

A Season of Happiness Presents



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Say Hello to the nicest, funniest, cutest, friendliest, most helpful creatures a person could want to meet. Just the kind of visitors Pronto, Wombat and their friends need as they tackle the problems of life in The Valley.

Story One – RAINBOW’S GIFT

By Dave Hawkins

It was early morning. The sun was starting to climb higher in the sky, shining over the hills and bathing The Valley below in its warming light. The birds were already awake and singing, as was someone else. Actually, he wasn’t singing: he was whistling, the same happy tune he always whistled when he was doing his rounds. Apart from being an elf, which was quite natural because many in The Valley were elves, Pronto was also other things – postmaster, policeman and, as he was at that precise moment, delivery man. Pedalling his cart along, he was returning home after delivering the morning newspapers to The Valley folk.

Seeing him on his bicycle pulling his little cart behind, people were usually in the main street waving to him as he passed, but on that day the town was deserted. This was the way it had been throughout The Valley all morning, and it was making Pronto feel so sad that the tune he whistled was far less jolly than it had been. Eventually, it stopped altogether. Now, the only cheerful thing about him was the cart’s big red and white candy-striped canopy above his head. Pulling off the road, he parked his cart next to a large tree with a door set in it. Picking up the last newspaper, it seemed as if he was going to deliver it to the tree-house, but there was no point as this was his own home. The newspaper was for his friend who lived next door.

Not surprisingly, there was no sign of Wombat. On this particular day, Pronto was earlier than usual because he hadn’t spent time talking to anyone. Knocking on the door to Wombat’s hole, he was wondering if he would receive the same treatment that had greeted him at every other house he had tried to deliver papers to. Maybe Wombat wouldn’t open his door either; but luckily he did. “You’re early for a change,” said Wombat in his normal grumpy voice, “Too early, actually. I haven’t even made the tea yet.” Pronto failed to reply. It seemed he hadn’t been

listening at all and was puzzling over something, a deep frown on his face. “What’s the matter with you today?” he asked his friend, “Did the chain fall off your bike again?”

“No,” said Pronto rather vaguely, “The bike’s fine, but I’m not. I’m a failure, Wombat,” he moaned sadly, “Nobody likes me anymore. They wouldn’t even come out for their newspapers. I must have upset them, but I can’t think how.”

“It’s not you, Pronto,” Wombat explained, “The Valley folk are too afraid to leave their homes, even for a moment. Word is going round that the loggers are coming to cut down the forest.”

“But that’s terrible!” exclaimed Pronto, “Lots of people live in those trees just like me. They will all lose their homes.”

“I won’t,” Wombat reminded him, “I’ll still be alright in my hole.”

“And you will be very much alone,” Pronto warned him, “You’ll have no-one to talk to, and no friends because the rest of us will have to leave The Valley.”

“Ah, that puts a different light on it,” said Wombat, “We have to do something to stop those home-wrecking, friend-driving-away loggers, and I might have just the thing.” He shuffled to a rack beside the front door and pulled out an umbrella.

“Why do you need that?” asked Pronto, “It’s not raining.” Then he saw that Wombat was about to open the umbrella and said hastily: “Don’t open it inside – it’s bad luck!”

“Rubbish!” declared Wombat, “But if it makes you feel better I’ll do it outside.”

“Do what?”

“Call Rainbow,” said Wombat. “She came to my bedroom last night and she said if we ever needed help with anything, I was to open my umbrella to call her.” Noticing the look of doubt on Pronto’s face, he added: “You can see the sense in it: after all, the colours of my umbrella are the same as Rainbow’s.”

On their way out into Wombat’s garden, Pronto was trying to tell him: “You do realise you just had a dream. A rainbow couldn’t have appeared in your bedroom. Rainbows are only ever outside in the sky, and they don’t happen unless the sun is shining through rain. Anyway, rainbows don’t speak: they just *are*.”

“Well, that proves how much you don’t know,” sneered Wombat. “Now, stand back. This is probably some kind of magic and I’m not sure how it works – I’ve never done it before.” Pronto moved well away as Wombat opened his umbrella, held it high above his head and began to spin it. The faster it spun, the brighter it became as if there was a light inside. In moments, the glow began to rise from the spinning umbrella and spiralled up into the sky like a twisting, multi-coloured flashlight beam.

“Very impressive,” commented Pronto, “But I can’t see where the rainbow’s coming from. There’s no rain. There aren’t even any clouds...” His words petered out as he saw the unbelievable – a brilliant rainbow appearing in the blue sky stretching right across The Valley; and all he could say was: “Well I never, fancy that.”

Wombat looked at him, a huge, smug grin spreading across his face. "See, Pronto: magic does happen."

It certainly seemed to be magic. Not only was the rainbow in a clear blue sky where it shouldn't have been, but she had a face. It definitely was a she, and her smile was as gentle and comforting as Pronto remembered his grandmother's always used to be. If he'd had any doubts that this was not real, Pronto changed his mind when the rainbow began to speak: "That was rather quick, Wombat. I never expected you would call me so soon. How can I help?"

Rainbow remained silent as Wombat explained the problem with the loggers. For a few moments after the explanation she said nothing, as if trying to decide on how she could help. That, however, was not the case. For what Rainbow had to do next, she would need to gather all of her powers.

There was movement on one side of Rainbow and that part of her seemed to be separating. It grew longer as it came down towards the two friends. "It looks like an arm with a hand at the end," said Pronto in a nervous whisper, and he began backing away.

Wombat frowned at his friend. "You really are a sook sometimes, Pronto. There's nothing to be scared of: it's only magic, like I told you; and Rainbow wouldn't harm us."

Rainbow's gentle voice echoed down from the sky: "Wombat's quite right, Pronto. What I am now going to do won't hurt you at all, quite the opposite." Her hand paused just above the ground before the two friends. She opened it to place a number of small objects on the ground.

Pronto peered at them. "They look like cushions," he said.

"Yes they do," said Rainbow, "But they are truly much more. These are Drumlins. They are my children, and their names are the same as their colours which are just like mine. They are my gift to you and The Valley folk. They will help you with your problem. Should the Drumlins find they can't manage it themselves, they know how to call me." After that, Rainbow said no more. Her hand started to rise as her arm pulled back up into the sky to become part of her once again. Then she faded altogether.

Pronto and Wombat stood in silence, stunned by the amazing display of magic. "Well," said Pronto eventually, "That was quite..." He paused to think of the right word and only managed to come up with: "...something."

"Hmm," murmured Wombat, looking down at the Drumlins. "I do believe in magic, but I don't see anything magical in a pile of coloured cushions, cuddly as they might be. Nor can I see how they are going to help. They just lie there like any other cushions..."

Wombat suddenly broke off speaking and his mouth fell open. The red cushion was stirring. When it stood up, it was obviously a man-Drumlin with a big moustache, and he was wearing some kind of Army uniform. Pronto's eyes flew wide as he started to speak in a very loud, very bossy voice: "Right, Drumlins," bellowed Red, "We are here to do an important job, not lie around all day. So, front and centre - shape up!"

Story Two – A TOUCH OF PRIZ-MAGIC

One by one the Drumlins stood up and formed themselves into a line facing Red. Green was gazing around, in particular out towards the distant hills. “To be sure, this seems a nice, homely place; a lovely shade of green – that just happens to be my kind of colour.”

“In my opinion, which is all that really matters,” said Yellow in a posh, haughty voice, “Yellow’s better – very much so, and far less green. Anyway,” she added, “We aren’t here to talk about colours. What is this job that is so important?”

“The loggers are coming,” explained Pronto.

“And,” Wombat added, “If they aren’t stopped before they cut down the forest, all the families who live there will lose their homes.”

Hearing this, Purple jumped up, setting the fur on her collar dancing. “Where are they?” she demanded in an excited, sing-song voice; then began skipping around as if she was boxing. “Let me at ‘em! I’ll give ‘em the old one-two. Did I tell you I was almost a contender once?”

“Er, I know it might sound like a rather stupid question,” said Blue, pausing to lift up his hat, only to put it back on his head in exactly the same place it was before, “But, what, er, may I ask, is a contender?”

“I’m not really sure,” said Yellow, “But it would have to be something very silly if Purple was almost one once.”

“Enough of the chit-chat,” growled Red, “And back in line, Purple! I know about contenders: they fight, and there’ll be no fighting!” he ordered, “Drumlins never do nasty things. Drumlins are ever-so nice, and ever-so proud of it. Now, what’s to be done about these loggers – any ideas?”

Orange began speaking, but her voice was so quiet that she could hardly be heard. Yellow encouraged her to speak louder, so she tried again: “Well, I was wondering if we could build a fence around the forest to keep the loggers out.”

The idea seemed to be worth a thought and there was silence for a few moments until Blue commented: “Er, wouldn’t that mean us, er, cutting down trees to, er, make the fence?” While speaking, he was stroking his tie, which was something like the hat thing he did to help him find the right words, “Then we’d be just as bad as the loggers.”

“Yes we would to be sure, and no we shouldn’t chop down trees,” said Green, “Not at all, at all.” He went quiet and took to gazing at the surrounding countryside.

“Well?” demanded Purple, a little annoyed at the delay, “Come on then. You’re supposed to be the thinker, Green, so think!”

“Oh, do shut up, Purple,” snapped Yellow, “That’s what he’s doing. Just give him time.”

Green continued to gaze around and think for what seemed an age. Finally, he turned to face the other Drumlins and said: “It’s quite simple, really. The loggers are coming to cut down a forest. I don’t suppose they care which one...”

“I’m afraid we only have one,” explained Pronto.

“Right at this moment, that’s a fact,” Green had to agree, “But if we gather seeds from the trees in the old forest, we can use them to grow a new forest... right over there,” and he pointed to a large clearing near the foot of the hills.

”Yes,” whispered Orange, “That does sound really lovely. Then the loggers will have new trees to cut down and they will leave the old forest alone.”

Everyone thought Green’s idea a good one, so off they went to the old forest to gather seeds from every type of tree growing there. Having put them in Pronto’s cart, the Drumlins and Wombat piled in. Pronto had been wearing his farmer’s hat, because seed-gathering was pretty much farming of sorts; but he was now going to be a driver, so he needed a different hat. “I’ll have my bus-driver’s hat, Wombat, thank you,” he said to his friend.

Wombat reluctantly began rummaging in a box. “I don’t see why you have to keep changing your hat,” he grumbled.

“Because,” explained Pronto, “An elf like me, or anyone actually, should dress to suit the job he is doing at the time. That way, he does it better. I am now going to be a bus driver, so I would like my bus-driver’s hat, please.” Once he had changed hats, but not before, Pronto pedalled his cart from the old forest to the clearing Green had chosen.

Climbing off the bike, Pronto was about to ask for his farmer’s hat again, but his friend was already handing it to him. “Now you’ve got the right hat,” said Wombat, “You’ll have no excuse for doing a bad job.”

Pronto put on the farmer’s hat and took a bag of seeds from the cart. The Drumlins each had a bag of their own; Wombat, however, remained sitting in the cart watching. “Aren’t you going to help?” Pronto asked him.

“I’m tired,” said Wombat.

“But you haven’t done anything!” protested Pronto.

“Just thinking about work makes me tired,” explained Wombat.

“Well, that’s not good enough,” Pronto scolded him, “Everyone else is doing their best, so I think you could at least try.”

After a moment of thought, Wombat said dismally: “Oh, alright; but don’t expect too much – I’m not wearing a hat.”

It took them a long time to plant the seeds, but they eventually finished and all felt pleased with what they had done. Even Wombat planted some, although he did eat about half of what he had because he was hungry. Pronto looked out over the newly-planted clearing and asked: “What happens now?”

“We wait for the seeds to grow into trees,” explained Green.

“And how long is that supposed to take?” Yellow wanted to know.

Green thought about it and finally said: “Quite a few years, I imagine.”

“Years!” exclaimed Purple, “We can’t wait that long. A few days would be too much.”

At that moment, Magpie flew in and perched on Pronto's cart. "You haven't even got that long," she sang, "The loggers are just the other side of the hills and they'll be here soon."

"Well," moaned Wombat, "That was a total waste of effort. If I'd thought to bring my umbrella I could have called Rainbow for help."

"There's an idea," declared Red, "And we will not be requiring your umbrella, Wombat." He turned to face the Drumlins. "Right, Drumlins, make a circle."

While the Drumlins were forming into a circle, Purple began jumping around with excitement. "Are we going to do it? We are, aren't we? I love the Drumlin dance."

"I don't see what there is to dance about," grumbled Wombat.

"A little patience, if you please," said Red; then he turned to face the Drumlins. "Now, Drumlins, you must concentrate very hard; then, on my command, by the left, do it."

Even Wombat was unsure and stepped back to stand beside his friend. They just waited and watched. The Drumlins all had their eyes shut as they thought very, very hard. Then they began to hum. Next, they started skipping to the left, but still keeping in a circle. Faster and faster they danced until the circle they had formed was spinning; and their colours seemed to flow into stripes the same as Rainbow's. Finally, just like Wombat's umbrella, the spinning colours became brighter and spiralled up into the sky. Once high enough, the band of light began to spread sideways to become Rainbow who smiled and said: "You need help, yes?"

Red told her: "I believe we need some of your Priz-magic, Rainbow."

"What's Priz-magic?" asked Wombat.

"Silence in the ranks!" barked Red; then he went on to tell Rainbow what they had done with the seed planting, and that they needed the trees to grow really quickly before the loggers arrived.

"And so it shall be," said Rainbow, "Just stand clear all of you and leave it to me."

There was movement within Rainbow and the arm with the hand started to appear. She spread her six fingers wide and the hand started growing bigger. It paused just above the ground and Rainbow began moving it round and round the clearing. As the hand swept on, it left behind brightly coloured stripes that eventually joined to become a huge canopy covering all of the ground that the seeds had been planted in. The light from the canopy grew brighter and brighter; so bright, in fact, that Pronto and Wombat had to close their eyes.

After a few moments, Rainbow said: "You can open them now."

Pronto was unsure at first and only opened his eyes a little; then they opened very wide as he saw before him a dense forest of giant trees, and he said: "Well I never, fancy that."

"More than fancy," said Wombat, "More than magic, even. A touch of Priz-magic has grown these trees much bigger than those in the old forest. When the loggers see them, they are the ones they'll want to cut down and they'll leave The Valley folk's homes alone."

Pronto looked up into the sky. Rainbow was there and she had pulled her arm and hand right back inside herself. "Thank you for that wonderful bit of Priz-magic, Rainbow," he said.

“No need to thank me, Pronto,” Rainbow assured him, “I was happy to be of help, as were my children.” Pronto smiled and turned to look on the Drumlins with a view to thanking them, but they all seemed to have fallen asleep and looked just like cushions again. “They are all very tired after their Drumlin dance,” explained Rainbow. “I am hoping you can do something for them, and for me.”

“Anything,” said Pronto.

“Anything at all,” added Wombat.

“Well,” said Rainbow, “I was going to take them home with me, but I have a feeling that you and The Valley folk may need their help again in the very near future. So, would you be able to look after them for a while? I am sure they won’t be any trouble.”

The pile of cushions stirred. Red sat up briefly and declared: “Of course we won’t! Drumlins are never any trouble.” Then he immediately fell back and went to sleep again.

Pronto smiled, looked up to Rainbow and said: “After what they’ve done for us, we’ll be only too pleased to look after the Drumlins for as long as you wish them to stay. I’m sure we will all have a good time together.”

Once Rainbow had gone, the two friends picked up the Drumlins one by one and put them gently into Pronto’s cart. Wombat was grumbling as usual: “I’m not sure about having a good time. Where are we going to put them? I bet you never thought of that.”

“I certainly did,” replied Pronto, “They can stay with us in our homes. We can take three each.”

“Three!” spluttered Wombat, “My hole isn’t big enough for three!”

“Of course it is,” Pronto stated, frowning at his friend. “You’ll have plenty of room once you’ve cleared up the mess you leave around the place.”

“I suppose so,” Wombat agreed reluctantly, then added: “But I’m not having Purple. She bounces around too much. She’ll end up breaking something.”

“Fine,” replied Pronto, “Whatever you want. You can have whichever Drumlins you want and I’ll take the rest. Just try not to be grumpy with them like you are with me.”

“It’s my hole and I can be grumpy in it if I like,” said Wombat.

“I’d be very careful about that if I were you,” advised Pronto. “Anyone with sense would think twice before upsetting people who can perform magic.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” admitted Wombat. “Okay, okay, I’ll be nice. I’ll be ever-so nice; ever-so, ever-so nice. Drumlins cluttering up my hole I suppose I can handle; but I do not wish to be magic-ed by them, not at all.”

“And you definitely wouldn’t want to upset Rainbow, or she could come and Priz-magic you.”

“She wouldn’t do that, would she?” Wombat asked hopefully.

Pronto just raised his eyebrows, smirked and remained silent.