

PRINCE GROGBAH

Mum was right to worry. For well over an hour goblins came pouring into the hotel's back garden until there wasn't a bit of space left.

I was starting to believe that the prince didn't exist at all. But finally there was an extra loud horn blast from the musicians.

'Prepare, unworthy creatures,' the Royal Shouter bellowed. 'The time has come for *His Dookiness* to arrive.'

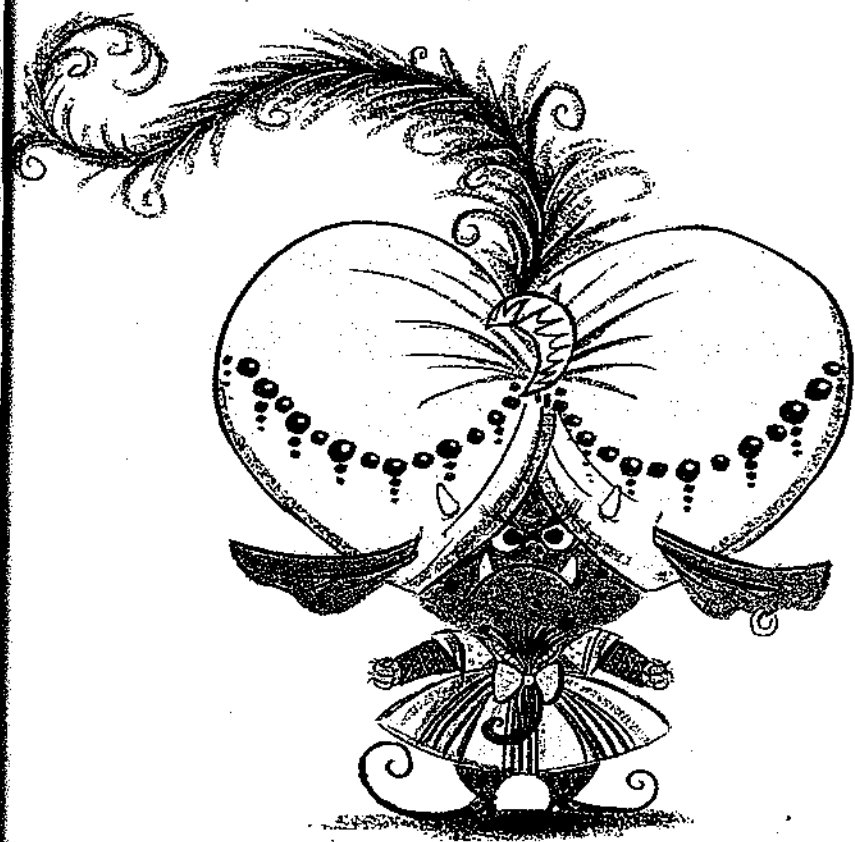
I glanced down the golden corridor and saw an ornate chariot making its way towards us, pulled by a team of miserable-looking goblin servants.

'Heave!' they shouted. 'Heave!'

The chariot reached the double doors, but where was the prince? It seemed to be completely empty,

except for a long, thin feather poking up out of it.

I looked about and saw that everyone had the same confused expression on their face. We watched as the feather jiggled, then moved to the edge of the chariot and ... and ... the shortest, fattest goblin I have EVER seen hopped down onto the ground.



Grogbah was barely taller than a bag of flour, but much, much wider. The prince looked like a grey pumpkin in curly-toed slippers. He was dressed in pink and purple robes covered with tiny gold embroidered flowers, and was dripping in jewellery of every kind. Bangles and necklaces tinkled as he walked, and the rings on every one of his fingers glinted in the sunlight. On his head was a bulging turban with a diamond brooch in the shape of a crescent moon on the front, fastening a **HUGE** feather in place. It was five times taller than he was.

'Greetings, pathetic overlings!' he said in a squeaky voice, then smiled as if he'd just paid us all a compliment. 'Bow at my feet. Grovel at My Gobliness.'

'Umm ...' Dad said. He looked back at the rest of us and gestured for us to copy him as he bent down on one knee. We all did the same.

'Lower,' Grogbah commanded. 'Marvel at My Hunkledom.'

We all got onto both knees and bowed forward.

'LOWER OR DIE!'

The goblin guards brandished their swords and bared their teeth.

How were we supposed to bow lower than the prince? We'd have had to lie flat on the ground and shove our faces in the dirt.

'Oh, mighty Grogbah!' Mum blurted out and rushed forward, bowing and nodding like crazy. 'We are so humbled to have you stay at The Nothing To See Here Hotel. On behalf of all of us, staff and guests, we have prepared a—'

'AAAAAAAGH!' Grogbah screamed and darted behind the nearest guard. 'Human! There's a human here! A dirty, stupid, lumbering, **UGLY, STINKSOME HUMAN!**'

Mum looked like she'd just been slapped round the chops.

'Prince Grogbah—'

'AAAAAAAGH!'

'If I could explain—'

'AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!'

'We actually—'

'AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!'

‘—run the hotel.’

The prince stopped screaming and peeked out from behind the expressionless guard.

‘What?’ he said. ‘Don’t lie to me, wretched human! Guards! Slice this human into chunklets and feed her to my beetles.’

‘WHOA!’ Dad stepped forward and raised his hands. ‘It’s true, Prince Grogbah. My great-great-grandfather, Abraham Banister, built the hotel.’

The prince reeled backwards when he saw Dad.

‘There’s more of them,’ he said with a look of horror on his little fat face. ‘It’s a plague!’

‘I can assure that there is no plague,’ Mum said, trying to sound calm. ‘We are the Banister family and we manage this hotel.’

‘My great-great-grandmother is Regurgita Glump,’ Dad added. He took his glasses off and lifted his head, letting the sunlight catch the copper tinge to his eyes. ‘See? I’m a halfling.’

Prince Grogbah stopped his whimpering and glared at both of them. There wasn’t a person in the whole of the magical world that hadn’t heard of

Granny Regurgita.

‘You?’ the prince said to Dad. He looked so disgusted, I thought he might be sick. ‘The offspring of Mistress Glump?’

‘Yep,’ Dad replied.

‘S’right!’ Mrs Dunch shouted from the top of the slide.

‘If I may,’ Lady Leonora said, floating out of the crowd. She pulled a ghostly flower out of the air and offered it to the prince. ‘The Banisters have magical blood and are nothing to worry about, Your Highness.’

‘B-but ...’ Grogbah’s bottom lip trembled.

‘We’ve prepared a feast for you,’ Mum said, pulling her famous ‘Welcome to the Hotel’ smile.

‘How could I possibly eat with the **STINK** of humans in the air?’

‘There’s gull-gizzard pâté and cockroach crostinis,’ Nancy said.

Grogbah’s jaw dropped and I spotted a little line of drool dribble down his chin. I told you magical creatures were greedy. He stepped back out from

behind the guard and straightened his robes.

'Well, I suppose I can tolerate the stink if there's just two humans,' he mumbled.


'Well,' said Mum carefully. 'Actually there are three.'

'WHAT?' Grogbah clutched at his necklaces in panic.

Mum pointed in my direction and the prince slowly shifted his gaze towards me.

'Hello,' I said, waving. I couldn't help but enjoy the look of revulsion on Grogbah's face.

Prince Grogbah blinked wildly, opened his mouth to speak and ... fainted, face down in the mud, with a satisfying



SQUELCH!



A RIGHT ROYAL PAIN

'Hath he popped hith clonkerth?' the ghost asked.

'If he has, can we eat him?' said the banshee, McCreedie, the geriatric banshee. She licked her crusty lips hungrily.

Nancy had carried the prince inside, and he was now lying on a sofa in the reception hall, with everyone huddled around. No one knew what to do, so we just stared at him.

Grogbah's subjects and guards and wives seemed very unsurprised that he'd fainted so I guessed this was something he did quite a lot. In fact, for the most part they didn't seem to care at all, and a lot of them had already plodded off for a paddle in the swimming pool.

'He's dead,' shrieked Wailing Norris.

'That's ridiculous,' Mum snapped.

'Grogbah?' Dad said, gently poking the lump.

'He's definitely dead,' moaned Wailing Norris.

'NORRIS, WILL YOU SHUT UP!' Mum shot back with an angry glare.

'He's so dead,' whimpered the ghost. 'I've never known anyone so dead. With every passing second, that prince is getting deader and deader. He's the deadest I've ever seen!'

AAAAGH! Prince Grogbah screamed

and sat bolt upright on the sofa, as Wailing Norris reeled backwards and sprinted through the nearest wall. 'Where am I?

'Your Highness.' Mum sat down next to the petrified-looking goblin. 'You're in The Nothing To See Here Hotel ...on holiday.'

'Holiday?'

'Yes,' said Nancy. 'You had a little fainting spell when you arrived. Maybe it was all the travelling, or your turban's on a wee bit tight.' She reached down towards Grogbah's red turban with its diamond brooch. 'Let's get this off you, dearie.'

Grogbah recoiled from Nancy as if she was trying to yank off his head.

'No!' he screeched. **'YOU CAN'T HAVE IT!'**

Nancy stopped in her tracks and gawped at the prince with eight wide eyes.

'I'm onto you, you thief! **YOU PIRATE!'** Grogbah pointed a stumpy finger at Nancy. 'You'll never get your filthy hands on my—'

'Turban?' Nancy said.

We all stared. What was the prince talking about?

Had he gone completely potty?

Silence filled the room. Grogbah looked slowly around at all our shocked faces, then lowered his hand and smiled a nervous, wonky smile.

'Haha!' he laughed a bit too loudly. 'Just kidding.'

We all carried on staring.

'Right! Is there anything we can get you?' Nancy asked, breaking the silence. 'Anything at all?'

'Yes,' said Mum, looking flustered. 'We're happy to provide you with anything you wish.'

Grogbah looked about at the dozens of creatures surrounding him, then his face twisted into a pompous, vinegary sneer. He stood up on the cushion he'd been lying on, puffed out his podgy chest and wedged his tiny hands onto his hips.

'I am Prince Grogbah!' he yelled. 'Ruler of the Golden Barrows! Conqueror of the Dooky Deep! And I don't like this grottish, stinksome **SLUM!**

'Perhaps you'd like us to show you to your room?' said Mum. 'We've saved you our deluxe penthouse. It's got a lovely sea view.'

'No!' shouted the prince. **'NOT GOOD'**

ENOUGH! I want this room.'

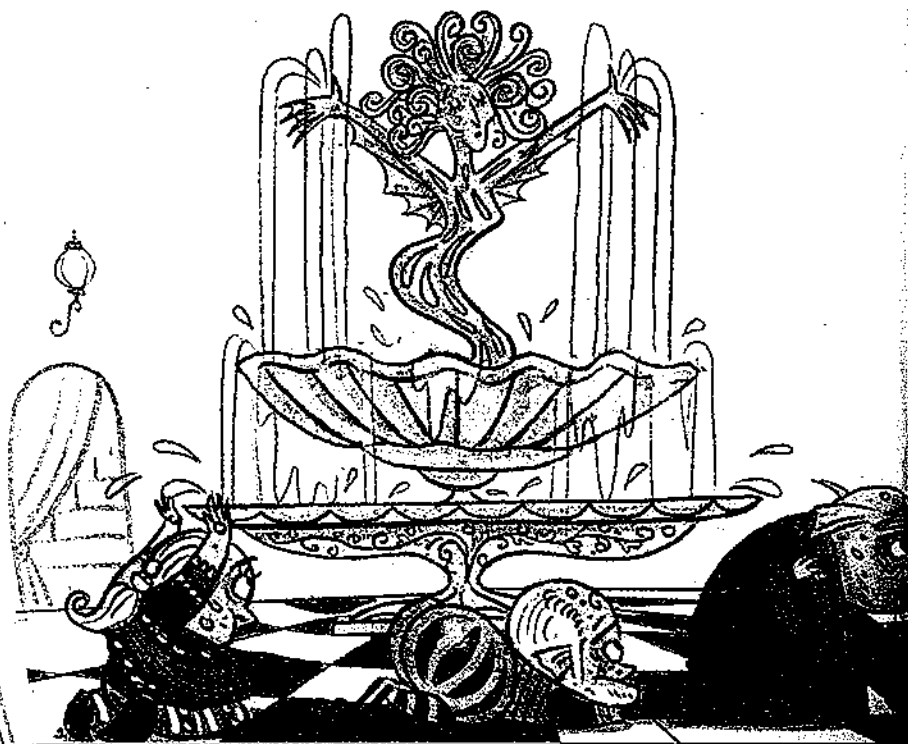
'This room?' Mum looked like she was about to lay an egg.

'Yes! This room, you prattling pook!'

'But this is the reception hall,' said Dad.

'DON'T CARE!' Grogbah shoved a hand in Dad's face. 'I want this one! It's got a high ceiling, and my own private plunge pool.'

'That's the fountain,' Mum explained.



'WRONG!' Grogbah scoffed. 'It's my own private plunge pool. Now, where are my servants?' He clapped his hands. 'Musicians? Dancers! Call the Royal Foot Massager!'

Before Mum and Dad could protest, a gaggle of goblins came running into the reception hall. Musicians gathered on the stone counter and instantly began playing, while others ran to the prince and started cooing and bowing.

'I WANT BEDS!'

LOTS OF BEDS!'



More goblins came tripping down the staircase, carrying mattresses above their tiny heads. One or two still had bed sheets on them and folded clothes.

'That's my mattress,' gasped Gladys Potts, pointing at the sheets with a little doggy-bone pattern.

'HANDS OFF!' the prince hissed. 'It's mine now. Everything is mine.'

I don't think I've ever been speechless in my life, but, at that moment, I couldn't have spoken even if you'd begged me to. The knobbly little whelp was taking over the entire hotel.

'YOU!' Grogbah pointed at Nancy. 'I'm going to take a dip in my plunge pool and I want those spider-silk towels. **MAKE THEM NO!**

A battalion of goblin guards surrounded him and pointed their spears and swords at him. He gasped in fright and started frantically pulling large, fluffy towels out of web.

'It would be smart of you all to do exactly what I say exactly when I say it,' Grogbah announced to the entire room. 'If you want to live, that is.'

With that, the prince dropped his silk robes to the ground and stood there, **BUTT NAKED** except for his turban and that stupid feather.

'Well, I never!' the Molar Sisters gasped.

Grogbah strutted towards the fountain, his plump grey bottom jiggling about like a pair of tiny, overboiled chickens.

'CALL FORTH THE ROYAL BUBBLE BLOWERS!' Grogbah bellowed as he lowered himself into the fountain.

A team of goblin servants came running into the reception hall, clutching reed-straws in their little hands. They circled the pool below the water-witch and dropped to their knees and dipped the ends of their straws into the fountain. Then, taking deep breaths, they started to blow bubbles with every bit of blowing power they could muster.

'That's better,' said the prince. 'I almost thought I was going to have to live in squalor on this grotly holiday.'

Just when I thought Prince Grogbah was going to relax and stop barking orders at people, his beady

MADICALS WELCOMF!

THE NOTHING HOTEL
(HERE)

BRIGHTON, UK

eyes locked onto me. I suddenly felt panicked, so I just shrugged and stared at the floor.

'You! Hideous human child!'

I lifted my head and stared at the nasty little bogey in his bubble bath. The last thing I was going to do was show him I was nervous, even though I was trying very hard not to squirm.

'To the kitchen with you,' Grogbah barked at me. 'Fetch me frog grog. **NOW!**'

I wish I could tell you that I stood my ground and didn't move. I also wish I could honestly say that I shouted, '**GET LOST, YOU CHUBSOME CHUNKER!**' at the prince, but I didn't. Mum and Dad had me well trained to be nice to guests so, before I had time to think, I was halfway to the kitchen ...BUMMER!