

Gruddel and the Hole That Was Too Big

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The Hole in Whispering Forest

Captain Bear loved walking through Whispering Forest. Not because it was always so peaceful — the trees softly whispered to one another — but because something unexpected happened there every day. Sometimes glowing leaves drifted through the air. Sometimes mushrooms jumped aside when you stepped on them. And sometimes you heard strange giggling coming from deep underground.

Bear marched on firmly. His pirate coat fluttered lightly in the wind and his hat sat neatly on his head. As he walked between the roots of a giant oak tree, he suddenly heard a soft buzzing close to his ear.

“BZZZZZZ...”

In front of his nose hovered a small insect with shimmering wings. It had a bright blue body and left a trail of sparkling dust behind it in the air.

“Well now,” Bear grumbled in surprise. “I’ve never seen one like that before.”

The insect made a playful spin and buzzed lower, straight over the forest path. Bear immediately felt like following it — not to catch it, but because he was certain such an extraordinary creature would lead him to something special.

He took a few big steps.

“Wait a moment, little friend!” he called with a laugh.

The insect buzzed between bushes, along tree roots and over a pile of leaves. Bear bent down, jumped across and kept following until it suddenly dived downward.

Right into a dark hole... into the ground.

Bear stopped just in time.

“Where are you going now?” he muttered curiously.

The hole was not large, but just big enough to stick your head into. It looked terribly deep.

Bear leaned forward to get a better look.

“Come back!” he said irritably, bending even further forward.

His foot slipped over a smooth root.

His hat tilted sideways.

And before he knew it, his entire bear head was inside the hole.

“Wooooah...!”

His paws flailed through the air, his boots caught behind a stone, and with a soft thud he came to a stop.

His body remained outside, but his head was firmly stuck underground.

“Wonderful,” Bear grumbled. “Just typical.”

He tried to pull himself free, but the hole was tighter than he had thought. The earth pressed softly against his cheeks and snout.

“Hello?” he called carefully.

His voice echoed deep into the ground.

From very far away came the sound of rustling.

Then he heard little stones shifting and soft footsteps approaching.

“Who is making such a fuss at my breakfast table?” called a cheerful voice.

Bear froze.

“Breakfast table?”

In front of his eyes appeared a bright green little hand... and then another one. They gripped the edge of the hole.

Slowly a head appeared, with messy orange hair, big round eyes and a wide grin.

“Hello!” the creature said happily.

Bear blinked in surprise.

“Uh... hello?”

“I’m Gruddel,” the little being said proudly. “And you’re sticking your nose into my house.”

Bear puffed a bit of dirt from his snout.

“Your house?”

“Yes of course,” Gruddel replied. “I live underground. With tunnels, rooms, root-slides and a cookie corner right next to the mushroom garden.”

Bear tried to move his head a little. It didn't move even a centimeter.

“My name is Captain C. Bear,” he said politely. “And I was following an insect that flew in here.”

“Oooh,” Gruddel said understandingly. “That must have been a flutterflash beetle. They always do that — first make people curious and then quickly zoom inside.”

“That's not very polite,” Bear grumbled.

Gruddel laughed mischievously.

“They think it's funny when big visitors get stuck.”

“Visitors?”

“Yes,” said Gruddel. “But usually it's rabbits or hedgehogs. Never a Pirate Bear before. That makes today special.”

Bear sighed deeply.

“Do you think you can get me loose?”

Gruddel squeezed his eyes together and looked Bear up and down.

“Maybe,” he said slowly. “But first I need to know if you are kind. Some surface-dwellers simply stomp tunnels flat.”

“I solemnly promise I won’t break anything,” Bear said quickly. “I’ve been stuck here far too long already.”

Gruddel thought for a moment. Then he smiled broadly.

“Very well. But first you must come and see my house. Being stuck isn’t really a problem down here. It’s part of it.”

“Part of it?”

“Yes,” Gruddel said cheerfully. “You don’t think you’re the first one, do you?”

Despite his uncomfortable position, Bear began to laugh.

“Welcome to the underground world!”