

THE GOOD TROLL'S LAST WORD

BY Donna Mann

SWODEM & SEVEER watched the clear water trickle over the stones. This was a perfect place: lots of shade trees, even a gate. They thought they'd found a place where they could have more fun than they'd ever had. But it wasn't working out for them as they had planned. They were sad. Their bodies sagged beneath their burlap trousers. Green lines hung around their necks like tires, wrinkling their skin. Long fingers impatiently tapped the stones they held in their hands. They were puzzled. Unbelief shadowed their faces. They shook their heads. "It happened again. I can't believe it."



"What went wrong?"

"Who knows?"

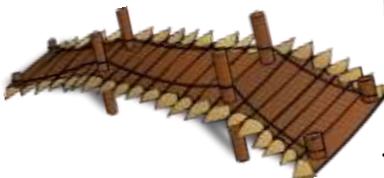
"We had it so well planned."

"Or thought we did."



SWODEM clapped SEVEER across the shoulder as he turned around. It had been a mystery how solid step-by-step plans had failed. After all, they were the new Reeves Creek Trolls. They had a reputation in other townships of scheming and carrying out their plans. They had teased children regularly since they decided to make this their goal in life.

The bridge at the bottom of The Meadow's lane had provided a perfect site. It couldn't get any better than this. They had watched this place after the new people came to live there. Children would often come to visit. The trolls would never harm them. But they had such fun planning how they would frighten them.



In the past, the Trolls had been very successful in causing trouble. Over the years, they had a collection of stories that made them belly laugh as they lay on the banks of the river and recalled the various times.

But life was different for SWODEN and SEVEER since that family had moved to the Meadows. All at once, SWODEN and SEVEER didn't feel comfortable - the property felt like peace and happiness. That certainly wasn't Troll-land. Yet, they were still certain they could change this - they would try to change it - think how they could change it.

"That's six times in a row. Each time was planned with precision. Every time, we had it all figured out. It would have been such fun - especially this last one."

"Yeah, well. Every time it went wrong."

"Next time, we'll do it. We'll plan it so well, that nothing can go wrong."

Their voices faded into a low, flat tone, with hints of sarcasm. Laughter followed as if they had just solved the greatest mystery.

BOB, it didn't matter if he spelled his name frontwards or backwards—it looked the same, was the oldest troll brother. He strolled into the garden and announced his presence by throwing a stone into the water. It skipped across the surface of the water spitting and gliding until it finally sank.

"And where have you been, big brother?" SWODEN and SEVEER said.

"You wouldn't believe it, but I saved a frog from a snake. I caught some leaves before they hit the ground. And, I even helped an old woman walk up a hill."

"Awe, hocklewhip. How bad can it get, BOB?"

"Don't you ever have any fun?"

"Fun?"

"Yeah, well, like tripping that old woman, or watching the snake devour the frog, or maybe trampling the leaves when they hit the ground. You just don't get it, do you? You need to have some fun, get with it."

"I do have fun. I just do it differently. It's not your way."

"We at least get some laughs—some real fun. The only way is to get somebody and get them good—that's enough for us."

"So what's your big plan now?"

"Oh, it will be good, you can believe that."

SWODEM & SEVEER put their heads together and started whispering. Then they broke into a laugh. "This time it will work, it's a no brainer—so easy—but brilliant."

BOB left them to their plans and went away.

Early the next morning SWODEM & SEVEER set the stage for their next hoax. Lindie sauntered down the laneway. She came to the bridge, hesitated, looked down in to the water and then walked swiftly across the logs to the other side. The logs shifted slightly under her feet and she steadied herself. Relieved, she went on her way to the mailbox to get the morning letters. As she turned to walk towards the house, she immediately saw bubbles rising up from the bridge. They curled up from between the logs and playfully bumped and collided in the breeze like a rainbow of colours. She ran towards them laughing with arms out stretched.



SWODEM& SEVEER watched Lindie with great delight. Crooked smiles crossed their faces. Curdles of spit filled their throats. They were delighted, anticipating her reaction. Just as they had planned, the bubbles attracted her and she reached for them.

Soon they would make their move and have their fun. Further and further she reached, almost touching the bubbles—but not quite. She followed the bubbles across the bridge, this time not even hesitating. She was just within inches of their grasp, when SWODEAM& SEVEER gasped as Lindie began to run right past them. Something had gained her attention—and she was gone.

"Hocklewhip! It happened again." SWODEM rang his hands. SEVEER wiped his brow.

"What is the matter with us? How can this be?"

Discouraged, SWODEAM replied, "Have we lost our charm or our wit?"

"Or maybe our smarts?"

"Seven times we've failed. We had such a good record up until this week. Our luck changed when we came to this bridge. We don't have any luck around

here, let's face it Why, it wasn't so long ago we scared little girls, we teased the wind, we made those dogs bark 'til they were near crazy."

"And," SEVEER laughed, "They'd almost lose their voice."

Just then, BOB slid down the side of the creek bank unto a large stone in the shadow of the bridge. He smiled at his little brothers, as he knew he had interrupted their serious thinking.

"Hey, little brothers, how's the world treating you?"

"It's not. We just can't have any fun anymore. Everything we do fail."

"Can't understand that. Why, I've had more laughs in just a few hours that will last all day."

"Well, I don't know what in your life you'd find to laugh at."

"I'll just tell you. I caught the wind and gave a man a breath of fresh air. I guarded a baby in a stroller against a stranger and I . . .

"Oh, don't tell me anymore. I can't bear to think of a playful troll—worse yet a loving one. You're not a real troll."

"I am so. I'm just a nice troll."

"Hocklewhip! There is no such thing as a nice troll. I tell you, we're not supposed to be nice. After all we're trolls. We're supposed to be sneaky, tricksters, mean. And, even worse than that if the truth was known, people are supposed to be afraid of us. In fact they're not supposed to really see us, just wonder if we're really here."

"Hey, little brothers," BOB said, "you're not powerful, that's the wind's role. Now *there's* a power and we all know it."

"But, we're supposed to be a different power—the wind is, well pleasant. Now, if it were a troll wind, it would blow everything down. It'd be done and over with."

"Ah, you guys think you're smarter than anything around you."

"Well, what about you?"

"Okay, what about me?"

"Come to think of it, maybe you're our problem. It seems every time we get a prank figured out and we're just about ready to make our claim—you show up *just after* it fails. And even worse, you're happy like you've just conquered something.

"Just coincidence, little brothers. Just coincidence!

"But, maybe not. I remember Grandpa Troll telling us that good always tries to overcome bad. And we would always have to make sure that the best one wins—and we know who that is."

"Funny, he told me that story too. And I'd bet my life on it. Happy-does-it, he was right," BOB said as he rolled on the grass holding his tummy, laughing. "I do believe he was right."

Which troll had the last word in the end?