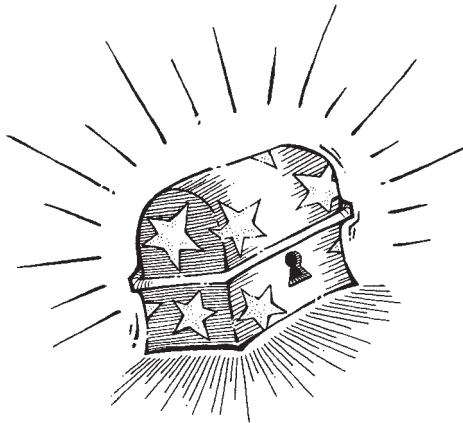


Kendra Kandlestar and the Box of

Whispers

Written and Illustrated
by Lee Edward Födi



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KENDRA KANDLESTAR AND THE BOX OF WHISPERS
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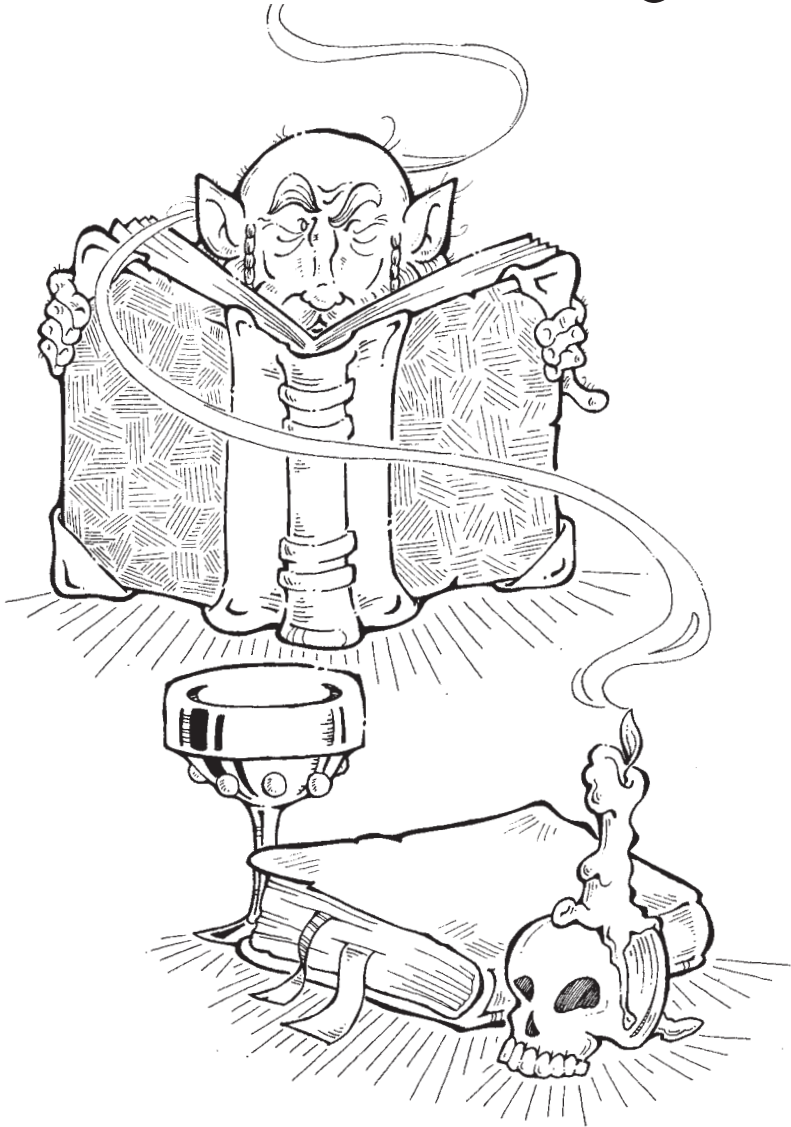
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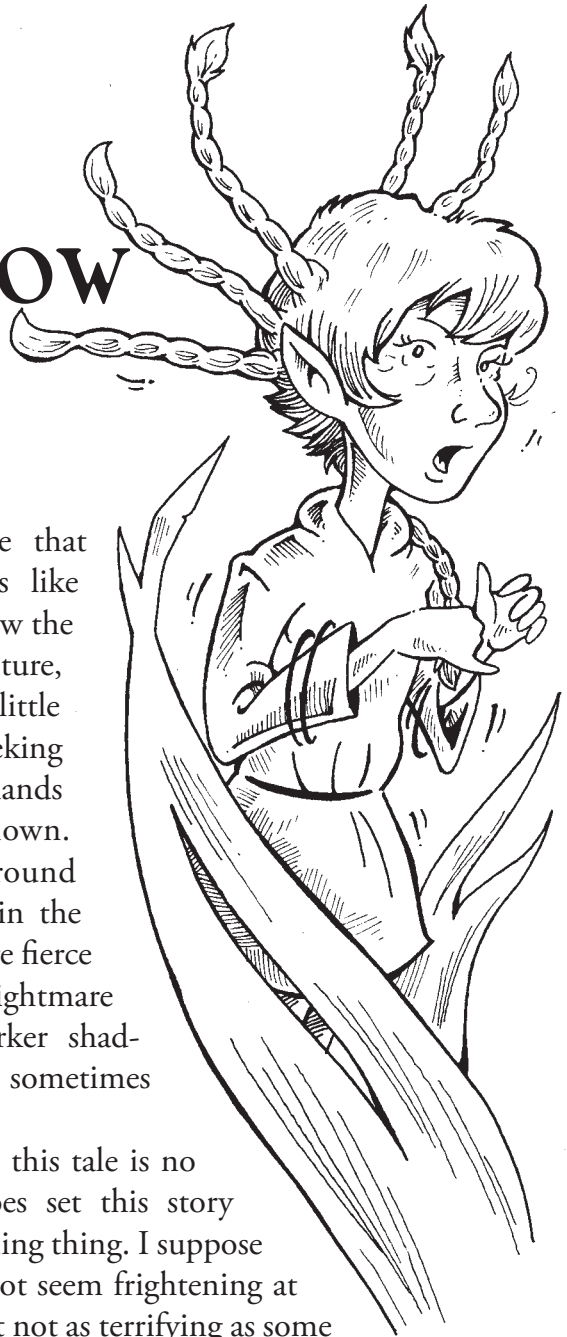


CHAPTER 1

A Dark Shadow

It is entirely possible that you have heard stories like this one before. You know the type: tales of high adventure, where you read about little folk with brave hearts seeking some magic treasure in lands treacherous and unknown. Here danger lurks around every crook and bend in the trail. Here creatures more fierce than your darkest nightmare prowl amidst even darker shadows. And here, they say, sometimes heroes are born.

Well, in that regard, this tale is no different. But what does set this story apart is one tiny frightening thing. I suppose it's a thing that might not seem frightening at all to you at first. At least not as terrifying as some of the things in those other stories, like an ancient hag, hunchbacked and cackling with three crooked



fangs, or a goblin with scaly gray skin and one yellow eye that glints like a bright gold coin in a dungeon's dim corner. No, this tiny thing doesn't seem dangerous at all compared to the fiendish villains in those other stories.

And now you wonder what this thing can be. Can you guess? No? Then let me tell you.

It is, believe it or not, a secret.

A secret, you say? How can a secret be frightening? Well, we will certainly come to that. But not quite yet. First we must go to the beginning of the story. To get to the beginning, we must go to the land of Een, during a time long ago when the world still remembered some of its magic. These were the days when ancient races such as Dwarves and Elves still roamed the earth. But even then the land of Een was not an easy place to find. It was tucked in between the cracks of here and there, a tiny, quiet place that the sharpest eye would miss.

Here, at the beginning of our story, a young Een girl was staring up with a frown at a row of unusually large carrots. The girl's name was Kendra Kandlestar and she was eleven years old. As for the carrots, they were unusually large because they were magic, or more accurately stated, Kendra had used magic to plant them. In fact, she had only planted them that very morning and by noon they had grown taller than the garden shed—with no end in sight. Kendra sighed. It had seemed like a marvelous idea at the time. Now that the carrots were looming over her like so many orange towers, well, she wasn't so sure.

She tugged on her long braids and furled her brow, deep in thought. Tugging helped her think. Thankfully, she had many braids. Her hair was long and brown, the perfect type for braiding. She had seven braids in all, reaching out from her

A DARK SHADOW

small head like the rays of a star. Of course, Eens are known for their braiding ability, though I suppose if you have heard of Eens at all, perhaps it's not their braids that you will recall. Most likely what you may have heard—and if you have not, I will tell you now—is that the Eens are a tiny sort of people, smaller than rabbits, but bigger than mice. They are also a very old people, which is to say they have been in the world for a long time, longer than most. Some scholars and other such people who study these things think Eens are related to Gnomes or Elves. But this is mostly because Eens have pointed ears and seem to know a thing or two about magic. They can talk to animals the same as you and I can talk to each other, and indeed many an Een town is populated with all sorts of forest critters. These are mostly the small friendly type of critters, the ones that aren't about to go eating Eens for lunch.

Eens come in many shapes and sizes, though it is safe to say that they are mostly small, mostly friendly, and—most of all—afraid of the big outside that exists beyond the magic curtain. This magic curtain is like a giant invisible wall that separates and hides the land of Een from the rest of the known world. But we shouldn't blame the Eens for being so timid. The world that exists beyond the magic curtain lurks with all sorts of dangerous monsters, including Ungers, Krakes, and Goojuns (both the lesser and greater varieties, if you happen to know or care that there is more than one type of Goojun at all). Of course, if you were as tiny as an Een, then you would know that the world is a hard enough place in which to live, never mind Ungers and Goojuns and such. To an Een, a flower might as well be a tree, or a rock or a mountain.

Of course, Kendra's carrots were another matter altogether. They would have been considered enormous even in our world.

“Uncle Griffinskitch is going to have a perfect fit when he comes home,” Kendra declared, tugging on her braids extra hard.

Then, as if he had been waiting for his name to be mentioned, Uncle Griffinskitch appeared, stepping out from behind one of the giant carrots.

“Kendra!” the old Een bellowed. His voice was deep and loud, though to a person the size of you or me, it would have seemed scarcely louder than a whisper. “What have you done now?”

With a gulp, Kendra turned to face her uncle. “Th-th-the carrots have grown out of control,” she stammered.

“Humph,” Uncle Griffinskitch muttered.

Uncle Griffinskitch said “humph” a lot, though Kendra had long ago learned that humph didn’t always mean the same thing. For example, a quiet humph means that her uncle was deep in thought, while a louder humph, the sort that came from the bottom of the old Een’s throat, meant that he was more than just a little angry. Then there was the roaring sort of humph that meant . . . well, it usually meant that Kendra had really done it this time. Of course, as long as he was in the humph stage, Kendra knew she was only in a tiny bit of trouble. It was when Uncle Griffinskitch yelled, “Days of Een!” that it meant extra chores for a week. Kendra wasn’t sure what “Days of Een” meant. No one else she knew ever said it, though she did find the phrase once in an old book in her uncle’s study. It began, “In the Days of Een, when all were one . . .” But that’s all she could remember, because it had been a long time ago when she read it.

Uncle Griffinskitch glared hard at Kendra with his sharp blue eyes. “Someone,” he said, “has been playing with magic.”



Magic, of course, was something Uncle Griffinskitch knew about. He was a wizard, after all, and a powerful one at that. It was one of the reasons he sat on the Council of Elders. Kendra liked to think that another reason was his beard, for it was so long and white that she could not help but to think of elders when she looked at it. Some Eens claimed that Uncle Griffinskitch had never once trimmed his beard or long whiskers. Kendra didn't know about that, but she was pretty sure the beard slowed her uncle down. He never seemed to move faster than the pace of a snail going uphill, despite the help of the short wooden staff that he always clutched in his withered old hands.

"I thought a little magic might help the carrots grow," Kendra told her uncle sheepishly.

"Humph," Uncle Griffinskitch muttered as he eyed a large book lying in the grass near Kendra's feet. "What's this?"

Gardening with Magic. How many times have I told you to not borrow my books without asking?"

"Yes, but I thought I could surprise you," Kendra began.

"I'm surprised all right," Uncle Griffinskitch interrupted. "Unfortunately, it is a surprise of the unpleasant variety."

"Er . . . can we stop them from growing?" Kendra asked.

"What's that?" Uncle Griffinskitch muttered, stroking his beard and gazing intently upon the carrots. "Yes, of course. A Goojun's sneeze would do it."

"A Goojun sneeze!" Kendra cried, tugging on her braids. "How would we get one? From one of their handkerchiefs?"

"Goojuns aren't exactly the sort to use handkerchiefs," Uncle Griffinskitch snorted.

"Oh," Kendra said. "So what then? I thought it was forbidden to go near Goojuns."

"Humph," Uncle Griffinskitch said. "It's not forbidden to go near them. Just to help them. Them and any other monster that lives out there."

He pointed a crooked finger into the distance, towards the magic curtain and the world that lay beyond. Kendra followed his gesture to the horizon, but she could see nothing except the vast blue sky. Of course, this was no surprise. No one could see the magic curtain, not even Uncle Griffinskitch, for it was completely invisible to the naked eye.

Kendra was just about to look away when suddenly she did see something in the sky. It was just a dot, far in the distance, and it made Kendra gulp. She had seen dots in the sky before, of course. They usually just turned out to be birds. But what made Kendra take particular notice of this dot was that it was quickly becoming more than a dot. With every second it was becoming larger and larger, plowing through the clouds

like a giant cloak of darkness—and it was heading straight their way!

“What is that thing?” Kendra cried.

Uncle Griffinskitch couldn't even muster a humph and, if he had, Kendra wouldn't have heard it anyway. For now a shriek came from the dark shadow, so loud and piercing that the world seemed to come to a sudden stop. If you had heard the shriek, you might have said that it sounded like long fingernails scratching a chalkboard. Or that it was like the blood-curdling cry of a baboon, deep in the wilds of Africa. Or, maybe, you might have said that it sounded like the screech of a skidding car, the type of sound that sends a shiver down your spine and frightens you to your very toes.



This shriek was worse than all of those sounds mixed together. It was so loud that Kendra had to put her hands to her ears just to try to block out the tiniest bit of the bone-jarring howl. It was the type of sound you could feel, the type that had weight. Indeed, it was so heavy that one of the giant carrots even cracked and smashed to the earth in a brilliant burst of orange.

The shadow itself was as large as the shriek was loud, casting a darkness so wide and gloomy that it seemed as if night had suddenly fallen. Kendra and Uncle Griffinskitch craned their necks as the ominous shape tore through the plants and trees above them, but all was black. Then in a flash both the

shadow and the sound were gone. The silence was blissful, but it only lasted for a second. In what seemed like one beat of a tiny Een heart, the shadow returned, zooming back with an even louder, more triumphant roar.

Then, just like that, it disappeared all together.

“Days of Een!” Uncle Griffinskitch cried after a few moments. His sharp blue eyes, framed with wrinkles, were still locked on the now-empty sky and his whole body was trembling.

“What was that thing?” Kendra asked.

“Humph,” the old wizard muttered, and it was the kind of humph that Kendra had never heard from her uncle’s lips. It was the kind of humph that suggested grave trouble.

“Hurry,” Uncle Griffinskitch said, casting a worried glance at Kendra. “We must go at once to the Elder Stone!”

