

A Burly and Grum Tale

BEYOND THE FOREST

by Kate Tenbeth

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CHAPTER ONE

Deep in the great forest there was a clearing filled with rays of warm, bright summer sunshine. The grass was soft and green and the flowers were dazzling in their brightness. A large brown bear had cleverly positioned himself right in the centre of the clearing so that the sun's rays constantly warmed him. He lay flat on his back, his stomach a huge shaggy mound. His eyes were closed, he had a big contented smile on his face and his snores shook the leaves on the trees. Perched rather unsteadily on top of the bear's stomach was a goblin.

Goblins have had a lot of bad press over the years but, when it comes down to it, they're more grumpy than bad and they'd be the first to admit that they squabble a lot. They're not very tidy. Their skin is a bright pea green colour and both male and female goblins have hairy red eyebrows and large ears. Their favourite food is rotting meat but they'll also eat grubs and mould. They're not as bad as people make out - just different.

This particular goblin's name was Grum and he was thinking. He had a lot to think about. Earlier that day he'd been thrown out of his home by his older brothers, Gripe and Grimly, who'd told him in no uncertain terms that he couldn't come back until he'd proved himself a worthy goblin. Grum had yelled a lot and dug his feet firmly into the ground but his brothers didn't care much. They each took an arm and dragged him to the boundary that marked goblin territory. By the time they were half way there Grum had stopped yelling but still wouldn't walk, deciding that as his brothers were being so horrible they could do all the hard work. His heels made deep tracks in the ground behind him.

The brothers were exhausted by the time they'd arrived at the boundary but still managed to summon enough energy to chuck Grum over to the other side.

Grum stood on one side of the boundary, his brothers the other.

"You're just jealous I'm uglier than you!" he shouted at his brothers.

Gripe and Grimly looked at each other and laughed. "In your dreams!" shouted back Grimly.

"Does mum know what you've done?" Grum demanded to know.

"She suggested it," snickered Gripe.

"She didn't," protested Grum, momentarily shocked. "She wouldn't do that."

"Oh yes she did," replied Gripe. "She's always spoilt you because you're the youngest but even she's had enough of your lazy ways - when was the last time you offered to dirty the house?"

"I'm not meant to!" Grum was a brighter shade of green than usual by now. "I'm her special goblin, she said so!"

"Yes, well," said Gripe with a smirk. "Not any more. Off you go. Prove yourself as a goblin and maybe then mum will let you back. Oh - and one last thing - be careful of all the beautiful people out there!"

Grum shook his fist. "You don't scare me! They're only stories - there's no such thing as beautiful people and you know it!"

"Whooooo...." Grimly made a ghostly sound. "Well I guess you'll find out soooooon!"

The brothers both burst out laughing. They thought it was so funny they had to lean on each other for support but that didn't work so they fell on the ground and rolled about clutching their stomachs.

Grum glowered. He'd show them. He turned on his heel and marched

away, the sound of their laughter ringing in his ears.

In case you didn't know, goblins can walk like humans but they have very long arms so it's easier and faster for them to walk on all fours. They throw their arms forward and plant their hands on the ground and then swing their legs along to catch up. They can actually move very quickly like this.

Grum swung and marched through the forest until he could go no further and then climbed to the top of what he thought was a small hill and sat down. He was so upset that it took a few minutes for him to realise the hill was not only moving slowly up then slowly down, but that it was snoring loudly. He wasn't that bothered however, mostly because although he'd heard of bears he'd never seen one so had no idea what he was sitting on. It may have been large but it was furry and seemed harmless. Rather like a very big rabbit he thought.

After thinking for a little while longer he stood up. He looked up and down the length of the bear and then slid down the round stomach. The bear continued to snore. Grum walked to the edge of the trees and rooted around in the undergrowth. Ah ha! He found a piece of branch, thick and heavy that lay half hidden. Grum picked it up, weighing it with one hand. Yes, it was heavy enough. Then he walked back to the bear and stood just a couple of inches away from its head. He planted his feet slightly apart, held the branch firmly with both hands like a baseball bat and swung it hard.

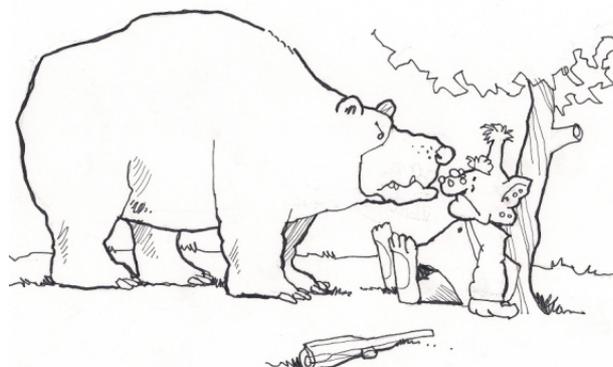
A huge roar of pain and surprise filled the air as the bear woke and scrambled to its paws. It immediately spied the goblin and bent its head down to only a mere inch away from Grum and roared once more. The roar was even louder this time, it not only filled the clearing but most of the forest for miles around, making animals run for cover and birds take to the air. Hot bear breath blasted Grum making his eyebrows quiver, and his green skin paled when he saw the bear's teeth in high definition. He tucked the branch behind his back.

"What," the bear's angry voice boomed like thunder, "do you think you're doing?" He sniffed Grum with a large black snout and growled deeply.

"Err, nothing," squeaked Grum.

The bear raised a massive paw and with a single swipe Grum flew through the air. He landed with a thump half way up the trunk of a tree and slid slowly down to the ground. The bear ambled up to him and raised his paw again. All Grum could see were thick ivory-like claws. "I'm sorry," he squealed. "I didn't mean to hit you."

The bear growled. Low and menacing.



"Well, yes, I did mean to hit you. But I'm sorry. I'll never do it again."

A lump had appeared between the bear's ears. "If you didn't smell so bad

I'd eat you. What are you?"

"A goblin - from the Griff clan." Grum sniffed his armpits. "And yes, I do smell bad," he admitted. "My mum always makes sure I do before I leave the house." At the thought of his mother Grum's chin trembled and his large tufty ears drooped. Glistening green tears rolled down his warty cheeks.

The bear put his raised paw down. He sighed deeply; he had a feeling he was going to regret continuing the conversation rather than eating this strange green creature. He gave the goblin a moment compose himself before asking, "Why did you hit me?"

"I have to prove myself as a goblin. I thought that if I knocked you out and took you back home mum would let me back in the house and my brothers would stop laughing at me."

The bear looked bemused. "And how exactly did you think you were going to get me back to your home? Do you know how heavy I am? I'm in my prime you know."

"No, well, look I... I don't know how I'd have got you back," admitted Grum. "But I would have thought of something! I'm good at thinking."

"Well your track record isn't too good so far," observed the bear.

Grum wiped his nose with the sleeve of his grey jacket. The bear pulled a face. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Grum P. Groblin."

"Grumpy?" The bear's lips twitched as he tried not to laugh.

"Yes... no... not Grumpy - Grum **P.** Groblin."

"Pea?"

Grum sighed. He had this problem all the time. "Goblins always have a secret middle name so I can't tell you what it is but it starts with P."

"Ah." The bear studied Grum P. Groblin thoughtfully. "Well, I'm Burlington Bear, Burly for short." There was a moment's silence. Burly gingerly touched the growing lump on his head with one of the soft pads of his paw. "I take it you're not going to try and smack me on the head again?"

Grum shook his head miserably.



Despite the fact Burly was by far the largest and strongest bear in the forest he was very mellow by nature. He was neither unkind nor a bully and only resorted to using his immense strength when absolutely necessary. His thick brown coat gleamed with health and his black eyes were bright and intelligent. And although at that moment in time he could feel a headache coming on he also felt a twinge of pity for the goblin. "So what are you going to do now?" he asked. "You must be a long way from home, I've never seen one of your kind

before.”

“I'll think of something. I'm good at...”

“thinking... I know,” said Burly. He sat down heavily on his haunches. Clouds of dust billowed up around him.

“I'm going to keep walking until I reach something called a town, that's what I'll do,” said Grum. “I'll show my brothers. I'm going to capture a beautiful person and bring it back alive to show everyone I'm a real goblin.”

“Okay...” said Burly slowly and pondered. He was a curious sort of bear and this was the most curious thing that had happened to him for a long time. Might be interesting and amusing as well he considered. He made a decision. “Where is this place 'town' that you want to go to?”

Grum stood up and waved a hand vaguely. “Over there.”

“Well,” said Burly. “We'd better get going then hadn't we?”

“We?”

“I'm interested.”

“I don't want you along.” Grum pouted.

“Tough.”

“We goblins are not to be trifled with.”

“Really?” Burly was amused.

Grum stood up and kicked the undergrowth tetchily. “Come on then.”

“Lead the way,” offered Burly.

“I will.”

And with that they set off, Grum in front moving swiftly through the woods and Burly ambling along behind chuckling softly to himself.

They walked for a long time. The warm afternoon sun cooled as evening drew in. Above them the blue of the sky deepened and bright stars glittered brightly.

“Are you sure you know the way to this town?” asked Burly.

“My mum said that towns are all around us,” replied Grum. “So I don't see how we can be going in the wrong direction do you?”

“You have a point I suppose,” replied Burly. “What's in these 'towns'?”

“Humans mostly. Beautiful people that can scare you to death with one look.”

“Humans are very good at scaring most things to death...” agreed Burly.

Grum stopped in his tracks and turned around. “You've seen one? You're telling me you've really seen a human?”

“I've seen several actually, but only from a distance, skinny little things. The only thing that gives them courage is their weapons.”

“Weapons? They have weapons?” This was something Grum hadn't considered.

“You name it, they've got it,” replied Burly. “And trust me, they're not afraid to use them. I've lost several friends of mine to their weapons.”

“And are they really beautiful?” Grum's face was now pale green, his red eyes anxious.

Burly's deep brown eyes pondered the question for a moment. “Beautiful? I really can't say. I know they don't have fur, just a thin covering of pasty skin stuff that breaks easily. Good to eat in an emergency so I've been told. I try to avoid them myself.”

Grum scrambled up onto a rock and looked directly at Burly. “So let me get

this right. There are such things as humans and they may or may not be beautiful?”

“That’s about it.”

“How many of them are there?”

“I’ve only seen them from a distance - one or two at a time - but it’s said they live together in their hundreds like bees in their hives.”

Grum gulped. “Hundreds?”

“Thousands!” Burly threw his paws wide open. “All milling around.”

Grum sat down. “Well, I suppose if I caught one it would really mean something then - you know, be important, prove I was a great goblin... My brothers - Gripe and Grimly said they didn’t exist.”

Burly looked sombre. “Oh yes, they do exist.”

Grum stood up and threw his chest out. “Then if they’re real I don’t care if there are hundreds or thousands of them - I’ll find the most beautiful one I can and bring it home.”

There was a pause and then once more curiosity got the better of Burly again. “Er, any particular reason why the human has to be beautiful?”

“You’ve got to be kidding.” Grum peered at Burly closely to see if he was pulling his leg. “Look I really need to scare my brothers and the more beautiful the human is more scared they’ll be yeah?”

It was Burly’s turn to study Grum.



He took in the massive red eyebrows, the green skin that was covered with warts and the large, crooked mouth crammed with large, crooked teeth. The penny dropped. Ugly to a goblin was good. Beautiful would therefore have to be pretty scary. It made sense in a strange kind of way. Burly laughed out loud and the sound echoed throughout the forest but this time the animals merely pricked their ears and went about their business and the birds didn’t even notice.

“I think we should rest up now,” he said when he’d stopped chuckling.

“There’s plenty of time to find a human. I know a cave nearby we can use.”

Grum considered the invitation. He was very tired, he’d had a busy and upsetting day. His stomach rumbled and he remembered he’d had nothing to eat since breakfast. His mother was probably serving up dinner right at this moment. His red eyes were momentarily sad. “Okay,” he nodded. “We can start tomorrow morning. Have you got anything to eat?”

“I have some honey and fresh berries.”

“Ugh - horrible, haven’t you got anything that’s been rotting for a while?”

Burly held out a paw and flicked open his claws. “Don’t worry, I’m sure I can dig you up something, maybe some grubs?”

Grum scrambled down from the rock. “They’re okay I suppose. Where’s the cave?”

“Not far.”
And off they set side by side.

CHAPTER TWO

The sun rose early the next morning and its bright rays filled the cave. Grum groaned and turned over as a finger of light tried to prise open an eyelid. Burly had already been up for some time and decided it was time to wake the groblyn. He bent down and nudged him with his snout. Still fast asleep, Grum reached out and swatted away the snout. Burly raised a paw and swatted him back. Grum was wide awake by the time he hit the floor at the back of the cave.

“Why? Why did you do that?” Grum protested as he struggled to his feet.

“Sorry, just don’t know my own strength sometimes,” replied Burly.

Grum glowered. His red eyebrows knotted together and he hitched up his trousers in an angry fashion. Groblins from the Griff clan were usually treated with respect. He opened his mouth to say something but Burly had bent his face to only an inch away from his own and raised an enquiring eyebrow. Grum shut his mouth.

“Are you awake now?” Burly enquired politely.

“What about breakfast?” Grum demanded.

“All in good time,” replied Burly patiently. “Have you got a plan yet?”

Grum considered. “We find the town, pick a human and bring it back. Simple.”

“We’re going to stand out a bit.”

“We are?” Grum was puzzled and looked himself up and down and then Burly. “Why?”

Burly turned and sat down at the mouth of the cave and looked out over the beautiful forest stretched out below. “If towns are where humans live then it will be nothing like this. They tear down trees you know, build their homes from stones and rock. Beyond this forest is a world that is completely different to ours.”



There was a pause as Grum thought about Burly’s words. “Stones? They build their homes from stone?”

“I believe so.”

“No trees?”

“No.”

“Oh.” Grum considered the situation but found it difficult to believe and

frowned. "Are you sure?"

"No, not really," admitted Burly, "I've never been near a place where humans live but I've heard other animals talk about it."

"Which ones?"

"Squirrels and foxes mostly."

"Oh," said Grum again. "I can't imagine a place without trees. But if you're right then I suppose we will stand out a bit..." A smile lit up his face. "We'll have to go in disguise! I'm good at disguises!"

"I have a better idea," replied Burly. "We're going to visit a friend of mine. He'll be able to help us."

"Another bear? And is this going to take long? We don't have a lot of time you know. Mum will be worried about me."

Burly smiled. "No time at all, just trust me. And, with a bit of luck, we can get breakfast there."

Mike lived in the hollow of an old oak tree. Ivy grew thick and glossy green around the trunk and bright flowers and herbs jostled for position in the neat garden that surrounded it. A pair of wood pigeons had nested just above one of the small round windows and two goats, like bookends, sat either side of a green painted front door and chewed. A beehive alive with busy buzzing bees hung from one of the topmost branches and right next to it was a steep and shiny slide that had been painted bright red.

Inside, Mike's little home was very comfortable and cosy. There was only one room and he cooked, ate, slept and sang in it. He'd made everything he could from what he found in the forest including the table, chairs and bed. It may have been a little basic but no matter what the weather was like outside, sunshine always streamed through the round windows and lit up the room with a warm golden glow. Everyone was welcome in Mike's home. A dormouse was curled up in an old trainer while a hedgehog slumbered in a nest of straw right next to him. An owl perched on the back of a chair near the kitchen window, he'd obviously been in some kind of accident because a small sling had been put on to support an injured wing.

Mike loved having guests and he loved surprises, which was just as well really. He was standing at the top of the slide getting some honey from the hive when he saw Burly ambling towards his front door with a scowling green creature loping along close behind.

"Burly!" he shouted and waved. Then he sat down and slid quickly to the bottom of the slide and ran across to them. "Burlington! How lovely to see you!" He reached up to hug the bear and then they did a complicated handshake of welcome.

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?" asked Mike once they'd finished.

Burly nodded politely. "Mike, this is Grum from the Griff clan. He's a groblin. Grum, this is Mike – Michael Angelo - my good friend."

Grum had been struck dumb since Mike had slid down to greet them and stared up at him open mouthed – a golden glow seemed to surround Mike and he was beautiful beyond belief. Grum dragged his eyes away and looked up at Burly. "You know what, I could just take him back... he'd terrify any Groblin alive - my brothers would keel over on the spot."

Mike looked perplexed. Burly looked heavenward. "You can't take Mike back, he's my friend."

"Is that what humans are like?" asked Grum tentatively and bravely poked Mike with a finger.

Mike looked at Burly and raised an enquiring eyebrow.

"It's a long story," sighed Burly before turning to Grum. "Look, Mike is not a human. He's an angel, that's why he's 'beautiful' - it's to do with light and energy and all that kind of stuff."

"Get out!" replied Grum. "Angels don't exist."

"Er, why don't you two come in? We can talk better there," said Mike who was now feeling slightly awkward, and he turned to go back into the house.

"Eeek!" squeaked Grum as he spied two small wings on Mike's back. "He *is* an angel - look at those wings - kind of small though aren't they? Hey - can I touch them?"

Burly closed his eyes with embarrassment.

"Maybe later," replied Mike politely. "When I know you a little better. Er, are you okay to get through the door Burly?"

Burly chuckled. "You may have to help a little."

Mike laid a hand on one of Burly's front paws and in an instant Burly was inside. The owl immediately swivelled his head to see the visitor while the dormouse and hedgehog continued their naps.

"Hey, where'd you go?" came a complaining voice from outside.

"Do come inside," called Mike cheerfully.

There was a long pause. "This isn't a trap is it?" asked the voice. "My mum always said angels were not to be trusted."

"For goodness sakes," said Burly tightly, embarrassed again by Grum's manners. "Just come in will you."

A green face peered around the door. Grum had a good long look around the interior before deciding to come in.

Mike may have been confused but he was always polite. "Now," he said. "Can I make you two a cup of tea? You must have come a long way Grum, I don't think I've ever seen a goblin before although, of course, I've heard a lot about them."

Grum wasn't listening, he was staring at the owl who was staring right back at him.

"Grum?" said Burly. "Mike's talking to you."

There was no reply, Grum was completely lost in his staring contest.

"Grum!" The room rattled a little.

"What?" Grum replied, cross at having been disturbed. He turned and saw Burly and Mike looking him. "What?"

"Would you like a cup of tea?" asked Mike.

"Tea? Err, yes, strong and black."

"Don't stare at that owl again," whispered Burly. "Mind your manners and say please and thank you - Mike's a friend."

Mike bustled about in the kitchen area, filling the kettle with water and rummaging in various cupboards for tea and mugs. "Honey cakes anyone? I've just finished a batch."

Burly put a large paw over the goblin's mouth just as he opened it. "Yes please, Mike. I have to say I always look forward to your honey cakes, they're

the best in the forest.”

Mike beamed with pleasure. “You'll have to thank the bees really,” he said modestly. “They're the ones that do all the hard work you know.”



In a short time the little table was set and they sat around it. At first Grum refused a honey cake but after a swift dig in the ribs from Burly he reached a green hand across the table and snatched one. He tried not to make a face as he ate it.

“Now,” said Mike, once all the cakes had been eaten (mostly by Burly) and a second cup of tea poured. “How can I help you?”

“Grum has been thrown out of his home,” said Burly.

“Oh no!” Mike was genuinely shocked. “I'm so sorry to hear that Grum, of course I'll do what I can to help. What do you need?”

“Well,” said Burly. “It's not going to be easy Mike. Grum has to prove himself a worthy goblin before he can return home. He's determined to go to a town, find himself a human and bring it back to his home to show his family. Goblins don't believe that humans exist, they think they're just made up to scare young goblins into being good.” He scratched his head with his paw. “They also believe that, er... they're beautiful and therefore frightening... He wants to scare his brothers.”

Mike was lost for words for a few moments as he tried to take in all the strange information. “You don't believe humans are real?” he eventually asked Grum.

“Well I didn't but I do now,” replied Grum, “because Burly here told me he's seen some. He said there are hundreds and hundreds and mostly they live together in towns. I just need one – nobody will even notice if we take just one.”

“They do indeed live in towns - well, most of them anyway,” said Mike. “And I think I can help you but I can't let you take a human, it's part of my job to look after them.”

“It's not like we'd kill it,” said Grum. There was a moment's hesitation. “Can we?”

“No!” Burly glared at Grum. “No one's going around killing anyone - got it?”

Mike picked up a teaspoon and stirred his cup of tea loudly. “I can certainly take you to town so you can find out what humans are like,” he finally said, “but only if you give your word that you won't kidnap or hurt any of them. I know they're not always very nice but you must be better than them.”

Grum scratched his head.

Burly nodded. “Thanks Mike, and I give you my word that we won't hurt anything or anyone. Grum?”

"I'd set my heart on one," Grum said sulkily. "What's the point of going if I can't bring back a human? I'll never prove myself to be a worthy groblin." He kicked the leg of the table. "I'll never be allowed home."

"Grum - give your word."

Grum mumbled something.

"Louder please."

Grum stared firmly at the plate in front of him and scowled. "I promise I won't take a human or hurt one."

"Well done," said Burly. "Once we're there I'm sure we'll find something to prove you've seen a human. Er, what's it like in a town Mike?"

Mike picked up a honey cake and nibbled it. "There are not many trees," he said.

"Already knew that," muttered Grum under his breath.

"Well, it's difficult to describe really, it's very busy," continued Mike, ignoring Grum, "humans are out and about almost 24 hours a day. They walk to some places but they also drive around in cars and buses..."

"Drive, what's drive?"

Mike frowned. "There's no way of explaining really. You'll just have to see when you get there. It's busy, noisy, dirty..."

"Burly said we'll stand out," said Grum.

Mike smiled. "You will indeed. I doubt any town will have seen the likes of you before but I'll put some of my protection around you, so you won't have to worry." He paused in thought. "Children might see be able you for what you are - I don't think they'll be scared, but just be careful."

"Thank you," said Burly, "we both appreciate your help."

Mike looked from one to the other. "Let's go then, shall we?"

Across the forest, Gripe and Grimly's complaints filled the morning air as they crashed through the undergrowth. Their normally green ears were bright red. Gripe touched his tenderly but still winced. "Mum's still got a lot of her strength," he commented.

"Mum in a million," replied Grimly. "Mind you, I didn't think she'd take it so hard about Grum. He always seemed to be underfoot - you'd think she'd be grateful having more room in the house."

"Will the colour ever come back to our ears? I've seen her do the same grip on dad but his always stay green."

"Yeah, but his must be like leather by now, probably doesn't even feel it any more."

"Wish I didn't," said Gripe with feeling. "You wait till I get a hold of that Grum - causing us all these problems."

Grimly held up a hand and they came to a halt. "Hold on," he said, "look here." They'd come to the edge of a clearing and he pointed to a large dent half way up a tree trunk. Groblins have a very keen sense of smell and Grimly sniffed the area. "This is recent," he commented as he continued to sniff.

"Looks about the same shape as Grum," declared Gripe. "Well, whatever did that to him must have eaten him. Come on, let's go home and tell mum." He turned to go.

"No blood though," observed Grimly.

"Look, whatever did that could still be around." Gripe had always been the

most cautious of the three goblin brothers.

They shuffled closer together. The air was still and quiet. Gripe fiddled nervously with the fringe of a red scarf he wore draped around his neck.

"It will have gone by now surely?" said Grimly. "I mean, why would it eat Grum and hang around?" But they took a step back into the cover of the forest away from the clearing. They stood there for a few minutes. Nothing happened. "Look," declared Grimly, "I think we should find something for mum to remember him by - I don't know, his eyebrows or something like that? She might not be so angry then."

"Good idea," said Gripe. "I can't go through the whole ear wrenching thing again. You first," he pushed Grimly forward into the clearing.

Grimly shook his fist and whispered loudly. "You wait, you..."

"Hold on - what's that over there?" asked Gripe. He pointed to a large branch that lay on the grass and seemed to have some grey material stuck to it.

"We go together!" said Grimly.

"Together? I don't think that's a good idea."

"Come on!" Grimly was taller and stronger than Gripe and he reached out, grabbed one end of Gripe's red scarf and hauled him out into the open. They walked over to the branch and both sniffed it. "Definitely bear," observed Grimly. "And that's a bit of Grum's jacket."

"Bags his room!" said Gripe immediately.

"But no blood..." said Grimly. "I'm not sure Grum was eaten."

"Yeah, but mum won't know that. Look, I'm hungry, I want to go home," Gripe whined. "We can take this bit of cloth back and tell her he's been eaten. It's not hard."

"Look!" said Grimly, and walked over to the far side of the clearing. "It's all beaten down here and there are two sets of footprints - the bear's and Grum's. They've gone off in that direction - looks like Grum's in front but he's not running or anything."

"Are you sure?" Gripe sensed he wasn't going to get his breakfast for some time. He looked down at the prints and whistled. "That has to be the biggest bear ever. Why didn't it kill Grum? What d'you think the little weasel said to him?"

"Maybe he's been kidnapped and the bear will eat him later."

"Chance would be a fine thing..." replied Gripe testily.

"We'd better follow the track I suppose."

"Aw, I'm hungry!"

"Suck it up," replied Grimly. "It's better to be hungry than have another ear pulling from mum. Now, let's get going."

And mumbling and complaining they both set off following the path that Burly and Grum had made the previous day.

CHAPTER THREE

Grum and Mike stood together at the bottom of the steep slide. "Why don't you just fly down when you've got the honey?" Grum asked. "I mean, you've got wings."

"I fly up to the hive but slide down - I just like to slide, it's fun, no other

reason,” replied Mike. “Now, are you ready to go to the town?”

By way of reply Grum started to climb up the slippery surface of the slide.

Mike folded his arms and watched.

Burly ambled up and sat down beside him. “You're not going to tell him there are steps around the back are you?” he asked.

“Nope,” replied Mike.

They both stood and watched with interest as the goblin slithered and slipped his way up front of the slide.

“I can take you to the edge of town,” said Mike, “but I'm afraid I'm going to have to leave you there to make your own way in - I've got a really busy day at work today. If you get into trouble just shout my name out loud and I'll be there in an instant.”

“I'm sure we'll be fine,” said Burly more calmly than he felt, “especially if the humans can't see that we're different.”

“You'll have to keep a close eye on Grum - I meant what I said that I don't want anyone getting hurt and that includes you.”

“I understand. You have my word I'll be careful and at the first sign of trouble I'll shout for you.”

A slight frown appeared on Mike's forehead. “I have to tell you that I'm worried – do you think you could wait until tomorrow? I'd be much happier if I could go with you.”

There was a loud wumphing sound as both of Grum's feet gave way at the same time and his stomach smacked the surface of the slide.

“Ouch,” observed Burly. “That must have hurt.” He looked down at Mike. “I think the sooner we get him sorted the better.”

“Can I ask why you're helping him? You could be putting yourself in danger – you do know that don't you?”

Burly gave both questions a lot of thought. “I'm not really sure why I'm helping him,” he admitted. “He smacked me on the head, he's rude and mostly ungrateful and unpleasant but he needs to go home Mike. He needs to be with his mum. I don't know much about goblins, but I don't think they do well out on their own. And yes, I am aware I could be putting myself in danger and it's probably just as well I don't know how much.”

Mike smiled. “You're a good bear, Burly and I'm pleased you'll going with him because I have a feeling that one way or another he's going to get into trouble. Just remember, there's a lot in the human world that will be new to both of you - just take everything in your stride. If you need me, shout and I'll be there, I promise.”

Grum's feet were scrabbling desperately but he was almost at the top.

“Thanks Mike, I appreciate your help,” replied Burly. “And, you know, he's quite a nice little chap when you get to know him.”

“In your face!” came a yell from the top of the slide. Grum stood there both arms raised in triumph before turning around and waggling his bottom at them.

“Nice,” commented Mike drily. “Now, remember, if you need me just call but you'll have my protection around you so there shouldn't be too many problems.” Grum was still waggling his bottom at them. “I'll keep my fingers crossed anyway.”

Burly nodded and then shouted up at Grum. “Come on down - it's time to go.”

Grum turned around, grinned widely and pushed himself off, sliding quickly down. He landed with a thump on the ground. "That was brilliant - did you see how fast I went? I'm going to get one when I get home and my brothers won't be allowed anywhere near it. Ever."

Mike smiled. "You'll have to see if you can get a swing as well - you feel as though you're flying - it's really fun."

"I will, I will," Grum nodded excitedly. "Now - are we really going?"

"Indeed we are," said Burly.

"Remember," Mike addressed Grum, "you're just going to look around a human town, nothing more. I'll pick you both up at the end of the day."

"Cool," declared Grum with a wide grin showing his yellowing teeth.

"Burly?"

Burly nodded.

"Right," said Mike. "Hold out your hands."

Grum held out a large green hand. Burly put a large paw on top of it. Mike nodded, laid both his hands on top and closed his eyes.

They didn't seem to move at all. Instead, all around them the scenery shimmered slightly. The green of the trees and bright colour of the flowers seemed to float then diminish. The little house became washed out, grey, before disappearing altogether. The sound of the birds chirping and honey bees buzzing faded and there was silence. All around them was grey emptiness and harsh, unclean air. Then, out of nowhere came a loud vrooming noise, fast and deadly.

Burly turned around quickly. Some kind of large animal was speeding towards him. He felt his heart hammer, it was like nothing he'd ever seen before. It had no legs only wheels and it was shiny. To his horror he saw humans inside - the beast had obviously eaten them. Instinct kicked in and without thinking he did what he could to save them, he stood on his hind legs as the beast came hurtling towards him and roared at the top of his voice. He could see the shocked faces of the humans inside.

The beast was moving quickly but swerved neatly to avoid him before speeding away. Burly could see the people turning to look at him and was about to run after them to save them when he felt something pulling on his fur. He looked down - Mike! Burly fell to all fours. "What was that?" he demanded. "You didn't say anything about beasts eating humans." He looked around. "Where's Grum?"

A pale green face appeared from behind Mike. "I think they may have seen you..." he said.

"I'm so sorry Burly," said Mike, "are you alright? I should have landed us somewhere quieter. What you saw was a car and it's not alive, it's made from metal and can't eat anything. Humans don't like walking very much so they've built machines that will carry them around from place to place. They've also build roads," he pointed to the smooth, black surface, "to make the cars go fast."

Burly's heart beat was slowly returning to normal but he still felt a bit shaky. "So the humans hadn't been eaten?"

"No, no, not at all. I'm so sorry. Look, maybe this isn't such a good idea."

Burly was embarrassed, he was there to look after Grum and stop him from causing problems - he was not meant to be the one causing the problems.

“Yes, no, we're here now, I'm fine. Sorry.”

Then they turned and looked around, seeing their surroundings properly for the first time. Beneath their feet, soft grass had been replaced by hard, grey stone. It felt cold and unpleasant. Burly shifted his paws, uncomfortable with the sensation. As far as the eye could see everything seemed grey and dark - tall stone buildings with sharp corners, black roads that cut straight through the land like a knife, and deafening metal cars that sped quickly past. He looked up and sighed gratefully. At least the sky was still blue.

“What have they done with all the colour?” he asked as he gazed around. “Where’s the grass? I knew some of the buildings would be stone but there’s so many of them... I don't understand.”

Mike shook his head, sad. “Humans have lost touch with so much Burly. Stone keeps out the rain, it keeps the heat in their homes and when they lay it on the ground it helps them get round more quickly.”

“But is the land dead?”

“No, it is still alive, just muffled. The stone blocks it.” A car zoomed past its windows open and loud, harsh music spilled out. “Their noise blocks it.”

Grum gave a low whistle, “And us goblins have a bad name. We'd never do anything to hurt the land. Not ever.”

“I know,” said Mike sadly. “But listen, the first impression is not always the best. The majority of humans have good hearts, they try to do their best and help. They're learning.”

Burly shook his head in disbelief as he gazed at the scene in front of him. Sadness overwhelmed him. “Really?”

Mike smiled gently. “Really. Just give them a chance.”

Grum coughed loudly and cleared his throat. Burly shook himself and looked down at him. “Are you ready then?”

“I was born ready.”

“Come on then. Er, which way do we go Mike?”

“Head in that direction, after five minutes you'll come to the centre of the town. Keep to the pavement.”

“Pavement?”

Mike pointed down. “That's pavement. That,” he pointed to the road, “you try to avoid if possible.”

“Okay. Right, see you later then Mike.” And they turned and headed into town.

Mike watched them. “Take care!” he shouted after them. “Remember, shout if you need me!”

Burly turned and gave a little wave. Mike frowned, unsure, but then vanished.

CHAPTER FOUR

As they headed into town they came across more and more people. Some seemed to be old and moved slowly, others were younger and in a hurry, some pushed strange metal contraptions that had young humans in them. They reminded Burly of a colony of ants, all busy and running around, all knowing what they were doing and where they were going without having to

communicate with anyone else.

"You know," commented Grum as they walked along. "They all look the same don't you think? And I'm not sure they're beautiful after all. It's a question of colour - they're all shades of pasty white to black - no colour whatsoever, that can't be right."

"Are you saying that humans are ugly?"

"Not in a goblin way," Grum was offended. "They don't have warts for one thing and their ears are ridiculous... they're just... well, sort of nothing really."

Burly stepped aside as a man walked towards him, head down, talking to himself. "No manners either," he commented. "And why was he talking out loud? Why doesn't he talk to the humans around him?"

They stopped and studied the man who strode past them oblivious to the fact he was being watched. He held what seemed to be a small stone close to his ear and was talking into it. Burly shrugged. "Guess we'll never know why they do that," he said. "What are we looking for anyway? Any idea?"

Grum shook his head. "Not really, but I need some kind of proof of all this - if I told family about this they'd simply think I'd gone crazy and Gripe and Grimly would make my life even more horrible."

A mother passed by with a small child skipping along behind her. "D'you think we could sneak a small human out?" Grum smiled at the child who promptly screamed and burst into tears. The mother turned around, scooped up her child and hurried away.

"Well, you're not going to get one by smiling at them that's for sure. But no, Mike said no kidnapping humans and we've got to keep to that. And don't underestimate the power of an angel - you really don't want to get on the wrong side of them. Ever."

"Okay, okay, I get the point. How much further do you think we've got to go?"

"I think we're there," said Burly and sat down. "The road's stopped, it's all pavement now."

"My feet are hurting already," complained Grum. "Don't they have grass *anywhere*?"

Burly pointed. "They've got some plants set in stone blocks just in front of that building," he observed, "that's about it." He watched the people as they hurried to and fro. "Looks like they must get sore feet as well with all this walking on stone, but they've solved the problem by putting coverings on their feet."

"Yeah well, if they hadn't done away with grass in the first place they wouldn't have to put things on their feet." Grum was tetchy.

"True, true," replied Burly. "Now, where do we go from here?"

Grey pavements stretched from one building to another. People milled about. They seemed to be going randomly from one building into another carrying bags.

"What are they doing?" asked Grum. "Where are they going?"

"Haven't a clue," replied Burly.

A woman walked past them talking loudly into another small stone. "Yes," she said. "I'm just walking up the High Street, I'll be there in a minute. Order me a cappuccino will you? I've bought so much in the shops I'm absolutely shattered darling... Okay... byeeee.... love you too...." The stone was somehow

snapped shut.



Burly blinked. "I'm going to have to find out what they're doing with those things they talk into. But she mentioned shops. These must be shops in front of us. And we're in a high street."

Grum glanced around. "We're not high though."

"True, but shops, well maybe we should look at the shops - there's obviously something in them of interest because humans are going in and out all the time. Maybe we can find something there for you to take back."

"Which one?"

Burly shrugged. "I don't know. I think we should just walk a bit further and have a look in one that seems interesting - they all seem to have different kinds of stuff in them."

Grum turned and headed over to the nearest shop and gazed at what was on display. "I recognise some of this," he said. "Look, that's gold and there are diamonds over there - great uncle Grix used to mine them." He reached out a hand to touch them but it hit the glass. He looked at Burly. "Whoa, that's weird - try and touch the gems."

Burly tentatively put out a large paw. It hit glass. He peered at it perplexed. "What is it? Some kind of barrier?"

"Looks like it."

"But there's nothing there."

"But there's got to be."

Burly smacked the barrier with his paw, this time a bit harder. "Definitely something there."

"Oi! You two!" An angry voice made them look around. "Yes, you two, get away from the glass, it was only cleaned this morning! Go on - move or I'll call the police!"

Grum and Burly exchanged knowing glances. Glass. So that's what it was. "We're sorry," said Burly politely to the angry human, and they moved on.

"So... glass is like a what? Some kind of defence system?" asked Grum.

A clear voice rang out. "You two don't know much do you?"

Burly and Grum turned to see who was talking to them. A short, skinny human was watching them. It had ginger hair that stuck up straight, sharp blue eyes, baggy trousers and a lot of attitude.

"Can it see us? You know, properly?" whispered Grum.

Burly stared at the short human over who stared back. "Yes, yes, I think so. This must be a young one. Act natural."

The human folded his arms. "Course I can see you. *And* I can hear you

you know. You're a bear and you're just a weird thing. What are you two doing here? Are you in the carnival parade?"

Burly and Grum glanced at each other. They had no idea what a parade was let alone a carnival. Burly took a shot. "Yes, yes we're in the parade. I'm Burly and this is Grum."

The human visibly relaxed. "Cool names. I'm Max. I'll show you about if you're new around here - got nothing else to do."

"Really?" Burly couldn't quite believe their luck.

"Course," said Max. "I know this town like the back of my hand. What do you want to see first?"

"Shops," said Grum.

"What kind?"

"We thought we'd just wander about," Burly bluffed.

"Aren't your feet cold?" Max asked pointing at Grum's feet.

Grum curled his toes. "No."

"Just wondered. D'you want to look at the next shop - it's my favourite, a pet shop."

"Pet?"

"You know - animals."

"Animals are in a shop?"

"Course, where else would you get them?"

Grum opened his mouth but Burly put his paw over it. "Please, show us around."

"Okay." Max smiled happily and led the way to the pet shop. They peered in through the window first. Grum knocked his forehead on the glass. "Mind the glass," advised Max, "it breaks."

"Glass - do all places have glass?" asked Burly.

"Course they do," replied Max. "How else can you see in? Oooh look - they've got kittens in. I'm going to get one for my birthday - come on!" And he disappeared through the doorway.

Burly was overwhelmed immediately he entered the pet shop. Birds squawked, mice and hamsters scabbled, puppies yipped and the smell... He looked around in panic, his first instinct to run, his breath became short and ragged. These animals were captured and stuffed in cages - what did humans do with them? Kill them? He was about to rear up when he saw Max reach down and pick up a tiny black and white kitten. Max's face softened and he was gentle as he held it, making mewing sounds to it.

"What do you think?" asked Max holding up the furry creature to show him. The kitten mewed and tried to climb onto Burly's arm. "Hey he likes you!"



Burly relaxed and smiled. Then he looked over Max's shoulder. A kitten's tail was hanging out of Grum's mouth. With a quick slurp Grum sucked the tail in.

"Grum!" Burly smacked Grum hard between the shoulder blades and a kitten shot out and landed on the floor. Max stared open mouthed at Grum, his eyes like saucers.

"What?" said Grum. "I'm hungry!"

The three of them stared at the slightly damp kitten who was making his way back in a rather wobbly fashion to his friends. Max gently put his kitten down next to him. "I think we'd better go," he suggested.

"Good idea," said Burly tightly.

"What?" Grum was cross. "We have them all the time at home - delicious *and* nutritious my mum says."

"Are you sure you're in the parade?" asked Max suspiciously.

"Positive," said Burly. "Now come on Grum and *don't* do that again."

Mumbling and complaining about harassment Grum left the shop closely followed by Burly and Max.

"Wow," said Max once they were outside. "I've never seen anything like that before. Were you really going to eat that little kitten?"

"No, of course not," said Burly a bit too quickly, "Grum was only joking... but we really are sort of new here... what else can you show us?"

"Well," said Max. "If Grum's hungry we could go for something to eat - there's a good café just a couple of streets away."

"Sounds good to me," said Grum. "Some of us didn't have much breakfast this morning." He glowered at Burly.

"Okay, okay," sighed Burly, "lead the way Max."

They ambled along taking in the sights and sounds of the town. Now they were getting away from what Max called the centre, the streets became narrower, the houses more higgledy piggledy and the people that passed by seemed more relaxed, some even nodded to them. Children carried bits of string that seemed to be held upright by round objects that floated in the air. Burly glanced up, multi-coloured flags hung across the width of the streets and the windows seemed to have flowers growing from them. And then, for the first time in his life he heard, in the distance, music. His bottom began to sway from side to side with the beat.

"What's that?" he asked Max.

"What's what?"

"That sound?"

Max stopped and listened carefully. All he could hear was the usual sounds of town, a buzz of movement and conversation, cars in the background and then he heard it too. "Oh that? That's music for the carnival - some of the floats have got live bands and everyone's getting ready for the parade. Don't you know what music is? Surely if you guys are in the carnival you hear it all the time?"

His sarcastic tone could have cut through metal but Burly was so bewitched by the music he didn't even notice and shook his head. "Never heard anything like it before, you Grum?"

Grum pulled a face. "No I hope never to again - it's awful, all that screeching and squawking."

Burly's bottom continued to twitch from side to side. "I kind of like it."

"Look," said Max, "here it is, Kate's Café, we can sit outside and watch what's going on - come on, there's a table free right at the front."

They sat down at the small table but Burly couldn't relax. Everything was so strange and uncomfortable and the chair he was sitting on was far too small, he could feel its legs wobbling under his weight.

"You okay?" asked Max.

"Fine thanks," Burly replied politely.

"What do you guys want to eat?" Max handed them each a large stiff sheet of paper.

Grum sniffed it. "What is it?"

"What?"

"This." He waved the bit of paper about.

Max frowned. "It's a menu. It tells you what there is to eat."

"Why would it do that?"

"So you can choose."

"Choose?"

Max rolled his eyes. "You guys have to be from another planet or something - look there's lots of things here you can eat, you can look through the menu and decide what you want." He reached across and turned Grum's menu up the right way.

The concept of choosing was completely lost on Grum - he always ate what his mum gave him, choice never came into it. He glanced across at Burly.

"Er, why don't you just tell us what there is to eat?" suggested Burly.

"Okay, well, for one thing," Max made a point of glaring at Grum, "there are *no* kittens on the menu." Grum's face fell. "But there are burgers and chips, pizza, ice cream and that kind of thing. Fast food you know." But even as he was talking to them, Max knew they had no idea what he was talking about. Burly had a polite but distant look in his eyes and Grum was staring at a pigeon perched nearby. "Tell you what, I'll order."

"Good idea," replied Burly. "Thank you."

A rather large human came over and stood by them. Max spoke to him for some time then sat back with a satisfied smile. "This is going to be good. I hope you guys are hungry."

"I could eat a horse," stated Grum.

Burly looked nervous.

Max sat forward, elbows on the table. "You guys are very strange," he said.

"So are humans," said Grum shortly.

Burlington quickly changed the conversation. "Max - why is that human talking into a stone?" He pointed to a man on the table next to them who seemed to be chatting away to himself.

"Sooooo strange..." repeated Max. "That's not a stone, that's a mobile phone."

"A mobile phone?"

"Yes, you can call another person far away and speak to them."

"Why would you want to do that when you're surrounded by other people? Why don't you speak to them?"

"Because you don't know them. Didn't your mother always tell you not to speak to strangers?"

Burly was baffled. "Why would she do that?"

"Because you don't always know what a stranger's going to do with you - you could get kidnapped and tortured or something. My mum's always having a go at me. If she saw me talking to you two she'd ground me for a month."

There was a sharp intake of breath from Burly. "You mean humans don't trust each other? They'd hurt each other?" He was genuinely shocked.

"Uh huh," Max nodded sagely. "You've got to be careful."

"If you've got to be careful then why did you talk to us?" Grum asked tartly.

"Because I'm a good judge of character and I can take care of myself," replied Max. "And anyway mum never told me not to talk to animals."

"I'm not an animal!" squeaked Grum in horror. "He is," he pointed to Burly, "but I most certainly am not!"

"What are you then?"

"A goblin."

"Well, that's got to be an animal of some kind."

"Just let me have him for five minutes," Grum muttered to Burly. Burly put a restraining paw on Grum and the waiter arrived with food just in time. Grum's eyes widened with delight when he saw what was on the plates. He didn't know what it was but it smelt better than anything he'd had since he'd left home. He snatched the plates out of the waiter's hands and tipped all the food on the table in front of him and started eating, frantically scooping burgers and chips with both hands into his mouth. Buns and chips were torn apart and sprayed across the table.

"Hey!" Max yelled. "You can't do that, don't you have any manners?"

The waiter took a step back and looked around for help.

Burly acted quickly. "I'm sorry for my friend," he said as politely as possible. "He's... he's... err..." A bit of burger flew past him. "He's been away for a long time and hasn't eaten. We'll clear up before we go, I promise."

The waiter nodded wanly and headed back into the café.

Max looked in disgust as Grum snuffled, slobbered and gobbled his food. "That is just so gross. Don't you chew at all?"

Burly tore his eyes away from the carnage and glanced up. The conversation around them slowly died as people stopped what they were doing to watch Grum devour his food. Burly could tell they weren't impressed.

"Grum, er Grum?" All he got back was a feral snarl. "Okay, you just go ahead but I think we'll move on as soon as you've finished, yes?"

Grum nodded and continued to eat. At one point he tried to say something

but food sprayed out of his mouth on to the table. He quickly grabbed it and stuffed it back in.

“Oh ew, that is so gross!” declared Max again.

Grum gave out a loud belch.

“Okay, he's finished,” said Burly. “I really think we should go now.”

“Aren't you going to pay?” asked Max.

“Pay?”

Max suddenly seemed nervous and ran his fingers through his spiked hair.

“You know, pay. With money.”

“Money?” Burly was struggling to understand.

“Yes,” replied Max. “Money - you know. You eat something, you pay for it - nothing's ever free you know.”

“Isn't it? Why?”

“Oh boy, you guys are in so much trouble.”

Burly felt a dark cloud around him building up. Trouble. The one thing they had to stay out of and somehow they'd managed to land right in the middle of it.

“What do we do?” he asked.

Max thought quickly. “Just do what I say, okay?”

“Why?”

“No questions. Just do what I tell you. Get up from the table, follow me and don't look back okay?”

Grum burped and smiled contentedly at Burly. Burly had a bad feeling about this but there was nothing he could do but follow Max's advice, he had none of this money stuff on him.

Max glanced around. The waiter was still inside. “Okay, now, just get up and walk away.”

Grum and Burly obediently stood up.

“Follow me.” Max headed off down the High Street and they hurried after him.

“Hey!” shouted a voice behind them. “Hey! Where are you going? Stop! You haven't paid!”

“Right,” said Max. “Now you run okay?”

As they ran like the wind it flashed through Burly's mind that flat stone surfaces meant you could run a lot faster.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gripe and Grimly stood in the deep shadow of a large tree. They'd followed Grum's trail to the cave and then, grumbling and complaining they'd crashed through the forest until they came to the clearing where Mike lived. Grimly flapped his hands signalling Gripe to be quiet. “Sssh!”

They surveyed a scene of complete harmony. The clearing was filled with dazzling sunshine and the air itself seemed to sparkle. In the centre was an old oak tree that had been made into a small house and two goats sat, as if on guard, in front of a green door. They had long white horns that curved back and stern expressions on their faces as they chewed. Birds sang sweetly from the trees around.

“I don't mind telling you I'm a bit worried,” whispered Gripe. “What would

Grum be doing in a place like this? Who do you think lives there? Do you think we should go and get help?" He pulled the ends of his scarf nervously.

"No!" hissed Grimly. "No help. We've got to do this ourselves."

They looked across at the pretty little house and each felt the cold finger of fear run down their spines.

"Do what ourselves exactly?" Gripe's voice came out as a squeak.

"Go in there and have a look," replied Grimly.

"Look, I never much liked him anyway," Gripe folded his arms. "Can't we just forget this?"

But although Grimly could feel his heart beating with fear he also felt a tingle of excitement and a smile spread across his face. "Are you scared?"

"No. Just never liked him. Don't see the point," replied Gripe quickly.

"Well, come on then, let's do it."

"Shouldn't we wait until it's dark? It's broad daylight out there."

"I was thinking we just go up and knock on the door."

Gripe's heart dropped to his boots. "You're crazy, you'll get us both killed."

"Yeah well, mum'll kill us and probably more painfully than whoever lives here if we go back without knowing what happened to the little pipsqueak."

Gripe considered the options - walking in broad daylight towards something that was beautiful and dangerous or going home to their mother without Grum - and sighed so hard his whole body shuddered. He was going to die either way. He glanced across at Grimly who had a smirk on his face and seemed to be enjoying this a little too much. "I swear mum swapped you at birth. Come on then."

And they both stepped out into the clearing.

The birds stopped their singing mid tune and turned to look at the two goblins. The goats stopped chewing and stared. A couple of bees were so surprised they collided in mid air and crashed to the ground. A rabbit froze in terror where it stood and the wind stopped riffing through the leaves. There was absolute silence. Gripe fought the urge to hold his brother's hand.

"He's definitely been here," whispered Grimly. "I can smell him."

Gripe was almost paralysed with fear. "Can't smell anything," he replied stiffly.

They were almost at the path. The goats, their bulging golden eyes unblinking, stared as the brothers tiptoed towards them and one of them scrambled to his feet and took a step forward. The brothers hesitated.



"Just - you know, edge around him," whispered Grimly out of the side of his mouth.

"You're so going to pay for this," came Gripe's hoarse reply.

They side stepped the goat, who did not take his eyes off them.

"Knock," said Gripe when they got to the door..

"You knock," countered Grimly.

"You suggested this," said Gripe.

Grimly took a deep breath, put a hesitant hand forward and gave one loud knock.

"No reply," stated Gripe immediately. "We should go."

"Coward," murmured Grimly.

Gripe fought the urge to smack his brother on the nose. "Hello," he whispered sarcastically, "there's no one home."

"We should just check."

"Are you mad!"

Grimly smiled very strangely, edged around one of the goats and peered through one of the small windows. Immediately, a head swivelled around, a large pair of yellow eyes blinked at him and large wings unfolded and flapped wildly. Grimly bellowed loudly and turned and ran as fast as he could back down the path with Gripe just a heartbeat behind him.

Angels don't use magic they simply use the energy that comes naturally from the earth itself and Mike had used a lot of it in order to transport Burly and Grum to the edge of the town. Concentrated energy takes a long time to disappear and there was still quite a lot left hanging around when Gripe and Grimly ran headlong into it and then disappeared. There was no sign left that they'd ever been there apart from Gripe's red scarf that had fallen off just in front of the green door.

Burly, Grum and Max were standing in a dark and narrow alleyway taking in great gulps of air as they tried to catch their breath. Grum could feel his lungs burning and Max was almost bent double from the stitch in his side. Burly looked troubled.

"That," gasped Grum, "was fun! Can we do it again?"

"No!" The reply was swift and stern from Burly. "Now we know about money we won't go to places where we need to use it. Mike told us very clearly to avoid trouble and we walked right into it."

"If my mum ever finds out what I did," Max panted, "she'll like ground me forever."

"If my mum ever found out she'd give me a hug and say well done!" replied Grum happily.

"Maybe we should swap mums?" suggested Max.

"Nah, she'd never take to you," said Grum. "You're too pasty and skinny and what are those flaky things all over all over your skin?"

Max snorted. "Freckles, they're called freckles, and you can talk - you're green as a pea, what's all that about?"

"Will you two please stop arguing!" Burly was feeling exasperated. "We'd better move on in case that human catches up with us. Where's a good place to go now Max?"

"Well, the carnival starts near the market - we could head that way. There's loads of floats and people dressed up so you'll kind of merge into the crowd."

"Sounds good to me. Lead the way."

Max nodded and the three of them set off down the alleyway.

"I think that now I'm probably wanted by the police," observed Max, "you should tell me exactly who you are and what you're doing here. And don't spin me that line about the carnival because I know you're nothing to do with that."

Burly looked uncomfortable but Grum answered cheerfully. "I'm Grum and that's Burly. I'm a goblin and he's a bear – isn't it obvious?"

"Well," said Max, "my mum used to read me stories when I was younger and some had goblins and stuff in but those were just stories – y'know fairy stories."

Grum stopped swinging his arms and came to a halt at the entrance to the alleyway, his face a picture of outrage. "A fairy?! A fairy!! How dare you compare me with a fairy?! And if you must know I am a true goblin and until yesterday I didn't think you humans existed – I thought *you* were the worst kind of horror story."

Max laughed out loud. "Really? Horror? That's kinda cool actually, but I don't believe you didn't know we existed – *everyone* knows we exist." He threw his arms open wide.

Burly wagged his snout and interrupted. "I have to admit humans have made quite an impression on the world," he commented. "But Grum is right, until yesterday he thought that humans were just stories made up to scare young goblins."

"Us? Scary?" Max was puzzled.

"Humans are destructive and have a tendency to either shoot us or tear down our homes..." replied Burly.

Max's face went pink, his ears bright red. "Oh, I see.... But I like animals... and stuff... I wouldn't hurt anything..."

Burly immediately felt guilty at hurting Max's feelings. "I know," he replied, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound harsh, it's just that humans are something we wild creatures usually try to stay clear of."

"Fairies!" muttered Grum under his breath.

"But if you're trying to stay clear of us what're you doing here?"

"Grum's brothers have thrown him out of his home and he's got to prove he's worthy of being a goblin. As all their stories say that humans are scary Grum thought he'd come into a human town and see if he could find one to take back with him, not that we're going to do that of course, but I thought I'd come along and keep an eye on him."

"I'll give you fairies," said Grum who was still so angry he'd barely heard a word.

"Grum," said Burly, "stop going on about fairies will you, Max is sorry aren't you?" He gave Max a keen look.

Max rolled his eyes. "Yes, I'm sorry Grum, really I am. I'll never compare you to a fairy again. Ever."

Grum glared at him. "You'd better not or I'll... I'll eat a dozen kittens in front of you!"

"Not while I'm around you won't," interrupted Burly. "Now will you two stop squabbling – we've got to get on so we can get out of here as soon as possible."

"Why don't you take me back with you?" asked Max suddenly. "I'd quite like to see other goblins."

Grum's jaw dropped. "I need a *beautiful* human," he finally said.

Max scratched his head. "What?"

Grum sighed. "I need a beautiful human – you're not exactly good looking are you?"

"Grum!" Burly was shocked, "apologise now and Max, don't listen to him, you are a very nice looking human – goblins just have a different view of the world...."

Max shook his head and stuck his hands in his pockets. "This is turning out to be the weirdest day ever," was all he said before turning on his heel. "Now follow me, if it's a beautiful human you want I know exactly where we can find one."

Grum looked up at Burly, "What did I say? I gave him a compliment."

Burly shook his head. "I'll explain later, let's just not lose sight of him shall we?" And they hurried after Max.

Mike had forgotten his packed lunch and had popped out of work to come back to his little house to collect it. He stopped on the path and looked around, puzzled. Something wasn't right, the air was... strange... but he couldn't put his finger on what it was. He'd had a nagging feeling ever since he'd left Grum and Burly that he really shouldn't have let them go on their own.

"Oops," he looked down, he'd almost trodden on a couple of bees lying on the grass in front of him. "Now, what's the matter with you two?" He bent down and peered at them. They were still alive, they just looked a bit, well, unconscious. Unconscious bees? He gently touched them and they shook themselves, stood up unsteadily and then flew off in a wibbly wobbly way.

He watched to make sure they got to the hive safely and then made his way to the front door where the goats were still sitting, their jaws moving to and fro as they chewed relentlessly. "Billy, Joe, what's been happening here?" he asked but they didn't reply. He didn't notice that one of them had a red strand of wool hanging from the side of its mouth. As he walked in the owl turned his head, hooted loudly and flapped his enormous wings, feathers flew all over the floor.

"What's unsettled you?" enquired Mike gently, "Ah, look, your sling has fallen off," he picked up the bandage. "Now your wing isn't going to get better if you don't keep this on," he told the owl as folded the bandage to create a new sling.

The owl gave a low hoot.

"I know, it's not nice but it won't be for much longer... now just lift that wing a bit..." He tied the sling in place.

The owl gave a louder hoot.

"Did something happen?" Mike gazed the owl in thought. "It can't have anything to do with Burlington and Grum surely..." He picked up his bag of sandwiches from the table and looked around but nothing was out of place. Dormouse - check, hedgehog - check – everything was where it usually was, but something was not right, he just couldn't put his finger on what it was. He shook his head in thought as he walked to the door. "I must be imagining things... everything's fine..."



CHAPTER SIX

A wide street had been cordoned off and the air was electric with activity. Busy carnival organisers raced about with clipboards, majorettes twirled their batons high into the air, dancers stretched their muscles, the marching band blasted trombones and banged drums, and a whole colony of children dressed as mice scampered about giggling while their proud mothers took photographs. A band from the Caribbean played the steel drums filling the air with lively exotic music and a dance troupe dressed like peacocks in flamboyant neon blue and gold feathers sang and laughed and swayed in harmony. Right next to them cowboys yeeha'd as they practiced lassoing and people on stilts tried to negotiate their way through without getting knocked over. The whole street glittered and sparkled with colour and excitement.

Max stood on the side of the pavement, his arms folded. "This," he stated, "is the carnival, everyone who takes part meets here and they form a procession to go through the town..." A passing clown stopped to offer Max a balloon but Max shook his head. "And this is where you'll find a beautiful person. Any questions?" He turned to look at them. Burly stood on his hind legs, his front paws limp, his mouth wide open as he surveyed the chaotic tumble of colour and activity in front of him.

Max couldn't see Grum. "Hey, where'd Grum go?" There was no answer from Burly who couldn't tear his eyes away from the scene and Max had to shake him hard to get his attention. "Hey! Where's Grum?" he yelled.

Burly looked down. The short ginger human seemed to be shouting at him from a long way away.

"Where – is - Grum?"

Grum! Burly snapped to attention, Grum was gone?

The ginger human suddenly grinned. "Don't worry, I can see him now – look, he's behind you."

Burly turned around. Grum wasn't behind him at all. Max wasn't much help, now he was laughing, "No, no, really, he's behind you!"

Burly turned around again but there was still no sign of Grum. Max was laughing really hard now and pointing to a spot right behind him so Burly craned his neck at an impossible angle and sure enough could just see the top of Grum's tufty ears; he standing directly behind him and not only that, he had a very tight hold of his fur.

"Grum! What's the matter with you? Let go of me, you're hurting."

A pale green face with red eyes as big as saucers gazed up at him. Burly twisted around again but Grum just moved with him like a shadow.

“Max,” sighed Burly, “just try to get him off me will you or we’ll be here all day.”

Max wiped away his tears and walked up to Grum. “Come on Grum, what’re you up to?” He tried to prise his fingers from Burly’s fur but it was no use, they seemed to be superglued on. “Grum? Grum? Look, what’s the matter? Come on, we can’t help you if you don’t tell us. Let go of Burly or he’ll have a permanent bald patch on his bottom.”

Slowly Max managed to coax Grum’s fingers away from Burly’s precious fur.

“Is there really going to be a bald patch?” Burly twisted his neck this way and that trying to see the damage.

Max rolled his eyes. “No, I was just saying that. Look, you need to speak to Grum, I think something’s happened, he’s not his usual horrible self.”

Burly dropped to his front paws and sniffed Grum. All he could smell was fear. Ah. Of course. “Grum,” he said gently. “Grum, are you okay?”

There was no answer.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Max.

“He’s in shock I think,” said Burly. “He comes from a world where beautiful is terrifying. It took a lot of courage for him to come here in the first place and then suddenly he’s confronted with all this...” He turned and waved a paw at the glittering mass behind him. “It must be the stuff Groblin’s nightmares are made of – beauty, bright colour and music – all the things they are frightened of most.”

“No way,” replied Max and gave a low whistle

“Yes way,” said Burly. “And we need to get him away from here now. You take one arm, I’ll take another.”

“No problem. There’s a quiet street just around the corner, we’ll go there. Hold on, what’s he staring at?”

Grum was looking over Max’s shoulder, away into the distance, his gaze was fixed and no longer seemed terrified, more... more... interested. Burly and Grum’s heads turned to follow the gaze which was fixed like a laser on one person, a young girl.



“Who’s that?” asked Burly.

“That’s the Carnival Queen,” replied Max. As he said it, an overwhelming feeling of doom flowed over him and with it came the certain knowledge he really shouldn’t have brought Grum here.

The carnival queen was oblivious to the three of them staring at her; this was her day and she was excited by all the attention being lavished on her. Her

young face was animated with happiness, her cheeks were flushed pink, her brown eyes sparkled, her rich auburn hair was thick and glossy and she constantly laughed and giggled showing pearly white teeth. Attendants fussed about her tweaking her dress and tiara this way and that.

“Wow,” said Max momentarily distracted, “Well, I have to admit, she is very pretty.”

“Maybe if she had some fur and carried a bit more weight she’d be okay...” commented Burly.

“That,” whispered Grum, “is the most lovely thing I have ever seen in my life – it’s enough to scare even my grandad and he’s the toughest groblin alive. Gripe and Grimly’ll be having nightmares for years.”

Max snorted, offended. “That ‘it’ is a she and she seems really nice – you can’t just go and grab her.”

“Just watch me,” Grum suddenly seemed galvanised.

“No!” Burly’s front paws shot out and lifted him off the pavement in a vice-like grip. “The rules were no taking humans - you gave your word!”

A man in a Victorian costume raised his hat to them as he rode precariously past on a penny farthing.

Grum wriggled and waggled his feet angrily as he tried to get free. “And just how am I going to convince my family I’ve seen all this and been brave if I don’t take back a human? They’re not going to believe me if I just give them a description, they’ll laugh their socks off and throw me back out of the house again.”

“You’re not going to do it,” said Burly, “and that’s final, we’ll find another way.”

“And,” added Max, “you may not have noticed, but at this moment in time she’s just waiting to lead the procession through town – being dragged away by two weirdos is not an option, trust me.”

Grum stopped wriggling and his head swivelled around to face Max. “Who are you calling wierdos?”

“Both of you, stop it,” said Burly. “Max is right – not about the wierdos comment of course – but we’ll have to think of something else and until we do we need to keep a low profile.”

“You two think about it, I’m off,” said Grum and with one final squirm he was free of Burly’s grip.

Just as both of his feet landed on the pavement a voice carried loud and crystal clear over the noise of the carnival. “That’s them there, look! The big fat hairy one and the short green one!”

“Fat and hairy?!” Burly exclaimed.

On the other side of the street stood the waiter from Kate’s Café and he had a policeman with him. They both looked angry. The policeman started to push his way towards them through the mass of dancers, musicians and the colony of scampering mice children.

“Quick,” yelled Max, “this way!” They spun around to race back the way they’d come but suddenly Max stopped in his tracks and a big smile spread over his face. “I think I’ve just found a way out of this - look there are some friends of mine, they’ll help!”

Standing a few feet away there was a group of boys watching as the carnival attempted to get into some kind of order; they were all dressed in

skinny jeans and baggy t-shirts, and battered skateboards were tucked under each of their arms. Max ran up and spoke to them urgently, he gestured to Burly and Grum who were duly inspected by the group.

“Right on,” a boy with long dark hair grinned as he scrutinised them and then glanced at the policeman ploughing his way through the crowd. “That’s cool, we’ll do it, right guys?”

There was a lot of grinning and nodding. Burly felt nervous and not for the first time that day.

Max grinned widely. “They’ll delay him and not only that, look they’ve given us a board each!” Three of the group held their skateboards out. Burly raised a quizzical eyebrow by way of polite reply. How was a thin plank of wood with small wheels on going to help?

“Quick, grab one, follow me!” shouted Max.

Grum and Burly did as they were told and went to grab a board each.

“How much do you weigh?” The boy who held out his board to Burly seemed reluctant to let go. “Don’t break it will you dude?”

Burly had no idea what he meant but snatched it from his hands and headed after the others. They ran for two streets and then Max stopped and held up a hand. “This is it guys,” he said. Burly and Grum stopped. Winding down a long slope in front of them was a wide path that led away from the town. On either side of the path was smooth green grass and they could see trees at the bottom in the distance. Burly felt a sense of relief, trees, greenery, home...

“This is the park and there’s a small wood down there – if we can get to it quickly I know a hiding place where we can stay until the coast is clear ok?”

Burly and Grum nodded and started to trot down the path.

“Hold up!” yelled Max. They both stopped in their tracks. “I said quickly, follow my lead.” He placed his board on the ground and put one foot on it. “Watch what I do.” He turned his head to make sure they were concentrating. “Now push off with the other foot - got that?” and with that he was gone, flying down the slope in the direction of the trees.

Grum gazed up at Burly who stood looking blankly at the rapidly disappearing figure of Max.

“I hate this day,” was all Burly said as he placed the board on the ground and carefully placed a ginormous hindquarter on it. The board creaked ominously.

“Go on then,” said Grum.

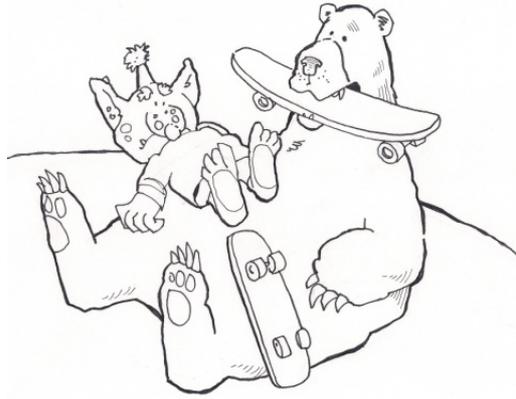
“We go together or not at all,” said Burly.

Grum gingerly put his board down next to Burly’s.

“On the count of 3 okay?” said Burly. Grum nodded and swallowed.

“1... 2... 3!”

They both pushed off - and immediately landed in a tangled heap.



“Come on you two,” Max’s voice floated up, “stop messing about and hurry up!”

“Stop messing about?” said Burly under his breath as he brushed the dust off his fur.

“If he can do it then we can,” declared Grum who already had a large foot placed on the skateboard ready to go.

Burly sighed deeply and placed the board back on the path. Grum stood just behind him. “Ok, let’s do this,” he said.

They pushed off for a second time and despite a couple of wobbly moments managed to keep their balance. They were slow at first but then they got the hang of it and Grum pushed once more with his foot and overtook Burly.

“Hold your arms out for balance,” yelled Burly after him. And then they were both flying down the path towards the safe haven of the trees.

The music from the steel band floated like happy bubbles through the air to the outskirts of town where Gripe stood clinging onto Grimly’s arm. Both of their faces were masks of terror - one minute they’d been running from the tree house and the next they were standing in an unwelcoming and frightening land the like of which they’d never seen before.

“Where are we?” Gripe’s voice was barely above a whisper. “And what’s that awful sound? Is someone being tortured?”

“Dunno,” replied Grimly trying to sound brave, “but it’s not good I can tell you that much.”

“Where’d the forest go?”

“I’ll bet anything it’s Grum’s fault, you just wait till we find him.”

“I lost the scarf that mum knitted,” moaned Gripe. “She’s not going to be happy.”

“That’s the least of our problems,” said Grimly. “We’ve got to find a way out of here. Now, let go of me will you?”

Just as Gripe let go of Grimly they both heard from behind them a deep rumbling sound that got louder and closer. Knees knocking they turned around to see what it was fully expecting to see a monster advancing on them.

Grum flew past at a million miles an hour yelling “YEEHA!” at the top of his voice.

“Out of the way!” yelled another, more panicked voice and with that a large brown bear shot past them.

Gripe and Grimly’s jaws dropped.

“That,” said Grimly weakly, “was Grum wasn’t it?”

Gripe nodded, not able to utter a word.

Grimly shook himself. "Come on, let's go get him before we lose him again - I'll bet he knows how to get home."

Gripe didn't move. "He... I...."

"I know," said Grimly impatiently, "but we can't let him see we're scared so move it! Come on!" And off they set, legs pumping, arms swinging, running as fast as they could after Grum.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Grum hurtled past Max into the wood and was only stopped by a large green bush. Burly came to a more sedate but very wobbly halt just on the perimeter.

"You okay?" asked Max grinning from ear to ear.

Burly didn't answer; his fur was wind blown and he looked a little wild-eyed. His hindquarters trembled as he stepped off the skateboard.

"That was wild!" shouted a happy voice from the bush. Grum scrambled out pulling bits of twig and leaves from his clothes and his eyes sparkled with excitement. "Can we do that again?"

"Course we can," replied Max, "but first of all who are those guys?" He pointed up the hill.

"Guys?" asked Burly distracted as he tried to smooth his fur back in place.

"Those guys, goblins – whatever you call them.... the ones who're already half way down the hill..."

"What? Goblins?" Grum ran to the edge of the wood and peered out.

"Burly! It's Gripe and Grimly my brothers! What are they doing here?"

Burly sat down heavily. "More goblins... you know I thought I saw a couple on my way down but I had other things on my mind... how did they get here? We'd better wait for them and find out."

"Your brothers?" Max asked Grum. "You mean the ones who threw you out of your house?"

"Yes," said Grum sulkily. "I'll bet they're here to be mean to me again."

"And, er, uh oh," said Max.

"Uh oh?" echoed Burly. He didn't think he could take much more excitement.

"Look."

On the crest of the hill stood the policeman. He was watching Gripe and Grimly as they ran towards the wooded area. "That's not good," said Max. "Move back a bit so he can't see us." As one they stepped back into the shadow of the trees.

"Let's go," said Grum. "Gripe and Grimly can take care of themselves."

"We can't leave them here," said Burly. "They may not know how to get home and could get stuck here."

"Serves them right," said Grum and folded his arms.

"But we have Mike, they don't. We're not leaving them here."

Grum stuck out his bottom lip.

"Who's Mike?" asked Max.

"An Angel I know," replied Burly.

There was a moment's silence as Max digested this information. "I.... I...."

Oh never mind....”

“Grum?” said Burly. “You know we can’t leave them.”

“I agree,” Max chipped in. “You goblins take a bit of getting used to, you really can’t leave them here, for one thing they’d be punched on the nose in a matter of minutes.”

“Anyway, look,” said Burly, “they’re waving, they must be missing you.”

“Oh very funny,” replied Grum.

“Look,” said Max, “you’ve got to make a decision, the policeman will come down here soon and then we’re really in a whole lot of trouble.”

Grum made an instant decision. He hitched up his trousers and before Burly and Max knew what was happening he’d run out of the wooded area towards his brothers yelling at the top of his voice.

Up on the crest of the hill the policeman tried to catch his breath. He wiped his brow with a large hanky; in all his years in the police force he’d never had to run and in the ten years he’d been on duty on carnival day there had never been any trouble. He’d stroll along taking in the sights, returning the odd stray child to its parents, having an occasional ice-cream and chatting with everyone. He’d always had a wonderful day. Until now. In just one day he’d had reports of a bear attacking a car, had to stop to help a group of young lads with skateboards find a friend they’d lost in the crowds, and now he was pursuing two suspects and was out of breath. He wasn’t in the best of moods.

He stood and scratched his head, puzzled that the two strange looking people he’d been chasing seemed to have changed. He was sure that one of them had been tall, fat and hairy but now both of them were short and green. He frowned as he watched the two of them run down the hill – they were moving in an odd way, running on all fours. He had to admit though that they were pretty speedy. Then, to his surprise, a third green person appeared, bursting out of the wooded area yelling and racing towards the two who were headed in his direction. Once he got to them he rugby tackled both of them at once, knocking them off their feet and then started punching them. He was shouting something as he wrestled them but the policeman couldn’t make out any words.

He sighed and started down the hill, he’d better break this up before things got out of hand. He’d only taken a few steps when he froze. An enormous dark brown bear walked out of the wood, looked around and then ran towards the green people.

“A bear,” the policeman said to himself and rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was definitely a very, very large bear and it looked dangerous. He grabbed his radio.

“Dispatch, get me animal control now” he said. “We have a situation.”

Burly was trying to separate the three goblins but it was difficult, they were packed together tightly as they wrestled and grappled each other. There was also a lot of shouting and name calling going on which is why, at first, he didn’t notice the loud whirring sound approach. In fact, it was only the extremely strong downbeat of air that first alerted him to the fact something was very wrong indeed.

When he did become aware that something not good was happening he

froze for a second before looking up.

In the sky above him hovered a monster the like of which he'd never seen before. It had shiny metal wings like knives that spun quickly around, the noise it made was deafening and the wind it created was like a tornado flattening everything on the ground. He glanced down, despite that, the goblins hadn't even noticed its appearance and were still rolling around on the grass, wrestling and shouting at each other.

He swiftly positioned himself between them and the threatening monster. As he squinted upwards he could see a human hanging from one side of the monster and it had a weapon – a gun! Burly tried to control the very real wave of fear he felt sweep over him but then anger replaced fear and he stood on his hindquarters and snarled and roared at the monster that was threatening him and his friends, swiping his paws in the air as if trying to catch it. The man perched on the side of the monster held the gun up against his shoulder, took aim and fired.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gripe was trying to crawl out of the scrum when the knock-out dart hit him square in the seat of his pants. A look of surprise crossed his face and then he crashed to the ground.

Mike materialised just at that moment. He took in the helicopter, the policeman on the crest of the hill, the three goblins (one of whom was now out cold), Burly who was trying to defend them and he even spotted Max watching wide-eyed from the woods. He quickly summoned all the energy he could and...

... paused the world. The helicopter hung in the air, quiet at last, while the goblins, Max and the policeman froze like statues.

"Burlington?" Mike said gently, "Burlington? Are you okay?"

Burly dropped to all fours, the rage in him evaporating. "Mike?" he said. "Mike, thank goodness you're here, it was horrible – that monster was trying to kill us!"

"Why didn't you call me?" asked Mike.

Burly suddenly felt very uncomfortable; he'd let things get out of control when he'd promised he'd take care of everything. "I'm sorry," he said, "it all started with something called money... and then Grum's brothers appeared... and is he going to be okay?" He pointed to Gripe who was lying with his bottom sticking up in the air.

Mike frowned. "He's only sleeping, don't worry. How did Grum's brothers get here?"

"I've no idea," Burly shook his head, "but at least they came looking for him I suppose."

"He didn't seem too happy to see them."

"Oh, that was mostly just for show, he doesn't really mean it," said Burly unconvincingly.

There was an awkward pause.

"So, what happens now?" asked Burly.

Mike surveyed the scene and shook his head. "Well, I have to admit I've

never had to deal with anything like this before but I do have a couple of ideas...”

Grum ate the first pair of Marigold gloves and licked his lips. They tasted good. Max sighed and handed him another pair. “You put them *on* your hands,” he said. “You don’t eat them.”

“They tasted okay,” said Grum defensively.

“I don’t care,” replied Max, “and you’ll thank me later because you’ve got to wash all these....” They were standing in the kitchen of Kate’s Café and all around them were stacks of dirty dishes. “And you are so going to have wrinkly washing-up hands if you don’t put them on.”

“I don’t see why I have to do any dishes at all,” declared Grum.

“You know why – we ran away without paying and let’s face it, you did all the eating, now come on.” Max turned to look at Gripe and Grimly who were trying to be invisible in the corner. “And don’t think you can hide – you know what Mike said so let’s get this done.”

“This is all your fault,” moaned Gripe to Grum.

“Actually,” said Max, coming to Grum’s defence, “it’s your fault, if you hadn’t been mean to Grum in the first place none of this would have happened. Now you take this,” he handed Gripe a tea towel, “and you,” he pointed at Grimly, “can rinse the plates once he’s washed them and remember what Mike said about no squabbling. I’m just going to go and clear a few tables.” He walked out of the door.

The three goblins shuffled around. Grum stared at the Marigold gloves hungrily.

“Look,” said Grimly, “you put them on like this,” and he showed Grum how to put them on.

“Oh,” said Grum as the penny dropped. “Why didn’t he say?” and he snapped them on his hands. “They look quite cool actually.” He hesitated for a moment. “Thank you Grimly.”

“You have to make sure the water is really hot,” said Grimly, quickly covering up the fact he was a bit embarrassed (goblins don’t show their emotions a lot), “and put in lots of washing up liquid. You wash the plates and stuff with this,” he handed him a sponge cloth, “then hand them to me and I’ll rinse the soap off. And Gripe you wipe them dry.”

“Why do I always get the worst” Gripe started to whine.

“Everything all right in there?” Mike’s voice drifted through from the café.

“Everything’s fine, no problem,” called back Grum hastily. And the three goblins started work.

Mike and Burly were sitting in the restaurant having tea and cakes. Burly sat back in a large wooden chair, a big smile on his face, feeling relaxed for the first time that day. “Thanks Mike,” he said, “I’m feeling a lot better now.” He blew on his tea before sipping it carefully.

“My pleasure,” replied Mike. He leant forward and offered Burly a plate full of multi-coloured cup-cakes. “Here, have another.”

“Are you sure?” asked Burly politely. He’d already eaten five.

“I’m sure, there’s lots more, this is a really good café you know.”

Burly reached over and helped himself to a bright yellow iced cup-cake with

sprinkles on top and popped it in his mouth – delicious. “You know I should be helping them in the kitchen Mike,” he said when he’d swallowed every crumb and licked his furry chops, “I’m probably even more to blame than them.”

“I know,” nodded Mike, “but you did your best and you put yourself between them and the helicopter which was incredibly brave.” He didn’t like to tell Burly that the man on the helicopter had actually been aiming at him in the first place. “But also,” he said, “I have a confession to make - I think that Gripe and Grimly were able to follow you because I left some concentrated energy lying around at home so I’m as much to blame as anyone. But what’s done is done so let’s just enjoy ourselves while we’re here.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever come back,” Burly said. “I’m going to stick to the peace and quiet of the forest from now on, too much excitement isn’t good for me.”

“I think we’ve both learned a lot,” replied Mike. “I’m going to trust my instinct next time – I really shouldn’t have let you go off on your own, the human world is really difficult to understand.”

“You can say that again,” said Burly with feeling, “but you did also say it’s not all bad, and you were right - some humans are very nice and also there’s music and excellent cake here.”

Mike smiled and sipped his tea. “Talking of cake, have another one Burly, I think it’s going to take them a while to pay off what they owe. And then,” he added, “I have a little surprise for all of you.”

An hour or so later, Max and Burly were mingling with the crowd that lined the street to watch the carnival as it passed by.

The marching band was the first to pass by, swiftly followed by the Carnival Queen seated in a glittering golden open topped carriage pulled by two ponies. The majorettes trooped in line behind her twirling and spinning their batons and then came the cowboys on their float followed by the mice children who scampered around excitedly waving to the cheering crowds. Clowns, miscellaneous fairies and men on stilts walked alongside the floats smiling and waving and handing out sweets and balloons to children.

Behind the mice came the Caribbean steel band playing like they’d never played before. The air was filled with music that sounded like happy sunshine and the dancers, like exotic birds, danced and laughed and sang.

With them on the float were three goblins – two were grumpy and one was happy.

Gripe had his fingers in his ears. “This is torture,” he shouted to Grum but Grum didn’t care, this was the most terrifying yet exciting thing that had ever happened to him and he was going to make the most of it. One of the dancers ran up and kissed him on the cheek.

“Did you get that?!” Grum turned and yelled at Max who was walking alongside the float taking photographs of him and everything else that was going on.

Max grinned and gave him the thumbs up. Once he’d explained to Grum what a photograph was and how it captured a moment in time in a picture, Grum was very, very happy – at last he would have the proof he needed to show his family that he was indeed a worthy and brave goblin. Sheer happiness flooded through him and he stood in front of his brothers and held up

his arms in triumph. “Who’s the groblin?” he shouted.

“You’re the groblin,” they answered glumly.

“Yay,” Gripe added, waving a little flag.

“I don’t hear you,” yelled Grum.

“You’re the groblin!” they shouted back at the top of their voices.

“That’s more like it,” said Grum.

“I’m sure his m other loves him,” observed Mike, watching from the street.

Burly smiled. “Thanks for doing this for him Mike, and you know he really is *the* groblin – I don’t think his brothers will ever be mean to him again.”

“I must admit, it is nice to have a happy ending, now come along Burly, I’ve just had a wonderful idea – I bet you’ve never eaten ice cream before and there’s a really good shop that sells it just down the road.”

“Ice cream?” said Burly. “Is it as good as cake?”

“Better and it’s cold,”

“Cold?” echoed Burly in surprise.

“You,” said Mike, “are going to love it I promise and there are all different types of flavours – my favourite is Cookie Dough.”

“Well,” said Burly, “I’m very interested in this ice cream – how many flavours are there?”

“I’m not sure but we can try them all, come on.”

Mike led the way through the busy crowd towards the ice cream shop and Burly followed.

Max watched them as they disappeared and took some photographs of Burly’s bottom as it happily bip-bopped from side to side to the beat of the steel drums. He’d tease Burly about them later.

“Max!” he heard Grum shout. “Come on!”

Max turned and raced to catch up with the float but Grum wasn’t with the steel band any more - he’d made his way to the Carnival Queen’s carriage and was now sitting next to her. A long arm was draped around her shoulder and a huge grin stretched across his face. The Carnival Queen looked momentarily surprised but then smiled radiantly and waved to the crowds.

“Take a photo Max!” yelled Grum. “This is the best day ever!”

And Max had to agree, this was the best day ever.



THE END!

Message from Kate: Thank you so much for reading my story about Burly and Grum and I do hope you enjoyed it - I know I had a lot of fun writing it! I'd like to thank the artist, Rob Jones for just being so patient and bringing the characters to life, my friends Stuart Wakefield, Jane Lomas and Brigid Makau and also my son, Angus, for all their support and encouragement - I couldn't have done it without them!

If you'd like to know more about Burlington, Grum P. Groblin and the other characters you can look on my blog where they have their own pages <http://burlyandgrum.blogspot.com/> or you can go to the Burly and Grum Facebook page.

If you'd like to contact me you can do so either by using the links above or by going on my author page at Smashwords:
<http://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/Puzzle1>