

CHAPTER 7

FAR SOUTH OF SMART

This is awful, awful, awfully bad. Kisser Fairy crouched and pushed back into the shadows of the dead tree. She was a brave Fairy and she was not one to scare easily, but today she felt fear icing her veins. It was paralyzing. Kisser knew what fear could do to a Fairy. She had seen Fairies make the poorest of choices when fear got into their brains. Peanut butter brain is what she called it. She knew she had to think. Every cell in her wings told her to fly as fast as she could away from this place but something else was telling her to stay. That something else might be fear, might be curiosity, or it might be her damnable instinct for getting knee deep in trouble. She stilled herself and took a deep breath. "Quiet your mind," she whispered to herself. She was not close enough to the Goblins for them to hear her and, she hoped, not to smell her. Goblins had an extremely keen nose for sniffing out magic; probably because they had none of their own and probably wouldn't ever. She peered out from behind the tree.

Nine Goblins circled one another talking in whispers. Surprise still glazing their eyes. They were happy, she thought, but confused too. Their new king was Obekey. How that happened she would never know. The Queen would know. The tree would know. She wondered if they already knew. Once,

when Kisser was a smaller, her mother had taken her to listen to the Queen teaching older Fairies how to listen to the vibrations of the tree. She told them if they listened hard enough the vibrations would become images and the images would have voice and stories. She told them when they understood how to listen they would be able to see things far away from here. Then she looked at Kisser, at least that's how she remembered it, and said, "One day, if you listen long enough and let yourself *into* the sound of the tree you can see things on the other side of the world when they are happening." The Queen and the tree were tied together somehow into the invisible but universal magic that permeated every living thing. Together, the tree and the Queen listened to the pulse of the world. They could sense things that no other creatures here could but, when it came to the presence of an Obekey, nothing was sure anymore. The Queen told her the same thing would happen if someone from this world fell into the Obekey's world. She could not even pretend to know how that would work.

Whenever an Obekey showed up everything got a little crazy. Even an Obekey that possessed little magic could really upset the balance of the world that so many creatures fought so hard to keep. One Obekey in particular had nearly destroyed their world when she tried to take all the magic from this world back to hers. The dragons had tried to tell her that magic was not something that one possessed but was an energy that could be focused if you were open to it. Things did not go too well for that Obekey. Kisser Fairy knew she didn't own magic but she still liked to call the magic she expressed *her* magic. She was sort of smug about the *way* she expressed her magic. A lot of Fairies tried to copy what she did with petunias and warthogs but no one had ever gotten close to getting it right! And that wasn't even

her best! Most of her best stuff she did when no-one was around to see it. She had seen other fairies do some pretty incredible things with their, or, *the* magic. She often tried to copy magic that other fairies expressed and sometimes she *could* but most of the time she just ended up frustrated. The Queen said that this was because every creature experienced magic differently and the magic experienced them as well and what came out of that beautiful union was, every time, a very unique expression of two worlds uniting. What she really wanted to do was talk magic to the tree the way the Queen did. Ooooh she would give anything for that. Just an hour talking with the tree would be amazing! The Queen had told her once, that talking magic with the tree was like dreaming while you were awake. She had said the world and everyone in it was connected in so many ways you wouldn't think it possible. Kisser Fairy had said she knew everything was connected and she didn't need magic to know that! The Queen smiled and told her that one day soon she would be able to dream with the tree and she would know just how many connections that she, Kisser Fairy, had with this world and the worlds she could not yet see. Everyone knew there were other worlds. She had never been to any but she had been promising herself that, in the event, if it should ever happen that she found herself bored, she would definitely consider traveling to another world. Although she knew it was not likely that she would ever want to find herself anywhere but here. Well, she thought to herself, not here exactly.

The Goblins below were busying themselves with housekeeping. One of them had a broom! He was sweeping the dirt. The others were pulling out little cages and hanging them around the camp. Kisser felt something wash through her suddenly, painfully. She felt lonely and trapped. It wasn't her

that was feeling it though. She was picking up on some other creatures emotions. Some sad magic here, she thought. In a glance she knew. The lamps the goblin were hanging around their camp weren't lamps at all Yeeyoo cages. Yeeyoo were mysterious. They never spoke but they did sing. The saying goes, 'When you hear Yeeyoo song nothing in the forest is wrong.' But the Yeeyoo lived *wherever* life was in harmony. Another saying, 'Lost in the night follow the Yeeyoo light' was a testament to how they would glow in the dark. When they gathered together they could turn the night into day. And here the Goblins had them in cages! Cages of all things!

Seeing the Yeeyoo caged by Goblins was exactly what Kisser needed. She felt the fear melt away. Her blood moved in her faster now. Fear of the Goblin and the Obekey Goblin King had turned into crashing waves of boiling anger and Kisser's call to arms trumpeted from her heart. She wondered how long Goblins had been using the Yeeyoo as lamps! Lamps! Never-mind how long, she thought. It's got to stop now. But she would risk everything if she tried to free the Yeeyoo now. No, the first thing she had to do was tell the Queen. Three days from home, she thought.

Kisser felt despair poking into her brain and inviting her to come and pick out caskets. There was nothing for her to do here. She hung her head momentarily wishing for the power of a mountain Golem so she could smash the Goblins below her. Wishes aren't getting you anywhere closer to home, she thought, still looking for some way to free the poor Yeeyoo. Nothing she could do. Not right now anyway. "Procrastination," she said out loud, lept skyward and kicked her wings into high gear.

Fairies could fly fast by themselves and when they employed magic they could move like a rocket. Kisser was tempted, She had to think clearly now. If she used her magic here the Goblins would smell her in a heartbeat. Goblins were good at a few things: War, deceit, torture, making terrible messes out of just about everything, and catching Fairies. If she went around the Goblin horde it would add another day to her trip. If she opened up the throttle on her magic to boost her speed every Goblin below would smell her. She might make it though. But if she didn't the Queen might not know until it's too late. Below her the Goblin pilgrimage to the new king was slow moving. They were not moving fast. The farther she flew from the King's camp the slower they seemed to move, the less certain they seemed. Most of them, she remembered had never had a King. The many young looked to the few old enough to remember when they did have a King. Kisser wondered how many Goblins in the hordes were old enough to remember. Not many she thought. Not many, she hoped.

A black shank roared through her hopes. An arrow from below! They saw her! Sometimes you make choices, she thought, sometimes they're made for you. Kisser pulled a breath deep into her lungs, focused it into her wings and let the magic fly out of her like a whip cracking through the air.

"High octane rocket burn baby! Whooooohooo!" Kisser pulled a pair of old goggles down over her eyes and let the magic surge through her body and felt her wings split the wind!

If you had been watching Kisser fly over the Goblin camp you might have thought she was an overly large dragonfly. When she let her magic out you would have seen that overly

large dragonfly disappear, as if by magic, right in front of your eyes. Yes, Fairies can fly that fast! She would not be able to fly that fast for long especially not over Goblin hordes. Any magic here the Goblins would have sniffed out and sacked by now for sure. No place for a fast recharge. She had to be cunning now. Ninja Fairy, she thought. I gotta be like a ninja! Her burst of magic had taken her over half of the hordes' scattered camps and marching columns but the next half of the horde looked even thicker. That half looked like they were waiting for the traffic to clear. She had to find a place to land before her wings gave out completely. The arrow had forced her to get above the clouds. She had to get closer to the ground to find a place to hide. Getting closer was a risk but falling out of the sky over a Goblin horde was a death sentence.

She dropped down below the clouds and focused a mile out. Nothing but Goblins ahead for miles. Even if she did find somewhere to hide the magic residue on her wings would give her away faster than if she stood on a hill and announced herself to passerby Goblins.

"We have a wonderful gilded model over here with plenty a velvety padding," she felt despair budging into her brain again uninvited, ringing, "should make eternity nice and comfortable for your – oh you're not going to care about your rotting corpse! You'll be basking in a salty Goblin stew!" Kisser pushed the cackling laughter out of her head. That's not *looking*, Kisser, she said to herself.

She saw a hill rising up out of the horde. No, it was not a hill. It's a Goblin slug. An *armored* Goblin slug. It was her only choice. She tucked her wings and dove. The slug came up fast.

The spiked armor that had looked like a pin cushion seconds ago now came at her like massive spears. She dove left, adjusted her dive, released her wings just above the slugs head, held her breath and plunged between the slugs thick skin and its armor. "Ack," she coughed, "gross!" She made her way up the slugs back and as deep into the armor as she dared.

Had they seen her? Maybe, but she doubted it. She held her breath and waited for the alarm. None came.

The Goblins would still smell the magic but they wouldn't find her here. They wouldn't find her unless they took all the armor and gear of the poor, dumb creature and that was not likely to happen. Too bad the snail wasn't going her way. She was going to lose ground hiding in here. On the flip side, the slug was a slow creature. It would be nightfall soon. She could launch herself again when the night came...she hoped. She pushed her heels into the slug slime and tried to make herself comfortable while the magic flowed back into her. "Kisser season," she said to herself recounting the steps before she saw the Obekey, "stupid fairy."

She imagined her friends sitting and wondering where she was. Tree would say something like, "Oh you know Kisser, she's probably off convincing warthogs to plant petunias!" And Grounder would say, "Probably gone north again do whatever it is she does up there."

Edawad, "Nah, you guys don't give her enough credit! She's off defending the weak and the helpless. That's just the kind of Fairy she is." Burg would then say, "Well," and he'd rub his belly with both hands, "you can bet wherever she is now, whatever she's doing it ain't smart."

“And you’d be right Burg,” she said quietly to herself.
“Where I am now is so, so, so far south of smart.” She pushed herself into the slug slime and listened to the Goblins grunting march.