

CHAPTER 6

BRING ME THE GREENHORN

The tent smelled. It made Yusef think of Kismet. Kismet always smelled bad after getting wet, but the tent smelled like a hundred wet Kismets that had not gotten a bath in a long, long time! Yusef had heard the word dank before and even used it a couple of times. Now the word dank would forever mean the how he felt being in this tent.

“It’s not much now but when the Hordes arrive this sad covering,” she swept her hand out in front of her, “this will become a palace of treasures!”

Part of him was still very busy trying to convince the rest of him that this whole thing was a dream. He looked around the tent. Five of his bedrooms would have fit in this tent easily. The ground was covered with animal furs of every imaginable and unimaginable animal. They were worn and old and mostly falling apart. He looked down at his bare feet. The fur he was standing on may have been white once. It was moldy looking now and the bottoms of his feet felt damp. Chains holding something not candles ran down from the twisted branches that supported the roof of the tent. They gave off a strange amber light that flickered like dying light bulbs. Some were brighter and if light could breathe, Yusef thought, this is what it would look like.

Derdunger walked into the shadows of the tent and returned holding a large box. She sat the box down in front of Yusef. It was an old box. It looked as worn as everything else in the tent but it didn't quite fit. There was something wrong with this box though. It had been painted to look like a treasure chest complete with painted padlock and loose gold and gems scattered toward the bottom of the box. On the top of the box a pirate with an eye patch, a black beard, a pirate hat and a parrot had been carefully painted. Below the pirate the words *Har! Here Be Treasure!* had been painted with gold paint lined with a deep blue paint so that it looked like it was stating off of the box. Parts of the box had lost paint and a more paint flaked from every side. Even the pirate had some missing buttons and hair. His eye was gone then back again. Wait a minute. Did the pirate just wink at him? A trick of the weird light maybe?

Derdunger swatted a lamp hanging above Yusef's head. "Wake up you lazy torch-head!" The light grew brighter and Yusef saw the box more clearly now. It was an old toy box!

"What are you doing with an old toy box?" Yusef asked the Goblin.

The Goblins eyes went just as wide as when he had come from under the blanket. "Toy. Box," she uttered in a whisper, her eyes drifting off to some shadow in the tent. "Toy box," she said again and chuckled. Again she said toy box and her chuckle became laughter. Then her laughter became a hysterical cackling growl. Yusef began to back away from the insane thing in front of him. The Goblin held her side and motioned for Yusef to wait. "Wait!" She gasped. "Toy Box! Ha! Do you know what we have called this for five-hundred years?" She asked rhetorically, still

chuckling and holding her side. "We called it The Holy Holder of the One Eyed Parrot King!" She broke into laughter again.

Yusef thought about it for a minute. He was pretty sure that no one was making painted pirate toy boxes five hundred years ago! Then again there was the old church that had paintings in it that were five hundred years old. So maybe there were five hundred year old toy boxes. Dang it, he thought to himself, why was I thinking about old stuff? I'm in another world with monsters who think I'm their king! Old toy boxes don't matter now!

Derdunger smiled at him, "Would you like to open it?" Her hand brushed lovingly over the toy box. "It's yours now. Only if you like it my king." Yusef looked at the box. His forehead wrinkled and his eyebrows scrunched together. Derdunger's smile went away.

"Open the box, my king!" She demanded.

Yusef looked up in surprise. "Why should I?" He demanded right back!

Derdunger cringed and backed away. "Oh, my King," she said in a hushed apologetic voice, "I only wanted to be the first to honor you with gifts! Other Goblin will give you baubles worth more trinkets but I wanted to be the first to pay tribute to you!"

Maybe there might be something in the box that Yusef wanted but what he really wanted was more than likely not in there. He sat down criss cross applesauce on the fur under him. The monster wanted him to open the box. He wanted answers. He put his hands together, stretched out his arms and cracked his

knuckles. Only one knuckle made a tiny pop. Derdunger watched him carefully. This was his negotiations and compromise position. His mother always did the same thing when he didn't get what he wanted and threw a tantrum. Sweep the hair back, raise the eyebrows, mouth 'okay' without saying it out loud, hands together, palms out, stretch arms out straight and listen to the knuckles pop like a deck of cards being shuffled.

"You want me to open the box?" Yusef began, doing his best imitation of his mother, "I'll open the box when you answer my questions." Very satisfied with the impersonation of his mother, Yusef grinned. Derdunger's face remained contemplative. She nodded her head.

"Why am I here?" He asked the monster on the other side of the toy box.

Her face wrinkled up. She reached up and played with a point on one of her horns, "Why, my king, you are here to be our King and lead us into glory!"

"That's really not what I meant," Yusef said. He had a feeling he wasn't going to get the answers that he needed from the big Goblin monster. "What I mean is how did it happen? How did I get here?" He asked anyway. "And can you tell me what Obekey means?"

Derdunger sat down, still taller than Yusef, behind the toy box. She blew a long breath from between her lips. A Goblin would not ask questions like this. A Goblin King would have known what and how and why it had come. She had been sure, when he came from beneath the sheet, that he was Obekey. But

now, the questions, the doubt in him, the momentary fear she sensed, she wasn't sure. She had never been close to an Obekey. She had never seen one, actually. She had, however, heard plenty of stories about the Obekey. More than any creature on this earth, the power of the Obekey was unrivaled. When she was younger, there had been an Obekey that came into this world. The Goblin King Gurmaltigu wanted to take the power of the Obekey for himself. He marched his army through and over the Black Perch, largest mountain on all earths. It took him a year and so many months to find his way across the mountain. In that time the Obekey learned of the Goblin Kings desire for his power. When Gurmaltigu came over the mountain and had the Obekey's castle in sight a massive storm came over the Goblin army. The next day the Goblin King and his army found themselves back on the other side of the mountain. They chose not to cross again. The Obekey had also befriended or charmed a certain midnight dragon that had a taste for moose. At least that is how Goblins tell the story.

As a matter of fact, all she had heard were stories of Obekey and their powers. There was nothing to prove the truth in the stories. For all Derdunger knew, all the Obekey stories could be made up. Now Derdunger was faced with a big problem. She had lit the green fire, the signal of the Goblin King. She had lit the green fire once before. Four hundred years ago when she thought a King was about to reveal himself. She had gotten so excited at the prospect of another King that she failed to recognize the Pixie magic beneath the empty cloak. The Pixies had dared to play one of their despicable jokes during the Goblin ceremony of the red winter moon. When the Goblin Horde arrived they laughed her as they tore her armor away and stole her baubles and left her with nothing! They exiled her from the horde until the real King

revealed himself and passed judgment on her foolishness. She would not live through another mistake. She should have tested this Obekey before she lit the fire. She cursed herself for being so impetuous and impatient to light the signal. She had to find out if this child was indeed an all powerful Obekey. She had to do it quickly. If he was not Obekey she would eat him. It would, she knew, be her last meal.

She opened the toy box lid, reached inside and pulled a bauble out. She let the lid fall and as she did, tossed the bauble over to the boy. It seemed to float in the air a moment just before it fell into the boys hands. He looked down, startled but also amused, "A plastic robot?" He asked looking up at her. He reached for the bauble saying, "Why would I want a plastic –." As he touched it everything around Derdunger and the boy lit up. Little tongues of lightning shot out from the bauble, wrapped around the boy like glowing smoke and explored the entire tent like cats whiskers.

"Obekey," she said aloud. His power surged and pulsed through the tent. Her doubts disappeared.

Yusef had watched the Goblin like he used to watch his father when he made excuses for things. He couldn't pick him up from school because the office needed him to stay late. The weather didn't agree with him, things were just too busy for him to get away. The excuses were too numerous to list. He could tell when his father was about to lie. He lied to Yusef so much that Yusef got really good at spotting other peoples lies. Now he could tell when anyone was about to lie to him and he could definitely tell when they did lie to him. It was his superpower. He was not too sure if he could tell when a monster was about to

lie to him. He watched her though, and she gave no signs that would lead him to believe that she was going to lie to him. Of course, she was a monster and he had never been lied to by a monster – well not a real one anyway!

The monster that called itself Derdunger played with her horns, rubbed the beards on her chin, and stared over the toy box at him. She looked down at her lap and blew out a long breath from between her lips. To Yusef this meant that he had won and soon he would have the answers to his questions! Or, with his luck, the monster would tell him that she didn't know anything. He couldn't let his future hinge on the monsters answers though. He had to figure out what he was going to do if she didn't know. While she thought about Yusef was making plans of his own. He knew he could run fast. He did not know if he could outrun a Goblin.

She was taking a long time to answer. Yusef planted his hands firmly on the ground. He started to move his feet out from under him. The Toy Box opened! Derdunger reached in and grabbed something which she then lobbed into the air toward him.

“Whoa!” He thought or said but wasn't sure of either. The thing in the air slowed down and seemed to float for a second. ‘What the heck did I do that?’ He thought and the thing dropped into his hands. The way the Goblin lobbed it should have put the thing way over his head. But it didn't go over his head. It stopped in mid air.

Without looking it Yusef could tell it was something familiar. He turned it over in his hand. A plastic robot? It was not a

magical treasure! It was a crappy piece of plastic. Was this a joke? He looked at the Goblin across from him. Its eyes were getting wide again. He held the robot toy tight in his hand feeling a little angry.

“What would I want with a plastic —,” he started to say. He may have finished the question or he may not have. Strings of liquid lightning blew out from his hand and engulfed the world.

His name is Leo. He is eight years old. It is raining in the sunshine and a new family is moving into the house across the street. A little boy his age jumps out of the back of an old timey pick up truck. He is black and Leo knows they probably won't get to be friends.

But they do get to be friends. They get to be best friends. The other boy is Martin. He is a year older than Leo. Their friendship is a secret. Not a soul knows or will ever know of the friendship they share. Martin says to Leo as they sit backs against a stone wall behind the old baptist church that if the people around here found out about them they would both hang from a tree. Probably not the same tree though, Leo says and Martin stares back at him with an incredulous frown wrinkling down his forehead. Come to think of it, Leo continues, how do they pick hangin' trees? I mean; I ain't never seen a tree labeled Colored and never seen one says Whites neither. Maybe same tree, says Martin, but different sides. They laugh the scariness off. The world does not.

They don't talk anymore about what they can't do together. Everything they can do together they do. One day Martin shows up with a bruised face and a swollen eye. I'd say you have a black eye, Leo says, but that'd be redundant.

That day is the day Leo gives Martin his prized Pez dispenser. It is a plastic blue robot full of Pez candy. Martin takes it and cries. Leo

says it will bring him luck. It does for a while. Martin keeps the Pez dispenser under his mattress. Leo brings him peppermint Pez to keep it full.

For Christmas that year Martin gives Leo a wooden ukulele he made at his fathers wood shop. Leo says that it's too big and he won't be able to hide it and together they can't figure out a way Leo would be able to keep it without someone figuring out where he got it from. They dig a hole by the old stone wall. Martin makes a box for the ukulele and they hide it in the hole. By the next summer Leo has learned how to play three songs from the radio and is working on a song for Martin.

That summer passes quickly. They spend all their time in the woods making up songs and eating Pez candies from the blue robot. Martin decided that their gifts to one another should live in the same hidey hole. Every night, before they return to their houses, the ukulele and the robot go into the same hole. Leo jokes that they are going to need a bigger hole in fifty years. Martin laughs and says they should just move away together. Both of them know there is nowhere in the world for their kind of friendship.

One night Leo's father takes him on a camping trip with a group of other boys and their fathers. They are gone for an entire week. He is no good in the woods with these other boys. They are all tougher than him. He knows the boys don't really like him. They are all nice to him because the fathers are around. He knows if they were not there they'd be using pieces of him for fish bait.

On the morning they leave all the fathers are gathered round Leo's father. They all pat him on the back and shake his hand erstwhile stealing embarrassed glances at Leo. A couple of the fathers even give his father a hug. Leo is sure something is very wrong. He's never seen

his father hug another man. Not even his own brother. On the way home he falls asleep. He wakes up three hundred miles later. His father tells him they had to move and they wanted it to be a surprise! Only three hundred more miles to go and they'd be wearing cowboy hats and eating barbecue.

Martin figured it out way before Leo did. The day Leo left to go camping the movers were loading up all the furniture from his house. When he turns thirteen he digs up the box and takes the robot Pez dispenser and the ukulele to the woods. He throws them both off a high cliff and walks away. He made a vow that he would never think of Leo again. The next day he comes back and hikes down below the cliff looking for the things he threw away. They are not there. He searches until dark but finds nothing.

Every year he returns to the old stone wall, digs up the box meant for their gifts and puts a poem in it. He hopes one day that Leo will come back. Martin will make him a nicer ukulele and Leo will put all Martin's poems to music. After the hole he returns to the cliff where he threw the gifts into the void. He hikes down year after year looking for the presents they gave each one another. Year after year he finds nothing.

Pixies smelled the ukulele and the robot the night Martin threw them over the cliff. They sat on the forest floor for all of seven minutes before the pixies dragged them into hole that opened up like a mouth between the roots of a tree.

What was that? Yusef dropped the plastic robot on the fur as he stood up and backed away from it. "What was that?" He yelled the question at Derdunger. "I need to leave," he said. "I need to leave and I want to go away from this place and, and," he

realized he was crying. What he felt about Leo and Martin was like he had lived a brief part of their lives. No, not their lives, but their entire world! He could remember what it felt like to have Leo's fingers playing his strings! His *strings* like *he* was a *ukulele*! "Oh my God! I dispensed candy out of my neck!" Yusef looked at Derdunger who was still sitting on the floor with wide eyes, her mouth expressionless and slightly opened. Yusef wasn't going to stick around and feel anything like that again King or not!

What he had felt when he touched that plastic robot wasn't a dream that was for sure! He hadn't ever felt anything like that in his life. He was trembling. He felt like someone had just stuffed his head with a lifetime of memories and they weren't all good! He stumbled his way toward the tent door. Racing, stumbling, holding his chest and wiping the tears a way from his eyes Yusef reached the door and fell through the opening. When he put his foot down the ground was not there. He was a hundreds of feet above the ground and he was falling!

And then he wasn't falling. He felt a his shirt tight around him and then a rough hand grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back into the tent. He fell onto fur ground. Derdunger looked down at him. Leo and Martin were still in his head. They were so sad. Yusef began crying again.

"There was only residue on that bauble," she said mostly to herself. "Look what he did with only the smallest magic." The Goblin pulled back the tent and yelled something down to the other nine monsters that were, presumably, still on the ground.

What they saw from the ground was the huge neck of a Ukulele made of frozen lightning holding the big tent hundreds of feet above the ground.

Derdunger looked out the opening of the tent toward moonclimb mountain. She could see some of the fires already going out. The horde was beginning to move. It would be a day or two before any arrived. She would have time now. She would have to give the King the answers he searched for. She knew she didn't know everything he would ask. She would do her best. The goblins kept only one book and that was the rule book. Their history was all passed down in stories they told each other. There were many stories about the place where the Goblin Kings waited for their time return to the world and conquer it. She had an idea that those stories weren't all as true as the Goblins would like to believe. What she was realizing now was that the Goblins didn't really know much about anything when it came to the magic of this world. She knew it had all been in books once. All those books had been burned by the pretend King Brumixgig thousands of years ago. The Goblins had kept no books since him. No king had ever made a rule against Goblins keeping books. She wondered why no Goblin had started keeping a written record since that King. Maybe she would start with this king. Obekey, Goblin King she thought. Yes she would title the book that. No, that didn't seem right. His name, she thought, she did not ask him his name. Derdunger turned to her new King.

He was fast asleep on the old fur floor. His magic even worked when he was sleeping. She wondered how much magic was in the world where the Obekey came from. How did they harness it? How did they use it? She had so many questions for the Obekey but they could

wait. All of her questions could wait. Her vindication was near. No Goblin would laugh at her now. The most magic this world had seen in hundreds of years was sleeping here in *their* tent. How something so small could hold that much power...another great mystery. The magic he made here today was worth thousands of trinkets. The pixies had never found a single bauble that held that much magic. The Obekey had drawn, out of a bauble that wasn't worth half a trinket, more magic that she had ever seen.

Her Goblin kin were waiting below. She yelled to them. Too far for them to hear my voice. She turned around and carefully stepped over the sleeping king. Somewhere in here, she searched through the 'Toy Box' and pulled out a large rainbow colored pencil. Then she found a book of paper. She carefully pulled out one sheet and set the rest of the book back into the toy box. She wrote quickly on the paper, wrapped the paper over around her dagger and dropped it down to the Goblins below.

Small Endlegub ran and grabbed the paper wrapped dagger. He knew what it was and immediately ran the dagger over to Sulingurg. She watched tall Sulingurg unwrap the paper from the dagger. Sulingurg being the only other Goblin out of the ten that could read as well read the note and signaled her with a waving hand. She watched him bark orders to twins and watched as they ran off toward the mountain and toward the Goblin hordes. Ordinarily they would never go into the horde. They, too, were outcasts. But today they had become anything but outcasts. Today they held the status of royalty.

"Go my friends, go and bring me the Greenhorn," she said to herself. She watched the moon rising again over the mountain.

She had not felt this content and this excited in a long, long time. She felt a warmth in her cheeks and gladness twinkled behind her eyes. The darkness came and the moon glowed over the canyon valley for the last night of the red winter moon. She would remember this night for the rest of her life.

She did remember it for the rest of her life, just not the way she expected she would. Contented just to sit and watch the night pass into dawn from the floating tent, Derdunger dreamt of the things she might accomplish with her new King. And just as sudden as the Obekey's lightning, her feeling of contentment vanished.

In the distance, at the base of the mountain, a green spear shot through her heart. Another camp had lit Green Goblin Fire. The green pillar of light was another Goblin declaring a king. Two Kings? There had never been such a thing.

"Hurry my friends," she whispered as the dawn swallowed the moon, "hurry and bring me the Greenhorn."