



# The One Great Gnome

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*The*  
**One Great  
Gnome**

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FOR MARIA

# The One Great Gnome



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## CHAPTER 2

# Vesper of Oglinoth

Sarah looked around her room to try to find a place for the statue. It was still just a sea of boxes. Sarah decided to lay the statue on her bed as she started to clean up. As she hung up her clothes and emptied her boxes, Sarah talked to her new friend. She told him about Lily, her old school, and how she wanted to be a writer like her father when she grew up.

When the last box was emptied and put out in the hallway, Sarah looked around. It looked just like her old room, but a lot bigger—and neater, too. Sarah knew it wouldn't stay like that for long.

She picked up the statue and placed him on her dresser by the mirror. “No, that's not right,” she said. Then she picked him up again and put him by her nightstand.

“That looks better,” she said. “I think you'll like it here.” Sarah even turned him so he could face the window. Just then, she noticed something she had not seen before. On the side on the statue, there was a carved scabbard or sheath. Sarah recognized this from her book *The Three Musketeers*—it was where people kept daggers or swords.

“Maybe you're upset because you're missing your sword,” she said. Then Sarah remembered the silver stake she had seen in the shed. “And I think I know where it is!” she added as she ran from the room. “I'll be right back!”

Sarah ran down the creaky stairs, two at a time, out the door and past her father, who was bringing the empty boxes to the street. “Whoa! What's the hurry?” was all her father could say as she sped past and was out to the shed in less than a minute.

She squeezed in through the shed door again and looked around. There, on the stone floor, she found the little sword. She picked it up and looked at it. She didn't know if her father would approve, so she put it in her sweatshirt pocket and walked calmly back to the front of the house and up to her room. When she got upstairs, she closed the door.

She looked at the little sword in her hand and at the sheath on the side of the statue. “Hmm, I think this IS yours,” she said. Sarah gently slid the sword into place. It was a perfect fit.

Suddenly, the statue started to move. At first Sarah thought she was imagining it. The statue almost seemed to make a little hop, then another, like popcorn right before it bursts open. Sarah looked around her room to see if everything was jumping. *Maybe Connecticut has earthquakes*, she thought. But nothing else was moving. Sarah was going to run away, but she had to know what was happening. She jumped on her bed and hid under the covers, just letting her head stick out the tiniest bit. The statue jumped and jittered until it fell from the nightstand and landed on the floor with a thud.

Sarah couldn't see it now, but the shaking seemed to have stopped. At least she couldn't hear it anymore. Sarah slowly crept to the edge of her bed and peeked over the side. She came face to face with a little creature that was looking up at her.

"Ahhh!" Sarah screamed.

"Ahhhhhhh!" screamed the creature. It was the statue, and he was alive!

The little fellow jumped under her desk, but stuck his hand out and waved his sword in the air. "Stay away from me, troll!" he stammered.

"Troll!" said Sarah, feeling indignant. She hopped out of bed and stood up tall. "I am not a troll," she said in a booming voice. "I am a girl!"

The creature stayed where he was, but she could see his face peeking out at her. He looked like a frightened rabbit. Sarah felt bad for sounding so mean.

"I'm sorry," she said in her own voice. "I didn't mean to frighten you. Are you an gnome or an elf?"

"An elf?" boomed the creature. Now it was his turn to be angry. He wiggled out from under the desk and stood to his full height, which Sarah noticed was just below her waist.

"An elf?" he repeated. "Do I look eight feet tall with long pointed ears with hair growing out of them?" He stamped his little feet on the floor.

She couldn't help but laugh. "Well, I've never met an elf," she said, "so I wouldn't know. But none of the ones I ever

read about sounded like that!"

Even though the creature still held tightly to his little sword, Sarah knew he did not mean her any harm. She sat down beside him.

"What are you, then?" she asked.

The creature must have known that Sarah did not mean him any harm either, because he slid his sword into its sheath. He bowed gracefully while removing his hat.

"I am Vesper of Oglinoth," he said. "I am of the great race called gnomes. But you may just call me Vesper."



Sarah got a good look at him now. This gnome was dressed in clothes that were all shades of olive green, except his hat, which was rust in color, like leaves in the fall. He wore a vest with a jacket on top that hung low on his back. His shoes looked rough and built for hiking. His face was small, but he was no child. His long white beard hung down to his belt. He looked like a small relative of Santa Claus, but not fat at all—he was lean and in very good shape.

Sarah stuck out her hand and gently shook Vesper's. "I am Sarah Maria Arroyo," she said. "But just call me Sarah."

They both heard the screen door downstairs swing open and bang shut. Sarah thought her father must have come back inside. Vesper hid under the desk again.

"Is everything okay, Sarah?" her father called from the base of the steps. "I thought I heard shouting when I was outside."

Sarah smiled at Vesper, letting him know everything was fine. "It's okay," she called back. "It was just me playing with the elf...I mean, gnome!"

As her dad went back to his work, Vesper climbed out from his hiding place. He seemed to feel ashamed at being so skittish.

"I'm usually not so scared," he said as he brushed his beard with his hand. "But I've never been to the upper world before, and I didn't know what to expect."

"Upper world?" questioned Sarah. "This isn't the upper world. We call this place Hadley, Connecticut."

"I have heard that name before." Vesper said. "I think it

was in a story the Ogg told us." He rubbed his eyes. "But I don't remember. Everything is very foggy now."

Sarah was about to pull a chair out for him, but thought it would be too tall. So she stayed on the floor next to him. "Well, you've been a statue for who knows how long!" she said. "It must take a while to feel better."

Sarah jumped up. "I bet you're hungry," she said. "Let me get you something!"

Vesper looked relieved. "Yes, maybe just a piece of Flemite or a tankard of Breem if you have them?"

Sarah just smiled and ran downstairs. She didn't know what he was talking about, so she figured she would just bring him back a bunch of different things and see what he liked. She grabbed a plate and filled it with pieces of cheese, some oatmeal bread, Oreos, some raw broccoli, a box of raisins, some Jell-O pudding, and a tall glass of orange juice. Just as she turned into the hallway, her father came into the room.

"What's all this?" he said as he saw Sarah's overflowing arms.

"Umm, just hungry!" she called as she ran past him and started up the stairs. But she stopped halfway and turned around. "Dad. Do we have any Breem?"

"Do we have any what?" her father called back, still astonished at his little girl's sudden appetite.

"Never mind!" she called as she raced up the stairs, ran into her room, and shut the door.



## A Time to Remember

Vesper proved to have a good appetite and was very open to trying new foods. He didn't care for the oatmeal bread (too spongy), and he wouldn't even touch the Jell-O ("gnomes never eat food that jiggles," he said). But the broccoli and raisins were his favorites, and he wanted to know if Sarah had the recipe for Oreos (she didn't, but she brought him another handful).

When Vesper finished eating, Sarah decided to ask him some questions. She didn't know where to begin.

"Where are you from?" seemed the logical starting place.

"I said I am from Oglinoth," Vesper said, as if the answer was obvious.

"Yes, yes," said Sarah. "But where is Oglinoth?"

"Ah, I understand," said Vesper as he took a sip of the orange juice (nice, but a bit too sour for gnomes). Vesper wiped his mouth with the tip of his beard and arranged himself more comfortably on the floor. Sarah did the same.

"My head's a bit foggy still," said Vesper, "but some things are very clear. I was born in Oglinoth, which is the biggest village in Oberith, the country of gnomes. My father and

mother are trackers, and I want to be one too."

"What's a tracker?" said Sarah, who suddenly wished she had started writing this all down.

Vesper stroked his long beard. "Trackers track," he said. "They track game in the woods for food. They track the paths through the thick forests to get to neighboring villages. They track the stars in the sky to tell when it's planting season. They track anything that needs to be tracked. but the things they track best are trolls."

Sarah remembered he had called her a troll when he first came alive again.

"Do trolls look like humans...like me?" she asked.

Vesper coughed and cleared his throat. "Umm, sorry about that. No, no, trolls definitely do not look like upperworlders. They are foul beasts. Our mortal enemies!"

Sarah could see Vesper's face changing. It was clear he did not like trolls.

"They are bigger than gnomes, about as tall as your kind. They are all covered in thick, coarse hair. And the worst part of them is their smell. It's enough to turn your stomach for a week."

"Why don't they take baths?" Sarah asked.

"HA!" laughed Vesper. "A troll wouldn't know what a bath was. They can't even communicate. They have the brains of a rock. They live by themselves and are very lazy. They hide in the forests and steal our chickens, our pigs, and the fruit from our trees. There's not a kind bone in their bodies, and if I had my way, there would be none left!" And with that,

Vesper stood up, pulled his sword from his scabbard, and pointed it at the sky.

Sarah thought she had better change the subject.

“Calm down, Vesper,” she said. “How did you get here? And why were you a statue?”

Vesper put his sword away and sat back down.

“Why I am here I do not remember,” he said. “I think there was something that I had to do?” Vesper stared out of the window, as if his memory could be found in the maple tree outside the window.

“And becoming a statue is easy for a gnome...but it’s embarrassing,” he said. He pointed to his sword.

“A gnome’s sword is his most precious companion. It is given to us at birth, and we are to keep it with us always. If we ever lose that sword, we turn to stone until it is returned to our hands or our scabbards.”

“So you lost yours, and that’s why I found you as a statue!” Sarah said. “What happened?”

Vesper scratched his chin. “It was so long ago... Yes, yes, I remember!” he said. “A beast. A terrible beast attacked me! I had just gotten through to the upper world when a huge, hairy beast jumped me. It had large fangs and sharp claws, and when I went to grab my sword, it attacked me and knocked it from my hand! And that’s when I turned to stone.”

Sarah tried to imagine what kind of awful beasts they had here in Connecticut. She’d certainly never heard about them in Manhattan!



Just then, Sarah’s cat Smokey padded into the room. He jumped up on Sarah’s bed. She reached out to pet him.

“BEAST!” yelled Vesper, drawing his sword again. “That is the same kind of beast that attacked me! Get away, Sarah, and I shall run it through!”

He lunged at the cat, but Smokey hissed and, with one paw, scratched him right on his round nose.

“Ouch!” yelled Vesper as he grabbed his nose. “Ouch, ouch, ouch!” He jumped around the room so much Sarah had to grab him and set him on her bed to calm him down. Smokey calmly hopped off and walked out of the room.

Sarah looked at Vesper's nose. It was just a little scratch. "That is a cat!" she said. "A cute fluffy kitty! And what's more, he's my fluffy kitty, so there will be no *running it through* today!"

Vesper felt ashamed. "Well, the one that attacked me must have been a lot bigger...and meaner, maybe." Vesper hung his head low. "It's no use," he said. "I'm not a tracker or a great hunter. I'm actually a cook. I was never good enough to become a tracker like my parents. I use my sword to cut bread more than anything."

Sarah felt bad for Vesper. "Do you know how long you were turned to stone?" she asked, trying to change the subject.

"I don't know," said Vesper. "But I think it was a long time. I remember that even though I was stone and couldn't move, I could still hear and sense things around me. I remember times when I was very hot, and other times I was very cold, and sometimes even covered with a blanket of cold for months at a time."

"Snow," said Sarah. "Go on."

"I just remember the periods of hot and cold came several times before I woke up here in this place."

"So you must have been stone for many years," said Sarah. "I wonder if your family was worried."

With that, Vesper jumped up as if a firecracker had gone off in his shoes. "I remember! I remember!" he said grabbing Sarah by the sleeve.

"Remember what?" Sarah cried.

"I remember why I came to the upper world!" he stammered as he hopped off the bed. "My family is in trouble and I was sent on a mission to get help!"

It was all Sarah could do to keep up with Vesper. He jumped to his feet, then down the stairs, and tried to figure out how to reach the handle on the front door.

"Stop—wait for me!" she protested. She was afraid Vesper might try to slice open the door with his sword if she didn't let him out. She grabbed the handle, turned it, and opened the door. Vesper ran as fast as his little legs could carry him. He looked around, then went straight for the backyard.

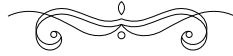
Sarah's father came up the stairs from the basement. He held a lamp in his hand. "Stop what?" he asked. "I wasn't going anywhere."

Sarah turned and faced her father. She didn't have time to explain all about Vesper and his coming to life right then and there. "I know, Dad," she said quickly. "It was just me playing again! I'm going to play outside for a while!" And with that, she ran outside to try and catch up to Vesper before he disappeared.

Her father called out from the front porch. "In a few minutes we're going to stop by the library so we can bring Mom her lunch, so don't go far."

"I'll be right back!" yelled Sarah, as she disappeared around the corner of the house where she had seen Vesper go.

Sarah couldn't have known that she would not be back for a very long time.



## CHAPTER 4

# The Passage Home

As Sarah got to the backyard, she quickly looked around. Where had the gnome gone? She ran by the stone wall, but didn't see anything. She looked in the windows of the bungalow. Nothing there but empty rooms. She even looked up into the large trees in the yard. No Vesper. Beyond her yard was what seemed like an endless forest. Vesper could be long gone by now.

Then she heard a crash as if a dish or pot had just broken. Sarah turned to look at the potting shed and ran right for it.

Sarah saw that the door had already been pulled open, and she squeezed herself in. At first, everything was silent, and Sarah thought she must have gone to the wrong place. Then, suddenly, a clay pot flew through the air and crashed at her feet. Someone was in the corner of the potting shed, trying to move the debris of broken pots and glass out of the way.

"I know it's here," she heard a familiar and determined voice say. Sarah dodged another pot as she pulled back a bench to get a better view. There she saw Vesper in the corner pushing the last pot aside. He looked up at Sarah and smiled.

"I knew it was here!" Vesper said. He clapped the dust

from his hands and pointed down at the ground. Sarah knelt beside him. There on the ground was what looked like a trapdoor. Sarah brushed away a layer of dirt with her hand. It was indeed a door. It was small and square, with an arch along the top. Sarah could see it was beautifully carved, with a leaf border design outlining its shape. It had two large metal hinges that were shaped like the heads of dragons. There was no handle or knob on the door, but it did have a small keyhole in its center.

"What is it?" asked Sarah.

"It's an entrance to my world," said Vesper. "It's called a gnome-way."

"Do you have the key?" she asked Vesper as she outlined the shape of the keyhole with her finger.

"Key? Key?" said Vesper as he felt in his vest pockets. "Where is the key?" He started pulling over pots and moving shovels. Sarah started to look too.

"Tell me...what happened?" she asked as she looked up on the top shelves. "What happened to your family?"

Vesper kept on pulling things apart, searching while he answered her. "The trolls!" he said. "The trolls were taking over the countryside! They were marching on the village, and the Ogg sent me to try and get help before it was too late." Then Vesper stopped searching and looked right into Sarah's face. "The day before I left, they had captured my parents!"

Sarah stopped searching and put her hand on Vesper's shoulder. "That's awful!" she said. She understood why

Vesper hated trolls so much. They kept looking for the key.

“Why come to Connecticut—I mean, the upper world?” said Sarah. “What would you find here?”

Vesper stopped searching and looked forlornly at Sarah.

“I didn’t know where to go or who could help us,” he said, “but I always remembered the great stories of this world that the Ogg told us, and I thought maybe I could find someone to help.”

“Who is the Ogg?” said Sarah. She had heard Vesper mention that name a few times.

“The Ogg?” said Vesper astoundingly. “The One Great Gnome, of course! He is the leader of all the gnomes. He is a very important man,” added Vesper proudly. “And I was his personal cook!”

“I am sure he is very dear to your heart,” said Sarah.

“Heart!” said Vesper with a laugh. He quickly opened his vest and undid two buttons on his shirt. There, hanging on a chain in front of his heart, was a metal key.

Vesper took the chain off and placed the key in the lock. It turned with a sharp “click” sound. Together they opened the small door, which proved to be quite heavy. Sarah peeked in. All she could see was a black hole going straight down into nothingness. There was a pungent smell of dirt and earth.

Vesper grabbed Sarah’s hand. “I need to see if I’m too late!”

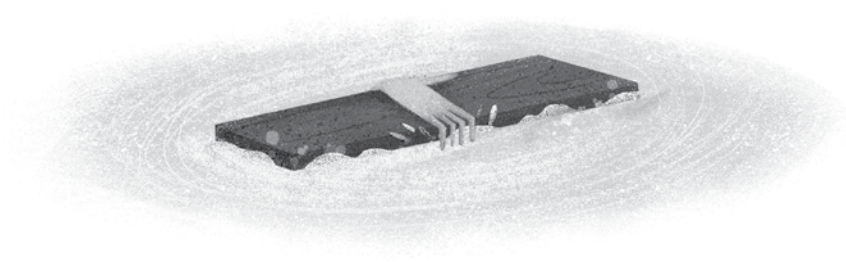


Vesper bowed low to Sarah and gently kissed the back of her hand. “May the moon and the stars always guide you safely,” he said. And with that, Vesper jumped into the hole and disappeared.

“Wait!” said Sarah. But it was too late. The hole seemed to have swallowed Vesper up.

Sarah felt awful. She had just met her first new friend, and now he was gone. “There must be something I can do to help!”

Then, without even thinking, Sarah jumped into the hole herself and disappeared.





**“May the moon and the stars always guide you safely.”  
So says Vesper of Oglinoth to his new friend Sarah.  
Will she help him and the rest of the gnomes save  
their world from an unknown foe—and will Sarah  
find her own way back home?**



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