



**INTRODUCTION by Tom Devlin,
Creative Director at Drawn & Quarterly**

In 2011, I went to Helsinki and was lucky enough to tour Tove Jansson's studio. She lived in the same large studio for fifty-seven years. It was easy to picture Tove there. I saw the table she used to write at; I saw the wood-burning stove she used to heat her house during the long winters; I saw the shelves and shelves of books—many her own, or her favorites by other authors, and even the hand-lettered scrapbooks her mother, Signe, made where she stored the strips she clipped from the newspaper. I saw the tiny alcove with the even tinier bed she had slept in for years. It was surprising how modest the whole place was. As far as I knew she was Finland's greatest literary celebrity, and yet she had lived such a simple life. Of course, I should have known this before I stepped over the threshold. It's in her books. It's visually manifest in her comics. The Moomins themselves live modest lives. They have many adventures but home is simple and comforting and there is nothing unnecessary.

Rereading these comics just before preparing this book, it struck me just how much of Tove we get in these stories. The Moomin stories (whether in chapter book, picture book, or comic form) all have a similar quality—a quality that is rare in today's world. There's a distinctly carefree, individualist vibe mixed with a hint of playful cynicism, a kind of embrace-life-and-live-it-to-its-fullest-but-maybe-don't-get-too-carried-away ethos. The Moomins can be selfish, cruel, and petty at times, but more often than not they are generous, nurturing, and involved—like real people. The Moomin world is populated by cranks, misanthropes, beasts, monsters, fretters, hagglers, and poets. The Moomin family clashes or organizes with these folks against common enemies or natural disasters or themselves.

One of my personal favorite aspects of the Moomin stories is how Jansson never preaches. The world is what it is and the Moomins are who they are and maybe we should all just stop and have some tea and jam or go for a walk. And *the drawings!* Tove Jansson is in that elite class of illustrators who can say so much with so little in the simplest illustration but then turn around and fill a page with undulating lines of darkness and water. Her drawings are a revelation—deep black ink or gorgeous, fulsome watercolors demand we stop and drink them in while clearly propelling us forward to the next adventure. Has any children's author ever so eloquently stated, book after book, story after story, “You are alone but that's okay, we're all alone”—and made it seem like an affirmation?

I didn't read the Moomin books as a kid. I only heard about them as an adult. The descriptions people used seemed improbable. These books couldn't possibly exist. Small mushroomlike beings that emit an electrical charge (Hattifatteners)—no way! A muskrat that carries a book called *The Uselessness of Everything*—never! But I was intrigued. And even better, there seemed to be a little-

known comic strip...I was designing a book series for Drawn & Quarterly in my head the moment I heard about that comic strip. I remember holding oversized slim hardcover books in my tiny hands as a child. They felt important; they enveloped me as I read them. I was physically in the book's world. I would lean back in an enormous chair and the book would cover me—the book was a roof, the book was shelter. I knew that was what a Moomin comic book should be. It should feel ageless, heavy (but not too heavy!), and there should be a bunch of books—to talk about, to lend, to lose, to find again, to fall asleep clutching. They should feel like the most important thing I had ever touched.

How did Drawn & Quarterly come to publish the *Moomin* comic strips? The story goes like this: New Zealand cartoonist Dylan Horrocks was visiting the US on a tour (along with Tom Hart, Megan Kelso, and James Kochalka) I had organized for his graphic novel *Hicksville*, and he had brought along a photocopy of the first and only English Moomin comic collection—a photocopy he had made from the rare copy that British comics historian Paul Gravett had in his collection. As luck would have it, I worked right next to a copy shop and I took a spare moment to make myself a copy of that copy. I immediately placed it on my bookshelf and headed out on tour with Dylan and the others and promptly forgot about this treasure. Years later, during a move, I unearthed the photocopied comic, paused, and read it. I was stunned. This was clearly one of the funniest, deepest, and most beautifully drawn comics I had ever read. Were there more? Again, years passed; I was living in Montreal and had been working for Drawn & Quarterly for a couple of years. D+Q had been

Chris Oliveros and Chris only for fifteen years, and Chris had a very distinct editorial vision. I was hesitant to pitch ideas to him lest they dilute the Drawn & Quarterly aesthetic. But Moomin might be the book, I thought. Chris's "yes" was immediate. I had no idea where to start but quickly discovered that there was a Moomin museum in Tampere, Finland, and if anyone might know who to contact it must be them. Sure enough, within hours they replied and I sent off my next email to the comic's rights holders, Bulls Licensing. In less than a day, the deal was done. Drawn & Quarterly was going to publish the complete Tove Jansson *Moomin* comic strip for the first time in the English-speaking world. We had no idea if this would be successful. Would people really care about a fifty-year-old Nordic comic strip? *Moomin: The Complete Tove Jansson Comic Strip* became the fastest-selling book in Drawn & Quarterly's history. So, I guess people did care.

I have my favorite stories in these Moomin strips for sure. Moomin's infatuation with Miss La Goona in "Moomin Falls in Love" is a particular favorite. The story contains some of my favorite comic lines ever written. The strip actually begins with Moomin saying "I wonder...why the heroine in a book...is always much more beautiful... than the one at home." Moomin says this as he trudges home in a rainstorm to his beloved Snorkmaiden.

After much back-and-forth and breaking of hearts, the story ends with



Moomin back with Snorkmaiden as he says, “I beseech you, think not of my infidelity.” Snorkmaiden’s reply is the withering and succinct “My heart is like the still white snow.” Brutal!

“Moomin’s Desert Island” has a host of Tove’s most direct and hilarious situations as well as some of her odder flights of fancy. After the Moomin family kills a wild boar and eats it for dinner, they encounter the boar’s wife, who agrees maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing. She requests that the Moomins at least bury his bones. This story also contains a great visual joke in that the Moomins somehow happen upon their ancestors, who are taller, skinnier versions of the Moomins, harking back to Tove’s early drawings of the Moomins before they appeared in the children’s books.

It is hard to pick favorites. There’s “Moomin’s Winter Follies” with its blowing grass and its squiggly hay and pages of Moomin slapstick and one of my all-time favorite characters, the winter-sports-loving “free and easy, brisk and breezy” Mr. Brisk. Well, I don’t so much love the character as I love the Moomins’ reaction to him, because the family as a whole finds

his rugged embrace of the cold an irritant at best—except Mymble, who declares, “Mr. Brisk is wonderful. He has made me understand...that we are all degenerate weaklings!”

At the end of her run on the comic strip, weary from years of deadlines and drawing the characters again and again, afraid this is what her life would be, Tove wrote the story “Moomin and the Golden Tail,” which is one of the funniest and saddest stories about success and its pitfalls in any medium. “I’m writing your biography. Would you say you are a precocious child?”; “My manager says fame can only be sustained by public appearances”; “You must raise your standards! Live up to the public’s expectations!” So many hilarious lines as Moomin becomes famous and then sees that fame disappear. At the height of his fame, he buys a cauliflower-white and rhinoceros-grey couch—just the best palette naming ever.

“Moomin and the Golden Tail” was the last comic strip that Tove wrote and drew. She drew four other stories after that, all written by her brother Lars. (These are the last three stories in the book plus the superb reworking of the prose classic “Comet in Moominland,” which precedes “Golden Tail” in publication if not execution.) She had tired of writing and drawing the comics but remained under contract. In one of the sweetest familial moves in comics history, Tove’s mother, Signe, and Lars “conspired” behind Tove’s back to make Lars her successor. He secretly taught himself to cartoon and presented Tove with his efforts. Lars quietly took over the family business and Tove went on to write novels, paint, and draw.





Since Drawn & Quarterly started publishing the Moomin comic strips and then the picture books—*The Book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My* and *Who Will Comfort Toffle?*—other publishers have released lost or little-known works of Tove's. You should seek these out—books by Sort Of and New York Review of Books, and of course those great chapter books that Farrar, Straus and Giroux have kept in print all these years. As we celebrate what would have been Tove's hundredth birthday, there's more of her work in print than ever before. This seems miraculous. But it's how it should be. Tove Jansson is many things—a great writer for kids, a great writer for adults, a beautiful illustrator, and a fantastic cartoonist. All these artists are finally out there for us to see at once.

As we put this book together, I thought a lot about how I came to know the Moomin comics and about the people with whom I shared enthusiastic Moomin-centered conversations once we started publishing those comics. Many of us share an enthusiasm for similar things in Tove's writing as you'll soon see. I asked these people to contribute their recollections, because when I think about Moomin, I think about these old and new friendships.

DYLAN HORROCKS, author of *Hicksville*

One of my earliest memories is of my mother reading me the Moomins while a storm raged outside. Later, I read them by myself, over and over, studying the pictures and letting the words roll around in my head. Images from those books crept into my brain like small forest creatures and built little houses from leaves and twigs, settling in for good and seeping into my daydreams and drawings and stories: the comet, a floating theatre, the Hobgoblin's hat, the mountainous empty ocean floor, giant waves and sand-filled caves and—above all—the lighthouse.

When I was thirteen, I found a history of comics in my school library (*Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* by Reitberger and Fuchs), a German book translated into English. Flicking through it I was amazed to find a couple of panels from a Moomin comic strip. I had no idea such a thing existed; all I'd seen was the novels. It was like dreaming of the perfect comic—the comic you always wished was real—and then waking up to find it was. But for a teenager in New Zealand in the early 1980s, finding out more was next to impossible. Years passed, and I began to think I'd imagined those few excerpted panels. No other history of comics mentioned a Moomin comic strip, and there was nothing in any library or any bookstore. But I still had the novels.

When I was twenty I fell in love with a girl with wild hair and a crooked smile and sent her a set of the Moomin books—the first present I gave her—and now we're married with two (nearly) grown-up sons. We still have those copies, old and worn from being carried around the world and brought back home. And there are miniature plastic Moomintrolls and Snufkins sitting on our windowsill and a paper Moomin stuck on the fridge.

At twenty-three, after moving to England, missing New Zealand and missing her, I bought another set of the Moomins and re-read them all over again. They kept me grounded and sane. I began to find other cartoonists who shared my obsession, including Glenn Dakin, whose beautiful minicomic about visiting Finland in search of the Moomins is a prized possession, and Tom Hart, whose early comics reference Jansson with almost every line. It slowly became clear that the Moomin comic strips were—for English-speaking readers, at least—a lost classic of cartooning: rare photocopies were passed around by hand like the Holy Grail. And when at last Drawn & Quarterly brought them back into print, the strips themselves were a revelation: playful, sardonic, and—of course—beautifully drawn.

I tried to write down why Tove Jansson is so important to me. It's hard to put this into words, but this is the best I could come up with:

1. *She was honest. Her stories were personal and probing, exploring the complicated mess of contradictory feelings that make us human without trying to force them into a neat and tidy structure.*

2. *She understood what it feels like to long for adventure while at the same time desperately wanting to creep into a safe, dark closet and go to sleep.*

3. *Her drawings look like they were made by a human hand. They feel mortal. Fragile and intimate. Human.*

4. *Her drawings are also powerful, muscular, gritty, and strong. Thick shadows and scratchy lines. Dark things that come from our violent angry places.*

5. *And love. Often sad, lonely, and dissatisfied love, but so much love. Jansson rages with love. Furiously in love with being alive and lost and stupid, wanting more than we can have and making things worse.*

6. *The Groke.*

7. *When she started drawing comic strips, Jansson ignored all the rules and did it her way. Decorative borders, playful narrative games, harsh black comedy, and casual absurdity. The Moomin strips are like comics from another world, where comics are something else entirely.*

8. *The Moomins have always been there and always will, from before I could read to now, with greying hair and kids taller than me. Each time I read them, it's like she wrote them for me as I am right now. Sometimes they make me feel happy and free; other times they help me accept how hard it all is.*

9. *The more I read about Jansson's life, the more I adore her. Her life was huge and difficult and beautiful and brave. Pictures of her always make me smile.*

10. *She's on your side.*

JAMES KOCHALKA, author of *American Elf, The Glorkian Warrior Delivers a Pizza, Johnny Boo, and numerous other comics*

I think I was maybe eleven years old when I discovered the Moomin books. For me this was a great age to start reading them...because they perfectly captured my freshly minted nostalgia for childhood. The pacing and tone felt like the life I had actually lived...the joy of imagination mixed with loneliness and a dash of fear, maybe? Most of my adventures as a young kid were in my own mind, drawing and pretending. But in those days we were also all free to wander the world unaccompanied by adult supervision, and so some actual true adventures were had as well. I saw the beauty and strangeness and magic of the world, and even real danger.

One fact that I find rather striking about many beloved chapter books for children is that the adventures can't really begin until the parents are dead. In the Moomin books this is not the case. Moomin Mama is always there to love you and comfort you at the adventure's end, or maybe even at various steps along the way. This mirrors my own childhood...whatever thrills (or terrors) I happened to encounter in the neighborhood at large, home was always safe and loving.

Episode 16. Snorkmaiden goes Rococo.



Revolutionären.

Tove Jansson's Character Studies for the Moomin Comic Strip

Translated from the Swedish by Tiina Nunnally



Annorots kungen.

One of the sad parts of comics history is how poorly original comic art was regarded years ago. It was considered just a means to the printed end and afterwards it was rarely returned to the artist or even stored at the publisher or syndicate. It was often just tossed out. And such was the case with the Moomin comic strips. Very little remains of Tove's comic strip work unless it was a personally rejected strip that never ran. There are some pencil roughs. And there are sketches. And in this case there are some ink studies. Fortunately, these beautiful drawings never left Tove's studio. When Drawn & Quarterly was assembling this book, we asked the rights holders, Bulls Licensing, if there was something we could add as extras—a special treat for the slipcase edition. We didn't expect much. So it was a very pleasant surprise that in fact there was a wealth of work—over thirty-five pages of tightly-drawn little-seen character studies for many of the strips that appear throughout this book. So, enjoy this behind the scenes look at one of the great comic strips of all time.

—Tom Devlin



Tove Jansson

Halberdiers



Episode 1.
Moomin.

Muumintrollin ystävä.

Gamyler.

Ei kukaan näin ennen.

En Hattifattener.

Samma gamyler
sedan de har
druckit fö-
berlingsvattnet.

Tove Jansson

Episode 1-Moomin. Middle right: Moomintroll's friends. Middle left: Gamyler. Bottom left: A strange creature, full face. Bottom center: A Hattifattener. Bottom right: The same Gamyler after they're transformed by drinking the magic water.



Polis.



Elakt barn.



Hemul.



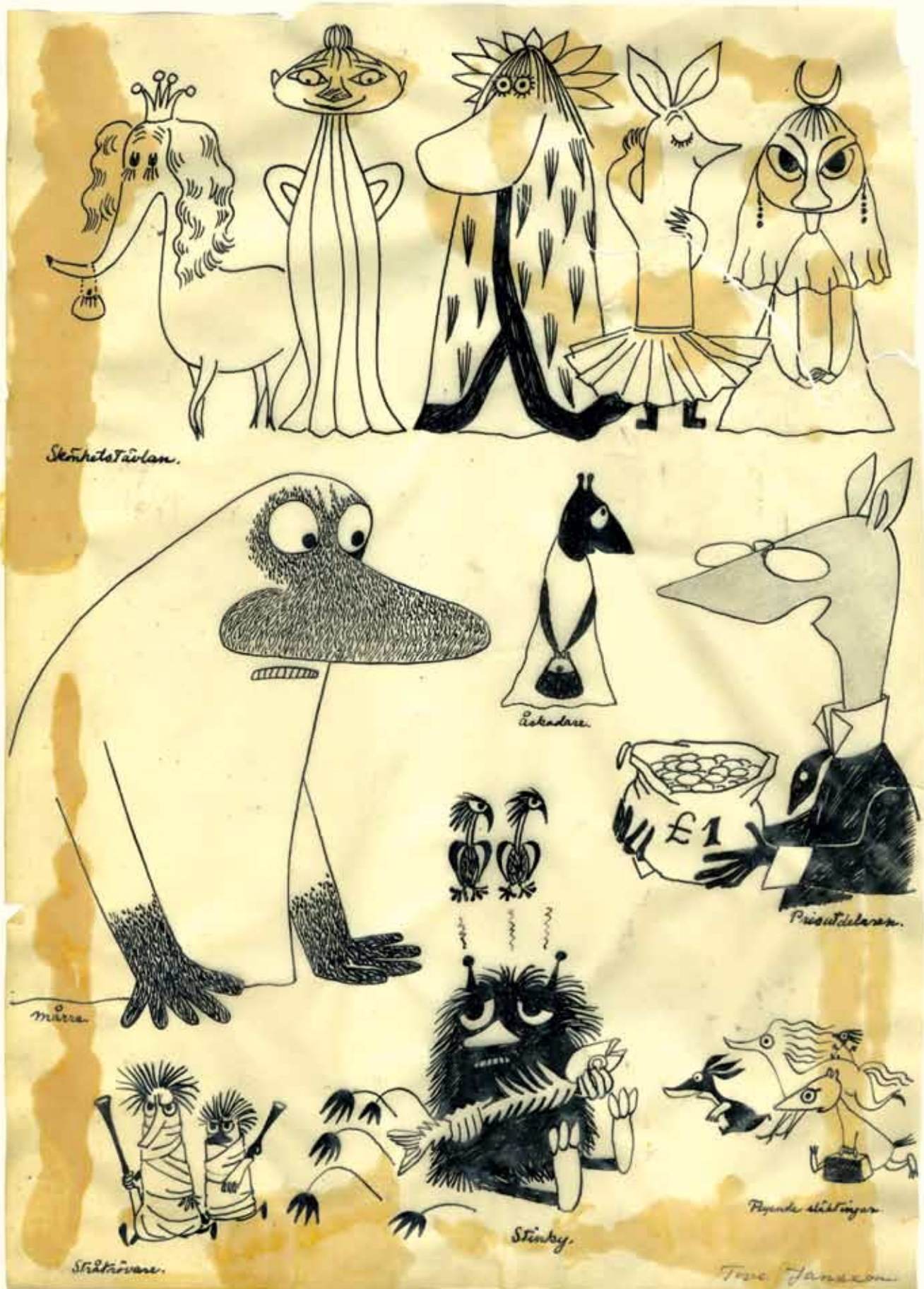
Katastrof-djur.



Hemul.

Tove Jansson

Episode 1-Moomin. Middle left: Police. Middle center: Beloved child. Bottom left: Hemulen. Bottom center: Catastrophe-creature. Bottom right: Hemulen.



Top left: Beauty pageant. Middle left: Mårre. Middle center: Spectator. Middle right: Prize-giver. Bottom left: Brigands. Bottom center: Stinky. Bottom right: Fleeing relatives.