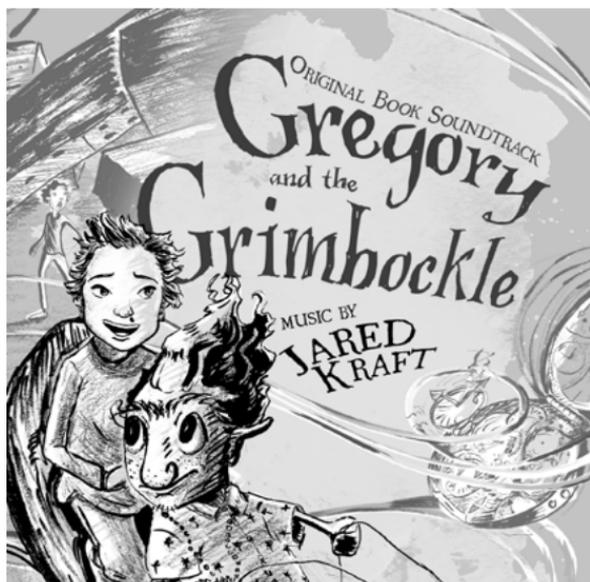


Gregory
and the
Grimbockle

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Gregory and the Grimbockle



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BOOK SOUNDTRACK BY

Jared Kraft



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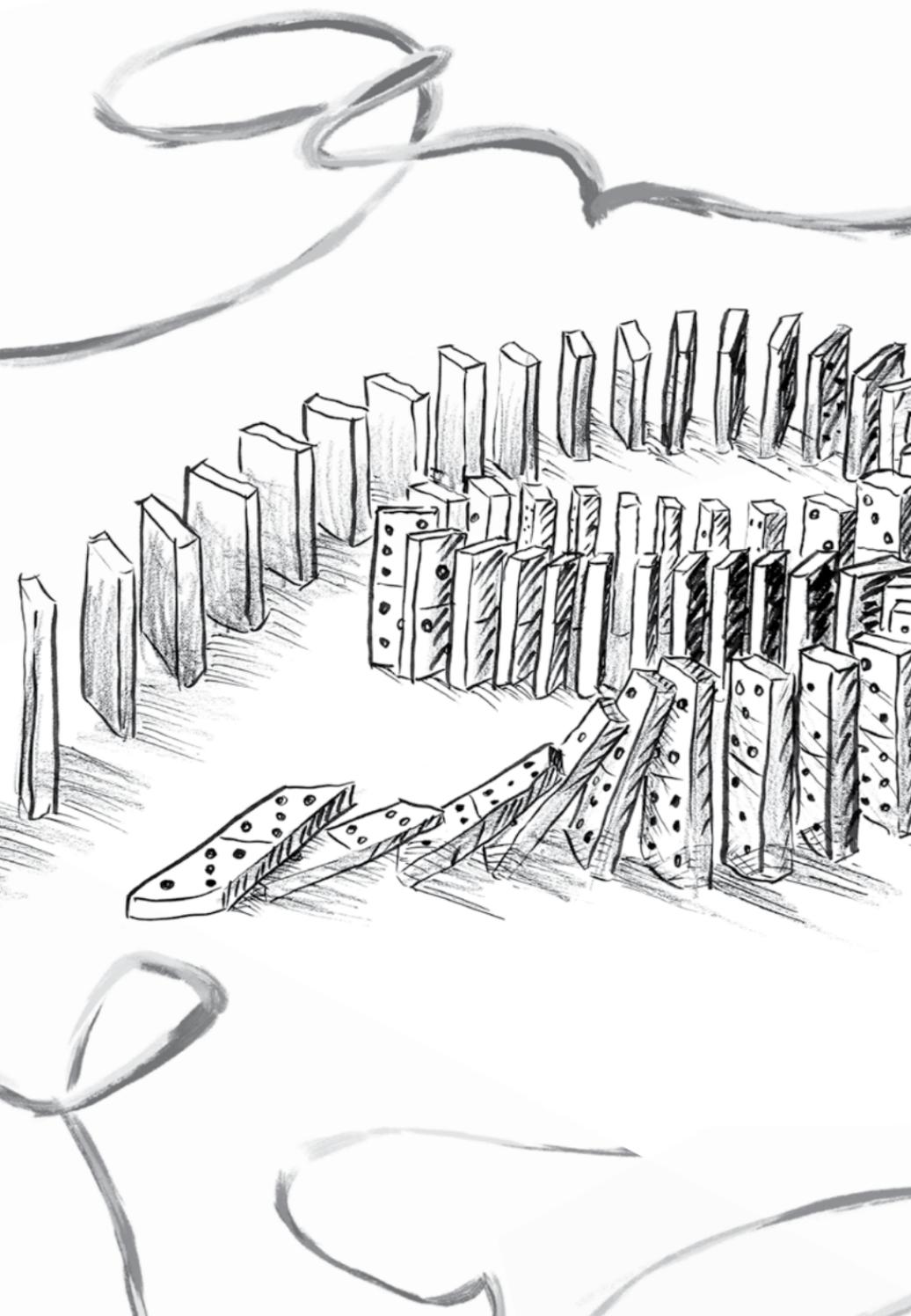
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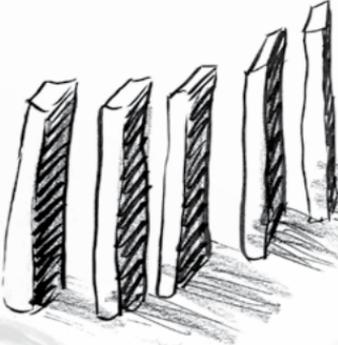
For my dearest nephew and niece, Oscar and Scarlett.

May you be utterly enchanted by the world always
and grow up full of whimsy and wonder, just as I did.

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CHAPTER 1



The Mole

Gregory felt he must be the most unfortunate boy in the world. To start with, he had barely any friends. To make matters worse, over the past few years poor young Gregory had developed an enormous and oddly shaped mole above his top lip. It looked, from afar, exactly like a great dripping of chocolate that had melted down a table in the sun. A closer inspection revealed it to be very much like a rude bunch of dried-up grapes hanging from underneath Gregory's left nostril.

It was a strange mole indeed, and it wasn't entirely uncommon for a complete stranger to

approach him on the street, lick his or her finger (or hanky), and rub at the drip mole heartily.

Gregory hated this. He disliked the attention. But even more, he loathed the stale smell of a stranger's saliva as it dried into a pale, smelly crust beneath his nose.

Even Gregory's own mother constantly forgot it was a mole. She would chase Gregory around the house for hours with her yellow-spotted tea towel, trying desperately to scrub it off. One day, she caught him and scrubbed the wretched thing so hard, it bled. Realising she'd made no progress in removing the stubborn splotch, she gave up. But often, still, he would catch her staring across the room at it, wringing her tea towel unhappily.

Aside from his mole, there wasn't much else in particular that stood out about Gregory. He was a typically stringy young boy of ten with scruffy black hair and dark, intelligent eyes that had a handsome slant to their corners like his father's. One of his feet was at least a size or two larger than the other, but no one except his family had known about it...that is, until his twelve-year-old sister, Marjory, had seen to it they did. Before long, the entire school knew.

“Big Foot,” his classmates had dubbed him the moment they’d found out. After that, they stomped around the schoolyard, making horrible sounds at poor Gregory’s expense.

Marjory didn’t stop with his foot, either. She teased Gregory at every opportunity, and any-time something unfortunate happened to him, she would say, “*You* were born under a purple star.” According to Marjory, this was an incredibly bad omen that meant Gregory would have to watch his back for life. Gregory didn’t particularly believe in omens, but even so, any mention of purple stars made his skin prickle.

His most recent mole encounter was with Ethel, the grumpy old woman who lived down his street. She was at least a hundred years old, maybe more, and had already received two letters from the Queen of England, which had led her to believe she was honorary royalty.

When Gregory was much younger, Marjory had convinced him that old Ethel was a witch who boiled little boys like him for supper. This had always made him run hard and fast whenever he’d spotted old Ethel coming his way, and even now,

he was a bit jumpy whenever she was about.

Much like his mother, old Ethel had something of a vendetta against Gregory's mole. Ethel seemed convinced that Gregory was just a dirty little boy who couldn't keep his face clean and appeared to have made it her mission in life to try to, as she put it, "Get that mess sorted!"

Gregory wondered how old Ethel supposed he managed to put a glob of dirt on his face in the exact same shape and place every day. Regardless, he tried his very best to keep out of her way as much as was humanly possible. Yet, on this particular day, he had been preoccupied the moment she'd pounced. He'd happened to notice the neighbourhood tomcat up high in a maple tree and was trying to decide if it was stuck or simply hunting the pigeons that came to roost for the evening in the branches. Before he'd even sensed her presence, Ethel's hand had shot out from the centre of a thick hedge beside him and tried to yank Gregory's mole clean off his face. When he'd cried out in pain and darted away, she had chased him all the way down the street, cane and all, screeching, "Come back here, you cheeky bloomerbine!"

THE MOLE



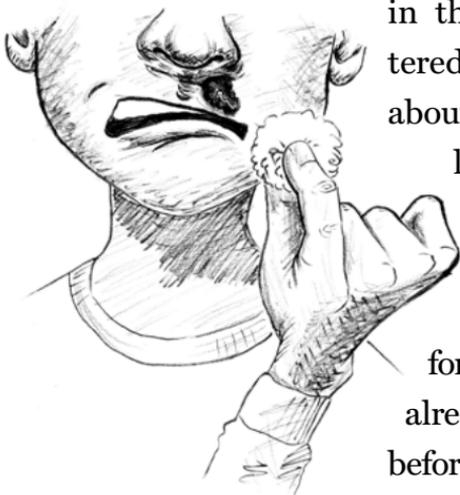
Gregory wasn't sure what a bloomerbine was, but he'd felt offended all the same.

He stood by the mirror at home now, dabbing his poor bleeding mole with a cotton ball. The cotton should have felt soft, but with the mole cracked and bleeding the way it was, it felt like sandpaper.

Heaving a great sigh, he moved the cotton away and began to inspect the damage. Now that the bleeding had subsided, he could clearly see a great, jagged crack torn right through the centre of the mole. Up close, it looked a lot like the picture on the wall in his science class of a giant fissure out in the desert of Mexico.

He gave another sigh, pulled a face at himself in the mirror, and muttered under his breath about the craziness of old ladies and the danger of distractions.

By now, he was feeling very sorry for himself and, having already had dinner alone before his twilight walk,



felt no need to leave his room again that night. Now, it may seem curious that a boy of ten should be out by himself so late, eating dinner alone and putting himself to bed when he pleased. But Gregory's family members were all rather self-absorbed and had never paid him much attention at all—not unless one counted making fun of his feet and attempting to scrub off his mole.

From the earliest he could remember, Gregory had been fending for himself. Making his own lunches, doing his own laundry... This was not to say his parents had mistreated him, necessarily, but his father was never around, and as for his mother, when she wasn't obsessively cleaning the house, her rear was usually firmly glued to the sullen-looking couch parked right in front of the telly.

Her favourite show was an afternoon soap called *Vows of Our Fathers*. When it was on, Gregory's mother never got up for anything—not even toilet breaks. This both impressed and disgusted Gregory, who had taken to leaving out a plate of biscuits just beyond her reach whenever her show was on to see if he could trick her into getting up. He hadn't yet succeeded.

Giving his wounded mole a final, cautious dab with the cotton, he leaned forward to drop the used ball into the small bin that sat at the base of the mirror stand. Right at that moment, he noticed something odd about his face. Something was hanging from his mole. Something small. Something black. Something...long.

Just a hair, thought Gregory, though his heart skipped a beat as he reached out to grab it. When he pulled back his fingers to inspect, he found them empty, but so, too, was the mole crack.

It probably fell to the floor, he thought before throwing himself straight into bed. He hadn't felt sleepy, but in no time at all, he was fast asleep.

If he had been awake, he might have caught sight of that long, black something rising out, once again, from his mole. Then, if he had looked harder, he might have even noticed that it was less like a hair and more suspiciously like the tentative antenna of an insect, testing the air with quivering lashings.

If he had continued looking, he would have seen the skin around the mole begin to shiver and ripple, then the mole itself begin to bulge

and stretch outward like a bubble. Soon, he would have seen two beady eyes on the end of a strange-looking head peeking out, regarding Gregory's nostrils with distaste.

With a push and a wriggle, a fearsome creature began to hoist itself onward and outward from Gregory's mole, like a baby snake emerging from its flexible eggshell. As the creature exited the mole, something strange began to happen. The head (which at first had been quite tiny) began to swell and grow, as did the rest of the body.

By the time the creature had fully popped out, it was about the size of a regular pantry mouse. However, illuminated by the moonlight as it was, it looked far more like a frighteningly large cockroach—except for the back half of the creature, which was raised up and coloured a light, milky shade of purple.

The cockroach creature froze stiff, save its antennae, which were flicking about like whips, and its eyes darting madly around the room. Then, with a final flick of its antennae, it scuttled quickly down the side of Gregory's cheek, raced

across the pillow, and took a flying leap from the edge of the mattress over to the bedside table.

This story might have ended here had all gone well. But it is about to take a twist and turn in that certain spectacular way that the most excellent stories do.

The creature landed fair and fine on its feet, but, alas, it was Tuesday, and on Tuesdays, Gregory's mother waxed all of the furniture. This meant that the moment those legs hit the shiny veneer of the table, all six of them slid out from underneath the poor beast, and it began skidding straight across the surface, eventually tumbling onto the floor.

Under normal circumstances, this wouldn't have been a terrible problem, for a falling insect makes barely a sound. But by a terrible stroke of luck, the creature happened to fall right on the worst place it could have.

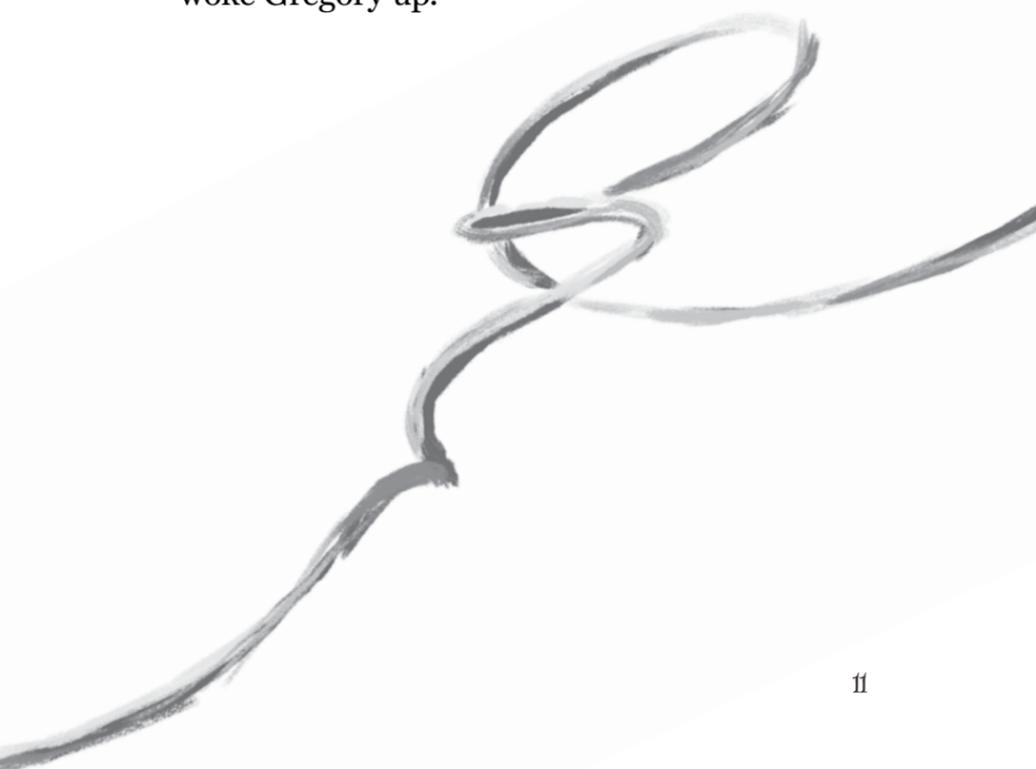
You see, having almost no friends, Gregory spent a lot of time alone. The more time he spent alone, the better he became at entertaining himself. His latest obsession was dominos. He

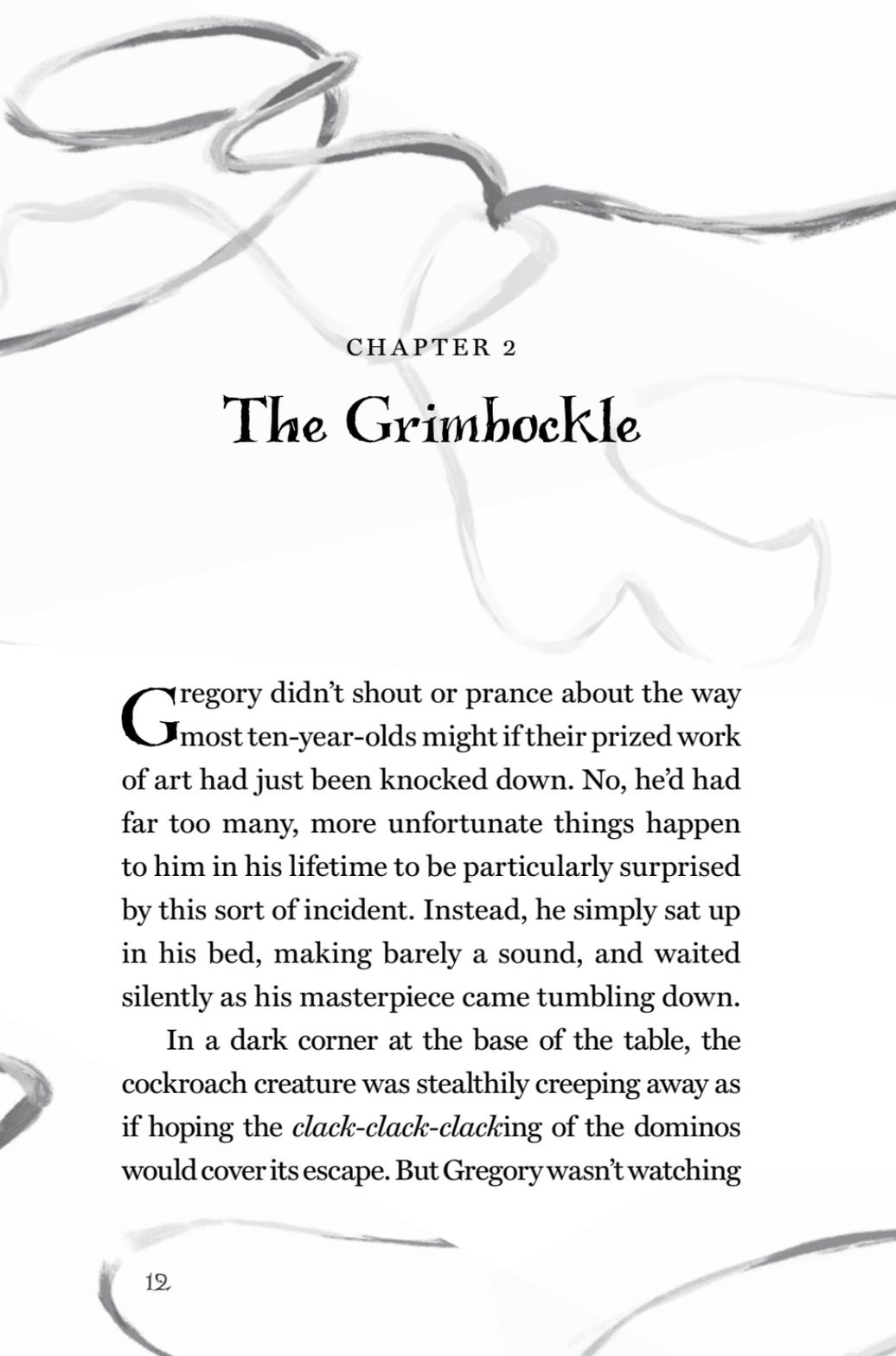


had hundreds, perhaps even thousands of them, lined up all around his room and had just finished linking the last of them together before dinner.

He had planned to knock them down right after his twilight walk, but his encounter with old Ethel had put him in a foul sort of mood, and he had decided to save the grand cascade for another, less offensive sort of day.

The domino chain began by the foot of the bedside table, which is precisely where the cockroach creature fell. Alas, it triggered an almighty cataclysm of dominos dropping, which, in turn, woke Gregory up.





CHAPTER 2

The Grimbockle

Gregory didn't shout or prance about the way most ten-year-olds might if their prized work of art had just been knocked down. No, he'd had far too many, more unfortunate things happen to him in his lifetime to be particularly surprised by this sort of incident. Instead, he simply sat up in his bed, making barely a sound, and waited silently as his masterpiece came tumbling down.

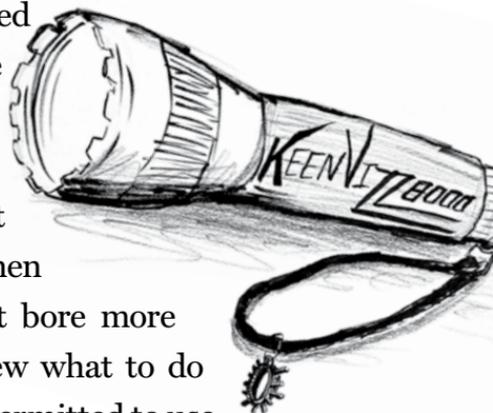
In a dark corner at the base of the table, the cockroach creature was stealthily creeping away as if hoping the *clack-clack-clacking* of the dominos would cover its escape. But Gregory wasn't watching

the dominos at all. He knew exactly where each one stood and could gauge in an instant the place the toppling had begun. He peered through the darkness to the spot where he knew something was moving while he felt for the cold metal of the aluminium flashlight he kept hidden under his pillow.

This was no child's toy. It was the KEENVIZZ 8000—a special tactical flashlight for which Gregory had squirrelled away every penny since he was five. His parents had never given him any money, of course. But every now and then, when the lemon tree out front bore more lemons than anyone knew what to do with, Gregory had been permitted to use the extra lemons that fell to the ground to set up a lemonade stand at the end of the street.

He'd hoarded a small fortune in the end, and right when he'd had exactly enough, he had gone straight to the hardware store and bought the flashlight he'd been admiring for years.

Had his parents ever found him with such an



expensive trinket, they would most certainly have confiscated it immediately. And so, to keep his special flashlight safe, Gregory carried it with him by day and tucked it under his pillow by night.

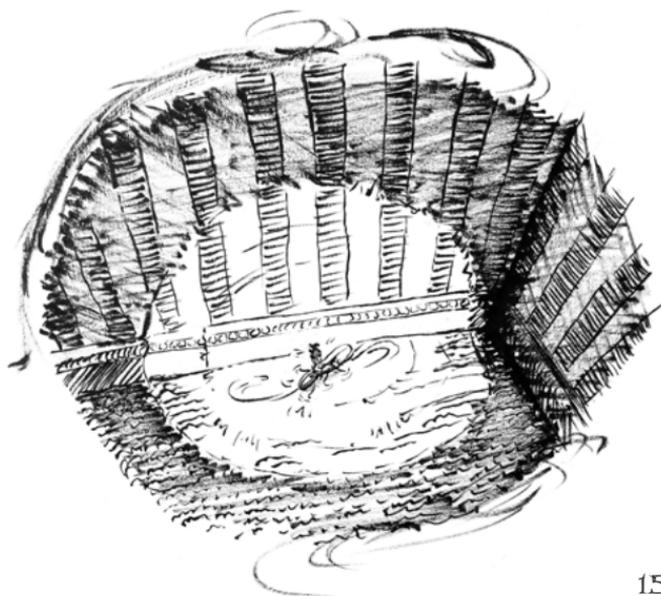
It didn't look particularly special. It was small, short, and painted a plain dusty black. But it was a very clever thing, the sort of flashlight that didn't need any kind of batteries or plugs to work. Should it ever go flat, one simply had to give it a quick shake to recharge, and, hey-ho, the lights were back on in an instant. It was also waterproof and had a dangerously bright beam that could pierce through almost anything. Once, on a school camping trip, Gregory had seen some of his classmates shining their flashlights through their palms to make the tops of their hands glow red. When he'd tried this with the KEENVIZZ 8000 later that night, the light had been so bright, it had come through his hand and out the other side—bright enough to shine through the wall of his tent and wake up the girls in the tent next door.

Once he had his flashlight in hand, Gregory searched with his finger for the rubber end, then

aimed for the precise spot where he thought the tremor had started.

He knew it wasn't Marjory who had knocked the dominos down. He could hear her unholy snores bouncing off the walls and rattling the windows in her bedroom.

Releasing half a breath, Gregory gave a quick, hard click to the button at the flashlight's end. The cockroach creature was illuminated instantly, surrounded by a bright circle of light exactly like a prima ballerina in the spotlight, centre stage. It scrambled frantically left...then right...but seemed trapped by the circle of light as if its edges were a solid concrete wall.



It became quite apparent that it was, indeed, a cockroach. Also obvious now was the strange purple man sitting frozen in fright on its back, stunned by the dazzling glare of the KEENVIZZ 8000.

“Egads!” hissed Gregory under his breath in surprise.

Hearing him speak, the small purple man fell forward, whispering secret commands urgently to its steed. Instantly, the cockroach leapt to life and, in the blink of an eye, scuttled straight under the bed.



Gregory scrambled over to the other side of the mattress just in time to catch them with his light. Once again, the cockroach seemed baffled by the brightness, scurrying from side to side so many times (and so quickly) that it soon grew tired. Finally, it stopped and cowered in the middle of the light,

shivering like a small, frightened animal out in the rain.

Realising it was trapped, the tiny purple man fainted, falling right off its trembling cockroach steed and tumbling onto the floor.

Suddenly, it was Gregory's turn to freeze as heavy footsteps came pounding down the hall.

"Gregory!" came his mother's cranky voice down the corridor. "What's going on in there?"

He clicked off the flashlight and leapt under the blankets into his bed just as the door flew open and his mother strode into the room.

She scanned the room thoroughly and noticed the fallen dominos. Then, seeing Gregory asleep in his bed, she quietly closed the door and returned to her room. As soon as he heard her footsteps disappearing down the hall, Gregory threw back the blankets and shone his flashlight under the bed.

Nothing was there.

He flashed the light around the room, scanning the hundreds of fallen dominos, but saw nothing.

Clicking off the light, he closed his eyes and strained his ears to listen in the dark. At first, he heard nothing but the dull rumble of Marjory,

still snoring in the other room. He could hear the thin branches of the willow outside scratching gently on the window. A loud dripping sound was coming from somewhere in the house. Other than that, the night was still.

He was about to give up when he heard the dominos shifting once again. Immediately, he cast his light over to where he'd heard the noise. There he saw the sorry sight of the cockroach trying to walk backwards, dragging the little purple man along with its antennae wrapped around both its legs. As soon as the light fell upon it, the cockroach froze, and the little purple man began to stir.

“Ow...,” it moaned, rubbing its head.

Gregory kept his light fixed on them.

The little purple man squinted nervously into the blinding light.

“What on earth is it?” wondered Gregory, thinking aloud.

“I is nothing! Nothing at all!” said the creature, trying to hide behind the cockroach.

“But you're not nothing at all. I'm seeing you right now...unless I'm still asleep...”

“Yes!” said the creature hopefully. “You *is*

asleep. You is dreaming me up.”

“It doesn’t feel like a dream,” said Gregory, pinching himself hard. “Ouch!” he muttered, rubbing the injured spot. “Definitely not a dream. What on earth are you?”

“I-I is a Bockle,” said the creature valiantly, though its voice trembled more than a little.

“A what now?”

“A Bockle.”

“What in the world is a Bockle?” Gregory almost shouted, but he forced the words to a whisper. (It simply would not do if any of his family woke up. As it was, he was amazed his mother hadn’t shaken him awake to ask about the dominos falling.)

“A Bockle is a Bockle just as a hoo-man is a hoo-man,” said the creature, flicking its eyes around the room as if it thought someone might be listening.

“I see,” said Gregory, not understanding at all.

“But I is the *Grimbockle*,” the creature said, as though it were important.

“So, that’s your name? Is it a boy’s name?” Gregory asked.

“Yes, it is my name, but I is not a boy. I is a Hebockle. Now, please,” it said in a slightly withered voice, “you is blinding us with your ferocious little sun.”

“Little sun?” said Gregory before realising it must mean the flashlight. Carefully, he slid off the edge of the bed and flicked on the star-shaped nightlight. At the same time, he clicked off the KEENVIZZ 8000, freeing the Grimbockle from its intangible prison. The nightlight had been a gift from his sister (one of the only things she had ever given him), though it was less a gift than a gag, the colour of the star being purple.

Still, Gregory quite liked it, and as he flicked it on now, a gentle purple glow emanated from it softly, coating the room in a dusky purple light. He lowered himself down and lay flat until his chin came to rest on the floor in front of the tiny purple Grimbockle.

“Hello,” he said, not knowing what else to say.

“Oh!” said the Grimbockle, wringing its hands and pacing beside the cockroach. “I is going to be in a pesky big mess over this! A pesky big mess indeed!”



The Grimbockle was off its six-legged mount now, and Gregory could finally begin to see what a strange little creature it was. Its basic shape wasn't too far removed from human, but its body was like a tiny purple onion and seemed to hover above its webbed feet, which looked remarkably similar to those of a duck. It's hands were much the same, but looked somehow more flexible, like a spider monkey's, with soft purple webbing in between the fingers.

Its skin was a light milky purple that appeared to emit a slight glow of its own, different from the one coming from the nightlight.

Its nose was large and bulbous, and sitting right above it was a set of great round eyes, dark as night and seeming to take up half the creature's face.

It had a shock of hair that was a darker shade of purple than its body, and it swayed on its own as the Grimbockle moved around, reminding Gregory of seaweed floating in the sea.

The only clothing it wore was a faded red shirt with white palm trees printed over it. The front of the shirt was buttoned, but down near the bottom hung the round and portly stomach of the Grimbockle, straining against the buttons.

Around its neck, it wore a long rope of light pink pearls. The entire effect was rather amusing, and Gregory couldn't help but smile a little at the creature's appearance.

"Oh," it twittered, holding its head between its hands and continuing to pace, "I is finding myself in rotten stinky trouble when the big bosses is hearing about this foul, messy muck up! I is being squished! I is being squashed! I is becoming the frog in the water pot's hot boiling stew!"