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Opening extract from

Takeshita Demons: The Filth Licker

Written by

Cristy Burne

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To adventurous children everywhere, with monster-loads of thanks to my family – C. B.

The publishers and the author would like to thank Mrs Keiko Holt
for checking the Japanese language and traditions

JANETTA OTTER-BARRY BOOKS

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Takeshita Demons
The Filth Licker



Cristy Burne
Illustrated by Siku

FRANCES LINCOLN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Chapter One



"Cait, are you still there?" I could hear breathing on the other end of the phone, but Cait's voice had disappeared, cut off halfway through a sentence. "Hello?" It was dark outside, late on the night before school camp, and I had a bad feeling in my gut that was cutting like knives. I was supposed to be packing shirts and shoes and lucky charms to take to camp, but I hadn't even opened my case.

The phone crackled. "Sorry," Cait whispered. "I had to go quiet. I'm supposed to be in bed. Dad'll freak if he finds me up this late."

So she was still there. Still OK. Relief prickled down my arms.

"What's up?" she asked. "Why are you calling so late?"

I swallowed. "It's about camp," I began. "I've got this feeling..."

Cait didn't hesitate. "I know," she said. "Me too."

I grinned despite the churning in my belly. Of course Cait would understand. She'd been with me through everything, helping me break into our school and rescue my brother, making friends with a half-dragon water-woman, even standing up to Mrs Okuda after she'd become a child-eating nukekubi demon. Since the night we'd met the demons, Cait and I had been virtually inseparable. Unlike Mrs Okuda and her head.

"I've been thinking," Cait continued. "About camp. I think we're going to need a few extra things…."

I listened, on the edge of my bed.

"But it's hard to know," she said. "For a start, I think I'll take two pairs, then I can wear one at dinner or whatever, and have the other if Mr Lloyd makes us go hiking. Are you taking two? "

"What? What are you talking about?"

The phone went silent. "Jeans," Cait said. "What are *you* talking about?"

"Demons." I hissed the word into the phone, as if a demon might be listening outside my door that very second. "At camp."

The phone stayed silent.

"Cait?" What was going on over there? Maybe she wasn't safe after all….

But then Cait's voice came rattling into my ear. She sounded tired. "Demons again, Miku? I thought you'd finished with that."

"But..."

"Mrs Okuda has gone," she said. "Mr Lloyd is back. You've got to give all this demon stuff a rest. We're off to camp tomorrow. No spooks or flying heads there."

"But we'll be all alone out there." School camp in the countryside. Cabins without locks. Woods on three sides and a hungry river out the back. Plus a long, lonely walk to the toilets every night. My guts twisted like snakes. "Anything could find us."

Cait snorted. "You worry too much. Focus on the good stuff. A whole week without homework."

"But what about that smell?" I sniffed, but I couldn't smell it now, which was a pleasant change. At school, in the library, on the bus. We'd been smelling it everywhere, something animal and musty, like a cross between wet dog and monkey droppings.

"Look…" There was a sigh and some shuffling. "I've gotta pack. Can we talk tomorrow?"

Tomorrow wouldn't help the feeling in my gut tonight, but perhaps Cait was right. Maybe we would be safe at camp. Maybe things would get better if we were further from home and away from our school, where everything had started. Still I delayed, feeling the hot phone burn into my ear. But I couldn't wait for ever. "OK. Sure. Tomorrow would be good."

"Great. So two pairs?"

I sighed. "Yeah. Two's probably enough."

So much for inseparable. Cait was now quick to change the subject if I wanted to talk supernatural spirits. Back when the nukekubi had invaded our school, Cait had believed me, defended me, even risked her neck for me. But maybe demons just weren't her thing any more. I was beginning to feel as if there was a forest between us, and it was growing.

That night I tried to stay busy, putting things in my case and taking them out again. Eventually, after everything was packed for the fiftieth time, I went to bed.

I lay there for ages, but I didn't sleep. The sick feeling in my stomach grew steadily worse, and from inside the walls of my room I could hear the rise and fall of something wailing. My bag was packed. The camp bus would leave in just a few hours. But something, somewhere, had already begun.