

Goblin Stones

By

Nick Shamhart

Once upon a long ago...

When I first learned that I was going to be a father I set out on a quest. Now remember, this was a quest that needed to be sandwiched into all the other chores a soon-to-be-dad has to do: build a crib, run to grocery stores and fast food places at all hours of the night to help satisfy cravings, install childproof locks that turn out to be parent proof or worse yet break almost immediately upon installation, learn how to properly change diapers, swaddle, and burp a baby, plus many many more.

I had heard stories, you see. Those stories were the reason for my quest. Old stories from a time when stories were told to be believed, and not simply to entertain bored people. No, the old stories also taught as they were told. You learned a lesson as well as passed the time.

The old stories tell of magic, and it was something magic that I went on a quest for. Tell me, have you ever heard of *Goblin Stones*?

No?

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Well, I didn't think so, and even if you had the stories you probably heard were to entertain you, not teach you ... if you take my drift.

I set out on a quest for Goblin Stones. Why? Because there is power in Goblin Stones that every parent should want. It's the power of protection. The old stories say that if you have Goblin Stones in your yard your children will always be safe from those crude creatures. Even the dimmest glow from a Goblin Stone will blare out in the night, saying, "Stay Away!" Just like mothballs for moths, only stronger.

I don't want to scare you with tales of goblins and the horrible deeds they've done. As it is you've probably already heard stories about goblins and the mischief they are prone to, so you have some idea as to why you'd want them to stay away. But, trust me; mischief is the least of what goblins are capable of. Why if even half of the stories I've heard about goblins are true, then you'd do well to find some Goblin Stones for your yard too.

I went to find the Goblin King. You see that's part of the secret to getting your hands on Goblin Stones. You have to have his permission. The stones have to be willingly handed over by the king, or they will have the opposite effect. Instead of screaming for goblins to, "Stay Away!" the glow from the stones will beckon, "Come and Get Them!"

And oh buddy, you better believe they will. Not just the stones either. Those goblins will come from all over to reclaim what was theirs and they'll take the children too. They'll carry the stolen stones and children away to their cities way, way down deep below the ground. Down, down, down past dirt, rock, and sand. Deep in the earth where they will

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never be seen again ... or, worse yet they may turn them into goblins and return them! Then you'd be stuck with a son or daughter or brother or sister that was a goblin. No matter how annoying a child may be, a goblin will be ten times worse. Trust me.

That's why you must find the Goblin King if you want Goblin Stones. To be truthful, that's the hardest part. Once you have his permission it's all downhill from there.

So, where do you find the Goblin King, you ask? Well that's a very good question. I had to ask it too. I looked and asked, and asked and looked all over the world. I asked little old men huddled under saffron robes in the high Himalayas. I asked little old men tucked under bright blue and pink blankets in the high Andes. Come to think of it, I must have asked little old men on every mountain range you can name all over the world. I asked in fishing villages and on city streets. I asked in coffee shops and libraries, doctor's offices and mortuaries. I asked, and asked, and asked. No one knew.

With all that asking and asking the nine months I'd had to find the stones in had shrunk down to a week. I was out of time. So, what did I do? Well, what's the best way to find something? Stop looking for it, right? Not give up. I didn't give up! I stopped looking. I let my mind drift. I wandered. I stopped asking. Once I stopped, then sure enough I found the Goblin King. Or it may be more appropriate to say, he found me. At a fried chicken joint of all places – I later found out that goblins are fried chicken junkies. Apparently there's some kind of addictive chemical in the batter that drives them crazy.

I was waiting for my order to be filled, and trying to ignore a noisy brother and sister who were

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using cold biscuits in an attempt to beat each other senseless while their mother played on her phone, when I heard a rumbling voice behind me say, “I hear you’ve been looking for me.”

I jumped a bit. I wasn’t expecting him and I had started mentally placing bets on who would win the biscuit fight. My mind was on food, not goblins. Turning around, I looked about the dine-in area of the fast-food restaurant. I didn’t see anybody besides the fighting siblings and a couple of families at the corner booths. Scratching my head I looked back to the counter girl who was messing around on her phone, too. The voice said, “Down here, bub!”

I turned back and looked down this time. He couldn’t have been more than four feet tall, holding a bucket of fried chicken twice as big as his head. There was a drumstick poking out from the corner of his wide, frog-like mouth and it moved from side to side as he chewed.

Now, I don’t know what stories you’ve heard about the Goblin King, but they probably aren’t very true. There are all kinds of versions of him from a great warrior to a foppish dandy. But this I can tell you for a fact. He doesn’t sing. He doesn’t dance. And he certainly doesn’t wear tight pants. In fact, he doesn’t wear pants at all. What does he wear then? Well, it’s sort of like a soft terrycloth robe, all bunched up and scrunched up to fit his tiny frame. He looks more like a toad that has learned how to walk on his hind legs. A toad that started lifting weights, lots and lots of weights because his stubby arms were huge! On his monstrous floppy feet he wears swimming fins. Why? They’re the only thing that hides his gnarly yellow toenails that smell like

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Fritos. Or so I've heard. I wasn't going to sniff his feet for the sake of science.

He may not be all that tough to look at him, but he makes up for it with attitude ... and well magic. The Goblin King knows more magic than all three of Macbeth's Weird Sisters combined. None of that, "Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble" rubbish for him. No, he can snap his fingers and turn you into a blue and purple polka-dotted monkey if he wanted to. So though he may not look impressive, you sure as heck better be polite. I looked down, meeting his wide yellow eyes, and said, "Yes, Your Highness, I am looking for you."

See I said *Your Highness* even though he is anything but high. *Your Shortness* would be rude; accurate, but rude. The drumstick moved from one side of his mouth to the other as he stared back at me, sucking on the bone and gristle with a popping, smacking sound. It was starting to give me the creeps, and frankly it was disgusting, but I didn't say anything. Rummaging through his bucket of chicken without looking down, he said, "Well, you found me. What'chew want?"

"I wanted your permission to collect some Goblin Stones, Your Highness."

"Oh ho ho!" he said with his frog-like yellow eyes bugging. Little bits of fried chicken batter flew from his mouth as he laughed, splattering my jeans and shoes. When he stopped laughing, and covering my shoes in grossness, he said, "Been a long time since anybody asked me for that. You know the old tales, lad."

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I nodded, trying to show as much respect as I could as I towered over the tiny king. He fished a chicken wing from his bucket and tossed it past his extra-large lips – whole. He chomped and crunched, finally slurping back the drumstick from the corner of his mouth like a loose piece of spaghetti. Placing a fist to his stomach he belched loudly and juicily. I passed him a napkin on reflex. He nodded, and after wiping his rubbery lips, he simply ate the napkin. I suppose that's one way to recycle.

Nodding as if coming to a decision, he said, "I tell you what. I got three buggers that are a real pain in my keaster at the moment. I know who you are, lad, and I'd have told most of my boys to leave any of your kin alone anyway ... not that they'd all listen, of course." He added a sly wink to the last as if we were old friends sharing a joke. I nodded, again respect. He continued, "You take care of those three for me and you can keep 'em. Deal?"

He stuck his grease-smearred hand out for me to shake. There were chunks of chewed chicken and who knew what else stuck to his fingers. I closed my eyes, leaned down, and shook it. It took all my willpower not to grab another napkin and frantically wipe the chicken grease, goblin slobber, and whatnot from my hand after it was over. I think he did that on purpose because he chuckled when I kept my hand at my side.

The smile vanished and his features turned serious. He grabbed my wrist, pulling me down closer. The smell of fried chicken and goblin breath just about turned my stomach. He whispered, "You know the old stories, lad. You know what you got to do, right?"

I nodded.

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“Good,” he let go of my wrist and patted the back of my hand repeating, “good.”

“Order for Nick!” The girl behind the counter shouted, and I turned to pick up my chicken, even though the smells of goblin breath (and the slimy goblin goop that was drying into a crust on my fingers) gave me second thoughts about eating any of it. When I turned back around toward the Goblin King he was gone.

I looked down at my hand, ready to clear the place out of lemon-scented wet wipes, and I saw that where he’d patted my hand were four words written in gravy: Klim, Groob, and Mook, Glasgow.

I had my goblins. I knew where to go. All that was left was the not so easy part of collecting my stones.

I traveled to Scotland. That may seem like a long trip just to get a few stones, but remember if you have Goblin Stones around your home or yard your children will always be safe from goblins. It was worth riding a few hours trapped in a flying tin can, forced to eat meager snacks, and rebreathe the burps and farts of all the other passengers that passed as ventilation.

I landed in Scotland’s biggest city and started asking around. I hit up all the typical places. Pubs, bars, coffee shops, pubs, and a few more bars. Hey, I only had a pint or two! It’s the goblins that like to hit the booze. Especially the Scottish and Irish goblins. Boy oh boy, let me tell you those little buggers drink more intoxicating substances in one night than most Americans do during the entire football season.

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The last pub I checked the bartender told me that three goblin looking blokes had just left. He thought he had heard one of them call the other Mook, so maybe it was them. That would work for me. Time was running out. I hurried out the doors and guessed at a direction to go. Sometimes in life we just have to choose. Sometimes we win and sometimes we lose.

By the time I arrived at the Glasgow River, I could hear the mumbling, grumbling speech of drunken goblins ... and one deep threatening growl from a troll. Oh boy. Trolls hate goblins. I mean Hate with a capital "H." And Goblins feel the same way about trolls. The two of them go together like orange juice and toothpaste, or hot fudge on fish sticks. If I didn't do something they'd tear each other apart, and my quest would have failed.

I jogged to catch up. When I rounded the side of a building I saw the troll had climbed up from under a nearby bridge and was pointing a thick finger the size of a Thanksgiving turkey at the three, much smaller, goblins. His big eyes were blurry with sleep and he was dressed in candy cane striped pajamas, complete with floppy nightcap. A teddy bear the size of a pony was tucked under his arm. He rumbled, "What are you three doing making all that noise? There's good people trying to sleep around here!"

I stepped in before the grumpiest of the goblins could speak up. He was glaring at the troll, looking like he might bite down on the huge finger pointed at him. I shouted, "There you guys are!"

Three smallish heads quickly turned my way, and one large, hulking, misshapen, monstrous head slowly caught up with them. I'd been working on my story and I figured now would be as good of time as

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any. I may even gain a bit more trust by calming the troll down, too. I smiled my brightest smile and said, “I’m a casting director for a new TV show-”

“You’re an American?” the troll grumbled with a frown that creased his hairy black eyebrows almost all the way down over his eyes. Still smiling, I said, “Yes sir, I am. Hollywood U.S.A.!” I added, hoping my nose wouldn’t grow with the lie (it’s been known to happen. Not just Pinocchio, but it’s why so many movie stars need nose jobs). Bright, fake smile shining, I added, “I heard those three fellows back at the pub and I thought they would be perfect for our new show.”

The troll still looked confused, but the goblins had added a greedy look to their drunken eyes. You wouldn’t have believed me if you were them. Heck, I wouldn’t have believed me if I were them, but thankfully we aren’t goblins. All goblins really want is to be famous. I think that’s common knowledge, right? Well they do, and they want fame really, really bad. They’ll do just about anything to get on TV or be in a movie. You know those Reality TV shows that are so silly and unbelievable with all that drama? You ever wonder how those people got on TV to begin with? Well, they’re goblins, of course. The makeup they cover them in just hides it really well, but if you catch them in the right light you can see it.

These three were no different, and that’s what I was counting on. They believed my story because they wanted to believe it. I don’t know if the troll believed it or not. Trolls are dumb and slow. This one was dumb, slow, and tired. All he needed to hear was what I said next, “Gentlemen, if you’ll come

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with me I'll fill you in on the details and we can let this poor fellow get back to bed."

The troll grunted and grumbled, turning away from us he scratched at his huge butt and disappeared back under his bridge without saying another word. The goblins scampered over to me. I told them the when and the where that they needed to meet me for an *official* audition, giving them my business cards if they needed to get in contact with me in the meantime. With dreams of fortune and fame dancing in their heads they left me there, waving goodbye.

I had a little under a week to set everything up for my trap. I was going to get three Goblin Stones, but I had some arrangements to make first.

On the evening of the audition Klim, Groob, and Mook were right on time. In fact they were a little early, because it was so close to sunset. You see all goblins know not to go outside during the New Moon. That is, after all, what turns them into Goblin Stones. The magic of the dark twists and turns their mischief into something to help others. It turns them into rocks that glow in the dark to light the way for loved ones to find their road home. The more pranks and evil things they've done the larger and brighter the Goblin Stones they'll turn into.

All goblins know this. They stay inside their caves, cottages, basements, and anyplace else they can hide when the Moon is new. But greed, oh boy, now greed let me tell you can make the smartest goblins into the dumbest things, and Klim, Groob, and Mook were so greedy they were dumber than the box of rocks they were about to become.

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I had set up a fake waiting room in the hotel I was staying at. It wouldn't have fooled you or me, but again sometimes when people (or goblins) want something so badly they're willing to fool themselves. The three bounced about in their chairs, grumbling impatiently, but not too loudly because they didn't want to ruin their chances of being picked. I'd paid a few homeless guys to hang out in the other chairs, figuring the goblins would wonder if they were the only ones auditioning. They were all so grubby and unwashed it was hard to tell them apart in any event.

I waited and watched from behind a screen I had placed to separate the waiting room from the stage (the bedroom from the balcony, but the goblins didn't know that...and the homeless guys didn't care). I waited until the sun set before I walked through the fake door saying, "Gentlemen, I'm so glad you could all come." Consulting a blank piece of paper I had on a clipboard, I pretended to read their names. "Ah, let's see Mr. Jacobs?" I asked. When no one responded one of the homeless guys nudged the man next to him who had fallen asleep, startling him awake. "Badgers! Badgers ate the pudding momma! Not me!"

Sighing and rubbing at my forehead, I said, "Right. Mr. Jacobs would you follow me please?"

He staggered to his feet and followed me past the screen and onto the balcony. Once past the goblins' line of sight, I slipped a handful of cash into his palm and he climbed down the fire escape. You're thinking wouldn't it look weird if he didn't come back out? Probably, but it was a risk I was willing to take because I had a few more things to do and I didn't want him getting in the way. I tacked a sheet

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up to cover the railing and view of the street. It looked horrible. You wouldn't have been fooled and neither would I, but all I needed was to get all three goblins out on the balcony so I could pull it away, exposing them to the moonless sky. A few seconds was all I'd need. The sheet should fool them for that long. I sat in a folding chair for a few minutes to give the impression that I was auditioning Mr. Jacobs.

Waiting as long as I could, I walked back into the room, reading from my blank clipboard, "Mr. Klim, Mr. Groob, and Mr. Mook, if you'd please come this way. I'll take care of you three all at once."

Sure that was a bit melodramatic, but sometimes you just can't help yourself.

The three goblins laughed and joked with each other as they walked past me. I threw the sliding door closed and locked it. One of the goblins grumbled, "Hey! What's the big idea?"

Another was about to say something else and the third started tugging at the locked door even though he could have unlocked it if he'd taken a second and stopped to think, but he didn't. I reached over and yanked the sheet down. It came away with a tearing sound and the dark Scottish sky fell over the goblins. It happened fast and it was kind of pretty. In the blink of an eye all three grubby, hairy, smelly, ugly brutes turned into lovely, beautiful, gorgeous, glowing rocks. Goblin Stones.

I picked them up and put them in my suitcase, stuffed under a pair of dirty socks and unwashed underwear so nobody at the airport would steal them. I was happy because I knew my children would now

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be safe from goblins, but I was sad too that the goblins had been so easy to take advantage of. I know goblins will steal children, pull them out of bed in the middle of the night, but was what I had done any different? I had used the goblins' dreams of fame against them, pulled them from their world and turned them into something else just like they would have done to a child. They would have done it out of selfishness but I had done it out of love. I'm not making excuses. Given the chance I'd do it over again. I'm just giving you something to think about.

Sometimes we do the right thing for the wrong reasons, and sometimes we do the wrong thing for the right reasons. When I arrived back home and placed my Goblin Stones around my backyard I wasn't sure which I had done. But I did know that people I loved could sleep safely with no fear of goblins.