

A BRIEF BATTLE FOR THE THRONE

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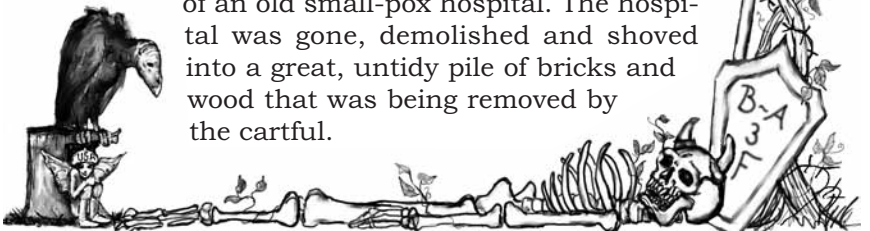
Lord Broggon of the Hobgoblin Tribe on Earth, took a coach about two miles up Gray's Inn Lane from London to Pentonville to check The Door. He had felt *off* for several days, and a certain intuition directed him to The Door between Faerie and Earth. Mr. Raggle, his sometimes Minister of the Exchequer, sometimes enforcer when events required, sat silently on his left with his hat set firmly on his lap. He gripped the brim.

"Calm down," Lord Broggon said. "You're making me tense."

Mr. Raggle did not respond.

For this daylight sojourn up from the city, they had assumed the glamour of gentlemen. Short gentlemen, somewhat ugly and somewhat hairy, but there was only so much a glamour could do for a hobgoblin. Thankfully, most Englishmen were short and hairy these days. The hackney coachman didn't question his fare.

They drew to a stop at the intersection of Gray's Inn Lane and the main road from Paddington to Islington, and Lord Broggon gaped at the rubble where The Door had, until recently, resided in the brick side of an old small-pox hospital. The hospital was gone, demolished and shoved into a great, untidy pile of bricks and wood that was being removed by the cartful.



In its place, an immensely long and wide building was well on its way to completion. Lord Broggon had never seen such arched roof-beams before: a double arch, almost like two long buildings side by side. It didn't look like a cathedral, but you could never tell with humans. Maybe it was to be a warehouse.

"That's some building they're putting up there, innit?" said Mr. Raggle.

"I don't give a damn what they put there; where's The Door got to?" Lord Broggon rapped on the roof of the coach with his walking stick and the driver swung down to open the door for them. They waited until the man had placed a wooden step below the door, then made their dignified way onto the street.

"It should've moved to the new building," Mr. Raggle said.

"I know what it's supposed to do." Lord Broggon set off toward the new building at the best pace his short legs would allow. The edifice, and edifice it was, positively swarmed with men and ropes and winches and other mechanical bits he could never remember the names of. They had sacrificed some very large and very old trees for those roof beams. Shame, that.

But then something caught his eye that went against all expectations, and he stopped abruptly in the middle of the road. The Door to Faerie had indeed moved of its own accord to the westward facing brick wall of the new building. And it was closed!

He stared in consternation at the narrow, wooden portal. The chipped and warped Door was closed. The Guardian was not hunched over at his post.

Lord Broggon turned to Mr. Raggle, who stood frozen with his hand in the pocket of his vest, hat yanked tight down onto his skull. A droplet of drool escaped Mr. Raggle's lips, as it was wont to do when he was very upset. He quickly dabbed it away with his pocket-handkerchief.

"It's closed, M'Lord."

"I can see that," Lord Broggon snapped, then turned back to the horror himself. "The Guardian's gone, too!"

"The Door's closed," Raggle whispered again, and Lord Broggon could hear something close to panic tingeing his voice.

He felt terrified himself. His wife and extended family were in Faerie. A great many Hobgoblins who depended on him had families back home. Why had The Door closed? What if something had happened in Faerie? He squelched the thought. He was in charge of the Hobgoblins here. Being lord was mostly an administrative post, but sometimes he had to act. Right now he needed to redirect Raggle's fear in the face of his own.