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Triss

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PEACE ISLAND

THE GREAT SEA

RAURA'S CAVE

SALAMANDASTRON

STOP DOG

MIGOOCH TRIBE





DUNES

SEARATY'S HUT

DUNES

FLATLANDS

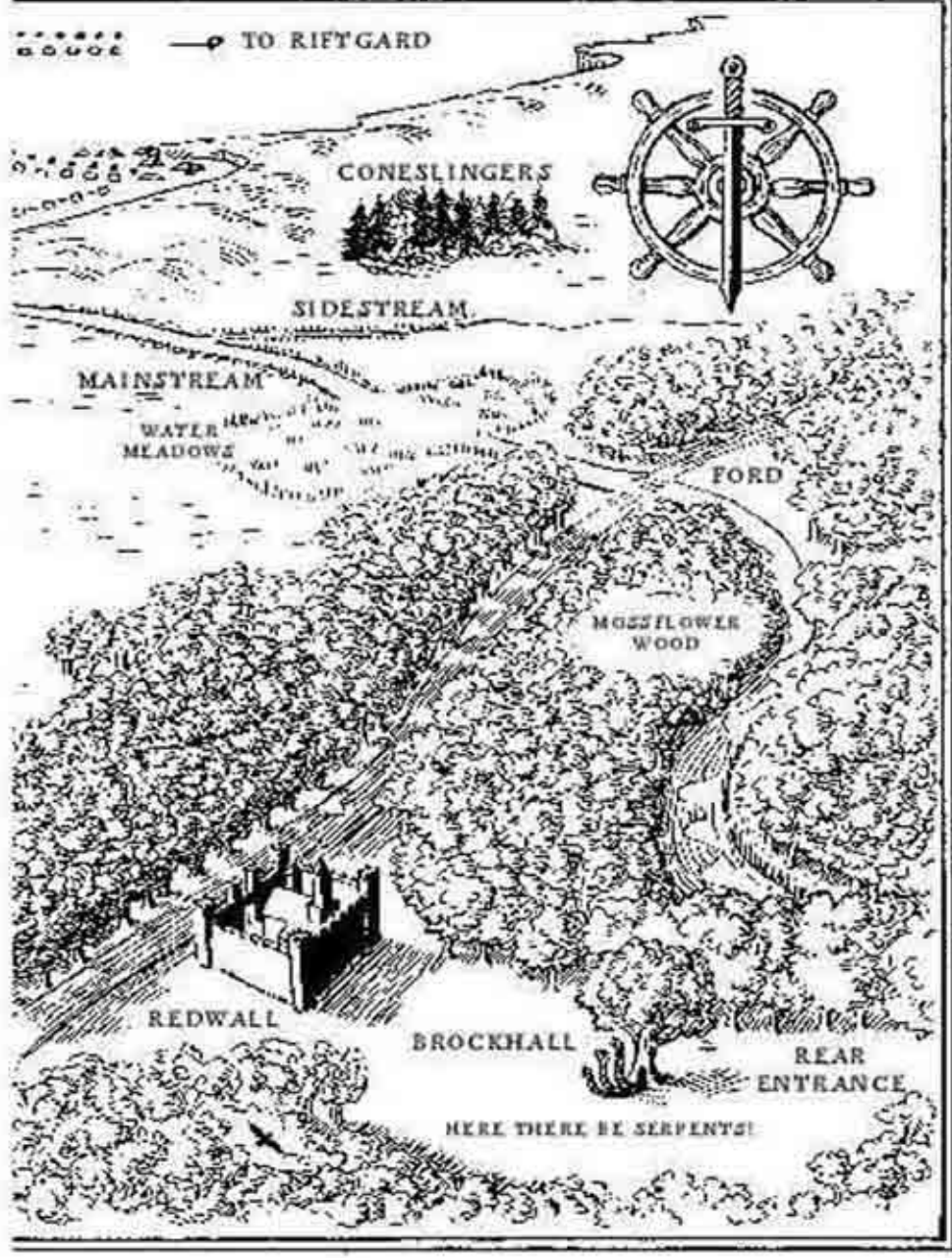
Routes Taken by Vessels on Great Sea

-  ○○ *Stopdog's Route*
-  ●● *Triss's Route*
-  □□ *Seascab's Route*
-  □-□ *Seascab with Vessel in Tow*

NORTH PATH

.....
.....

→ TO RIFTGARD



CONESLINGERS

SIDESTREAM

MAINSTREAM

WATER
MEADOWS

FORD

MOSSFLOWER
WOOD

REDWALL

BROCKHALL

REAR
ENTRANCE

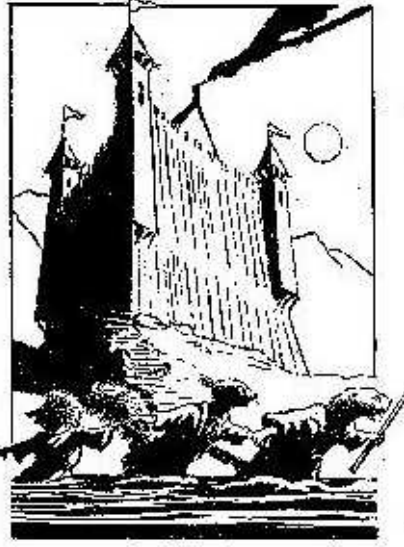
HERE THERE BE SERPENTS!

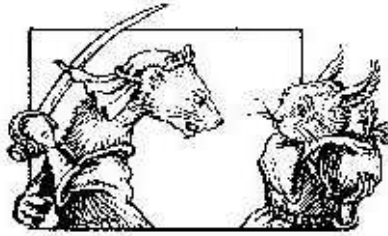
Were days that long, was grass so green,
In seasons of youthful desire,
Roaming o'er seas of aquamarine,
Where westering suns drown in fire?
'Cross mountain, forest and river,
I'd wander, carefree and bold,
Never heeding the days to come,
When I'd wake up, slow and old.
Oh, how the silent summer noon,
Warms dusty memories,
In an orchard, midst my dreams,
'Neath verdant, shade-ful trees.
Come visit me, you little ones,
Hear stories, songs and rhymes,
A roving warrior's saga,
Of far-gone, golden times.

—Kroova's Song

BOOK ONE

A Season of Runaways





Princess Kurda was considered by all to be a highly skilled swordbeast, the best blade at Riftgard since her grandsire, great King Sarengo. She was a Pure Ferret, as were all of the royal blood, creamy white from tailtip to nose, with coral pink eyes. Kurda worked hard at being the best. Every morning from breakfast to lunch she could be found practising in her weapon chamber. This particular morning was no exception.

Rows of turnips hung by strings from the rafters. Two squirrel slaves, one a young maid, the other an old grizzled male, stood by, awaiting her commands. The Princess donned a single long-sleeved glove of ecru linen. Pulling it tight on her paw, she nodded at the long rack of swords, her voice curt and imperious. “De heavy sabre, yarr!”

Triss the squirrelmaid hastily wrapped an oiled rag about her paws and lifted the heavy sabre from the rack by its blade, carefully avoiding getting oil on the leather-bound hilt. Kurda flexed her limbs gracefully. Without even a glance at Triss, she grabbed the sword, drawing the blade so swift and hard from the squirrelmaid’s grasp that it sliced through the oiled rag and nicked her paw. Triss leaped smartly out of the way, her teeth clenched in pain as the ferret Princess went slashing at the turnips. With deadly accuracy the heavy sabre made the air thrum, chopping through the solid vegetable. Halves of turnip flew everywhere, striking both slaves, bouncing off the floor and caroming from the walls until there was nothing left but straggled roots dangling from the strings. Kurda wiped a scrap of turnip from her cheek with the linen glove, panting slightly. Holding the sabre point forward to Triss, the ferret grated, “Clean diss good, I try rapier now, yarr, de rapier.”

Triss hurried to select the rapier Kurda had indicated.

The old male squirrel, Drufo, scrambled to clear the floor of turnip pieces, careful to wipe any wet spots, lest the Princess should slip. It would go badly for both slaves if she did, as they knew from bitter experience.

Fixing her paw firmly in the basket hilt of the rapier, Kurda whipped the keen flexible blade back and forth, enjoying the sound it made. Triss signalled Drufo with her eyes; he skirted the wall furtively until he arrived behind his young friend. Diligently cleaning the sabre blade upon her oiled rag, Triss watched Kurda work with the rapier. Poising herself like a dancer, with one paw outstretched, she attacked the root stems on the string ends.

Snick! Whip! Zip!

The blade struck with swift snakelike movements, snicking the roots off at the string, though the last two strikes missed the roots, severing the strings. Kurda snorted with anger. Dropping the sword carelessly, she rapped out more commands.

“Get me der straight sword, middle size! You get ready to throw ven I say. Move yourselves!”

Drufo ran and picked up two of the larger chunks of cut turnip. Triss grabbed the rapier and selected a long, medium-weight straight sword, with a cross-hilt and fine-honed double blade.

The ferret Princess snatched it impatiently from her, whirling the blade and shouting at Drufo
“Trow! Trow!”

Throwing both pieces of turnip upward, Drufo covered his head with both paws, jumping out of the way. Kurda slashed up, then sideways, in two speedy movements. She cut one piece, but the other thudded to the ground untouched.

Kurda’s pink eyes blazed with anger at her error. Drufo was bending to pick up the pieces when she whipped the flat of the blade viciously across his back.

“Stupid oaf! Ven I say trow, you trow dem proper. Trow high, vot do you tink I am? You t’ick mudbrain bunglepaws!”

Drufo stayed bent over, still protecting his head with both paws as the ferret vented her spleen on him with the flat of the swordblade. Knowing her old friend was in danger of losing his life, Triss yelled as she began throwing turnip chunks in the air with all the haste she could muster.

“Princess, I can throw better than that old fool, look. Hup! Hup! I can send them higher, too. Ready to throw!”

The ploy diverted Kurda’s attention. She turned and chopped both chunks as they came down. The squirrelmaid, who was ready with two more, made sure she tossed them high and slow. The sword cut through the chunks easily. Kurda was out of breath, but her temper had improved. She leaned on the sword, nodding and panting. “You t’row good, dat’s de way to t’row turnips, yarr!”

The door opened and another Pure Ferret ambled in. He was bigger than his sister and had a silly grin all over his face.

Kurda addressed her brother contemptuously, “Vot do you vant, Bladd bootnose?”

Bladd was used to his sister’s insulting manner. His droopy oversized gut wobbled as he chuckled. “Huh huh huh huh, you make a better cook than a swordbeast, yar. You still choppin’ turnips for der stew, liddle sister. Huh huh!”

She raised the sword, advancing on him. “One day I chop you for der stew, lard barrel. Yarr, I chop you good. Vy you come here, eh?”

Bladd shuffled to the door and held it half open, creating a shield between them. He poked his tongue childishly at Kurda. “King vant to see you, yarr, he mad about der herrinks. He say come now quick, or he put a big lock on his door.”

Kurda pointed at him with the sword, her bad mood renewed. “Sneaknose, you been tellink tales to King about me!”

Bladd took off downstairs, laughing idiotically, with his sister hard on his heels.

Triss helped Drufo up as the door slammed behind the two Pure Ferrets. She steadied the squirrel.

“Are you all right, Drufo? She didn’t cut you, did she?”

He smiled, rubbing his back ruefully. “Thanks t’you, she didn’t, missie, thanks t’you. Huh swordbeast? That white streak o’ slime ain’t half the swordbeast yore dad was. White streak o’ slime!”

Triss chuckled silently at the way her old friend often repeated phrases. She set about gathering up the cut turnips. “Lend a paw with these, you old grumbler, let’s get them out to the others. Every body helps.”

The squirrelmaid poked her head over the sill of the high chamber window and imitated the harsh shriek of a seagull. Far below a gang of creatures were working, laying a path of pine logs to make a walkway between the sloping grass hill and the rocky shore of the river. It would run from the gates of the Riftgard fortress, along its edge, to the jetty. Moored at the pier’s end, facing downriver to the sea

was a ship. It was small, with one square purple sail, a very pretty little craft, skilfully built and wonderfully ornamented.

The workers, an assortment of squirrels, mice, hedgehogs and otters, looked upward at the window. A slim, pretty sea ottermaid named Sleeve murmured, "Stan' aside, mates, 'ere comes supper, thank to miz Triss."

As they dropped the turnips down, Triss questioned Drufo about her father, whom she had never known.

"Do you remember my father? What was he like, Drufo?"

The old squirrel shook his head fondly. "Like no other, young 'un, like no other! There was never a swordbeast born could cross blades with Rocc Arrem, an' I knows, 'cos I fought alongside him. We was like brothers."

Triss heaved more turnips over the sill to her friends below. "But despite all that, he was slain."

Drufo paused for a moment, his face grim. "Brought him down with arrows, more'n a score o' those dirty Riftgard rats. I remembers it t'this day, but Rocc, yore pa, went down fightin', snapped his blade an' hurled it in their faces. Rocc Arrem wasn't never one to surrender, never!"

Triss sighed as she swept the last vegetables up from the floor. "Wish I'd have been old enough to fight, they'd have never got him. We'd have still been free, living in the mountains upriver, all of us."

Drufo watched those below gathering the last of the turnips. He looked to the high mountains on either side of the river, thick pinewoods sweeping down their sides to the rocky banks, still patched with last winter's heavy snows.

The old squirrel voiced his thoughts. "Ah, 'tis a cold hard place to live, this northland, I tell ye, an' a harder place to be enslaved in than any I know."

Keeping her voice low, the squirrelmaid drew close to Drufo. "Once we've got the boat built, it'll be downriver and the open seas for us. We'll find a better life in those lands beyond the great sea."

Drufo grabbed her paw anxiously. "Triss, don't be foolish, nobeast ever escaped from Riftgard and lived to tell of it. You've got to ferget those mad ideas!"

Triss pulled her paw from his grasp. "Four more days, that's all it'll take, Drufo. I'm not missing a chance of freedom by being fainthearted. Shogg the otter and Welfo the hedgehog have been helping me. Our boat should be ready soon. You can escape with us, there's room for one more!"

Drufo looked at Triss anxiously, keeping his voice low. "You three don't know the danger yore in. It's a messy. Y'just don't know. Stealin' wood from the King's new walkway, pilin' up vittles, an' tackin' t'gether rags for a sail, 'tis too risky. I want no part of it, no part, d'ye hear me? I ain't goin' t'be responsible for the death o' young creatures!"

Triss cocked an ear to a sound outside on the stairway. She muttered swiftly under her breath, "Sto it, somebeast's coming!"

The door was wrenched suddenly open. Captain Riftun and four of his rats marched into the chamber. Triss and Drufo fell upon all fours, making a pretence of cleaning the floor. Riftun was a mean-natured rat; cruelty was stamped on his narrow face. He leaned on his spear and placed his footpaw hard on the back of Triss's neck.

"So tell me, wot are slaves doin' alone an' unattended in a roomful o' weapons, eh?"

Drufo kept his tone humble as he explained. "Princess Kurda gave us permission, Cap'n. We been attendin' her at sword practice. Me'n'Triss is just cleanin' up. We're near done, Cap'n."

The rat Captain glanced round the chamber. "Looks clean enough t'me, eh, lads?"

The four rat guards nodded their agreement eagerly. "Aye, Cap'n!"

Riftun lashed out with his spearhaft, knocking Drufo flat. "Don't ever let me catch yer alone in he

again. Get down t' the walkway an' report for work. On the double!"

~~Drufo scrambled up and made for the door. Triss was about to rise and go with him, when Riftun~~ brought his spearpoint down to rest at the base of her skull.

"Not you. I've had you watched, missy. Yore goin' down in the cages t' keep yore two liddle pals, the otter an' the spikepig, company. Bet you thought I didn't know you was makin' an escape boat. Take 'er, guards!"

Two rat guards grabbed Triss's paws whilst the other two menaced her with their spears. Drufo tried to intercede.

"But, Cap'n, it couldn't have been 'er, she's been with me all the time fer days now. Triss ain't done nothin', I swear it!"

Riftun gave him a kick that sent him staggering awkwardly down the stairs. He winked at the four guards. "Show me a slave an' I'll show yer a liar. Take 'er to the cages, she'll sing like a lark when I'm done with 'er!"

Triss was hauled off downstairs, tight-lipped but struggling. She glimpsed Drufo's pitiful, frightened face as they dragged her off to the punishment cages.



Beyond the trackless seas, far from the fjords and mountains of Riftgard, the late-spring afternoon was mellow as butter and blue as a periwinkle. Great Abbot Apodemus and his old companion Malbun Grimp sat dozing peacefully on the sunwarmed ramparts of Redwall Abbey's northeast wall. Somewhere over the treetops of Mossflower a blackbird warbled its rich, fruity aria to the season. There was hardly a breeze to be felt. Down below, the Abbey grounds basked still and silent in serene noontide.

Malbun was a wood mouse who held the position of Healer and Recorder of Redwall. She was drifting off into a slumber, both eyelids drooping as her chin dropped toward her chest. An admiring butterfly ventured to perch on Malbun's nose. She banished it with a twitch of her snout and opened one eye.

"Any sign of them coming back yet, Ap?"

Apodemus had his eyes closed, but he was not yet asleep. "I dunno. Why don't you go and look, Mal?"

Malbun opened her other eye, turning her gaze upon the yellow-necked mouse who was Father Abbot of all Redwall. "'Cos I'm only a lowly beast around here. You're the Abbot, they're your responsibility."

Apodemus kept his eyes closed, relishing the warmth of the sun upon his ears. "'Tis a powerful position, being Abbot of Redwall Abbey."

Malbun considered this statement before replying. "Aye, so it is."

A slow smile broke the repose of Apodemus's features. "Well, I'm glad you realise that, Mal. I order you to go and look to see if the whortleberry gathering party are returning!"

With a sigh, the Healer Recorder pushed herself upright, smiling as she shuffled to the battlement. "That's a flagrant abuse of power, Father Abbot. I'll do your bidding, but I'd like it noted, I'm doing so under protest."

The Abbot opened his eyes and winked at his companion. "Protest noted. Now go and look, will you?"

Turning her back, Malbun leaned against the battlement. "Don't have to look, I can hear 'em. . . Listen!"

Carrying over the still air, voices could be heard raised in song, young and old alike.

"All in the days of spring,
When flowers do bloom about,
We merrily go and sing ho ho,

Whortleberries come out.

Whortleberry, blaeberry, bilberry, too,
They taste so good to me, my friend,
As they must do to you,
And yet I say to you now,
Oh what is in a name,
For whortle bil or blae sir,
The berry's all the same.

We range the forest far, for,
There's nobeast will deny,
Nought is half so good, ho ho,
As a whortleberry pie.

Bil whortle blae, blae whortle bil,
All around the woodlands,
Field or valley or hill,
Get ready good old cook, marm,
Stoke up your oven's fire,
A whortleberry pie this eve,
Is my dear heart's desire!"

Apodemus rose and stretched lazily. "We'd best go down and open the gate if we want any pie for supper. C'mon, I'll race you!"

Malbun Grimp's huge middle shook with laughter. "Are you talking to me or that snail just by your footpaw? Race me indeed, we'll soon need a hoist to get us up and down the wallstairs!"

The Abbot gazed ruefully at his considerable stomach. "Oh, for the days when we were Dibbuns."

The two old friends linked paws and shuffled off down the broad, red sandstone wallstep chunnering away to one another.

"I'll wager that snail would've beaten you easily."

"Aye, you're right, Mal, we're built for comfort, not speed."

"Right, and we've got the dignity of our positions to consider. Wouldn't look right, a Father Abbot and a Healer Recorder, charging about like two frantic frogs."

Wandering between vegetable patches and around through the orchard, they came out onto the front lawns. Late daffodils, blue milkwort, buttercup and pink speedwell bordered the soft green grass.

Behind them, as they made their way down the gravelled path to the main gate, Redwall Abbey reared high in dusty rose-hued splendour. Arches, buttresses, bell tower, carved gables and long stained-glass windows sat square in the centre of Abbey grounds and stout outer walls. Apodemus stopped a moment, turning to cast a fond eye over the ancient structure, then gripped his friend's paw a little firmer and sighed. "I love our Abbey, Mal. Sometimes I get up early just to look at it in dawn's light. There's no place like it, is there?"

Malbun patted his paw fondly. "No place at all, Ap. We're lucky to be living here, very lucky!"

Between them the two mice lifted the wooden gatelock bar amid ribald calls outside from the Redwallers.

"Open up or we'll scoff all these berries!"

"Quick, afore we starve t'death!"

"Hurr you'm never starven t'death with ee gurt stummick loike that on ee, zurr!"

"Huh, take a look at y'self, ole fatty chops!"

The huge oaken doors swung open. Apodemus and Malbun jumped smartly aside as the Abbey creatures poured in: squirrels, mice, moles, hedgehogs, some shrews, three otters, even a large old female hare. All of them carried some form of basket, pail or trug, laden with ripe whortleberries. Abbeybabes, or Dibbuns as they were called, had their paws and faces liberally stained with the purplish blue juice. The Abbot shook his head in mock severity at a molechild who was stained from top to tail.

"Dearie me, master Ruggum. You look as if you've had a busy day."

Ruggum explained in curious molespeech. "Oi wurr doin' gurtly well, zurr. 'Til ee rascal Bikkle pushed oi into ee barsket o' berries, but oi etted moi way out'n 'em!"

Bikkle, a tiny squirrel with a huge bushy tail, tried hard to look the picture of innocence as she defended herself. "Farver h'Abbot, Ruggum pulled me tail, so I chased 'im an'e falled into the berries hisself by askident!"

Apodemus could not hide a smile as he replied. "By askident? Goodness me, that Ruggum's always having askidents. What d'you say, Memm Flackery?"

The fat old female hare, who was nurse to all the Dibbuns, pulled off her poke bonnet and fanned her whiskers with it. "Fiends, marauders, all of 'em, wot! Into the tub with the bloomin' lot of you! That's what I jolly well say!"

Yells of dismay arose from the Dibbuns.

"Waaah! Not more tubs, Memm. Us on'y got baffed last night!"

"Oi'll be scrubbed to ee shadow if'n you'm put oi in ee tub again, marm. B'aint that roight Turfee?"

Turfee the mousebabe scowled darkly. "They scrubs likkle ones t'death in this h'Abbey."

Gurdle Sprink, the hedgehog Cellarkeeper, eyed Turfee sternly. "You mind yore manners, young'un. A bath'll do ye the world o' good, then off t'bed with the lot of ye!"

A horrified silence fell over the Dibbun contingent, then Ruggum raised a small clenched paw and shouted. "Dab!"

Immediately the little creatures scattered, all yelling, "Dab! Dab! Dab!"

Memm Flackery grabbed the two nearest her to stop them escaping. "I say, somebeast close the flippin' gates, sharpish!"

Skipper of otters was lithe and brawny. He swiftly closed the gates and dropped the gatelock shut. Catching a hogbabe by her apron strings, he shook his rudderlike tail in puzzlement. "Dab? Wot's Dab s'posed t'mean, mate?"

Crikulus, the ancient shrew Gatekeeper, explained. “It’s those liddle scamps’ latest secret society, ~~Dibbuns Against Bedtime~~, that’s wot Dab means. They don’t like bein’ sent off t’the dormitorie early. Huh, I’ll never join ’em, I loves my bed. I’d stay there all season if’n I could.”

After a deal of chasing, the Dibbuns were rounded up and herded inside the Abbey. Memm and Friar Gooch, the Abbey squirrel cook, followed them in.

“Hmm, think I’ll preserve some o’ those berries in honey.”

Memm tried not to look crestfallen. “Not all of ’em, Friar, you are goin’ t’cook some tonight?”

Friar Gooch patted her paw. “Don’t fret yoreself, marm, I’ve planned some whortleberry spong puddens with cream’n’crumble toppin’.”

The fat Harenurse’s eyes lit up greedily. “Oh my aunt’s whiskers, you’re a bloomin’ toff, Gooch, a absoballylutely first-rate grubslinger, wot wot!”

Beyond the locked Abbey gates, Ruggum the molebabe and Bikkle the little squirrel sat on the path giggling. They had evaded capture by nipping out a second before Skipper shut the doors.

“Hurr hurr hurr, ee Skipper a’most chopped moi tail offen in yon doors. Oi bee’s most speedy furr mole-choild, hurr hurr!”

Bikkle whirled her bushy tail in delight. “Us won’t get baffed an’ sende to bed early no no more!”

Ruggum sucked juice from a berry he found on the path. “Burr, Bikk, we’m shore t’get catchere if’n uz be a stoppen owt yurr. Ee Memm bee’s orful farst furr a gurt fatty beast.”

Bikkle did not hesitate. She grabbed her friend’s paw resolutely. “Cummon, us run ’way an’ live inna woods, Ruggs!”

Ruggum brightened up at the thought of this capital scheme. “You’m roight, Bikk. They’m b’air goin’ to keep baffin uz an’ senden uz oop t’bed urrly til we’m old an’ dead and buried!”

Paw in paw, the two Dibbuns trundled off north up the path, cutting off east into Mossflow woodlands and making plans for the marvellous life that lay ahead of them.

“We live up inna tree an’ eat h’apples, an’, an’ . . . anyfink!”

“Boi ’okey uz will, an’ never get ee baff, or even ee likkle wash!”

“Us jus’ play an’ play, all day an’ all night long. Heehee!”

“Burr, they’m big uns be vurry sad us’n’s gonned.”

“Tchah! Now they ’ave to baff each other an’ all go to beds early. That teach ’em a lessin, heeheehee!”

Spring eventide threaded crimson gold and lavender rays through the leafy woodland canopy. Day’s last long shadows darkened Redwall’s lawns, shading the grass to a rich emerald carpet. Single notes and trills of nightingales echoed from the Abbey orchard, serenading the coming darkness.

Gooch and his trusty assistant cook, a young molemaid named Furrel, checked the rows earthenware basins as they loaded up trolleys in the kitchens. Both were satisfied that the whortleberry puddings were perfect in every respect. Foremole, Redwall’s traditional mole leader, stood by his trolley, button nose aquiver at the delicious aroma from the basins. Furrel chuckled at the look of bliss upon his face.

“Yurr, h’uncle, oi’ll ’elp ee load yon trolley, afore yore snout be a fallen off in deloight.”

Foremole patted his niece’s paw fondly. “You’im a gudd an’ koindly mole, Furrel, thankee gurdle moi deary.”

Redwall had two dining rooms, the Great Hall, which was used for large feasts or special occasions, and Cavern Hole, a smaller, more comfortable chamber. Abbot Apodemus took his seat in Cavern Hole, alongside Gurdle Sprink.

Rubbing his paws in anticipation, the Cellarhog remarked, “I wager in less’n a score o’ days ’twould be light and warm enough to take our evenin’ meals out in the orchard.”

Apodemus watched Redwallers seating themselves. “Aye, summer will soon be upon us, Gurdle. Oh, look out, here comes trouble, but don’t they look nice and clean!”

Straight from the bathtubs, a horde of Dibbuns in clean smocks came dashing in to claim their favourite places at table. Memm, Sister Vernal, and Malbun shepherded them in, issuing cautions as they tried to keep order.

“Don’t run! What’ve you been told about running, eh? Walk nice and slowly now. That includes you, Turfee!”

“I say, go around the table, you little rip, don’t you dare try to climb over the Father Abbot!”

“Come here, Toobles; there’s still soap in your ears. Gotcha!”

The tiny hedgehog squealed outrageously as Malbun cleaned out the soap with her apron corner. “Waaah! I bein’ slayed, ’elp me!”

Old Crikulus the Gatekeeper covered both ears and closed his eyes tightly, until peace was restored and the Dibbuns seated. Abbot Apodemus rose from his chair to recite a grace.

“Be thankful for the season,
And happy for the day,
Be grateful for the bounty,
Which comes to us this way.
Good food from the earth is grown,
And brought unto our table,
By honest toil and labour,
Let’s eat, whilst we are able!”

The silence was broken by Turfee the mousebabe, banging his spoon upon the table and roaring. “Where are me pudden?”

Gurdle Sprink glared severely at the rowdy Dibbun for a moment. Then he called out, “Aye, where’s that child’s pudden? Bring it right away!”

Amid hoots of laughter the puddings were served.

Halfway through the meal, Skipper of otters was pouring out dandelion cordial for some of the little ones, when he glanced around and scratched his rudder.

“Where’s liddle Ruggum an’ Bikkle, anybeast seen ’em?”

Sister Vernal looked at Memm. "I can't recall bathing them, can you, Memm?"

~~"Not really. I say, Malbun old thing, did you scrub those two rascals, wot?"~~

Malbun tapped a paw against her chin thoughtfully. "No, marm, but I recall we had two clean smocks left over when we dressed the Dibbuns. I just thought they were extras."

The Abbot addressed the other Dibbuns, who were spooning in whortleberry pudding and swigging cordial as if they had survived a seven-season famine.

"Did any of you see Ruggum or Bikkle this evening?"

Foremole murmured into the Abbot's ear, "No use arskin' they'm h'infants, they'm busy h'eatin' puddens."

Memm Flackery chuckled drily. "Indeed they are, old scout. You'd get more sense out o' the puddens than those ravenous scoundrels. Just look at 'em eat!"

Gooch and Furrel went and took a quick look around the kitchens. The two missing Dibbuns were nowhere to be seen.

Old Crikulus shrugged his narrow shoulders. "They've prob'ly pinched a couple of puddens for themselves and gone off to eat 'em without gettin' bathed first."

Apodemus was inclined to agree with him. "That's right, they'll turn up sooner or later. I wager they're snoozing in some quiet corner. If anybeast should find them, I'd be grateful if you'd bring them both up to my room. I intend to have a severe word or two with the master Ruggum and mi Bikkle!"

Out in Mossflower Woods darkness had descended. Moonshadows and shifting breezes created an eerie pattern through the leafy tree canopy. Somewhere an owl hooted and a nightjar's churring staccato rent the woodlands. Ruggum and Bikkle huddled together in the shelter of a fallen beech tree. Both were cold, hungry and frightened little creatures.

"Yurr Bikk, oi'm a thinken et bee's toime t'go 'ome."

Bikkle was of the same mind as her molefriend. "Me wanna go 'ome too, but Memm be shoutin' us an' send us to beds wiv no puddens. Me still wanna go 'ome, though."

"Yurr, then us'ns go roight now, and you be knowen ee way, Bikk?"

"I not know. You said you knowed."

"Hoo urr, you'm gurt fibber, oi never said oi knowed ee way."

They sat looking at one another, then chorused aloud, "Waaaaaah, we's lost!"

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