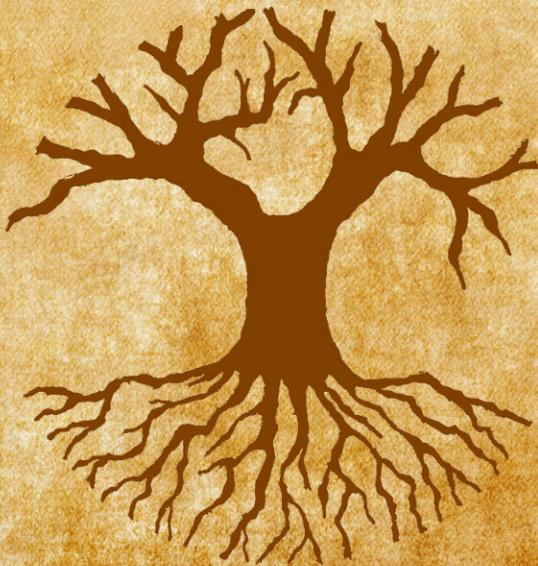


The
TROLL
of
BREMEN



WAYNE DENSLEY

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THE TROLL OF BREMN



A story about a Troll, some cheese, and a sturdy bridge,

It is often remarked upon by those who know them well that Trolls can sometimes be cruel and unhelpful creatures. It is not that they are born that way, for all Trolls begin their lives the same as most other Souls in this world, they are loved by their Mothers and doted upon by their Fathers.

Although no Troll would say it aloud, it is indeed the world itself that changes them, the hardness that grows in their hearts a result of how they themselves are treated. To be a Troll is no easy thing, to live as one a life given over to hardship and cruelty. For those acquainted with the Troll-kin it is generally agreed that it is not nice being a Troll.

In the midst of their travails Trolls do however, harbour one great love. It does not reside in the beauty of the world, nor in the harmony of music or the pleasures of good food. For Trolls love comes in the form of bridges and for most, once a bridge is found, it becomes their home forever. To move a Troll once it has found its bridge is not an easy thing. Remember this, for all that follows will seem less plausible if it is forgotten.

For a Troll a bridge is a thing of wonder, a structure built to last that spans the one thing they find most difficult, water. Trolls, and they will readily attest to this themselves, cannot swim and any deep river that stands in their way is for all practical purposes impassable. Bridges solve this problem, for a sturdy bridge means a river need no longer be an insurmountable barrier. A Troll can cross such boundaries without fear and a large bridge can serve also as a dry home, its span a roof beneath which an industrious Troll might build a Trollhouse. Having done so a Troll could then settle into a quiet life raiding nearby farms for sheep, and extracting a reasonable toll from any traveller that might have need to cross their bridge.

It should be mentioned in passing that this great love has proven to be a considerable problem for most Trolls. Once found a bridge serves as

home and in a Troll's mind can only be their property. It is something they own and little regard is ever given to who might have actually built the bridge, or who might feel they have a legitimate reason to use it. A Troll with a new bridge can be a happy creature indeed. For all who live about them however, the same cannot necessarily be said.

Although there are many different types of Troll that live in the world it is generally agreed that the least reasonable of their number are those who know themselves as Wallots. It is beyond dispute that a Wallot Troll is a large and menacing creature. Usually taller than the tallest of Men, and possessed of an overly large head, they cannot be considered either handsome or hygienic. They are cunning and malicious creatures known for their ability to hold grudges, and in the case of male Wallots, maintain an almost obsessive liking for matured cheese. Unlike other Trolls they have been known to raid local towns and dairy farms for the elusive product. It has been remarked that this is unusual behaviour not exhibited by other Trolls and many a Wallot has been captured when hard cheese is used as a lure. Like fish to worms it is a Wallots' greatest weakness.

It has been the experience of many who have crossed their paths that they can be cantankerous, ill-mannered souls, eager to return any mistreatment or injustice metered against them. Their lives are ones of hardship and discomfort and those that do not have a bridge find themselves wandering the fields and forests of the world. Such a Troll was Ignatius Wallot until he found his bridge at Bremn.

It should be noted before we continue that in these modern times Bremn is a large city, though now known by another name, filled with the clamour of many people and the frantic cacophony of a great number of loud and odorous motor-cars. In the time of Ignatius Wallot it stood instead as a small village, settled upon a quiet road between two larger towns. Having not garnered fame as the home of either great men or greater deeds it happily existed unnoticed and peaceful in its anonymity.

Like most villages however, Bremn had everything needed to provide for a comfortable and well-ordered existence. A Baker gave its good residents their daily bread, a Tailor put fine clothes upon their backs, and a Blacksmith supplied all that was needed to keep horse and

wagon in good order. The surrounding farms provided a bounty of fresh produce, and for one of the finer delicacies of life there resided a Cheesemaker, one of great skill who had, for the purposes of this story, a son who did not like cheese.

It was on an overcast and shadowed afternoon that Ignatius Wallot stood upon the crest of a hill and looked down towards the village of Bremn. Since leaving his family's cave in the far western mountains he had been searching, his intention to find a comfortable bridge and build for himself a Trollhouse of his own. Over many hills and many fields he had travelled, keeping far from the notice of men but taking a sheep or two every so often just because he could. Ignatius Wallot had no real intention of causing great harm in his life, but he was a Troll and it was in his nature to be obnoxious and sometimes cruel.

Unlike most Trolls however, Ignatius had always appreciated the value of a good plan. Before leaving his Troll-kin in the far mountains he had made himself a list, a catalogue of sorts detailing all the possible bridges in the east that might serve him well. In his search he had found a number of bridges but all had been discounted. They were either too short, too low or not sturdy enough for his purposes. When he saw the bridge at Bremn however, he stopped himself in his tracks for he knew that he had indeed found his home.

Standing at the southern approach to the village the bridge stood sturdy and long in span. The river it crossed ran wide and deep but travelled quietly beneath the bridge in a languid flow. It was a true thing of beauty and Ignatius immediately fell in love with it. He could see in his mind's eye a neat Trollhouse beneath its northern-most arch, nestled close upon the river bank, with strong walls and a stone fireplace for roasting mutton.

The village itself stood only a short distance further to the north and Ignatius could see in its neatly ordered roofs and white painted walls the possibility also of building a Troll-hoard. Like most Trolls he appreciated all shiny things and resolved quickly that anybody who might wish to use his bridge would have to pay a shiny toll to do so. Many shiny things put together in the one place would build his Troll-hoard and if, by chance or design, he might have another Troll to stay he could show off his hoard. Much, he thought, to the envy and

chagrin of his visitors. That was his plan and being a Troll of great energy he saw no reason to delay.

The news that a Troll had taken up residence beneath Bremn Bridge spread quickly through the village and its surrounding farms. No inhabitant of the area had ever seen a Troll before and a number of meetings were held to determine what should be done. Much was said of the dangers of such creatures, and many rumours were spread of the possibly vile and malicious acts it might perpetrate in the name of wanton cruelty and nastiness. With no other course available the village took a vote and agreed without dissension that the Troll must go.

This was however, easier said than done for no person in the village had any knowledge of Trolls. If they were to remove the creature from beneath their bridge it was unanimously decided that without delay they would need to consult a specialist.

With this purpose in mind messengers were dispatched with great haste to the larger towns that could be found to the north and south of Bremn. To their vexation and dismay they found no Troll removal experts. Instead their messengers returned to Bremn with stories to recount of other villages that had attempted to remove their Trolls, and the disasters that had quickly befallen them. In answer to these unwelcome responses messengers were sent with greater urgency to the west and the east, as far as the Palace itself but all to no avail. It was said politely in answer to all enquiries that such matters were the responsibility of the local authority. In this case it would be up to the Mayor of Bremn himself to rid his village of their Troll problem. By coincidence the Mayor, a part-time position of little authority in Bremn, just happened also to be the Cheesemaker.

In crisis the village met again in dire session. Whilst the village's messengers had been scouring the Kingdom for answers Ignatius had been busy, for he was indeed an industrious and energetic soul. In short order he had built his Trollhouse and stocked his larder with mutton from the nearby farms. All who crossed the bridge were now regularly being accosted for shiny things, and for a small village such as Bremn it was an impost that could not be tolerated. The cry went out, something had to be done.

Quickly a plan was formulated, another vote taken. It was decided that the Mayor should approach the Troll and convince him that he must move on. Compensation would be offered if necessary, but the creature would have to go. To all concerned it seemed a reasonable and civilised way forward. The Troll would be given the opportunity to leave peacefully, but if that did not eventuate then he would be forcibly removed. All were in agreement though nobody knew who might actually remove Ignatius. It was however, a plan and the village left it to the Cheesemaker to make it so.

For the Cheesemaker this was definitely not a good plan. He had heard tales of the cruel things done by Trolls to those who might bother them, but he was a brave man and resolved to contact the Troll on the following morning. In the dark hours of the night however, whilst resting comfortably upon his bed, the Cheesemaker realised that to simply approach the Troll without notice could be construed as improper and possibly impolite. He resolved instead to try something slightly different and devised a plan of his own, one that would require a pen, some paper, and a good supply of hard cheese.

On the following morning the Cheesemaker did not speak with Ignatius directly. Instead he knocked softly upon the Troll's Trollhouse door and left a short message written upon his best parchment paper. Wrapped within the parchment he lay a large wedge of his best hard cheese, and upon the paper he had written in his best handwriting,

*Dear Sir,
If it is convenient I would like to speak with you
tomorrow morning at nine regarding matters of some
importance to the village. I do hope you like cheese.
Regards from the Mayor of Bremn.*

The Cheesemaker did not know that Ignatius could not read at all. He had tried his letters when he had been a Trolling and had found them frustrating and uncomfortable. In this he had not been alone of course. Trollings were routinely dropped on their heads and the same fate had befallen most of his brothers and sisters. Luckily a mastery of letters was not a skill required by a Troll in the normal course of their day. Until now it had not been important to him and as he turned the paper about in his fingers he gave it no thought. What lay wrapped inside however, was a completely different matter.

Pulling apart the thick parchment he felt his breath draw back into his enormous lungs. Immediately the cheesy, pungent aroma filled his large nostrils and he stood motionless, every square inch of his skin tingling with the joy of what he had been given. In his mind this was a gift of unusual value and he had to know who had placed it upon his doorstep. Quickly he ran about the thick arch of the bridge and climbed the riverbank up onto the roadway above. Looking about he could not see anyone upon the road, and with no benefactor to thank for the kindness stood there for some time scratching his head. There was however, cheese to eat and he abandoned his search to ensure that it was consumed quickly.

Returning to his Trollhouse Ignatius found himself a knife and plate. Upon the white china the wedge of cheese seemed the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and with some delicacy he sliced down into it. It can be said that Ignatius Wallot, a Troll of many years in the world had eaten much cheese in his time. He had stolen from farmhouses across the length of the Kingdom but he had never eaten cheese such as the wedge left upon his doorstep. He could not tell whether it was because it had been freely given to him, or whether it was simply a cheese of considerable quality, but regardless of its origin or manufacture it was a wedge he could never forget. It was great cheese.

For his part the Cheesemaker did not know of the Troll's appreciation for his gift. With some trepidation he stood at the Trollhouse door on the following morning and knocked once again. From within there came a great commotion and as the Cheesemaker took a step backwards the door flung open. At its threshold Ignatius stood expectantly and looked down upon the Cheesemaker, his eyes surveying the man for any sign of more cheese. Luckily for the Mayor of Bremn he had taken it upon himself to bring a good supply.

“Sir,” he said with as much confidence as he could muster. “Might I have a few words?”

Ignatius could see a large wrapped parcel that smelled heavily of hard cheese and with an expectation of what it might contain moved aside and gestured for the Cheesemaker to enter. Once inside the Cheesemaker did what was only polite and introduced himself.

“Sir,” he said, bowing low. “The Mayor of Bremn at your service. If you have a few moments I have been asked to talk with you on a matter of some delicacy.”

The Troll looked the man up and down, but his Trollhouse was filling quickly with the odours of hard cheese and Ignatius really had no interest in speaking at length about anything else. Motioning for the Cheesemaker to sit Ignatius found a knife, and with a larger plate in hand took the round of cheese from his visitor.

What followed was a conversation wholly unexpected yet strangely comfortable. Ignatius had many questions regarding cheese and in his unrestrained enthusiasm for the subject gave the Cheesemaker little time to respond properly to any of them. By what process did the Cheesemaker produce his cheese he asked? How long had it been matured? Did he ever use herbs? Did he prefer boiled milk or raw? Was cheese made with goat's milk really cheese at all? What were his thoughts on the use of wax to preserve the rounds? Such were the questions that ushered from the Troll that the Cheesemaker quickly came to realise that in this ugly creature he had found a kindred spirit, a soul that loved cheese as much as he did making it. It was indeed a curious happenstance and in the ramshackle confines of the Trollhouse the Cheesemaker sat back and talked.

It had been many years since he had been able to hold a conversation with anyone interested in the fine detail of his craft, and it suited him well to while away a few good hours talking with the Troll. Only when the round had been fully consumed, and both souls had had their fill did the Cheesemaker take his leave. He asked if he might return on the following morning and Ignatius agreed. It would be nice he said, but he did request that the Cheesemaker bring another round with him. To this the Cheesemaker happily agreed.

Making his goodbyes the Cheesemaker left the Trollhouse and walked the short distance back to his shop in the village. To his surprise a great number of Bremn's more prominent residents were waiting at his doorstep. All did not appear happy.

“Where have you been Cheesemaker?” they asked. “Have you had any success with the Troll?”

The Cheesemaker smiled and reassured his fellow townsfolk that all was in hand. They need not worry, he said, for all was indeed well. In a few days, he added, he would report back to them with good news. Amid a general grumble of disappointment the villagers dispersed, each returning to their homes with none of them completely convinced that the Troll was about to leave. They were however, more than happy to leave the problem squarely with their Mayor, and as they left the Cheesemaker unlocked his door and closed it carefully behind him.

In truth the Cheesemaker did not know what to do. In the few hours he had talked with the Troll he believed he had made a good friend, and he was not disposed to see Ignatius run off any time soon. In the quiet of his shop he resolved to find a solution to his predicament, one that would keep the villagers happy and let his new friend remain. What that solution might be was something he would need to sleep on.

The following morning the Cheesemaker returned to the Trollhouse door. He was met at its threshold by the heavy odours of roasting mutton and it was a welcome smell indeed. The Cheesemaker had a particularly liking for well-roasted meats and when Ignatius opened the door he was quickly enveloped in a smoke saturated with the wonderful burned edges of mutton on an open fire. The Troll looked the Cheesemaker over and upon spying another round of cheese motioned for him to enter.

It is a curious thing about Trolls that may have been mentioned earlier. They are generally uncomplicated creatures that tend to return how they are treated in kind. When handled cruelly they respond the same and when shown kindness provide the same in return. It is unfortunate however, that a Troll very rarely experiences kindness and it does take them time to recognise that friendship or compassion has been offered. It is said by those who understand the Lore of Trolls that a Troll who is made an enemy will be one always, and one who is made a friend will remain so forever.

On this morning the Cheesemaker and the Troll talked of cheese and well-roasted mutton and between meals conversed on the wider issues of the world. The Cheesemaker found buried within their

conversation clues that his new friend had travelled widely and asked much of the conditions of the Kingdom beyond their farms and fields. To this Ignatius said he knew little. He did mention however, a number of things that needed to be done to keep the bridge in good repair and in was then that the Cheesemaker had a very smart idea indeed.

To Ignatius the Cheesemaker and part-time Mayor of Bremn put forward a proposition. If he was agreeable the village would employ Ignatius as an official Bridge-keeper, his job to maintain the bridge and report on the health of the river that ran beneath it. In return the village of Bremn would pay him, on the first day of each month, a small sack of shiny things for his Troll-hoard. There could be no more tolls he said, but the small sack of shiny things would be more than adequate compensation for any losses he might incur. As a bonus the town would also pay the local farmers for each of the sheep he took on the understanding that it could be no more than six per month. To the Cheesemaker it seemed a fair and honest offer and it was one that took the Wallot Troll quite by surprise.

Although he searched his memory Ignatius could not remember any of his kin ever having been “employed”. It did not seem a particularly Trollish thing to do and for more than a long moment he sat back in his Troll-made chair and considered what such a proposition might do to his Trollish reputation. The idea of being able to work upon the bridge, rather than just living beneath it, was an idea that he could not put aside easily. In the end he decided it was indeed a fair and honest offer. He did however, have two requests of his own.

The first was not unexpected. Ignatius said he would require at least two rounds of cheese per month and as his second request, the continuation of the Cheesemaker's visits at least every other day. To this the Cheesemaker and part-time Mayor of Bremn agreed. With the shaking of ill-matched hands the deal was struck, and although the Cheesemaker did not yet realise it, had made a Trollish friend for life.

Upon the conclusion of the Cheesemaker's second visit he walked slowly back into the village and was once again accosted by a larger crowd of his fellow townsfolk. To cries of when would the Troll be going the Cheesemaker raised his hands and asked for quiet. He had

been the Mayor of Bremn for many years and he knew the village folk well. They were, in their hearts, good people but like many easily scared by those things they did not understand. If he was to have their agreement about his deal with Ignatius he would have to sell the benefits of it to the town in terms they would find advantageous. He decided a straightforward and truthful approach would serve best.

Firstly he proclaimed that on this morning he had saved the village a considerable amount of money. The bridge was to be repaired and properly maintained and it would cost the good people of Bremn no more than a small sack of shiny things, and a few sheep per month, to ensure the bridge's good order. To this all the villagers fell silent.

Secondly he declared that it would be the Troll, Ignatius Wallot who would do the work as the official Bridge-keeper of Bremn. To this the silence did not last. Calls to force the Troll out were exceeded only by the calls for the Mayor to be immediately impeached and it took the Cheesemaker some minutes to calm the crowd. The bad news had been delivered, now he needed to give them a reason to accept it.

“Friends,” he said eventually, “We cannot force the Troll out of his home. You have heard the tales told by our messengers of what happens to those who try to do so. For whatever reason Ignatius Wallot, for that is his name, has found his home here and he will be staying no matter what we might think. If he is to stay do you not think it better that he be one of us, doing a job of value, rather than stealing from us and generally making our lives miserable?”

To this the slightly less angry crowd returned to a grumbling murmur of discontent. They had all heard the stories brought back to them from the north and south and had no wish to see such cruelties visited upon themselves. With the townsfolk now slightly less agitated the Cheesemaker explained in full the nature of his agreement, and took the time to show how much money they would save by employing Ignatius. In this the crowd found something positive and after much further discussion grudgingly agreed to employ the Troll on a trial basis. If, they said, Ignatius behaved himself for the first three months then the village would proclaim him Bridge-keeper of Bremn. To this the Cheesemaker agreed.

Now it must be said that the Cheesemaker was very pleased with his agreement with Ignatius. He had found a friend in the Wallot Troll and was glad that he would be left to live his life in peace, but he was also a practical man and could see the benefits of having the Troll around. Such creatures were little seen in the wider world and to have one associated with his village as an ally could only benefit Bremn. None of his fellow villagers could see it yet but the presence of Ignatius Wallot might have greater benefits than just a well-kept bridge. On this however, the Cheese-maker knew that it would be time alone that would prove him correct.

In the following days the village returned to its unhurried, pastoral existence. The townsfolk found themselves thinking less about the Troll that lived beneath their bridge and more about the upcoming harvest festival that had always served as the major social event of the Bremn calendar. In the distance they would sometimes notice Ignatius working upon the bridge and in time even that went unremarked. The Cheesemaker made his visits, ate well-cooked mutton and found on his frequent official inspections of the bridge the Troll to be an industrious and competent Bridge-keeper. Within the first month the bridge had been restored and a new set of solid stone balustrades set upon its walls. Such improvements did not go unnoticed and grudgingly the villagers began to see Ignatius as an acceptable member of their community. He kept to himself, as is the way of Trolls, and so time moved on.

In was shortly after Ignatius had received his second small sack of shiny things, and upon the eve of the harvest festival that trouble came to the village of Bremn. Although not a hamlet that knew either fame or much fortune the harvest festival drew people from all over the district. For two days of each year Bremn became a much larger village and the year of the new Bridge-keeper's arrival proved no different. Amongst the milling crowds could be found farmers and villagers, tradesmen, entertainers and merchants, all determined to enjoy the company of friends and the bounty provided by a good harvest.

It has never been recorded where they came from, but into this happy festival there arrived three angry young men. Short on money and determined to cause trouble they began to raise concern in the village.

Small things went missing, property was broken and money taken. Suspicion fell upon them but without proof of guilt they enjoyed the good graces of the village until the evening of the second night of the festival. Taking their ease upon the steps of the village hall the three angry young men overheard two villagers talking on the contents of the small sack given to their Bridge-keeper. The villagers did not mean any harm in their conversation but the young men heard only the makings of an easy profit. It was in their minds that they would steal the Troll's sack and beat him for good measure.

Waiting until the early hours of the morning the three angry young men crept close to the Trollhouse. Inside Ignatius lay asleep, and had no chance to defend himself as the thieves broke through his door and assailed him. With sticks and stones they beat him, their intention to force him to reveal the whereabouts of his Troll-hoard. It was something Ignatius would never give up and quickly he was battered into unconsciousness.

Dragging him outside onto the riverbank, one of the men stayed with Ignatius whilst the other two ransacked his home. Unable to find the hoard, for Trolls conceal their shiny things behind many layers of trickery, the two men returned outside and began to try and awaken their victim, slapping him about the face and yelling loudly into his overly large ears. It was in this moment of great danger that salvation came to Ignatius, and from a most unexpected source.

Walking the road above happened a weary traveller. He was a man of Bremn but one who had not seen the streets of his quiet village for many years. He was indeed the Cheesemaker's son, a man who had gone out into the world to discover what it might offer him and had now returned as a soldier of the King's Grand Army. Hearing the commotion below the soldier peered over the bridge's fine balustrade and saw in the shadows below a crumpled form, surrounded on all sides by men wielding sticks and stones.

Like his father the Cheesemaker's son was a good man, one who had seen much violence in his life and one who could not pass by whilst another soul lay in distress. Without a thought the Cheesemaker's son jumped from the bridge onto the soft earth below and took up his own long walking staff. With three swift strikes he knocked each of the

men to the ground then struck them once again, each across the temples for good measure. Arrayed upon the wet earth the men lay still, the Cheesemaker's son standing over them as other men and woman from the village ran for the riverbank.

Great was the commotion that followed. Seeing the three angry young men laid neatly upon the ground the suspicions harboured by the villagers were proven correct. Immediately a Constable was sent for, and whilst a number of the local men bound and carried away their hapless captives the remainder carefully moved Ignatius so that he might lay upon his back. Battered and bruised he was not a sight for the squeamish. The Cheesemaker knelt at his side and it was as he took his huge hand that he noticed the stranger who had saved his friend. In the dark of night he had not yet noticed who was Ignatius' benefactor but it did not take long.

Standing, he called to his son and they embraced. It had been many years and much they had to catch up on but the Cheesemaker's friend lay in distress. It was then that the son realised that it had been no man he had saved. Grotesque in form the Troll rested upon the wet earth and for a moment the Cheesemaker's son did not know what to do. Seeing his son's uncertainty the Cheesemaker lay his hand upon his shoulder and thanked him for saving Ignatius. This may be no man, he said quietly, but he is my friend and you have done him a great service. Can you help me carry him to his home?

The Cheesemaker's son could hear in his father's voice the concern he held for the battered creature, and knowing that there would be a good story to be told of its origins he nodded and stooped to take the Troll under his shoulder. It is probably not surprising to say that it took more than the two men to move Ignatius. He was a Troll after all and not a small one at that. Six men were needed to lift Ignatius from the wet ground and carry him bodily into his Trollhouse, a further three stronger men needed to manoeuvre him properly onto his Troll-sized bed. When the job was done some of the villagers said their goodbyes but most stayed. Their concern for Ignatius required they help him and in the dark of night they began.

Rolling up their sleeves the men and women of Bremn began their work. Ignatius needed to be washed and clothed, his home ordered for

a long occupation where he might be tended and cared for as he recovered. These things they did because somewhere within the few months that had passed Ignatius had ceased to be a Troll in their eyes, and instead had become a part of their community. What they would do for any of their number they would now do for him, and in the remaining hours of the night they worked to ensure he would be comfortable as he recovered.

When dawn broke the Mayor of Bremn and his son sat upon Troll-made chairs at the threshold of the Troll-house and listened as a Nurse went about her business inside. Most of the villagers had returned to their homes and in those early hours news came that three Constables had arrived to remove the angry young men to a place of safekeeping. With the Constables came advice also that the three were well-known to the authorities of the Capital and would be dealt with accordingly. There was a chance, they said, that Ignatius might have to give testimony but they were wanted for so many other crimes it appeared somewhat unlikely.

Sitting in the over-sized chairs the Cheesemaker's son asked his father how he had come to know Ignatius. The Cheesemaker retold his first conversation with his friend and everything that had transpired from it, and in the process of doing so the soldier could see that his father had found a fellow traveller in the misshapen creature. He resolved to get to know Ignatius himself and as they sat in the shadows of the bridge they talked about the long years that had passed between them. It was a conversation that lasted most of the remaining day.

Two weeks passed as Ignatius recovered from his injuries. In time bruises healed and battered limbs became whole again. It is fortunate for creatures of a Trollish disposition that they are doughty souls, hard to harm and quick to recover. It was indeed a measure of the battering Ignatius received that he needed to remain in his bed, but as the days passed he arose and found his voice once again.

His first concern lay with finding a proper account of what had happened and who had helped him. Many of the villagers who came to tend Ignatius gave him their own story on the events of that awful night. Some were accurate, others not so much so, but all told of the courage of the Cheesemaker's son and of the efforts taken by all to

help Ignatius back to health. Upon hearing this Ignatius had to pause and think long and hard about what had happened. He was a Troll and kindness and sacrifice were little known to him. As he listened to the accounts of his salvation he found it difficult to understand the kindness that had been shown, and even with the benefits of an already long life had no experience of how to deal with it. What he did understand however, and he felt it to his core, was that he owed a great debt to the people of Bremn, and to the Cheesemaker's son in particular. For Ignatius the townsfolk who came to his aid were no longer just friends they were family, and for a Troll that was a very serious Trollish thing indeed.

With Ignatius' return to good health the life of Bremn also returned to normal. Years passed far quicker than they should and in those years the village of Bremn prospered. The concerns felt for having a Trollish Bridge-keeper faded and in their place came a curiosity that brought many visitors to Ignatius' Trollhouse door. Many who journeyed through the village wished to meet with Bremn's most unusual resident and Ignatius bore the intrusions as best he could. Indeed the village found itself host to many visitors and soon the merchants and boarding houses of Bremn were doing very well indeed. In very short order the village grew into a town, and soon boasted its very own Constable, though the position had not yet been filled, and a proper Town Hall.

Bremn prospered and upon its outskirts Ignatius kept his bridge in good order. It stood however, no longer at a distance from the village as he had first known it. The growth of Bremn had pushed the town to the banks of the river but he found he did not mind the closeness of Men any more. He would never have admitted it to himself but his life as a Bridge-keeper had changed him. Friendship and kindness had shaved the hard edges from his shoulders, and he had instead begun to see the possibility that a Troll might be able to live a happy and satisfied life after all. It was a thought that plagued him often for he was still, above all other things a Wallot Troll, and just below the surface there would always lurk a Wallot Troll's nature. As he worked upon his bridge his only real fear resided in the possibility that he might one day disappoint his new family.

His concerns were soon forgotten however, with the arrival of an unexpected knock upon his door. Standing at his threshold was the village Butcher, a man that Ignatius knew enjoyed the smell of roasted meats as much as himself, but who had in the past been unhappy to accept his residence as Bridge-keeper. The man held his hat in his hand and asked if he might enter. As Ignatius had just taken a very nice rack of mutton ribs from his fire he invited the Butcher inside.

After accepting a meal of well-roasted mutton the Butcher stated his reason for disturbing Ignatius' peace. Politely he asked the Bridge-keeper if he had ever heard of a new-fangled sport known as a "Tug of War". In truth Ignatius could not say that he had, and with visions in his head of carnage and excessive property damage asked what a Tug of War might be. The Butcher explained that as Bremn was now officially, and apparently proclaimed by Royal Decree, a town of some import it had been invited to participate in the annual Royal Tug of War Tournament in the nearby town of Dussel.

The game, the Butcher explained, required two teams of men and a very long length of rope. Each team would take up an end of that thick and sturdy rope and attempt to pull the other team across a central mark on the ground. The Butcher declared openly that he had never seen such a contest himself, but he had heard that it was a great entertainment and considerable prestige went to the town that prevailed. More importantly a silver trophy was the prize, and as he explained further he mentioned that it might look very nice indeed displayed in Bremn's new Town Hall.

Over a large wedge of hard cheese Ignatius asked the Butcher what such a contest might have to do with him. The Butcher replied that he wanted Ignatius to be a part of their team. It had been mentioned in passing conversation that as Ignatius was both large and immensely strong he might be a good fit for such a competition. The Butcher also offered an opinion that with him as a part of their team they might actually win.

Ignatius scratched his head, as Trolls are want to do when they are unsure about something, but the allure of a large and shiny trophy was something he could not easily ignore. He agreed to join the team and shook the Butcher's large hand to seal his commitment.

There was however, one possible impediment said the Butcher. To fully participate in the tournament it had been stated in the rules that all players must be Subjects of the Crown. It was, after all, a Royal Tournament. This was not necessarily a problem, he continued, but did Ignatius know if he was a Subject to the King? Ignatius scratched his head again, shrugged his large shoulders and replied that he did not know. Such a question had never been asked of a Troll and he had to admit that he did not know how to go about finding out.

The Butcher told Ignatius not to worry. He had a friend in the Law who could clarify Ignatius' status within the Kingdom, and if all went well he could have an answer within a few days. It would no doubt require the study of a few books and a conversation or two with his Learned Friend, but there should be little trouble in getting the answer they needed. Neither the Butcher or Ignatius himself were ever made aware of the storm they would generate from such a simple question.

With much work to do organising the town's new team for the Royal Tournament the Butcher forwarded a short letter to his Learned Friend in the Law. What, he asked as politely as he felt necessary, was the status of Trolls within the Kingdom? Could they be classed as Subjects of the Realm or were they not? The Butcher's Learned Friend did not know the answer himself for he had never been asked for such an opinion before, but he did know someone who might, and in the next mail forwarded a letter to a Learned Friend of his acquaintance in the Capital.

The Butcher's Learned Friend's Learned Friend was in fact a Judge, and upon receipt of the inquiry sat behind his large desk and considered the unusual request. Intrigued, he considered it from all its pertinent angles and once he had taken many large books from his bookcase realised that it was a question without precedent. If he was to determine the answer he would need to consult with others.

Quickly he forwarded a copy of the letter to all his Learned Friends. This was not a simple question they replied. Here was a question of Law that had never been asked of the Royal Courts and it would, by necessity require study, legal argument and possibly they hinted, the convening of a Royal Commission.

When the King heard of the legal rumblings within his courts he summoned his Chief Justice and asked what was going on. The Chief Justice replied that one of his learned Judges had raised a matter of law regarding the status of Trolls within his Highness' Kingdom, and in consequence they were conducting a preliminary hearing to determine an answer. The King saw the novelty of the question and asked to be kept informed of its progress.

It came to pass very quickly that a Hearing was convened. A bench of nine Wiggled Judges sat before a dozen seated Barristers and all began the deliberation of the question that had never been raised before. Was a Troll a Subject of the King? It was a question that once reported upon by the press fired up the entire Kingdom.

In Bremn the Butcher and the Bridge-keeper were unaware of the turmoil they had instigated. In the courts of the land a fierce legal argument raged and upon every street corner men and women debated what should be the rights of Trolls, and the consequences of allowing a Troll to be a Subject of the King. Some thought it ridiculous, others built underground shelters and stocked up on food, but most were simply intrigued, and luckily for the Kingdom the answer was quickly settled.

It was determined by a hearing of the Royal Courts that in spite of their sometimes criminal behaviour a Troll born within the Kingdom was automatically a Subject of the Crown. No Wiggled Judge could doubt that such creatures were intelligent and much evidence was presented to say that it would indeed be unfair to treat them any differently. It was also rumoured, said one of the Wiggled Judges, that one such Troll had been employed as a Bridge-keeper somewhere in the south of the Kingdom, and in that capacity had proven himself a competent and industrious employee. If one Troll could be a valued Subject of the Crown why not them all?

In a unanimous decision the Wiggled Judges affirmed that a Troll born within the boundaries of the Kingdom was indeed a Subject of the Crown, and with that question resolved turned to other matters of similar import. News travelled quickly and it was only a few days later that the Butcher received a letter from his Learned Friend in the Law. He was happy to report, he wrote, that after considerable legal

work on his behalf it had been determined that a Troll was indeed a Subject of the Crown. Ignatius could participate in the Royal Tournament at Dussel, and mentioned in passing that an invoice detailing his efforts on the Butcher's behalf would follow in the next post.

For the Butcher the news could not have come quickly enough. Only three days remained until the tournament and as Ignatius returned to his work the town prepared, for there remained much still to do. Uniforms had to be tailored, equipment gathered and the rules carefully studied and discussed. It was a considerable undertaking for a small town but one that was not beyond them.

On the evening before the tournament there came another knock upon Ignatius' door. In the Butcher's arms he held an over-sized uniform, resplendent in light blue and edged with white satin cloth. It could be said that Ignatius was not overly impressed. Nobody had mentioned anything about uniforms and he looked upon the brightly coloured cloth with considerable mistrust. There was however, a shiny trophy to be won and he took the clothing from the Butcher nonetheless. At first light, the Butcher reminded him, they would leave for Dussel.

Although he would not say it to the Butcher, it seemed to Ignatius that this Tug of War was a frivolous thing. What good purpose could come from it he thought as he settled himself for sleep. It was however, something he was learning about his human friends. Things that for a Troll might hold great moment, like a well-ordered Bridge, or a particularly odorous cheese, were of only passing importance to the townsfolk of Bremn. He had been lucky he mused, that he had found a town that indeed needed a well-ordered bridge, and a friend in the Cheesemaker who held a passion for hard cheese as strong as his own. He realised that if he was to remain a part of Bremn he would have to try this Tug of War and discover what all the fuss might be. The uniform looked tight, he thought as he fell into sleep.

As good as his word the Butcher knocked upon Ignatius' door upon the first glimmers of morning. Ignatius had carefully attired himself in his uniform and had been mildly surprised to find that it fit very well indeed. Grabbing up a bag filled with cold mutton, bread and hard cheese Ignatius climbed the riverbank and found upon the road a

large wagon, upon which there resided seven other members of the Tug of War team. All were large men, the Butcher and his son the largest, the Blacksmith and his nephew the strongest, and three other men of generous stature conscripted to make up the eight required by the tournament rules. With Ignatius, who was easily twice the size of all the others as anchor, Bremn had indeed gathered itself a formidable team.

Together the Men and Troll of Bremn made the journey to Dussel. Ignatius had never ridden in a wagon and to accommodate all the team members the Butcher had acquired a sturdy timber wain for the day. Sturdy as it was the horses that pulled it found themselves labouring under the weight of its cargo. By mid-morning the horses needed rest and the Butcher drew their transport to the road's edge.

With time to spend whilst the horses took water the Men and Troll of Bremn talked on the upcoming tournament. None had engaged in a Tug of War before and much time was given to speculation on how well they might do. All gave thoughts on the matter including Ignatius, but by the conversation's end it had been generally agreed that only time would give them their answers. When the horses were again fit for travel the men clambered aboard, however Ignatius remained on the road. If they were to make the tournament on time, he explained, it would be better that he led the horses rather than ride upon the wagon. It was a circumstance the men of Bremn were uncomfortable with for they had found Ignatius to be good company, but they could see his point and let him take the lead.

In that manner the Men and Troll of Bremn made their way to Dussel. At the front strode Ignatius, his large hand gripping the reins of both horses as he followed the road. Upon the wagon the Men of Bremn watched the hills slowly move about them, the sum of their conversations spent on Tug of War and the unknowns soon to be discovered.

Dussel came into view at the bells of Midday. The Men and Troll of Bremn stopped upon a rise in the roadway and looked down a long, shallow hillside towards the town. In the bright light of day it was a most impressive sight. Standing upon a hill of moderate proportions Dussel was a large walled town, its houses and public buildings

nestled behind walls and towers that on this day were festooned with brightly coloured flags and banners. On open ground before the town's main gates there spread a collection of tents and marquees, arranged about a rectangular area of mown grass. At the edge of this rectangle a stand had been erected, one that was steadily filling with a colourful array of spectators. At all points of this ground flags and banners moved in the breeze. It was indeed one of the most wonderful sights Ignatius had ever seen.

The tournament was scheduled to begin in the first hour after midday and with no time to spare the Men and Troll of Bremn found their tent and prepared themselves for the games to come. Quickly they were met by a number of officials, given the roster of rounds and told that, as they were a new participant to the sport they should watch the first few rounds to obtain a better understanding of how the game was conducted.

On this point the Men and Troll of Bremn could not have agreed more. As a group they made for the edge of the field and watched as the first teams to compete strode onto the cleared ground. For all it was quite an education. First to compete were the teams of Dussel and a town from the far west named Gorendale. Arrayed in their colourful uniforms the teams took up their rope and arranged themselves for the battle to come. It was nothing like anything the Men or Troll of Bremn could have expected.

Taking up the strain against the tightening rope each team began to move in unison, pulling as one as they fought to drag the other towards a clear mark, painted between them in white lime on the mowed grass. It was a titanic battle of strength, movement and teamwork, each team acting as a single force, moving in a practised motion that in turn was resisted by the other. In the face of this brutal test of strength the Butcher turned to Ignatius. I think, he said quietly, we might have our work cut out for us here. Ignatius nodded in agreement. It was going to be a long day.

And so it transpired. The Men and Troll of Bremn engaged in eight great tugs of war that day and were roundly defeated in seven of them. Only in one round did they emerge victorious, the measure of their success tempered somewhat by the knowledge that the opposing team had been afflicted with a stomach condition brought about by

the consumption of incorrectly prepared chicken. Ignatius himself could see the justice in such an outcome. Nobody, he believed earnestly, should eat birds. It just wasn't right.

Disheartened the Men of Bremn climbed back aboard their wagon, the rigours of a long day without reward a reason for quiet dejection that hung heavily upon their number. The Butcher himself was the most disappointed. He had entered the tournament with great hopes of success, but had seen from the first how truly unprepared they were. The techniques used by their opponents had quickly nullified any advantage they might have gained with Ignatius as their anchor, and the ruthless competitiveness of their rivals had seen no quarter given. They had been utterly beaten.

Ignatius however, had a great day nonetheless. It is a Troll's nature to take disappointment as it comes and the almost complete defeat of his team in the latter rounds was no more than he might have expected. He was a Troll after all, and mostly things never went to plan anyway. The day itself had been a revelation though. Immersed in the carnival atmosphere of the tournament he had seen and experienced things he had never been a part of before, and as the day progressed he thought less of their ongoing defeat and more of what the day itself had to offer.

It could be said of Trolls in general that they spend most of their time avoiding humankind rather than trying to understand them. In the midst of the Royal Tournament Ignatius found himself enveloped in the colour and pageantry of the festival, and he took what time he could to experience everything going on about him. The food he ate, the musicians he listened to and the entertainments he watched. In the main it was an overwhelming blur of movement and noise that, if he was being truthful to himself, he did not fully understand but otherwise quite enjoyed. He did wish though that there had been more fighting. He would have liked that too.

Of all the things he discovered on that day his greatest satisfaction focused upon a strange new sugary concoction called cotton candy. In his life he had never tasted anything like it and in the midst of the day's exertion ate a great deal. He figured that if he was to enjoy that sweet treat again he would need to convince the team to return to the

tournament in the following years. Looking at the state of his fellow team-members as they climbed aboard their wagon, he expected that ideas of any further participation might prove unwelcome.

As had been the case with the Butcher, Ignatius had seen from the first round that they had not been prepared for the tournament. By its end however, they had been given a strong and undeniable lesson in how such games were to be played, and in the midst of that lesson had learned all that was needed to train and practise. Upon the journey home Ignatius, who was not the most persuasive of souls at the best of times, argued that they now knew how to compete, all they needed was practice and better equipment. Looking at the different teams, he said, he could see no reason why they could not take the trophy. All that was needed was time.

It can be said that none of the Men of Bremn wanted to listen, but the seed of an idea had been planted. Within a few weeks of the tournament the Butcher again knocked upon Ignatius' door and within the month the team had begun regular training. Methods were discussed and new techniques developed. Much conversation was entered into regarding the finer points of the tournament rules, and when training was done a considerable amount of mutton and beer would be consumed. Very quickly Ignatius found himself to be a team-member and the fact that he was a Troll remained as only an advantage the team had not yet fully explored.

Months passed and with the cycle of the seasons the year moved on swiftly. In its own good time the day of the next Royal Tournament arrived and on that day Ignatius ate a great deal of cotton candy. Better prepared for the battles to come the Men and Troll of Bremn took up their rope and from the start made good use of the skills learned in their long hours of practice. It can be reported that Bremn won five of its eight rounds that year and returned home with a third-place bronze cup. It was not silver but it was a start.

With trophy in hand the Men and Troll of Bremn journeyed home. News of their success spread quickly before them and by the time their old timber wagon had made the town its residents were out in force, a grand welcome given as the team made its way through the streets. For Ignatius this was most confusing. They had not yet won

the silver cup but everyone seemed very pleased nonetheless. The Cheesemaker, who wore his new robes of office as a now, full-time Mayor, officially welcomed their team back, made an appropriately eloquent speech and gave each a small medallion to commemorate their success. For Ignatius a large round of cheese was also offered and eagerly accepted.

With the Royal Tournament now behind them for another year the maintenance of his beloved bridge became Ignatius' main concern once again. Visitors still arrived upon his door and as he had done in the past he tolerated the intrusions as best he could. It was on one particularly dark night however, that he received a knock upon his door that was very familiar. It was not the polite rap he might expect from one of the townsfolk. This was a solid thump, not repeated more than twice and made by a heavy fist.

At his door stood one of his Troll-kin, a Wallot he knew as Cousin Lagmord. It can be said that Lagmord was a particularly large Troll and framed in Ignatius' doorway he was an imposing figure, clothed in a leather travel cloak and topped by an immense, wide-brimmed felt hat. He had the slumped shoulders of a Troll who had travelled a great distance so Ignatius immediately invited him inside.

Lagmord took a chair in Ignatius' kitchen, and as is the way of Wallot Trolls Ignatius offered food. Soon a round of hard cheese, a side of mutton ribs and a half-barrel of beer were being noisily consumed. It had been some time since Ignatius had eaten in the company of kin and he was glad to enjoy his food with another Troll who knew how to eat properly. One side of mutton disappeared quickly and soon another was well on the way. Lagmord spent some time on the cheese however. Never in his existence, he proclaimed, had he ever eaten such a cheese, and as is the way of Wallots had many questions on its make and origin. It was not until the early hours of the morning, and only after he had eaten his fill, that Lagmord explained why he had found himself at Ignatius' door.

Much to Ignatius' surprise Lagmord declared that he was famous, apparently. His exploits as the Bridge-keeper of Bremn, and his participation in the Royal Tournament at Dussel, had been closely followed by his kin in the far mountains, his success a point of much

discussion and considerable argument. For many Wallots he was a Troll of distinction, for others not so much so, but all of the Troll-kin knew the name of Ignatius Wallot. Lagmord told him sincerely that many of his kin wanted to be just like him.

To this end Lagmord had travelled from the far mountains, his intention to discover how Ignatius had found success and then mirror that success under a bridge of his own. In answer to this Ignatius replied that he had been more than fortunate in his dealings with the people of Bremn. He had been befriended by the Cheesemaker and all that had followed had been the product of a good-sized measure of luck and a considerable amount of hard work. In talking with Lagmord Ignatius explained the agreement he had made with the people of Bremn, and as a consequence of that agreement the great Troll-hoard he had accumulated in keeping to it. At the mention of the Troll-hoard Lagmord's eyes widened and Ignatius smiled. Rising from his chair he asked if his cousin would like to see it.

It must be mentioned here and now that there are many things that Trolls enjoy. A sturdy bridge is uppermost when considering those things, a good cheese and roasted mutton close behind in their estimation, but in their social discourse nothing is enjoyed more than unrestrained bragging. For a Troll the opportunity to skite freely and openly on one's success is something that can never be ignored, and a decent Troll-hoard had always been the best measure of that success. When asked if he would like to see it Lagmord, of course, could not say no.

Now it cannot be recorded at this time where Ignatius' Troll-hoard was located for that should remain secret, nor openly could he expose the trickery employed to keep it hidden, but once opened Lagmord could see how successful Ignatius had become. By any measure Ignatius was a rich Troll, his shiny things piled in large wooden chests that glittered in his torch's light. As a Troll Ignatius had no real need for money, however most of his accumulated hoard consisted of silver coin, nicely shined cutlery and plate, a plethora of jewellery and collections of miniature silver animals for which he held a particular regard. Lagmord could only stand in wonder at his cousin's success and eagerly listened as Ignatius bragged of each acquisition. There were stories to tell and Lagmord listened to them all.

For three days Lagmord stayed with his cousin, and in the midst of their discourse Ignatius had an idea. The town of Kolbrook lay five days walk to the east, and it had in its possession a bridge of some repute. Ignatius explained he had heard of the bridge during the last tournament, the town of Kolbrook also participating. What if, he ventured, Lagmord approached the town Aldermen to become their official Bridge-keeper. He could offer the same deal as Ignatius had been offered, and throw in the additional advantage that he would join the Kolbrook Tug of War team. The only risk to such a proposition would be that they might say no.

Lagmord could see the wisdom in Ignatius' idea and agreed to have a go. He would have to look at the bridge, of course, but he was sure he could make it work. Emboldened by such a bold plan Lagmord left his cousin's Troll-house the next morning and struck out eastwards towards Kolbrook. If he was lucky, he said, he would see Ignatius at next year's Royal Tournament. To that Ignatius waved him farewell and returned to his kitchen to eat some more mutton.

It should be mentioned that in the year that followed Ignatius had more than a few of his kin come visiting. Rumours of his Troll-hoard and the fame of his hospitality had spread widely amongst the Troll-kin, and as the months followed he found himself entertaining both the high and the low of Troll society. Most came for a free meal as they went about their own business in the wider world, but a few came to learn from Ignatius, and soon he had become a mentor to other Trolls looking to be Bridge-keepers of their own.

It was indeed fortunate that the Kingdom possessed many fine bridges and with the help of the Cheesemaker, Ignatius was able to refer them on to those towns that were looking for respectable Troll Bridge-keepers. Soon Ignatius began to receive letters from towns looking to employ his kin, though he could not help noticing that most of those towns were also Bremn's competition in the Royal Tournament. To all these letters Ignatius gladly referred his cousins.

It came to pass that Bremn's third Royal Tournament proved to be its most successful. Having applied their previous experience and having honed their skills the team, which was now called the Bremn Bulls, gave a good account of itself. Ten teams entered the tournament and

Bremn beat them all. In a dazzling display of technique the Bulls swept their opponents aside and in a final, epic battle with Dussel took the Royal Cup.

It can be said without danger of overstatement that this was a remarkable achievement for every other team in the competition had, in the course of the year, also acquired a Troll of their own. It had come as a considerable surprise to the Butcher but Ignatius pleaded ignorance on how it might have come to pass. The sight of so many Trolls in the one place, and the brute strength that they were able to bring to the spectacle, only heightened the roars of the crowd and sweetened the taste of Bremn's success.

With Royal Cup in hand the victorious Bulls made their return home. The news of their great victory raced before them, and somehow in its delivery included rumours of ferocious Trolls and equally ferocious battles of wit and strength. By the time of their arrival home the town lay in great excitement and such were the celebrations no member of the Bulls could lay their head down for two straight days.

News of Bremn's resounding victory spread wide upon the Kingdom. The King himself had seen the great spectacle and in the weeks that followed visited the town, and to Ignatius' great annoyance visited with the Troll in his Troll-house. It proved to be only a short stay but the King thanked Ignatius for his help in securing Bridge-keepers for the other competitors, and promised from that day forth that all Trolls in his realm would be treated well. It was a promise that the King and his descendants kept until the Kingdom itself was no more.

With Bremn's new-found fame there also came other happy news. The Cheesemaker's son had returned to the Grand Army and after concluding his service applied to become the first Constable of Bremn. Such a position was granted to him and it was with considerable fanfare that he was installed as Custodian of the Law for the town and its surrounding farmlands. This greatly pleased the Cheesemaker. His son had returned home to him, safe now from the perils of war and content to live a settled life in a peaceful town.

Such could have been the end of this story, Ignatius a Troll of means, the remainder of his days spent enjoying the company of good friends,

his life as a Bridge-keeper secure. Such it would have been but for the return of three angry men.

It was in the darkest of nights, beneath a clouded sky that three angry men returned to Bremn. No longer young, these men harboured a great hatred of the Cheesemaker's son and blinded by that hatred had resolved to take vengeance upon him. Being the cowards they were the angry men brought others with them, vagabonds and thieves from the larger towns of the Kingdom, all drawn together by promises of violence and the riches of a Trollish hoard. In the darkness they advanced upon the town, their intent to do harm to the Cheesemaker's son and take for themselves the treasure that had been denied them all those years before.

Against them stood only the first Constable of Bremn. It was his custom to patrol the streets in the early evening, and as it happened was standing at the northern end of the bridge when he spied a number of dark shapes moving swiftly across the fields towards the town. All that lay between them was the river, the only way across the bridge upon which he was standing. He did not know who they were but he resolved quickly that he would not let them pass until he had found out.

Quickly the many shapes came together at the other end of the bridge, and confronted by at least two dozen men he called for them to halt and state their business. In reply the gang just laughed and sneered, their intentions unmistakable even in the dark. All pulled sharp weapons from beneath their cloaks and as one advanced purposefully down the length of the bridge towards the Cheesemaker's son. Apart from a short wooden baton, and a whistle that he carried with him always, he was unarmed.

Beneath the bridge Ignatius sat before a crackling fire, his thoughts wandering as he relaxed after a day filled with work and visitors. He had just replaced a section of the bridge's cobbled roadway and felt pleased with its completion, but as he sat considering what he might do next he heard a sound he was all too familiar with. It was the jeering of cruel voices, those given easily to anger and brutality. Rising from his chair he listened with greater intent and felt then the movement of many men running across the bridge's roadway. He

knew his bridge and he could recognise the sound of everything that might pass upon it. Another round of cruel laughter confirmed his suspicions. There was trouble above and that meant his family was in danger. Grabbing up a large club he kept near his front door he ran out into the night.

For his part the Constable of Bremn knew he had no way of stopping the advancing gang. With only a baton at hand he had no ability to properly defend himself, he could only hope to hold them long enough that an alarm might be raised within the town. Searching his pockets for his whistle he put it to his lips but before he could blow a warning a huge dark shape reared up behind him, grabbed him firmly by the collar of his uniform and dragged him off the bridge.

Now it should be said, as it is not generally known, that Trolls are magical beings. People see them as odious, uncouth creatures but in their own way they possess considerable power to change themselves when they, or their family, are threatened. For some Trolls this power exhibits itself as a capacity to become invisible, for others an ability to become extraordinarily small and avoid detection. For Wallots it is something quite different. In the face of danger they become large, very large. And so it was for Ignatius.

As the Bridge-keeper climbed the riverbank and turned about the edge of the bridge he saw the Cheesemaker's son standing alone in the dark as the gang of hooded men advanced towards him. He could have saved himself, as so many Trolls might have done, but the man who stood so bravely against so many was family and needed help. In that instant Ignatius knew exactly what he had to do.

Thrusting his hand into the soft earth he closed his eyes and imagined the soil itself being drawn over his body. Immediately the earth began to move, forming a thick skin of dirt and tangled grass that matted itself about his form, twining roots and leaves in an armoured layer that no sword or arrow could penetrate. It was his anger however, that gave him his true power. In a roiling cloud of blue light his magic took hold, building him to twice his normal size, and in his rage he advanced upon the angry men. It would be the last, terrifying thing they would ever see.

Regaining his feet the Cheesemaker's son took hold of his baton and ran back onto the bridge. To the south a great storm was building beyond the hills, and silhouetted against the flashes of lightning that filled its clouds the Cheesemaker's son could see Ignatius attack the bandits. Outlined against the lightning as dark but sharply defined forms he could do nothing but watch as Ignatius wielded his club, swinging it down like a thunderbolt upon the hapless men. Some tried to stand their ground but Ignatius swept them away. The rest began to run and Ignatius chased them down, delivering each a blow that flattened them bodily into the wet earth. None of the men made it further than a stone's throw from the Bridge and all met their doom beneath the rough edges of Ignatius' enormous club.

The battle lasted no more than a single, lethal minute and as Ignatius walked back to his friend he could tell something was not right. Breathing heavily in the cold night air Ignatius stood tall, his earthen tangled frame towering over the Cheesemaker's son. He had protected his family but there was something definitely wrong, the magic that resided within him should have dissipated quickly. Instead he could feel it growing, building like a storm and running wild. Turning to the Cheesemaker's son he yelled for the man to run, but the Constable was not about to leave his friend to some unknown fate.

"What is it?" he yelled into the growing wind. Ignatius turned to his friend but he could not answer. Something had taken hold of him from deep within, the magic paralysing him as it worked its way through his body. With all the strength that Ignatius had left he extended his hand towards the Cheesemaker's son. Without thinking the Constable took hold of it.

What happened next cannot be recounted by the first Constable of Bremn but was witnessed by many of the townsfolk who attended the scene. In an eruption of magic the Cheesemaker's son was engulfed in a bright aura of light, his body transfixed as the Troll magic tried to take a hold upon him as well. Such would have been the fate of both Troll and Man but for the arrival of a great crowd from the town. In desperation the Butcher and his son tried to pull the two souls apart and in their turn were quickly engulfed as well. Seeing his son in the grip of some unknown force the Cheesemaker pulled at them all, but was himself strongly afflicted.

It was the Cheesemaker's new apprentice, a smart lad of no more than twelve years that broke the chain of magic holding the men in thrall. Running to the river the boy found a bucket and filled it with water. Before any of the crowding townsfolk could stop him he threw the pail's contents over Ignatius. In a pounding detonation the wild magic that held Ignatius and the Men exploded outwards, throwing them all into the air and flattening everyone else who stood upon the bridge. All about the townsfolk the wild magic spiralled, its power feeding off the approaching storm before being swallowed up into the clouds above. Only then, and for just a moment, did all become silent.

In the heartbeats that followed no soul stirred. Then there came a soft moan, then another just slightly louder, and before long a train of curses and oaths filled the air as Ignatius and the townsfolk returned to wakefulness. Rubbing bruised heads and stretching battered backs the people of Bremen came to life, regained their feet and swiftly began to account for their number. By some act of Providence no soul had been lost in the blast though it was soon discovered how many of the bandits had perished at the battle of the bridge. Their bodies lay in considerable disarray and with nothing that could be done for any of them, were laid in better order then left covered for the arrival of the Constables. All were counted however, and they numbered twenty-three.

In the midst of this accounting a squadron of Royal Cavalry arrived upon the scene. At their front rode a Commander who dismounted quickly and surveyed what was left of the bandit gang. They had been tracking these men, he said, for two days, having heard rumours of their gathering in the forests to the south. The squadron's intention, he added, had been to hunt them down, but it seemed the gang had already met an untimely and gruesome end. How, he asked, had the town brought these men so low?

To this the townsfolk of Bremn pointed to their saviour, and to this the Commander stood in wonder. Sitting on the end of the bridge's stone balustrade rested Ignatius, his clothes still smoking from the power of the wild magic that had afflicted him. Instinctively the Commander put his hand to his sword but he was stopped by the clamour of Bremn's citizenry, each a witness to the bravery of their Bridge-keeper and the steadfast courage of their First Constable. For some hours the

Commander and his Men catalogued the battlefield, for that is what they called it, and recorded the statements of each man and women that had witnessed Ignatius' defence of their town.

By morning's first light it had become clear to the Commander that a great service had been done not only to Bremn but to the Kingdom itself. Twenty-three wanted men had come together to attack the town and all had perished at the hands of the town's official Bridge-keeper. The Commander duly noted all the facts, had his men properly remove the bandits from the bridge, and asked if they might have use of a wagon to transport the remains back to the Capital. The Butcher said he had just the thing and in quick order returned with the Bremn Bulls wagon. Luckily, he declared, they had just purchased a new transport of their own for the Royal Tournament and the Commander should find it in good order.

In truth the Commander had never seen or heard anything like it. The town had been saved, men of proven violence and brutality had been overwhelmed by a single soul standing upon a sturdy bridge, and through all his questions and inquiry not a single witness had referred to Ignatius as a Troll. It was a circumstance of such unusual moment that he immediately forwarded a full report to his Commanding General.

For Ignatius' part he was very sore indeed. He did not know why his magic had become wild but in the cool morning air he could sense that any magical power he possessed had now left him. It was a loss however, that he could live with. If he was to deal with any bandit gangs in the future he resolved that he would have to do so as Ignatius Wallot alone. There were other things however, that required his attention and before any other considerations he needed to determine if his friends were alright.

Within the milling townsfolk he found each propped against the bridge's balustrade, their injuries well tended and talking quietly amongst themselves. Immediately Ignatius apologised for their discomfort but his friends would not hear it. Ignatius had done them a great service they said, and they should instead be thanking him. Ignatius thought on this and decided it best not to argue the point. Instead he searched out the Cheesemaker's apprentice and thanked

him for his timely action. If ever, he offered sincerely, the boy needed a large Troll for any purpose then he would be at his service. To this the Cheesemaker's apprentice politely bowed and accepted his thanks.

Such would have been a good time to end the story of the Troll of Bremn but for the fact that the tale is not yet done. Upon the receipt of the Commander's report the Commanding General made a further report to the King himself. News of the Battle of Bremn had spread far and wide, indeed beyond the borders of the Kingdom itself, and with the Commanding General's report in hand the King decided he should take an unscheduled trip into the countryside.

Without notice the King in full regalia made progress to the town of Bremn, his purpose to visit with the official Bridge-keeper regarding a matter of great importance. His royal progress through the town did not go unnoticed and soon the King, his large and rather impressive entourage, and the town's entire population stood crowded upon the riverbank around Ignatius' Trollhouse. Ignatius was not impressed by the interruption and expressed his displeasure loudly.

“What do you want?” he yelled in answer to the King's knock. “Don't you people know I'm busy?” In answer the King knocked again and with the help of the Cheesemaker coaxed Ignatius out into the light of day. Standing before the King, Ignatius scratched at his head and waited for whatever was to happen. He had learned that the best response to most of the things humans wanted to do was simply to wait until they were finished, and that is what he did.

To all who stood together upon that riverbank the King proclaimed that Ignatius Wallot, official Bridge-keeper to the town of Bremn would be known from that day forward as a Protector of the Realm. To this the townsfolk gasped for such an honour had not been proclaimed for many years. In addition, he added, Ignatius Wallot would be registered as a Troll of Good Name, a position for which he would be provided one small bag of shiny things on every anniversary of the battle. To this Ignatius' ears pricked. Here was something definitely worth listening to, and he stood all the straighter as the King offered him a silver plaque, upon which had been inscribed his proclamation as Protector. Ignatius eagerly accepted the plaque, for it was indeed a particularly shiny thing, but as he leant forward to take

it he whispered to the King if he was actually required to do anything to keep it. To this the King smiled and replied no. It was, he answered, an honorary title though one of great prestige and rarely given.

In reply Ignatius offered the King the hospitality of his Troll-house and the possibility of some particularly good roasted mutton. The King accepted the offer but before entering the confines of Ignatius' home declared to all who stood upon the riverbank that the day would stand as a public holiday, to which all present should apply themselves diligently to food, drink and the enjoyment of good music. All, he added quickly, at the expense of the Crown. To this there erupted great cheers and all present retired to the taverns of Bremn to celebrate Ignatius' good fortune.

It can be reported that the King enjoyed the Bridge-keeper's roasted mutton. It had been a long time since he had been able to relax beyond the watchful eyes of his entourage and it felt good to sit in Ignatius' kitchen, the cares of his Realm postponed for at least a few hours. They talked at length of matters regarding the world as experienced by Trolls and the King listened carefully. He did however, have one question of a personal nature for the Bridge-keeper, and it proved to be somewhat unexpected.

Could he, the King whispered, see Ignatius' Troll-hoard? It transpired after some interrogation that the King had a liking for shiny things, and having heard the rumours that he would find a fellow traveller in the Bridge-keeper wished to view his collection. The King, of course, promised to show Ignatius his hoard in return.

This was unexpected but not unwelcome. The capacity for a Troll to brag about his hoard to another Troll is, as previously mentioned, almost unlimited. To find a man, let alone a King, to brag to was an opportunity no Troll could leave unanswered. Ignatius trusted his King. After all, he thought sincerely, if you can't trust a King who can you trust?

Quickly Ignatius removed a false wall from his kitchen, and behind a large sheet of crumpled parchment that looked remarkably like a solid bank of soil he uncovered the way to his Troll-hoard. Dug into the riverbank beneath the bridge Ignatius had excavated a long tunnel that in turn opened into a large room. Lined in solid wood planking it

was empty but for a neat row of equally solid wooden chests. In the light of two large torches the chests of shiny things sparkled and glimmered, their contents ordered meticulously by type and quality.

It could be considered an understatement to say the King was impressed. At length the King and his Bridge-keeper talked upon the contents of the boxes, and with considerable enthusiasm Ignatius described how he had come to acquire them. Of most interest to the King was Ignatius' collection of miniature silver animals, and on these alone the King asked many questions. His Bridge-keeper discovered that the King owned a great collection of his own for which he had a considerable regard, and after returning to the kitchen again talked at some length. The King's visit ended with a commitment that Ignatius would, at the first opportunity, travel to the Palace and view the Royal Collection. After inspecting such a fine collection, the King said, it would only be fair for Ignatius to view his.

As the King left, Ignatius asked him what would happen to the Cheesemaker's son. To this the King turned and asked Ignatius what he meant. It seemed, Ignatius replied, that he had received much praise and reward for his actions but it had been the Constable that had stood unarmed upon the bridge and faced the bandit gang. Should he not, Ignatius asked, he acknowledged as well. To this the King nodded and whispered to Ignatius. Do not be concerned, he said, the Constable would soon be rewarded.

The King proved true to his word. In the coming days the Cheesemaker's son received a letter from the Palace, requesting his attendance at a ceremony to be conducted upon his arrival. With no other information given the Cheesemaker's son journeyed to the Palace and there found himself at the centre of a grand occasion. Standing before the King the first Constable of Bremn was recognised for his bravery, elevated to the status of Gentleman of the Court and promoted to Inspector of Constables. It can be said that the Cheesemaker's son was very pleased indeed.

It is here that this story of the Troll of Bremn can come properly to an end. There is however, one final thing to be recorded and it concerns the good men of Bremn who came to Ignatius' aid. Although they survived the wild magic that had almost consumed their friend, it did

leave a mark upon them, and a very Trollish one at that. It can be said that the Butcher, the Cheesemaker and both their sons enjoyed more years in the world than they might have otherwise expected, and in the course of those years developed an unusual liking for bridges, shiny things and in particular a good-sized round of hard cheese. Needless to say this suited Ignatius Wallot very well.

The End