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Holly Bluesky
Unmagical Friend Wanted
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Sample translation by Melody Shaw

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A roasting hot day in mid-summer

Hello! Or as we like to say here in the Nightshade Forest: **Horrido!** My name is Beatricia Emilia Lisanna Liliana Aurelia Bluesky. But everyone calls me Bella, and that's fine by me!

I've just had my birthday, and here are all the presents my parents and my party guests gave me:

The big book of herbology

Two magic wands (one of them is crooked – I'm told it's the latest fashion)

A witch's hat

A bright red cloak

A herb mill

Several spell-stones

A Turbo-800-Super-Broom (also the latest model)

A pale yellow pentagram

A slime-green mortar and pestle

Magical oils and candles

It really was a lovely birthday party. **Suuuch fun!**

Mum and Dad and my birthday guests all thought up some brilliant surprises, but they still only gave me magical stuff again. Even though everyone around here knows I'm not really interested in magic and wizardry, and especially not in spellcasting and herby stuff.

Mum claimed she'd tootally forgotten that, and Dad said he was still hoping for a miracle!

Well, I'm hoping for one too. Just not the same kind as Dad, who wants me to go to Nitsy Simsalaludwig at the Hooting Hut to finally learn proper witching.

No! What I really, really want is for a miracle to happen and for me to find a best friend. One who can't enchant or bewitch the least little thing. She can't have any magical or fantastical abilities either, nor be able to transform a fat old toad into a handsome prince.

Anything but that!



Curing warts, corns and flat feet with a single click of the fingers? Absolutely not! This whole magical, wizardy deal, **grrr**, it sooo gets on my nerves!

Unfortunately, at our home in the Nightshade Cave, you could fall over magical creatures at every step.

That's thanks to my father, by the way. He's the leader of all the spellcasters, diviners and wizards, and can move mountains with a thought. Genuine mountains. It's true!

Great big Bella Bluesky pinky finger promise!

Mum is also not entirely blameless in the constant hullabaloo at home in our veery spacious cave. She conjures up the most fabulous clothes out of thin air, for:

Earthy earls

Enchanted princesses

Fragile fairies

Ashen vampires

Old-school wizards

Fashion-conscious witches

Windy goblins

Bashful dragons

Sleepy giants

Normal people, the kind who can't perform any sort of witchcraft, wizardry and enchantment, hardly ever stray into the Nightshade Forest.

From outside it looks quite sinister, gloomy and eerie – **creepy!**

There are even rumours that there are ghosts in the forest. At least, so say the folks in **Hambling-on-the-Wold**, the village sooo close to us that's absolutely swarming with un-magical people.

Now, you may be wondering why I don't just wander down into the village to look out for a perfectly normal, absolutely **magically powerless** best friend. Believe me when I say: I'd love to!

But either Claude, my chameleon, snitches on me right away, or Dad just happens to be looking into his crystal ball right at the moment I'm trying to find a way through the Impenetrable Hedge, which runs right around the Nightshade Forest.

Great wobbly dragons' teeth! I actually tried it once, and Dad caught me straight away. You should have seen



the fuss he made! Telling me I was getting into huge danger, because everyone in Hambling-on-the-Wold was dangerous and completely crazy, and I must avoid contact with them at all costs!

There's a good reason why the Impenetrable Hedge only opens up if you breathe a **super strictly secret magic spell** into the leaves. Unfortunately, I have to wait until my **21st** birthday before someone whispers that into my ear.

Maaan, that's an **aaage** away!

Babbling bicornes and drivelling dragons! Mum and Dad just don't understand I need an absolutely **un-magical** best friend. One who'd really understand me, share all my secrets, and always be there for me. We could find ourselves a secret hideaway, and spend the night there. Then the next morning we could picnic in the open air and talk for hours about anything at all, and we'd be really close because we're bestie-bestie-BFFs.

Woonderful.

But I'm **never-never-never-never** going to meet a best friend like that while I'm here in the Nightshade Forest, where no-one from Hambling-on-the-Wold **ever** wanders into by accident, certainly not any nice girl around my age.

SIGH...

Mum always says: 'But Bella, my sky-blue child, you already have a best friend: Claude, your darling chameleon, who has stayed faithfully at your side since you were born. And besides him, there's Wanda Woodruff and Gussie Gorse, the two junior witches. Why don't you make friends with them?'

PAH! What a silly idea! They're not exactly young. Well, perhaps they are, compared to the senior witches who're much older. Besides, Wanda's got three revolting warts on her chin, and Gussie's got two on her nose, and neither of them are interested in anything other than **witchy stuff!** Sooo boring!

As for Claude, well, of course he's always there for me, but he's more of a watchdog – or at least a watch chameleon – than a friend I could talk to about anything. Certainly not about girlie things.

So that's how it is!

Bella: (And he's still not a girl, and absolutely nothing like a best friend!)

Claude: (The things I go through...SO EMBARRASSING!)

2

The same roasting hot day, about twelve minutes later

'EEELVIIIS! Wheeere aaare yooou?'

EEK! What was that? Who's that shouting?



Here I am, sitting on my **favourite megalith** daydreaming about a best friend, when I practically fall off in surprise. Suddenly, right next to me in the undergrowth, there's a **donkey!**

Or is it Claude? He's able to transform himself – which is not particularly unusual for a chameleon – but Claude can take on all sorts of imaginable (and even unimaginable) forms – **swish, swish!**

Completely unmoved, Claude cheerfully continues his irritating 'Eee-aaaw, Eee-aaaw, Eee-aaaw!'

URRRGH, that sounds terrible. So squeaky. My nose is already beginning to itch. That always happens when something really irritates me, or I get wound up about something.

ATCHOO! There, I've exploded already. Immediately, I'm surrounded by tiny **luminants**, all because I was just imagining watching luminants on a dark night with my best friend.

'Claude, stop it now,' I moan at him, 'I've just used magic again by mistake, and it's all your fault!'

And Claude actually stops. He stands there gawping and...hmm, that's a bit **weird**. No matter what animal or other kind of creature he transforms into, his eyes always stay the same: dark brown and goggly!

But the donkey in front of me has one brown eye and one pale blue goggle-eye!

The luminants have already scurried away into the soft moss. It must have been an enormous shock to them, because it's broad daylight and they usually only come out at night.

There's a rustling in the bushes, and I glance over my shoulder...

Hickety Snickety!!!

'Elvis, there you are. You're forever running off, you cheeky monkey. If Dad finds out, he won't even let you out of the stable ever again. Imagine that. Always in your stable, no fresh air, barely room to swing a hoof. That won't be fun, will it?'

A girl, looking like she's been dragged through the hedge backwards – I feel dizzy just looking at her. She has an unbelievably large number of freckles, and sparkling eyes as green as her shirt. Here in our magical Nightshade Forest! Just an arm's length away from me!!

A girl!

She turns to me, smiles and says 'Thank you for catching Elvis!'

I'm so flabbergasted, I can't reply. Besides, I've suddenly got a toad in my throat – not a frog, a proper enchanted toad – and when you've got one of those, all you can say is 'croooaaak'.

The girl gives me a sympathetic look. 'Ah, I guess you don't understand me? You don't look like you're from around here. Bu we can try sign language.' She does some crazy finger waving, points to her chest, then to her donkey, back to herself, saying 'III aaam Isabellaaa, buut eeeveryone caaalls me Iiizyyy. Thiiis iis



Eeelviis, my doonkeey. He raaan awaaay. Dooo yooouuu uuunderstaaand?’

Totally Crazy!

‘Of course!’ I reply.

‘Hey, you do speak my language. So why were you pretending you couldn’t speak?’

‘I wasn’t doing anything of the sort!’

Izzy leans her head to one side, rubbing her chin and looking as though she’s thinking furiously. ‘Hmm, OK, your dress is very strange. Maybe you’re playing a peasant girl? Are you part of a theatre group rehearsing a play? School production? But why the blue hair?’

Double bubbling birchbark brew, what on earth is this Izzy talking about?

‘Aha, I get it!’ She gives me a crazy wink. ‘Top secret!’ Then she steps closer, leans in and whispers: ‘Your secret is safe with me. I promise. So tell me, what are you rehearsing, and where are the others?’

WHAAAT?

Others? Rehearsing? I can’t make her out, this Izzy, with her freckles and her crazy talk.

Then it gets even better. Suddenly her eyes widen into saucers as she blurts out: ‘Wow, and there’s a unicorn in the play too. Great, I loove unicorns. But, well, I don’t want to spoil the fun for you and your theatre group, but your unicorn has two horns. And it’s got coloured spots. They’re both wrong. No unicorn looks like that.’ She pats my arm. ‘Your costume designer...I think you should suggest as gently as possible that he needs to remake it if you don’t want the audience laughing you off the stage.’

I look at her in disbelief, then shake her hand off. ‘What are you talking about? This is a bicorn.’

‘Nonsense! There’s no such thing as a bicorn,’ replies this Izzy, ‘OK, in reality there’s no such thing as a unicorn either, of course.’

‘There’s a whole enormous family of bicorns living here in the Nightshade Forest, so there definitely is such a thing as bicorns.’

Izzy’s face switches from smile to grimace as she clutches her throat.

‘NI-I-IGHT-SH-A-A-ADE F-O-R-E-S-T? I’ve stumbled into the Nightshade Forest?’ she croaks, looking anxiously around. ‘I was only chasing after Elvis...I had no idea...’ Izzy takes a peculiar deep, hissing breath. ‘We have to get away from here! Right now! Everyone knows how sinister and creepy and dangerous this forest is. It’s no place for children; it’s no place for anyone!’

She grabs Elvis by the tail and tries to drag him with her, but the donkey refuses to budge.

EE-AW, EE-AW!



'What's the matter with you?' gasps Izzy, dumbfounded. 'Do I have to spell it out for you? It's mega-dangerous here. **M.E.G.A'**

I can't move a muscle, even if I wanted to. I can only stare at Izzy while my heart pounds like a drum, almost turning somersaults in my chest.

Is she...can she possibly be...???

'You're really not from round here? I mean, you're not by any chance visiting Rhona Ragwort, Gussie Gorse or Wanda Woodruff? A relative...from somewhere?' I can hear my voice is as rough as sandpaper. 'You – you're not a witch?'

Izzy shakes her head with such indignation her hair flies in all directions.

'Huh? Of course I'm not a witch! I'm Isabella, I'm a perfectly normal girl from Hambling-on-the-Wold. I thought that's where you were from too?'

'No...' I whisper. 'No...actually I'm not.'

Bella: 'Unmagical! She's totally UNMAGICAL!'

Izzy: 'Crazy! She's TOTALLY crazy!'