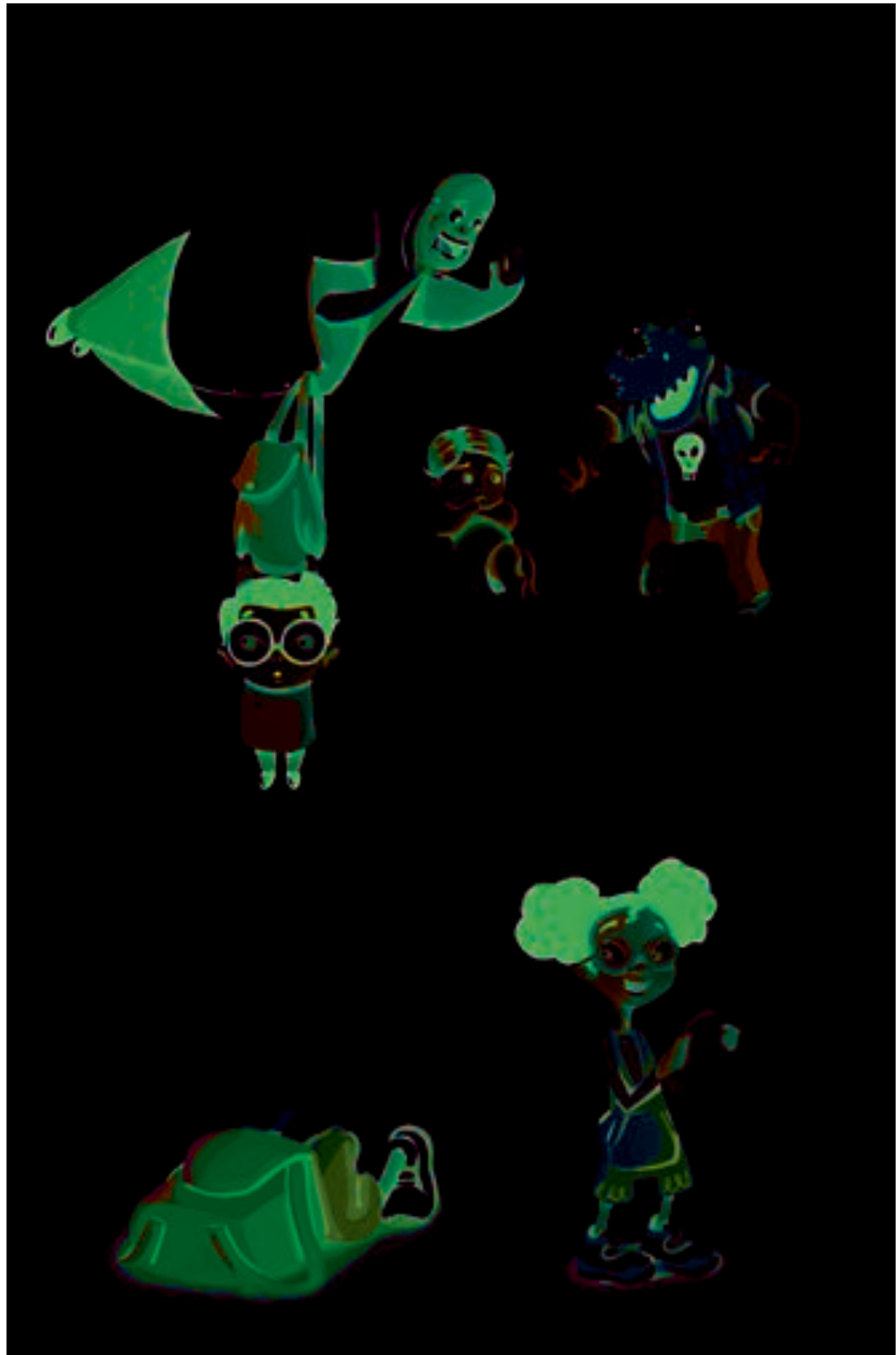


The Tooth Collectors







For my little angels ,
Ruben ,Ashlynn , Ebony, Amaya
(O. A)

For Amy
(D.T)

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Chapter One

“You’ll yank that tooth out if you keep fiddling with it,” Mum sighed as she watched Ruben rocking his bottom front tooth with his forefinger. He pushed it back and forth, wriggling it from left to right with the tip of his tongue. He could taste the sweetness of his raw gum.

“Will you leave it alone?” repeated Mum, a hint of irritation now entering her voice.

Ruben huffed. He wanted his tooth to fall out. He needed his tooth to fall out.

“But I want it to fall out now,” Ruben sulked, stringing the words out slowly. His mouth awkwardly changed shape to allow his speech to fit around his loose tooth.

“What’s the big hurry?” his Dad asked.

“I want to buy a little red Manga,” Ruben beamed, a curious smile spread from cheek to cheek. For a moment, he almost forgot his wobbly tooth.

“What’s that?” Dad asked with a puzzled look on his face.

“It’s a small colourful mannequin with big eyes. You collect and swap them with your friends. Amber Peters has twelve, Mohammed Ali has seven, Sibel and Tulay have nine but I’ve only got three and I need to collect more.”

“What’s that got to do with your tooth falling out?” Mum questioned as she dished up a large plate of jollof rice with two corn on the cobs for Dad.

Ruben paused and took a deep breath in. He inhaled the sweet smell of the tomatoes and spices. He loved jollof rice; furthermore, he loved sweet corn. He could eat sweet corn in the morning, noon and night. Five a day was not enough for Ruben. Boiled, fried or roasted. He didn’t care. He could eat sweet corn all day long.



“...Because...” he finally continued. “When my tooth falls out, you’ll put money under my pillow.”

Mum stopped pouring the rice and froze whilst dad looked up from his medium sized paper. They looked both shocked and bemused.

“Money?” Dad stated, raising his eyebrows.

“Yes money! Can I have £5 this time?” Ruben asked cheekily as he salivated in anticipation of his meal.

“We don’t put money under your pillow. Well I don’t. Do you?” Mum glanced at Dad as she placed the stewed oxtail on top of the mounds of rice.

“Of course you do,” Ruben laughed.

Dad closed his paper and carefully folded it into three before attempting to place it on the table.

“Not there,” grumbled Mum.

Dad obediently removed it from the middle of the dining table before finally placing it on the

floor by his chair.

“Ruben,” Dad began in a serious tone. “I can assure you; we don’t put money under your pillow in exchange for your little rotten tooth.” Ruben laughed again but Dad didn’t. Neither did mum.

“I’m serious Ruben. We don’t leave money under your pillow.”

“Yeah right, so who does?” Ruben asked cynically.

“The tooth fairy off course,” Mum huffed.

Ruben chuckled really loudly this time. Again, both Mum and Dad remained silent.

“Come on Mum. I’m eight years old now and I know tooth fairies don’t exist.”

Mum sat down at the end of the short, four seater table. She looked up across the steaming food and stared at Dad with a small smile.

“Say grace dear,” she said quietly, now looking down at her plate.

“God bless this meal we are about to eat and bless the tooth fairies who come at night for children’s teeth. Amen.”

Ruben burst out into uncontrollable floods of laughter.

“Amen,” Mum replied, unamused at Ruben’s response.

“Dad, stop being silly. There are no such things as tooth fairies.” Smiled Ruben

“That’s what I used to say until...” his voice drifted off, a far away expression appeared in Dad’s eyes.

“Never mind...you don’t believe in tooth fairies anyway...eat up.”

And at that, Dad began to sprinkle some chilli peppers onto his rice. Ruben wondered why his Dad ate so many chillies but he thought more about what Dad had just said.

‘Until what?’ he thought to himself as he bit into his sweet, warm, golden corn. He pulled the cob from his mouth and there on his plate of orange coated rice sat a small, creamy

coloured tooth.

“Look!” Ruben exclaimed, “I’m getting paid tonight!”





Chapter Two

An irritating buzzing sound disturbed Ruben's sleep that night. It was like a bee and a fly jumbled together with a bit of chatter and annoying whispers. It was a buzzing sound but not the type of buzzing sound he'd ever heard before.

He turned over from left to right in an attempt to ignore the sound but it was useless. It continued just as stubborn and persistent. Ruben flipped again, this time from right to left. He squeezed his eyes tight, trying to get back to his dream. His dream of having twenty different coloured Mangas.

He yawned a small, gentle yawn and slowly opened up his big dark eyes.

‘What is that annoying sound? And where is it coming from?’ he asked himself, half expecting to hear an answer. He listened carefully for the direction of the sound. It seemed to be coming from behind the curtain.

Ruben rubbed his eyes. Was he still dreaming? A greeny, yellowy glow flickered behind the curtain. A sudden glimmer of silvery light sparkled and flashed, then the greeny, yellowy glow returned.

‘What’s that?’ Ruben slowly sat up in bed, half scared, half excited.

Bravely, he stretched out his arm towards the curtain. A flash of tiny silver sparks flickered again making him jump back as though he had been electrocuted.

‘*Be brave,*’ he said to himself, shutting his eyes as he tried again to push his dark blue curtains to the left. Ruben slowly and carefully pulled the curtain back. The moonlight shone brightly into his bedroom;

the football covered wallpaper lit up with an eerie glow. He opened up one eye to peak, then the other. He couldn't believe his eyes. He scuttled backwards as fast as he could, rolled off his bed and bumped his head with a thud!

"Ouch," he cried, rubbing the back of his head. His heart was beating fast; he could feel the thud in the pit of his palms. Surely it couldn't be what he thought. No way! It just couldn't be. Ruben scrambled to his knees and peeked just slightly above his bed. The two glowing lights buzzed at each other continuously. Slowly, Ruben crept up to the window sill. He got on his knees, slowly crawling closer until he was within touching distance.

From this distance, the buzzing began to sound like high pitched voices. Ruben cautiously leaned evermore closer, his face peering curiously at the lights. Close up, he could see that the glows were actually two small people.



One girl with light brown skin and soft curly afro hair divided into two equal bunches. She wore large, round, red rimmed frames with cracked lens in both eyes. Through the smashed lenses, he could see her big brown eyes. They were huge. Her thin pink lips moved as quickly. She stamped her tiny foot and waved her forefinger at the boy. His skin was slightly darker and his eyes were slightly smaller. Both of them wore denim dungarees and what resembled white trainers.

“I can’t believe you!” squeaked the girl. “You stupid little fool. How could you?”

How are we ever going to collect now? Oh you idiot.” She stamped her left foot and again a spark of light flashed.

“Cole! Cole! I’m talking to you!”

But the tiny boy didn’t answer. He just froze in the direction of the glowing girl.

“What’s the matter with you?” she continued to squeak.

She took a step closer to Cole then removed her broken glasses.

“Cole!”

The speechless boy raised his hand and pointed his finger in the direction of Ruben. The girl squinted.

“What?” she asked as she moved her head in the direction of the boy’s finger. Ruben took a deep breath in. He was scared. What were these creatures and what did they want?

The girl stared at the boy’s finger for a while before finally raising her head up to see Ruben’s face in front of her. She let out a loud, horrific scream. It sounded like a nail scratching a wooden board. The boy began to scream too. It was deafening. Ruben shut his eyes tight, plonked his fingers in his ears and ran to the back of the room.



