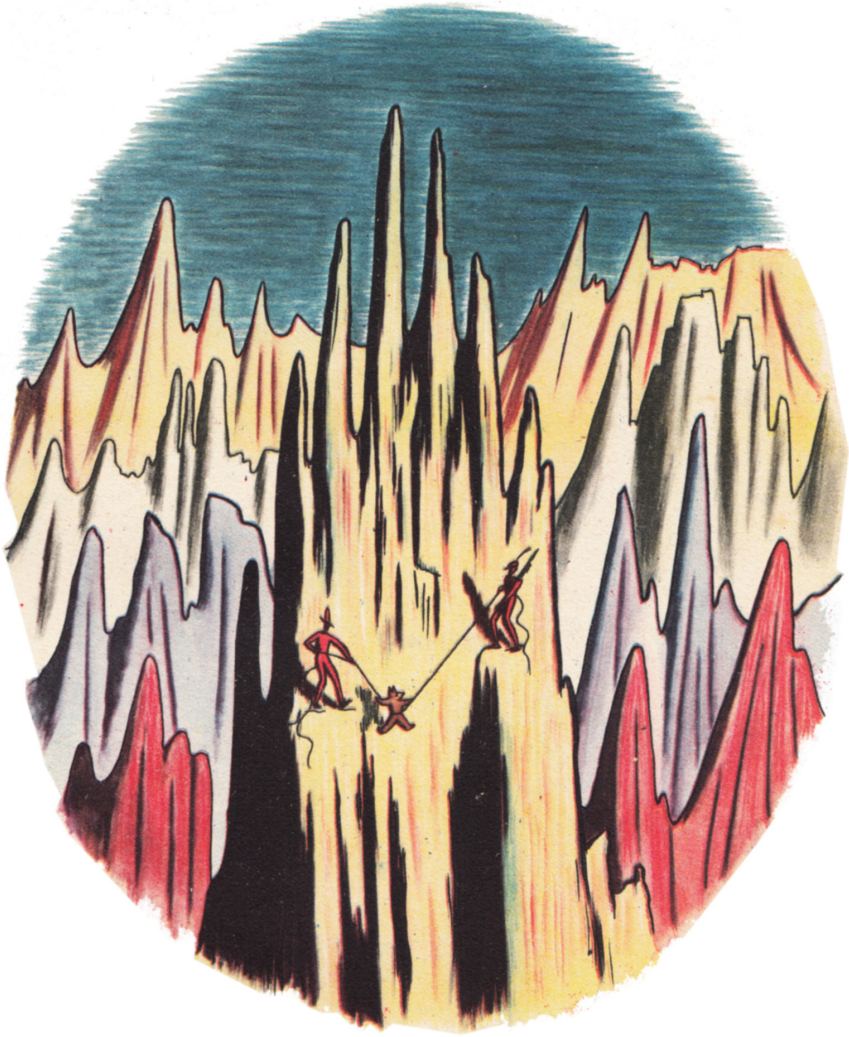


CONTENTS

The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily	I
<i>Characters</i>	5
<i>The Scene</i>	11
<i>Chapter 1</i>	13
<i>Chapter 2</i>	23
<i>Chapter 3</i>	33
<i>Chapter 4</i>	43
<i>Chapter 5</i>	53
<i>Chapter 6</i>	63
<i>Chapter 7</i>	73
<i>Chapter 8</i>	83
<i>Chapter 9</i>	91
<i>Chapter 10</i>	101
<i>Chapter 11</i>	113
<i>Chapter 12</i>	121
Index of Illustrations	129
A Reader's Companion by Lemony Snicket	133
A Letter from Dino Buzzati to Frances Lobb	171

The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily



Once upon a time, in the ancient mountains of Sicily, two hunters captured the bear-cub Tony, son of Leander, King of the Bears. But this occurred some years before our story begins.



Characters



KING LEANDER. He is the King of the Bears, the son of a King who in turn had a King as father. He is therefore a bear of most ancient lineage. He is tall, strong, valiant, virtuous and intelligent too, though not as intelligent as all that. We hope you will like him. His coat is magnificent and he is justly proud of it. Faults? Perhaps he is a little too credulous, and in certain circumstances he will show himself somewhat over-ambitious. He wears no crown upon his head, but may be distinguished from the rest both by his general appearance and by the fact that he carries a great sword suspended from a tricolour sash. He will live for ever as the leader of his beasts in the invasion of Sicily – at least, he deserves to.



TONY. King Leander's little son. There is little to be said about him. He was still extremely small when two unknown hunters captured him in the mountains and bore him down to the plains. Since that time nothing has been heard of him. Who knows what has happened to him?



THE GRAND DUKE. Tyrant of all Sicily and sworn enemy of the bears. He is extraordinarily vain and changes his clothes eight times a day, but in spite of this he never succeeds in looking less hideous than he is. Children laugh at him behind his back because of his large, hooked nose. But woe to them if he ever discovers this.



PROFESSOR AMBROSE. A most important personage, whose name you would do well to learn at once. He was Court Astrologer – that is, in plain English, he studied the stars every night (unless it was cloudy) and according to their position foretold things to the Grand Duke before they came to pass; all this by means of very difficult calculations – or so he said. Naturally not all of them were successful: sometimes he hit the mark and sometimes he did not – and then there was trouble. By guessing right he recently put the Grand Duke in a tremendous rage – we shall see why later – and was expelled from the palace with ignominy. As well as this, Ambrose claims to be a magician and to know how to work spells, but so far he has never worked any. He does in fact own a magic wand which he guards exceedingly jealously and which he has never used. Indeed, it appears that this wand can only be used twice, after which its power is exhausted and it can be thrown away in the dustbin. What does Professor Ambrose look like? He is very tall and lanky, with a long pointed beard. On his head he wears an enormous top hat, over his shoulders a very old greatcoat, greasy and dirty. Is he a good man? Is he a bad man? That you must judge for yourselves.



THE BEAR SALTPETRE. One of the most eminent bears, and a friend of King Leander. He is very handsome and a great favourite with the she-bears. He is always elegant, is a distinguished orator and would like to rise to high office in the State. But with what high office can King Leander ever entrust him amid the solitude of the bleak mountains? No, he was not made for a harsh life among the rocks and snows: Saltpetre would feel at home only in the great world, amid receptions, balls and banquets!



THE BEAR TITAN. A giant, perhaps the biggest of them all. They say he is a whole head taller than King Leander himself – and moreover he is very valiant in war. Without his providential intervention, the invasion of Sicily would have ended in utter disaster on the very first day.



THE BEAR THEOPHILUS. He is the wisest of them all. Growing old has taught him many things. King Leander frequently asks his advice. In our story he will appear only for a few moments – and then, as you will see, not in flesh and blood. But he is such an excellent bear that it would be wicked not to mention him.



THE BEAR MERLIN. Of humble stock but noble disposition, and full of good will. He stands apart from the others, lost in marvellous dreams of battle and renown. Will these ever come true?

Unless we are much mistaken, more will be heard of him one day.



THE BEAR MARZIPAN. Of undistinguished appearance, but worthy of admiration for his ingenuity. He spends his time in inventing a quantity of machines and devices which are undoubtedly brilliant – but the necessary materials are lacking in the mountains, so until now he has not been able to put anything remarkable into practice. In the future, however, who knows?



THE BEAR DANDELION. Gifted with rare powers of observation, he can discover things which people more learned than he fail to see. One fine day he will become a kind of amateur detective. He is a worthy beast, and one can have complete confidence in him.



COUNT MOLFETTA. A noble of some importance, cousin and ally of the Grand Duke. He has at his disposal a truly strange and terrible army, such as no other ruler possesses. At present we will say no more – and it is useless to press us.



TROLL. A wicked old ogre who lives in the Eagle's Nest Castle. He feeds preferably on human flesh, the more tender the better, but he eats bears too, when he can. Old and solitary as he is, he would probably

not succeed in procuring any by himself – but in his service, and charged with this very task, is Marmoset the Cat in person.



MARMOSET THE CAT. A fabulous and most ferocious monster. We think it best not to speak of him at length here. You will be frightened enough when he suddenly appears on the scene. There is no point in being frightened now. “Bad news will keep,” as the bear Theophilus – bless him – used to say.



THE SEA SERPENT. Another monster still more gigantic and no less perilous. To make up for this, however, he is a great deal cleaner, since he lives in the water all the time. He has the body of a serpent, as his name implies, but the head and teeth of a dragon.



THE WEREWOLF. A third monster. It is possible that he may not appear in our story. In fact, as far as we know he has never appeared anywhere, but one never knows. He might suddenly appear from one moment to the next, and then how foolish we should look for not having mentioned him.



VARIOUS APPARITIONS. Ugly but harmless. They are the ghosts of dead men and bears. It is difficult to tell one from the other. In fact, when they are turned into ghosts, bears lose their coats, and their

noses get shorter, so that they differ little from human ghosts – although the ghosts of bears are a trifle plumper. In our story the very small ghost of an old clock will also appear.



THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS. A most powerful spirit of the rocks and glaciers, of an irascible temperament. None of us has ever seen him, and nobody knows exactly where he lives, but we may be sure that he exists. For that reason it is always better to keep in his good books.



A SCREECH-OWL. We shall hear his voice for a moment in Chapter 2. As he is hidden in the depths of the forest, we shall not be able to see him, the more so as dusk will already have fallen. For that reason the portrait printed here is completely imaginary. The screech-owl will merely give one of his melancholy hoots, as we have said. And that is all.

Chapter 1



Sit still as mice on this occasion
And listen to the Bears' Invasion
Of Sicily, a long, long while
Ago when beasts were good, men vile.

Then Sicily, unlike today,
Was formed in quite another way.
Her snow-clad mountains rose so high
That with their peaks they touched the sky,
With sometimes in the mountains' stead,
Volcanoes, shaped like loaves of bread –
And one had a peculiar manner
Of puffing smoke out like a banner:
It used to roar like one possessed
And even today it is still rumbling away with the best.

There in the gloomy mountain lairs
Above the snowline lived the bears,
And they fed on lichen and truffles and fungi
And chestnuts and berries – and never went hungry.

Very well, then. Many years earlier, when Leander, King of the
Bears, was looking for fungi on the mountains with his little

son Tony, two hunters had stolen his child from him. The father had wandered along a steep crag for a moment, and they had surprised the cub alone and defenceless, had tied him up like a parcel and lowered him down the precipices, down to the valley at the bottom.

“Tony! Tony!” loud he cried,
But vainly did he waste his breath;
Only the echoes still replied,
Around a silence as of death.
He sought him up, he sought him down.
Could they have taken him to the town?

Eventually the King had returned to his lair and said that his son had fallen off a crag and been killed. He had not had the courage to tell the truth, which would have been a disgrace for any bear, let alone the King. After all, he had allowed the cub to be stolen from him.

From that day onwards he had known no peace. How many times he had thought of going down among men to look for his son! But what could he do by himself, a bear among men? They would have killed him, or chained him up, and that would have been the end of him. And so the years went by.

Then there came a winter more terrible than any of the other winters. It was so cold that even the bears shivered under their heavy fur. Thick snow covered all the small plants, and there was nothing left to eat. They were so hungry that the smallest

cubs and the bears with weak nerves used to cry all night. They could not stand it any longer. At length one of them said: “Why don’t we go down to the plains?” In the clear morning light they could see the bottom of the valley free of snow, with human habitations and smoke coming out of the chimneys, a sign that something was being prepared to eat. It seemed as if Paradise itself were down there. And the bears from their high crags remained for hours gazing at it and heaving deep sighs.

“Let us go down to the plains. Better fight with men than die of hunger up here,” said the more venturesome bears. And to tell the truth, the idea did not displease their king, Leander: it would be a good opportunity of looking for his little son. The danger would be far less if all his people descended in a body. Men would think twice before confronting such an army.

None of the bears, King Leander included, knew what men were really like, how wicked and cunning they were, what terrible weapons they possessed, or what traps they could invent to capture animals. So they decided to forsake the mountains and go down to the plains.

When our tale begins, the Grand
Duke was ruler of the land.
Ugly, thin, conceited, grim,
We shall hear some more of him.
Who could ever be aspirant
For the love of such a tyrant?

Now you must know that some months earlier the Court Astrologer, Professor Ambrose, had prophesied that an invincible force would come down from the mountains, that the Grand Duke would be put to rout and that the enemy would make themselves masters of the whole country.

The Professor had said that because he was sure of his facts, thanks to his calculations by the stars. But think of the Grand Duke! He fell into a passion and ordered the astrologer to be flogged and banished from Court. However, as he was superstitious, he ordered his soldiers to climb up the mountain sides and kill every living thing they found. Thus, he thought, nobody would be left in the mountains and so no one would be able to come down from them to conquer his kingdom.

Off went the soldiers, armed to the teeth, and they killed without mercy every living thing they encountered up there – old woodcutters, shepherd boys, squirrels, marmots and even innocent little birds. Only the bears escaped, hidden in the deepest caves, and so did the Old Man of the Mountains, that grand, mysterious old man who will never die and who lives no one has ever quite known where.

But one night in haste a messenger cried
“A snake has been seen on the mountain side!”
And a serpent appeared, made of little black dots,
He-bears and she-bears and bear tiny tots.
“Bears?” laughed the Duke. “Just leave them to me,
And soon you will see a great victory!”



The bears, driven by cold and hunger, go down to the plains and engage in battle with the seasoned troops of the Grand Duke sent to repulse them. The intrepidity of the bear Titan puts the Grand Duke's soldiers to flight.



Chapter 2



CHAPTER 3

