

Stolen Secrets

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Rachael Lindsay

Stolen Secrets



Nightingale Books

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Rachael Lindsay

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Dedication

Foor mi speshy dearigs ~ mi beebees en mi angelicors ~

Thanken, thanken foor ur lovelor.

Sonnerig, songlis, fonnerig en floweries wit u todagen

en forever.

Kissig, kissig.

Acknowledgement

Once more, my special thanks and love to:

Sophie 'Socks' Rolland

for her fantastic artwork ~
imagination and talent, combined.

sockse@gmail.com



A note from the author ~

When I was young, I used to play in a sycamore tree at the bottom of our garden. I knew each sturdy branch and gnarled whirl of its bark; the tree's own fingerprints.

It was always best in summer. I climbed a rope ladder into my imagination and disappeared amongst the tree's leafy robes. I clasped it so hard, its imprint stayed upon my cheek and green stained my white socks.

In that tree, I rode the ocean's storms.

In that tree, I could fly, swoop and soar.

In that tree, I fought pirates and tamed dragons.

It was my special place, that tree.

My secret world...

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“HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS.”

Troll-Talk ~ A Glossary

A

angelicor – angel

animor(es) – animal(s)

askli – ask/to ask

B

backen – back

badli – bad

beebee – baby

beetloosh – beetle

biggy – big

borg – bye

brekenfasht – breakfast

bringor – bring/to bring

brokisht – broken

bookor – book

butteri-fleegen – butterflies

buzzor(s) – bee(s)

C

carefloosh – careful

chattoori – to chat/to talk/chatting

clinkoori – to clink glasses (“cheers!”)

cloudoosh – cloud(s)

comli – come/coming/to come

creepori – creep/to creep/creepy

D

dearig(s) – dear one(s)

dedden – deadly/dangerous

dee – the

dingle-donglor – bell

dis – this

doctoori – doctor

drinkoosh – drink

E

eatig – eat/to eat

eggsie(s) – egg(s)

en – and

es – is/are/it’s

excitig – exciting

F

fastli – quickly/fast
fatli – fat
feelen – feel/to feel
fetchen – fetch/to fetch
findor – find/to find
fishen – fish
flaggermuss(es) – bat(s)
floweri(es) – flower(s)
fonnerig – fun
forerver – forever
foresh – forest
foor – for
frendor(s) – friend(s)

G

gib – give/to give
goingor – going/to go
gooshty – good

H

hab – have/to have
halloo – hello
happenig – happened/happening
happli – happy
heer – here
helpen – help/to help

Herbie Poshtig – collecting pouch (usually for herbs)
homerig – home/house
honig – honey
hurtig – hurt/to hurt

I

im – I/I'm

J

K

kissig(s) – kiss(es)
krankoosh – ill/poorly

L

laterig – late
leftig – left/to leave
leggor(s) – leg(s)
liker – like
littelor – little
lovelor – love/to love

M

marvellurg – marvellous
mattoori – (the) matter
meer – me
mekken – make/to make
menor – people/men
mi – my
mistig – misty
Mistig Vorter – Misty Water (Thom's boat)
monkee-monkee – monkey business
moonish – moon
morgy – morning
morish – more
morsi(es) – mouse (mice)
mushroomer – mushrooms
musten – must

N

nachtor – night
nay – no
needen – needing/need/to need
nestli(es) – nest(s)
nettli(es) – nettle(s)
nics – not
notoori(s) – note(s)

O

oon – one

oop – up

oor – our

oos – us

outen – outside/out of

P

pictoori(s) – picture(s)

pleasor – please

problemori(s) – problem(s)

pussor – cat

pyor – pie

Q

R

runnig – run/to run

S

sadli – sad

saftoosh – safe/safely

scent-pretti(es) – perfume(s)

secresht – secret

shineror – shine/to shine
shleepish – sleepy
shoo-shoo – go away
shtay – stay
shtop – stop
sistori – sister
sitli – sit/to sit
songli – song
sonnerig – sunshine
soonig – soon
soundor – sound/noise
speshy – special
strangeror – strange
strikor – strike/to strike
strongish – strong

T

tay – tea
thanken – thank you
thinken – think/thinking/to think
thingor(s) – thing(s)
thri – three
todagen – today
tweetors – birds
tvo – two/too/to

V

u – you
udder – other
ur – your
urnli – only

V

varken – (to) wake
ve – we
veg – way
verisht – very
vi – why
vildi – wild
vorter – water

W

wass – what's/what
wisperoo – wispy
wit – with

X

Y

yo – yes

Z

Chapter One

“My home is my nest. My nest is my home.”

The night owls have swooped soundlessly to their beds, feathers fluffed and fresh with forest air. The bats have quick-flitted to their roosts, to dangle and swing. The dark, dark creatures have scuttled into their hidey-holes.

Shhh...

All is secret-silent in the forest.

The hedgehogs are tucked up, embraced tightly in leafy curls. The foxes have long since reached the snug safety of their dens.

Shhh...

All is still.

Sleep hangs heavy in the air, awaiting the dawn.

This is the magical moment when night meets day; a pause, as night ceases and the sky softens.

A pale finger of light points to a great ramshackle gathering of twigs and sticks, feathers and moss; a magnificent magpie jumble of collected bird-bedding scraps, high up in a tree. A rope bridge links this nest, precariously, to the nearest sturdy branch of a neighbouring pine. A worn, rickety-pickety ladder leads down to the forest floor.

Finnr, the tree-troll, stirs.

A snuffle. A rub of the nose.

The gentle light arrives at the entrance to his home. A fresh day! Dewy brightness to welcome into the forest!

With a clearing *harrumph* of his throat, a yawn and a stretch, Finnrr fastens the buttons on his dungarees and collects his green, floppy hat from a twig hook. He climbs out through the nest-hole and breathes in the pine-scented air, with eyes closed, better to savour the moment. Then, with hat now covering balding head, white whiskers protruding from underneath, the tree-troll tap-taps his weather-stick and addresses the birds nesting around him.

“Gooshty morgy, mi littelor tweetors! Dee morgy songli, pleasor!”

Hearing familiar troll-talk, tiny waking chirrup ensue, bird-nudgings and shufflings, blinks and chatters.

A few more taps; a dramatic pause, as Finnrr raises his hands to conduct:

“Oon! Tvo! Thri!”

In wonderful unison, the dawn chorus begins.



This was how every day began for Finnrr.

He had lived in his special tree house for countless years, adding to its nest structure, season on season. His many bird companions lodged with him, and came and went with the passing of time. The old troll had known generation after generation of fat wood pigeons, pied flycatchers and tree

pipits. He had shared his nest-home with turtle doves and cuckoos, wood larks and waxwings. He had families of needletails close by in the hollow trunks and he knew all the woodpeckers' mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and cousins. He even had tawny owls waking at night and silently taking flight from their tree holes, returning later with their supper.

Every morning, Finn'r would rise before the forest itself had woken. Every morning, he would tap-tap his weather-stick. Every morning, he would conduct the dawn chorus.

The birdsong floated this morning, like every other, through the wakening woodland, encouraging others to join in; the tweets, chirrups, chirps, peeps and twitters swelling into a musical refrain which no living creature could ignore. At the sound, other forest trolls awoke, stretching and yawning, smiling and blinking, all happy to live in their secret homes, tucked away from the Big People. Hildi cut bread and spooned out bilberries for breakfast. Thom collected his bucket of fjord water and let Grimo out to stretch his paws. Dotta warmed goat's milk over her fire, humming and swaying, as Grimhildr stacked the wood. Hairy Bogley and Ulf heard the birds but knew it was their signal to sleep on, in their smoky home-cave above the fjord, tired from their night-time gatherings.

With bare, hairy feet, Finn'r stepped onto his rope bridge and pointed his weather-stick up at the sky. He nodded in satisfaction, his troll-tail swishing slightly.

“Sonnerig wit wisperoo cloudoosh,” he murmured. “Verisht gooshty, gooshty.” It was going to be a perfect day for tending to his flowers. The tree-troll turned back to look at

his home and he drew in a breath of satisfaction and great pleasure. The seedlings he had planted on the outside had flourished over the last few weeks and bright colours sprouted from every tiny, mossy nook. It was a glorious, hanging, flower basket of a tree house nest.

Finnr loved it.

The birds loved it.

The bees and the butterflies loved it.

The trolls, who gathered mushrooms and firewood from the forest floor below, loved it.

The flowers were not just for decoration and everyone's delight, though. They were not just for scenting the forest air, mingling with pine and herbs, encouraging nectar sipping insects and pollen collecting honey-makers. Finnr collected their petals for perfumes and fragrant pomander making. He knew exactly which, and how many, to mix together for the perfect aroma bouquet, and he knew at what time to gather the flowers' softness into his bottles and jars. His skill in choosing and blending was unique. No other troll had his knowledge.

Finnr also knew everything about bark and leaves, seeds and roots, and deep-buried truffles. He knew how to forage without upsetting the delicate balance of the woods. He did not disturb the beetles and spiders, or the many-legged millipedes, if he could help it. He knew how to dry pieces of fallen bark, later grinding them between two specially chosen stones into a fine powder. He knew how to boil gnarled roots in collected waterfall splashes, over his little fire in a clearing, enjoying the earthy bonfire smell. With age-old knowledge, he cooled and bottled the liquor, ready for use when necessary.

Finnr was always busy.

For Finnr had a gift.

He was able to select exactly the right powder to mix with milk or water, to pour exactly the right amount of root liquor and to combine any number of different ingredients to make all manner of concoctions.

In short, he was a medicine-maker.

There was a certain magic about him, which enabled him to understand a fever or a condition or an illness, and then to blend his home-made forest remedies for immediate recovery of the patient. All trolls have some knowledge of medicines; Hildi was very skilled in honey medicine-making and Dotta tended her animals with fearful jumbles of love and hope, but Finnr was the real expert.

He kept his pots and jars and bottles in small, feather-lined hollows in his tree-nest, winched up in a small bucket, by rope, from the ground below. At times, he had barely enough room to curl up inside, if he had been particularly busy with his alchemy that day. Somehow though, there would be just a little space left for Finnr to lie on the downy floor, with hairy troll-knees tucked up underneath his soft blanket and there he would sleep soundly, until it was time to rouse his bird lodgers.



All Finnr's birds were wild. They chose to share his nest-home because they felt safe and there were always scraps of food available. They were free to fly away and nest elsewhere,

should they wish to, and so they came and went of their own free will. However, whilst Finn'r loved them all and enjoyed their company, he longed for a *special* friend. After all, Hildi and Thom had each other, Grimo the cat and Tracker the dog, not to mention their mice. Dotta and Grimhildr had their flaggermusses, Pipi and Fug. Hairy Bogley lived with Ulf and even Snorrie Magnus had Herpet, the frog. Finn'r had hoped a little hedgehog he came across one day would adopt him, but getting a hedgehog up and down the tree had proved tricky and it was far kinder to leave him snuffling for worms amongst the leaves.

So, it was with some concern, but also a certain degree of excitement one day, that he found a lost egg. There was no evidence of the nest from which it had come. The parents were not calling for it. They were nowhere to be seen. Luckily it was still perfect; smooth, glossy and olive-brown.

And still warm.

Finn'r picked it up from the moss which had cushioned it, turned it over tenderly in his knobbly fingers and then popped it under his hat. It made him smile - an egg on an egg-head! He made haste back to his tree, carefully climbing his rickety-pickety ladder to the rope bridge, hoping and hoping that the egg would survive. For fourteen vigilant troll-dawns, Finn'r kept his hat on his head. He slept upright, as best he could, so his hat-incubator would stay in place, snugly cosseting the precious contents. Occasionally, he would roll his head gently on his shoulders, to turn the egg as a mother bird would, in the nest. When his head itched, he did *not* scratch.

Then, as Finnrr was walking in the woods one fine morning, he felt a slight movement under his hat. He stood stock still, holding his breath, waiting.

Could it be?

Yes! There it was again!

Without doubt, the egg was twitching slightly. Its smooth shell was moving against his own bald crown!

Finnr looked around for a comfortable spot to sit down and quickly espied a risen tree root, covered in fallen pine needles. He lowered himself down, keeping his back and head poker-straight, and cautiously removed the soft, floppy hat for the first time in two weeks, carefully rolling the egg into it. A delightful rush of cool air freshened his head. Holding the hat in both hands, he peered in. There was the egg, nestled cosily – with a definite, fine, hairline crack beginning to show.

“Yo, yo!” Finnrr exclaimed in joy. “Mi beebie tweetor comli! Mi littelor eggsie es brokisht!”

The new father-to-be looked around him excitedly, hoping he could share his news with another forest troll, but he was quite alone. A scritch-scratching sound was to be heard, delicate but insistent. Finnrr stared wide-eyed into the depths of his hat.

“Comli, comli, mi beebie,” he encouraged, urging the tiny beak to peck and the little toes to scrape.

The crack became a chink. As Finnrr watched, a flimsy, white tissue layer was revealed and he could see fidgety movement underneath it. His heart began to pound. A brand new life! Here in his hands!

He had seen many baby birds in the lodging nests of his home, but the hatchings had always been quiet, private moments for the mother and father; the wise troll left them to their wild nature and instincts. This though, was different. This was a hatching of his own making!

He, Finnr, had found and adopted this egg, so full of promise.

He, Finnr, had cared for it and kept it warm, day and night.

He, Finnr, was responsible for maintaining the little life which was erupting in his very own hat!

His heart swelled with pride.

And so, after much wriggling and chipping, scratching and scraping, when the damp fledgling head finally poked out of the shell, the first thing the baby nightingale saw was Finnr's beaming face!

She saw his bright, beady, bird-like eyes.

She saw his long, poky beak-like nose.

She saw his happy, gappy-toothed grin.

It was love at first sight!

"Halloo mi beebee," whispered the tree-troll, watching the bird put her head on one side to consider him. "Im lovelor u! U shtay wit meer? Pleasor?"

Grimhildr and Dotta were firm when Finnr asked for their advice. The two sister-trolls were used to looking after wild animals which they rescued from danger in the forest, and they certainly knew the heartache of letting them return. They knew it would be wrong for Finnr to try to keep the baby bird as a pet. He could feed her, like her parents would have done, but when the time came for the nightingale to fly from Finnr's nest, he must let her go free.



"It was love at first sight."

Finnr knew they were right. If the little bird chose to stay that would be wonderful, but if she chose to fly off into her own life, so be it. So, lovingly, he cared for the bird, which he named Luscinia, feeding her on ants and chewy little grubs and insects until she was big enough to find her own. He understood her tweets, her songs, her chatter. He delighted in her plain brown feathers and dull appearance, thinking her quite the most perfect little bird he had ever seen. He listened, enthralled, as Luscinia found her adult voice. On still, late summer evenings, the nightingale would sit perched on Finn's toes and entertain all who could hear her, with the most melodious of birdsongs. Her warbles and whistles echoed through the night-time wood, when all other birds were quiet. She had a captive, and captivated, audience.

Luscinia chose to stay.



The dawn chorus finished as the sun rose to settle amongst wispy summer clouds. In a clearing in the forest, Finn busied himself with a small cooking fire and stirred some sticky porridge in his old pot. He was just about to sit down and eat when he heard his name being called. Looking up, he saw his good friend Thom striding towards him, Tracker at his heels. A small jar was swinging from a loop on Thom's green dungarees and a clutch of dried nettles was in his hairy troll-hand.

“Halloo Thom! Comli en eatig brekenfasht wit meer,” greeted Finn, waving his wooden spoon over his head, blobs of porridge dripping from it.

“Yo, yo! Thanken, thanken!” Thom grinned, taking his place by the smoking fire and patting the ground to show Tracker where to sit. He had already eaten, but it would have been impolite to refuse the usual troll hospitality. “Im bringor gooshty buzzor honig en nettles foor tay, Finn,” he continued. “Hildi ‘shoo-shoo’ meer todagen – Hildi mekken pictoris foor Biggy Menor dis morgy.”

Finn nodded in understanding and they sat in smoky, companionable silence as the tree-troll stirred the contents of his pot. Sometimes it was good to be like this, just the two of them, in the forest, Thom away from his beloved troll-lady, doing man-stuff with Finn. Sometimes, Hildi wanted their little home to herself, so she could spend some happy hours making her pictures. She used them in exchange for items the trolls could not find or make for themselves, although any dealings with the Big People always carried an element of risk. She had a few special contacts in the nearby town; Big People who would accept her as she was, not jeer at her short, hairy legs and trollish ways; Big People who would not want to disturb their way of life, or capture them to use as workers, or do them harm. These few Big People valued Hildi’s creative pieces and would sell them on, without telling others who had made them. Thom knew better than to get in her way once she had cleared the tiny kitchen table and begun to arrange her herbs and ferns and dried forest flowers.

As always, Finn'r welcomed the company. He accepted Thom's honey with enthusiasm and spooned a dollop into his porridge. Then, he scrambled up his ladder and returned, swinging from his tree house like a monkey, with two wooden bowls he had fashioned recently from fallen pine. Thom replaced the cooking pot with another, filled with water this time, dousing the nettles, letting them heat and stew.

Contentedly listening to the crackle of the burning sticks, wafting the smoke away from their faces now and then, the two friends tucked their troll-tails underneath them and shared the sweet, steaming oats.

What a perfect start to the day!

After breakfast there would be jobs to do, but ones which would be fun and not a hardship. The flowers in Finn'r's tree house would be watered and picked. The bees and insects would join him as he preened and tweaked. Perhaps he would wander, weather-stick in hand, through the green forest, collecting bark and roots. Perhaps he would join Thom in his little blue fishing boat, Mistig Vorter, out on the fjord, letting his hands trail in the icy water.

What a wonderful life!

Nothing could spoil it.

Then, unexpectedly, a cloud shifted to block the sun. The trolls felt a cool breath of wind, which made the backs of their hairy necks goose-pimple, momentarily.

Finn'r looked up at the sky, quizzically.

He raised a wise eyebrow and then a frown creased his face. He was good at reading nature. He was good at

understanding signs. He had not expected the weather to change this morning.

He felt ever so slightly uneasy.

The day had started off so cheerily...

Here he was with his good friend, eating good food. All was well in the forest as far as he could tell. The birds and woodland creatures were fine and dandy. The sunshine had been so bright.

One, dark, rain cloud.

Was this a sign?



Chapter Two

“Ideas for my notebook, My notebook for ideas.”

The rain, now falling in the forest, also pattered on the roof of a certain Big Man’s house. It ran in rivulets to the gutters and down the pipes, into the litter-blocked drains on the street. It gave the dirty windows the only wash they ever had, but still left them streaked and grimy.

Waking rather late in the morning, Doctor Klumpet rolled out of the wrong side of bed and spread his fat, pink feet on the thick rug. He fumbled around on the chest of drawers for his glasses, his pudgy fingers groping blindly, sending a stack of coins spinning onto the floor. His notebook fell with them, loose pages of money calculations scattering in disarray.

“SCARAB!” he boomed. “WHERE ARE YOU?”

The effort made him wheeze and for several seconds, he could not take a breath until a thick, sticky cough had spluttered from his mouth. Recovering with some difficulty, he thundered again.

“MISTER SCARAB! COME HERE, DIRECTLY!”

There was a light skittering sound of quick feet on cold, stone steps, and the door was opened wide.

“About time too!” Doctor Klumpet grumbled, looking at his scrawny assistant. “What took you so long?”

“Sorry, sorry, Doctor K!” came the soft, breathy reply. “I have things to do, you know! I was busy, busy packing your bag up for the day. I think we might need some more leeches before long, and your Wonderful Wheel of Medicine Magnificus needs oily-oiling.”

“Never mind the leeches and the Wonderful Wheel of Medicine Magnificus Mister Scarab, did you pack my toffees?” asked the doctor. “You know I can’t work without them.”

“Yes, yes, Doctor K! I would never, ever forget your toffee-toffees!”

“Good man! I have to have my *carrrrrrramels...*” the doctor salivated, rolling the *rrrr* with his tongue, as if he did indeed already have a mouthful. “Beautiful butterscotch balls of *crrrrrreamy* gorgeousness!”

Mister Scarab smiled a pale, sickly smile and clasped his hands together. His bony knuckles became quite white. He knew when to keep quiet and this was one of those moments. He let the doctor enjoy the thought of sweet toffees to come and waited, patiently. He stood before his employer, rather stooped and a little shrivelled, with a fawning expression but sharp, clever eyes. He had been employed by Klumpet for the last ten years and was used to his ways. Although he was a miserable-looking specimen, he thoroughly enjoyed his work. It gave him a sense of importance he would not have had elsewhere, since he was Klumpet’s right hand man and as such, held in high regard in the town. He earned a good wage from the doctor’s profits and the two were united in their avaricious determination to create as much wealth as possible.

Scarab had ambitious dreams of owning a huge mansion one day and of spending his retirement relaxing on the doctor's yacht, as they sailed warm, exotic waters. Perhaps they would explore desert islands with swaying palm trees, catch delicious fish in shimmering nets and cook them on the beach as the sun set. Perhaps they would have their own crew to toil away at the ropes and sails, whilst others served them fancy drinks and sweetmeats from silver platters. Oh what bliss! He spent many hours in bed at night, fidgeting and scheming, twitching, planning and preparing for the future. He had to keep on the right side of the doctor; he needed Klumpet's knowledge of medicine. In return, Klumpet acknowledged that Mister Scarab was essential for new ideas and full-time assistance.

They were a money-making dream-team.

The exorbitant fees they charged for visits to homes of the Big People in the town were paid, because there was no choice. Doctor Klumpet was the only practitioner of medicine for miles around and Mister Scarab's idea of making house calls to see his patients, instead of running a costly surgery, meant he could charge more. In fact, he could charge whatever he liked and put his fees up at a moment's notice. It was an excellent business!

"We already have many, many house calls lined up for today, Doctor K," Mister Scarab continued, passing a silk dressing gown to cover his employer's faded, blue-striped pyjamas, the buttons straining against his round belly.

Doctor Klumpet belched as he reached for a large, gold, signet ring, forcing it over a swollen knuckle.

"Better put extra toffees in, then!"



The sudden rain had sent Thom on his way, Tracker at his heels. It had fallen in heavy drops onto the fire, making it hiss and sending more smoke into the forest. Finn stamped on the embers in his bare feet, making sure no risky spark remained, then hurried up his rickety-pickety ladder to the rope bridge and into his nest-home. He shrugged off his surprise at the change in the sky. Maybe his weather-stick just got it wrong today. There was no need for concern; everything was fine. He took off his hat and hung it up, whistling as he did so. Then he sat on his haunches, snug and warm, listening to the pitter-patter of the rain as it landed on branches, twigs, leaves and pine needles. There would be no need to water the flowers *this* morning! The butterflies had disappeared hurriedly from nectar-laden ladders where they had been sipping. The birds had become quiet and still.

Luscinia however, never far away, responded to Finn's whistling and rustled through the thicket of the nest to join him.

"Comli, comli mi lovelor Luscinia," the tree-troll beckoned, tenderly. "Sitli en shtay wit meer. Im mekken notooris in mi speshy bookor."

So saying, Finn turned to one of the many storage nest-holes set into the soft lining of his home and rummaged around. Out came two stubby pieces of charcoal and an old, leather-bound notebook. The nightingale took up her perch on

Finnr's grubby toes and watched him turn the book over in his hands.

How precious this notebook was!

Finnr grinned as he held it to his nose so he could take a deep breath in and smell the cover. He stroked it lovingly and gave a contented sigh. This was his most valuable possession! He remembered the day that Hairy Bogley, the hermit troll, had arrived with it for him. He had not asked where it had come from; Hairy would not have told him. All trolls lived simple lives and, although they had many things of importance to *them*, they rarely had any item of actual costly value. They regarded as essential only love and friendship, the natural world of animals and plants, cool water and fresh air. They shunned the ways of the Big People and their greedy fixation with money. It had no meaning for them and they did not understand it.

Finnr had needed a notebook though and, over the years, it had become very special to him. It was full of memories and so, irreplaceable. He opened it with care and turned each ivory parchment page. There before him, was a lifetime's work, meticulously recorded by feather quill dipped in blackberry juice, from rough charcoal notes and work-in-progress scribbles. There were medicines and remedies drawn in detailed pictures, together with samples of roots, pressed berries, bark, leaves and seeds. Tallies were documented during mixing sessions, to be written up more formally later on, showing number of pinches of *this*, or dried leaves of *that*, or tiny drops of *the other*. Some were ancient cures passed down from forefathers; whispered, explained, taught. Some

were Finn's own ideas using an acquired skill, technique or new ingredient. Some were modifications and improvements of old methods, tested by Finn, who had a particular talent for that sort of thing. It was a precious keepsake of troll-secrets and information; a compilation of many years' work and innate, natural troll knowledge. The old tree-troll was part-historian and part-scientist – and *very* sentimental. He had to keep this notebook safe because he could no longer remember all the information it held. It was far better, now he was this age, to record every detail for easy reference and for other, future medicine-troll use.

Finn picked up his charcoal as Luscinia began to preen her feathers. A soothing flower balm for blistered ember-feet was needed.



Mister Scarab scuttled ahead of Doctor Klumpet, carrying the medical bag and a sheet of paper with names and addresses on. Big, fat plops of rain were making the list rather soggy, but the assistant could remember who needed to be seen and carried it only to appear important, busy and bustling. The doctor lumbered behind, panting, umbrella in hand, cursing the weather. More than once, he had been squinting ahead instead of looking down at his feet and as a result, the hems of his loud, checked trousers were wet-through with puddle-splashes. By the time they had reached the first house, he was red-faced and beads of sweat had broken out on his brow.



“...the hems of his loud, checked trousers were wet-through...”

“Not s-so f-fast, Scarab!” he puffed as they paused before knocking. “Why-why do you s-scurry off s-so quickly?” Dropping the umbrella, he bent over double, with hands on knees, to catch his breath.

“Beetle by name, beetle by nature, Doctor K! You know that!” answered the assistant, spitting on one thin hand and smoothing his lanky hair across his head. “We have much to do today, as you know. We really can’t dawdle!”

So saying, he straightened the collar of his bottle-green overcoat, shiny with the wet, and rat-tatted at the door. He made a quick gesture to indicate Klumpet should wipe the corner of his mouth, as a fleck of white spittle needed to be removed, and then he stood to one side to allow the doctor to enter first...

Five short minutes later, the pair was once more standing on the street. Mister Scarab weaseled a wad of cash deftly into the inside pocket of his overcoat, as the doctor rubbed his hands together. Klumpet blinked his watery eyes quickly as he licked his moist, sausage lips in excitement.

“An excellent start to the day, Scarab! Excellent!”

“Not sure we needed *both* the leeches, Doctor K. They don’t grow on trees, you know! They are getting more and more difficult to get hold of these days.”

“Nonsense!” came the retort. “I’m the doctor, so just remember your place! You, Scarab, are merely my minion – my underling – my gofer. You might have some good business sense, but I *know* medical facts! I wanted to use both leeches: one for each eyelid. Bound to help the old lady to see better!

These ancient methods are tried and trusted, believe me. There's no need for new-fangled prescriptions for pills and tablets! Just rely on my old-fashioned, no-nonsense approach. I know what people want – and of course, I want people to *think* they are getting value for money!" He chuckled suddenly, behind one plump hand. "Even if they aren't!"

Mister Scarab smirked, nodded in agreement and ticked the name from his list. He cast a glance at the doctor who was busy stuffing a fat toffee into his mouth. It was a good job he was very convincing when he was with the patients, Scarab thought, because right now he looked like an overgrown schoolboy. At least the rain had finally stopped so they could make better progress. Mister Scarab shook out the umbrella and folded it into precise pleats, then he took hold of Klumpet's elbow in order to guide him.

"Onwards, up the street, Doctor K! People to see. Money to make!"



Finnr had finished his notes and with a chuff-chuff under the nightingale's beak, he got to his feet. Luscinia fluttered softly onto the feather covered floor and watched as the troll tidied his writing away, into its little hole inside the nest. The notebook fitted there perfectly, with charcoal sticks and feather quill on the top, ready for another day. Finnr was very fussy about keeping neat and as uncluttered as possible, because

space was limited and he liked everything to be in its proper place.

“Luscinia, mi speshy tweeter,” Finnrr said, gently. “Im mekken scent-pretties todagen. Im needen floweries foor dee butteri-fleegen.”

Luscinia nodded her grey-brown head and sang a note or two in approval. Finnrr whistled the notes back to her and she took her leave of the nest-home, chack-chacking happily as she flew. The little bird knew which flowers Finnrr would need for his perfumes today. They had tried and tested a few combinations recently and all they were missing were wild rose and lavender. Those would be easy to collect!

Whilst his little helper was gone, Finnrr took a small bottle from a nest-hole. It had a tiny glass stopper which caught the light and sent rainbow-spangles across his face. It contained the mustard-yellow oil of jonquil, and gave a sudden burst of fresh, spring fragrance when the stopper was removed. It had the ability to transport the mind to warm meadows and sunshine, for a fleeting, calming moment or two. Finnrr knew it well and, with skilful blending of rose and lavender, would be able to make a beautiful fragrance, perfect for dabbing onto his butterflies’ wings! The butterflies would then flit through the forest, spreading the scent, encouraging birds and insects to visit flowers. The following pollination would create more flowers and seeds for Finnrr’s medicine storage, next year.

The thought *usually* made Finnrr smile in satisfaction. Today though, he had a nagging doubt. It was all very well, this gathering, mixing, bottling and shaking, but what of it *then*? His nest-home was getting full of jars and bottles and

samples and testers. He had some from years before, tucked away and not yet used. Not tried. Not tested. He was frustrated that his remedies were not given the chance to restore good health.

Another thought occurred to him as he began to count how many medicines he had stored. What was the use of his notebook? His marvellous compendium of ideas? His treasured collection of notes about bark and leaves? His detailed anthology and catalogue of seeds, berries and roots? If the medicines were not to be used, why write their recipes down at all?

Finnr shook his head. Why indeed?

Were all his efforts to be in vain?

His problem was plain to see: trolls were too healthy! This was, of course a good thing; Finnr would be the first to say how wonderful this was. The forest trolls, the mountain trolls and those who lived by the water's edge were all as fit as fleas. They ate well, from nature's cupboards. They kept themselves busy and active, going about their daily lives in both work and play – chopping and gathering firewood, swimming in the bracing water of the fjords, rowing boats, climbing trees and exploring their troll-world. They breathed either the fresh mountain air, or that of the sea. They had few worries and slept well at night. In short, they lived long, happy, healthy lives.

That gave Finnr, the medicine-maker, few opportunities to practise his skills and use his talents to the full.

For the second time that day, a cloud seemed to appear in Finnr's world. It was most unusual for him to feel like this.

When Luscinia returned with a beak full of flower stems and petals, even her bright eyes did not cheer him.

“Ah, Luscinia,” Finn r sighed, stroking her back absent-mindedly with one charcoal-stained finger. “Clouoosh es wit meer.” He made a sad face and his little friend, having dropped her flowers, flapped up to his shoulder. “Mi bookor wit notooris es nay gooshty. Trolls es strongish en happli!” He gestured to all his jars, bottles of remedies and collected ingredients, with his weather-stick. “Puh!”

Luscinia, as always, understood. The two of them had a way of communicating which was unique to them. Finn r understood her song; the nightingale understood his whistles. Finn r understood her fluttering and chat-chats; Luscinia understood his muttering and troll-chat. The two regarded each other for a moment, lost in thought, and then the bird gave a series of sudden trills! *An idea!*

In a flurry of feathers, she flew from Finn r’s shoulder to the nest-hole and peeped out. Another trill and then a returning flit, to whistle and warble with enthusiasm, her song filling the cosy home and causing quite a stir amongst the other birds.

Finn r’s eyes widened in excitement! What a wonderful plan! It was a bit daring – and he would have to take care – but the thrill of being able to use his medicines and methods at last, outweighed any thought of danger!

“Yo, yo, Luscinia!” Finn r cried. “U comli wit meer?”

The nightingale had already plucked the green, floppy hat from its twig hook and let it fall at his bare, hairy troll-feet. Try leaving her behind! Finn r scooped it up. He grinned his best gappy-toothed grin and began to gather a few special

medicines. Into the hat they went, with his tiny bottle of jonquil oil, stopper firmly in place. He jammed the hat onto his head and grabbed his notebook, not caring for once that the quill and charcoal sticks scattered onto the floor. Clutching his weather-stick in eagerness, he made haste to his rope bridge.

“Gooshty borg mi littelor tweetors!” he called out as he swang down his rickety-pickety ladder to the forest floor. “Im goingor mekken excitig thingors! Comli, Luscinia, comli!”

Why hadn’t he thought of this before? So many different Big People out there! All ages, sizes and shapes!

Finnr, the medicine-maker was coming!



