

Ragnar Gets Lost

Ragnar was feeling out of sorts, as if he had got out of bed on the wrong side. Not that his bed had sides, or was anything like yours or mine, of course. His was made mainly from piles of aromatic leaves, specially chosen because their scent kept insects away, and normally he found it very comfy, but not last night. Now, it was cold and cloudy, the sky threatened to hurl down sheets of rain, soaking him to the bone, and, as winter was approaching, Ragnar and his friends were on the move.

They set off, marching ever southwards, but Ragnar just felt exhausted, wishing he could curl up under the leaves again. He trudged along at the back of the group, and from time to time he blew his trumpet, but without his normal energy and exuberance. At first it was just a half-hearted toot, but as they marched, his rather random blasts began to settle into a regular pattern, and as the morning wore on, he realised he had just made up a new call. "Doo, Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo*", it went. He played it again and again and started to feel rather pleased with himself. "Doo, Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo*.... Doo, Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo!*"

Then something odd happened. He thought at first that he could hear a distant echo. It was very faint: "Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo-Dee*" it went. Ragnar knew what an echo was. When he played in the cave, he could sometimes hear the same pattern ringing around as though someone else was also playing. But he realised this was a different pattern and not an echo at all: "Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo-Dee*". There it was again! And it just wasn't what he had played. Perhaps there really *was* somebody else playing a trumpet on the other side of that hill.

Ragnar wanted to find out. He knew the route the others were taking. He had done it before. "I can always catch them up", he thought, so he gave his friend Annika his trumpet, and without telling her what he was doing, and where he was going, he bounded off. Annika was a kindly soul, and she didn't mind looking after it. After all, she was pleased to see him looking more his usual, enthusiastic self, and it meant he would no longer be quite so grumpy when he came back.

He left the track, crossed a river, scrambled through some brambles and into a wood. Floating on the breeze he could still hear scraps of melody, "*Dee-Doo-Dee*...." they went. And they were definitely louder now. Somebody was out there. He started to climb through the wood and had almost reached the top of the hill when the cloud came down and the rain started. Ragnar couldn't see more than a few paces in front of him and soon he was not only soaking wet, but completely lost as well. He wished he had told Annika where he was going and oh, how stupid he had been to leave his trumpet behind! "If only I had brought my trumpet", he muttered, "I could have called for help." For a while he did not know what to do, but as he was cold, as well as wet, one thing he was

sure about was that he did not want to stop moving. Then he heard the trumpet again, only this time it went "Doo-Doo, Dee-Doo-Dee, DOOOOO!" The call was longer and now he thought he heard it more frequently. It was as though the other trumpet player was beckoning him. "Doo-Doo, Dee-Doo-Dee, DOOOOO!" There it was again! And it now sounded as though there might be more than one person playing. Ragnar made his mind up. He must follow the direction of the calls and meet the other trumpeters. They might even be able to help him find his friends.

From the top of the hill, the only way was down. But the clouds were now so thick he could hardly see his hands in front of his face. He picked his way slowly and carefully through rocks and mud, scared that he might fall into some deep, invisible ravine. Down, down, down he climbed, and after what seemed like an age, the clouds parted. But when he looked around, he found he was in a place he did not recognise. Not even slightly. The clouds had gone and so had the trees and most of the plants. The sky was now a brilliant blue and it was very hot. As far as the eye could see, there was dust, rock and sand. More sand than Ragnar had ever seen. He was just thinking how pleased he was that the blazing sun had dried out his soaking clothes and he was starting to wonder where he might be when he got a shock: coming towards him was a procession of about a thousand people. He had never before seen that many people at once. Ragnar could hardly believe his eyes, or his ears.... There, leading them all were six other trumpeters. "Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo-Dee*, DOOOOO!" they played. "Doo, Doo, *Dee-Doo-Dee*, DOOOOO!"

John Humphries, 2016