

Chapter 1

Woo-woo

"Woo-woo!" burred Baby Brother as he hurtled down the village street on his woolly mammoth.

It was his Midsummer present. Mother MacBear had taken him to Mairi MacSheep's wool shop to buy it. There were lots of woolly animals in the shop: puffins, bonxies, bishbirds, pandas, jumblies, kangaroos. At first Baby Brother was attracted to a rather splendid bishbird, but then his eye was caught by the biggest of all the woolly toys.

"Do you know what that is, my wee laddie?" asked Mairi.

"Hellyfump!" Baby Brother shouted with delight.

"Well, not quite. It's a mammoth. Some people say they're extinct," she said to Mother Macbear. "But I have heard tell there are still some woolly mammoths in the Frozen Lands." (The Frozen Lands were the northernmost part of the forgotten Lands of the North. Bearloch animals never went there.)

"Mam-moth! Mam-moth!" chanted Baby Brother over and over.

"All that long woolly hair is for keeping it warm in freezing temperatures," Mairi continued. "Look at its long trunk. That's for getting inside pots of honey. It's very useful."

The mammoth had caught Baby Brother's attention in a rather unusual way. It had winked at him. Baby Brother was delighted by this, but it did not surprise him very much. This was because he was so young, and still discovering new things all the time. The idea that some things ought not to happen had not yet occurred to him.

The mammoth was as big as Baby Brother himself. It was mounted on wheels and had a string for pulling it along. Baby Brother soon decided that "Woo-woo!" was its name. No one else had noticed that it winked.

So Mother MacBear and Baby Brother left the shop and set off down the village street towards the river. Their home, the house called the Den, lay beyond the river, not far from the shore of Bearloch.

Baby Brother was pulling the mammoth along behind him. But soon he felt something nudging his back. Turning around he saw it was Woo-woo's trunk. At once he knew what the mammoth meant. On this downward slope he could ride it.

So he did, careering down the street at an alarming rate. Fat Fiona the postman's daughter, stepping out of her front door into the street, only just avoided a nasty collision. 'Riding mammoths is not permitted in the village,' she said crossly to Mother MacBear.

Fortunately Baby Brother and Woo-woo came to a stop when they reached the bridge.

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Baby Brother's big sister and brothers - Beth, Duff and Tosh - were standing on the bridge playing extreme Pooh sticks. (In regular Pooh sticks, as most people know, the players drop sticks into a river from one side of a bridge, and the winner is the one whose stick appears first on the other side of the bridge.)

In extreme Pooh sticks the sticks have to travel under the bridge upstream rather than downstream. Players are allowed all kinds of aids, such as poles, magnets and string. But even so the bears were finding it very difficult.

Extreme Pooh sticks had been invented by Waverley Bear, that famously astute bear, who was known for her inventions of all sorts of really useful things and some completely useless ones. She invented extreme Pooh sticks because she wanted to provide something more challenging for small bears who were bored with regular pooh sticks.

"Do you think we could dam the river just below the bridge?," said Tosh. Extreme Pooh sticks was so difficult they had forgotten about competing and were pooling their ideas.

"Or we might ..." Beth had a rather good idea involving seagulls, but she was interrupted by the arrival of Baby Brother on his mammoth, with Mother MacBear in hot pursuit.

"Hey!" said Tosh, pointing at the woolly beast. "That's cool."

"Woo-woo!" said Baby Brother, with a huge grin. He got off the mammoth and was about to pull it back up the slope when his mother stopped him.

"Isn't that rather dangerous?" said Duff to Mother MacBear. Duff was the eldest and most sensible of the four bears. "He could have ended up in the river. Or sent Fat Fiona rolling into the river."

"Aye," said Mother Macbear. "You're all going to have to keep an eye on him. He's becoming quite a handful now, and I can't be watching over him all the time. You must all be responsible for him."

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From then on Baby Brother could not be parted from his mammoth. Wherever he toddled, he pulled Woo-woo along behind him. And, unless anyone stopped him, he rode Woo-woo down every slope he found.