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Cedar Monster and Birch Goblin



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Chapter One

A crisp, foggy evening fell on the valley. Just the sort of weather birch goblins cannot stand. They don't like darkness, cold and the damp fog. Foom, the birch goblin did his best to get home as soon as possible from his usual walk to the safety of the birch forest. He was cold, pulled his cloak of birch leaves and poplar flakes together. He closed his eyes, for at this time of night, after sunset, a birch goblin must be very careful not to flash his glowing green-gold eyes and let anyone know of his existence. Birch goblins are brave but cautious!

He was already imagining how nice it will be to sit at home in the hollow of a birch with the dandelions and climbers around, drinking hot cider, when he heard a roar from nearby. Foom stopped and froze. So suddenly, he almost fell off the bare ash branch he was walking on. What kind of dangerous creature could it be? He knew all the animals of the forest, and none of them makes that sound! Maybe a stray cow from the land of the humans? Brrrr! Birch goblins never go near humans, and they don't really like the animals and plants humans live with. The only dangerous one among them, though, is the dog, which can speak the human language better than the language of the forest.

Foom heard the roar again, this time closer.

Certainly not a cow. But what kind of animal cries like that? Is it terrified? No, no, it is more like sorrowful! Like a creature in distress, that never makes this noise except when in despair. Birch goblins are cautious and also great pranksters, but they are not evil. Foom was sure that whoever was crying, had a reason, and he had to help them. Even if it meant reaching his warm home and hot cider later. He headed in the direction of the sound. The bellowing sounded close up, but Foom still couldn't see anything with his glowing green-gold eyes. What is it? An invisible animal?

"Hello!" he whispered into the silence that fell after one of the cries. "I'm here to help you, whoever you are! Show yourself!"

As he finished his sentence, he stepped back, almost falling over. A huge, semi-transparent thing appeared directly in front of him. But it was a monster, that's for sure, because it was hideously ugly. It was a real hairy-legged, white-eyed, unsightly, formless thing. Now he was not only crying, but weeping bitterly, hot, sizzling tears falling from his white eyes.

"Hey, you, don't burn the forest" Foom said to him. The monster sighed and wiped its eyes with one of its tentacles.

"So... sorry..." he stammered. "I didn't mean to."

He looked so clueless and forlorn that Foom took pity on him.



"Don't be sad, buddy, tell me what the problem is, we'll solve it for sure!" He tapped the monster on the shoulder, or what looked most like a shoulder.

"I'm lost!" The monster howled again. And again the hot tears flowed.

"Where are you from?" Foom asked. "And who are you anyway?"

"I am Tutu..."

"And what kind of creature are you, Tutu? Where do you live? Let's see if I can get you home." (Goodbye, cider, goodbye dandelions!)

"I'm a cedar monster" Tutu replied plaintively. "A small monster, a rather smallish one."

(Small?! Holy moly, how big can a full-grown cedar monster be?!)

"I had to leave my home, the flower garden" explained Tutu. "I had to leave everything behind. My family, the cedar monsters. The man gave me water. But now I am not allowed to go home!"

"What have you done? Why can't you go home?" Foom asked in shock. The most terrible punishment for a birch goblin is to be driven from his home. He got no answer, just more bitter sobs.

"I'm scared here!" Tutu shouted. "We never walk in the forest at night! We never walk alone!"

"All right, Tutu" said Foom, patting the semi-transparent body of the monster. (Such hot tears! It would warm my cider..

Salty cider though? Brrrrr!)

"Come with me! My name is Foom, I'm one of the birch goblins. You spend the night at our place, then in the morning we'll see what we can do for you. The birch goblins are wise and they help each other... And... sometimes they do help others. I'm sure we can work something out."

"Fine", Tutu agreed.

They headed towards the birch grove. They walked in silence, the cedar monster hiccupped, and Foom, though birch goblins love a good chat, was reluctant to listen to Tutu's strange sentences.

"We're not far", he turned to the cedar monster later, when he heard a noise. They stood at the edge of the birch grove, tiny firefly lanterns lit one after another around the familiar hollows, and there, waiting for them, stood Umma, the Old Lady of the Birch Goblins. The highest office a birch goblin can achieve. She stood before them, and did not look pleased at all.

"You... You..." she said, pointing a long finger at them.

"Not Yuyu, Tutu!", corrected the cedar monster with an indulgent smile.

"Foom!" The Old Lady of the Birch Goblins interrupted him. „You brought a cedar monster here?!" Foom was terrified. He hadn't thought about what his people would say if he turned up with a stranger. He'd never heard of the cedar monsters being their enemies, because he'd never known they existed.

"He was crying so badly", he replied apologetically. "He was lost."

"Why didn't you take him home?" Umma growled at him. "To his own place."

"He said he couldn't go home", said Foom, swallowing hard, because he hadn't asked what the cedar monster had done. "He's tired, hungry and thirsty, and I just want to give him something to eat and drink. And he could spend the night here."

"Cedar monsters are different from us", Umma explained sternly. "They live with humans in watered flower gardens. In our forest they cannot survive."

"It is not his fault", Foom insisted. "No one can be faulted for where he comes from when he is hungry, thirsty, tired, cold and lonely!"

The cedar monster stood with his head bowed.

"He is not one of us", Umma declared."

Foom looked around. They were already surrounded by a crowd. Noone said a word. They wanted to hear Umma's decision. Her orders. Which had not yet been told.

"There has never been a cedar monster among us before", said Foom boldly. "We cannot know what it would be like if he lived with us. And we don't know for sure if he wants to stay here. All I ask is to let him spend the night with us as our guest. And then we figure out what to do next. But the birch goblins shouldn't be the ones who leave a hungry, thirsty, lost and rather smallish creature to its fate in their grove!"

There was silence. It was so quiet that you could hear the flickering of fireflies.

"All right" Umma sighed. "The birch goblins help each other... And sometimes they do help others. But it's your job to give your guest dinner and a bed to sleep."

"Of course!" shouted Foom, grabbing the furry tentacled creature by the arm (or what). "The birch goblins will help you."

The cedar monster smiled shyly and followed the goblin towards its home.





