

The Sorcerer's Hat

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Translated from the Swedish by C. Lynn Steele

(original title: Trollkarlens hatt)

INTRODUCTION

One gray morning the first snow fell on Mumindale. It came floating down, thickly, silently, and within a few hours everything was white.

Mumintroll stood on the stairway, watching the valley draw its winter covering over its head, and he thought softly, "Tonight we're going into hibernation." For this is what all mumintrolls do some time in November (and it's quite convenient for anyone who doesn't like darkness and cold). He closed the door and pattered in to his mama and said,

"The snow is here."

"I know," said Mumintroll's mama. "I've already made up all your beds with my warmest blankets. You can sleep in the west attic along with the little creature Sniff."

"But Sniff snores so horribly," said Mumintroll. "Can't I sleep with Snusmumrik instead?"

"Just as you like," said Muminmama. "Sniff can have the east attic."

So the Muminfamily and all their friends made ready, scrupulously and solemnly, for the long winter. Mumintroll's mama set out a supper for them on the veranda, but all they got on their plates was spruce needles. (It's very important to have your stomach full of spruce needles if you're planning to sleep for three months.) When supper was over (and they had got rid of the taste), they said good night to each other a little more courteously and formally than usual, and mama reminded everybody to brush their teeth. Then Mumintroll's papa went around and shut all the doors and windows, and hung mosquito netting over the chandelier so that it wouldn't get dusty.

And then each one crept into his bed, made himself a cozy pit and pulled the blanket up to his ears, and thought about something pleasant. But Mumintroll sighed a little and said, "We're going to lose an awful lot of time."

"No we're not," said Snusmumrik. "We'll be dreaming. And when we wake up, it will be spring."

"Yes..." murmured Mumintroll. He was already far away, gliding into the half-darkness of a dream world.

Outside the snow kept falling, thick and fine. It already covered up the stairway, it lay heavy on the roof and the window sills. Soon the whole Muminhouse would be one soft, white snowdrift. The clocks left off ticking, one by one. Winter had come.

FIRST CHAPTER

in which it is told how Mumintröll, Snusmumrik, and Sniff discovered the Sorcerer's hat, how five little clouds appeared unexpectedly, and how Hemul found himself a new hobby.

At four a.m. on a spring morning the first cuckoo flew over Mumindale. It perched on the blue rooftop of the Muminhouse and called eight times, a little hoarsely to be sure, for it was still very early spring.

Then it flew away toward the east.

Mumintröll woke up and lay for a long time looking at the ceiling and wondering where he was. He had slept for a hundred nights and a hundred days, and the dreams were still whirling around him, trying to draw him back into slumber.

But when he turned over to find a new, comfortable sleeping position, he caught sight of something that brought him wide awake. Snusmumrik's bed was empty.

Mumintröll sat up.

And Snusmumrik's hat was gone too. "What in the world!" said Mumintröll.

He pattered over to the open window and looked out. So, Snusmumrik must have gone down the rope ladder. Mumintröll heaved himself over the window ledge and climbed down carefully on his short legs. It was easy to make out Snusmumrik's footprints in the damp earth. They rambled here and there and were rather difficult to follow. Sometimes they made a great leap and jumped over themselves. "He was happy," thought Mumintröll to himself. "He turned a somersault here, plain as day."

All at once Mumintröll lifted his nose and listened. Far away, Snusmumrik was playing on his harmonica, his happiest song, "All the little creatures tie their tails in bows." Mumintröll began to run straight toward the music.

Down by the river he found Snusmumrik sitting on the railing of the bridge, with his feet dangling over the water and his old hat pulled down over his ears.

"Hi," said Mumintröll, sitting down beside him.

"Hi there," said Snusmumrik, and went on playing.

The sun had got as far as the tops of the trees and it was shining straight into their faces. They squinted up at the light, and swung their legs over the bright running water, and felt happy to be together.

On this very river they had sailed away to so many remarkable adventures in days past. And on each journey they had found new friends and brought them home to Mumindale. Mumintröll's papa and mama welcomed all the new acquaintances warmly, they just moved new beds into the house and made the dining room table bigger. So the Muminhouse had become a topsy-turvy sort of place, where you did what you felt like doing and seldom bothered about tomorrow. Naturally, astonishing and frightening things sometimes happened, but no one was ever really unhappy (and that was a great advantage).

When Snusmumrik had got to the last verse of his spring song he stuck the harmonica in his pocket and said,

"Is Sniff up yet?"

"I don't think so," said Mumintröll. "He always sleeps a week longer than anybody else."

"Let's go wake him up," said Snusmumrik with determination, and hopped down from the railing. "We have to do something special today, because it's going to be such a fine one."

Under the window of the east attic Mumintröll signalled according to their secret code: three ordinary whistles and a long one between the paws (which meant, Something is going to happen). They heard the snoring stop, but nobody moved up above.

"One more time," said Snusmumrik. And they signaled again, doubly loud.

Then the window flew open.

"I'm asleep!" Sniff cried angrily.

"Come on down, don't be cross," said Snusmumrik. "We're going to do something special."

Then Sniff shook out his sleep-wrinkled ears and climbed down the rope ladder. (Perhaps I should mention that they had rope ladders outside all their windows, since it takes so much time to go down stairways in the ordinary way.)

It was certainly going to be a splendid day. The earth was full of tiny, just-awake creatures who had been sleeping all winter and now ran about to wish each other good morning. Everywhere animals were airing out their clothes and brushing their fur and tidying up their houses, and getting themselves all ready for spring.

Sometimes the three friends stopped to watch a house-raising, or listen to a quarrel. (These happen fairly often in the early spring, because you can be in a bad humor when you've just come out of hibernation.)

Here and there, tree spirits sat on the branches combing their long hair, while their children dug tunnels through the patches of snow on the northern side of the tree trunks.

"Happy spring!" said an elderly water snake. "And how was your winter?"

"Fine, thanks," answered Mumintröll. "Did you sleep well, sir?"

"Beautifully. Regards to your papa and mama!"

So they went along, passing the time of day with everyone they met. But the higher they climbed up the side of the mountain, the fewer people there were to meet, until at last all they saw was a mouse mother or two, bustling about with her spring cleaning.

It was wet everywhere.

"Not so nice," said Mumintröll, lifting his paws high above the melting snow. "It can't be healthy for a mumintröll with so much snow about. That's what Mama says." And he sneezed.

"Listen, Mumintröll," said Snusmumrik. "I've got an idea. What if we went to the top of the mountain and set up a marker to show that nobody had been there before us?"

"Let's!" cried Sniff and dashed off in order to get there ahead of the others.

On the mountaintop the spring wind was blowing briskly, and you could look all around at the blue horizon. Westward lay the sea, eastward the river wound in among the Lonely Mountains, northward the great forest was budding out in its spring foliage, and to the south smoke rose out of the chimney at the Muminhouse, where Mumintröll's mama was making morning coffee. But Sniff saw nothing of all that. For on the peak of the mountain lay a hat, a tall dark hat.

"Someone has been here before us!" cried Sniff.

Mumintröll picked up the hat and looked at it. "It's a fine one," he said. "Maybe it would fit you, Mumrik."

"No, no," said Snusmumrik, who was fond of his old green hat. "It's much too new."

"Maybe Papa would like it," said Mumintröll thoughtfully.

"Let's take it with us," said Sniff. "But I want to go home now. My stomach is growling for coffee. How about yours?"

"You said it!" cried Mumintröll and Snusmumrik with feeling.

So it was that they found the Sorcerer's hat and took it home with them, never dreaming that with this simple act they were turning Mumindale into a mad place, filled with magic and every kind of extraordinary happening.

When Mumintröll, Snusmumrik, and Sniff came in on the veranda the others had already drunk their coffee and gone off in all directions. Only Mumintröll's papa was still at the table, reading a newspaper.

"So, you're awake too," he said. "Remarkably little news in the paper today. A brook overran its banks and destroyed an anthill. No lives were lost. And the first spring cuckoo flew over the valley at four o'clock this morning and went off toward the east. (An easterly cuckoo is well enough but a westerly cuckoo would have been even better.)"

"Look what we found," said Mumintröll proudly. "A beautiful black top hat just for you!"

Muminpapa examined the hat very carefully, and then set he it on his head in front of the dining room mirror. The hat was a bit too large and hard to see out from under, but all in all it made an impressive sight.

"Mama!" cried Mumintröll. "Come and look at Papa!"

Mama opened the kitchen door and stood in the doorway, all astonishment.

"Does it suit me?" asked Muminpapa.

"It certainly does," said Mumintröll's mama. "Yes, you look very manly in it. Only it's just a little on the large side."

"Is this better?" asked Papa, and pushed the hat down on his neck.

"Hmm," said Muminmama. "It's nice enough, but I almost think you look more distinguished without the hat."

Papa looked at himself in the mirror, frontwards and backwards and from the sides, and then he laid the hat on the bureau with a sigh.

"You're right," he said. "It isn't everybody that can look his best in fine clothes."

"Charm is its own adornment," said Mumintröll's mama fondly. "Eat more eggs, children, you've been living on spruce needles all winter!" And she vanished back into the kitchen.

"But what shall we do with it?" asked Sniff. "Such a fine hat!"

"Use it for a wastebasket," said Mumintröll's papa. Then he went upstairs to work on his memoirs (that great book that deals with Muminpapa's stormy youth).

Snusmumrik set the hat down on the floor between the bureau and the kitchen door. "Now you have another new piece of furniture," he said, grinning, for Snusmumrik had no use for possessions. He liked to wear the same old clothes he had worn ever since he was born (no one knew when or where), and the only piece of property he never gave away was his harmonica.

"If you've finished breakfast, let's go out and see what the snorks are up to," said Mumintröll. But before he went outdoors he swept up his eggshells and dropped them into the wastebasket, for he was (sometimes) a well-behaved mumintröll.

And the dining room was empty.

In the corner between the bureau and the kitchen door stood the Sorcerer's hat with eggshells in the bottom. And now something really extraordinary happened. The eggshells began to change.

For that's how it is: whenever anything stays long enough inside the Sorcerer's hat it gets changed into something entirely different--just what, you can never know beforehand. It was a lucky thing the hat didn't fit Mumintröll's papa, for if he had kept it on his head a little longer, the protector of small animals only knows what would have become of him. As it was, Papa got only a slight headache (and that was gone by afternoon).

But the eggshells lay in the hat, and slowly they began to change shape. They kept their white color, but they grew and grew and became soft and woolly. After a while they filled up the entire hat. And then five little white clouds spilled over the brim and sailed off onto the veranda, bumped down the stairway, and hung in the air just above the ground. But the Sorcerer's hat was empty.

"What in the world!" said Mumintröll.

"Is anything on fire?" Snork asked nervously.

The clouds stood before them, motionless, without changing their shape, as though they were waiting for something.

Miss Snork put out her paw very cautiously and stroked the nearest cloud. "It feels like cotton," she said in surprise. The others came closer to touch them.

"Just like little cushions," said Sniff.

Snusmumrik gave one of the clouds a gingerly shove. It floated a short distance and stopped.

"Who do they belong to?" asked Sniff. "And how did they get onto the veranda?"

Mumintroll shook his head. "It's the funniest thing I've ever seen," he said. "Maybe we should call Mama."

"No, no," cried Miss Snork. "We're going to investigate this ourselves." And she pulled one of the clouds down to the ground and ran her paw across it. "So soft!" said Miss Snork. And the next moment she had sat down on the cloud and was swinging merrily to and fro.

"I want one too!" cried Sniff and grabbed another cloud. "Giddyap!" But when he said giddyap the cloud rose and made an elegant little arch over the ground.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Sniff. "It moved!"

Now each of them climbed up onto a cloud and cried "Giddyap!"

The little clouds went sailing here and there, hopping about like large white rabbits. It was Snork who discovered the way to steer them. A light tap with one paw, and the clouds turned. Both paws meant full speed ahead. Small nudges with the backside, and the clouds stood still.

It was marvelous fun.

They flew straight up to the treetops, and over the roof of the Muminhouse.

Mumintroll landed his cloud outside Muminpapa's window and cried "Cockadoodledoo!" (He was so excited he couldn't think of anything cleverer.)

Muminpapa dropped his memoir pen and rushed to the window.

"By my tail!" he exclaimed. "By my tail!" And he couldn't get another word out.

"This will make a great chapter for your memoirs," said Mumintroll. And then he steered his cloud to the kitchen window and called for Mama.

Muminmama was very busy cooking meat loaf.

"Whatever have you found now, little Muminchild!" she said. "Be careful you don't tumble off."

Down in the garden, Snork and Snusmumrik had invented a new game. They drove their clouds

toward each other at full speed and collided with a soft bounce. The one who fell off first was the loser.

"Now you're going to catch it!" cried Snusmumrik and dug his paws into the sides of his cloud. "Full speed ahead!"

But Snork veered skillfully to one side and launched a sneak attack from underneath.

Snusmumrik's cloud capsized and he landed on his head in the middle of the flower bed, with his hat over his nose.

"Round Three," cried Sniff, who was scorekeeper and hovered slightly above the others. "Two to one. On your mark? Get set! Go!"

"Shall we make a little flight together?" said Mumintroll to Miss Snork.

"Gladly," said Miss Snork and steered her cloud up next to his. "Where shall we go?"

"Let's see if we can find Hemul and give him a surprise," suggested Mumintroll.

They flew once around the garden, but Hemul was not to be seen in any of his usual places.

"He never goes very far," said Miss Snork. "Last time I saw him he was sorting his stamp collection."

"But that was six months ago," Mumintroll pointed out.

"Ooh, you're right!" said Miss Snork. "We've been asleep since then."

"Did you sleep well?" asked Mumintroll.

Miss Snork soared smoothly over the treetops and thought for a while before she answered. "I had a scary dream," she said. "A mean-looking man in a tall black hat was grinning at me."

"That's funny," said Mumintroll. "I had the very same dream. Was he wearing white gloves?"

"That's right," Miss Snork nodded.

They thought this over as they glided through the woods.

All at once they caught sight of Hemul lumbering along with his paws behind his back and his snout pointed at the ground. Mumintroll and Miss Snork flew up on either side of him and called out at the same

time, "Good morning!"

"Argh!" exclaimed Hemul. "What a fright you gave me! You know better than to creep up on me like that. It makes my heart go to my throat."

"Oh, sorry," said Miss Snork. "Just look what we're riding on."

"Extraordinary," said Hemul. "But I'm used to the way you do extraordinary things. And right now my mood is bad."

"Why?" said Miss Snork sympathetically. "On a fine day like this?"

Hemul shook his head. "You wouldn't understand," he said.

"We could try," said Mumintröll. "Have you lost another stamp?"

"Hardly," Hemul sighed. "I have them all. Every single one. My stamp collection is complete. There's not a thing missing."

"Well then, well then," said Miss Snork soothingly.

"See? I knew you wouldn't understand," said Hemul.

Mumintröll and Miss Snork looked at each other sorrowfully. They reined in their clouds a little, out of respect for Hemul's unhappiness, and flew along just behind his back. Hemul lumbered on while Mumintröll and Miss Snork waited for him to tell them what was on his mind.

And after a while he burst out "Ha! Worthless!"

After another while he said, "What does it all matter, anyhow? I may as well use my stamp collection for scrap paper!"

"Why, Hemul!" said Miss Snork in alarm. "Don't talk like that. Your stamp collection is the finest in the world!"

"That's just it!" cried Hemul in despair. "It's finished. There's not a stamp in the world that I haven't collected. Not one! What shall I do now?"

"I think I'm beginning to understand," said Mumintröll slowly. "You're not a collector any more, you're just an owner. And that's not nearly so much fun."

"No," muttered Hemul miserably. "Not nearly." He stopped and faced them with his features all scrunched up.

"Hemul, dear," said Miss Snork, patting him gently with her paw. "I have an idea. What if you started collecting something different, something completely new?"

"That's an idea," admitted Hemul. But he still looked scrunched up, for he didn't feel it was right to be happy so soon after such a great sorrow.

"Butterflies, for instance?" suggested Mumintröll.

"Impossible," said Hemul gloomily. "My cousin on my father's side collects them. And I can't stand him."

"Ribbons, then?" said Miss Snork.

Hemul only snorted.

"Jewels?" Miss Snork went on hopefully. "You'd never run out of them."

"Ugh," said Hemul.

"Well, then, I don't know," said Miss Snork.

"We'll figure out something for you," said Mumintröll reassuringly. "Mama will know. By the way, have you seen anything of Muskrat?"

"He's still asleep," answered Hemul sadly. "He said it was useless to wake up so early, and I expect he's right." And Hemul continued his lonely way through the woods.

Mumintröll and Miss Snork steered their clouds back up over the treetops and hovered there in the sunshine. They tried to think of something that Hemul could collect.

"Shells?" Miss Snork threw out.

"Or trouser buttons," said Mumintröll.

But the warmth made them sleepy. They couldn't think any more. They lay on their backs and looked up from their clouds into the spring sky where the larks were singing.

And suddenly they caught sight of the first butterfly. Everybody knows that if the first butterfly you

see is yellow, it means the summer will be happy. If it is white, you get only a pleasant summer. (We won't even talk about black and brown butterflies, that's much too sad.)

But this butterfly was golden.

"What can that mean?" wondered Mumintröll. "I've never seen a golden butterfly."

"Gold is even better than yellow," said Miss Snork. "You'll see."

When Mumintröll and Miss Snork got home for dinner they met Hemul on the stairway. His face was shining with joy.

"Well?" said Mumintröll. "What's it going to be?"

"Plants!" cried Hemul. "I'm going to be a botanist! Snork thought of it. I'll collect the world's finest herbarium!" And he spread out his skirt* to show them his first find. Among the dirt and leaves lay a little spring onion.

"*Gagea lutea*," said Hemul proudly. "Number one in the collection. Perfect specimen."

And he went indoors and dumped everything on the dinner table.

"Take it into the corner," said Mumintröll's mama. "The soup goes here. Has everybody come back? Is Muskrat still asleep?"

"Sleeping like a pig," said Sniff.

"Did you have fun today?" asked Muminmama when she had filled all the soup bowls.

"Great!" cried the whole family.

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Next morning when Mumintröll went to the woodshed to let out the five clouds, they had vanished, every one of them. And nobody dreamed they had anything to do with a few eggshells, which were lying back in the bottom of the Sorcerer's hat.

*Hemul always wore a dress he had inherited from his aunt. I suspect all hemuls wear skirts. It's funny, but that's the way it is. (Author's note)