

Ganiedral Ledra

Early the next morning, Brebble woke to a high melody of notes coming from outside his doorway. “Griffin,” he said angrily. He tore off the covers, threw on his slippers, and peered into the hall. Along with the music came a laugh, and then a murmur. He imagined the creature, pipe in one talon, sparkling bottle in another. A neatly dressed, pale looking crowd assembled along the spiral stairs, looked up at him. *A toast!*, said the griffin. *To our newly organized librarium, and foolish Brebble, who fell for the oldest trick in the book – the lady in distress.* The party raised their glasses, cried: *Hear, hear!* (Which Brebble knew meant: *Hear him! Hear him!*). And the woman in the white dress laughed and smiled and sipped her drink.

Approaching the study, he climbed onto the chest and listened. A clamor proceeded: a cymbal, a bass, and a trumpet. Suddenly the instruments worked together, and as the drummer’s rhythm switched, the rest of the band kept up. Brebble tapped along at first but then grew annoyed. “It’s another trick,” he said aloud. “I undo the planks, and it asks for more tobacco for my pipe.” But he listened and hummed, nonetheless. The music stopped, the crowd began chatting, and then came the griffin’s voice: “Well done,” it said. “Now, if you could just push that catalogue a little more to the left.” – a rumbling of something being dragged – “Good. That’s perfect right there.” – more shuffling, along with a loud bang – “...Yes, it’s a fine collection, Alcides. I agree.” – more shifting and hammering – “No, I wasn’t familiar with that one, but I do have something stored in my reserve. It’s called *Let There Be Light! Let There Be Giants!* Have you heard of it?”

At this, Brebble saw the entire galaxy; stars and planets stretched without end; and everything grew dim; but then came a small glow. Within the glow letters appeared, and the letters became words, and the words became pages, and the pages grew into an enormous book. And here was *Gigantes Sit!*, in all its glory. The book dissolved, the hallway returned, and the music from the study continued.

Recalling the griffin’s comment, Brebble felt certain that the creature had somehow retrieved his lost book from the abyss. He imagined it walking along a tunnel, humming to itself, when – WHUMP! – the volume landed on its feathery head, as if to say: *Dear Brebble, Surprise! You weren’t able to help me from falling, but eagle-lion assures me this will never happen again. Also, the weather down here is non-tropical. Sincerely yours, Giant Book.* He hastily moved the trunk, pried off the boards, and opened the door.

The room was incredibly bright, additional lamps were placed on each spiral landing, and the stairway was filled with a crowd: the men wore black three-piece suits, with high collars and neckties, and the women had on white dresses. Like the blonde lady, they were unusually pale with green eyes, and then Brebble momentarily recoiled in horror and disbelief: a closer examination revealed catlike pupils. Various groups conversed, some flipped through books, and others carried things about. The blonde woman, still positioned across from the doorway, the bottom of her white dress spread along the landing like the pedals of a great flower, sat before a series of wooden cabinets, and Brebble assumed it was the catalogue the griffin had mentioned through the door. On a landing above, where the creature had been the previous night, was a gramophone (a small box with a large horn and a spinning record), and this was the source of the music. To the left of the music player was a wooden booth, where the griffin spoke into the mouthpiece of a wall phone. Saying farewell, it placed the earpiece onto its cradle and fixed a golden dark-centered eye on Brebble. “You’ve returned just in time!” it said, and then it leaned and whispered

something to a man nearby, who left but then shortly reappeared with a tray of glasses. The griffin took one and signaled with a nod.

“Attention! Attention!” said the man carrying the tray.

The crowd along the stairwell grew still, and Brebble saw that each already had a glass, and the scene was oddly familiar. He wondered how long it would be before the griffin mentioned his falling for *the oldest trick in the book: the damsel in distress*. This thought, however, was quickly interrupted by the man with the tray. “Champagne?” he said, which Brebble reluctantly accepted.

“I’d like to begin a toast,” said the griffin. “I think it was King Reginald Fernheap, who once stated – There are many important things throughout one’s life, but most valued is our recorded history.”

The assembly applauded.

The griffin chuckled. “Not bad, considering old Fernheap wasn’t much of a reader to begin with.”

The assembly laughed.

“To those who helped. To our dearest version of recorded history. To our new librarium!”

Again, the crowd applauded and shouted: “To our new librarium! Hear, hear!”

“*Our* librarium?” said Brebble flatly, drowned out by the cheering.

The griffin stretched its feathers and gave a quick flap of its wings. “But let’s not forget the most important fellow, King Reginald aside. This is a man of great fortitude – especially for putting up with all of us.”

The crowd murmured with approval.

The griffin lifted its glass again and motioned toward Brebble. “To Mr. Broxworth! Owner and high curator of the librarium!”

A mass of feline eyes turned to Brebble. “To Broxworth!” they shouted, and he reddened: he’d never had such recognition in all his life, let alone such a grand title as *high curator*. “Uh...Thanks,” he said, and quickly waved.

The woman across from Brebble lifted her glass, and he did the same, and she grinned: her green eyes darkened into two cosmic portals. His heart gave a few extra beats. Instantly, he realized he liked being the high curator, and he thought perhaps the griffin wasn’t so terrible after all. Besides, he still needed to find out about the book, and maybe things were easier than he originally imagined.

“Sir.” It was the man with the tray again. “Would you care for another glass? But before Brebble could reply, the griffin appeared. Up close, he saw the creature was much taller than he, and the lamp light gave sharp definition to its tremendous beak, its lion claws, and its steel gaze. Brebble found this frightening, yet somehow its voice provided a sense of reassurance. “He’s completely at your disposal, Mr. Broxworth,” said the griffin. “Just say the word and presto.” He nodded to the woman, and she joined them. Up close, Brebble saw that she smelled like spring lilacs, and now his appointment to high curator seemed even *more* remarkable. “Introductions are in order,” the griffin continued. “I am Jorfis Torabus, and this is Ganiemdral Ledra.”

The woman curtsied. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Broxworth.” She curtsied again, and then returned to sorting the cabinets.

“Uhm, nice to meet you,” said Brebble, drowned out again by the surrounding noise.

Jorfis glanced at Ledra and then back to Brebble. “I propose this. How about you return for an official tour, say around noon? Things should wind down by then, and we’ll finally have a chance to speak.”

“Alright,” said Brebble. “There’s something I’d like to discuss with you, however – although I’m having trouble saying it. It’s simple, yet I can’t quite–”

"I, too, have experienced this. An idea climbs up from the brain, yet remains suppressed behind the tongue. Hold everything until our rendezvous, and in the meantime, I'll have Ledra help you with organizing your home. I won't take no for an answer. I think you'll find her a delight and a tremendous help. You're the high curator, after all, and what good would that be without a second in command?"

Brebbles again recalled the book, the reason he entered the librarium in the first place, but instead blurted: "Yes. That'll be fine. I'll see you at noon."

"Gather your things, Ganiedral Ledra," said Jorfis.

"Yes, Mr. Torabus," she replied, shortly joining Brebbles with several filled satchels over her shoulder.

"Now, if you'll pardon me," said Jorfis. "I've more calls to make – alas, irretrievable time beckons us forward." He gave a flap and returned up the stairwell toward the booth, humming along with the gramophone's music as he went.

It was half past five in the morning when Brebbles showed Ledra around the house. She swept up the broken plate in the kitchen, left from the previous night, and together, they repositioned the chest under the window and returned the wooden planks to the outdoor shed. After more tidying, Ledra withdrew and unfolded a small cot, placed at the end of the corridor by the window, and squeezed her things between the wall and the heavy wooden chest. Brebbles originally thought she'd organize for a few hours and return to the study, and he was thrown off by this: there hadn't been a guest overnight since his parents had lived there. He showed her the bathroom off the kitchen, and placed out extra towels and soap by the washstand.

After rummaging through the pantry, Ledra examined the wood stove. "It's still quite early, Mr. Broxworth," she said. "You go and get some sleep, and I'll take care of everything from here."

"Um...Alright, Ledra," said Brebbles. "But if you could be less formal? I'm not used to...any of this. Surely you understand?"

"That wouldn't be proper, Mr. Broxworth."

"Brebbles."

"No, Mr. Broxworth."

Brebbles exasperatingly sighed.

"And remember, you've an appointment at noon with Mr. Torabus."

"Yes, I didn't forget, but thank you."

"I'll wake you for breakfast at ten o'clock?"

Brebbles nodded.

Ledra curtsied.

"You don't have to—"

"To *not* do so, would be an insult to the Ganiedral bloodline." She angrily curtsied again.

Brebbles made for his bedchamber. "Completely unnecessary," he muttered.

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Broxworth?"

Brebbles turned and saw that Ledra looked upset. "I said – It's nice that you're helping me."

"Yes, you're welcome, Mr. Broxworth."

Brebbles closed his door and climbed into bed.

Later that same morning, Brebble woke to shouting outside his room.

"He's not to be disturbed."

"Don't be silly. Breebble! Hellooooo!"

"Just leave the delivery, and I'll tell Mr. Broxworth you stopped by."

There came a series of taps on the door, and then Ledra's voice: "Mr. Broxworth, I'm sorry to disturb you, but this woman insists – I explained that you are *not* to be woken, but she refuses to lis–"

"Would you *please move*, and let me *speak* to him?"

"I'll do no such thing."

Brebbeble leapt from his bed. "Rani," he thought aloud. Frantically searching for his robe, he stumbled over his slippers, flung the door open, and discovered both women in a vehement stare-down. "Uhm, err, Rani," he said, "This is Ledra. And Ledra, this is Rani."

Ledra sourly curtsied. "Charmed."

Rani continued glaring. "Brebbeble, have you completely lost your mind?"

"I have an idea," said Brebble. "Why don't we have breakfast in the kitchen?"

Ledra set the cups and plates and put on the kettle; Rani cut the bread; Brebble spread the preserves; and then Ledra disappeared into the pantry and reemerged with a large wooden box filled with pastries.

"See, Mr. Broxworth," she said. "I made tiny cakes while you were asleep."

"Thanks," said Brebble. "They look del–"

"The bread's fresh," said Rani. "It's the most recent batch."

"You always bring the finest," said Brebble, patting her arm.

"Care for more tea, Mr. Broxworth?" said Ledra. Brebble nodded, and she leaned over him and topped his cup.

Rani's brow furrowed. "More bread?" she asked.

"No, I'm fine, thanks," said Brebble.

"More cakes, Mr. Broxworth?" asked Ledra.

"He's had enough pastries," said Rani, shoving Ledra's basket with the bread tin.

At this, Ledra pushed the basket sharply against the tin, and a few slices dropped to the floor. "Let me get the broom," she said.

Rani frowned.

"I have another idea," said Brebble. "Rani, let's say you and I visit the garden outside?"

"Yes," said Rani, nodding, and her face brightened.

"I'll join as well, Mr. Broxworth?" said Ledra. "I know a great many things about plants and flowers, and it's nice to have an expert for such matters."

Rani frowned again.

Brebbeble looked at Ledra, and then at Rani, and then back to Ledra. "That's very gracious, but Rani and I have important things to discuss."

Ledra's green eyes widened. "I'm well versed in the ways of important conversations, Mr. Broxworth. Just ask Mr. Torabus. I can act as an advisor, if need be."

Brebbeble politely refused again, and Ledra quietly cleared the table as he and Rani headed outside.

A stone path, dividing two semicircles of tall grass and wildflowers, led to a faded, wooden entryway. The front end of Rani's wagon peered from a hinging post, and her donkey nuzzled at some nearby clover. An unkempt hedge enclosed the perimeter, where oak, maple, ash, and birch stood before a dark pine

forest; within the grounds, apple trees scattered their fruit along the earth; and sparrows chirped and darted, picking at seeds and insects. As far as Brebble was concerned, this was a garden.

Rani squinted against the sunlight as she plucked an apple from a nearby tree, wiped it on her sleeve, and bit into it. She looked thoughtfully at Brebble. “You realize, of course, there’s an elf in your house,” she said.

“A what?”

“An elf, Brebble. You know, they prowl the forest late at night. You can tell by their pupils.” She pointed to her eyes.

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not ridiculous – you’re ridiculous for letting that *thing* into your house.”

“Her name is Ledra.”

They both sat quietly in the grass, and Brebble put together Jorfis, and the librarium, and the crowd along the stairwell, and the assistants, and their cat eyes, and it occurred to him: onlyworld, where unnatural things reside, such as ghosts, *elves*, or griffins. Why hadn’t he thought of this? Had he been in a fog all morning? He explained to Rani about Jorfis, the spiral staircase, the griffin’s assistant, his appointment as owner and high curator of the librarium, but left out his falling for *the damsel in distress*.

“So they gave you a title,” she said. “That doesn’t mean you should trust them. What does a griffin want with a bunch of books, anyway? There’s something more to this. Be careful.”

“Of course he’s interested,” said Brebble. “The librarium’s unique. My father always said it, and he was right. My whole life has been fish and fish and fish, but this – this is different. Besides, Jorfis might be horrifying to look at, but he’s friendly once you get to know him. And Ledra’s only odd because she’s overly polite.”

“Just be careful.”

“Stop worrying so much.”

“I’m not worrying so much.”

The two fell silent again. Rani flung her apple core at an oak tree, and a few sparrows bolted into the air. “There’s a man giving a speech about giants tomorrow night,” she said. “I thought we should go.”

“Horace Maltbin,” said Brebble.

“That’s right – Horace. You already knew?”

“He stopped by yesterday, since he knew I was fond of books.”

“Oh.”

“He’d mentioned the lecture, and there was something else, but I’m unable to say it.”

“Okay. But why aren’t you able to say it, when you normally tell me everything?”

“I have no idea.”

They agreed to meet at her family’s bakeshop before the event, and they both said farewell.

Back inside the kitchen, Brebble found everything neatly put away, and the house seemed different. The assistant’s absence created a thing Brebble normally didn’t feel: alone. He puzzled over this as he entered the hall, and nearly tumbled over Ledra, who lay face down on the stone. “Are you alright?” he asked.

“You lost your tooth here,” she said into the floor. “You were just a tiny thing, then.”

Brebble felt a wave of relief. “You gave me the worst fright.”

She looked up at him, and her eyes darkened. “This is where you played,” she said. “And your mother brought you hot cocoa – right over there.” She pointed toward the small table, and then sat up, and her eyes returned to green. “Care for some hot cocoa, Mr. Broxworth?”

Before he could respond, she got up, brushed off her dress, and made for the kitchen. He followed and took his usual chair, and watched her retrieve several glyph covered, paper bound packages from the closet, none of which were his. She examined the long row of hanging utensils and cooking vessels, and unhooked a small, black pan: the same pan his mother had used. Within moments, the room smelled of toasted chocolate, and she set down a brimming mug, and it was the most wonderful cocoa he had ever tasted.

Copyright © 2015 by Watson Gates Wood
All Rights Reserved

Copyrighted Material

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and locations are either a product of the author’s imagination or used in a fictitious setting. Any resemblance to actual events, locations, organizations, or people, living or dead, is strictly coincidental. No part from this book may be used or reproduced without written consent from the author.