

THE PAGE TURNERS

THE GREEN PRINCESS

A Bonus Chapter for
Newsletter Subscribers

KEVIN T. JOHNS

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A Note from the Author

Hi!

I'm Kevin T. Johns, and I want to thank you for your interest in my novel, *The Page Turners*. I hope that you enjoy this special bonus chapter, written specifically for YOU, my newsletter subscribers.

The events depicted in *THE GREEN PRINCESS* take place just before the beginning of the novel—so, if you want to see what happens next to Nate and his friends, be sure to pick up your copy of *The Page Turners*.

To learn more about the book, you can
visit www.thepageeturnerstilogy.com
follow me on Twitter @Kevin_T_Johns
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I look forward to hearing from you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin T. Johns', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

BONUS CHAPTER

THE GREEN PRINCESS

It was during the summer before grade nine that Nate Bourdain discovered *Paradise Fields*.

The thick paperback lay at the bottom of a cardboard box filled otherwise with British spy novels. It had been the spy novels that had first caught his attention; but something about *Paradise Fields*, perhaps its size, intrigued him. He flipped open the back cover and peered within: over 1,400 pages!

“How much for this one?” he asked, holding it up.

The man sitting in a lawn chair on the other side of the junk-covered table smiled. He still had most of his teeth. “Oh, that one’s a classic. It’ll cost you six bucks.”

“Six bucks?” scoffed Nate. “For a used book?”

“Like I said, that one’s a classic.” The man grinned. He’d been bargaining dollars and quarters since six that morning, and intended to take Nate for all he could get.

The teen flipped to the front and checked the publication date: the book was less than ten years old. “Oh, yeah, a *real* classic,” he said, dropping it back into the box.

It was no big loss. The book had intrigued him momentarily, but it wasn’t as if he’d intended to visit the yard sale in the first place. Nate had been wandering directionless through the trailer park, just to get out of the house and kill some time. It was Saturday evening, and his two best friends, Danny and Spenser, had persuaded Danny’s dad to drive them into the city to see a movie. Nate was supposed to join them, but he had cancelled at the last minute. He’d told them he wasn’t in the mood to make the trip from their small country town, Maplewright, all the way into the city; but the truth was that, after a week of rummaging through the pockets of his step-father’s dirty jeans, searching under couch cushions, and even once daring a peek into Roger’s wallet, he’d managed to scrounge and steal a grand total of seven dollars and fifty cents—and the multiplex theatre his friends were headed to charged nine dollars a screening.

So, while Danny and Spenser sat in plush theatre seats with laps full of candy and popcorn, waiting eagerly for the lights to go down, Nate wandered the trailer parks of South

Maplewright with nothing better to do.

It was beginning to get on in the evening, and so he turned away from the table of junk, intending to head back home—but the man jumped up from his lawn chair.

“Hey, now,” he said, “don’t leave so fast. Maybe we can make a deal.”

“I’m not interested,” said Nate.

The man retrieved *Paradise Fields* from the cardboard box and made his way around the table. “Tell you what: I’ll give it to you for four dollars. I’m a big science-fiction fan, so it’s tough for me to let a beauty like this one go at a price like that; but I can see you really want it.”

He pushed the book toward his customer, and Nate examined the cover again. *Paradise Fields* was clearly a fantasy novel, and decidedly *not* science fiction; but Nate had about as much interest in explaining the difference as he had in haggling the price down further. “Three bucks,” he said. “Take it or leave it.”

“Sold!”

Nate gave the man the money, and when he arrived home a short while later it was with *Paradise Fields* in his hands.

His step-father, Roger, was sitting on the stoop in front of their tiny bungalow. He leapt up on seeing Nate. “You locked me out!”

As he drew closer, Nate noted Roger was swaying on his

feet. “No, I didn’t. You were still here when I left.”

Roger pointed a yellow, nicotine-stained finger at him. “Don’t lie to me, you little jerk.”

Nate did his best to ignore the insult. “You probably locked the door when you left and then forgot your keys at the bar.”

Roger’s eyes blazed with drunken anger. “You think you are so damn smart, don’t you?”

“No,” said Nate, dully.

“Come here,” said Roger.

Nate remained in place.

Roger’s face transformed into an inebriated grin, the anger seeming to have vanished. “Come on over, son.” He motioned for Nate to join him. Slowly, Nate moved toward his step-father. As soon as the teen was within arm’s reach, Roger drew back and then smacked Nate across the face. The book fell from Nate’s hands, as he tumbled to the ground.

“You aren’t any better than me,” growled Roger. “You’re nothing.”

Nate lay there, his cheek hot and stinging, with his step-father looming over him. He felt like crying, but he’d promised himself months before that he’d never again let Roger see him cry another tear.

“I’m going back to the bar,” said Roger, spinning in an awkward and unbalanced turn, and then stumbling off.

Nate pulled himself back up to his feet and brushed the dirt and dead grass from his clothes. He went to the door of the house and tried the knob, just in case Roger had been mistaken in his intoxication—but it was locked. He went around back and checked the other door, but it too was locked. Even the window to his bedroom, which he was sometimes able to jimmy open, if the temperature was right, refused to budge. Resigned to having to wait outside until Roger returned with the keys, Nate went back to the front step and sat down.

Paradise Fields still lay where it had fallen in the dirt of the untended lawn. Nate went and picked it up, and returned to the stoop. He felt tired and his cheek stung—beginning to read such an apparently epic tale felt like too intimidating a task in his current state, so he opened the book to a random page, midway through, and began to read:

Takim slammed shut the cellar door. He and Takeh hurriedly descended the rickety wooden steps, down into the damp blackness of the cellar.

He reached into his pocket—the flint was there; somehow, it had remained with him through the battle, even after his helmet had been knocked from his brow and J'Gros, the once virgin blade, wrenched

from his hands. He felt his way along the wall in the dark until he touched a sconce. After many attempts, a spark from the flint brought light to the torch.

The orange flames leapt into the air and threw shadows against the moist earthen walls. Wine barrels lined the far end of the cellar, and the stale air carried with it the sickly smell of fermentation; it mixed with the odour of fresh blood emanating from the siblings.

“So this is to be our grave,” said Takeh, taking a brief glance around the pitiful space before dropping to the filthy floor in exhaustion.

“No,” said Takim, kneeling down next to her and examining the wound in her leg. “We’ll not die this day, dear sister.” He pulled the leather thong from his waist and tied it about her thigh in a tight tourniquet. She grimaced in pain, but the bleeding was stanchd.

“How goes the battle in the fields?” she asked.

“The battle is lost.” His tone was grim.

“Already?”

“Yes.”

“And Branna?”

“I lost sight of him early in the fray.” Takim shook his head with sorrow. “We were out-numbered ten to one.”

His sister’s eyes grew wide with horror, and he saw, quite suddenly, in the brown depths of her gaze, that there had been a secret love between his best friend and his sister. He felt a surge of anger and betrayal; but it faded swiftly, for it no longer mattered—Branna’s

lifeless body undoubtedly lay amongst the hundreds of dead Fraham that littered the valley fields.

“The village, too, is lost,” said Takeh, staring across the cellar at nothing. “The goblins slaughtered all on sight, caring not for age, nor sex. Those who resisted were decapitated, and their heads now sit atop spikes in the village square. The heads of women and elders . . .” Her voice trailed off.

“Our warriors in the fields never stood a chance,” said her brother. “There could be no stopping them. Dark magic shields this army of the Gumrahieme.”

“The wizard,” said Takeh, as if speaking not to her brother, but to the cellar walls.

“Yes.”

He lowered himself down, and they sat next to each other for warmth, just as they had done as children during the long winters.

“Tell me a story,” said Takeh, “as you did when we were young and the world was not as dark as it has now become.”

He sighed heavily. “I can no longer remember the tales of our youth.”

“Stop that,” said Takeh, looking on her brother with disapproving eyes. “These monsters may steal our lands and slay our people, but they can never take our stories. Speak now: as long as our stories are told, the Fraham spirit lives on.”

Takim lowered his head in silence, and for a moment it seemed that he would not speak and that all truly was lost; but then his chin

rose and the words came out of him clear and strong:

“In ancient times, there was a great Fraham princess. She was gentle and kind, and her people loved her for it. She would never be Queen, for she had an elder sister, who had travelled all the lands, had learned much, and was soon to be wed. The princess held no malice towards her sister; indeed, the engagement brought her great joy. She loved her sibling dearly, and knew her sister would one day make a great monarch.

“The day the messenger arrived at the castle carrying the wedding invitation, the princess could barely contain her excitement. She unrolled the scroll with delight, and read the words of summons; they had been inscribed in an ink of bright silver, which sparkled with such beauty that the letters seemed to float above the parchment. The young princess’s exhilaration was tempered, however, when she came to the invitation’s final phrase:

“‘Given that this royal matrimony will commence in the emerald season, all attendants are kindly asked to wear garments of green.’

“The princess frowned. Despite her plentiful wardrobe, she had not a stitch of green clothing. It had been more than a year since she had last seen her sister, and she wanted dearly to please her on her wedding day; so in the weeks that followed, whenever possible, the princess frequented the peasant market outside the castle walls, and travelled to the merchant shops lining the nearby river.

“It seemed that with each trip she discovered new treasures. The first week, she returned home with a fitted gown of forest green,

stitched by the kingdom's finest seamstress. The second week: a bracelet of smooth jade to wear on her left wrist, as was her people's tradition. The third week: a green ribbon of silk, from the farthest western shores of Paradise Fields, to tie in her hair. The fifth week: an emerald necklace of such beauty that a war had been fought between two kingdoms after its theft during the time of antiquity—or so the jeweller had assured her.

“But, try as she might, the princess was unable to find a pair of green shoes to complete her outfit. She visited every cordwainer within a day's riding distance; but word of the wedding had spread throughout the land, and every shoe of green had been snapped up in eager anticipation, and the supply of hide from which they were made was now exhausted.

“The days passed by and, before long, the wedding was but a single night away. The princess looked out her window and cried tears of despair that evening, for it was now assured that she would not have green shoes for her sister's nuptials. She wept with such fierce intensity, and her sorrow came from such purity of heart, that the tears, upon leaving her face, did not fall to the floor: instead, they rose into the night sky. Up they went, climbing ever higher, until the very surface of the moon turned wet. It was those tears that awoke the spirits that slept in the orb of night.

“With a flourish of misty colour, an elder woman appeared, suddenly, before the princess, floating outside of her window, as if made from smoke.

“What is wrong, child?” asked the elder spirit. ‘You are young, and beautiful, and are loved by your people.’

“I have not shoes to wear to my sister’s wedding,’ cried the princess.

“Are those not shoes you wear upon your feet now?”

“My violet slippers, yes. But I am in need of shoes of green.’

“I see,’ said the spirit.

“Who are you?” asked the princess, wearily.

“I was once a Queen of this land. The same blood that flowed through my veins now flows through yours.’ The spirit wore a satchel, hung over her shoulder, and she reached into it, retrieving something of its content. As she held her hand out before her, the princess saw two small, olive-coloured beans, resting in the centre of the spirit’s palm.

“What are those?” asked the princess.

“Beans. They are for you.’

“The princess cupped her hands, and the spirit dropped the beans into them.

“What am I to do with them?” asked the princess.

“Plant them. Water them. Tend to them,’ said the spirit.

“And what of the wedding? What of the shoes?” asked the princess—but the spirit had dissolved into air, and her beneficiary was now speaking only to the night.

“The princess left her chamber, and went to the scullery, where she retrieved two pots. Then, in the courtyard, under watch of the moon

and the stars, she filled the pots with rich soil. Carefully, she planted the seeds within, nurtured them with cold water from the well, and then returned with them to her chamber. She placed the pots on the window sill. And then she went to bed, and slept a dreamless slumber until morning.

“Upon waking, the young princess was startled to find the beans had sprouted overnight. Two stalks, nearly as wide across as the pots themselves, rose up from the soil, and at each of their peaks, rather than flowers or buds, hung a shoe of green. Carefully, the princess plucked the shoes from their stems, and placed them upon her feet. The fit was perfection.

“She looked to the sky and thanked the elder spirits, and then began her preparations for the wedding.

“And what a wedding it was! For decades to follow, its splendour was discussed, and the princess brought her sister great joy that day. While each in attendance wore the colours of the emerald season, the princess’s beauty dwarfed all others’, and she was henceforth known to all her people, indeed known throughout the ages, as The Green Princess.”

The torch flame had grown dim, and Takim’s words dissolved into the cool darkness of the cellar.

“Thank you,” said Takeh. “That tale was always among of my favourites, and you tell it well. I am glad to hear it, one last time.”

“And what does that story tell us?” asked Takim.

Takeh thought for a moment, and then said, “That what we need

most dearly cannot be found in the marketplace, nor purchased in a stall. It can be found only within ourselves and the traditions of our people. It tells us that the kernels of knowledge housed within fairy tales and legends must be cherished and cared for, so that they might flourish in our time of need."

"Yes," said Takim, "and that hour of need has now come upon us. So let us not look to the warriors in the fields, nor to the people of our village, to turn the tide of this battle: let us look to ourselves."

They clasp hands together, each of them confident that the Fraham spirit had not yet been snuffed out. The Green Princess would live on, at least till morning.

Nate closed the book. Night had come, making it too dark to continue reading any further. Tomorrow, he would return to the world of *Paradise Fields*, this time starting from the beginning.

A strong breeze had begun to blow. Summer was drawing to a close. Soon it would be time to begin high school. . . . Nate preferred not to think about it.

Roger never did come home that evening: so, as the night drew on, Nate made a bed for himself under the stars. He lay on his back on the walkway in front of his home, and

used the book as a pillow.

The crescent moon shone in the sky above him, and he looked to it for help, praying that the spirits of his elders would appear before him and grant him his wishes—but no spirits came to his aid, and Nate spent the night cold and alone.

END OF
"THE GREEN PRINCESS"