

THE ADVENTURES OF THE MOTTs

PART III

THE PRINCESS WHO HAD THE HICCUPS



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FOREWORD

”*G*rrrrrr, don’t touch me, you modd,” Sillyhead poked Dunderhead. “You know how much I hate to be touched!”

“I am not touching you, but we are too close together in this laundry basket,” Dunderhead shoved him too.

“And I hate the feeling of somebody else’s fur near me, unless it belongs to an ugly moddess. Besides, it must be so dirty and matted, that it sticks to my fur pleasantly! Still, I don’t know why princess Jelly crammed us to sleep here of all places. It must be punishment for not soiling Grumpy well enough the other day when we were pouring stagnant boggy water all over him.”

“Yes! Not only that the dirtiest and nasty-smelling water is for him only, but we get punished in this way,” Sillyhead grumbled.

“Yes, who does she think she is, this Jelly. It

wasn't long after she came that she started bossing us around. We have to admit it, though: she makes the most delicious spoilt-fruit-and-earthworm cookies. Nom, nom," Dunderhead smacked his lips dreamily.

"No, we aren't going to forgive her only because of the goodies. It's not fair! We haven't done it on purpose. Grumpy kept spinning, so it was only normal for us to miss a spot! Ughhhh, wait a minute, what is this smell on you, you ugly scarecrow? I can't stand it. Is this s-s-s, ughhhh, is this soap?" Sillyhead flinched all of a sudden.

"Um, no.... um... I fell into the toilet yesterday while I was stealing water from a cistern in a house at the end of the village. I grabbed the toilet freshener so as to climb up the toilet seat, and I've smelled like daisies ever since. Ugh! I thoroughly rolled into the swamp afterwards, but there... this wicked soap won't stop smelling," Dunderhead complained.

"Alright, alright, stop blabbering," Sillyhead poked him again. "Let me be and wrap yourself up into something smelly, so that I don't feel the fragrance. Come on, go to sleep!"

But Dunderhead didn't answer. He was already snoring away and dreaming of mouldy raspberry and earthworm jam. Only a month later the cozy laundry basket in Sillyhead's company would seem

like a distant dream. Because only a few weeks hence the two silly modds would find themselves in the hands of their most hateful enemy – the radiant and affectionate hugging monster! But before we see how that happens, let's pop over to Mottland and see how life is there after children and motts saved the city from the stinking pests.

You must be wondering who this princess Jelly is? When Grumpy went back to Moddland after they lost the battle with their cousins the motts, he decided to drown his sorrows in moddovilea – the famous Modd drink, which is prepared with mouldy brine and snail slime. Jelly was the indisputable moddovilea expert in the kingdom. Grumpy drank so much, that in the end he proposed marriage to her; was it out of intoxication or love, no-one knows. That's how Jelly became Queen of the Modds and started ruling with Grumpy.

Chapter 1

THE MOTTWEDDING

The warm sunrays of the July sun were spreading all over Mottland. The day was especially sunny and charged with positive energy. As if there was something in the air – a happy intoxication that made all motts smile. They were tinted with their brightest colours, their furs were glistening with early morning dew, as if purposely coated with brocade. All this festive mood and flurry of excitement had its explanation.

At first sight an ordinary event, but on second thoughts - quite extraordinary. A wedding was at hand; not any other, but a mottwedding. The mottwedding of the most-beloved beauty in Mottland and the most-beloved ... heart-throb in the city? Ummm, not really. The most-beloved and bravest of all motts. (Yes, that's better.)

So Pagu and Mux were getting married! All guests who were invited to witness this significant event (significant for the whole city) were happy for their princess and her chosen one. Pinky was probably a little bit happier than the rest because he expected the reception in the palace to be beyond his wildest dreams.

The wedding ceremony was going to be performed by the wisest mott in Mottland – Hush the sage. No-one knew Hush’s exact age. He and Shush (his wife) had always looked in this exact way, ever since Mux remembered them. And his grandfather had once told him that he remembered them that way too. Who knows... maybe they knew some longevity secret known only to the wisest of all sages among the motts.

“We are to start with a short ceremony and then continue with the reception.” Hush said in a solemn voice and all eyes were on him.

“Can’t we have the reception first?” Pinky murmured, and Goula poked him in the fluffy coat.

“Quiet! Enough with the food, Pinky! You just had a salt stick. Sit still for two minutes!” Izzy scolded him. Izzy was Pagu’s best friend – a princess too but in a neighbouring kingdom. She had come for this most important event in Pagu’s life.





Mux was already standing next to Hush and was tapping his feet anxiously. He was breathing irregularly and his heart was going with a crazy beat. It was then that gentle music started playing. All motts rattled their claws (obviously it was easier for them to do that than clap) and their eyes turned to the end of the lane of carefully folded white napkins. The mottwedding was taking place outdoors, in the garden of the house whose closet Pagu inhabited. There she was... as if she was beaming. Her fur was shining in gentle pink, from head to foot, and there was a beautiful white veil spreading behind on the lane; the veil was as thin as a cobweb which seemed to attract each and every sunbeam and entangle it in this exquisite creation. The veil had been passed on from a royal generation to a royal generation, and no-one knew its origin.. Only Hush the sage could possibly have any idea, but it had never occurred to anyone to ask him anyway.

Pagu walked along the alley accompanied by dreamy looks and inaudible sighs. When she reached Mux, he was still looking at her with his mouth open and his eyes staring. Pagu gently lifted his chin, so that he closed his mouth, and she winked at him playfully. Mux gave her a broad smile and a loving gaze in return. The ceremony started. Hush's speech seemed to be over in the

blink of an eye when Mux heard Pagu say softly: “I do.” He himself energetically confirmed that he agreed to take her for his wife, and the two of them touched their noses lovingly. After that it all ran so fast – the dances, the lively chatter of the guests, the treat. Pinky, who kept asking if there was more banana on a stick; Izzy, who talked with Goula for a suspiciously long time; and of course, Pagu and Mux, who were inseparable... Yes, it was official – she was his sweet wife, his princess!

Chapter 2

THE PRINCESS WHO HAD THE HICCUPS

„I will miss you so much, Mux!” Bobo murmured with wet eyes while he was watching Mux pack his luggage in a frenzy of activity in the wardrobe at home. After the mottwedding Mux was going to move in with Pagu in the palace, and the boy kept fussing about his little mott friend gloomily.

“Come on, Bobo!” Mux pinched his leg gently. “We’ll be seeing each other again! Pagu and I will be coming to visit you, we will be getting together again. Don’t be sad! Besides, I will miss Doddie and you a lot too.” Mux went on in a trembling voice and looked at Doddie with his big sad eyes.

“Oh, look at you, two big boys who are about to cry!” the old man said with a smile and hugged

Bobo while Mux snuggled in between them.

“I am happy, grandpa. But I was so used to Muxie, that I don’t know what I will do with this deserted wardrobe now!”

“I will send Goula over every day.” Mux suggested. “It is true that he is not as good, kind, loving, funny, and fluffy as I am, but he’ll do. And he won’t bother you all the time.” he added with a wink.

The three of them started laughing. Mux even landed on his bottom into a pile of socks. They were probably going to talk away for a long while, but Izzy emerged all of a sudden.

“Come on, Mux! Pagu is waiting for you. It’s time for the honeymoon.” She stood in front of them and started tapping her foot nervously.

“Let’s go then!” Mux jumped, kissed Bobo, winked at Doddie and dragged his luggage, packed in a handkerchief, after Izzy, who was running ahead. Bobo gave a deep sigh, and in order to distract him, Doddie instantly suggested making his favourite fragrant herb tea with two spoons of honey and a pinch of vanilla.

After Mux and Pagu came back from their honeymoon, the palace was in perfect harmony, but what no-one still suspected, was that there was a still happier event ahead that would change our fluffy friends’ life completely...





Mux and Pagu stood cuddled above a piece of colourful fluff on the floor and observed it attentively with a gentle smile on their faces. What could that be? Maybe another royal acquisition in their beautiful home? “Wee, weeeee! Wee-wee-weeeee.” The colourful fluff moved; apparently this strange sound came from it. “Weeeeeee!” Pagu bent over the fluff and stroked it gently, but instead of the end of the Wee-sound, there came an even louder one. This time it was:” Weeeee-kha-kha-khaeee!” Wait a second! That was no fluff at all! Pagu and Mux definitely had a new acquisition in their nest, and it was not ordinary...

The cute couple had come into possession of a little daughter – tiny and fluffy. She was the most wonderful minicreature in the whole of Mottland. They had named her Magu which meant “predestined to live a long and happy life” in Ancient Mottish.

The smiles of her two proud parents had been stuck on their faces since the moment of her birth. They constantly watched over her, rejoiced at her existence, showered her with love. It was clear what kind of life awaited Magu – a wonderful happy life.

And then there was a peculiar sound: “Hic!” Pagu and Mux looked at each other. “Hiccup!” came again. Magu herself was surprised with the unusual sound she made, and her big eyes widened. She looked at her parents in surprise, they looked at her too, then looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

“Hiccup!”

Chapter 3

AT HUSH'S

A week had passed and the little princess still had the hiccups. From dusk till dawn, from meal to meal, during playtime, and even a little when she was asleep...

"How long is this going to last!" Pagu worried herself 7th day in a row.

They had tried everything. They patted her back, they rocked her gently, they gave her water with a spoonful of honey (a reliable cure for every mott indisposition), but the hiccups did not go away. It is important to mention that motts never called an illness "an illness" or pain "pain". All of this was only indisposition to them. That's it. Maybe that's the reason why they rarely felt unwell.

"Yes, this can't go on anymore!" Mux said one day. "I am going to Hush the Sage! He is so wise that he must know how to help little Magu."

Hush lived with his beloved Shush in a distant wardrobe. The way to their home passed through thirty houses, seventy rooms, and a big closet. Mux knew that this journey was going to take a long time, but he was determined to help his little princess and make his beloved Pagu happy. He started on a Friday morning and arrived at lunchtime on Saturday. All worn-out, he stood in front of the massive wardrobe where Hush lived and knocked on the door.

“Ding-dong-ding-dong,” sounded a monotonous ring, as if Mux had knocked a brass bell with a gavel. He knitted his brows in surprise, shrugged his shoulders and waited. The door opened slowly with a creak, and shivers went down his spine.

“Pshaw!” Mux huffed and puffed with irritation. “Why all the mysteriousness and antiquity, provided that he is hardly ever visited by anyone!”

“Cooooooooooooooooome in!” Hush’s voice resounded from inside. “Hold on tight to the first shirt’s sleeve on the right and pull three times while counting out loud. Mux smacked his forehead, but he was there with a mission, so he had to stick to all the nonsense and wacky directions given by the most ancient mott of all. He grabbed the sleeve and started counting.

“Ooooooone, twoooooooo, threeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

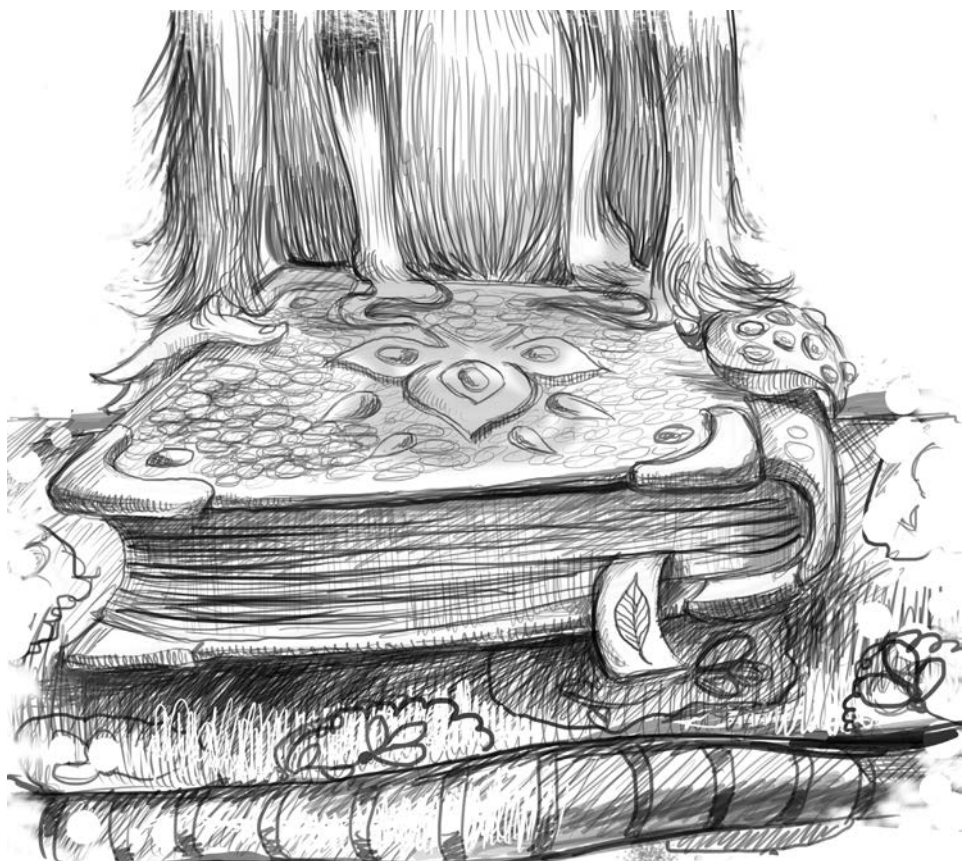


ooooooooooooahhhhhhh,"Mux suddenly flew up and thumped in front of Hush, who had settled in the uppermost shelf of the wardrobe with all the hats and scarves. Hush, who had pulled him up, put the shirt's sleeve down again, smiled complacently at the dumbfounded Mux, and raised his eyebrows.

"Well? What brings you here, my friend?" he asked.

"Was all this necessary?" Mux snapped while he was sleeking his coat.

Then he looked around and saw that practically all the shelf was arranged with Hush's and



Shush's belongings – most of them dusty scarves, hats, some peacock feathers, and two thick books with leather covers, deep in dust as well. Shush herself was in a corner stirring some infusion in a deodorant cap.

“Of course it is necessary!” Shush stood up. “Come on, Mux. You are here, so the situation must be serious. Speak!

“Magu has had the hiccups for 9 days.” Mux mumbled worriedly.

“Hm, hm, hmmm, “ Hush said. “Did you try water sweetened with a pinch of honey?”

“Yes.” said Mux.

“Hm, hm, hmmm!”

“What? Give me some of your wisdom, Hush!” pleaded Mux.

“Hm, hm, hmmm! The world, Mux, was created in such a way so as to cure itself. There is not a single indisposition that cannot be relieved by something that grows on our land. People are said to be clever, but they can never understand this...”

Hush stood up, went to Shush and whispered something in her ear. She nodded, put her potion aside, and the two of them went to the heavy leather-covered books. Together they took one of them and dragged it to Mux. Hush blew the dust off the leather cover, and opened it with difficulty.

Mux read inside: “A Recipe Book: cooking, herb, tonic recipes; youth and old-age recipes; recipes for smiles, and against bad mood.”

“Ah! There’ll be something here for Goula’s grumpiness.” Mux thought.

“Ahem!” Hush cleared his throat and dragged his finger through the contents while he was silently reading to himself. “No, there is nothing here!” he announced solemnly.

“But how come? Let’s have a look at the other book then!” Mux jumped up.

“No. The other book contains other things that do not concern you. There will be no cure for Magu’s hiccups there.” snapped Hush.

“Is this all? How come?” Mux nearly burst into tears. “What shall I do now?!”

“Maybe what you are looking for can only be found in the Ancient Mott Book. This is the most ancient book which has included wisdom since motts’ early existence. They say that the Ancient Mott Book was so ancient, that nobody remembered when, how, and who wrote it. Judging by the wise things written in there, it must have been a very wise mott. Here is how the book started so that nobody should ever be in doubt whether this is the Ancient Mott Book: “This is the most ancient mott book. It was written and created by most celebrated sages and it is full of

the wisest words of wisdom, so as to help motts in their wise or not so wise deeds.”

“Well, let’s have a look there!” Mux jumped up.

“My dear mott... The Ancient Book is kept in the Council of Elders in the big city. It is veeeeeeeeery far from here, and I do not advise you to go and look for the book. You had better wait for the hiccups to go away at some point.”

“But... how...” Mux sniffed. I cannot wait any longer. I am going! Who should I look for there? How can I find the book?”

“Mux, the big city is dangerous and it is constantly changing. The last time I went to an assembly of the Council of Elders about 189 years ago, the mott brotherhood was in the most colourful house in the city center. However, I do not know if it is still there. This is all I can help you with.”

Mux thanked Hush half-heartedly, got down the shirt sleeve on his way back and started for home as sick as a parrot. Pagu was waiting for him there, hoping for good news, but Mux was going to disappoint her.

Chapter 4

MUX IN THE CITY

It had been three whole days since Mux started packing. Pagu was fussing around him worried. She had done her best to try to stop him, she was begging him not to go, she was taking things out of his luggage and hiding them on purpose. She got a bit angry, but when she saw that his bravery was dauntless, she gave up. Pagu hugged him, she rubbed her nose in his and gently said: “Please, Mux, be careful!

“Of course, Pagu!” Mux winked at her. He looked at Izzy, who had come to help Pagu until he was to come back, and he ordered: “Look after my dear wife!”

Izzy nodded her head and embraced Pagu.

“Are you sure that you don’t want Goula and Pinky to come with you?” Pagu asked hopefully for the hundredth time.

“Yes, I don’t want to involve them in this journey. This is my mission. Don’t hurry off telling them because they will be after me at once.” Mux warned her.

He started off with his bag over one shoulder. He walked on and on for 2 days and 4 hours, straight ahead until he reached the oldest tree trunk and then to the left where the road split. The shortcut was to the right, but the road went through the valley of the modds, so Mux chose the longer, but safer path. And then one evening he saw the big city lights.

Mux reached the city the next day. Just as Hush had advised him, he headed for the square with the singing fountain. Hush had told him that it was a wonderful square with a very beautiful old fountain. In the middle of the fountain, there was a figure of a woman holding a pot on her shoulder, and the water streaks looked as if they were dancing around her under the sounds of the gentle tones of a harp. One of the prettiest and most colourful houses in the whole area was situated there, in the square. The Council of Elders used to meet there. The cleverest motts of all kingdoms used to discuss and write down words of wisdom in the Ancient Mott Book. There were cures for all sorts of indispositions in the Book. An unpleasant surprise, however, was

awaiting Mux. Once having reached the square, he didn't find the house. The fountain was there, but the house was substituted by a large store. The whole façade was covered with neon signs which invited you to buy all sorts of things. It was noisy and crowded. The fountain was the only reminder of the once magical quiet place. The lights were reflected in the splashes that playfully jumped out of the pot and made curious colourful drawings in the water. Mux looked around in the hope of seeing something familiar: a little house with a green garden – a garden where the children run and play; something that suggested that motts lived there somewhere. Alas, he only saw shiny buildings, a lot of cars, busy people. The most colourful person was a traffic police officer in a bright yellow vest who was trying to direct the traffic. Mux realized that the Council of Elders was no longer there. Now what? Our little friend wondered. That book was his only hope. He was hoping to find out how to stop his little daughter's hiccups. Mux got saddened.

Once he made sure he had searched every corner of the square, Mux noticed that a lot of people seemed to be going down and then coming out of the ground. A short hesitation followed. He decided to walk after them. Who knows, maybe things have changed in the big city, and people



and motts have decided to live together under the ground. So after a few leaps he found himself in something like a tunnel. It was only then that Mux remembered that it must be the underground. He had heard of it, but that was his first time in there. Mux was invisible to people but they were so many that it was very difficult and extremely dangerous for him to move about. He had to watch out for being stepped on. A minute had barely passed when the train appeared. The little mott squeezed inside right before the doors closed. Mux cuddled in a corner of the carriage and started watching the people. There were so many passengers, and it was so quiet, even deserted. Two children were sitting next to each other, but instead of talking, they were playing tiny electronic games. A few men were reading newspapers, a woman had opened a box, and a pair of new red shoes were peeping out of it. Two teenagers were reading their students' books, others were simply staring at their mobile phones.

THUMP. Something fell next to Mux and he jumped. THUMP, thump, something fell down next to him. Mux looked around, popcorn was falling near him. He turned and saw a, freckled girl who was throwing popcorn at him out of the box she was holding. The girl was smiling at him, and she kept on throwing popcorn one at a time.

“Hey! What’s up?” Mux was very surprised. Why was that girl throwing popcorn at him? How come? “I am invisible, aren’t I!” he shouted out loud.

“Yeah, right!” The girl laughed. “I’d rather say that I can see you well enough.” The girl replied.

“But that is impossible!” It was only then that Mux realized he had become visible again and everyone in the carriage could notice him. But why was no-one paying attention to him? It was crowded.

“It seems that nobody else is interested in funny little creatures!” The girl said, as if she gave an answer to Mux’s question. “Anyway, what are you: a big talking mouse or a little dog with a claw?”

“A mouse?!” Mux jumped. I have been called different names, but a mouse...

“Alright, alright. Don’t be offended.” The girl tried to calm Mux down.

“I was just messing around because I am bored. I am here with my father, but he is reading a newspaper and... would you like to play with me? My name is Alex.”

“Hello, Alex. I am Mux. I would gladly play with you, but I am looking for something.”

“Is it a treasure?” Alex jumped with excitement. “Let me help.”

“Well, not exactly. I am looking for a book...”

“Is there a map in the book, one that shows where the treasure is?”

“No, the book says how I can help my princess...”

“Well, well! So the book is the treasure you are after!” Alex’s face lit up.

“Yes, you could say that.”

“Alright then. Let’s find that book. I will help you.”

“But I don’t know where to look for it... It used to be in the colourful house in the square with the fountain...”

“Yes, it was a very pretty house. My father used to take me to the square when I was younger, we liked to throw coins into the fountain, for luck.



Last year, however, they built a big mall there.”

“I saw that...” Mux replied sadly.

“Listen, our stop is coming next.” Alex pointed at a map above the carriage door. “But if you get off two stops after us, you will find yourself in the Central Park. It’s very nice there: colourful benches and a lot of flowers. There are even a few ducks that walk around the pond where they live. If your book was once in a colourful house, then it’s possible that it’s now located someplace colourful. I don’t know of another place in the city which is more colourful than the park.”

Mux smiled.

“Yes! The park, of course! Thank you, Alex!”



“You’re welcome!” Alex was smiling gladly too. She even blushed a little. “I hope you manage to find your treasure, the book I mean.”

The train stopped, the doors opened, and Alex got off the carriage with her father.

Mux became invisible. He didn’t feel like explaining that he was not a talking mouse again. He then waited for the stop near the park. “It must be out there somewhere.” Mux was thinking while the train was on its way to the next station.

Chapter 5

ON THE TRACK OF THE LAST MOTT IN THE CITY

*M*ux arrived at the park in the late afternoon and immediately saw that Alex was right. The park was like a little colourful island in an ocean, surrounded by tall buildings, malls, and skyscrapers. Everything was showered by warm sunrays, there were wonderful flowers there, green trees, and many benches, spread along the walks. Children were running along the paths, their parents could hardly reach them. Their tinkling voices echoed in the whole park and mingled with the birdsongs.

“Ah, it’s magical here!” Mux murmured while his little eyes were drinking sips of the surrounding beauty.

Mux didn’t have the slightest idea where to

look for mott sages, but he was sure that if there really were any motts left in the city, then they would undoubtedly live here somewhere. And so, encouraged and with a smile on his face, our little friend started walking around the park.

The day was warm and sunny. Perhaps because of the fatigue, the long way, or the peacefulness that Mux felt at that colourful place, he decided to lie down under a tree with a good shade and have a nap. Oh, how nice it was to sleep under the sky.

“Chirp, chirp!” A little bird was singing right above Mux’s head. He opened his eyes slowly, but instead of a little bird, he saw ... a hairy creature!

“What!?” Mux jumped up and started rubbing his eyes in disbelief.

“What what?” The fluffy creature answered in a familiar voice.

“Pinky, is that you?” Mux asked a little bit startled.

“Of course it’s me, who else could it be?” Pinky was surprised. Then he pointed up at the nearby tree. “That over there is Goula, he is climbing to get some walnuts. After all, it’s time for breakfast.”

Mux was quite surprised. What were his friends doing there? Apparently the nap had been quite long because he noticed that the sun was just rising. He must have slept heavily all evening and all night.



“But how did you end up here?” Mux asked, still sleepy and confused.

“Well,” Pinky started a little bit unsure. “We... uhhhh....you know, we learned from Pagu that you had gone on a journey. And we are your friends, you know, so Goula and I decided that we could not let you go alone... on a journey, I mean. Because, you know...., journeys are not interesting if you are on your own. Besides, Pagu was worried...”

Mux smiled. He knew that his own Pagu would not let him have this adventure alone.

“And how is she? Does little Magu still have the hiccups?”

“Oh, yes, she does! They started calling her “the princess who has the hiccups” in the kingdom.” Pinky answered, a little bit embarrassed, digging a tiny hole in the ground with his leg. “But don’t you worry. Pagu is taking good care of her.”

“And how did you find me here, under this exact tree?” Mux was puzzled.

“Well, we didn’t actually find you. You found us. That is to say, I was looking for some raspberries, you know that wild raspberries are extremely delicious. As we were looking for them, we found them.” Pinky pointed at a big wild raspberry bush next to the tree where Mux had slept. “So we found you along with the berries. “

“What about the park? How did it cross your mind? “

“Oh, that’s easy too. After we arrived in the city, we went to the fountain and the colourful house, but the house was gone. However, I remembered that my father once came to this park some years ago. So he has told me about the wild raspberries. And since Goula and I were hungry...’

“Raspberries, strawberries, biscuits... Pinky, have you got any time left for anything else, after all this food?” Mux asked laughingly, and his friend answered awkwardly:

“Of course! I get so hungry because I play a lot with Zdravko. We chase each other about, we play tag and hide and seek in the house...”

“Oh, I know your tag: you race to the fridge for food. As for your hide and seek, the winner is the one who gets to hide his biscuits best so that the other doesn’t find and eat them. Ha-ha-haaa!” The two friends were rolling on the floor laughing.

“Hey, what’s the big deal? What’s so funny?” They heard Goula’s voice. Mux and Pinky looked at the tree, Goula was waving from up there. “Come on, catch if you want to have breakfast!” He shouted and started picking walnuts from the tree, and they fell down to the ground one by one. The motts’ claws were so strong that it was no problem to break the walnut shell.

“Raspberries, walnuts, a breakfast long dreamt of!” Pinky licked his lips and rushed to the falling walnuts. Mux, however, stayed where he was and continued to gaze at the top of the tree. He wasn’t looking at Goula, who was lower. Mux was looking at the top. What could have attracted his attention?

“Mux, don’t be distracted! These walnuts will not break and jump into your mouth on their own.” Pinky encouraged him. But Mux didn’t pay any attention to him and continued to look at the treetop.

“Mux, what’s the matter?” Pinky shouted, seeing that his friend was staring up at the clouds.

Mux didn’t reply, but he pointed upwards with his paw. Pinky looked that way. He suddenly jumped with a start, after he had been looking up for a few seconds. “That must be a house, right?” He shouted.

“A house?!” Goula repeated after him. “Pinky, you are so hungry that you’re now seeing things.”

“Noooo, Goula, look! That is a house hidden among the branches of the tree.”

It was only then that Goula had a careful look towards the given direction, and he saw it. Yes, indeed, there was a little but neat house, comfortably cuddled in the branches.

“Hmm, we’ll see about that!” Goula said and



quickly started climbing up.

So in just a minute the nimble mott was at the door of the house. It was a little but very beautiful house made of wood. It had a copper doorknob and a little bell that was hanging from a rope at the entrance. Without wasting any more time, Goula pulled the rope and they heard a silent gentle “ding-dong”.

There was silence and the three friends waited impatiently to see who was going to open the door. Naturally, Goula was the most anxious of the three. After all, he was at the door while his friends were safe down on the ground. “I wonder if some bad dwarf might live here...” Goula thought.

“Who dares knock here at my door at this late hour when I am sore? Are you looking for a favour or some trouble if you’re braver?” A hoarse voice came from inside.

“I am not knocking, I am ringing.” Goula answered.

“Don’t be witty, that’s no joke. Beware, my boy, do not provoke. You can get beaten up right here and right now without powwow,” The voice said in rhyme.

“I am Goula. I am not looking for any trouble, but I am worried, even double. I ask for advice and I will pay the price. My friend is in distress, so can you help us with this mess?” Goula answered,

trying to make up a rhyme himself. Then he scratched his neck in wonder how he had come up with that.

The door opened and a little mott appeared. He was small-sized but obviously veeery old. His beard was grizzled, his glasses were enormous and covered a big part of his face.

“If a friend is in distress, quickly come and let us fix the mess.”

Goula smiled, but before he stepped over the threshold, he pointed to Pinky and Mux, who were standing next to the tree trunk, and were trying to see what exactly was going on up there. The elderly mott nodded and made a sign to Goula that his friends could come in too. The scent of freshly brewed herb tea lingered in the air.

Chapter 6

THE RIDDLE

“How strange! We got a bit distracted looking for some raspberries, and all of a sudden we found Mux and one of the elderly motts. Isn’t that a lucky chance!” Mux was astonished while he was looking at the host’s wonderful wooden house. “Everything in our life happens for a reason even if you’re just a confused mott, no matter what the season. If fate is by your side, it helps you with your pride; it takes you to the righteous road, all the way to your dream, especially if you have a good team!” The very wise mott interrupted again in poetic tones; he made a sign to the three friends to sit down on a pile of cones, covered with spring tree moss. Then he offered them a cup of tea served in a walnut shell, and stood before them full of expectation.

“Dear wisest of all the wise motts,” Mux started.



“My friends and I are here to disturb you because of the following: my little daughter has got the hiccups and she can’t stop hiccupping. We are looking for the Council of the mott elders, keepers of the Ancient Mott Book, and we were hoping that you could direct us to it.

“Oh, the Council of Elders is no longer! Some of them, though stronger, are gone to Heaven. Others left disappointed when we were driven

out of our wonderful colourful home that we were previously appointed. All of us ran away, the elders got old and grey. We put an end to all wise deeds and in that everyone easily succeeds.”

“Oh, no! What about the book? Can you at least tell us where it is?”

“Its exact place I know not, but something else I can give away, my dear mott. Listen to me very carefully and remember it all necessarily! It’s a riddle which I was trusted with, and only with the right motts it must be shared indeed. Anyway, you seem kind of pleasant; though a bit clumsy, still incandescent. So here it is: “The book is at a place surrounded by water. It’s noisy, it’s quiet, music sounds as loud as riot. And even though night spreads around in darkness, the book is covered with colours of the rainbow and it sparkles.”

“I didn’t understand a thing!” Pinky arched his eyebrows and noisily sipped some tea. “Can’t you somehow explain it all in simpler words?”

“Hush, Pinky!” Goula scolded him and pointed at Mux who was obviously deep in thought because he had taken the “mott in thought” position: he was standing, slightly bent, his claw touching his forehead.

“A place surrounded by water. It’s noisy, it’s quiet, music sounds... night spreads... darkness, colours of the rainbow...” Mux kept repeating

again and again. Then he was startled.

“I got it! I know where it is!” Mux shouted. “Thank you wisest of all the wise motts! Come on, boys!”

“Wow!” The wisest of all the wise motts was surprised. “These brave motts, a bit like little chubby dots, seem to have found the right way, and I pray that in less than two weeks they will find the cure, and the indisposition of the dearest tiny princess will no longer endure. Good luck, dear bravest motts, a bit like little chubby dots!”

“Enough is enough! Chubby! Why so insulting?” Pinky felt a little offended, but Mux was already pushing him impatiently towards the door, he was smiling and waving to the wisest of all wise motts. When they found the way out, Goula was the first to say: “Well, do you really know where the book is, Mux?”

“Yes!” His friend smiled and the two of them went ahead while Pinky walked behind them, sulking; he muttered to himself: “a bit like little chubby dots”. I will teach him and his wise muzzle a good lesson!”

Chapter 7

THE EARTHEN POT

When they found themselves in front of the fountain at the town center, Mux pointed at the earthen jar and solemnly said: “The book is at a place surrounded by water. It’s noisy, it’s quiet, music sounds as loud as riot. And even though night spreads around in darkness, the book is covered with colours of the rainbow and it sparkles.”

“It’s in the earthen pot!” Mux concluded.

“Well done, Mux! Why didn’t I think of it!” Goula greeted his friend.

“How come it’s in the earthen pot?!” Pinky had obviously not understood the wise mott’s riddle.

“Oh, Pinky! Well, look at the earthen pot: water, it’s noisy around, but it’s quiet inside. The city lights are all over the statue, but it’s dark inside of the pot. Do you understand now?” Said Mux.

“Ummm, I think so!” Pinky mumbled.

“Alright now, if it’s all clear now, let’s get inside quickly!” Goula shouted.

“Ummm, excuse me but how exactly are we getting inside?” Pinky scratched his head. “Motts can’t swim, and this figure and the pot are in the middle of the fountain. Besides, water is pouring out of the pot, and even if we reach it, there’s a fair chance of us getting into the waterfall. And then, that’ll be the end of Pinky, the end of Goula, the end of...”

“Oh, enough with the drama!” Goula waved his hand. “I see a frog over there. She’ll help us!”

“What? Oh, no, no, no! I don’t get along with frogs!” Pinky was indignant. “Look, look at her! She’s watching me with her bad staring eyes. She doesn’t like me, I’m sure!”

“Who on earth likes you!” Goula snapped at him and shouted to the frog: “Frog, come here!”

But the frog kept looking at them, as cool as a cucumber, and she didn’t even move.

“Friends, not that way!” Mux interrupted them in the end. “I will work it out” he said and he went to the frog. The frog kept its eyes on him.

“Dear little frog!” Mux started...

“Little frog?” Pinky giggled. “That frog looks as if it has eaten six little frogs!

“Pinky!!!” Goula and Mux shouted.



The frog was now looking at Mux in expectation, and it seemed he had started telling her his story: the hiccups, the tour around town and the park, back to the pot and the book; the indifference in her eye gradually changed to sympathy.

“Hop up!” The frog quacked to Mux.

“But, oh, no, no! What do you mean “hop up”? I thought that you could maybe jump over there and, you know...”

“I said that I would help you, not that I would do your work for you.” The frog frowned again.

“Alright, alright. Just calm down. I don’t want you to get angry and drop me into the fountain, right?” Mux said.

Then, under the watchful eye of his friends, who



had forgotten their quarrel, Mux timidly stepped onto the frog's back, bent over, and put his arms around what was supposed to be her neck.

"Ughhhh!" Pinky made a disgusted face, but Goula poked him and both of them froze in expectation of what was going to happen next.

The frog made sure that Mux was holding her tight. She squatted, one jump was enough – they found themselves on the figure of the woman. Then she started climbing her back and when she reached her shoulders, she made a sign to Mux to get off. His legs trembling, he slowly moved ahead to the statue's hand, and in a second slipped into the pot. Now everyone froze in expectation.

Chapter 8

THE ANCIENT MOTT BOOK

*M*ux was surrounded by impenetrable darkness. Only the sound of splashing water seemed to be flowing into a pleasant melody. “Oh, yes! That was the place, surely!” Mux thought and plopped into the water which was up to his belly. He then felt something next to his foot. He bent a little and his paw reached a hard leather book-cover.

“The book!” he shouted. ‘I found it, boys! But there was no-one to hear him inside, especially with this noisy fountain as a background. It was then that the water stopped!

“Ha! That’s what I call luck!” Mux thought, he pulled himself up with his paws, and showed his face out of the top of the pot. “What’s going on,

boys? Who stopped the water?"

"It was Pinky! His gluttony has finally done some good!" Goula was laughing his head off, Pinky was frowning, and the frog was standing as stolidly as before.

"I smelled strawberries and my nose took me to a sticky thing located on one side of one of the fountain's walls. Somebody must have glued it there, but, oh, what a fraud – it turned out it was not a strawberry, nor did it taste like one; you couldn't even chew it. I mean, you can chew it, but you can't possibly swallow it. Here I am, chewing it for more than two minutes, and there's no end of it." Pinky desperately explained.

"To make the long story short, let me finish." Goula interrupted Pinky. "There was a little button under the sticky thing. Our Pinky is a nosy mott, you know, so he decided to push the button, and that's when the water stopped."

"That's all very well, but I am, ummm, a little bit stuck in here." Mux moaned. "Besides, the book is pretty heavy. We must somehow decide on a way to get it out. Frog, please, come and help."

The frog looked at Mux and said: "We had a deal about one load, not two. My back already hurts because of you, not to mention the way you were holding me ..."

"Come on, frog, please, help me!" Mux asked



her. He knew that one good word can make miracles. But not this time; the frog didn't want to hear of the heavy book, not to mention the idea of taking it back again. Pinky then stepped in and said: "Frog, if you help us, I will give you some of the delicious thing that I have been chewing for more than two minutes now; you see, there's more and more." The frog thought for a while, she

was somehow tempted, then unwillingly agreed to help Mux. Only a minute later Mux came out and the three friends gathered around the book as if it were a rare treasure. The book was not very big, but it was quite heavy. It was covered with some sort of strange metal-like book cover on all sides, so it looked more like a chest, not a book. There was a buckle on one side and the front cover read, just as Hush the sage had told them, “This is the most ancient mott book. It was written and created by most celebrated sages and it is full of the wisest words of wisdom, so as to help motts in their wise or not so wise deeds.”

Mux unbuckled the book, opened the heavy book cover and started turning the pages.

“Itchy Scalp, Claw Formication, Bruised Claw, Pale Claw, well, well, look at those, Winking Eye, Not Winking Eye, that’s interesting. Ah, here it is: “Continuous Hiccups”. Mux cleared his throat and started reading: “This is an indisposition, unlike the hiccups (short term), which continues for a longer time – from 3 hours to 3 weeks or more...”

“Wow, how wise it sounds!” Pinky whispered.

“Hushhhh!” Goula scolded him again.

“Quack!” Said the frog. She was delightfully munching the chewing gum that Pinky had found.

“This rare and rather unpleasant phenomenon

is observed most commonly in little motts or grown-ups who forget to breathe when they consume food...” Mux continued: “Do you hear, Pinky, you are in danger of the hiccups! “The strange occurrence has to be cured only with the Healing Flower (with a capital letter “H”) because there is also a healing flower with a small letter “h”.” The Healing Flower grows on the high mountain peaks on my right.”

“But how do we know which right is the book’s right?” Goula grumbled, but Mux made a sign for silence and then read on. “Oh, excuse me. You do not know which the mountain on my right is. This is the mountain on your left! Alright, alright, enough with the ancient sense of humour. Hahahaha!”

“Oh, come on!” Mux cried with indignation and shook his head, after which he continued: “This is the highest mountain in Mottland. It was once an extinct volcano. When it erupted in the past, it created a favourable environment for the Healing Flower to grow due to the ashes and earth. This flower is exactly the same as the healing flower (small letter “h”), but it is much bigger. Be careful so as not to confuse one with the other because the healing flower makes the voice hoarse – it sounds just like a roaring bear. And you wouldn’t like it if the mott got a thunderstorm-like voice, apart



from the hiccups. You will recognize the flower by its wonderful scent and its stripy pattern. Make sure you do not inhale its scent once you have plucked the flower because it will put you to sleep for at least 25 minutes. When you pick the flower, quickly tie it in a bag and then boil some tea so as to heal the hiccups. Good luck!”

“Come on, friends!” Mux shouted. “Let’s put the book back and go.”

Chapter 9

IN SEARCH OF THE HEALING FLOWER

Once the three friends learned about the Healing Flower, they set out for the mountain on their left without any further delay. That was actually the highest mountain in Mottland, but the road that led there was not at all safe...

“Goula, which way shall we go?” Pinky asked slightly worried.

“Hmmm.” Goula scratched his nose. “There are two options: either we take the shortcut through the valley of the modds, or the long way through the forest of the bears.”

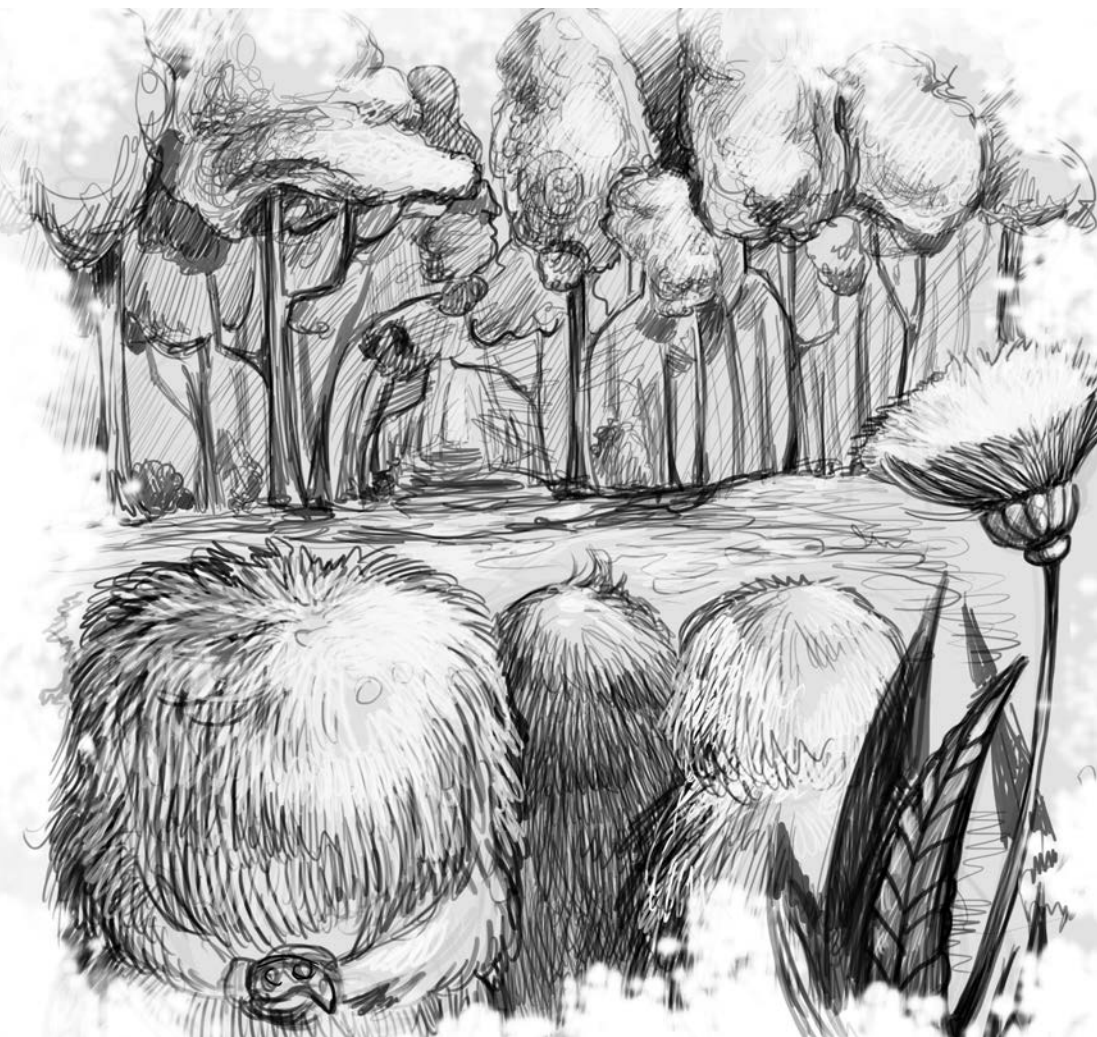
“My, oh my! Is there a third option?” Pinky asked a bit more worried.

There was silence, Mux and Goula looked at

each other. Both options were dangerous, and there was no third one.

“Goula, I suggest we walk through the forest.” Mux said calmly. “After all, the name of the forest doesn’t necessarily mean that there really are bears in there, right?”

“Yes, maybe there are only bunnies there. It’s a bit strange though, why haven’t they called it the forest of the bunnies then?” Goula answered with



a frown. “Of course there are bears there!”

“I ... ummmm. I, I... I...” Pinky stuttered. “I remembered that I had some work at home. Maybe I should get going.”

“Pinky, don’t worry! Even though you are a bit chubby, you are still too little for a bear’s notice.” Mux assured him. “Besides, there are many delicious berries in the forest: strawberries, raspberries...”

“Strawberries!” Pinky jumped up.

“Raspberries too.” Continued Mux.

“What about the bears?”

“Don’t worry about them. Motts get along with all animals.”

“Unless you touch the bear’s honey – they might eat you up then!” Goula was making fun of him.

“Ooooh, I have no such intention. Let’s go then – the strawberries are waiting for us. Um, I mean, there is a long way ahead of us.” Pinky urged his friends.

So the three friends continued their adventure, heading to the forest of the bears. A mott saying has it that “Better in the forest of the bears than in the valley of the modds.” Or was it “Better in the forest full of strawberries than the valley full of raspberries.” Well, it wasn’t that either. Anyway, the friends headed to the Healing Flower with an energetic step.

Chapter 10

DANGER

IN THE FOREST

*A*fter 2 whole days and nights, and 1 morning Goula, Pinky, and Mux found themselves in front of the forest of the bears. That was actually an ordinary forest with lovely oak trees, many bushes and colourful flowers. Birds were singing in the crowns of the trees, bunnies were chasing each other in the grass, ants were hurrying on somewhere... Even Pinky, who was otherwise quite timid, entered the forest without hesitation; he was enchanted by the cheerful colours of the place.

“Maybe there are no bears here after all.” He thought out loud. “Look, the bunnies are playing, a doe is grazing calmly over there. The bears might have disappeared from the forest.

“Yeah, just like dinosaurs.” Goula laughed.

“They were here, but now they’re not.”

“In any case, that’s the path we’ve taken. So let’s cross the forest because the mountain comes up next.” Mux insisted. He really missed Pagu and Magu, so he wanted to get back home as soon as possible.

“If we walk fast, we will manage to cross the mountain in a day.” Goula looked at Pinky. “Unless somebody gets distracted and starts eating berries. If that happens, our adventure will become too long.”

“Ohhhhh, don’t worry about me.” Pinky said. “I can eat and walk at the same time, I will not make anyone wait!”

So the friends went deep into the forest. Goula was walking ahead. He found a path, decided that they should follow it, and led his friends that way. Naturally, Pinky was the slowest. He kept looking about for fruit and mushrooms; he often stopped to admire the beauty of some colourful bush or some beautiful flower. However, he took a really long time admiring a fragrant flower with a stripy pattern. Pinky liked it so much that he tore a few sprigs of it and put them in his bag. The day was wonderful: warm and sunny. There was no hint of what was to happen next.

Some time later in the afternoon, the friends stopped to get some rest near a stream. Pinky



could finally eat the raspberries he had gathered along the way. As they were resting and eating delicious berries, they heard a scary noise. It was not a tiny rustle, but a great big one! Actually, the whole earth shook, a nearby tree cracked in two, the bunnies ran away, the birds flew high up into



the sky, even the ants hid. Something big and scary was coming towards the stream. The three friends didn't dare to move. What was approaching them? Goula decided that it was better to hide, so he quickly pulled his friends behind a big bush. And it was a good thing that he did so because a huge

bear came from behind the tree next to them. It had long, sharp and extremely scary teeth. “My, oh my!” Pinky thought.

The bear bent over the stream and started drinking clear water slowly. Nobody dared to move in the bushes. Although the motts get along with all kind of animals, it’s always better to stay further away from big bears. When the bear had finally quenched his thirst, he turned and was just about to leave when some smell got his attention. He probably smelt the berries. The bear looked around and saw a few raspberries on the ground. He swallowed them at once and went on sniffing, and before he knew it, he was in front of the bush where the three friends were hiding. He peeped into the bush and met Pinky’s eyes. Seeing the little mott, the bear got up on his hind legs, spread his paws and gave the most terrifying roar that shook the earth. At least that was supposed to happen. Instead, a tiny chirp came out of the bear’s mouth.

Goula couldn’t hold his laughter: “Ha-ha-ha! What was that?? Are you a bear or a birdie?”

“Chirp, chirp!” The bear was still waving his scary paws, but instead of frightening someone, he made even Pinky laugh.

The bear then bowed his head, sat down next to the bush, and started crying.

“I am no bear!” He said. “I made a clown of

myself with this tiny voice. No-one is afraid of me!”

“Hey, hey, what’s the big deal?!” Mux tried to encourage him at once. “It’s true, you don’t have a scary roar, but you are enormous. All animals hid when you came, did you see that?”

“Yes, they do that when they see me, but once I roar, they fall about laughing.” The bear kept complaining. “What a bear am I with such a tiny birdlike voice! I am so ashamed that I have been roaming the forest alone for months on end. I dare not go to the rest of the bears because they will make fun of me. I am so lonely!” Big tears were rolling down his muzzle.

“Mux, we must help him!” Pinky felt sad, he gave the bear a few raspberries, hoping that would cheer him up. But it didn’t help. The bear was still crying. Bunnies were playing around the bush again, birds were singing. Apparently, no-one was scared of the chirping bear.

“Yes, we must help him!” Goula agreed.

And Mux was deep in thought. There was no doubt they had to help the bear but how? If only the Ancient Mott Book was there with them... Surely, there would be a cure to this indisposition too. It was then that it came to Mux!

“Yeeeeeeeeesssss!” He shouted. “I know how to help you, dear bear!”





The bear stopped crying and looked at Mux.

“Really? You will help me, the big funny bear?”

“Well, yes! The motts never leave anyone in the lurch!” Mux said.

“And how will you help me?” The bear wondered.

“Leave that to us.” Mux shouted. “Pinky, you picked some of that fragrant flower with the stripy pattern, right?”

“Well, yes.” Pinky answered thoughtfully.

“Give it here!” Mux told him.

Pinky took the flower out of his pocket. Mux looked at it carefully and shouted: “Pinky, this is the healing flower, the one with a small letter ‘h’. And we read about it in the Ancient Mott Book, so we know what this flower can do, right?”

“Well, yes, that’s the flower which makes the voice gruff and scary.” Pinky said.

“Gruff and scary!” The bear jumped.

“Yes, REALLY scary at that!” Goula added.

“We only need to boil some tea using this flower and that’s it. We will have a big bear with a gruff voice.” Mux rejoiced.

So before the bear knew it, Goula was making fire to boil the tea. It was ready a few minutes later. The bear had a few sips and gave a roar. Well, it wasn’t a loud roar, but it wasn’t a chirp either.

“Drink some more!” The motts encouraged

him.

The bear nodded his head and drank the whole tea at one go. Everyone was looking forward to the result. So he stood up on his hind legs, spread his paws, and the miracle happened. Out came such a roar that every living creature ran away, the trees shook, the birds flew up into the sky, Pinky even hid behind Goula.

“Grrrr, GROWL!” The bear was roaring. “I am finally a real bear! Thank you, friends!” The bear was hopping around the motts.

The three friends smiled, congratulated the bear, and once they had finished Pinky’s berries, they decided it was time to get back on their way.

The bear saw them to the path, thanked them once more, and waved his paw after them for a long time.

Chapter 11

THE BEGINNING OF A FEATHERY FRIENDSHIP

*T*he mountain was steep and high, and our friends were quite tired by the time they climbed it. Especially Pinky, who was in the habit of taking a nap or a bite every hour. He complained a lot.

“Pinky, we must climb a bit more, find the flower, get back to the forest, and spend the night there because if we don’t make it, we might get lost in the mountain; and who knows what might happen to us then!” Goula said and hurried his friend.

“I know but I can barely stand on my feet! We haven’t had any rest for a whole hour!” Pinky moaned.

“Keep it up, my friend! We’re almost there! You can see the mountain top over there, and we don’t even have to climb all the way up. Something tells me that our flower grows ooooooover there in that sunny meadow about 10 minutes up the slope. That’s the only spot among the rocks where there’s green grass and sunlight. I am sure we’ll find something delicious for you there. I promise you that while Goula and I are looking for the flower, you will take a nap, have a bite, and only then shall we turn back, ok?” Mux’s approach was diplomatic as always so as to satisfy both of his friends.

“Alright.” Pinky got a grip and went on, though with a moan.

When they reached the meadow, Mux turned out to be right. It was all in the afternoon sun; magical birds were chirping around, and the Healing Flower (with capital letter) was growing everywhere. They wouldn’t have to look for it for a long time. It was different from the healing flower (with small letter) only by its size – just as the Ancient Mott Book had it.

“Well, let’s pick the plant and go!” Goula ordered.

“No way! Mux promised me some rest. I will lie down for a second, just like that...” Before he finished the sentence, Pinky dropped down on the



ground and closed his eyes in a catnap.”

“Well, it seems that we’re on our own. Let’s pick some flowers.” Goula and Mux glanced at each other and started for the tall tree in the center of the meadow; that’s where the flower was growing the most. They were just about to pluck the first blossom, when they suddenly heard a familiar sound behind them: “Chirp, chirp, chirp...”

“Hey, that sounds like the bear before we gave him back his voice. Maybe he’s nearby?” Mux wondered and looked around.

“Hey, look! Up there!” Goula said and pointed to the treetop. A big nest had landed in the crown, and three baby jays were chirping there.

“Oh, how cute they are!” Mux became all mushy. “Let’s go meet them and have a chat. It’s always nice to meet a new friend. Why else would fate give you a chance to make a new acquaintance?”

He started climbing the tree.

“Mux, be careful!” Goula cried out. Mux heard it, the sound, the rattle that modds make with their... oh, no! A RATTLESNAKE! Mux started shivering so hard that he nearly fell off the branch.

“W-w-wh-where?” He looked at his friend and Goula pointed his claw to the jays’ nest.

The snake had wrapped around the branch where the little birds’ straw house was, and it was making menacing rattling sounds while the poor

baby jays were chirping...

“We must help them!” Mux shouted. “But how??”

“Here!” Goula said and threw a few flower leaves to Mux. “Hold your nose and get on with it!”

That’s right, the book said that once you pluck the flower, its scent would be soporific, so to avoid that, you would have to put it away in a bag at once. Mux took a deep breath so as not to smell the scent; he held the flower tightly in his claw, and he started climbing bravely. The snake was too busy wrapping around the chirping jays’ nest, so it didn’t notice how all at once flower leaves started flying around. Its mouth was wide open, so a few leaves fell directly in, and one even got stuck on its nostril. The snake took a noisy breath, then sneezed and sank into a strange kind of stupor. Its body unwrapped from the branch and fell down onto the grass, just where the Healing Flower was. Goula plucked a few more leaves and shoved them in the snake’s nose. That would give them enough time to escape, and the parents would be able to hide their baby jays. Goula helped Mux to get down from the tree, they picked the three biggest flowers, took them and waved goodbye to the jays who were chirping and jumping with joy and gratitude. Goula and Mux ran to Pinky to tell him about their adventure and they headed

towards the way back in a hurry because the sun was about to hide behind the faraway mountain ridges. Mommy and daddy jay, who had just come back to their nest, followed the motts with their eyes and listened to the extraordinary story of the two brave saviors of their babies.

Chapter 12

THE WRONG PATH

„*H*urry, hurry up!” Mux was shouting and running down the slope. “Oh, ouch, ouch! I can’t do it anymore!” Pinky was moaning and holding his belly with one paw, while grabbing one branch after the other with his claw, stepping down the slope. “I will fall down and that’ll be the end of me! They will write about me: “Pinky’s gone – once again hungry, tired and drawn. His last meal was a rotten walnut that he ate with a squeal.” What a tragedy!”

“Oh, stop whining, will you!” Goula scolded him. “Would you like to spend the night here? You’d better be hungry, tired, even really sweaty, but not eaten up by nocturnal beasts in the mountain!”

Mux wasn’t paying attention to his friends’

fighths, he was only scurrying ahead.

“Oh, no!” Pinky cried out at once.

“What’s the matter this time, you grumpy!” Goula asked.

“Friends, I’ve got some bad news.”

“What now? Is your stomach empty again? Or you’ve got a thorn in your left leg? Or you’ve finally realized that you must be on a diet??”

“A diet?! That’s absurd! And, yes, I have a thorn, but I’ve been keeping that for later. Of course I am hungry, we’ve already discussed that.”

“Pinky, tell us, what’s the matter?” Mux asked.

“Well, I think that we’ve lost our way. I remember that when we were walking up the path, there were wild raspberries at every step. And now, I haven’t seen a single berry ever since we started back. That definitely means that we’re on the wrong path.”

Mux stopped and looked around. Everything seemed the same. He didn’t see another path when they were at the jays’ tree, but the motts were then in such a hurry that they didn’t even think of checking if that was the right path. It was now too late to go back. The sunset was going to leave them in the middle of nowhere. Once darkness came at night, various animals that lived at the slopes of the highest mountain in Mottland could attack and eat the three friends at the blink of an eye: snakes, rats, moles...

“Oh, no! Where are we headed then?” Goula wondered.

“The Valley Of the Modds, where else!” Pinky started.

“Yeah, right! How do you know? It’s impossible that we’ve done something that stupid!” Goula snapped at him.



“There, it’s written over there.” Pinky pointed at a big wooden board nailed on the nearby tree. It read: “To the Valley of the Modds. Come if you dare!”

“No, no, I don’t dare... please.” Pinky said.

Pinky started walking up the slope again.

“Alright then. Let’s get back. It’s better to find



a place to sleep in the meadow than risk being caught by the modds.”Mux said, but at that exact moment a big bluish purple something swept him from his place. Hardly audible cries were heard:

“Dear, oh dear, oh dear, dear meeeeeeeee!”

That was Pinky, who had slipped on a tiny stone and now, with all the force of gravity, was rolling down the slope, straight into the valley of the modds, their hateful cousins.

Chapter 13

**CAPTURED
BY THE MODDS**

*A*fter one long final “Oh, dear”, a short “thud” was heard and Pinky found himself on a meadow. But this meadow was different – somewhat darker. There were no colourful fragrant flowers, no bunnies playing, no bees gathering honey, no ants even. It felt as if everyone was hiding. While staring at the greyness of the scenery, Pinky heard steps behind him. Goula and Mux were going down the slope fast.

“Pinky, are you alright, my friend?” Mux inquired worriedly.

“Alright my foot! How can I be alright when I’ve got scratches all over me!” Pinky started moaning.

“Oh, stop it, you seem alright to me!” Goula



scolded him. "Let's climb back up the slope, because the Sun is already setting, look."

"I'm afraid there's no time, and the slope is very steep too. It will be very difficult to climb it," said Mux: "and it looks like we need to go forward."

The three friends looked at each other. No one seemed to want to go through the valley of the modds, but they had no choice. So, after helping Pinky remove a couple of thorns from his left paw and his right leg, and a huge prickle from behind his ear, the three friends boldly continued ahead.

And the Sun began to yawn in the sky, preparing to go to bed. The little motts had to find somewhere to spend the night fast. There were scarcely any plants in the valley, and the motts could be easily seen from a distance. And then...

"Aha!" Goula exclaimed. He, as usual, was leading the way. "Over there!" He pointed to a large tree in the distance. "That's where we'll stay tonight. We'll hide in its roots."

Shortly after, the three comrades found themselves standing in front of the tree, and right on time, because the Sun had just set, taking away all the light. While Goula and Mux were gathering twigs and leaves for their bed, Pinky was inspecting around the tree, hoping to find something to eat. Unfortunately, he had no success, and so, with empty tummies, the three friends lay down and

went to sleep fast and tight. But in the morning, an unpleasant surprise would be waiting for them...

"Well, it's the motts, I told you it was the motts, you Sillyhead!" Dunderhead snapped.

"They looked like mice to me in the distance." Sillyhead started looking for excuses.

"Mice my foot! Mice don't have that unpleasant smell... of soap! Yuck!"

"It is true! Look how clean they are – awful!" Sillyhead frowned in disgust too.

Coming out of his sleep, Mux opened his eyes softly and all he could see was this: two gargantuan modds standing right over him, studying him. He had seen those modds before. Mux was so confused that he didn't even move.

"What are we going to do with them now?" Dunderhead inquired.

"Well, I don't know, but we'd better ask Grumpy." Sillyhead replied.

"Well, how are we supposed to ask him when my mobile phone is out of range here?"

"Ha-ha-ha!" The two modds gargled. This sinister laughter woke Goula and Pinky up too. They rose to their little feet, but there was nowhere for them to run. The modds had pinned them to the tree. Mux, however, decided not to give up without a fight. After he stood up, he waved his claw threateningly, and he tried to walk around

Sillyhead.

“Hey, I know you! And you won’t get away this time!” Sillyhead stretched his arm and grabbed Mux. Dunderhead didn’t wait for further invitation either and caught Goula and Pinky, who were trying to enter the fight. But there was no fight, the three friends were too little for the two modds, and they were captured easily.

“Because of you, you little pestering motts, Grumpy grounded us and sent us to scour the valley at daytime.” Dunderhead growled.

“Do you know how unpleasant it is to be outside in the light, instead of being in our stinky, damp, dark cave?” Sillyhead added.

The three little motts had their noses pointed down in despair. The poor little things had no idea where they were being taken, nor what was going to happen to them. They could only hear the modds arguing again.

“Well, my grandfather once...”

Chapter 14

**SILLYHEAD
AND DUNDERHEAD
ON GUARD**

„*H*a-ha-ha! Finally, you’re in my hands!” Grumpy’s voice filled the whole cave. “Sillyhead, Dunderhead, take them straight to the “guest room”. Let them get some rest there, while I figure out what to do with them.“

“The guest room?!” Sillyhead and Dunderhead stared wide. “But...but..., boss, we don’t have a guest room!“ Dunderhead stuttered in perplexity.

„Is that so?!“ Grumpy grinned. “Well, what do we call the dark, shady room with the bars where rats and cockroaches chase each other inside?“

“Oh, that one?!“ Dunderhead smiled too. “We call this room a dungeon...“

“Or cell!” Sillyhead added.

“Or prison!” Dunderhead continued.

“Or...”

“Quiet!” Grumpy yelled. “Everyone understood which room we’re talking about, now take them there!”

And he pointed towards the interior of the cave.

And the poor little motts still had their heads hung in despair. Not only were they held in captivity, but they couldn’t help princess Magu either. “What is going to happen to her?!” Mux wondered.

“If only I were a little bigger and stronger, I would show those modds!” Goula was talking to



himself beneath his breath. Pinky was having his concerns too: “Oh, dear, just how cold it is here, and it’s dark too. I wonder what they serve for dinner in this cave?!”

And so, after walking for several minutes, making 3 left and 4 right turns, going back once because Dunderhead couldn’t remember the way, the motts finally found themselves in front of the “guest room”. Sillyhead shoved the little motts inside and, together with Dunderhead, he remained there on guard, because Grumpy had told them so. Because when Grumpy says something... he has said it, and it is final!

“Hey, Dunderhead, how clever you were to guess what the “guest room” was!” Sillyhead praised his friend.

“Well, I am quick-witted sometimes indeed.” Dunderhead boasted.

“Well, it’s true – as clever as a fox! No – as two foxes!” Sillyhead continued heaping praise on him.

“Two foxes my foot! As clever as a whole herd of foxes!”

“Do foxes live in herds?”

“Who cares about foxes?! The important thing is that I am as clever as them.”

“You’re as clever as a fox that went to university. Say, you’re one professor fox.” Sillyhead couldn’t

stop with the praise.

“Well, you guessed about the cell too. You too have your clever moments every now and then. And look at how big and strong you are. Clever and strong. I would say that you are clever-strong!” Dunderhead scratched his head. Maybe there was no such word, but it sounded nice anyway.

“You’re strong too, Dunderhead! Hard as a rock. No, not as a rock, as a mountain. Better yet, as a mountain rock!”

“Oh, really?! Jeez, Sillyhead, if I’m a mountain rock and you’re clever-strong, can you imagine what the two of us make?” Dunderhead wondered.

“Yes, the two of you together are like little kids with the brains of a chicken. Not just a regular chicken, though, but a small and silly one. Ha-ha-ha!” Goula, who couldn’t resist and entered the conversation, was bursting with laughter.

“Hey!” Sillyhead yelled. “Shut it, or I’ll come and...”

“Oh, if I don’t die of hunger, I’ll certainly die of boredom because of these two!” Pinky looked at his friends.

Sillyhead and Dunderhead just waved neglecting them and continued their laudatory conversation, which would inevitably grow into an argument about their grandfathers. Our friends were in for some hard times.

Chapter 15

A FRIEND AMONG THE ENEMIES

*A*n excruciating night had gone by and maybe a couple of more hours, when steps were heard and everybody turned to see who was approaching the cell...oops, that is the “guest room”. And there she was, princess Jelly, standing before them. Slender, well-dressed, even neat, she didn’t look one bit like the princess of the dirty, stinky modds.

Jelly stepped slowly towards Sillyhead and Dunderhead, holding a tray full of food in her hands. Everybody licked their lips, especially Pinky. Jelly gave each of the big modds a sandwich and then approached the bars behind which the little fluffy motts had been locked.

“Here you are!” She said and handed the food over to the prisoners.

“But...” Mux was perplexed. “Is this all for us?”

“Take it and don’t ask!” Pinky shoved his friend and started greedily for the sandwiches.

“It is for you!” Jelly replied and smiled ever so slightly.

“Weird thing!”, thought Mux. “She’s supposed to be the modd princess, yet she is nice to us! There must be a catch“. Jelly sensed that the motts were hesitant, so she whispered quietly:

“I know Pagu!”

“But how?!“, Mux was startled.

“It’s a long story, I don’t have time for it now.“



Jelly looked behind her back and after she made sure Sillyhead and Dunderhead were busy with their sandwiches and couldn't hear her, she went on: "Can you see the corridor to the left?", she asked.

"We can see it!" The three friends answered as one.

"If you follow it and make 2 left and 2 right turns, and then another left turn, you'll get to an iron door." Jelly took another glance at the munching Sillyhead and Dunderhead. And, as they were still busy, she continued: "Here's the key to the door!" The princess took out a small key and gave it to Mux. "Behind this door, there is a tunnel that will take you out of the cave and near the forest, then to your freedom and Mottland."

Without waiting for an answer, Jelly turned, gave Sillyhead and Dunderhead a look and said in a stern voice:

"Make sure you guard those prisoners well because if they disappear, you will be in for some serious trouble!"

"Yes, princess!" The two modds replied.

After that Jelly started slowly towards the tunnel she had initially come from and vanished in the darkness.

"Strange thing! Why would she want to help us?!" Mux wondered out loud.

“Well, it looks like a trap to me,” Goula replied.

“It can’t be a trap, see, they already have us, don’t they,” Mux went on.

“Well, there’s no harm in giving it a try!” Goula was always ready for adventures.

“Well, let’s give it a try then, just let me finish this sandwich first.” Pinky couldn’t stop munching.

“But how are we going to get out of this cell?!” Goula wondered.

“I have an idea.” Mux said and gave his friend a wink.

Goula smiled too, it was time to escape.

“Hey, Sillyhead!” Mux shouted. “Is it true that Dunderhead is smarter than you?”

“What?!” Sillyhead frowned. “Who told you that?! I’m smarter than him.”

“Oh, so Dunderhead is the braver one then.” Mux went on.

“What are you talking about!” Sillyhead bristled up. “I am braver!”

“That’s not true! I’m braver!” Dunderhead entered the conversation.

“You?! You are afraid of soap! And you get goosebumps at the sheer sight of washing powder.” Sillyhead was visibly angry.

“Well, you’re afraid of toothpaste!” Dunderhead snapped back at him.

“Well, of course I am! I brushed my teeth once

and they became whiter and didn't smell bad. Yuck!"

"It won't be easy to solve this argument!" Mux interrupted. "You need a challenge!"

"Channel-what now?!" Dunderhead was confused.

"Channelge!" Sillyhead corrected him.

"No! Challenge," Mux clarified.

"Chillage, exactly. That's what I just said!" Dunderhead frowned again.

Mux realised that there was no point explaining and simply said:

"You need a race!"

"Ahaa, this then. Hmm, we love to race."

"Good! So, in order to find out who's braver, I will come up with a scary task, and we'll see who'll do better!"

"Come on, give us your channel... chillen... give us your task already!", Dunderhead was all swanky.

"So, there are cockroaches and rats in our cell. And it's dark and damp too. Your task is to catch 10 cockroaches and 2 rats. The fastest one wins the race."

"Hey, but that's going to be super easy!" Sillyhead yelled.

"Ahaaa, or maybe you're just afraid of the dark or the cockroaches?!" Mux replied.



“He is afraid and he knows I’m going to win,” Dunderhead couldn’t stop laughing.

“I’m not afraid! Let’s do it!”

“Well, alright then. We’re going to step out of the cell, so we don’t stand in your way, and we’re going to watch from outside to make sure nobody’s cheating.”

“Deal!” Sillyhead unlocked the door and the motts came out of the “guest room” while the modds took their place inside.

“Hey, just make sure you go nowhere!” Dunderhead frowned.

“How can we go anywhere?! The place is full of tunnels and we don’t know which one to take. Let’s start with the challenge. Ready, set, go!” Mux had barely shouted out the signal and the two modds were already kneeling on the floor looking for cockroaches and rats.

The three friends didn’t wait long. Goula gently closed the door, Mux turned the lock silently and the three of them headed for the corridor princess Jelly had pointed to them...

“Hey, I saw this cockroach first!” Dunderhead screamed.

“Well, maybe you saw it first, but I caught it...” Sillyhead replied. “I already have 5 cockroaches and... ooh, wait, is this an earthworm? So I have 4 cockroaches, 1 worm, and...”

Chapter 16

THE VISIT

*T*he previous day had been quite busy for our friends in the cell, but it had been just as hard for princess Pagu. Ever since Mux and his pals had set off to find a cure for Magu's misfortunes, Pagu had barely got any sleep. Although Magu was growing to become a healthy and beautiful baby, she still had the hiccups. Maybe she had even come to think that this was a normal part of life, because she somehow still managed to eat, sleep, and smile at everyone who came by to say hello between those hiccups.

Izzy kept watch over Pagu, just like she had promised Mux, and she would use all sorts of tactics to coax her into eating and getting some sleep. She would only let Hush the Sage and his wife Shush visit her, as well as radiant grandpa



Dodie. Dodie would calm her down, telling her stories about Mux's valour, while Hush and Shush would bring her different aromatic potions to make her feel less worried about her loved one. But she worried nevertheless. She worried very much.

And then one morning, right after Pagu had fed her tiny daughter and was singing her a lullaby, a large bird flew in through the window.

"I'm looking for princess Pagu, the glorious princess of Mottland!" The bird started looking around, while Izzy had already risen to her feet and was ready to tear it up to pieces feather by feather if the situation called for it. No one, absolutely no one, even a bird of that size had the right to barge in the princess' quarters uninvited.

"Ah, you bird, how dare you break in like that in the princess' home!", Izzy was all worked up and she stood in front of Pagu.

"Take it easy, squirrel!" The bird reprimanded her. "I'm not just any bird, I'm a JAY, and I've flown all the way here because I have important information about your friends. I owe them because they saved my baby jays from a rattlesnake.

"Did you just call me squirrel?! Ah, you're really pushing it! We are more ancient than you, you sack of feathers! If you're going to mock us, hit the road before I turn you into chicken soup!" Izzy

was still livid.

“Izzy, it’s alright, let’s hear what our guest has to tell us. After that we shall explain to him why we are not squirrels,” Pagu intervened.

“Excuse me, princess, but I do believe that you would really want to find out what is happening with your close ones. Yesterday, as my dearly beloved wife and I were flying back home from hunting, we noticed some strange activity in our little children’s nest. At first we saw some fluffy creatures and we sped up, but by the time we got there, they had already gone. The baby jays told us what had happened and how your friends had saved them from the mouth of a rattlesnake, which at that moment was taking a nap on the ground near the tree. They described those animals to me as a curious natural wonder – a mix between a squirrel and a mouse but with a crab-like claw. Up to that moment I had only heard of the motts, but I had never seen one. The modds on the other hand, I have both heard of and met. Those idlers live in the valley next to us. And so I decided to find the brave motts and thank them. The next morning, as I was circling over the valley, however, something bad happened. I had just spotted the motts resting under a tree, when they were taken away against their will.”

“What do you mean taken away? By WHOM?”

Izzy and Pagu shouted together.

“By two modds! I don’t know them, but they were both huge, ugly, and dirty.

“Sillyhead and Dunderhead!” Pagu remarked. “Please, continue.”

“Well, I was flying above them, when they suddenly entered the foot of a rock and disappeared from my view. That’s where the cave they live in is. I realised I had to help them, but I didn’t know how. Then I noticed a bear in the meadow, who I have been friends with for a long time. We often share berries from the bushes near the southern slope. So I asked him if he knew anything about those curious fluffy creatures, and much to my surprise, it turned out they had helped him as well. It turns out that your friends are a big deal. The bear told me their story, showed me the direction to Mottland, and here I am, standing right here with you. I apologise once again for bursting in like that, but I reckoned that it was a matter of life and death.” Then the jay stared sharply at Izzy and puffed up like a peacock.

Pagu was sitting silently in her chair with the hiccuping Magu in her lap. She spent about a minute in silence and then she said:

“Thank you for this information, mister Jay. I am thankful for your effort. Can I ask you for a favour? Will you take a letter to a person in the

valley you mentioned? I shall compose it very quickly and shall give it to you straight away. It is in your direction, and I hope it would not be too troublesome for you.”

“And whom is it addressed to?” Izzy asked surprised.

Pagu looked at her and replied:

“Princess Jelly.”

It was a warm and sunny spring day and little Pagu and her grandfather – the great King Ben I were going on a picnic in the mountain again. Pagu loved going for a walk with her grandfather. She felt secure and calm, nestling in his thick fur. He knew every living being in the mountain and always found a diplomatic way out of any situation that could be considered harmful to him or his little granddaughter. On that particular day, they were going to gather mushrooms and sorrel for the special seasonal mushroom-and-sorrel mott soup.

They took a winding path at the edge of town leading towards the walnut slope, and from there, through the watermelon valley, they entered the dense shrubs where the edible mushrooms grew. But just there and then, right next to a thick bush,



Най-добри приязнели
завинаги

they saw something dark and small that was whimpering and whining.

“A kitty!” Pagu exclaimed.

But it wasn’t a kitty. From behind the bushes a little snout appeared and two wide open dark eyes fixed on the princess.

“This is, this is...” The great Ben I stuttered. “Fire and brimstone! This is a little Modd!”

Pagu had heard and read about the modds, but this fragile and frightened creature was in no way similar to the large, dirty, and stinky monsters that mummy and daddy scared her with. On the contrary – in the two dark olive eyes there was a playful flicker, and Pagu didn’t feel like running away, instead she wanted to grab the little girl by the hand and start playing tag with her in the shady meadow until they get tired.

This dirty little cutie was a lost little modd that went by the name of Jelly. After grandpa Ben and she sent her back on her way home, the two girls secretly promised each other to remain friends and to meet right on that very same sunny meadow every last Tuesday of the month. Oh, the jolly games they used to play! They made wreaths from the branches of weeping willows, they gathered pinecones, they raced with bunnies and took naps cuddling in the roots of the largest oak tree in the meadow.

A long time had passed since then and Pagu grew up to rule Mottland, and it wasn't before last summer when the modds had attacked them that she remembered about her despicable cousins. Later she heard the news about the new queen of Moddland – “some female named Jelly“, and Pagu started thinking about her childhood friend. It seemed that this friendship would turn out to be of great importance.

Chapter 17

A LETTER FROM A FRIEND

Dear Jelly,
A long time has passed since our last meeting, but I hope that, just like me, you remember all the carefree afternoons that we used to spend playing in the shady meadow, throwing roots at each other; and we made grandpa angry, by hiding from him.

I don't know whether I have the right to ask you for help, but there is no one else I can ask, and besides rumour has it that you rule Moddland wisely and fairly and that you often talk sense into Grumpy, telling him not to do evil deeds that are uncalled for..."

Jelly finished reading the letter in which Pagu was briefly telling the story of Mux, Magu, the

hiccups, and the pressing need for a cure. After that she was asking her to help the motts escape, assuring her that she wouldn't have to risk her reputation of a strict ruler. She just had to give the tiniest hint to where the exit was to her friends, and since they were clever, they would come up with a plan how to get out of there in one piece. The letter ended with heartfelt regards and a proposal for a secret meeting for good old times' sake.

“Of course I remember you, Pagu!”, Jelly smiled to herself.

She alone had thought about helping the poor motts in the cell, but after the warm words of her childhood friend, she had her mind set. She tore the letter to tiny pieces so that no one could find it and read it and then went out of the room wearing a mysterious smile on her face.

Chapter 18

IN THE BOWELS OF THE CAVE

*G*rumpy was climbing down the corridor, firmly holding a bucket full of scummy water and a mouldy sponge, when he bumped into princess Jelly in the corridor.

“Where are you going, my love?” She smiled at him. “Are you going to take a bath?”

“No, my love! I’m going to the nasty, vile, soap-smelling motts. I’m going to tell Sillyhead and Dunderhead to give them a little wash up, because I can sense their repulsive soapy aroma all the way up in my stinky room.”

“But, love, this is unacceptable! You must give them a bath at once!” Jelly agreed. After that she gently caressed Grumpy and continued up the stairs.

She was even nicer to him than usual because she knew what would happen when her husband found out that the motts had run away. He would

never suspect her, of course, but she decided to play it safe, acting nicely, and she even hurried towards the kitchen to prepare a new jug of moddovilea.

“Ha-ha-ha! It looks like our paths have crossed again, stinkers!” The booming voice of Grumpy came from the distance, and Sillyhead and Dunderhead looked at each other. “Get ready for a nice stinky bath, ha-ha-ha!”

“What does he mean again? We see each other everyday!” Sillyhead whispered to his friend.

“Yes, and Grumpy never offers to give us a stinky bath. We must have done something to deserve a reword,” Dunderhead replied.

“Yes, maybe because we are so brave and strong!” Sillyhead boasted proudly.

“And because we are guarding those funny little motts, ha-ha-ha,” Dunderhead spoke again. “And speaking of them, where are they?”

“Well, aaaaa...they were right here, weren’t they?” Sillyhead started looking around. “Check the cell!”

“We are in the cell, you Sillyhead! And they are not here with us!” Dunderhead was beginning to sound a little worried.

“And why are we in the cell?” Sillyhead scratched his head and Dunderhead looked at him feeling that something wasn’t right.

“Heeey, frieeends, who’s ready for a baaath!”

Just then Grumpy's bulky figure stood in front of the bars. The gigantic smile was running all across his face showing how yellow his 9 teeth were.

"Uguum, we ...", started Sillyhead in a barely audible voice and smiled back at him quickly.

When he saw the two modds behind the bars, Grumpy's smile disappeared immediately. He started looking around feverishly. He came closer to the cell and sneaked a peek in the darkness, but he could only make out the two ugly silhouettes of Sillyhead and Dunderhead.

"Aaargh, what have you done again, you lousy, stinky, walking natural disasters!" Grumpy screamed at the top of his lungs as Sillyhead and Dunderhead instinctively took a couple of steps back and even held their hands together. "Where are the motts?! Tell me now, or I'll throw you in the washing machine! Tell me, you fools! What have you done? Why are you in the cell, and why are the prisoners gone?! Why! Whyyyy?!"

The last "Whyyy" boomed so deep into the cave that Mux, Goula, and Pinky, who were running for the exit, got genuinely startled.

"Oh dear, oh dear, Grumpy got really mad!", Pinky started worrying. "Let's get out of here quickly, because if he catches us, we are doomed!"

"Wait, wait, what did Jelly tell us? Two left turns and two right turns, or two right turns and two





left turns, and then another right turn?“, all of a sudden Goula got restless. He had been repeating the princess’ directions during the whole time, but when he heard Grumpy’s scary voice, he immediately forgot them.

“Oh, well, I got so scared that I forgot them too.” Mux stopped anxiously.

“Look!“ Pinky pointed his claw to one direction. “I think I can smell the scent of freshness from there. The exit is probably that way!“

And that was really the case. From the tunnel on the right came the barely detectable smell of morning dew mixed with a scent of strawberries. And the left tunnel was filled with the characteristic impenetrable darkness and sticky stench. The three friends didn’t hesitate long and went right, then right again, then left, then left again, and the pleasant aroma was getting stronger and stronger, and they slowed down taking deep breaths. This was definitely the right way. There was only one turn left to take before the iron door and the freedom they yearned for. The three friends made another right turn and they suddenly hit something soft, fragrant, and extremely fluffy.

“Hug, hug, hug, hug!“

All of a sudden there came a deafening voice and something grabbed them in a soft, warm hug. Maybe they had taken the wrong way after all.

Chapter 19

THE HUGGING MONSTER

“We have to split!” said Sillyhead when they reached the first tunnel that branched into two. “I’ll take the left, you take the right.”

“No way! Everybody knows that it’s forbidden to go right! That’s where the hugging monster lives!” Dunderhead yelped.

“Are you stupid or something?!” Sillyhead laughed. “Do you still believe this nonsense?! There’s no hugging monster. It’s made up just to scare the little modds who are not bad enough.”

“Why don’t you go right then, if you think you’re so clever?!” Dunderhead suggested. “I’m not going there. I can smell some pleasant smell and this gives me the creeps.”

“Alright, alright!” Sillyhead got angry. “I’ll take that tunnel, but we have to promise – if either of us starts shouting, the other one must immediately come to him.

“And this guy, the first one, why does he have to shout?”

“Well, because he’s found the motts and he wants to get the other one for backup!” Sillyhead snapped.

“Alright, then I’m not going left just yet. I’ll stay here and I’ll wait for you to get me.” Dunderhead wisely concluded. “If you don’t shout, you’ll just come back and then you’ll go the other way, and I’ll still be here guarding.”

Sillyhead didn’t find this plan particularly clever, but he decided not to go into too much detail, so he just waved dismissively and went in the tunnel. This part of the cave was pretty creepy indeed. There was no mould, it didn’t smell bad, no bats could be heard. He shivered.

“Oh, what’s going on with me, there is no hugging monster. No one has ever seen it, so it doesn’t exist. This place is forbidden because Grumpy probably hides something secret here. Oooh, what could it be? Probably moddovilea supplies or the rarest, most malodorous mildew that has to rot for a hundred years before you can wallow in it... Or a ballroom maybe, where the

annual modd mud balls used to take place...”

Sillyhead started fantasizing about the things he could stumble on and zigzagged deeper and deeper inside the forbidden zone.

And in the meantime...

“Hey, let us go!” cried Mux.

“Yes, we can barely breathe,” Goula was twisting and turning too.

“Hug, hug, hug, hug!”, growled the hugging monster and with its eyes wide shut and its mouth grinning it rubbed and rubbed its snout against the two scared motts.

“Leave my friends alone right now!” Pinky commanded.

By some miracle, he had evaded this interesting beast’s embrace and was now staring at this gigantic, amorphous, fluffy being that stood before him, which was holding his friends in its strong arms and didn’t look in the mood to negotiate. Or perhaps it simply couldn’t, because the only thing that it kept repeating was the constant: “Hug, hug, hug, hug!” This part of the cave apparently belonged to the hugging monster in question. Unlike the other tunnels, it was bright and clean there, it smelt nice, and there were all sorts of strange soft objects lying everywhere around the monster. Pinky recognised straw dolls, stuffed



toys, balls of yarn, and pillows – all things that must have appeared suitable for hugging and that have fallen in the beast's paws.

“Friends, I’m going to help you! Just wait here and don’t move!” Pinky shouted and started tapping his feet and farting nervously.

How could he help them!? He was only a little mott, while the monster was big and strong... “Backup!” he thought and started looking around. He would go back, find the right way, get outside, and look for someone to help him. There was no other way... That’s how it was going to be. He cautiously started going back the corridor deaf to his friends’ cries begging him not to do anything stupid. Yes, that was his moment. He would do whatever he could, but he wouldn’t leave them there – to be hugged who knows how long.

Chapter 20

THE HERO OF THE DAY

„*S* cared or not, I can’t leave my friends in trouble!“ Pinky kept saying to himself while running back the same corridor they had come from. All of a sudden the sound of steps could be heard in the distance. He froze in one place and stared ahead.

“Gosh, just how unpleasant this place is! You can barely breathe from the stench of mountain dew. Yuck!” Sillyhead was cursing. “It l’ooks like Dunderhead played me for a fool?! He would stay guarding! As clumsy and slow as he is, he can’t even guard a snail. Not only that, but he is so stupid that after he loses the snail, he won’t guess how to find it again. And it’s as simple as it can get – just follow the tracks! Ha-ha-ha,” Sillyhead laughed so loud that even Dunderhead heard him.

“Sillyhead! Should I come?!“ He shouted.

“No, you just stay right where you are!“, Sillyhead replied.

In the meantime Pinky was scared stiff. He had the modds coming towards him from one direction, and the hugging monster holding his friends in its paws in the other. How could he find his way out of this pickle?! And that’s when he had an idea. Pinky turned back and in only a minute he was standing in front of the fluffy hugging beast.

“Hey!” The little mott shouted.

“Hug!” The monster replied.

“I can see that you love to hug. Unfortunately, my friends are very tiny and are not very good for hugging. Wouldn’t it be nice, if they were larger, and fluffier, and more furry...

The hugging creature looked at Goula and Mux. They were very tiny indeed and they almost disappeared in his arms. Pinky went on:

“I know, however, two huuuuge and fat modds, who are much more pleasant to hug. They are a little smelly – you’ll have to bathe them, and perfume them, and comb them. But after that you’ll hug them all day long. What do you say – would you like to swap?

The monster, which wasn’t actually scary at all, but rather big and fluffy, smiled. Apparently it was ready to make the deal, and it even gave out a “hug-hug” to confirm it. Goula and Mux



also nodded their heads in agreement. Now it was down to Pinky to trick the two modds to go there and then...

“Hey, you big, fat modd! Can you catch me?!“, shouted Pinky when he jumped in front of Sillyhead.

“Who’s fat?!“, the modd frowned. “Not only am I going to catch you, but when I do I’ll...”

“Ooooh, I’m sorry! I mistook you for Dunderhead, he is fatter,” Pinky interrupted him.

Sillyhead got offended. He had always been more than Dumhead – more big, more clever, more fast, so he had to be more fat too.

“No, he isn’t! I’m more fat than him.”

“Aaaa, I don’t believe you! He’s fatter. And maybe he’s even taller.”

“How?! More tall!“ Sillyhead was getting white with anger. “That’s not true!”

“Well, we can always check. You just have to stand next to each other and we’ll see who’s taller.

Sillyhead thought that this was a good idea and quickly shouted:

“Dunderheeeaaaad! Come over here at once!

“Comiiiiing!” A voice was heard in the distance.

And so, after a couple of minutes, after all Dunderhead wasn’t the fastest, the two modds were standing next to each other in front of Pinky.

“Hmmm!” The little mott pondered. “It looks

like Sillyhead is taller after all.”

“It’s so not true!” Dunderhead got offended. “I’m more tall!” He insisted.

“Yes, actually Dunderhead is taller.” Pinky kept teasing them.

“How?!” Now Sillyhead was offended. “I’m more clever...aaaaa... I meant more tall!”

“Oh, this isn’t going to work. But I know how we can settle this,” Pinky said.

The two modds were all ears.

“Inside this corridor, there are a couple of bats that are fast asleep. They are hanging veeery high. Whoever of the two manages to reach them is dumber... I mean... taller than the other one!”

“Hmm,” Sillyhead contemplated. “If they’re hanging very high, it means only I can get them.”

“There’s no way you’ll get them.” Dunderhead snapped back. “Let’s check.”

“Hey! You’re not messing around with us like last time in the cell, are you?” Sillyhead suddenly remembered.

“Who? Me?! Why would I be messing around with you? The boys and I just went for a stroll, and we would have come back after that. Right now Mux and Goula are actually where the bats are. Come on, let’s go there and see how tall you are, and then we’ll get back to the “guest room!” Pinky cleverly found his way out of the situation.

So the three of them went along the corridor that would take them to the hugging monster.

Boom-bam, oh-ah, oh deaaar... Everything happened so fast that the two stinky modds never figured out where that huge monster came from or how they found themselves trapped in his embrace. They did see, however, Pinky, Mux, and Goula running up the corridor.

“Hug, hug, hug!” The monster was smiling and holding Sillyhead and Dunderhead tightly in its arms, and they still couldn’t believe their eyes,

“So it exists after all!” Sillyhead cried.

“I told you!”, Dunderhead was sulky. “I can’t believe they outsmarted us again!”

In the meantime, the motts were running towards their freedom. They were more careful this time and they took the right way that would take them out of the cave and from there, straight to Mottland.

Mux made sure he still had the Healing Flower (with a capital letter H). “Soon Magu, daddy’s coming home!” He thought and continued forward bravely.

Chapter 21

BACK IN MOTTLAND

“*T*hey’re coming!” Izzy stormed breathless into the room where Pagu was. “They’re coming, Pagu! They’re coming back!”

Pagu jumped.

“Oh, Mott God! Is this true, Izzy? Where are they? Are they alright? Quick, take Magu, I’m going!”

“But, princess, you’re not dressed properly!” Izzy shouted behind her. “And your crown is here...”

But Pagu was already running outside towards Mux and his friends. She only wanted to get a glimpse of them, to hug HIM, not to let him go ever again, never ever again! When she saw the three valiant motts, she started running even faster and threw herself in Mux’s arms with tears





in her eyes.

“You’re alright, you’re alright...” She kept repeating, taking turns hugging the three friends.

“We’re alright, alright, but we are starving!” Pinky spoke. “Ever since we got away from the hugging monster, we haven’t had a single bite. Look at me, I’m all scrawny! Nothing’s left of my tummy. That’s the first time since I was born that I can actually see the tips of my toes.”

“Knowing you, it’s safe to say that you’ll catch up quickly,” said Izzy, who had just managed to catch up with Pagu and was still holding Magu in her arms.

“My little girl!” Mux noticed them and approached Izzy.

“Oh, you’re flattering me...” Izzy blushed and gave a smile of satisfaction.

“He wasn’t talking to you, dear.” Goula whispered to her and pointed at Mux, who was reaching out waiting for Izzy to hand Magu over to him.

“Oh, yes, of course. I forgot. There you go, Mux!”

Mux hugged the little princess, she looked at him with her gigantic eyes, smiled and said: “Hiccup!”

“The flower!” Mux remembered. “Come on, let’s get inside the palace, prepare the potion, and let her drink it. You’ll see that the hiccups will

stop. Besides, there's so much to tell you!"

Mux kissed Pagu tenderly and embraced her with his free arm. The three started for the palace.

"Hey, hey, where do the three of you think you're going? We're coming too, got it?!" Pinky followed them, and then he turned to Goula and Izzy and added:

"Izzy, you're going to cook us something to eat, aren't you?"

"It's going to be a long evening." Goula looked at Izzy and the two started laughing.

It was a long evening indeed and the whole of Mottland celebrated. The friends told their stories over and over, Mux and Pagu couldn't get their eyes off of each other, and little Magu slept peacefully without hiccupping for the first time in weeks. Bobo and Doddie also couldn't wait to hear the exciting story of their favourite Mux. But they had to wait until tomorrow. Because family was the most important thing now.

Next day had a promising start. Mux woke up next to his Pagu, went over little Magu's bed, who was just waking up as well, and spoke to her softly:

"Good morning, sweetheart! Smile, it is a beautiful day outside!"

THE END



EPILOGUE

“It’s all your fault!” Sillyhead nudged his friend.

“No, it’s not, it’s all your fault!” Dunderhead frowned.

“Your fault!”

“No, your fault!”

“Hug, hug, hug!” the Hugging Monster interrupted and continued squashing the modds in its arms.

“Enough with that “hug-hug” already!” Sillyhead growled.

The hugging monster felt sad, but then smiled and shouted:

“Kiss, kiss, kiss!” And it started kissing the modds.

“Aaaaaa!” Sillyhead and Dunderhead screamed...

Stories with Sillyhead and Dunderhead

“*M*y grandfather crossed the sea on an empty fish can...”

“Well, he probably reeked of fish after that.”

“Maybe he reeked, but I want to see you fit in a fish can. You wouldn’t even fit in a barrel!”

“Well, my grandfather once ate so much beans that when he farted, he fogged the village so bad that no one could see the sun for two days!”

“Wow, it must have been quite a fart!”

“Of course it was. Even my grandma’s flowers died!”

“Well, my grandpa went to Spain once. And, as he was walking around a shed, he collided with a bull. And it was quite a collision because grandpa got so mad at the bull that he gave him a good pinch and started chasing him. And so the bull was running and my grandpa was chasing him. The bull running, grandpa chasing him around the shed, and there were people standing by watching and having fun. And so the famous Bullfights were born...”

“Well, maybe that’s why bulls hate red so much.”

“Well, yes! My grandpa’s claw is red, you know.”

“Well, my grandpa started climbing the mountain this one time. But he got so lost in

his thought that he accidentally climbed Mount Everest!”

“Mount Everest my foot!”

“Well, yes. And that’s how he became the first modd to conquer Mount Everest! My grandpa was a big deal...”

“What was he thinking about so hard?!”

“What do you mean what about?! Well... he was thinking about... how to escape that smell that had been pestering the whole village.”

“What smell?!”

“Well, the fish smell! Apparently your grandpa had just come back from the sea...”



Perhaps you wonder:

Why doesn't Mux ask some animal to take him to the big city?

Yes, indeed, Mux could ask some animal for help, for example a bird. After all, motts and animals are very good friends. However, he decides to have this adventure alone because he knows that danger will lie close everywhere around him on the way, so he doesn't want to take any risks with his closest friends.

Who keeps the book in the fountain? What if someone finds it?

The book in the fountain is part of the mott world, so, just like the motts, it is invisible for the rest of the world. Thus, it is not necessary to guard the book – its wisdom is available only to the motts in need.

Why did the nice Jelly marry the bad Grumpy?

Jelly believes that there is goodness in every creature. When she initially meets Grumpy, she is absolutely sure that he is too bad, so she doesn't want to make friends with him. However, his strong desire to impress her and his concern for her, eventually give her hope that he can change in a good way.

Why doesn't Hush reveal what is hidden in the other mott book?

It is in there that Hush hides something a lot more precious than mott wisdom. He keeps all love poems that he has written for Shush throughout their rather long life together. Since he is very shy, he doesn't want anyone else to know about them.

♥ **What happened to the bear once he got his voice back?**

First, he started roaring, of course. He roared as much as he could. All animals hid away, even the birds fell into silence. They didn't know that he didn't mean to scare them, but simply to celebrate his loud voice. After he has a good roar, the bear gave a broad smile and started waving and greeting everyone in the forest cheerfully. There was harmony again, so he gathered his relatives and they all went ahead running their bear errands together.



Do you remember:



Why don't they prescribe the princess any medicines?

There is no such thing as a medicine in the mott world. Every indisposition there is treated by natural cures and clean air.



How do the three friends put the snake to sleep?

The Healing Flower's main healing property is that it stops the hiccups. But do you remember that the Ancient Mott Book also says that if you inhale its scent (instead of making tea), it might take you to the land of dreams? Our friends do well to remember that, so they manage to put the snake to sleep right on time.



Where does the most ancient mott live?

What's his name?

The most ancient mott lives in a little house cuddled up in the branches of a lovely walnut tree in the most colourful park in the big city. His name is kept secret, you can't find it in a leaflet. Only the frog knows it although she rarely shows it. She, who hides in the fountain, always looks at the stars, and dreams about the mountain.



What is the most famous modd drink made of and what's its name?

Moddovilear: it's made of mouldy brine and snail slime.



Where does the Hugging Monster live?

It lives in one of the tunnels in the modd cave. Unlike the modd part of the cave, the Hugging Monster's part is very bright, clean and fragrant.





Why do Goula and Pinky follow Mux even though he hides his plan from them?

Because they are his best friends and they would never leave him, no matter how dangerous his adventure is, not for all the honey in the world!



Which is the bird who tells princess Pagu that Mux, Goula and Pinky have fallen into the modds' claws?

It is the jay, whose little ones are saved from the rattlesnake by the three friends.



Why do the friends help the husky bear although they are afraid of him?

Motts are extremely good and no matter how big their fear is, nothing is more important for them than to make another living creature happy.



What's Pagu's best friend's name, she stays with Pagu and helps her while Mux is away.

Her name is Princess Izzy and she comes from the nearby mott kingdom.



Why is Alex, the little girl, the only one in the underground to notice Mux?

It's because all other passengers are so absorbed in their phones and tablets that Mux, who has forgotten to become invisible, still remains unseen by them.





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"A week had passed and the little princess still had the hiccups. From dusk till dawn, from meal to meal, during playtime, and even a little when she was asleep..."

Will Mux find a cure for his little daughter?

He is up for an exciting adventure, a lot of dangers and twists, annoying modds, a bear and ... a hugging monster.

He, however, is determined to face the challenges and never give up because "Everything in our life happens for a reason even if you're just a confused mott, no matter what the season. If fate is by your side, it helps you with your pride; it takes you to the righteous road, all the way to your dream, especially if you have a good team!"

So are you ready to follow him?