

A Burly and Grum Tale

BURLY AND GRUM AND THE SECRET CITY

by Kate Tenbeth

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CHAPTER 1

The river glistened and sparkled in the sunlight as it hurried on its way to the sea. Dragonflies dipped and darted across the surface, their wings buzzing noisily. Willow trees along the bank draped their long branches lazily into the water while nearby ducks dived and bobbed and waggled their tail feathers.

Burlington Bear (Burly to his friends) stood in the shallows of the river under the cool shade of a large oak tree. He was staring as if hypnotised at the river, sure that at any moment a large, fat fish was going to swim by.

Just a few yards upstream was Grum the gromlin who was up to his ears in mud. Literally. Mud for a gromlin was apparently the best thing in the world. Burly knew this because on the way to the river Grum had talked endlessly about how wonderful mud was and how the thicker, blacker and stickier it was the better. Personally, Burly always tried to avoid mud because it stuck to his fur and he was very proud of his thick, glossy coat but he'd tried to look interested as Grum had chattered on. All Burly could see of Grum now were his eyes, the tips of his ears and the top of a red straw that he used to breathe through. His lucky straw he called it.

Burly liked peace and quiet. He liked fish. He knew he wasn't having any luck catching fish because his human friend, Max, who was just a few yards upstream of Grum was scaring them away. As soon as they'd arrived at the river, Max had run up and down along the river bank like an excited puppy until he'd discovered a tree that had fallen so that part of it hung over the river like a dive board. He'd whooped with delight at the discovery and immediately raced along the tree trunk and dive bombed into the water. He'd spent almost an hour doing this and each time emerged from the water with a huge smile and a

sparkling clean body. One clean friend, one muddy friend thought Burly.

Now, before I go any further I feel I should explain a couple of things. I know, of course, that you know what a bear is because the chances are you have one of your own at home (not a real live one of course) and, being human yourself (I hope), you will know what a human being is, but you may not know what a gromlin is so I'd better explain.

Goblins are creatures that live in the wild where there are no humans so you would probably never have seen one. They are pea green in colour, with large red eyebrows and red eyes. They're very vain and boast about the number of warts they have and the crookedness of their yellow teeth. They're not very tall – maybe about the size of a large child but they are very strong and they argue a lot amongst themselves. They speak their minds and this can make them seem rude but they don't mean to be, they just see things differently. Their arms reach the ground and they swing them forward when they're walking – they can move very quickly like this. Oh, and their favourite food is rotting meat and insects. But funny enough, despite all this, they can be very endearing. Maybe it's because their honesty is refreshing. Who can say?

Burly, Grum and Max had been friends for just a few weeks. They'd met when Grum had been thrown out of his home by his two brothers, Gripe and Grimly, who'd told him he couldn't come back until he'd proved himself to be a brave and worthy gromlin. Grum met Burly who took him under his paw, and together they went to a human town so that Grum could find a way to prove he was brave. It was while they were there that they met Max who'd shown them around and taught them how to use a skateboard.

To other bears, humans and goblins it may have seemed an unusual friendship but none of them noticed.

Even though the summer air was soft and warm, the river was icy cold and Max shivered as he clambered out of the water. His goosebumps had goosebumps but still he couldn't resist running along the tree trunk just one more time and dive bombing into the clear water. "Hey, Burly!" he shouted and waved his arms, "look at me – I'm going to see if I make a wave big enough to splash Grum."

Burly politely tore his gaze away from the water. "I'm watching!" he called back.

Max took a deep breath then ran as fast as he could along the tree trunk until he got to the point where it hung over the river when he jumped, quickly curling up tightly in a ball. "Incoming!" he yelled as he barrelled through the air. He hit the water like a ton of bricks.

Just above the mud, Grum's eyes widened as he saw the equivalent of a large bucket of water come flying through the air in his direction. He squirmed and tried to bury himself deeper but didn't move fast enough and clean water hit him square on top of his head. He pulled his lucky breathing straw from his mouth and wriggled his way to the surface.

"I'm so going to get you!" he shouted.

Max laughed and swam away. "Come on then!"

Grum muttered and grumbled as he slurped his way out of the clinging mud.

Burly smiled but then heard a disturbing sound - his stomach rumbling. "I think it's time we had something to eat, don't you? Are you ready for a picnic?" he called. They were magic words. Max and Grum immediately forgot their squabble and turned and headed for the riverbank where three separate bags sat waiting for them.

Max got there first. He grabbed a large towel and wrapped it around his shoulders before rummaging through his backpack to see what his mum had prepared for him. His teeth chattered noisily with cold. "C..c..come on you guys," he called. But as Grum got nearer, however, a strong and horrible smell hit him. Max wrinkled his nose, "Maybe you should sit down wind a little bit – are you sure that was mud you were lying in?"

Grum shook himself like a dog and lumps of thick mud flew everywhere. "Why don't you check?" he snickered.

"Ew gross..." said Max as he picked a sticky glob of gunk off his towel. "Burly, can't you stop him from being disgusting – that could have gone in my sandwiches!"

Burly sat down heavily next to Max and the ground shook a little. "Grum, behave," he said, "and I'm afraid I have to agree with Max, you can't eat when you're covered in mud - go and have a quick wash in the river."

Grum looked horrified. "But the mud..."

"I know that mud is a good thing to you," said Burly as kindly as he could, "but it's only manners to be clean when you sit down to eat."

Grum pouted but turned and made his way to the edge of the river. He touched the surface of the river and shuddered.

"Go on," said Burly.

Grum put a large hand in the water, scooped a little bit up and lightly sprinkled himself. He turned to face them, a wide smile on his face. Burly raised his eyebrows. "A bit more than that - go on!"

Grum's face fell and he waded into the river. Dark mud spiralled away from him as the water flowed around him. He looked crestfallen as the mud disappeared downstream. A minute later he stomped out of the river, clean and almost sparkling, and back to their picnic area.

"Well done," said Burly. "Max?"

"You smell a lot better," said Max handing him his bag, "why don't you see what your mum's packed for you?"

A huge smile filled Grum's face and he rummaged through his bag with excitement. "I know what she's given me, all my favourites, and she's the best cook ever... look - crispy fried earwigs with green fungus sauce, ancient tree mould, freshly baked cockroaches and mushrooms seasoned with...."

"Stop!" Max's face paled. "That is all just so gross – and don't put it out, I don't want to see it, it's horrible and smells revolting."

Grum looked offended. "Actually it smells great and I haven't commented on

all the stuff you've brought along." He pointed at Max's pile of food – sandwiches, biscuits, apples and crisps.



"That's all good stuff and none of it smells," replied Max.

"Stop it both of you," instructed Burly sternly, "and Max, I have to agree with Grum this time. He may eat food that's different to yours but you have to accept that if you want Grum as a friend."

Grum stuck out his tongue at Max. Burly rolled his eyes. "I suggest you both ignore what the other one is eating. Now, who's going to unwrap this bag of cupcakes for me, it's a bit difficult with these claws."

"I will," Max volunteered. "My are *really* clean," he added pointedly to Grum.

"My hands are *really* clean," mimicked Grum.

"Oh go eat your grasshoppers or whatever they are," replied Max as he tore open the packet of cup cakes.

"Earwigs," said Grum tetchily, "they're earwigs and you should try them, they're really crunchy and tasty."

Max made a face. "I don't think so somehow. Here you go Burly, they look nice – are they ones that Mike made?"

Mike was a friend of Burly's. He was an angel who lived in the forest and when the three of them had got into a trouble in town he'd come to their rescue. Although Mike worked full time as an angel his hobby was baking cakes. Burly's hobby was eating cakes. They were very good friends.

"Mmm, yes," Burly wiped some pink icing from his mouth. "He made them fresh this morning. He sends his love by the way – he'd liked to have come along, but he's very busy at work at the moment."

"I can imagine it must be a tough job being an angel," said Max solemnly.

"Indeed it is," said Burly. "He does look very tired sometimes."

"Maybe we could take him something back as a present – y'know, cheer him up a bit?" suggested Max.

"That's a good idea," said Burly, "when we've eaten let's go and explore, see if we can find him a nice flower or rock or something."

"Maybe something to decorate his slide?" said Grum. Mike had a steep red slide that Grum loved.

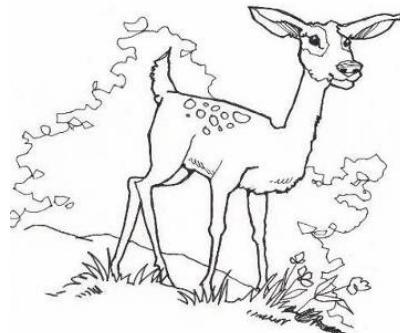
"Good idea," said Max.

They ate in peace for a few minutes when Burly said, "Shhh, we have a

visitor..." Grum and Max stopped eating and looked around. Burly nodded in the direction of a silver birch tree. Standing close by the trunk of the tree, watching them with large wary eyes was a deer.

Burly lowered his voice. "It's alright, we won't harm you," he said to the shy creature.

The deer stepped out into the clearing.



She had a dappled honey brown coat and delicate features; she walked daintily past them to the water's edge and lowered her head to sip the water.

"Oh wow," said Max quietly, "this is such a cool place."

Burly nodded his head and smiled. "It certainly is," he replied. "Now, I think we should just carry on but be just a bit quiet so we don't frighten her."

They continued their picnic.

"Here," said Max, "do you want a peanut butter sandwich Burly, mum always makes way too many."

Burly sniffed it with his snout and popped it in his mouth. "Mmmm, good," he mumbled, "crunchy."

"The only way to go," said Max. "Smooth peanut butter is rubbish."

The deer finished drinking and shook her head. Drops of water plinked into the river.

"She's beautiful," said Max.

"Why thank you," replied the deer.

Max dropped his sandwich. "She... it... the deer..." He looked at Burly and pointed at the deer, "...spoke..."

Burly raised his eyebrows. "Any reason why she shouldn't? You've been talking to a bear and goblin for a few weeks now." Grum sniggered.

"I suppose you've got a point," muttered Max picking up his sandwich and flicking off the bits of dirt. "Why was I even surprised?"

The deer walked daintily towards them. "Hello," she said and lifted her nose to sniff the air. "Are those peanut butter sandwiches you're eating? They smell good."

"Here you can have one," offered Max.

"Smooth or crunchy?"

"Crunchy."

"Ah, thank you, but I prefer smooth."

Burly laughed out loud at the expression on Max's face.

"You want some crispy earwigs instead?" asked Grum.

The deer flicked her ears and looked around. "I must be going," she said politely. "Good day," and she disappeared quietly into the wood.

"Wow," said Max, "that was really cool. And odd. Cool and odd. And weird."

"The forest," said Burly, "is all of those things, now come on you two, let's get looking for something to take back for Mike."

The three of them finished off their lunches and packed all their rubbish away tidily. Grum stretched and patted his stomach. "That was great, my mum's the best cook in the world," he declared, "Come on, let's explore. We should go that way," he pointed randomly into the forest.

"Hang on," said Max, "I just want to wash my hands." He ran to the river through the little hoof marks that the deer had made and bent to swirl his hands in the water. At the bottom of the river bed he saw something glinting and reached down to pick it up. "Hey guys," he shouted, "I've found something!" He picked up the shiny object and rubbed it on his shorts.

Burly ambled down to see. "What is it?"

Max scraped off some dirt and held it up to the sun. "I think it's a coin - y'know, money."

Both Grum and Burly remembered money, they'd got into a lot of trouble when they'd gone to town and had lunch without being able to pay for it. Burly winced at the memory. "It's nice and shiny," he commented.

"Maybe Mike would like it," said Grum. "He can stick it on his slide."

Max examined the coin. He'd never seen one like it before, it was very old and, now it was clear of mud, it was a shiny yellow colour - gold? On one side there was a picture of a bird and on the other side a man's head, and the man seemed to be wearing some kind of hat made of feathers. He handed it to Burly who sniffed it with his large snout and looked at it closely. "Could be from one of the Old Ones," he said.

"Old Ones?" Max felt a quiver of excitement in his stomach.

Grum laughed. "Humans don't know much do they?"

Burly frowned. "There's no reason for them to know, Grum, everything has been lost."

"What? What's been lost, tell me!" Max was really excited now and hopped from foot to foot.

"Men used to live here," said Grum.

Burly nodded. "A long time ago there used to be a big town in the middle of the forest. The story says that they were good people who lived well with the animals but one day they all disappeared. We don't know where they went - maybe to another forest. They left their buildings and everything they had."

"Wow, oh wow," breathed Max. "Really? A secret city? Are the buildings

still there?"

"Some," shrugged Burly. "Mostly they've fallen down now and it's a dangerous place."

"Me and my brothers play there all the time," said Grum who could tell Max was interested.

Max's eyes were shining. "Really? Can I go and see it, please, please?" The thought of going to see a secret ruined city in the middle of the forest made Max's head almost explode with excitement.

Burly looked slightly troubled. "There's nothing there Max. It all happened a long, long time ago and some things are best left alone."

"But what if we find something, you know, stuff they left behind? Oh please Burly.... it would be great...."

Burly looked down at Max. All his instincts were telling him it wasn't a good idea but he wasn't sure why. "What do you think Grum?" he asked. "You and your brothers play there, is it safe?"

"Course it is," said Grum, "and there's loads of stuff like that," he took the coin and examined it closely. "I think Mike would really like it."



Max almost screamed. Treasure, there was treasure!!!

"Please, please, please Burly....."

Burly hesitated. "If we go you have to listen to me, the way we listened to you in town." The memory of skateboarding flew through his mind. "Well, maybe not quite the same way, but this isn't town Max, this is a forest and it can be dangerous."

Max took Burly's paw. "Burly I trust you and I promise I'll listen to what you say."

"Oh go on," said Grum. "What can happen?"

CHAPTER 2

A narrow road wound its way like a black ribbon through the dark forest. Not many humans used the road because they found the tall trees that loomed on either side of them quite scary and threatening. Even in summer when the sun was shining the road was dark and cool with little or no sign of the sky above. No one willingly stopped along the road but a large scruffy white van had driven

off it and parked between two large trees.

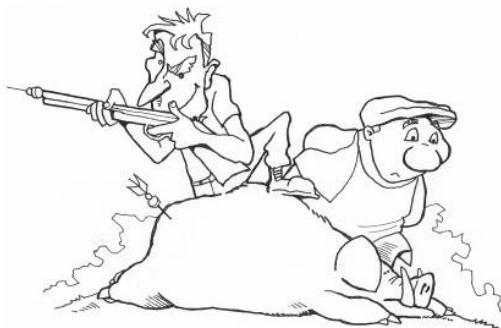
Two men stood next to the van. One was young, tall and handsome but with sharp features. He had broad shoulders and thick blond hair that had been gelled firmly into place. He wore a brilliant white t-shirt that showed off his muscles and held a rifle with both hands. His name was Captain Quentin Tee. The second man was very short and fat. His light brown shirt and shorts were too tight and dark sweat stains showed under his armpits and down his back. He wore a flat cap to hide the fact he had no hair. His name was Tyre.

"Watch," commanded the Captain. He raised the rifle to his shoulder, aimed it into the darkness of the forest and squeezed the trigger. Pouf! A little dart flashed out. Almost immediately there was a loud squeal followed by a crashing sound.

Tyre trotted into the undergrowth and a couple of minutes later, grunting and sweating, pulled out a large hairy boar by its front legs. "Cor blimey," he gasped, "that was a great shot Sir, you've got a great eye."

Captain Q Tee walked over and nudged the pig with one foot. "He'll still be sleeping when we get back. Tie him up Tyre and we'll take him back with us, there's nothing quite like fresh bacon. And Tyre?"

Tyre mopped his brow as he pulled the boar closer to the van. "Yes Sir?"
"Hurry up."



"Yes Sir, course Sir, sorry Sir." Tyre quickly tied the boar's legs together and hauled him up and into the back of the van. Four large cages were inside the van and Tyre locked the pig in one of them. He hopped out of the van, padlocked the door and ran to the Captain.

"Right," said Captain Q Tee. "Let's go get ourselves a bear then shall we?"

Grum's mother was preparing tea when she stopped and as still as stone with only her ears quivering as if listening carefully to something. Her red eyebrows knotted together in thought. "Gripe! Grimly!" she bellowed at the top of her voice.

Gripe and Grimly were in the forest collecting dried up mushrooms when they heard her shout. They immediately dropped their baskets of mushrooms and ran - when their mother called they didn't wait around. It took them a couple of minutes to get back to the house where she was already waiting for them. She didn't look happy.



"What took you so long?" she demanded.

Gripe and Grimly opened their mouths but she interrupted. "Your bother is in trouble, go and find him."

Gripe's jaw dropped. "How do you..."

"I know," said his mother sternly. "Us mothers always know. Grum is in trouble. He's with Burly and that skinny human - where did they go?"

Grimly shook his head. "I'm not sure, I think Grum wanted to show them some mud..."

"Go now, go and find him and don't - I repeat *don't* come back without him," demanded their mother, "or your ears will be red for the rest of your lives."

They stood like deer caught in headlights.

"Now!" she yelled and clapped her hands. "Go now!"

They turned and ran. "Aw," said Gripe as they crashed through the undergrowth, "not again!"

Burly, Grum and Max walked in single file through the forest. The deeper they went the denser it became, the trees became larger and grew closer together so it was difficult to see the sky, but Grum led the way confidently, swinging and marching with ease with Max directly behind him, his head full of ruins and treasure, and Burly taking up the rear. Something was troubling Burly but he couldn't lay his paw on what it was. But if there was one thing he was sure about, it was that he had good instincts and at the moment they were on full alert. He'd have to keep a very careful eye on Grum and Max.

"Not much further now," said Grum. "In fact - we're here!" He stepped into a small clearing and Max rushed in after him.

Max stood and gazed at the scene in front of him, a huge smile on his face. A tall, thick curved wall covered in a sea of green vines and ivy rose out of the forest as if it were an ocean liner ploughing through water. Some parts of the wall had crumbled and broken and beyond it he could see the ruins of a large city.



Grum was excited to be showing Max something special. "This is only part of it," he said, "it goes on forever once you're inside."

"There's more?" said Max who already could not believe his eyes.

"Lots more," said Grum. "Come on, I'll show you where my bothers and I hide out, it's really great. This way!" And they ran off to explore without a second thought. Burly followed more sedately behind them, noting that the forest had fallen silent.

Grum and Max spent a happy hour exploring the town that lay within the walls. There were hundreds of small houses, narrow alleyways and shops. Some houses still had furniture in them, bowls and cooking pots lay scattered, swords, bows and arrows looked as though they'd been tossed aside, abandoned. They also found lots more coins and Max's pockets were soon bulging. The forest had, of course, moved in. Plants and trees grew wherever they could and many small animals, birds and reptiles lived in the shelter the buildings provided. All the streets led into a wide, cobbled road at the end of which were steep stone steps that went up and up.

"What's that?" Max pointed at a building at the top of the steps.

"Don't know, man stuff I guess," replied Grum. "There's lots of things there made from the same metal the coins are made of - we can have a look for something for Mike."

Max's eyes widened with delight. Treasure! "Come on!" he shouted, "race you to the top! You coming Burly?"

"Hold on there both of you," said Burly firmly, "it's getting late, too late to explore, we should turn around and head back."

"Awwwww" came the cry from Max and Grum.

"There's plenty of time," said Grum sulkily.

Burly frowned. "Your mothers will be worried and we need to leave now. It'll be dark in a couple of hours." He looked at their disappointed faces. "Look, we can come back tomorrow morning and then you can have all day to explore, how about that?"

Grum looked at Max. "It does get dark quickly in the forest and well, you've met my mum, I don't want to be late home..."

Max stuck his hands in his pockets and looked up at the building standing

there just waiting to be explored.

"You promised you would listen to me," reminded Burly.

"We can come back tomorrow?" asked Max.

Grum grinned. "Yes, and I can show you everything properly, it'll be great and Grimly and Gripe can come along as well!"

Max nodded. "Okay," he said slowly. "Let's go home..."

Captain Q Tee was by the riverside examining the prints left on the ground. He frowned in thought. "There were three animals here," he observed. "The large bear that we're looking for, a deer and... and... something else. I've never seen anything like those prints before. Tyre?"

Tyre peered at the huge footprints that were Grum's. "Never seen anything like 'em before either Sir."

"If you look closely you'll also see hand prints... no, knuckle prints.... close to the foot prints, as if it were moving by using its hands." He stood up and scratched his chin. He couldn't scratch his head because of all the gel there. "Could be we have a rare animal here Tyre," he said and rubbed his hands. "Money, I smell money."

Tyre beamed. "We could do wif some o'that Sir," he replied.

"Indeed, indeed. Now, what's this?" He stooped down once more. "Tyre, there was also a child here."

"A child Sir?"

"A child, maybe ten years old or so, look, footprints are all over the place."

"D'you think the bear ate him Sir?"

The Captain scratched his head and followed the footsteps back to where Grum, Max and Burly had had their picnic. "No, no I don't think so - he sat down with them here - look."

"Could he be a wild boy Sir, y'know, like Tarzan, brought up by wolves and stuff?"

"Don't be stupid," Captain Q Tee snorted, but then he hesitated. "Although maybe not so stupid... a wild boy? A wild boy... what an attraction! This is a good day, Tyre - boars, bears, boys... we could retire if we play our cards right."

"Cor blimey Captain Cutie, that would be good, my poor old bones...."

"Tyre?"

"Yes Sir?"

"Don't call me Cutie again."

"Yes Sir, sorry Sir, just sort of slipped out Sir."

"Now come on, let's follow these tracks. Our fortune is at the other end."

"Comin' Sir."

"Lead the way then Tyre."

“Yes Sir.”

Tyre found the three pairs of tracks leading away from the clearing. “Nice and easy tracks Sir. That bear’s a big un, he’s flattenin’ everything in sight.”

Captain Q Tee held his rifle firmly in his hands. “Let’s hope we flatten him first Tyre, let’s hope we flatten him first.”

CHAPTER 3

Gripe and Grimly reached the riverbank not long after Captain Q Tee and Tyre had left. They looked around, puzzled. Like most creatures of the forest, goblins have very sensitive noses and they were both soon sniffing the air - the Captain’s eau de cologne had a very distinctive smell.

“That’s horrible,” observed Gripe making a face and covering his nose with the new blue scarf his mum had knitted for him, “what is it?”

Grimly shook his head. “Smells like... I don’t know...” He looked down at the ground and saw the clear footprints. “Man...” he said. “Man... men have been here, look, they put things on their feet and there are their footprints.”

Gripe felt his heart beat faster. Humans didn’t come into the forest, they just didn’t. Why were they here?

Grimly shook his head. “Let’s just have a look around, double check Grum was here shall we?” He spotted the area where they’d sat for lunch and headed over there. “He’s definitely been in mud,” he said looking at the drying blobs splattered all over the grass and bushes.

“And here’s one of mum’s crispy fried earwigs he’s dropped,” said Gripe picking it up off the ground and popping it in his mouth.

“He’s been here alright and it looks like they headed in that direction. The humans followed them. Mum was right, Grum’s in trouble.”

“Aw,” whined Gripe, “why does he always do this? What are we going to do?”

“Follow them,” said Grimly. “Let’s see what they’re up to, but Gripe, we’ve got to be careful, this isn’t good.”

“What about the alarm? Shouldn’t we set off the alarm?” The forest had its own system for dealing with intruders and an alarm could be set off warning all the animals that lived there that something was wrong.

“We haven’t got time to go back now, but I think someone else will do that, have you noticed how quiet it is?”

Gripe hadn’t and he immediately pricked up his ears. You could have heard a pin drop. He paled. “I’ve never heard it so quiet,” he whispered and shuffled closer to Grimly.

“The alarm’s going to go off any second,” said Grimly, “now come on.” Grimly was taller and bigger than him and he leant forward, grabbed both ends of Gripe’s scarf and pulled hard, “I said - come on!”

They disappeared into the forest, following the tracks.

Burly was leading the way back along the narrow winding track when the forest alarm went off. He stopped in his tracks and Max bumped into him. Grum was startled, it was the first time he'd ever heard the alarm properly although he'd been through lots of drills. Max looked at the faces they were making. "What's the matter?" he asked.

Grum put his fingers in his ears. "What, you can't hear that?" he asked, screwing up his face.

"Hear what? Burly?" Max tugged Burly's fur.

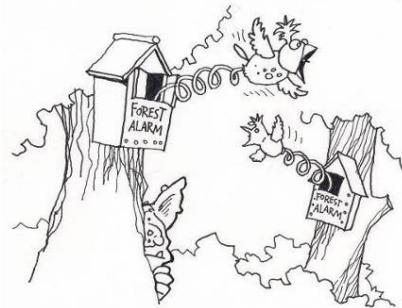
"The forest alarm has gone off." Burly said.

"Forest alarm? What forest alarm?" Max asked.

"If there's a serious problem in the forest we have an alarm signal," said Burly. "A high pitched bird song of sorts - can't you hear it?"

"Oh... a what? A bird song?" He strained his ears but could hear nothing that sounded remotely like a bird song.

"I did say of sorts," replied Burly, "it's a difficult noise to explain but either way we'd better hurry up, the two of you need to be home."



Just as they started to hurry along the path the deer they'd spoken to earlier sprang in front of them; she looked terrified, her legs were trembling and every part of her was alert, ready to run. "Don't go that way," her voice was frightened. "There are hunters, they're following your tracks, you're going to meet them soon if you continue." And with that, she bounded away into the depths of the forest.

Burly tried to sound calm as he gazed at the two frightened faces looking up at him. "Okay, you heard what she said, there are hunters. First thing, let's get off the track shall we? Follow me." He immediately turned and led the way deeper into the forest. "Max," he called over his shoulder, "you stay close to me. Grum, you know the forest, try to cover up the tracks as we go."

Max felt his heart beating wildly and he hurried along next to Burly, who was moving quickly. Grum sprang into action and tried to cover up the fact a bear that weighed a ton and was the size of a small house had walked that way. "Give me the easy job why don't you," he muttered as he looked at the trail of broken branches and squashed vegetation behind them.

Tyre and Captain Q Tee walked steadily along the path that had been made earlier by Burly. "He's a big one," said the Captain.

"Have you noticed how quiet it's gotten Sir?" asked Tyre behind him.

"That's because they know we're here, they know we're hunting them, they're afraid Tyre. This is the best part Tyre, the hunt, the fear. Now come on."

Tyre looked anxiously at the trees around him and scurried along after the Captain.

Burly was thinking hard. It was only a matter of time before the hunters found their tracks and he had to get Max and Grum to safety. He made a decision and stopped.

"Grum," he called.

Grum's face appeared behind a straggling bush he'd been trying to make look natural. "What?" he asked tetchily holding two bits of broken branch.

"The hunters," said Burly, "they're after me, not you. We've got to split up - take Max back to goblin territory and then make sure he gets home safely, and I'll lead them away. Do you understand?"

Max's eyes immediately filled with tears. "No Burly! You can't do that! We'll come with you, we'll lose them somehow!"

Burly looked at the trampled vegetation behind him and knew it was just a question of time. "Max," he said gently. "Max, you have to do what I say. I'll be alright I promise. You both promised you would do as I asked, now I'm asking you to leave. Grum, take Max."

Grum's face was pale, but he took Max's arm.

"No!" shouted Max and held on to Burly's fur.

"Max, I can move faster, I'll stand a better chance without you, do you understand?"

Max wiped his nose. "Oh Burly..."

"Come on," said Grum, tugging Max's arm. "We've got to go. Good luck Burly." Grum turned quickly so Burly couldn't see that he, too, was close to tears.

"Did you hear that?" asked Captain Q Tee.

"Thought I 'eard a boy cry out," said Tyre. "Came from over there," he pointed off the track.

The Captain smiled slowly. "I was right Tyre, I was right - there's a boy loose in the jungle. This is our lucky day - this way!" And they veered off the track in the direction that the voice had come from.

Burly was running for his life through the forest, the earth shook beneath his feet and bushes and undergrowth pulled and tore the fur he was so proud of. He didn't want to confront the hunters because he knew they would have guns and that guns always won. He headed for the river, thinking that he could head downstream through the water and they wouldn't be able to follow his tracks. In every single fibre of his fur he could feel them coming for him.

The Captain stopped and examined the ground. "They split up Tyre - the boy and creature went that way, the bear this way. He's running now, he knows we're after him."

"Which way we gonna go , Sir?"

Captain Q Tee stood up, "The bear, Tyre, the bear, let's bag him first and then we'll get the boy, come on!" He started to run. "Hurry up Tyre, we've

almost got him!" Tyre's short legs ran faster.

Burly stood by the side of the river and looked at it as it raced by. If he waded in now, he'd be out in the open and easy prey but if he didn't... he looked over his shoulder... they'd find him anyway. He had no choice, he had to try to lose them. He walked into the river. The forest behind him seemed to hold its breath. Then there was a noise, a breathless pouf! and a dart hit him in his hindquarters. Burly crashed into the shallows of the river and the cool water trickled around him.



CHAPTER 4

Max and Grum ran in the opposite direction, Grum dragging on Max's arm the whole time. But Max suddenly pulled free and stopped in his tracks. "Grum!" he shouted, "We can't leave Burly!"

Grum stopped and rolled his eyes. "I know, I know, I wasn't going to go much further - just far enough to fool the hunters, of course we're going back!"

"Yes!" Max punched the air.

Grum put his hands on his hips . "Look, this is the forest, every sound at the moment is carrying - just be quiet will you? Follow me and be quiet."

Max nodded solemnly and they headed back along their path. "Sorry," said Max quietly. "I should have known you wouldn't leave Burly."

"Yeah well," sniffed Grum. "He's a friend, I don't leave my friends in trouble okay?"

"Okay," nodded Max.

They came to the place where they'd parted with Burly, and Grum sniffed the air. "They've been here," he said, "can you smell that?"

Max sniffed the air. "That's ManHunk," he said. "My dad uses it. My mum hates it."

"And you have the nerve to say us goblins smell bad," said Grum.

Max grinned. "It is a bit gross..."

"Burly was right," said Grum, "they're following him, look, they've run after him. I don't suppose you've got a plan?"

"A plan?"

Grum sighed heavily. At that moment he heard a rustling. "Shhh!" he

signalled to Max. "Hide!" They dived behind a bush.

Gripe and Grimly strode into the opening. Grimly sniffed the air. "They went that way," he said.

Grum couldn't help himself. "Grimly, Gripe!" he shouted and sprang out of the bush.

Gripe almost collapsed, and clasped his hand over his heart. "Grum, don't do that!" he said.

Grum grinned widely. "What are you doing here?"

"Following you as usual," replied Grimly. "Mum sent us, said you were in trouble."

"Mum in a million," said Grum happily.

"We've got to take you home," said Gripe, "or she'll kill us."

Grum looked back at Max and then at his brothers. "Can't and won't," he said. "We've got to find Burly."

"What?" squeaked Gripe. "You can't do that - they're hunters, hunters! They'll kill you!"

"Look," said Max. "Burly led them away from us to save us and he's in trouble. We're going to help him whether you like it or not. These hunters are men, I can talk to them."

Grimly looked at the two of them and felt a familiar tingle of excitement. "Which way?" he asked.

Grum pointed to the flattened bush. "That way."

"No!" groaned Gripe, twisting the end of his scarf. "Noooo, mum'll kill us."

"Then go home," said Grimly.

Gripe threw his arms up in the air in defeat. "Let's just do it shall we? We'll probably be dead by the end of the day, may as well get it over and done with..."

They followed the track for a few minutes. "He's heading for the river," said Grum.

"Is that good?" asked Max.

"Probably hoping to make it downstream - they won't be able to follow his tracks if he's in the water."

"He's pretty smart," said Max.

"We'll see," said Grimly.

They made their way as quietly as possible through the dense vegetation until they came to a clearing that led down to the river.

"Shhh," hushed Grum. "Hide, we're not going out there until we're sure it's clear."

They hunkered down behind the trunk of a large oak tree and peered out into the open area. There by the river were two men and Burly. Burly was lying motionless in the shallows of the river and the tallest man was resting one of his feet on Burly's hindquarters.

Burly! Burly was dead! They'd killed him! Max felt a large green hand clamp itself over his mouth before he could cry out.

"Take a picture," he heard the tall one saying to the short fat one. The fat

one hustled about and took a small camera from his top pocket. The tall one smoothed his eyebrows and stood proudly next to Burly.

"I ain't never seen such a big bear, Sir," commented the short fat man as he snapped away.

"Yes, he's in his prime," said the tall man happily. "He'll fetch a pretty penny."

Max felt his heart skip a beat, maybe Burly wasn't dead. He looked at Grum next to him, who was watching the scene intently. Max signalled for him to move his hand from his mouth.

"Let me talk to them," he whispered, "maybe I can convince them to let Burly go."

Grum raised his hairy red eyebrows. "No. They're hunters. Let's just see what they do next, they're in our forest, they won't go far - how're they going to carry him for one thing?"

Max drummed the tree trunk impatiently with his fingers, then he walked out into the open.

"Hey!" he shouted.

He heard the rustle of bushes behind him and guessed that Gripe and Grimly were restraining Grum.

The two men stopped what they were doing and turned to look at Max.

"Well," said Tyre. "There's your wild boy Sir, but he don't look much like a wild boy t'me."

"Stop right there!" commanded Captain Q Tee and raised his rifle. Max swallowed and put his hands up like he'd seen them do in films. "Where's your friend?" asked the Captain.

"Friend?" asked Max.

"Don't play me for a fool boy - there were three of you, the bear, you - and a creature."

"Ah..." Max tried to think quickly. "He got scared and ran away..." He heard a muffled squeak from the bushes behind him. "I just want to see Burly."

"The bear?" asked the Captain. "The bear has a name?"

"His full name is Burlington, Burly to his friends. You're not allowed to call him anything," said Max bravely.

"So," said the Captain, "you are a wild boy after all. Tyre, tie him up."

"Yes Sir!" said Tyre.

"Wait!" said Max. "I have money. If you let my friend go I'll give you money!"

The Captain snorted. "You? Money? Show me."

Max rummaged in his pockets. The Captain kept the rifle trained on him. Max pulled out a handful of the coins he'd picked up at the secret city and threw them on the ground.

"Step back, boy," said the Captain. "Tyre, have a look."

Tyre trotted over and picked up a couple of the coins. He brushed them off, held them up to the light and then bit them. "Gold Sir, they're gold, ain't seen nuthing like them before Sir."

"How many have you got ?" asked the Captain.

"A few," said Max. "But I know where there are a lot more. If you promise to let Burly go I'll show you where they are."

"Bring them here Tyre, let me see."

Tyre took the coins to the Captain who inspected them. "They're definitely gold. Where did you get them boy?"

"I told you, I'll show you if you forget about the bear."

The Captain raised his rifle and aimed right at Max's heart. "Tell me," "No," Max's knees were shaking.

The rifle was slowly lowered. The Captain turned, looked at Burly then looked at the coins and made a decision. "You have a deal, show me."

Max felt relief flood through him and his legs almost gave way. "I want to see Burly properly," he said.

"Go on then," the Captain waved the rifle.

Max splashed through the water and threw his arms around Burly's neck. "He'll wake up in a few hours," said the Captain.

"He'll be cold in the river," said Max, "can't you pull him out?"

The Captain laughed. "You've had enough from us. Now," he pulled Max by his shoulder, "you show us where the gold is okay?"

Max looked down at Burly, he seemed to be alright, just sleeping. He nodded. "Okay," this way. As he headed back into the forest he looked for signs of the three brothers but there were none. He didn't doubt, however, for one second, that they were watching and keeping an eye open for him.

CHAPTER 5

Max led the way back to the ruins. The walk seemed to take forever and he deliberately slowed down on occasions, pretending he wasn't sure where he was going.

"What's this creature who was with you?" demanded Captain Q Tee, poking him in the back with the rifle.

Max staggered forward. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I told you, boy, don't treat us like idiots, I've been hunting since I was born and I've never seen tracks like that, it looked like the animal was walking on his feet and knuckles."

"Oh, that was me just messing around," said Max. He was pushed in the back again and this time stumbled and almost fell.

"I'll find it boy, don't you worry, I'll track it down and I'll have it stuffed and mounted but don't worry, you can still come and visit." He laughed nastily.

"Cap'n Cutie, Sir?" asked Tyre.

Cutie? Max snickered - he got another sharp poke in the back for that.

"What is it Tyre? And *don't* call me Cutie."

"Yes Sir, sorry Sir. Er, it's going to get dark soon, we have to leave enough time to get back while it's light."

"I'm aware of that Tyre. How much further boy?"

"Five or ten minutes." Max was wondering if he could spin it out until it was dark and then the hunters would be at a disadvantage.

"And the gold?"

"The gold's right there for the picking."

"Gold Sir," said Tyre happily. "It *would* be nice to 'av some money Sir, maybe buy meself a little bit o'land somewhere."

"Yes, Tyre, but let's make sure we get it first shall we?"

No matter how slowly Max went, it was still broad daylight when they arrived at the edge of the ruins. The Captain and Tyre gazed up at the crumbling walls.

"Well I'll be..." said the Captain impressed. "A secret city hidden in the forest. Good heavens Tyre, do you know what this means?"

Tyre scratched his head. "Lots of old buildings falling down Sir?"

"No Tyre, it means money, more money. Once we've taken the gold we can open it up to tourists, show them around – we'll be rich beyond our dreams!"

Max was immediately angry. "You can't let tourists in here! They'll spoil it - what about the animals?!"

"They'll find somewhere else to live, now go boy, show us where the gold is."

Max found the large opening in the wall and led them through. The Captain beamed with pleasure as he surveyed the city lying before him - this was more than he could ever have hoped for."

"Bit exciting this Sir ain't it?" said Tyre. "Remember when you was a boy and dreamt of finding old cities and pirates and stuff?"

"I was never a boy Tyre, now get moving."

Max wound through the maze of narrow alleyways. "Where are you taking us?" asked the Captain.

"Well," said Max. "I found the coins lying on the ground in lots of places, mostly in homes and stuff - you'll have to wander around like I did and pick them up."

The Captain stopped in his tracks. "Is that so? You think we should wander around until it's dark, collecting coins and then your creature friend can attack us, is that it?"

Max's eyes widened. Actually, that had sort of been his plan.

"You must take us for idiots. Tyre, put a transmitter in there," he pointed to a crumbling house. "We'll head back now but return tomorrow with more men, more guns and set up camp. You," - he pointed to Max, "will come with us, I've got just the place for you. I hope you like pigs but actually, it really doesn't matter much if you don't..." he laughed and grabbed Max by his t-shirt and shoved him along the narrow, cobbled street.

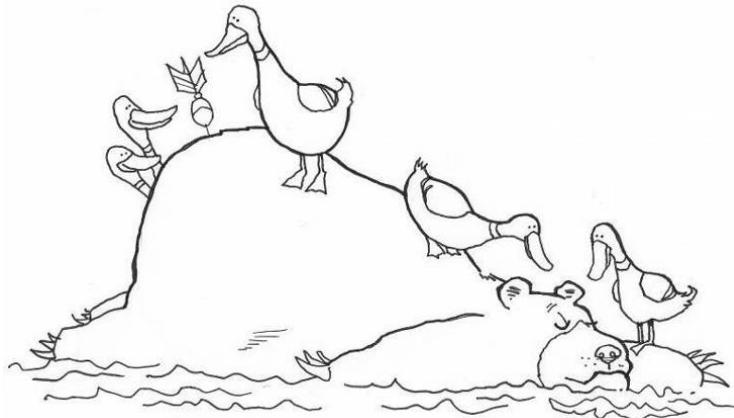
Cool water lapped around Burly, gently splashing his face. The little deer stepped daintily out into the shallows and sniffed him gently. He was still alive but sleeping deeply. She nudged him with her nose. No movement. She looked around, she had to do something to wake him up. She spotted some ducks swimming by. "Hey," she called, "come here." The ducks swam over to see what she wanted. They bobbed in a row, waiting for her to speak.

"This bear," said the deer, "has been shot by men."

Loud quacking broke out amongst the ducks.

"Yes, yes, I know, but they're not here now. He's asleep but I need to wake him up. Any ideas?"

The ducks went into a huddle. Then they split up. Half of them swam up to Burly's head and heaved themselves upright; they stood up in the river and flapped their wings so that water was scooped and flicked over Burly's head. The other section of ducks waddled up along Burly's back and inspected him closely.



And then they started quacking.

In Burly's dreams it was raining heavily and he was being attacked by millions of ducks, all of them quacking loudly. He reached out a paw to swat them away but they just kept quacking and quacking and quacking... He frowned more deeply and tried to ignore the noise but they were persistent... and that rain... and that quacking... He could take it no longer. He sat up and roared. "Will you stop that quacking!"

The quacking stopped and the ducks swiftly retreated, wagging their tails in triumph.

"Ah," said the deer politely, "I see you're awake."

"My head hurts," groaned Burly.

"I think it's going to hurt a lot more in a moment...." replied the deer.

Max stood in a small cobbled street with crumbling houses on either side. The Captain still had the rifle poked firmly in the small of his back but was talking to Tyre. Max looked around, no sign of Grum or his brothers anywhere. Where were they? As if they were reading his thoughts, he heard a whining voice, "Aw, why me? I got shot last time..." and Gripe appeared in front of him - it looked as if he'd been shoved. The Captain and Tyre whipped around and stared in amazement at the green creature trying to steady himself. Gripe smiled and gave them a little wave with his fingers.

In less than a second the Captain had raised his rifle and shot Gripe in the shoulder. Gripe didn't even have time to look amazed and fell like a brick to the ground. Max rushed over to him. "Gripe, Gripe!" he shook his shoulders. "Why did you do that?" he demanded angrily. "He wasn't going to hurt you!"

The Captain stood over Gripe's body and gave it a little shove with his foot. "My goodness that's one ugly creature and what a smell." He wrinkled his nose.

"You don't smell that great yourself!" said Max hotly. "You didn't give him a chance."

The two of them ignored Max completely, they were just transfixed by the green creature in front of them.

"What is it, Sir?" asked Tyre. "I ain't seen nothing like that before."

"I have no idea," said the Captain. "It's a new type of creature and it's going to make us more money than we've ever dreamed of. You, boy, what is it? You know it, don't you?"

"Yes, I know 'it'," replied Max, "and it's a really nice creature - you didn't have to do that!"

The Captain shrugged. "We'll find out more later, meanwhile, Tyre, I suggest you bag it and then we'd better get going."

Tyre whipped out a large hessian bag from his pack and started to roll Gripe into it. Once he was inside, Tyre tied the top and then picked him up and threw him over his shoulders. "Cor blimey Sir, it weighs a bit." Tyre's legs were definitely buckling.

"Yes, yes," said the Captain, "I'm sure it does, but never mind just keep walking Tyre, we've got a long way to go."

Max's head was spinning, why would Grum and Grimly do such a thing? Poor Gripe, yes he whined a bit, well, a lot actually, but he didn't deserve to be shot. But as he saw the sweat on Tyre's face and his legs tremble under the weight, understanding began to dawn. They were slowing the hunters down, making them tired and vulnerable. The journey back would be a long and interesting one....

Burly tried to stand up properly but his legs were wobbly. He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate while the deer filled him in. "The last I saw the human had been taken prisoner and three goblins were following them, they seem to be going back to the place where the Old Ones lived."

Burly tried to talk but his mouth seemed to be glued together, it was dry and tasted horrible. He bent his head and took a long drink of water from the river. "Thank you," he eventually said, "thank you for your help."

There was a loud quacking and the sound of splashing water. Burly looked at the bobbing ducks all lined up looking expectantly at him. "And thank you as well," he told them politely. "You did a great job." The ducks bustled away, wagging their tail feathers in a pleased way.

The deer smiled politely. "The forest alarm has been turned off but everyone is mobilised, those humans won't get out of the forest."

"I don't think we should hurt them," said Burly quickly. "I'd like to think we're better than them."

"A few of the big cats are feeling peckish so it's not like they'd go to waste," replied the deer, surprised. "Recycling, you know, it's all natural. Also, if the cats are fed, I'm a bit safer for a while."

Burly smiled at the logic. "You're right, that is very important," he admitted. "I'd better go, however, and sort this out before anyone gets seriously hurt. Thanks and I owe you."

The deer nodded then bounded neatly away.

Burly took a few unsteady steps, shook himself all over, and then strode into the forest. He was going to rescue Max.

CHAPTER 6

The Captain aimed the rifle at Gripe's head. "I'm going to lead the way," he told Max, "if I turn around at any point and you are not walking right next to Tyre I will shoot your green friend again and this time the rifle is loaded with bullets - do you understand?"

Max looked at the large sausage shaped bundle that was Gripe and nodded.

"Right, jolly good, let's go, it will be dark soon. Tyre, what are you waiting for?"

"Sir, ready Sir."

Max almost felt sorry for Tyre; although he was very strong he was obviously struggling under the weight of a fully grown goblin - sweat poured down his face and each step was an effort. Max decided on another tactic. As the Captain turned and led them away from the city of the Old Ones Max beamed his best smile at Tyre. "Can I help at all?" he asked politely as they walked along.

"Nah son, this is man's work," grunted Tyre.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Max.

"Well, the Capt'n will keep him - in good conditions mind so you don't 'av to worry 'bout that, he'll get food n'stuff - and then he'll probably show him, y'know like in a zoo."

"Oh. Er, how long have you known the Captain?"

Tyre was pleased to talk, it took his mind off the pain that was shooting down his back and legs. "Long time son, long time - 'e looks after me y'know."

Max raised his eyebrows. "He is kind of rude to you isn't he?"

"'e looks after me," repeated Tyre. "Without him I'd be useless."

"Oh I don't know," said Max. "You're really strong and pretty smart."

Tyre made a face. Max couldn't tell whether it was a smile or pain. "Always 'av been strong son. Short and strong my old mum used to say but smart, nah, brains don't run in our family, the Cap'n takes care o' the thinking."

There was a rustle of undergrowth ahead of them and the Captain strode back towards them. His handsome face was flushed red with anger.

"No talking!" he commanded. "Alert Tyre, you have to remain alert! This is the forest - we could be attacked at any moment!"

"Yes Sir, Sorry Sir." Tyre shifted the weight a little.

"No more talking!" The Captain turned on his heel and stalked ahead of them.

"He's an old bossy boots," whispered Max out of the side of his mouth.

He was sure that the grunt Tyre gave was in agreement.

On and on they walked. Light was falling quickly around them and the

shadows deepened. Max listened intently for any sign of movement - he was sure the goblins were out there somewhere and had some kind of plan, they weren't far from the river now and time was running out....

Goblins use their long arms not only to move quickly along the ground, but to swing from branch to branch and Grimly and Grum had moved swiftly through the treetops and were now almost at the picnic spot. The low menacing sound of wild cats snarling and growling nearby, however, made them stop on a branch and pause for a moment.

"Uh oh," said Grimly.

"Uh oh?" echoed Grum.

"The big cats are closing in. They love a forest alarm and a crisis - one way or another it usually ends up in a meal for them."

"Well as long as it's the human with the gun they eat and not me I don't care," said Grum. "Hold on, what's that?" From below came a loud crashing sound and it was getting nearer. Grum grinned happily. "Half the forest is coming down - I know what that is - Burly!!" He jumped to the next branch down and then on to the ground - and was almost run over by a stampeding bear. Burly screeched to a halt, leaves and dirt scattered everywhere.

"Burly!" Grum threw his long arms around Burly's neck in a big hug. "You're alright!"

Burly sat down with Grum dangling from him like some kind of odd necklace. "Grum, you're alive! Max, where's Max?" he said.

"Hello Burly," said Grimly who was standing on the sidelines, a broad smile across his face. "How are you?"

Burly blew out a large sigh. "My head feels like it's been trampled on but I'm okay."

Grum finally let go and dropped to the ground. "We thought you were still knocked out!" he punched Burly playfully.

"The two humans have got Max," said Grimly, "they're on their way back to the human road now. Our plan was to wait for them in trees where the track runs alongside the river and ambush them - they won't be expecting an attack from above."

"And," said Grum happily, "we've slowed them down!"

Burly looked around. "Where's Gripe?" he asked.

Grum grinned. "Oh they have him as well - he's what's slowing them down - great idea eh?"

Burly was lost for words.

"They'll be here soon," said Grum, "we'd better get a move on so we can find the right hiding place and wait for them."

A sudden roaring and snarling filled the air and a flock of birds screeched and squawked and took to the air, feathers flying. "The big cats are practicing," said Grimly. "We'd better hurry."

The Captain stopped dead in his tracks and scanned the track ahead, light was

fading quickly now and he'd heard the cats. As a professional hunter he knew that the tables had turned - they were the ones now being stalked. He smiled a slow smile and continued walking - hunting or being hunted, he loved both.

Behind him staggered Tyre with Max right next to him. "Did you hear that noise?" whispered Max trying his best to sound scared. "Sounded like cats - lions or something..."

"Not lions son, this ain't Africa y'know," came the reply.

"Well they didn't exactly sound like any house cat I've come across," replied Max.

There was a sharp but loud crack and a pouf of dust blew up just in front of Max's feet. Max looked up. Captain Quentin was staring at him down the barrel of the rifle. "I thought I told you... NO talking!"

"Did you just shoot at me?" demanded Max.

"Don't push it son," advised Tyre.

"But he..."

"Quiet or the next time I won't miss," commanded the Captain. "Tyre, stay close to me, it's going to get tricky." Tyre trotted as best he could up to the Captain. "You boy, if anything happens, remember I shoot your friend first - I can always sell his body to scientists - it doesn't matter to me if he lives or dies. Don't think you can outsmart me, I'm the best hunter in the world."

"He is that an' all son," observed Tyre.

They continued walking. "He's still really horrible to you," whispered Max out of the side of his mouth. Tyre did not reply but looked straight ahead, his face a picture of concentration.

Burly hid as best he could behind the largest bush he could find. Grum was perched up in a tree above him and Grimly was on the other side of the track. They'd agreed a signal. Whoever saw or heard the hunters first would make a cawing sound like a raven. The minutes ticked slowly past and the forest seemed eerily quiet. All of a sudden there was a rustling sound swiftly followed by loud cawing and Burly tensed.

"Don't move!" hissed Grimly from across the track, "false alarm - that *really* was a raven..."

"We should choose another signal..." whispered Grum loudly.

"No," came the swift reply, "it's too late now, and hush up will you..."

"I think a duck would be good," continued Grum, "we're near a river."

"Will you HUSH! Listen, that's them!! Caw caw!"

Burly wiggled his bottom in anticipation of the pouncing and then he, too, heard the soft crunching sound of human footsteps trying to walk quietly through the forest. He strained his ears, he could only hear one pair of footsteps. The delicate crunching came closer and closer.

Then, from nowhere, came a cry that would freeze the blood of any animal - the goblin war cry - and Grimly fell like a ton of bricks onto Captain Quentin Tee. Burly burst out from behind the bush but all he could see was a pair of legs and arms sticking out from underneath Grimly. A rifle had fallen to the side

of the track and he immediately hurried over and pushed it with his snout into the long grass safely out of the way.

"Well that was easy," said Grimly, a big smirk on his face. The arms and legs wriggled as the hunter fought to be free. "No use him doing that." Grimly's bottom was placed squarely over the Captain's face. "Actually it quite tickles." There was a muffled protest from beneath him.



"I think," said Burly, "that you'd better tie him up and quickly, there's a second hunter and he won't be far. Where's Grum?"

Grimly looked around. There was no sign of Grum.

Grum was, at that precise moment, flying through the air on a vine at a hundred miles an hour heading straight towards Tyre. Tyre couldn't see a thing because of the sweat pouring down his forehead into his eyes and didn't stand a chance. Being hit by a goblin moving at a hundred miles an hour is enough to sweep anyone off their feet and that's just what Grum did - he smacked Tyre square in his stomach with his feet and Tyre went down like a skittle at a bowling alley.

"Yay!" yelled Max, his arms in the air, "Go Grum!"

Grum landed on the ground and then threw himself like a wrestler across Tyre's ample stomach, pinning him down. "Quick," he yelled, "tie him up or something."

Max didn't need to be asked twice. He unhooked a pair of handcuffs from Tyre's belt and snapped one end on to one wrist then on to the other. The moment Tyre was secure Grum jumped off him and ran to the bag that contained a still snoozing Gripe. He tipped Gripe out onto the ground. "Wasssup?" murmured Gripe in his sleep before turning over and nestling down into some soft grass.

Grum nudged him with his foot, "He's okay!"

Burly galloped onto the scene and skidded to a halt in front of them. "You're alright!" he cried, "Oh thank goodness, let me look at you both." He made Grum and Max stand still and inspected them. "Max, did they hurt you? Are you okay?"

Max threw back his shoulders. "Nah, we're fine - look, we put handcuffs on him."

Tyre was still lying on his back like a tortoise that had been turned over, waving his arms and legs and trying to catch his breath.

"I think I knocked the wind out of him," grinned Grum. Max high-fived him. "Let's get him to his feet," said Burly, "and make our way to the picnic site -

Grimly's holding the other one there."

Grum walked over to Tyre, put his face right up against his and grinned as nastily as he could, showing all his broken, yellow teeth. A little noise that sounded like "eep or eek" came from Tyre. Grum grabbed him and hauled him to his feet. Tyre looked around in desperation.

"If you run," said Max, "either we'll get you or the cats will."

"Mind you, I'm quite peckish myself," said Grum smacking his lips.

Tyre paled. He didn't understand what Grum was saying - the words sounded like a wild animal slobbering and snarling - but he knew instinctively it wasn't good.

"Stop playing with the human," said Burly, "let's get back to Grimly, he'll be wondering where we are and it'll be dark soon."

"I'll bring Gripe," said Grum. "I suppose I'd better, mum'll be cross if I leave him behind..." He bent down and picked up Gripe, swinging him casually over his shoulder.

When they got back to the camp area, Grimly was perched on top of a large boulder watching the Captain. Captain Q Tee had been tied securely to a large tree trunk, his face was flushed and angry as he struggled to get free. He was shouting at Grimly, "That was disgusting - what kind of animal sits on someone's face - I'll put you in a cage for the rest of your life, you see if I don't, you.... you green freak you!" Grimly curled back his lip in an eerie smile.

"Stand with your back against that tree," Max told Tyre, pointing to another tree a few feet away from the Captain.

"Tyre, Tyre, don't you dare do what he says!" commanded the Captain. "I order you to fight - fight man!"

Burly took a step closer to Tyre and breathed warmly on the back of his neck. Tyre trotted over to the tree and waited to be tied up. "Sorry Guv," he said apologetically.

Max got a length of rope and tied him securely to the trunk.

"Look for knives and stuff as well," advised Grimly, "look what I got from the other one," he pointed to a small arsenal of weapons deposited on the river bank, well away from the Captain.

"I'll do it!" volunteered Grum, "I quite like scaring this one!" He smiled wickedly and approached Tyre whose chubby knees buckled.

"Well, what do we do now?" asked Max as Grum rummaged through Tyre's pockets.

A low growl vibrated through the air. "The cats are almost here," said Burly. "Now listen carefully - no matter what these humans have done to us we have to get them back safely."

"But they've seen the secret city, and he," said Max nodding in the direction of the Captain, "wants to bring lots of people to the forest to see it - the forest will be ruined and the animals will lose their homes."

Burly looked glum.

Grum went up and prodded the Captain with his finger. "You sure we can't let

the cats have them?" he asked. "It would solve a problem, I mean, they're so horrible I don't think anyone would miss them."

"Well," said Max, "he's really mean - he shot at me and was going to put Gripe in a zoo for people to look at - but the other one's sort of okay."

The Captain wriggled and shouted, "Why you little... you wait till I get free from here, I'll soon sort you out!" Tyre gave a wavering smile. Neither of them understood Burly or the goblins but knew from what Max was saying that their fates were being decided.

"Okay," said Burly decisively, "here's what we do - we make our way to Mike's - he's the only one I know with enough power to make these two forget about the secret city."

Grum sighed heavily. "Oh okay, let's get going."

"There is another problem," said Grimly. They all looked at him. "Well, apart from the fact night is falling and big, hungry cats are only a few feet away, if I don't get Grum and Gripe home soon mum is going to kill me."

"Oh yes," said Grum slowly, "mum - I'd forgotten about her."

Burly looked uncomfortable, he'd met Grum's mother and knew she was a force to be reckoned with. He hadn't met Mike's mum but he had a feeling she was also probably someone not to be trifled with. Mums seemed to be like that when it came to their children.

"Well," the Captain spoke calmly for the first time to Max, his voice like ice. "I may not understand what your friends are saying, but I do understand one thing, it's too late - look behind you."

Max turned around. Facing him were two large mountain cats, their powerful golden bodies muscular and scarred, their amber eyes calculating and cold.

CHAPTER 7

Grum's mother appeared as if from nowhere behind the cats. She had her long skirt hitched up with one hand and a tight grip on a large rolling pin with the other. She took in the scene with a single glance.

"I'd move if I were you boys," she said in a firm but clear voice to the cats.

The larger of the two turned to face her and twitched the tip of his tail - in all his years in the forest he'd never seen anything quite like her.

Grum, Grimly and Max shuffled closer together, placing themselves between the cats and the captive humans. Burly stepped forward and the second cat growled and hunkered down, wriggling its hindquarters, positioning itself to leap at him but Burly stood his ground; he seemed to double in size and roared so loudly the whole forest shook. The cat hesitated.

Grum nudged Max. "He did that to me once - pretty scary eh?"

"Wow," breathed Max impressed.

"So what's it going to be boys?" Grum's mother asked the two cats. "You seem to be in a bit of a tight spot here - you'd better get going before I use this and the bear has you for breakfast," she waved the rolling pin at the cat facing her. He flattened his ears and snarled, showing long sharp canine teeth and

swiped out a paw to scratch her with his claws. She swatted it easily away with the rolling pin and the cat gave a quick growl of pain. It backed away. The second cat joined it. Slowly, carefully, growling softly to themselves they retreated from the clearing.

"Right!" Grum's mother adjusted her skirt and strode towards Grimly. "You!" she said, grabbing him by a green ear and tweaking hard, "were meant to go and get your brother and bring him home safely not put him on the lunch menu for cats."

"Sorry, sorry," squeaked Grimly.

"It's not his fault..." started Grum but faster than a cobra can strike his mother had grabbed his ear as well.

"Why is it always you?" she demanded, her red eyebrows knotted in exasperation.

"Eeek..." squealed Grum, who was now on his knees.

"Where's Gripe?" she paused in the ear pulling for a moment.

"Er, over there, sleeping... we didn't forget him..." whimpered Grum. His mother let go of his ear and marched over to inspect the snoozing Gripe. She prodded him with her foot before turning around. Her blazing gaze homed in like a lazer on Burly. His eyes widened and he took a step back, Max bravely stood beside him but held on to his fur.

"You!" she said. "I thought you were a responsible bear! Every time he meets you he gets into trouble! And who are these creatures?" She waved her rolling pin in the direction of the two hunters who were watching the scene with their mouths wide open - not a sound could be heard from either of them.

There was a sudden rush of information as everyone tried to fill her in, "hunters... humans... shot Burly... zoo... knocked out Gripe... scientists... guns... gold... tourists..."

"Hold it!" She raised her rolling pin up once more and silence fell. She walked slowly over to Captain Quentin Tee. For the first time in his life he felt real fear wash over him, a deep desire to run away overwhelmed him but although he wriggled wildly he was tied fast. He swallowed and closed his eyes.

She stood in front of him and sniffed the air. "This one," she said, "is bad inside, really bad. Maybe I should have let the cats have him." She wandered over to Tyre who squirmed. She poked his bulging waistline with her rolling pin. "They'd have had a good meal from him," she observed. Tyre fainted.

Burly coughed and bravely interrupted. "It's getting late," he said, "and we all should be getting home before it gets dark. I'll take these two to a friend of mine who will make sure they forget everything - they'll never even remember they've been in the forest."

Grum's mother raised her red eyebrows. Burly had raised a good point - it was getting late and it was time her sons were safely home.

"Mum," said Grum, "I want to go with Burly."

Her eyebrows shot up a notch. "Oh you do, do you?"

Grum rubbed his throbbing ear. "Yes, I do. We should all stick together."

There was a gentle thwacking sound as she smacked the rolling pin against the side of her skirt. "Actually," she said, "this time I think you're right - we need

to make sure these two are out of our forest and never come back and as I can't trust you I'm coming with you. Burly, lead the way."

Burly was lost for words but scrambled his thoughts together quickly.

"Grimly, collect all those horrible weapons and hide them - we'll destroy them later. Grum untie the humans. Mrs... er.... sorry I don't know your name..."

"Daffodil."

Max giggled.

She turned and fixed him with a glare. "Is something wrong?"

Max stuffed his fist in his mouth. "Nothing... sorry..."

"I'm Mrs Griff to you and don't you forget it."

"Yes, sorry..." Max turned and busied himself helping Grum untie the Captain.

In a couple of minutes they were all ready. The Captain and Tyre had their hands tied together and stood quietly as Mrs Griff patrolled up and down in front of them, her rolling pin grasped firmly in one hand. Their weapons had all been collected and hidden and they were ready to go.

"I'm sure we've forgotten something..." said Burly glancing around the clearing once last time.

From the grass came a low moaning sound. "Gripe!" shouted Grum and rushed over.

"Move yourself Gripe!" said his mother, "you've had a long enough nap, now hurry up."

"Mum? What? Where am I?" He staggered to his feet and looked around blearily.

"Never mind," said Grum putting an arm around Gripe's shoulder, "just come with us and I'll tell you all about it on the way."

And so, just as dusk finally fell in the forest, the little band headed for Mike's house.

Mrs Griff did not hold with angels but she knew that Mike, small and skinny though he was, was actually very powerful and when they arrived at his house she strode forward to meet him. "Daffodil," she said holding out a large green hand.

"Burly?" asked Mike gazing around at the group. He could feel the twitch of a smile on his lips.

Burly rolled his eyes indicating the green hand being offered. "Oh, er, sorry, good evening, hello Daffodil," Mike said hurriedly, shaking her hand with a firm grip, "nice to meet you..." Grum gave him a little wave. "Grum, good to see you - oh, and Gripe and Grimly are here too... and Max... and, er..." he looked the Captain and Tyre, "they are...?" He looked up at Burly enquiringly.

"Long story," said Burly.

"Cake?" offered Mike.

"Oh yes please!" said Burly with feeling. "Cake would be very good."

"Do sit down," said Mike, "there are a few chairs just over there behind the

slide if you wouldn't mind sorting them out Burly - I'll be with you in a minute, I'll just get some cake. Oh, and also I've got some crispy fried earwigs in the cupboard - I made them this morning just in case Grum dropped by..." He turned to go to his home.

"Cor blimey!" came a loud cry from Tyre. "It's an angel - look Captain Cutie, it's a real angel - 'e's got wings - my mum always told me they was real."

"Ah," Mike spun around and smiled at him, "yes, of course, Tyre isn't it? I remember your mother, lovely lady."

"Bless 'er," sniffed Tyre, tears springing to his eyes, "she were lovely weren't she? Best mum in the world."

Mike nodded gently. "Now Tyre, you just sit down and I won't be a moment. How would you like some honey cake?"

Tyre's head bobbed up and down as he tried to sniff back his tears.

"Oh for goodness sakes Tyre, stop blubbing like a girl," sneered Captain Tee. Tyre turned his back on him.

And so they all sat down to tea and cakes while Burly carefully explained everything that had happened. Mike listened quietly and frowned in deep concern when he heard that both Burly and Gripe had been shot. It was all very serious. He occasionally glanced across at Tyre who had been untied and was happily eating honey cake with them, and then at the Captain who was standing to one side glaring at them with a withering look of contempt on his face.

"So Burly, Max, Grum, Gripe, Grimly... er... Daffodil, thank you for not letting the big cats eat the humans," said Mike.

"What are you going to do about those two?" asked Daffodil crunching earwigs (she would never have admitted it, but they were just as good as those she made). "You can't let them go and tell everyone about the ruins in the forest if they're going to bring lots of humans in - you mark my words, they'll cover the forest in stone and we'll lose our home."

"I agree," said Mike seriously. "But don't worry, in actual fact they can't even leave this clearing unless I let them - it's all to do with energy and stuff you know, but obviously I can't keep them here forever."

Daffodil looked nervously around. Despite the fact night had fallen, there was a soft golden light in the air that sent a shiver down her spine. Grum grinned widely, "You okay mum?" he asked cheekily. Daffodil glared at him.

Burly wiped a few cake crumbs from his mouth. "Can you help them forget about the secret city of the Old Ones?" he asked.

"Yes, yes I can," said Mike, "that's easy, but I'd prefer to try and let them see what a wonderful place the forest is and how much more worthwhile it would be keeping it as it is. Tyre?"

Tyre stopped short of licking the plate and looked across at Mike.

"How would you like to stay with me for a while Tyre?" asked Mike. "I have lots of animals here that need looking after, you could help me."

Tyre's jaw dropped open. "Stay wiv you? 'Ere? D'you mean it?" he looked around in wonderment.

"Yes," said Mike, "stay here with me."

"My mum always said a miracle would 'appen, yeah I'll stay 'ere please and 'elp the animals." Tears sprang to his eyes again and he wiped his nose with his sleeve.

"Good, good," said Mike smiling. "Here, have a tissue Tyre. Well, that's one sorted - what do we do about the Captain do you think?"

Burly rubbed his hindquarter as he remembered the dart. "Definitely more difficult," he commented, "he's got a bad heart that one."

"I think we should put him in a zoo," said Max, "give him a taste of his own medicine."

Captain Quentin Tee's mind was working furiously. The odd group in front of him were talking about him but he could only understand Max and Tyre - everyone and everything else sounded like a series of squawks and grunts. He had to get out of here - this was a story of a lifetime, he'd sell it to the newspapers for millions, he'd capture the green creatures and sell them to zoos and scientists. His eyes darted greedily to and fro as he thought of all the money he could make.

Mike looked at him sadly. "He's going to take a lot longer to sort out," he commented. "He has a fine understanding of wild creatures - that's what makes him a good hunter, but he seems to have lost his way. I'd like to see if I can change the way he thinks and keep him here in the forest for a while - he won't be able to leave or hurt any of the animals and maybe in time he'll come to appreciate the forest for what it is."

Daffodil folded her arms and gave a loud harrumph.

Without a word of warning the Captain broke into a run and disappeared into the depths of the forest. "You'll never get me!" he shouted over his shoulder as he crashed through the undergrowth.

The goblin brothers pushed back their chairs ready to give chase but Mike held up his hand. "Don't worry, I promise you he won't be able to leave the forest. Well, not until I'm sure he's ready to leave."

"What about them cats?" asked Tyre anxiously, "they seemed pretty peckish and he ain't got no gun."

"He'll be fine," replied Mike, "I won't let anything bad happen to him I promise."

Daffodil gave another loud harrumph which was then followed by a long silence.

"Can we go back to the Secret City tomorrow Burly?" asked Max.

"I don't think I can take any more excitement," replied Burly, reaching for another cake.

"I'll look after him," said Grum.

"Oh no you won't young goblin," said Daffodil firmly.

"We'll go with them, won't we Gripe?" declared Grimly, "don't worry mum."

Gripe let out a low groan but nodded yes. Daffodil raised her eyebrows and looked questioningly at Burly.

It's impossible for a bear to look invisible, especially when they're sitting at a table eating cake and Burly knew he was beaten. "Oh okay, I suppose you didn't get to see much of it today and I did say you could go back," he finally

replied, "but no running off and getting into trouble."

"Cool," grinned Max, "that's really cool, thanks Burly." He turned and gave Grum a high five.

"I'll show you the tunnels that run under the city, they're fun," said Grum.

"NO!" shouted Burly and Daffodil together.

Grum and Max looked taken aback but then started to laugh.

"Okay," agreed Max, "no tunnels..."

"...this time," added Grum before swiftly changing the subject. "Hey, can we go on your slide Mike?"

"Does look like fun," said Grimly.

"You've got to try coming down headfir st," said Max.

"Go on," said Mike, "you've all had a tough day today, you may as well enjoy yourselves. Daffodil, some more crunchy earwigs?"

"Don't mind if I do," replied Daffodil.

"Burly? Cake?"

"Thanks Mike, it's turned out to be a great evening, thank you."

"My pleasure," said Mike, "my pleasure."

"Oh," said Tyre, "shall I make another pot of tea?"

"Yes please," said Mike, "that would be nice."

And so they sat back in their chairs in the golden glow of light and watched as the goblins and Max ran around and laughed and slid down the slide.

"Hold on!" Grum's voice suddenly cut through the air, "no one told me there were steps at the back!"

Burly and Mike laughed out loud and the evening was perfect.



THE END

PS: For those of you who are worried about the boar locked in the van, Mike did of course, set him free and he trotted safely home to his family!

Thank you so much for reading this story about Burly and Grum and I do hope you enjoyed it (I know I enjoyed writing it!). If you would like to know more

about Burly and Grum, you can visit their website at
<http://www.burlyandgrum.com>. Thank you!

Kate