

## CHAPTER ONE

*Which is about Moomintroll and Sniff following a mysterious path to the sea, pearl-fishing, the discovery of a cave, and how the Muskrat avoided catching a cold.*

**T**he Moomin family had been living for some weeks in the valley where they had found their house\* after the dreadful flood (which is another story). It was a wonderful valley, full of happy little animals and flowering trees, and there was a clear narrow river that came down from the mountain, looped round Moominhouse, and disappeared in the

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\*It was painted blue. Moominhouses usually are. *Translator.*

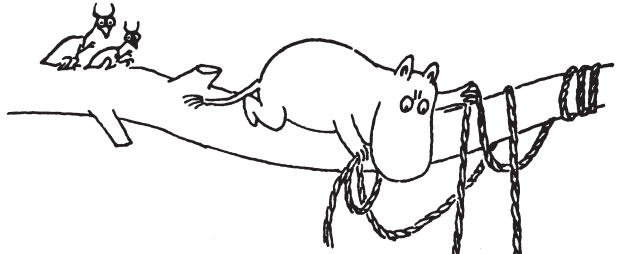
direction of another valley, where no doubt other little animals wondered where it came from.

One morning—it was the morning that Moomintroll’s pappa finished building a bridge over the river—the little animal Sniff made a discovery. (There were still plenty of things left for them to discover in the valley.) He was wandering in the forest when he suddenly noticed a path he had never seen before winding mysteriously into the green shadows. Sniff was spellbound and stood gazing at it for several minutes.

“It’s funny about paths and rivers,” he mused. “You see them go by, and suddenly you feel upset and want to be somewhere else—wherever the path or the river is going, perhaps. I shall have to tell Moomintroll about this, and we can explore it together, because it would be a bit risky for me to go alone.” Then he carved a secret sign on a tree trunk with his penknife, so that he could find the place again, and thought proudly: “Moomintroll *will* be surprised.” And after that he scooted home as fast as he could so as not to be late for lunch.

Moomintroll was just putting up a swing when Sniff got home. He seemed very interested in the mysterious path, and directly after lunch they set off to have a look at it.

Halfway up the hill on their way grew a clump of blue-trees covered with big yellow pears, and of course they couldn’t get past that without Sniff deciding that he was hungry.

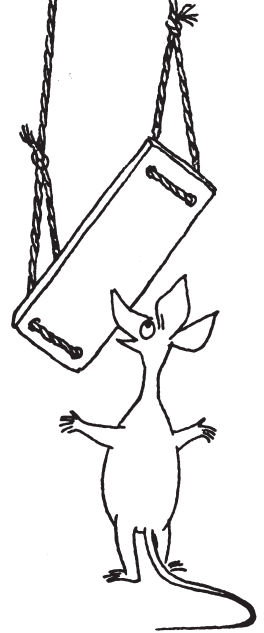


“We’d better only take the windfalls,” said Moomintroll, “because mamma makes jam from these.” But they had to shake the tree a little so that there *were* some windfalls.

Sniff was very pleased with their haul. “You can carry the provisions,” he said, “because you haven’t got anything else to do, have you? I’m too busy to think about things like that when I’m the Path Pioneer.”

When they reached the top of the hill they turned and looked down at the valley. Moominhouse was just a blue dot, and the river a narrow ribbon of green: the swing they couldn’t see at all. “We’ve never been such a long way from home before,” said Moomintroll, and a little goose-fleshy thrill of excitement came over them at the thought.

Sniff started to snuffle about. He looked at the sun, felt the direction of the wind, sniffed the air, and in fact behaved in every way like a great Path Pioneer.





“It should be somewhere here,” he said busily. “I made a secret sign with my knife on a plum tree just where it began.”

“Could it possibly be here?” asked Moomintroll, pointing to a curly flourish on a tree trunk on the left.

“No! Here it is!” screamed Sniff, who had found another curly flourish on a tree trunk on the right.

At the same time they both caught sight of a third curly flourish on a tree trunk right in front of them, but it was terribly high up, at least three feet above the ground.

“That’s it, I’m sure,” said Sniff, stretching himself. “I must be taller than I thought!”

“Well, strike me pink!” exclaimed Moomintroll, looking around. “There are curly flourishes everywhere! And some of them are nearly a hundred feet up. I think you’ve found a haunted path, Sniff, and now the spooks are trying to stop us from using it. What do you say to *that*?”

Sniff didn’t say anything, but he got very pale about the nose. And at that moment a cackle of spooky laughter broke the silence, and down fell a big blue plum, which nearly hit Moomintroll in the eye. Sniff gave a screech of terror and ran for cover, but Moomintroll

was just angry, and had decided to have a look for the enemy when, all of a sudden, he saw who it was. For the first time in his life he was face to face with a silk-monkey!

She was crouching in the fork of a tree: a small, dark, velvety ball. Her face was round and much lighter than the rest of her (about the color of Sniff's nose when he had washed rather carelessly), and her laugh was ten times bigger than herself.

"Stop that horrible cackling!" shouted Moomintroll when he saw that she was smaller than he. "This is *our* valley. You can go and laugh somewhere else."

"Wretched wretch!" muttered Sniff, pretending he hadn't been frightened. But the silk-monkey just hung by her tail and laughed louder than ever. Then she threw some more plums at them and disappeared into the forest with a parting hoot of evil laughter.

"She's running away!" screamed Sniff. "Come on—let's follow her." So off they rushed, scrambling



headlong through bushes and brambles under a perfect rain of ripe berries and fircones, while all the little animals underfoot escaped into their holes as quickly as they possibly could.

The silk-monkey swung from tree to tree in front of them; she hadn't enjoyed herself so much for weeks.

"Don't you think it's ridiculous (puff) to run after a silly little monkey like that," panted Sniff at last. "I don't see (puff) that she matters."

Moomintroll agreed to this, and they sat down under a tree and pretended to be thinking about something important. The silk-monkey made herself comfortable in the fork of a tree above them and tried to look important too; she was having nearly as much fun as before.

"Take no notice of her," whispered Moomintroll. Out loud he said: "Good spot this, isn't it, Sniff?"

"Yes. Interesting-looking path, too," Sniff answered.

"Path," repeated Moomintroll thoughtfully. And then he suddenly noticed where they were. "Why, *this* must be the Mysterious Path," he gasped.

It certainly looked most mysterious. Overhead the branches of the plum trees, oaks, and silver poplars met and formed a dark tunnel which led away into the unknown.

"Now, we must take this seriously," said Sniff, remembering that he was the Path Pioneer. "I'll look for by-paths, and you knock three times if you see anything dangerous."

"What shall I knock on?" asked Moomintroll.

“Whatever you like,” said Sniff. “Only don’t talk. And what have you done with the provisions? I suppose you’ve lost them. Oh, dear! Do I have to do everything myself?”

Moomintroll wrinkled his forehead dejectedly but didn’t answer.

So they wandered farther into the green tunnel, Sniff looking for by-paths, Moomintroll looking for dangerous intruders, and the silk-monkey leaping overhead from branch to branch.

The path wound in and out of the trees, getting narrower and narrower, until at last it petered out altogether. Moomintroll looked baffled. “Well, that seems to be that,” he said. “It ought to have led to something very special.”

They stood still and looked at each other in disappointment. But as they stood a whiff of salt wind blew in their faces and a faint sighing could be heard in the distance.

“It must be the sea!” exclaimed Moomintroll with a whoop of joy, and he started running upwind, his heart thumping with excitement, for if there is anything Moomintrolls really love, it is swimming.

“Wait!” screamed Sniff. “Don’t leave me behind!”

But Moomintroll didn’t stop till he came to the sea, and there he sat down and solemnly watched the waves rolling in, one after another, each with its crest of white foam.

After a while Sniff came out from the fringe of the wood and joined him. “It’s cold here,” he said. “By

the way, do you remember when we sailed with the Hattifatteners in that dreadful storm, and I was so seasick?”

“That’s quite another story,” said Moomintroll. “Now I’m going to swim.” And he ran straight out into the breakers, without stopping to undress (because, of course, Moomintrolls don’t wear clothes, except sometimes in bed).

The silk-monkey had climbed down from her tree and was sitting on the sandy beach watching them. “What *are* you doing?” she cried. “Don’t you know it’s wet and cold?”

“We’ve managed to impress her at last!” said Sniff.

“Yes. I say, Sniff, can you dive with your eyes open?” asked Moomintroll.

“No!” said Sniff. “And I don’t intend to try—you never know what you’ll see down there on the bottom. If you do it, don’t blame *me* if something awful happens!”

“Pooh!” said Moomintroll, diving into a big wave and swimming down through green bubbles of light. He went deeper and came upon forests of crinkly seaweed swaying gently in the current—seaweed that was decorated with beautiful white and pink shells—and even farther down the green twilight deepened until he could see only a black hole that seemed to have no bottom.

Moomintroll turned round and shot up to the surface, where a big wave carried him right back to the beach. There sat Sniff and the silk-monkey screaming



for help at the tops of their voices.

“We thought you were drowned,” said Sniff, “or that a shark had eaten you up!”

“Pooh!” said Moomintroll again. “I’m used to the sea. While I was down there I got an idea—a good idea, too. But I’m wondering if an outsider should hear it or not.” And he looked pointedly at the silk-monkey.

“Go away!” Sniff said to her. “This is private.”

“Oh, please tell!” entreated the silk-monkey, for she was the most inquisitive creature in the world. “I

swear I won't breathe a word."

"Shall we make her swear?" asked Moomintroll.

"Well, why not?" answered Sniff. "But it'll have to be a proper swear."

"Repeat after me," said Moomintroll. "'May the ground swallow me up, may old hags rattle my dry bones, and may I never more eat ice cream if I don't guard this secret with my life.' Go on now."

The silk-monkey repeated the swear, but she was a bit careless over it because she could never keep a thing in her head for long. "Good!" said Moomintroll. "Now I'll tell you. I'm going to go pearl-fishing and then I shall bury all my pearls in a box here on the beach."

"But where shall we find a box?" asked Sniff.

"I shall hand that job over to you and the silk-monkey," replied Moomintroll.

"Why do *I* always have to do the difficult things?" asked Sniff gloomily. "*You* have all the fun."

"You were the Path Pioneer just now," said Moomintroll. "And besides, you can't dive. So don't be silly."

Sniff and the silk-monkey set off along the beach. "Wretched wretch!" muttered Sniff. "He could have looked for his own old box."

They poked around for a bit, but after a time the silk-monkey forgot what they were supposed to be doing and began to hunt for crabs instead. There was one that always careered off with his odd sideways gait and hid himself under a stone, so that they could