



“Give him *back!*” Young-hee shouted, trying to sound commanding. She stared in desperate terror at the creature grinning malevolently in front of her. Short and grotesque, with the stump of a horn in the middle of his forehead, he smelled of ash and deceit. He was a *dokkaebi*, a goblin. And he had her little brother.

“No, he’s my servant now,” the *dokkaebi* answered, “fair and square.”

Young-hee’s thoughts raced. Around them, crowds of bizarre creatures—elegant fairies, entrepreneurial witches, clay golem servants, and people-that-weren’t-really-people surged through the market, ignoring the overstuffed stall where Young-hee faced off against the *dokkaebi*. She was on her own. *Think!* she urged herself, but she barely understood the rules of this strange place, and this goblin was clearly happy with his prize.

Oblivious, Young-beom turned his dirt-smudged face to his big sister and chewed happily on his *yakgwa* honey biscuit. *Stupid! I never should have brought Bum to a place like this.* “Bum” being her nickname for her annoying little brother. She had been to the goblin market before, but not without a guide, and never with Bum. She had been told it was treacherous, but thought she could handle it. Now, because of her recklessness, her brother had been taken.

“He’s not your servant,” she said. “He’s my brother.”

“Oh, I must differ. I offered an exchange of services: I’d fill his hunger with a delicious cake, if he’d enter my service for a year. He accepted.”

“No!” cried Bum, growing upset. “I did *not!*”

The goblin scowled. “And yet, there’s one of Woo’s half-eaten *yakgwa* in your hand, and its crumbs around your mouth. Or is the boy a thief?”

“Woo?”

“Woo,” he grunted, pointing a lumpy goblin thumb at himself.

Scared by the goblin’s snarl, Bum tried to run, but the moment he reached the shop limits he stopped short—as if held by a chain. Young-hee rushed to Bum and put a comforting hand on his head.



“He couldn’t have agreed to anything,” said Young-hee, watching her brother begin to understand that something was very wrong. “He’s too young. He’s just a little kid.”

“Pfft,” said the dokkaebi dismissively. “He accepted the offered. Now he must pay the price. That’s the way of things.”

“But he didn’t know,” she said weakly. She ran a hand down Bum’s side to his ankle, feeling the invisible thread that held him fast. She had narrowly avoided similar capture on her first market visit.

“Few people know the true cost of the things they buy,” the goblin snapped. “That is not my concern. Woo never made the rules. That’s just the way things are.”

Young-hee tried to imagine what her mom would do. “Look, Mr. Woo ... I’ll get my friends—the *jangseung* guardians and, uh, and the giant toads, and the fairies. I’ll bring them all here, and they’ll make you give me my brother back.”

Woo shrugged. “Tell whomever you like. Everything’s fair and square. This is a goblin market, and goblin rules apply.”

“*Jigyeowo*,” screamed Young-hee, her emotions exploding, and her face turning red. Bum cringed. “Give me my brother back! *Right now!* Or I swear I’ll make you sorry!”

Woo spread his fingers and pressed his open hand against Young-hee’s chest, pushing her hard against the wall behind her, just beyond Bum’s reach.

“You will do *no* such thing,” said the dokkaebi with low menace. “You think you can threaten me, girl, in my own shop?” He stuck a fat, earthen finger from his other hand in her face. “Do you know anything about dokkaebi power? Your little brother is *mine* now, for at least the next year, and there is so much I can do to him. I could sell him to something big and nasty, some creature that likes to eat little boys. He’s not very big, but many creatures would find him juicy and delicious. Or maybe I could just vanish him, send him somewhere far away—another realm, another time even. I have many, many cruel options if you rub Woo the wrong way.”

Woo took a slight step back, removing his hand from Young-hee,



his voice softening. “The fact of the matter is, rules are rules. Without laws and contracts, all would be chaos. No one would ever close a deal, would ever make any money.”

Young-hee breathed in, the scratchy pressure of the goblin’s touch fresh on her skin. She felt broken. But just then, one of the dokkaebi’s words reverberated. “Money?” she said. “I could give you something for him, to get him back. That would be fair, right?”

“Like what?” asked the dokkaebi, rubbing its chin skeptically.

She rooted through her jacket pockets, one stuffed with her brother’s doll, but the other full of hair bands. “Uh... I have all the hair bands you want.”

“Hair bands?” said the nearly hairless creature, “Why would I want hair bands?”

“Money, then?” she implored. “I have some money.”

“Gold!?”

“No, it’s regular money,” said Young-hee, digging through her pants pockets. “But it’s worth a bit. It’s my birthday money.”

The dokkaebi looked disdainfully at the crumbled won notes. “Paper money? I never heard of anything so silly. This isn’t even mulberry paper. No!”

“But I have to get Bum back. I’ll do *anything* to get him.”

“Anything?” he said, his voice betraying his attempt to look uninterested.

“Yes!”

“Well, I like the sound of ‘anything.’ ”

“Please, just tell me.”

The dokkaebi looked thoughtful. “Would you go anywhere?”

“Yes!”

“Would you brave great danger?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Would you ... get a *pullocho* for me?”

“Yes, anything!” she exclaimed, grasping at hope. “Er, what’s a pullocho?”

“It is a very special plant,” explained the dokkaebi, “A root, like



ginseng.” The dokkaebi turned and went digging into a pile of papers.

But suddenly, Bum shouted “*Hiya!*” and he put all the fury of a frightened four-year-old into a kick to the dokkaebi’s ankle.

The goblin looked momentarily surprised, then merely annoyed. “Don’t do that,” he commanded, and immediately Bum went quiet. “Stand over there,” he said, and Bum obeyed. “Part of being a servant is doing what you’re told,” he explained, returning his attention to the piles of papers and extracting an old drawing—simple, but quite vivid, of a green, wrinkled root. “They used to be rare, but you could find one with a bit of work. Now, though, I cannot remember the last time I saw even a piece of a pullocho. Some think they no longer exist.”

“So how can I find one?”

“That’s your problem. That is, if you really want your brother back.”

“I do!”

“Good. It so happens I heard a rumor that a noble-hearted *simmani* might be able to find a pullocho in the ruins of the great Sacred City, in the shadow of the first sandalwood tree.”

“And where is the Sacred City?” Young-hee could barely understand anything the dokkaebi was saying.

“I only know that it is far away, across the lake of Mey, over the Cheongyong Mountains, past the Great Woods. You will need to ask the animal-spirit women to find out where exactly.”

“The animal-spirit women?”

“Yes, three sisters: Bear, Fox, and Snake. They live on their own near the Hungry River. They are very old and know many things.”

“Oh. That sounds far...”

“Doubtlessly. Or I would have gone myself.”

Young-hee racked her brain, trying to think of what else she could do. She doubted whether the great frogs or the Grannie Dol would help her. The jangseung couldn’t walk, of course. Besides, Woo didn’t seem worried about anyone she might be able to enlist. She could go back to the real world and get help from her mom or someone, but



how could she begin to explain all of this? Who would believe her? And how could she find this world again without her brother? There were no good options. The dokkaebi had won.

“Okay, I’ll do it,” she said. Woo seemed pleased, but Young-hee wasn’t finished. “But you have to promise me something, too.”

Woo immediately stopped smiling. “Promise what? You’re in no position to demand anything of Woo.”

“If I am going to go on your stupid quest, you need to promise you’ll take care of my brother.”

“Agreed.”

“You cannot sell him or do anything to him or let anything bad happen to him.”

“Agreed.”

“And you have to promise to be here, in this market, in the same place, and return him to me safely once I bring you your pullocho. No tricks.”

He sighed, looking impatient. “Agreed.”

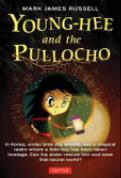
“That’s a promise?”

The dokkaebi’s face grew very serious. “It is a true vow. But, little human, understand you must keep your part of our bargain too. Do not try to trick me or take back your brother by force. He is mine now, and if you break our deal, I can do with him whatever I will—sell him or maybe just eat him myself. I bet he is tender and juicy.”

“I want a contract,” said Young-hee impulsively.

“A true vow is binding,” said Woo, turning into his shop to root through his piles. He emerged with a small, fiery-red jewel. “Put this under your tongue,” he said, handing the jewel to Young-hee. She held it between her thumb and finger. “It’s a *yeouiju*,” explained the dokkaebi, “a jewel from the jaw of a yellow dragon. If it is under your tongue when you make a promise, the promise cannot be undone.”

Young-hee put the dragon jewel to her mouth, gave it a quick sniff, put it under her tongue, promised to get the pullocho, and then handed it back. Not bothering to wipe it off, Woo put it straight under his tongue. She could barely make out what he said, but it



sounded like a promise to keep their bargain. He took out the jewel, wrapped it in a small bag, and put it away.

“I don’t feel any different.”

“Nor should you ... as long as you don’t break our agreement.”

Young-hee looked down at her brother, standing at the far wall of the shop and watching. He seemed scared, even if he didn’t grasp everything going on. *How can I leave him behind?* she wondered. *He won’t understand. He’ll be so scared and lonely.* But if she thought about Bum’s feelings, she would never be able to go. A sadness—deeper and more painful than anything she had felt since her dad went away—cascaded through her. But she had to lock up those feelings and fears and frustrations. She gave Bum a big hug.

“I’m so sorry, Bum, but I have to go.”

“No, *don’t*,” he pleaded. Young-hee was surprised at how much he seemed to have understood. “Don’t leave.”

“I don’t want to. But I have to.” She wished she could have hugged him for the whole year, until his contract with the dokkaebi was finished. She looked at the half-eaten biscuit in his hand. “Come on, you should at least eat your yakgwa.”

“I’m not hungry anymore.”

“Here, take your Gangjee,” she said, pulling the ragged doll from her jacket pocket. “It’s just his toy. No tricks,” she told Woo. He glanced at it and nodded. “Gangjee is very strong and very brave. He’ll keep you safe.” Bum held the toy and looked up at his big sister.

“I suppose you want old Woo to give you food and supplies to help you on your way,” said the goblin.

“I don’t want anything from you,” snapped Young-hee, more bitterly than she intended. “I just want to get my brother back.”

“Then you better get going. The sooner you find the pullocho, the sooner you can have him back.”

Young-hee hugged Bum once more. It took everything she had to walk away. Each step felt heavy as stone, as long as a mile. She kept looking back, but after just a couple of stalls, the trudging masses of indifferent shoppers and merchants swirled around her and hid Bum



and Woo's stall. Young-hee dropped to the ground and sat against a wall, holding her knees and crying harder than she could remember. She cried until her tears were all gone and her eyes burned. Then she stood and started marching through the market. She knew what she had to do.

### **The Fox and the Farmer**

*Many years ago, high in the Taebak Mountains, there was a wealthy farmer who lived on a large property with his wife, many servants, and three strong, healthy sons whom he loved very much. But deep down, he was sad they had no daughters.*

*One day, while walking with his eldest two sons high in the mountains, he discovered a beautiful baby girl. The farmer and his sons searched high and low for the baby's mother, but to no avail. He returned to the farm and announced that he would raise and love the baby as his own daughter. For the next few years, the farm prospered, and everyone was happy.*

*But on the night after the daughter's fifth birthday, a wild animal killed one of the farmer's servants as he slept. The distraught farmer sent out many hunters, but they could not find the creature responsible.*

*The next night, another servant was killed by an animal, and the night after that, and the night after that. Soon, the whole farm was swamped by fear and swirling with rumors: Maybe it was a crazed bear. Maybe a pack of wolves. Maybe, some whispered, an evil ghost.*

*More nights passed and more servants died. Traps were set, but they caught nothing. They could not even find any footprints.*

*Finally, the farmer's eldest son vowed to hide and keep watch all night. At the darkest hour, he saw something move in the shadows. As it drew closer to his hiding place, he realized that it was his adopted sister. In horror, he watched as she snuck around a wall and transformed into a fox, but one with nine lush tails. The animal jumped through a high window, and what followed was the terrible noise of a fox killing a man.*

*The son ran to the window, crying out to wake the whole house.*