

LUMPSTERS

'Blasters and plasters!', muttered the Giantess, shaking her head. She was annoyed with herself.

The day had not started well, as she had said to her husband before he set off for a hard day down at the forest. A pesky infant giant-killer had been poking around in the garden overnight, ripping up the beanstalks and trampling on the flowers in the rockery. The Giantess had had to go out and pick up the crushed leaves and prop up the beans again, quite forgetting that she had left the kettle on and the toast under the grill; so that, by the time she had tidied up the garden a bit, there was black smoke billowing out of the kitchen and steam everywhere. Rushing in to salvage the breakfast, the Giantess had been unable to see where she was going and had run smack into the doorpost and bashed her nose. No sooner recovered from that than she had tripped over a trail of string which the

pet baby dragon had been playing with and had broken a chair.

And now, down at the beach where the sea lapped up against the Giants' castle on the rocks, she had accidentally trodden on a creature whilst paddling; the last living ... er, something she could never remember the name of. One of those things with a big claw like a crab, but not a crab. A lurcher? A limpot? A crabster? Oh, blasters and plasters: she could never remember the name of the things! She knew what it looked like – well, what it **had** looked like until she had stepped on it, because now it looked like a sad pile of shell and bits of claw. Of course she knew what it looked like – it was sort of long and fat, with eyes on stalks – or were those some sort of feelers? And then it was bright red – or was that only in restaurants?

The Giantess sat down heavily on a rock and sighed.

‘I must do something about this,’ she said to the horizon. ‘I can’t just go around stamping on sea creatures. That was the last one. Now, who can I go and see about it?’ She placed her chin in her hands and mentally ran through the list of her acquaintances: there was the Wizard up at Breezy Bendalloch, or the Old Woman of Whiterashes – no, she was no good, deaf as a post, blind as a bat and daft as a duckpond. What about the Old Owl on Auchterlennoch Hill? He knew a thing or two. But maybe not.

The day passed slowly as the Giantess sat and thought, gloomily staring alternately at the sea and the remains of the sea creature she had so unhappily extinguished. Perhaps there was nothing else for it but to try and stick it together again... Lumpster! That was the name of the creature – a lumpster. Funny how names you try to remember suddenly hit you when you’re not really thinking about them.

‘Yes, I suppose I will.’ said the Giantess to herself, ‘I can probably put it together myself. After all, I can remember what it looks like and what it was called. It can’t be all that difficult to cobble it together somehow.’

Feeling determined, the Giantess painfully set herself down on her knees next to the heap of shell and legs which had innocently been scuttling across the rocks when the Giantess had taken her morning stroll.

‘Now, let’s see.’ She picked up bits here and bits there and examined them. She was determined to get it right. She made a neat pile of legs – there seemed to be around thirteen of them, although she didn’t think there had originally been *quite* so many – but maybe her memory was faulty. Then another pile of claws – five seemed a bit much, but then again... A pile for the broad bits of shell, and finally a pile of all the bits she was not quite sure of.

Having made the neat piles, she sat back and considered them carefully. Now then, how did the lumpster look? She decided to start as if it was one of those really tricky jigsaws with lots and lots of pieces of blue sky which your aunts give you and you don't mean it when you say thank-you. Only this one had lots of red bits.

The Giantess cleared a space and started with the head, sticking bits together for the mouth and other bits for eyes and feelers. At least there was only one possible head – this was a good start.

Then she progressed to the body. Here it was more tricky. The air was soon full of bad words and grunts, as piece after piece refused to stick to the other pieces, or the last piece jammed in pushed all the other ones out again. There were moments when the Giantess was about to throw the whole thing into the sea. But she remembered that this lumpster had been the last one in the world and so she had to put it back together properly.

At last she had the body stuck together, and after a pause for breath she stuck it to the head. Perfect! Just a couple of places where there were gaps. And perhaps the head was a bit high – but she could well imagine that the creature liked to see the sun when swimming along, and did not want to spend its time looking straight in front.

At that point she had to stop for lunch. The Giant would be back from the forest soon, hungry after doing whatever Giants got up to each day in the forest, and he always wanted his luncheon – if it was not on the table there would be a houseful of ‘Fe Fi Fo Fum!’ and all the other nonsense she had to put up with: it was not worth all the bother sometimes.

After lunch, it was back down to the beach. Now for the legs. Question: how do you stick thirteen legs evenly on a lumpster? Answer: it takes a lot of patience and considerable powers of imagination. And, well, nothing in nature is perfect. So, after an

hour or two of hard work, she had six legs down one side, six down the other and one leg stuck out the back like a tail. Even if it was not quite the same as the original, the Giantess felt that an improvement was the least she could do for the lumpster for its inconvenience, and the extra leg at the back could be useful for jumping suddenly on its prey or hopping along the sea-bottom. What a happy lumpster it would be!

The claws did not present too much of a problem. The Giantess argued with herself as to whether it had been a right-clawed or left-clawed beast, and then came down in favour of the left. Soon she held in her great hand an almost lumpster, with just a small pile of strangely-shaped bits on the rocks at her feet, whose purpose was a bit obscure. The lumpster looked up at her out of its one large eye, while simultaneously examining the rocks below with its two small eyes. Its little legs waggled about as if in eager anticipation of running around in

circles (as indeed a set of large legs on its left and small legs on its right might suggest).

After some deliberation, the Giantess decided to test the lumpster without the dratted extra bits and see how he got on. Gingerly, she put him into a shallow rock-pool which the tides had left behind. The lumpster happily scuttled in and sank like a stone to the bottom, among the sea-anemones and barnacles. Its new head gazed upwards. Bubbles emerged from a crack down one side.

‘H’m’, muttered the Giantess approvingly, ‘Not bad, not bad at all. Now perhaps...’ She lifted the lumpster out again, and stuck some of the extra bits over the crack which caused the bubbles. This time, the lumpster floated quite happily on the surface of the pool – looked like a real improvement. She had a nagging doubt as to whether lumpsters in the wild floated on the surface or scuttled at the bottom of the sea.

‘Oh, but just look at him! Isn’t that one happy little lumpster?’ She bent down and chucked him under one of his several sharp chins. The lumpster apparently grinned back rapturously – perhaps only because his little mouth had been stuck on in a *happy* shape. Its head looked straight up at his rescuer, as if pouring out all his gratitude through his one big eye, while his other eyes scanned the rock-pool floor for eatables.

With a contented sigh, the Giantess stood up, casually brushed the annoying little pile of ‘extra bits’ under a pile of seaweed, and wandered happily home. A species saved for tomorrow – **that** was good way to end a day which had started badly!