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.'

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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 goodnight 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.'

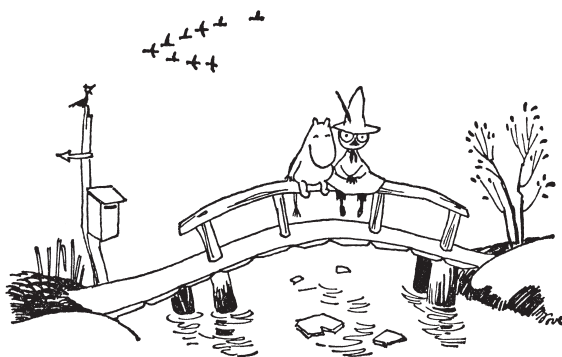
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‘Don’t worry,’ answered Snufkin, ‘we shall have wonderful dreams, and when we wake up it’ll be spring.’

‘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.

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CHAPTER 1

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

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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. Aha, 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.

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‘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.’

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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.)

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