

The Book

Mackinnon Hart

The Bookman held out an untitled volume to the gentleman behind the desk. As the book passed between hands, the corner clinked against one of the more expensive tricks of the trade – a still snow globe seated on the gentleman's desk in which a very small lady sat silently in the fallen snow.

“Another trinket for your collection,” offered the Bookman with a smile that displayed pointed teeth in between the poisonous, plump, red lips.

“Careful, you fool” snarled the gentleman, stopping his hand just short of the snow globe, as if afraid to touch it. “What have you brought me this time, Bookman?”

“Oh, I think you'll be quite pleased with this one – no, don't open it. Not yet. Let the creature sulk in its filth for a while.”

The gentleman raised a well manicured eyebrow and all the dolls on the top shelf slowly turned their heads to watch with interest. The gentleman removed the hand from the top cover of the book, sneering at the Bookman through piggish eyes. “And what's this one's crime?”

The Bookman leaned in closer, hands on the dark wood.

“Would it pique your interests to know that I've brought you a lyruk?”

The gentleman's face went slack and the girl in the snow globe raised her head with sad eyes.

“You didn't... the lyruk? The one...”

The Bookman nodded, slowly pushing the hand with the book down onto the desk between them. The girl in the snow globe put her head in her hands.

“And it has been well sought after to say the least. From my understanding, there's a large price for this book now in Erama, Princes, and Trosseim, as well as the price the Fairy Queen will pay for its release.” The Bookman bowed deeply. “But what you do with it does not concern me. I've made you a rich man and now its your turn to do me a similar kindness.”

The gentleman grinned widely. “Then, if I'm not to open the book, I'll need proof of its existence.”

“Gladly.”

The Bookman reached into a large bag at the foot of the table. Rummaging for a moment through the various vials, bones, and miscellany, the hand finally withdrew none other than the single dark purple feather, now somewhat battered from the journey.

With trembling fingers, the gentleman took the feather from his accomplice, holding it up to the dusty light from the window.

A sob escaped some lesser toy in the shop and the gentleman scowled. “Quiet!” Then, to the Bookman, “This phoenix feather... I have waited for this day for too long.”

“As have many.”

The Bookman rapped on the cover of the book with rough knuckles.

“There are many options to get your money's worth out of this one. Now pay up, if you will.”

“Of course.”

Reaching under the table, the gentleman withdrew a small wooden box with a tin plate on the lid. “This should be all you're wanting.”

The Bookman eyed it suspiciously. “The key?”

The gentleman nodded. “Safe in the box.”

“Then I'll be on my way.”

“Indeed. But don't forget who's done you this kindness.”

“Nor you. Good day.” “Good day.”

Then, as soon as the Bookman had left, to the girl in the snow globe, “Quit your tears! You make me sick.”

In the privacy of the tavern's back room, the exhausted Bookman opened the day's other catch. The satin cover sipped beneath the beefy fingers to fall open. But the image within opened the Bookman's eyes wider. For a moment, there was nothing but disbelief: a staring contest between the Bookman and the pixie within the pages. Then, impossibly, the pixie leapt off the page, over the Bookman's arm and whizzed out the window.

All the Bookman could do was stare at the empty binding of the book where the pixie had wriggled out of. It wasn't possible. It had been held in by deer heart threads, no pixie magic could free it from that. Grabbing a loose end from the top of the book, the Bookman brought it to those plump lips, closing them around the thread for a taste.

Thread of jasmine. Not deer heart. But that wasn't possible. Just like all the other threads, just like the cinder threads the Bookman used on the lyruk, each had its unique location in the thread box, each with a unique label to tell it apart. The Bookman grew pale.

Pulling out the thread labeled cinder threads, another taste. Salt. Like deer heart threads. Tricky little... Devil's child...

A young woman strolling down the street did a double take as a very large pixie, or perhaps just a small, highly unusual person, sauntered past, winking at her cleverly with one wicked red eye while tying back a mane of flaming red hair, wide-brimmed purple hat in teeth.

“Hello, darling.”

As the woman turned to attempt to return the greeting, the stranger finished, placed the large hat atop that fiery hair with a flourish and, with a flick of the wrist, gently inserted a long, dark purple feather into the brim, whistling a lively tune all the way.

