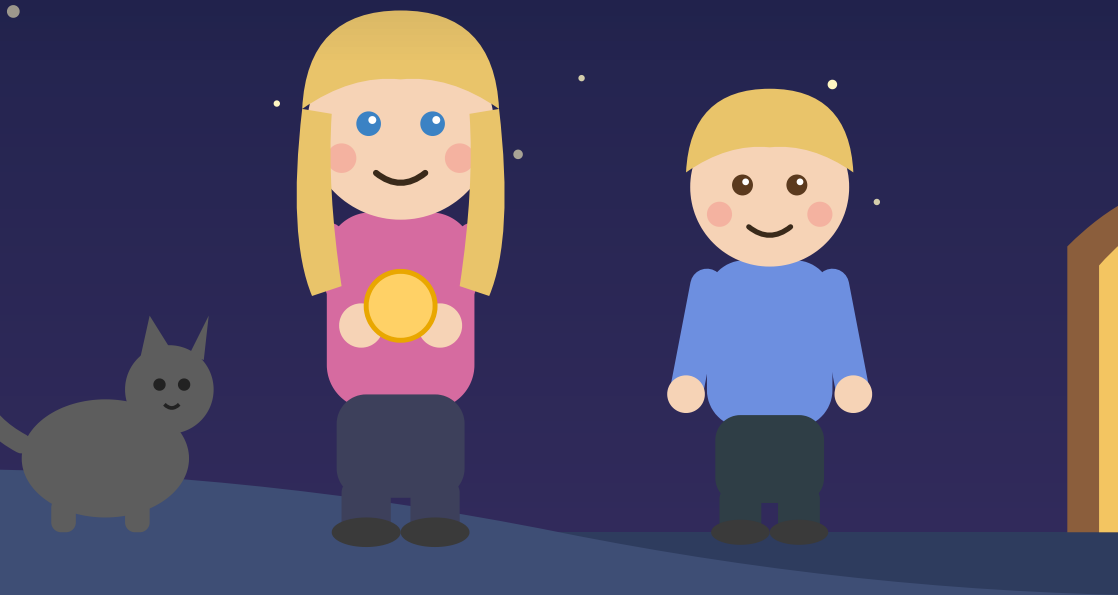


THE LAND OF TWELVE MOONS

A book of stories for

Lily





These stories were written especially for Lily

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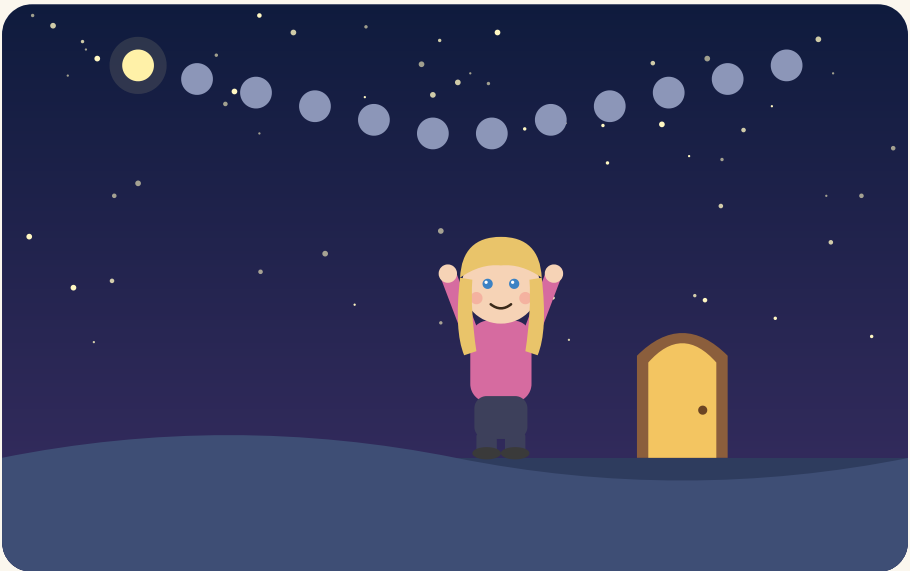
The Star Key



An ordinary evening. In the dark the wardrobe grew taller and the window deeper. *Lily* slid a hand under the pillow — and froze. Something warm was there. A key! Tiny, gold, warm as a sunbeam on the windowsill. It hummed softly: “Mmmm...” Like a kettle about to sing. Then it tugged her hand, the way a kitten tugs a sleeve: come on, I’ll show you.

A gold line crept over the wallpaper. Up, then a corner, then down — and there was a door the size of a book, with a moon for a handle.

Lily knocked: knock, knock, knock. The door creaked open. It was small and *Lily* was big. But somehow they fitted each other. From the bed, Biscuit kept one eye on it all, like a real guard. Behind the door stood the night. Not black but blue, like blueberry jelly. It smelled of warm grass and honey.



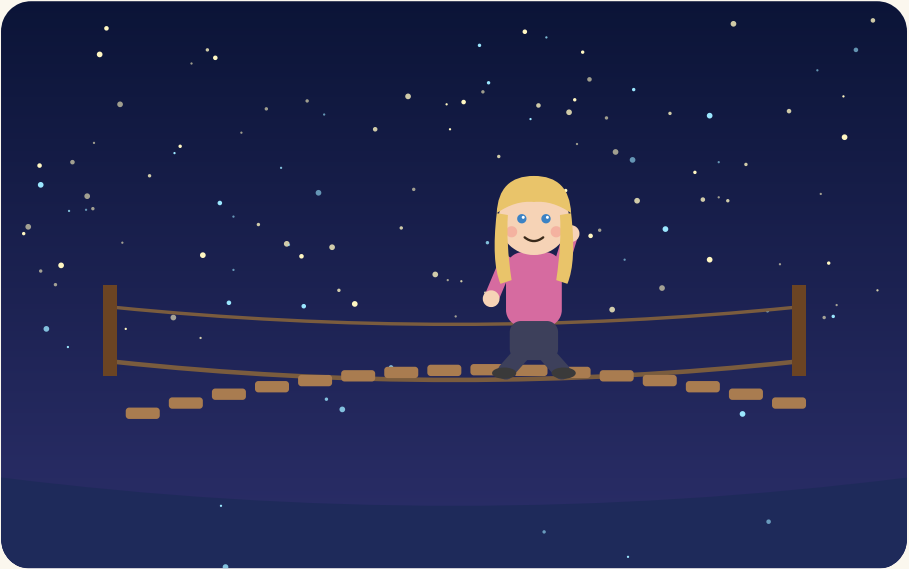
Down in the valley a river rang, and stars floated in it, slow as dumplings in soup. Above hung the moons. Twelve! They stood in a ring, like a clock with no hands. All pale, as if painted with milk.

Only one was blinking, just a little. This was the first page of a great big book. Under the moons stood a signpost. On the top arrow an owl sat snoring: “Hoo-oo... hoo-oo...” Wake her or not? *Lily* decided: yes, but politely — and tapped the post.

“Hoo-hoo!” The owl’s eyes flew open, round as saucers. “I wasn’t asleep! I was... keeping watch from the inside. I’m Luna the owl, keeper of the moons. A moon lights up when someone finishes an adventure. But nobody’s come for ages. Will you go?” “I don’t know if I’m brave,” *Lily* said. “I’m scared.” “Hoo-hoo. Of course you are. Brave is ‘scared’ plus a step.” The scared part was already there. Only the step was left. “I’ll try.” And the blinking moon — blink! — grew a little brighter.

A bridge crossed the river of stars. Rope and planks, light as a swing. Luna flew over to the far side to wait. *Lily* stepped onto the first plank.

The bridge creaked, as if to ask, “Well?” “One, two, three — here I go,” *Lily* whispered. Step. Another step. Looking down was scary, so *Lily* looked at the stars in the river instead. One star winked. Another seemed to wave a ray. A third was blowing bubbles.



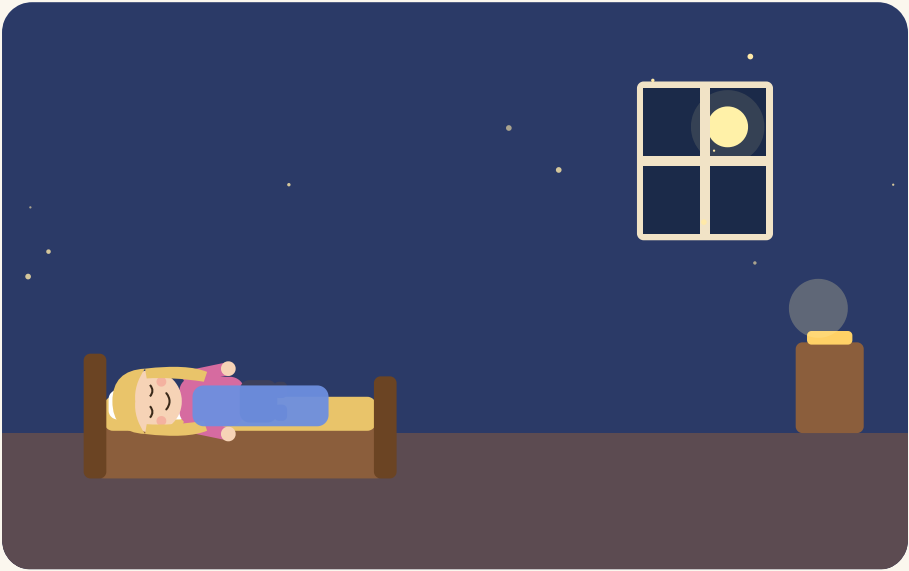
Right in the middle the wind blew, and the bridge swung — whoo-oosh! — this way, then that. *Lily* stopped. Her knees shook. The key in her pocket hummed loud, loud, as if it were nervous too. The door was right there. But *Lily* didn't turn back.

She took a deep, deep breath. “One. Two. Three — here I go.” One step. Another. And another. And there was the soft grass of the far bank.



Lily looked back — and gasped. Every plank she had stepped on was glowing. A gold path stretched across the river, made of her own steps. And the brightest spot was the scariest one, in the middle. The stars in the river chimed like clapping. Then, high in the sky, came a thin little “Ting!”

The blinking moon filled with light and shone out, round and warm, like a lamp in a window. “It’s lit!” Luna the owl flapped her wings. “The first moon is lit!”



She gave *Lily* a map, folded in four, with twelve little circles. One glowed like a crumb of moon. “Moons don’t run away.

Hold the key tight, and the door will open. Going home is always quicker: close your eyes.” *Lily* closed her eyes — and felt her own pillow. The key lay under it, warm. Biscuit was snoozing at the foot of the bed. She felt sleepy and proud at once, and the two feelings got along fine. The key hummed softly: “Mmmm...” That meant: see you tomorrow.

• ♦ •
The End

ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Courage is taking the step even when you're scared.

BEDTIME QUESTION

When were you scared, but took your little step anyway?

The Dragon Who Was Afraid of the Dark



That night *Lily* just couldn't fall asleep. A clock ticked in the kitchen. And on the wall lived shadows. A shaggy giant with a round head. A long arm with spread-out fingers. A lumpy mountain. They didn't move. But they looked as if they might. She pulled the blanket up to her nose. Under the pillow the key grew warm and hummed: "Mmmm..."

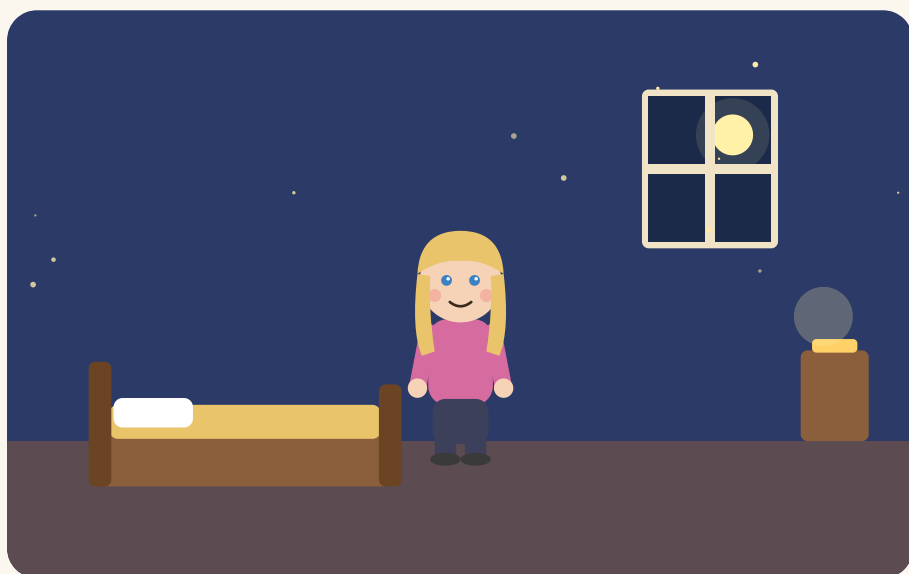
Then, from under the bed, somebody said: "Hic!" A spark jumped out from under the edge of the blanket, as tiny as a match head, and went out.

Lily froze. She could have dived under the covers. Instead, she leaned over the side of the bed and peeked underneath. There, next to a lost sock, sat a little dragon the size of a kitten. He was shaking so hard that his scales jingled like spoons in a glass. “I’m not scared!” he squeaked. “Well... a tiny bit. Hic!”

The little dragon’s name was Ember. He had come through the little door, from the Land of Twelve Moons. “Everyone’s saying you’ve got the key to the door now!” he gabbled. “Oh-oh-oh, I thought, whoever has the key can’t be scared in their room. But you’ve got a giant!” He pointed a claw at the wall and hid up *Lily*’s sleeve. So the brave one here was *Lily*. That was a surprise. And it didn’t make things any less scary.

Lily held Ember in one hand. He was warm as a stove and light as a mitten. Biscuit came over, sniffed the guest and snorted: all right, you can stay.

To be honest, *Lily* was scared too. But now there was someone smaller. Ember looked up the way you look up at someone big and brave. So *Lily* said what she most wanted to hear herself: “Let’s go and look closer. I’ll be right here.” Ember nodded. He was so nervous he hiccuped, and the spark lit them both up.

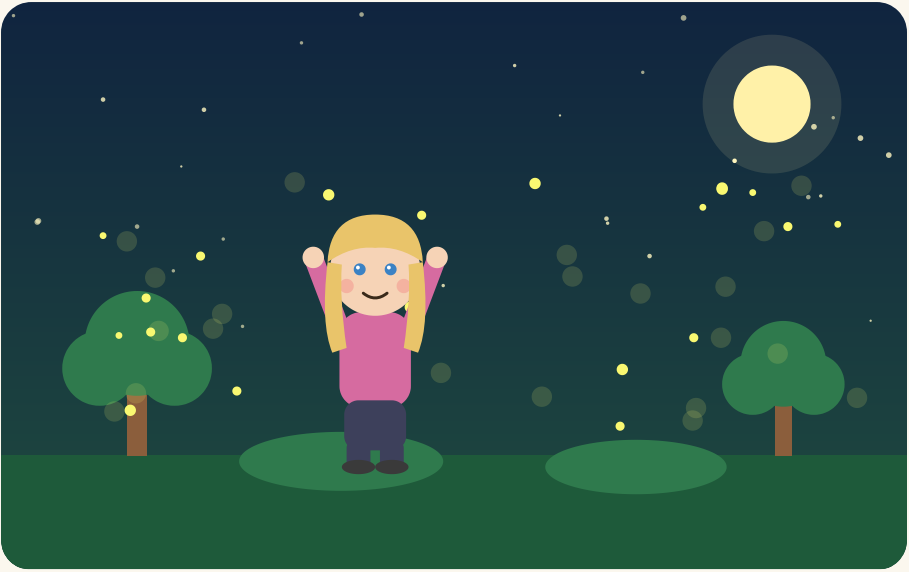


The floorboards creaked softly. *Lily* tiptoed, with Ember hiccuping on her hand every other step. The giant on the wall grew bigger, and the steps grew smaller.

“Hic!” A spark flared up. It was as bright as a lamp. Who’s there? It’s only... a coat! It hung on a hook, with the hood sticking up like a shaggy head. “Good evening, Sir Coat-Hook,” *Lily* said politely. Ember laughed so hard he hiccuped three times in a row.

Next, the long arm. “Hic!” Who’s there? It’s only... a branch! It swayed outside the window, waving its leaves as if to say hello. Then the mountain. “Hic!” Who’s there? It’s only... a chair! With a blanket on it, folded like slopes. “Blanket Mountain!” Ember scrambled to the top and declared himself a mountain dragon, big and terribly brave. It turned out hiccups make the best lamp in the world. Especially laughing hiccups.

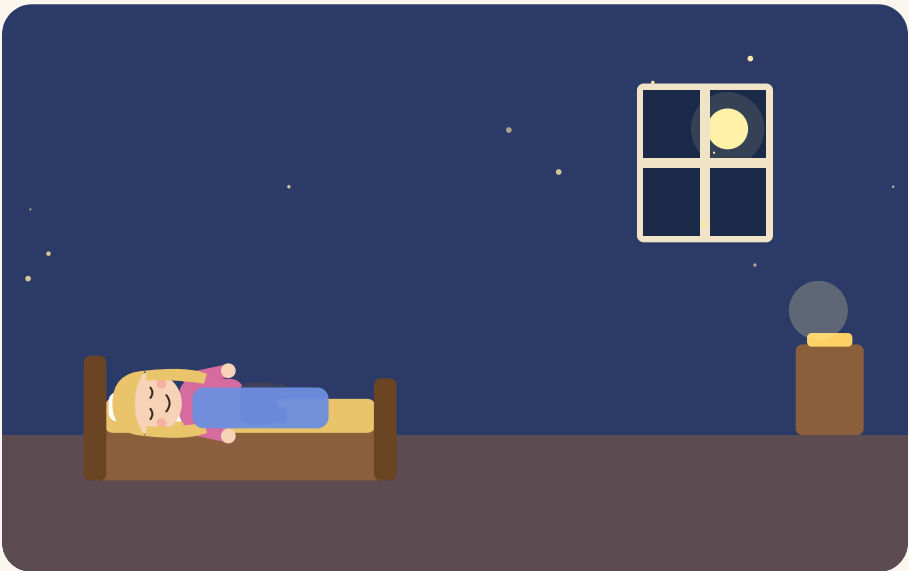
They went to the window and pressed their noses to the glass. The glass was cold, but Ember’s nose was hot, and it left a little misty spot. The garden was full of life.



Fireflies blinked in the grass, as if someone had scattered crumbs of light. A hedgehog pattered down the path. Somewhere an owl was hooting. And above the trees hung a thin new moon, smiling. Ember stared and stared, and even forgot to hiccup. “Oh-oh-oh,” Ember whispered. “There’s so many of them out there!”

“The dark isn’t empty at all,” said Ember, amazed. “But what about the giant? And the mountain?” “They’re still there. Sir Coat-Hook and Blanket Mountain. Only now they’re ours,” said *Lily*.

And added: “The dark is only night with the light switched off.” *Lily* kept that secret for every night: go closer, and give the shadow a funny name. Ember yawned and curled up on the rug, tail to nose. His last spark didn’t go out. He glowed, soft and steady, like a night-light nobody had switched on.



Lily watched Ember until her eyes closed by themselves.

Outside came a soft “ting”, like a spoon set down on a saucer. The second moon had lit up, gentle as a night-light. On Luna the owl’s map, one more circle began to glow. In the morning a scale would be lying on the rug, warm and shaped like a leaf, ready for the shelf by the window. For now, the shadows were only shadows. And the night was only night.

• ♦ •
The End

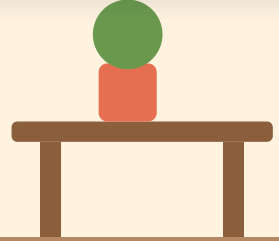
ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Help someone feel less scared, and you will too.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Have you ever comforted someone who was more scared than you?

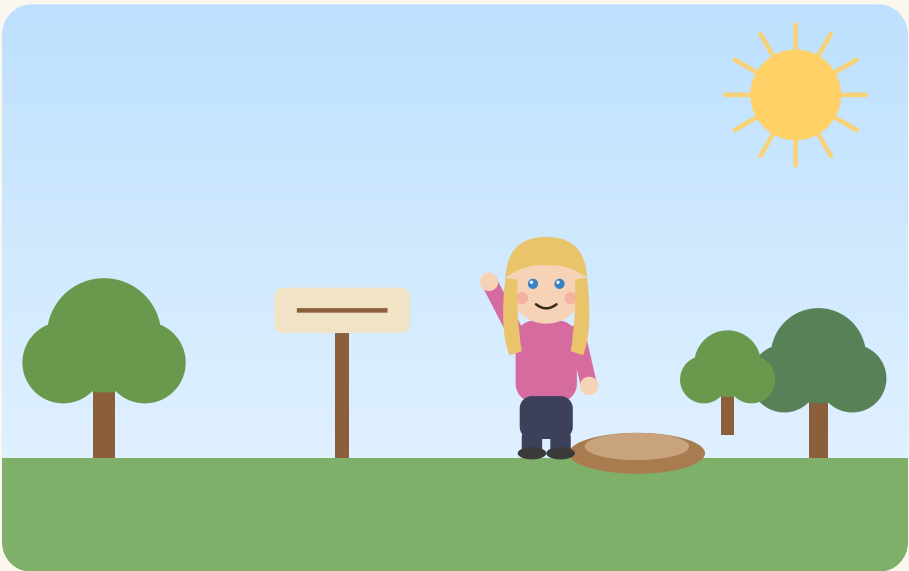
First Day at Forest School



When *Lily* was in bed that evening, something went ding-a-ling at the window. An acorn was swinging on a thin string. Smooth, in a little cap, with a bell inside. A note was tied to the string. The letters were wobbly, as if written with a paw: “You are invited to Forest School. First day: today. Miss Badger, Teacher.” “Today?” *Lily* said. “But it’s night.” The key under the pillow hummed: “Mmmm...” As if to say: where you’re invited, it’s morning.

Lily sat up in bed.

Her tummy went tickly and cold, like after ice cream. Even her toes curled up. “What if nobody plays with me?” she thought. “I don’t know anyone there.” But the acorn rang so cheerfully that sitting still was impossible. The key felt warm in her fist and hummed: come on. A gold line on the wallpaper, a little door, knock, knock, knock — and behind it, leaves were rustling.

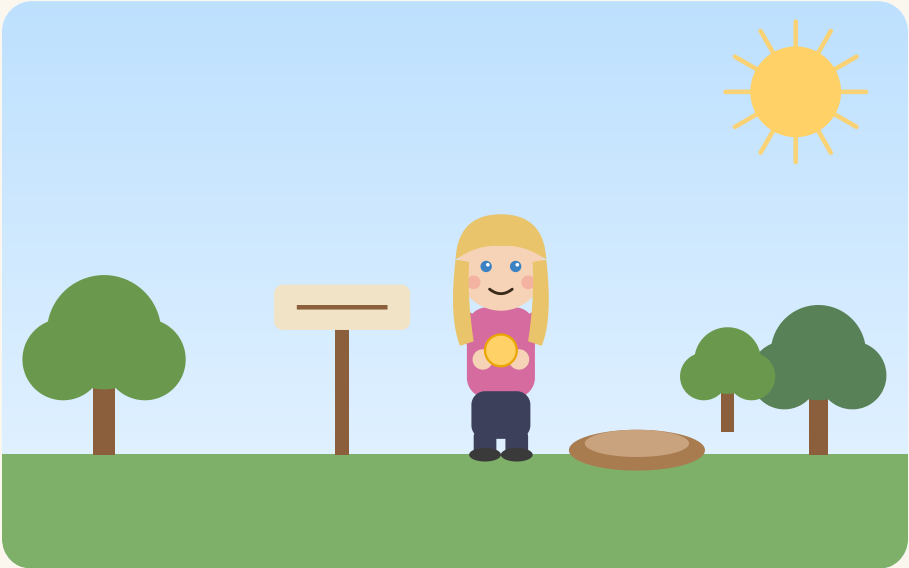


The Rustling Wood smelled of mushrooms and morning dew.

The gate of Forest School was two birch trees leaning together as if whispering. A row of acorn bells hung between them, and one hook was empty. *Lily* looked at the acorn in her hand and understood: it came from here. Little animals with leaf backpacks crowded at the gate, each saying hello their own way. Hedgehog: “Snuff!” Woodpecker: “Tap-tap!” The bunnies waggled their ears. Hello! — And hello to you! And there was Max! A first day is smaller for two.

Right by the birch stood a fox cub. Alone. Red as an autumn leaf, with his nose tucked into his tail — only his eyes shone. “He’s scared too,” *Lily* thought. “Maybe even more than me.” Going up first felt like stepping onto a wobbly bridge. But for steps like that, *Lily* had a counting rhyme. “One, two, three — hello!” The fox cub’s ears pricked up, and his tail slid off his nose.

“...Hello,” he whispered. “I’m Rusty. Can I... come with you?” “Of course you can!”



Ding-dong! went the bells on the gate. Out from behind an oak came Miss Badger, the teacher. Her glasses sat on the tip of her nose, and a list rustled in her paws. “Good morning, class,” she said. Everyone stood up straight. But her voice shook a little. “I have to tell you something.” Miss Badger took off her glasses and put them back on. “It’s my first day too. I’ve been a teacher... since this morning.”

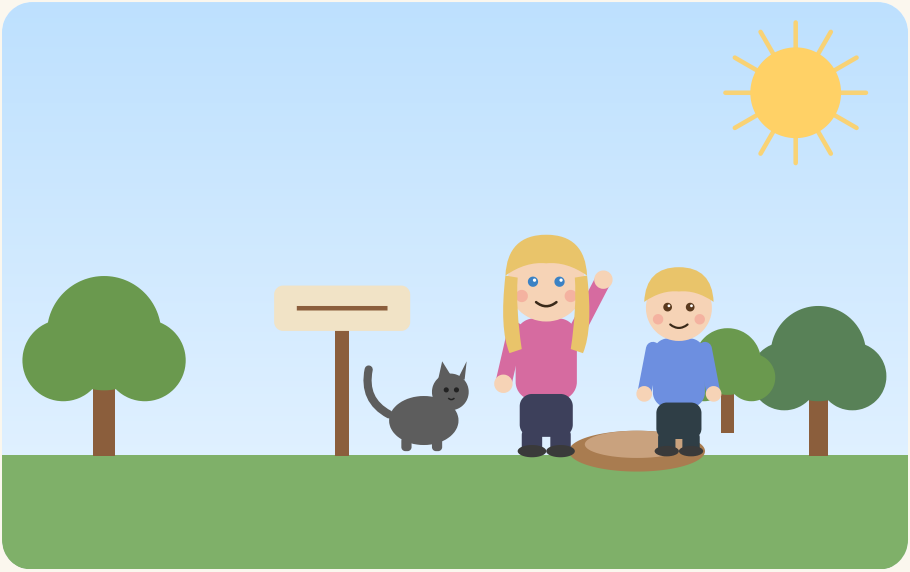
For a second nobody spoke. Then the hedgehog said, “Snuff!” and everyone laughed. Even Miss Badger. It felt as light as taking off a heavy backpack. “First task,” said Miss Badger, checking her list. “Build a big nest. Who it’s for, we’ll find out this evening.” The bunnies dragged sticks. The woodpecker carried twigs. Rusty and *Lily* gathered moss, soft as velvet and a little damp. The nest grew and grew — until it was taller than Miss Badger herself!

Then the nest wobbled. Crunch... crunch... whoo-oosh! — and it fell apart in every direction. Silence. Rusty hid his nose in his tail again. Miss Badger clutched her glasses. Everyone stared at the heap, not sure whether to cry. But *Lily* looked at the heap — and laughed. A pair of bunny ears stuck out of it, with moss on top like a green hat. And then everyone laughed. Loudest of all, the bunny in the moss hat.

Bzz-zz!

Over the clearing flew Zuzu the bee, in tiny glasses, with a picture from the Honey Library. “A z-z-splendid nest!” she buzzed. “Only it’s upside down. Big sticks at the bottom, small ones on top. It’s all written down!” They built it again. Big sticks down. Small ones up. Moss inside, to make it soft. Rusty wasn’t whispering any more. He was giving orders: “Here! No, here!” The nest came out a bit wonky, but strong. Miss Badger knocked on it with her paw — it didn’t even creak.

In the evening two real birds settled into the nest and began to chirp. The class had built someone a home! Hello! — And hello to you! Miss Badger gave *Lily* the acorn bell: “Keep it. It came for you.”



At home the acorn rang on the shelf by the window: ding! The sky answered: ting! The third moon lit up, as if it had been at school too. Luna the owl's map had one more glowing circle. *Lily* closed her eyes. Tomorrow — again.

The End



ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

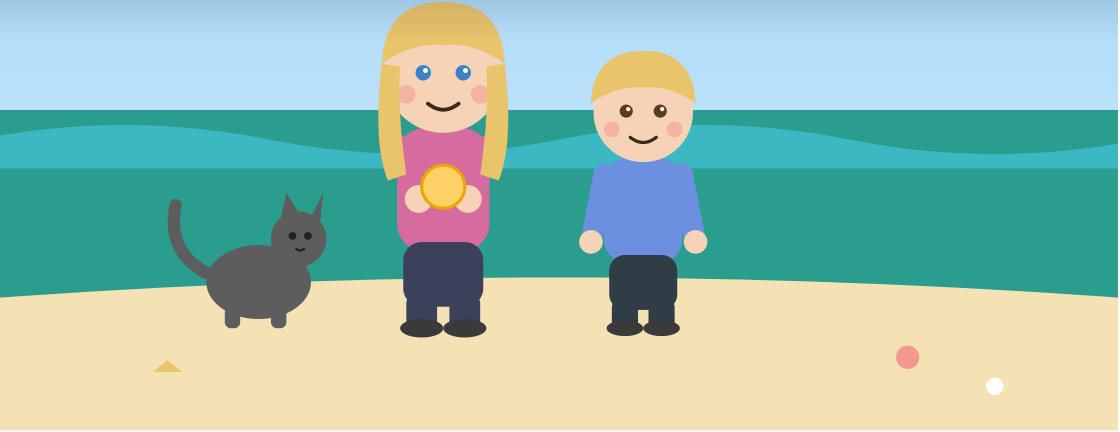
*A new place becomes yours with the first
hello.*

BEDTIME QUESTION

Do you remember going somewhere new
for the first time? Who did you say hello
to?



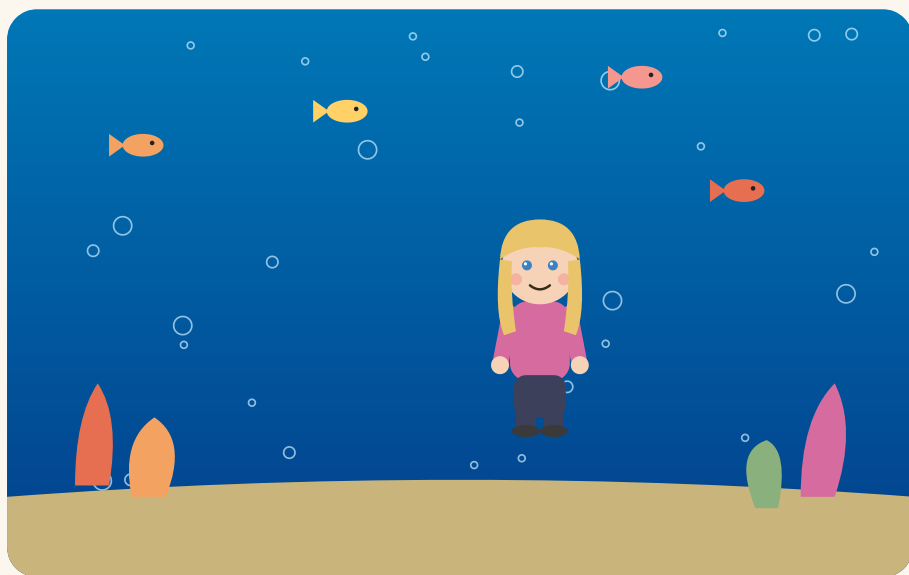
The Secret of the Underwater Kingdom



The key hummed and tugged at the wall — and behind the little door was a beach. Warm sand, a warm breeze, and a sea as pale as milky tea: the Bright Sea. It smelled of salt and sun-warmed pebbles. Biscuit settled on a towel by the water, on guard. A wave rolled a shiny bubble to *Lily*'s feet. Inside lay a pearl and a note in round, slow letters: “Help! The Singing Shell has gone quiet. The Turtle Queen.”

The pearl was warm, like a nut held tight in your hand. *Lily* squeezed it — bloop!

— and a see-through bubble grew all around. It didn't pop, even when poked. It was springy, like a ball. "I can breathe underwater," *Lily* guessed, and stepped into the waves. The water was warm as a summer evening. Below, corals swayed, pink and yellow and fluffy, like bushes in bloom. Overhead the sun wobbled, green.



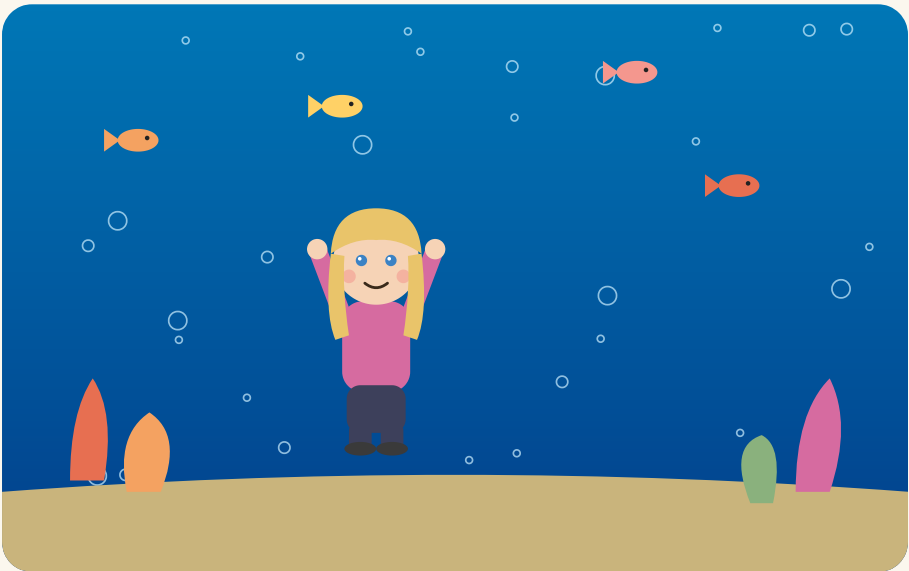
But the kingdom was quiet. Fish hung in sad little groups, and nobody was dancing. Even the seaweed drooped like floppy ears. "Bubble, bubble, tell me true!" said *Lily*. "What happened?"

“The Shell won’t sing, and you can’t dance without a song!” the fish bubbled all at once. “It was Otto! There was a cloud of ink by the Shell! He’s always knocking things over!” The Turtle Queen sighed a heavy sigh. Everyone had made up their minds. But *Lily* decided to listen to Otto first. Nobody had asked him.

Otto’s cave was full of lost things. A button, a little key to who knows what, an old trumpet and a teaspoon. All neatly set out on stone shelves. The cave was cool and smelled of wet stones. In the middle sat Otto himself — big, soft and pink. When he saw his guest, he shrank: “Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.” *Lily* counted: eight. One for each arm. And sat down beside him on a warm stone, without a word.

Otto was quiet for a while. Then, carefully, with a bubble or two, he began: “I wanted so much to dance with everyone.

But I have eight arms, and they keep getting tangled. I bumped the Shell. It wobbled... I got scared and... I blushed.” “In ink?” asked *Lily*. “Octopuses blush in ink,” sighed Otto, and a heart-shaped cloud spread through the water. “And the fish started shouting. Nobody let me explain.” He let all eight arms drop, and they lay around him like the petals of a sad flower.

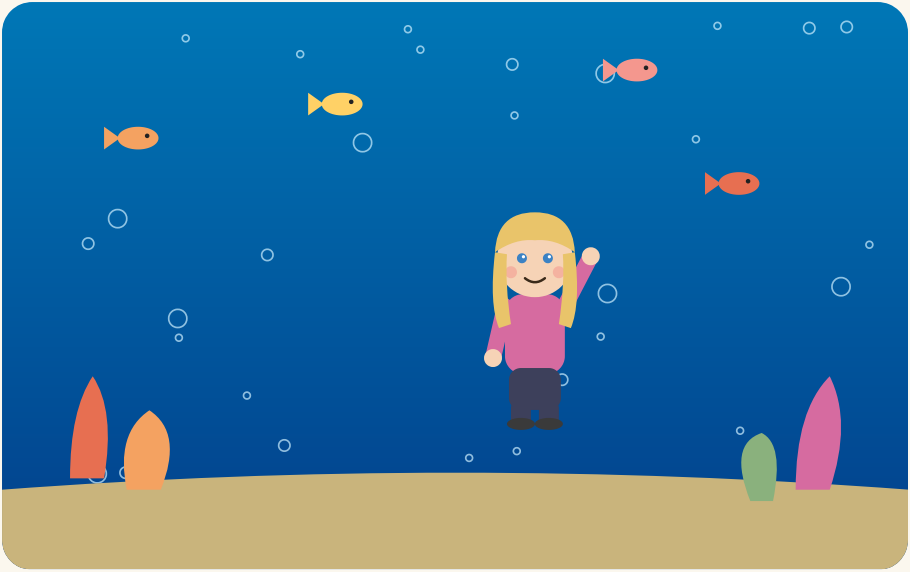


Lily thought hard. A bumped shell goes clink and keeps singing, like a bell.

But this one was silent, as if something had covered its mouth. “Otto, it wasn’t the bump,” said *Lily*. “Something’s stopping it. Let’s go and look.” “What if they say it was me again?” “I’ll be right there.” Otto looked at *Lily*, then at his arms, then at the mouth of the cave. At last Otto swam off, trying not to bump anything.

The Singing Shell lay on the sand, huge and pearly. An old fishing net was wound all around it, full of knots, like a kitten’s ball of wool. It smelled of weed. “So that’s what shut it up!” *Lily* gasped. There were lots of knots, and *Lily* only had two hands. But Otto had eight. “You hold here, and you hold there,” *Lily* said, showing Otto which arm went where. Max tugged at knots too.

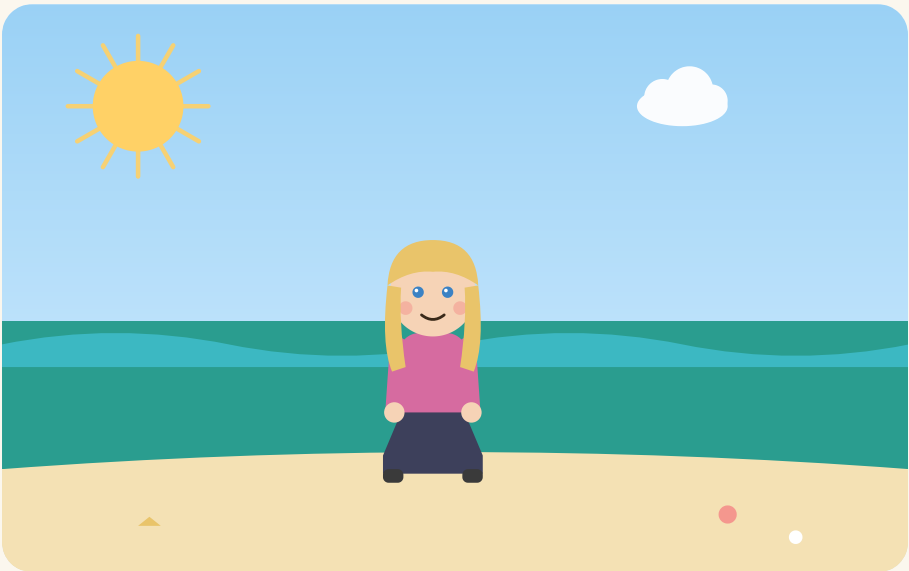
Knot by knot — and the net slid off onto the sand. The Shell took a deep breath. “Bubble, bubble, tell me true!” *Lily* whispered to it. And it sang.



Bubble notes floated out, and the water chimed like glass bells. The Turtle Queen swam closer to hear better. The fish swam up, looking sheepish. “Sorry, Otto! Sorry... Sorry...” There were exactly eight of them — one little fish for each arm. Otto blushed so hard that a whole cloud of hearts floated around him.

Then Otto led the dance. Eight arms led eight rings of fish, and not one got tangled. *Lily* danced right in the middle.

The water swirled and chimed, and *Lily*'s head spun too — the happy kind of spinning. The Turtle Queen nodded slowly. That meant “good”. To say goodbye, Otto gave *Lily* a little shell from his cave. “It hums when you miss a friend.” “And the net?” “I’ll keep it,” said Otto. “For my collection. Lost things can be useful too.”



On the beach the sand was warm, and *Lily*'s heels were wet and sandy. The shell in her hand hummed softly: oooo. Missing Otto already.

Over the water came a thin “ting”, like a drop on glass. The fourth moon lit up, round as a pearl. Home was quicker than quick: *Lily* closed her eyes, and her cheek found the pillow. In the kitchen a clock ticked: not a minute had passed. The shell went on the shelf by the window. Listen, and it’s still singing, just a little.

• ♦ •
The End

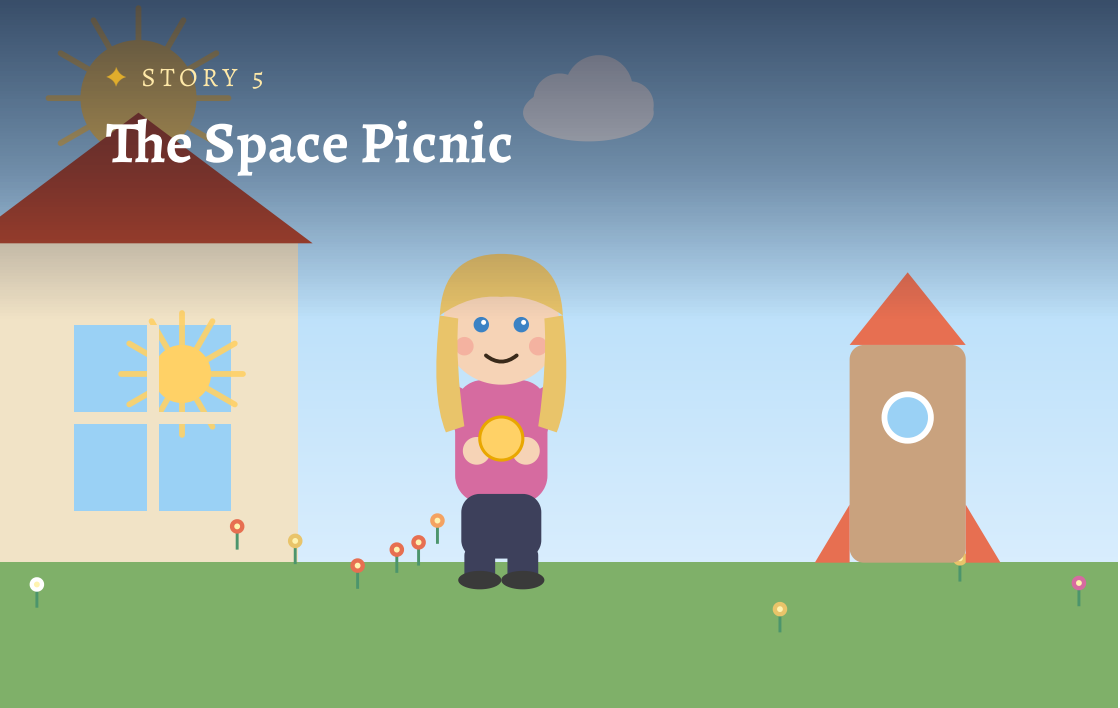
ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Before deciding who’s to blame, listen.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn’t do? What helped?

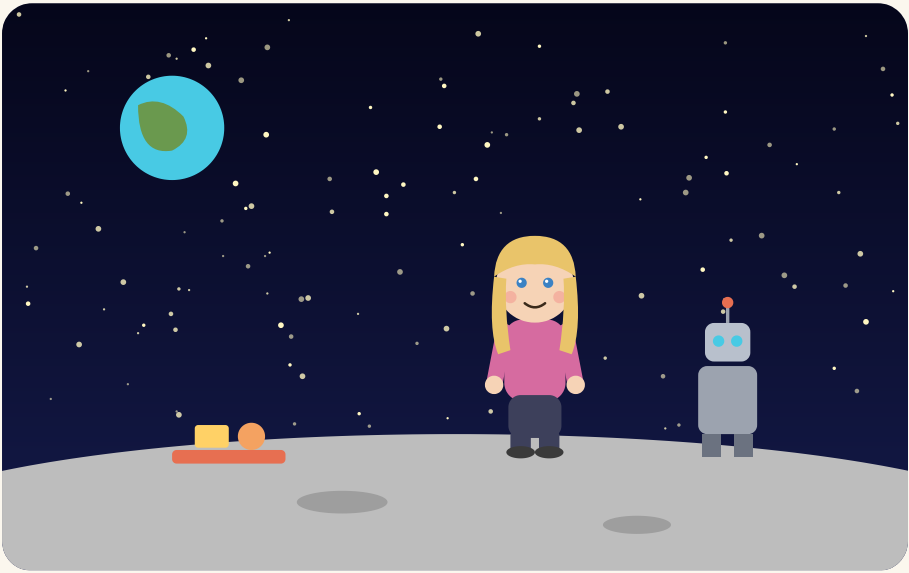
The Space Picnic



The box was huge: you could climb right inside and still have room for sandwiches. *Lily* had a plan. She cut out a round window, drew buttons and levers with a marker, and put on a colander for a helmet. The holes were for hearing space. The marker smelled of strawberries. Still light, but the moon already hung in the sky, pale as a button on a blue shirt.

The key in her pocket grew warm. It always warmed up before magic. *Lily* took it out and, just to see, touched the box.

The box hummed: “Mmmm...” — like a fridge at night. It rocked, as if stretching after a nap. The drawn buttons lit up one by one. Biscuit sat on the step: mission control. Max climbed in too. *Lily* sat in the captain’s seat — an upside-down bucket — and gripped the drawn lever. Time to go!

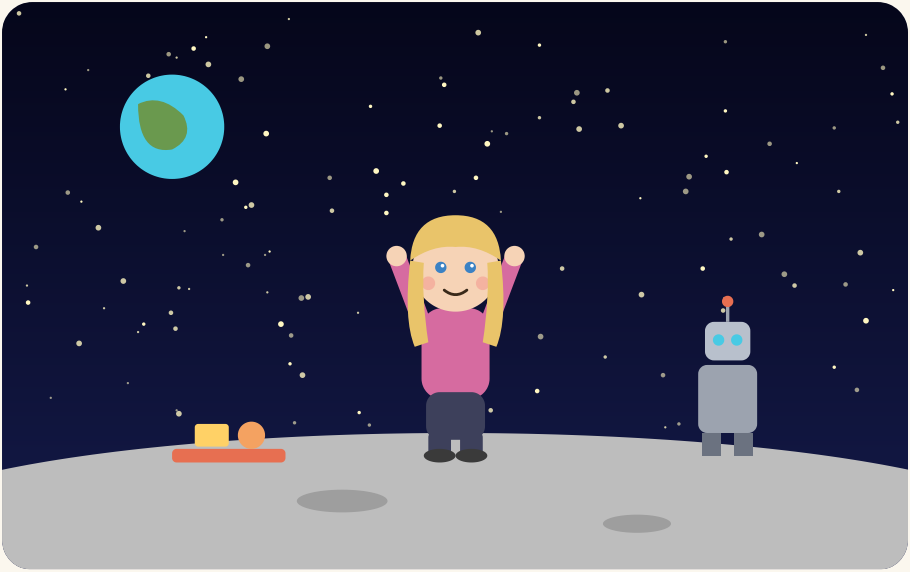


“Three, two, one — lift-off!” shouted *Lily*. It was “one, two, three”, only backwards. The box shook and roared: rrrrrr! The windows rattled, and the sparrows flew off the fence.

The bucket seat bounced; the colander slid over her nose. Then — whoo-oosh! — the yard dropped away. Houses turned tiny as blocks, their windows yellow dots. The sky grew darker and darker, until it was black.

The rocket landed softly on the Moon Meadow. The dust underfoot was silvery and soft as flour, and footprints stayed in it, sharp as stamps. *Lily* jumped — and floated up, high and slow, like a dandelion seed. Bip the robot came rolling over — square, on one wheel, with lights on his chest. Behind him flew Zuzu the bee with a basket. “Z-z-splendid, you’re here! The picnic’s ready!” Every jar had a label. So did the sandwich: “Sandwich. Do not fly away.”

Questions poured out of *Lily* like peas from a bag. “Bip, why is everything full of holes?” Why? — Bip-bip, let’s find out! “Bip. Fact number one,” said Bip. “They are craters. Rocks from space fell on the moon.



Where a rock landed, it left a hole.” He put a bowl of flour on the rug. *Lily* dropped a pebble in — poof! — and there was a little crater in the flour, with a rim. Just like a real one. And a white puff all around.

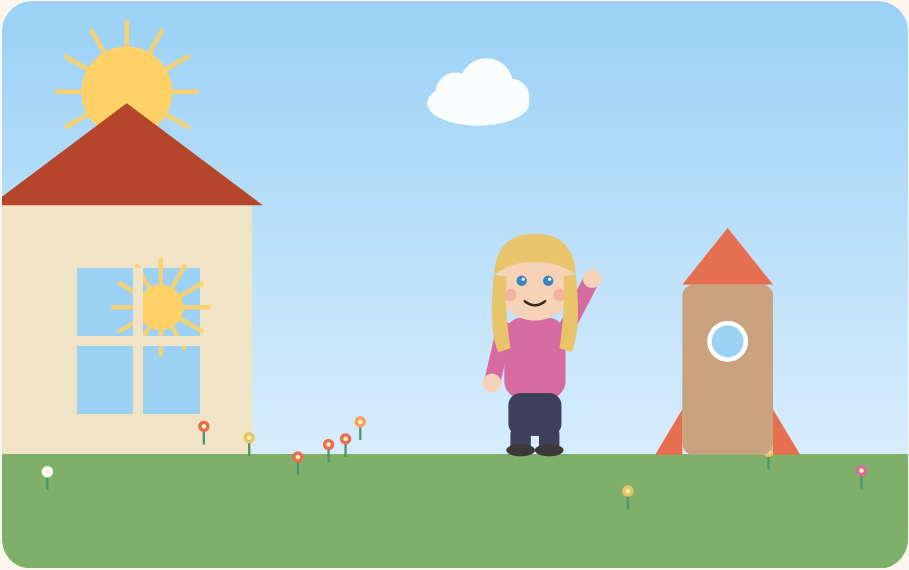
“Why can I jump so high?” Why? — Bip-bip, let’s find out! “Fact number two. The moon pulls things down too, only more gently than the Earth. So here you weigh less and jump higher.” “And why is the sky black when the sun is shining?” “Fact number three. There is no air here.

On Earth, air scatters the light, and the sky looks blue. Here there is nothing to scatter it. We can breathe because the key keeps a bubble of air around us. Bip-bip, that is a fact!”

Zuzu handed out sandwiches. *Lily* took a bite, waved an arm — and the sandwich slipped away. It floated up and began to circle Bip’s head. “Bip has a moon of his own!” laughed *Lily*. “Bip. That is not a real orbit,” said Bip sternly. “But it is close.” Everyone tried to catch it. But you can’t rush about on the moon: jump too hard and off you fly. They had to move softly, as if in a dream. Zuzu caught it. “I did write: do not fly away!”

Afterwards they sat on the rug and looked at the Earth — blue and round, like a balloon on a string. *Lily* looked at Bip. The lights on his chest were blinking pink. “Bip, why are you smiling?” “I do not have feelings,” said Bip.

His lights turned even pinker. He blinked. He whirred. He worked something out inside. Even his wheel squeaked with the effort. “Does not compute...” he said at last, quietly. “I don’t know.”



Bip’s aerial drooped. He really didn’t like not knowing. “But that’s the most interesting answer!” said *Lily*. “That’s where everything begins.” Bip thought. Then he took out a notebook and wrote: “Question number four. Open.” His lights went pink, pink, pink.

Zuzu put a pinch of moon dust into a thimble and stuck on a label: “Moon Dust. Do Not Sneeze.” “For you. To remember.” Time to go home. “Three, two, one — lift-off!”

The rocket landed softly in the yard, and the box was just a box again. In the kitchen a clock was ticking: not a minute had passed at home. Before bed the thimble went on the shelf by the window. And three new questions for tomorrow were already spinning in *Lily*’s head. “Ting!” went the sky, like a spoon against a thimble. The fifth moon lit up — and seemed to wink. Or maybe it was a crater. *Lily* smiled and closed her eyes. We’ll find out tomorrow.

The End



ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

*“Why?” is a door; “I don’t know” is a
start.*

BEDTIME QUESTION

What three “whys” would you like to find
out tomorrow?



The Magic Words



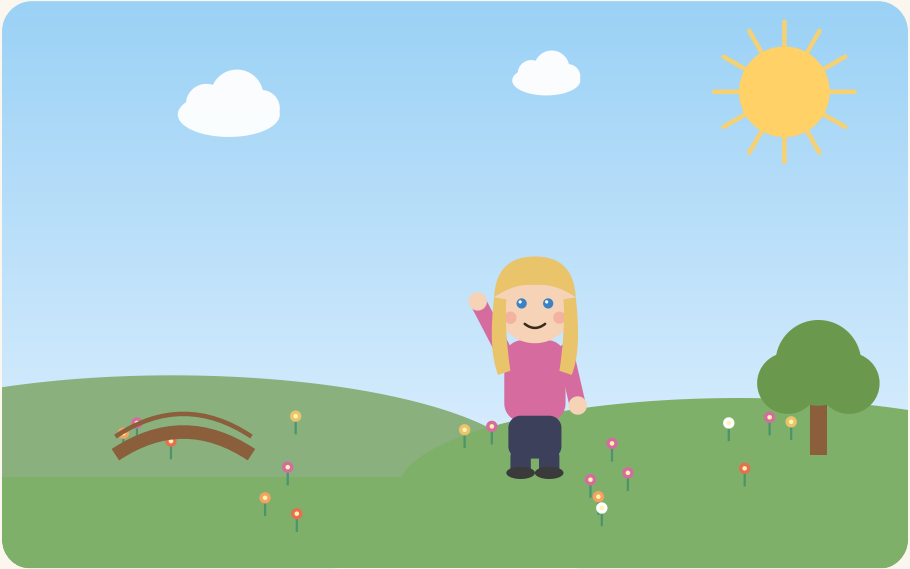
The key under the pillow grew warm and hummed: “Mmmm...” *Lily* knew what that meant. Knock, knock, knock — and the little door opened right onto Daisy Meadow. It smelled of warm grass and honey, and the daisies were so white they looked freshly washed and hung out to dry. Racing towards them came Fluff the hare, the fastest messenger in the Land, with a letter bigger than herself. “Hurry-hurry-hurry!” she gabbled. “A letter for Zuzu! Very urgent! Let’s run!”

The way to the Honey Library went over the Humpback Bridge. It was tiny and arched, like a cat's back. On the very top sat a gnome — his back to everyone, his hat pulled down to his nose.

“That’s Grumble,” whispered Fluff. “He never lets anyone through.” “Then we’ll be quiet,” *Lily* decided, and went on tiptoe, soft as a cat on a blanket. The first plank said nothing. The second didn’t either. But the third... “CREAK!” The gnome didn’t turn around. He just said: “Hmph.”

“Then loud!” *Lily* decided. She took a big breath, and together with Fluff, shouted: “Let us through!” Even the daisies jumped. But the gnome pulled his hat down lower. Now only his beard stuck out, tangled like a ball of wool after a kitten has played with it. “Hmph.” Fluff sat down on a tuft of grass, and her ears drooped. “I’m the fastest in the Land,” she sighed.

“But speed doesn’t help here. This needs... something else.”



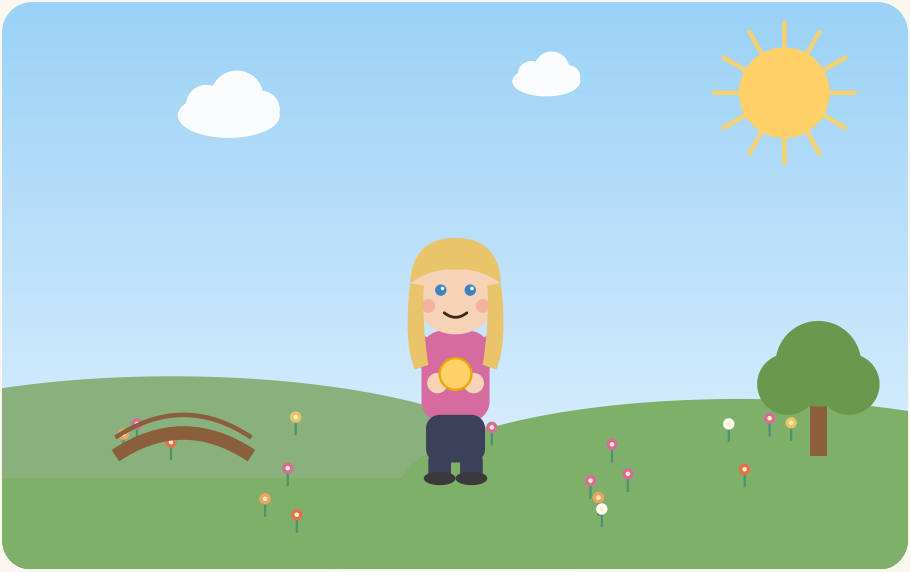
So *Lily* stopped being sneaky and stopped shouting. She simply stood still and looked — carefully, the way you look at a ladybird on your hand. The gnome’s boots were worn, with a hole in one heel. His shoulders drooped. An empty mug stood beside him on the plank. He sat the way you sit when you’re very, very tired. “He isn’t cross,” *Lily* thought. “He’s tired. And maybe nobody has spoken kindly to him for a long time. Nobody at all.”

Lily came close enough for the gnome to hear without shouting, and said: “Good morning.” Pop! A flower opened by the gnome’s boot, yellow as a yolk. The gnome stirred. His hat lifted, just a finger’s width. Out peeked a nose, round and very surprised. “Please let us through. Fluff has an urgent letter.” Pop! — a second flower, blue as the evening sky. And one corner of the grumpy mouth slowly crept up.

The gnome stood up, brushed off his knees and took off his hat. Underneath were kind eyes, a little sleepy, like someone who’d woken very early.

“That’s the magic of my bridge,” he said hoarsely, as if he hadn’t talked for ages. “Nobody’s remembered it for a hundred years. They all just sneak or shout.”

“Thank you,” said *Lily*. Pop! — a third flower, red as a wild strawberry. The gnome picked it and held it out to *Lily*: “Here. This one will never fade.”



Then the gnome coughed, went red right up to his ears and said — for the first time in a hundred years: “Thank you... too.” And then something funny happened: his beard went curly. All by itself! Curl after curl, like wood shavings. Grumble touched it and laughed. “Go on across,” he said, stepping aside. “And come again. Just because.” Fluff shot over the bridge so fast that the planks didn’t even have time to creak.

The letter arrived just in time. “Z-z-splendid!”

buzzed Zuzu, and stuck a label on the envelope: “Delivered with Flowers.” And all the way back, *Lily* tried the words on everyone. “Good morning, daisy!” — and the daisy nodded. “Thank you, Fluff!” — and Fluff’s nose went pink. “Bridge, please don’t creak!” — and the bridge didn’t. “Ting!” sang the sky. The sixth moon was opening — slowly, petal by petal, like a flower in your hand.

Getting home was quicker: close your eyes — and there’s your own pillow, cool side up. The red flower went in a glass on the windowsill. It glowed in the dark like a tiny lamp. Biscuit sniffed it and sneezed. On Luna the owl’s map, one more circle lit up. *Lily* closed her eyes and whispered to the dark: “Goodnight.” The dark was quiet. Then, very softly, it seemed to answer: “Thank you.”

The End



ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

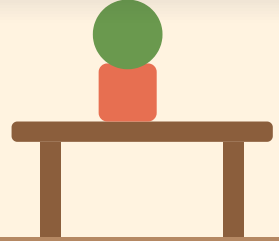
Look carefully first, then say a kind word.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Who did you say a kind word to today —
and what happened next?



The Lost Smile

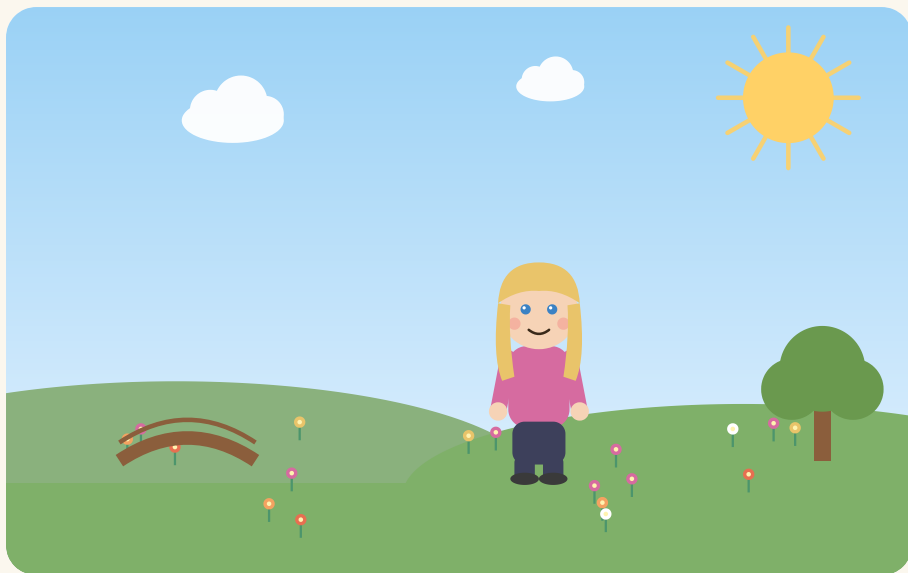


The morning started all wrong. The left sock was itchy, the porridge was lumpy, and outside the sky hung like a wet sheet. *Lily* sat on the bed and sulked — at the sock, at the porridge, at the whole wide world. She felt cross and sad at the same time, and didn't know why. Even the rain on the window sounded hurt. Her mouth turned down all by itself. And then *Lily* noticed the worst thing of all: the smile was gone. Completely. Lost!

She looked everywhere.

Under the bed was the other sock — dusty, and very pleased with itself. In the desk drawer, a button everyone had been hunting for since last winter. In her pocket, only crumbs and one raisin. *Lily* even looked in a slipper: smiles can be small, it might have rolled in. No smile anywhere — big or little. Then someone tapped on the window. Softly, wetly: drip. Drip-drip.

Outside the glass hung a little cloud — small, curly and a bit faded, like a sock that has been washed too often. It was dripping on the windowsill. *Lily* opened the window, and the cloud floated in, leaving little wet dots on the floor. “Hello,” it said politely. “I’m Puff. I’m partly cloudy today, with a chance of drizzle. What’s the weather like in you?” *Lily* thought about it. People often asked about the weather outside. But nobody had ever asked about the weather inside.



“In me... it’s thundering,” *Lily* said at last. “I’m cross. And sad too. Both at once.” “Thunder and showers,” Puff nodded, and a drop fell off. “It happens. All weathers are allowed.” “What if I don’t know why?” “Then let’s go somewhere with lots of room. There’s space for every weather there.” The key under the pillow grew warm and hummed: “Mmmm...” Knock, knock, knock — and the little door opened onto Daisy Meadow, wet and shiny after the rain.

Fluff the hare was sitting on a tuft of grass.

For once she wasn't running anywhere. "My feet are fast, but I listen slowly," she said. "Tell me." So *Lily* told her: about the itchy sock and the lumpy porridge. Fluff didn't interrupt. Her ears just turned this way and that. "Mm-hm... And what else?" With every word there was more room inside, as if someone had opened a window.



"Where do I put the grumps?" asked *Lily*. "In the ground!" said Puff. "They're heavy. Stomp!" *Lily* stomped in a puddle.

Splashes flew everywhere — on the grass, on the daisies, on her nose. “Stomp, stomp — grumps, go down in the ground!” Another puddle, and another! Puff floated along behind, raining right over her head like an upside-down umbrella. By the tenth puddle the grumps had run out, and the laughing began — wet, right up to the ears.

“And the sad?” asked *Lily*, getting her breath back. “Sad is light,” said Puff. “You breathe it out.” *Lily* took such a big breath that her cheeks puffed up like two balloons — and: “Phe-e-ew!” Phew — sad, fly up to the cloud! Two tears came out with the “phew”. That was all right. Puff caught them in mid-air, the way you catch snowflakes, and said briskly: “Perfect. Just what the rainbow was missing.” And the little cloud began to drift slowly aside.

Puff moved aside like a curtain — and behind it was the sun.



It had been there all along. You just couldn't see it. And *Lily* felt her mouth stretch all by itself. The smile! It hadn't been lost. It had been hiding behind the storm, like the sun behind a cloud. A rainbow curved over the meadow — exactly like a smile, only huge. “Ting!” went the sky, like a drop on a windowsill. The seventh moon came out from behind the clouds — together with the smile.

Fluff held out a pebble — smooth, cool and dark as a tiny rain cloud. “It’s a grump stone. When you’re cross, squeeze it tight. The stone doesn’t mind.” Getting home was quicker. The sun lay on the pillow in a warm patch. On Luna the owl’s map, one more circle began to glow. Biscuit licked her cheek: at last! Pebble in hand. Smile in place — as if it had never gone away.



The End

ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Every feeling has a name, and every feeling is allowed.

BEDTIME QUESTION

What was the weather like inside you today — and what helped it clear up?

The Backwards Birthday



That evening an envelope lay on the pillow. The writing on it went backwards: “YADHTRIB SDRAWKCAB”. *Lily* held it up to the mirror and read: “Backwards Birthday.” And underneath, very small: “All for you. Please come.” The key under the pillow grew warm and hummed: “Mmmm...” Knock, knock, knock — and the little door opened onto the Party Glade by the Moon Tower. Flags fluttered, lanterns swayed, and it smelled so strongly of honey you wanted to lick your lips.

The guests all arrived at once — walking backwards. Their party hats were on their feet. “Goodbye! Goodbye!” they shouted happily. Here, that meant hello. Ember the little dragon got tangled in his hat, flopped onto the grass and hiccuped: “Hic!” A spark flashed in the air. The candles on the table were blown out first and lit afterwards. “Back to front and upside down!” laughed *Lily*. It was terribly funny.

Only then did *Lily* notice: there were no presents. Not one box, not one bow. “What about me?” she asked quietly. Her throat felt tight. It was her party! Luna the owl, keeper of the moons, flew down, fluffy as an old mitten. “Hoo-hoo. Happy... happy... I forget what day it is!” The owl looked into *Lily*’s eyes. “Upset? I understand. But here it’s backwards: the birthday one gives the presents. Try it. Moons don’t run away.” *Lily* looked at the guests.

The guests looked back — hopefully.



“All right,” *Lily* sighed. “Back to front and upside down.” On the table were bright paper, pine cones, glue and a big basket with a ribbon. But what should go to whom? *Lily* began to watch the guests — carefully, as if through a magnifying glass. Ember was shivering and blowing on his paws. Rusty the fox cub had filled his pockets with pebbles. Otto the octopus, in a barrel of sea water, said sorry to everyone who passed. And Bip the robot asked “why?”

more often than his lights blinked.

For Luna the owl — a drawing: all twelve moons in a ring, in yellow pencil that smelled of wood. So she wouldn't forget. "Hoo-hoo..." Luna held the drawing to her fluffy chest. "Nobody has ever given me anything before." For Ember — a stripy scarf. Ember wrapped himself up to the eyes and said: "You know... I'm warm. And not just on the outside." Then he hiccuped a heart-shaped spark.



For Rusty — a shiny pebble, striped like a lollipop, for his collection.

Rusty hid his nose in his tail: when he's very happy, he always goes shy. For Otto — a card: "A Day Without Sorry". He read it, took a breath, began "Sorr..." — caught himself and laughed, bubbling. For Bip — a little box tied with string, and inside it a question: "Why is giving fun?" "Does not compute..." said Bip. But his lights twinkled like party lights. *Lily* put one parcel aside. It said "Max" on it.

Every happy face made *Lily* even happier. It was strange: not one present for her, and a whole mountain of joy. Ember kept touching his scarf, Rusty held his pebble up to the light, and Luna showed her drawing to everyone. Evening came. The lanterns turned honey-gold. The basket was empty — just the ribbon at the bottom. But inside, *Lily* felt full. As if the basket had moved in there. Biscuit sniffed the empty basket: honey.



Then Zuzu the bee brought out the cake — huge, honey-sweet, with moon candles. “Z-z-splendid, cut it!” she buzzed. “Only the birthday one gets the biggest piece!” “No,” said *Lily*. She counted the guests, took the knife and cut the cake as straight as a ruler. The same for everyone. The last piece was for *Lily*. It was exactly like everyone else’s — no bigger, no smaller. Zuzu looked at it, then at hers, and nodded. And that turned out to be the tastiest present of all.

“Ting!”

went the air over the glade, as if someone had clinked teacups. The eighth moon lit up — round and gold, like a cake. Getting home was quicker: close your eyes — and there's your own pillow. In *Lily's* fist was the ribbon from the basket, smelling of honey. It went on the shelf by the window. Full, warm and sleepy. On Luna the owl's map, one more circle began to glow — gold as honey. The basket was empty, but inside was full to the brim.

• ♦ •
The End

ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

When you share, joy grows bigger.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Do you remember giving someone a present?
What did their face look like?

The Great Snail Race

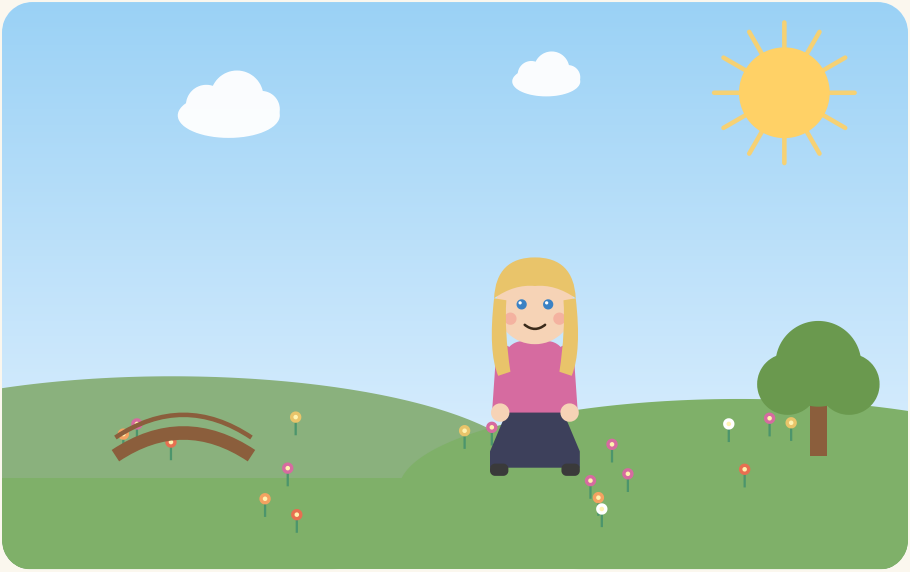


The key under the pillow grew warm: “Mmmm...” Knock, knock, knock — and the little door opened onto Daisy Meadow. There, on the snail racetrack, a start line was drawn in chalk. Today was the Great Snail Race, and *Lily* was head judge. Fluff the hare put a judge’s hat made of a leaf on her head and handed over a magnifying glass — as huge as a frying pan. “A judge has to see everything,” she said, and hung a whistle around her own neck.

Four snails stood at the start, each with a number on its shell: Rocket, Lightning, Zippy and Button. The slowest creatures in the Land had the fastest names. Fluff blew the whistle: wheee! The race was on. Rocket put out his feelers. Lightning had a think. Zippy yawned. And Button just sat and looked about. “Faster!” *Lily* burst out. “Come on, go!” The snails didn’t go. They crawled. One tiny step. Maybe one and a half.

Fluff crouched beside *Lily*. Her feet kept twitching and her ears kept flicking: staying still was the hardest thing in the world for her. “I’m fast,” she whispered. “But I learned to wait slowly. Today speed isn’t what matters. Look through the glass. Quietly.” “Look at what? It’s just grass.” “Whatever you find. Slowly, slowly, softly, softly...” *Lily* sighed, lay down on her tummy in the warm grass, and held the glass up to one eye.

First *Lily* saw a ladybird.



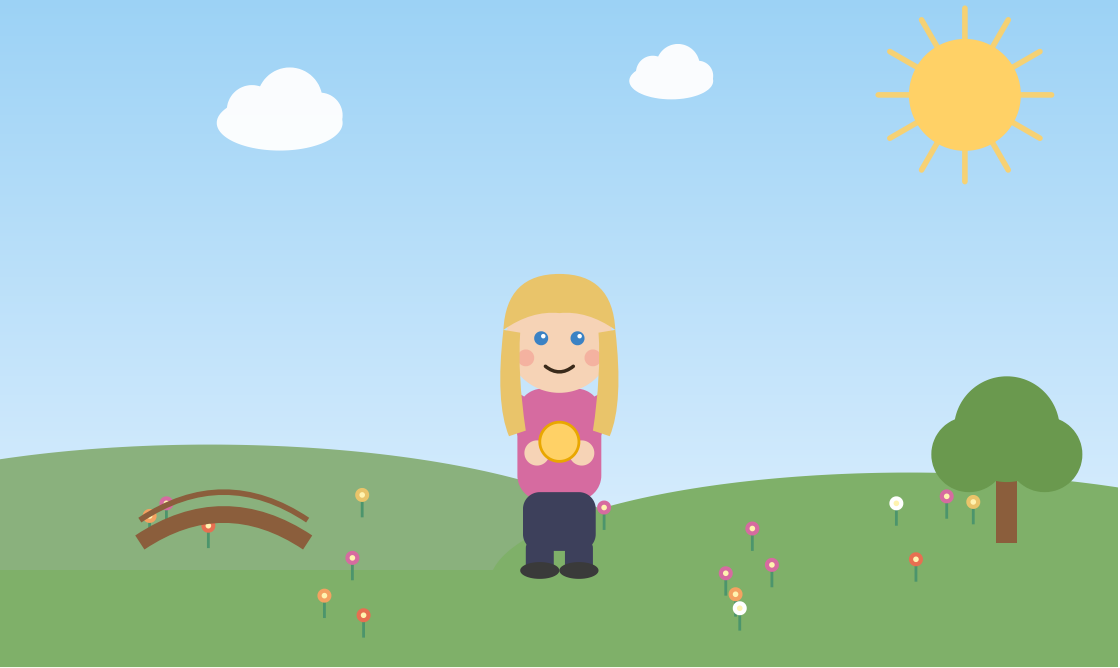
Through the glass it was enormous, like a red spotty umbrella. The ladybird was climbing a blade of grass like a mountain: slip, rest — and up again. The grass swayed under it. At the very top the ladybird opened its wings — whirr! — and flew away. “Did you see?” *Lily* whispered to the snails. The snails hadn’t. They were crawling. Another tiny step. But *Lily* was already looking for what came next.

Next came a drop of dew on a blade of grass. Round as a glass marble.

Inside was a rainbow, as small as a fingernail. And there was someone else in the drop: someone with a magnifying glass, in a leaf hat. *Lily* laughed: it was her! Then a grasshopper began to play its tiny fiddle: tring-tring-tring. Then an ant dragged a crumb past — bigger than the ant itself — and never dropped it once. *Lily* watched and watched — and forgot all about the race.

Strange: waiting wasn't boring any more. *Lily* stopped hurrying the snails and started telling them what was ahead: "A ladybird just flew off here. There's dew there — careful, it's wet." The snails waved their feelers — listening. The sun warmed her back, the grass smelled of honey, and time flowed slowly, like honey off a spoon. Unhurried minutes grow long, warm and interesting. Biscuit was dying to chase the snails. "Wait," said *Lily* — and Biscuit waited.

And here was the finish!



All four snails reached the chalk line at once, feelers to feelers. “Who’s first? Who’s first?” cried Fluff. She even stopped hopping. *Lily* bent down with the glass. And understood: Button could have come first. She’d been ahead all the way, but kept stopping to wait for the ones behind. “Medals for everyone!” *Lily* decided. “They came in together. So they won together.”

The medals were acorn caps on blades of grass instead of ribbons. Fluff put one on each snail. Button first.

Then she hung one more on *Lily*. “For waiting well,” she said. *Lily* touched the medal. It was bumpy, light and warm from the sun, like a real acorn. Luna the owl, keeper of the moons, has a saying: “Moons don’t run away.” Now *Lily* knew what it meant.

The sky rang: “Ting...” — very softly, as if the moon wasn’t in a hurry either. And slowly, slowly, like a snail at the finish, the ninth moon lit up. Going home could have been quicker. But *Lily* closed her eyes without rushing — so as not to miss anything. The medal went on the shelf by the window. On Luna the owl’s map, one more circle lit up, taking its time. And sleep came by itself — unhurried, like Button. Slowly, slowly, softly, softly...

The End



ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

If you can wait, you see more.

BEDTIME QUESTION

What interesting thing did you notice
once when you had to wait a long time?

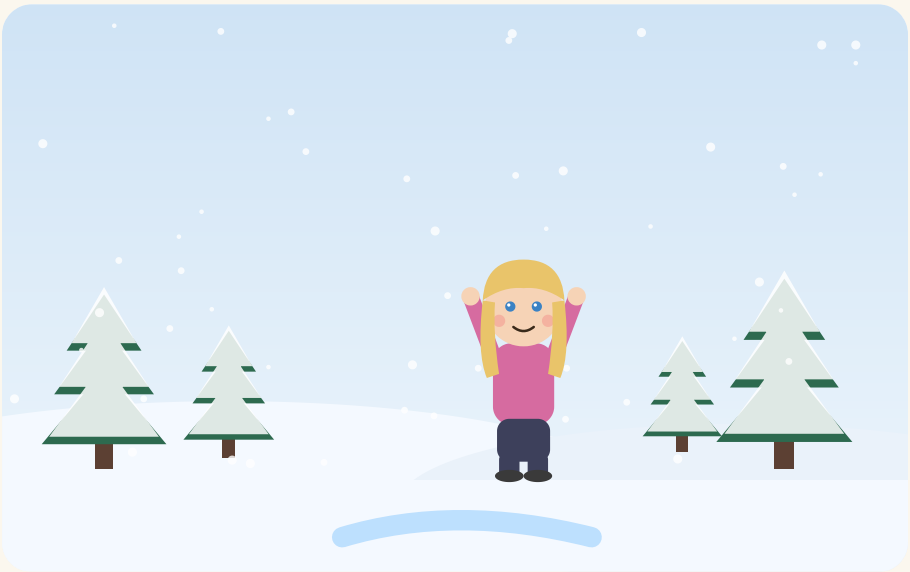


Keeper of the Winter Forest



That evening the key under the pillow hummed: “Mmmm...” — and for some reason it smelled of pine. It tugged her hand to the wall, and a little gold door appeared on the wallpaper. Knock, knock, knock. The door creaked, and three snowflakes flew into the room. Cold air blew in from behind the door, smelling of pine needles and orange peel. *Lily* pulled on a hat, wound on her stripy scarf, and stepped forward. The snow crunched underfoot like sugar in a sugar bowl.

On a snowy branch sat Luna the owl — white with frost, like a snowball with eyes. “Hoo-hoo. The winter forest needs a keeper. For one day. Will you do it?” She pinned a wooden badge on *Lily*, carved with a fir tree. It was light as a button and smelled of pine. But wearing it made you stand up straight, like a guard. Max came too: a second pair of hands. “Who will help the forest?” asked the owl. “I will!” said *Lily*. It just came out.



The first job came at once.

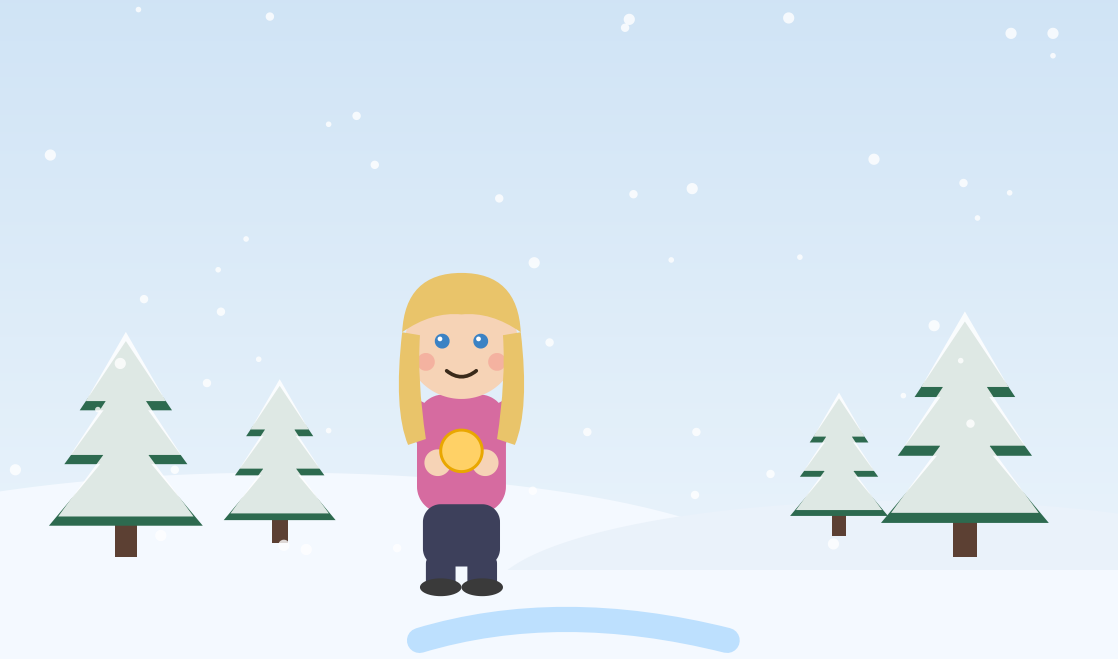
The stream had frozen, and the thirsty animals stood sadly on the bank: the deer licked the ice, a hare tapped it. Along flew Ember the little dragon, no bigger than your hand. “Hic! I can warm things! I’m a dragon! Well... a small one.” He breathed on a stone until it puffed steam. *Lily* picked up the hot stone in her mittens and put it on the ice. The ice sighed — hssss — and melted into a round little window.

Rusty the fox cub laid a path of fir branches to the water, so nobody would slip. The branches prickled and smelled like a holiday tree. The deer lined up. “After you,” bowed one. “No, no, after you,” bowed the other. They bowed for so long that the hare got a drink first. Rusty leaned over the water — and bump! — went nose-first into a snowdrift. He came up with a white beard. “Can I... be a grandpa now?” And Biscuit rolled in the snow like a dumpling in flour.



Something under a fir tree was shivering softly. A little deer! Legs like sticks, snowflakes on his lashes, wet eyes. He had fallen behind his mother and got lost. Who will help? — I will! *Lily* took off her stripy scarf and wrapped the little deer up to the ears. At once he stopped shivering. But now *Lily*'s neck was cold. Then Ember climbed onto her shoulder and curled around her neck like a warm collar. “Hic. Better?” Much better. The collar even snored a little.

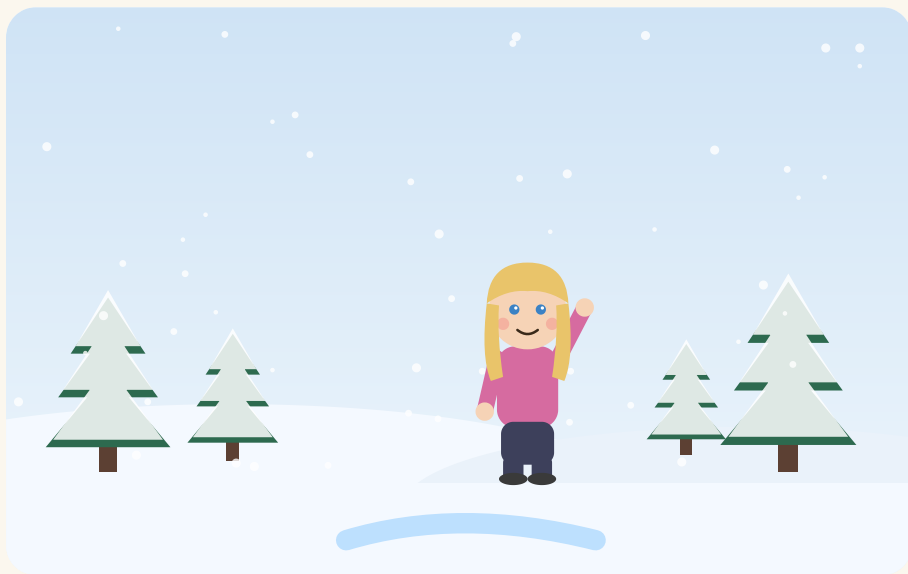
Now they had to find Mother Deer.



Rusty drew a map in the snow with a stick: here's the tree, here's the stream, here are the tracks. *Lily* crouched and looked carefully. Little tracks — the fawn's. And next to them, big ones, like halves of a heart. They went over the hill. "This way," *Lily* decided. Over the hill stood Mother Deer, calling softly. The little deer bounded over to her, scarf and all, like a present with a bow. Mother Deer breathed on *Lily*'s mittens — warm as an oven.

The third job was about tomorrow.

Birds go hungry in winter: seeds under snow, berries under snow, everything under snow. *Lily* gathered pine cones, spread them with honey and rolled them in seeds. Her fingers stuck together as if glued. Ember hiccuped with laughter; Rusty chose the branches. The cones went up on the branches, and soon the fir tree was cheeping. Bullfinches sat all over it, red as apples. It was a winter apple tree.



It got dark early. But the dark here was full of lights and friendly voices.

Along the path, snowy lights came on by themselves. Mother Deer and the fawn walked *Lily* to the little door. “The forest has said thank you already,” said Luna the owl, touching the badge. “Keep it.” In the frosty air came a “Ting!” — like icicle against icicle. The tenth moon was lit, white as fresh snow. At home the badge went on the shelf by the window. Outside, a seedy pine cone swung softly.

• ♦ •
The End

ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Caring is small things done with your hands.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Who did you take care of today — even a little,
even with one thing?

The City Where Dreams Hide

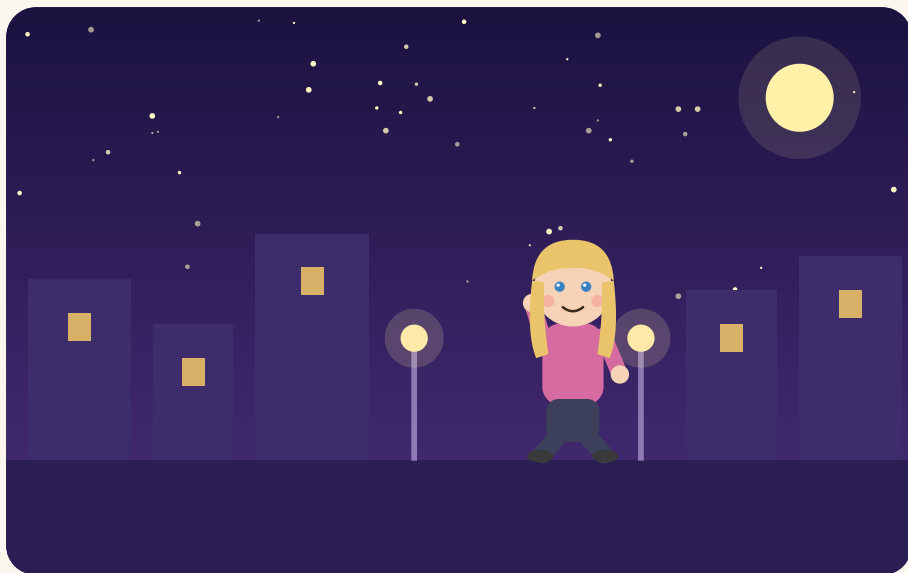


L*ily* just couldn't fall asleep. She turned onto her left side, then her right, then her back.

Thoughts bounced in her head like balls in a playground: about tomorrow, about yesterday, and about why cats have whiskers. The pillow was hot on both sides, the blanket was scrunched up, and one heel kept getting cold. Even the kitchen clock ticked too loudly. And the key under the pillow hummed very softly, as if afraid of waking someone: “Mmmm...”

The little door in the wall opened without a sound, as if it knew noise wasn't allowed. Behind it lay a street — cobbled, sleepy and very slow. The houses stood in nightcaps with tassels. SnORES drifted from the chimneys: one house snored deep and low, another with a whistle. The lanterns were dark. On a roof sat a cat, big and ginger, soft as a sofa cushion. The tip of his tail glowed like a candle wick. “Hush-hush... the lanterns are listening,” said Purr the lantern cat.

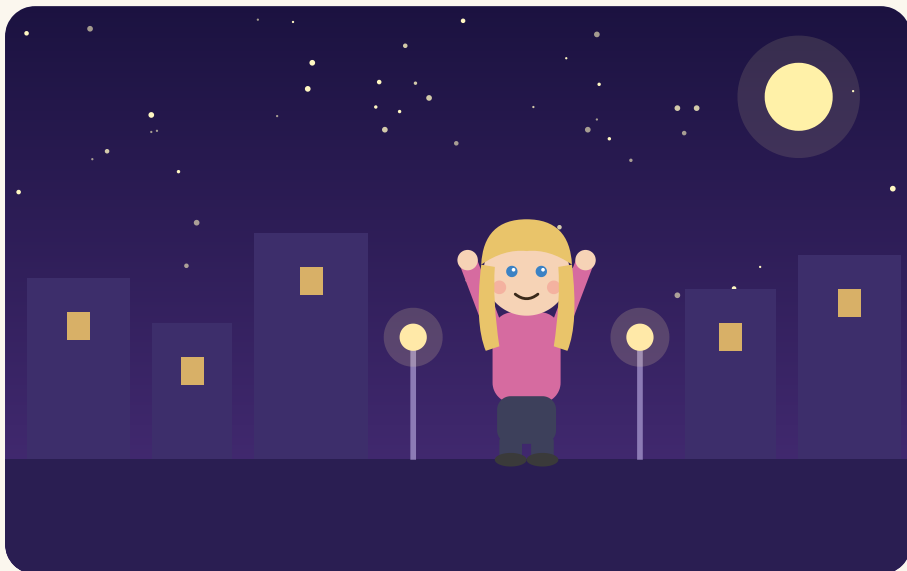
Lily ran across the street to him — and the nearest lantern shivered and dimmed. “Don't hurry,” said Purr. “Hurry puts lanterns out. Breathing lights them. In — like smelling a flower. Out — like blowing on a candle.” *Lily* stopped in the middle of the street. Breathed in — the air smelled of fresh laundry. Breathed out — slowly, slowly.



Purr touched a lantern with his tail, and it lit up, yellow and warm, like honey tea.

So they walked down the street. In — and a step. Out — and a new lantern. *Lily*'s steps grew slower and softer. The bouncy thoughts stopped bouncing. They rolled more quietly, more quietly — and curled up in a basket, like kittens. The street sloped gently downhill. The stones underfoot were warm as a stove. Lanterns lit up one after another, leaving a path of warm light behind.

Somewhere a doorbell tinkled softly, then went still.



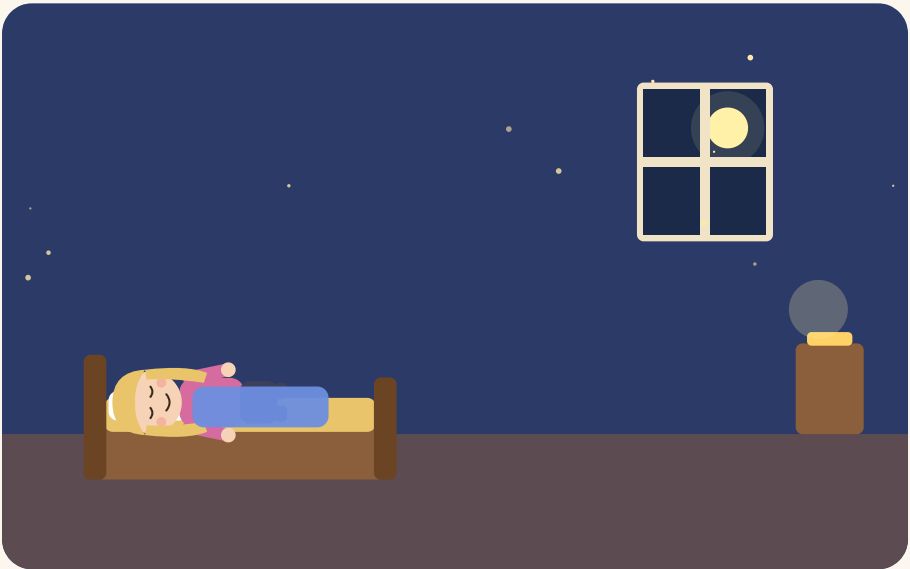
The street led to a little round square. There were shelves, and on the shelves were jars. Lots and lots of jars: round ones, tall ones like glasses, and tiny ones. They glowed faintly, like fireflies. *Lily* peeked into one — empty. Into another — empty too.

“Dreams aren’t given out here, mrrrr,” said Purr.

“You wish for them yourself. Think of something warm.” *Lily* sat down on a step and thought.

There were lots of good things. But you had to pick one.

And *Lily* picked. A warm towel after a bath. Rain on the window when you're at home, snug and dry. The jar grew warm in her hands. A light came on at the bottom. It rose slowly, like milk in a pan, right up to the brim. High in the sky came a soft "ting", like a spoon in a glass. The eleventh moon was lit. Purr nodded, his tail-tip glowing steady.



Lily held the jar in both hands, carefully, like a baby bird. Purr led the way back.

His tail glowed ahead like a little candle. They walked slowly, step by step. The cobbles were smooth and warm. Behind them the lanterns went out, one, then another. Softly, without a click. As if falling asleep. The houses in nightcaps snored more and more quietly. Here's the little door. Here's the rug. One step.

Here's the bed. The pillow, cool side up. The blanket, soft and warm. The jar stands on the windowsill. It glows, just a little. Biscuit is snuffling at your feet. The thoughts are lying in their basket. The key under the pillow is quiet. Eyes heavy. Hands warm, feet warm. In — like smelling a flower. Out — like blowing on a candle. Outside, the moon. It dims by itself, like a night-light before sleep. Quiet. Even quieter. Sleep has come. It's here. Goodnight, *Lily*.

The End



ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

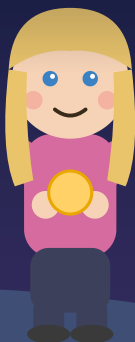
*Calm breathing in and out leads to good
dreams.*

BEDTIME QUESTION

What warm memory would you put in
your jar tonight?



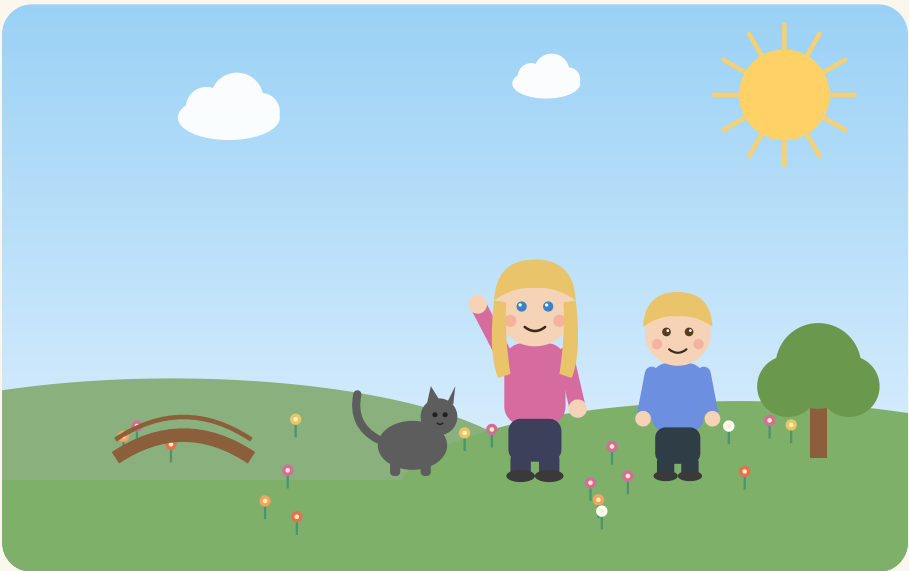
The Great Journey Home



That evening the key hummed in a special way, like a kettle before a party. The little door opened on the first knock. Warm grass rustled underfoot, and it smelled of honey. By the Moon Tower, which looked like a lighthouse, waited Luna the owl. “Hoo-hoo. This moon is the hardest,” she said. “It lights up when someone shows the Land what home is.” And she held out a lantern — glass, light and empty.

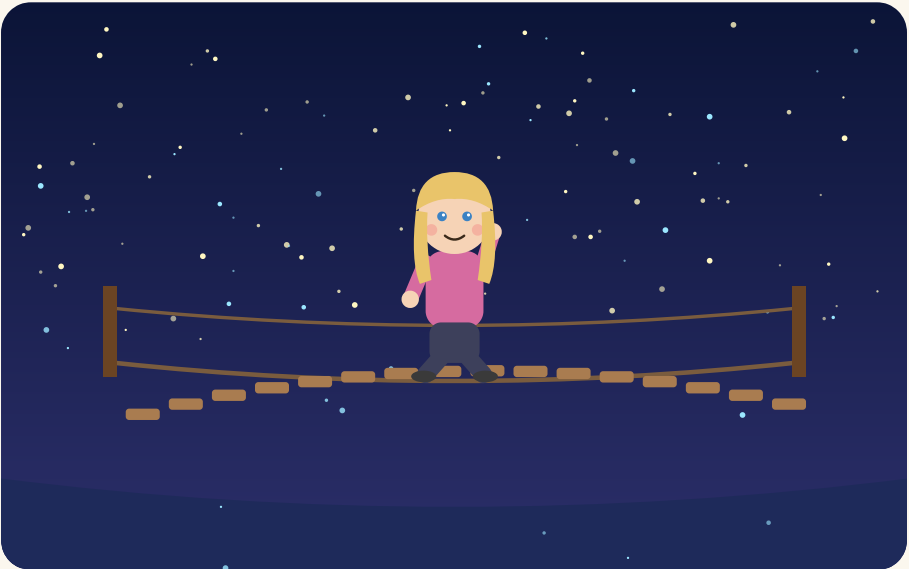
“This lantern doesn’t light with matches,” the owl explained.

“It lights with memories. And everyone has come to see you off.” For now the lantern was cold, like a glass of water. First to run up was Ember, the little dragon who used to be afraid of the dark. He held a spark in his paws. “I’m still a tiny bit scared of the dark,” he said. “But now I know: I can be a light for someone.” The spark jumped into the lantern, and the lantern lit up.



Rusty the fox cub, who used to only whisper, held out a paper.

It was a map of the way home, with paths and a little bridge. “I drew it myself!” he said loudly, with no “...” at all. Everyone turned. Rusty didn’t even hide his nose. Bip the robot rolled up with a list, “Things to Take”: lantern, socks, honey. And the last item was a name — *Lily*. “That is not a fact,” said Bip. “That is a feeling.” The lights on his chest turned pink.



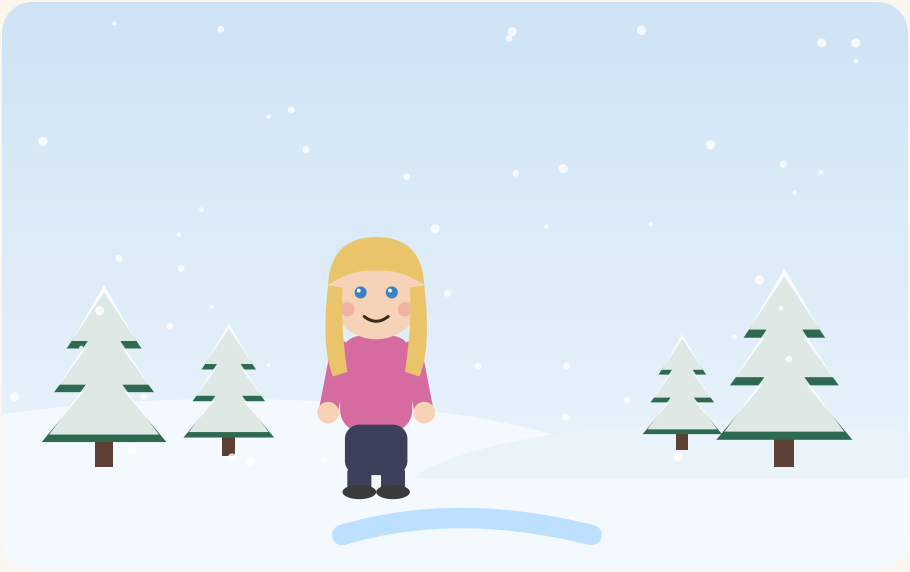
Puff the cloud floated up quietly. “I’m clear today, with a touch of sadness. Here.”

And it gave *Lily* a piece of shade, cool as the other side of the pillow. “For when everything is too much: too bright and too loud.” Otto the octopus held out a pearl that sang, and said: “Sorry.”

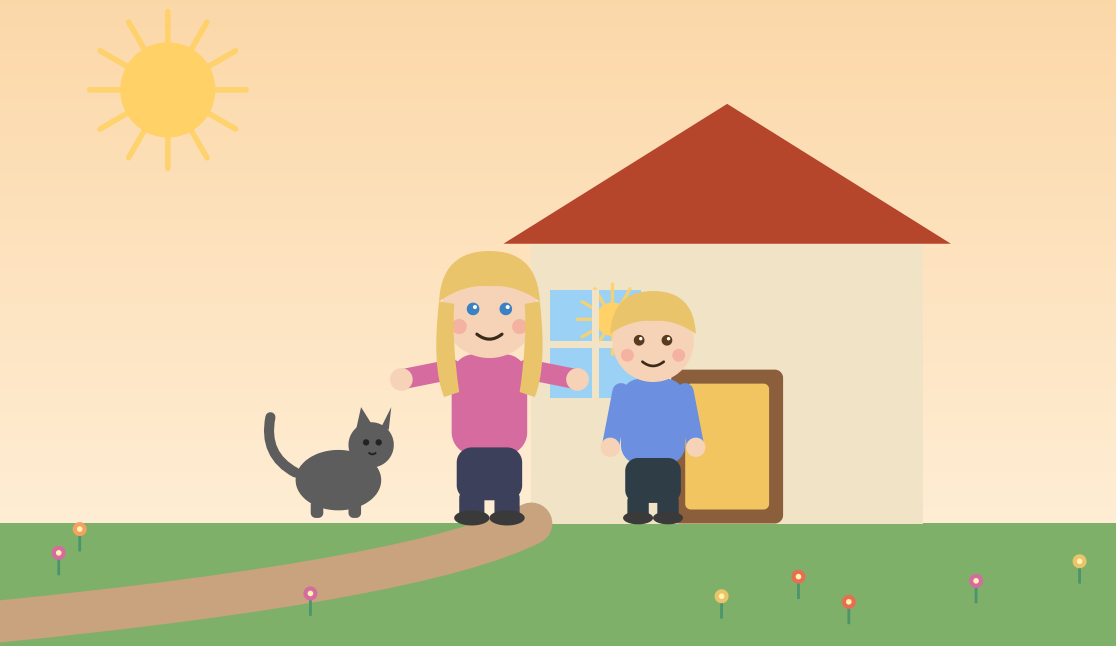
Everyone froze. They were waiting for seven more sorries, one for each arm. But he didn’t say any more. He just smiled, and let out a shy little cloud of ink, as if he were blushing.

Zuzu the bee brought a jar with the label “Honey for the Way Home”. “Z-z-splendid! It’s all written down!” Purr the lantern cat gave a new wick for the lantern and said the shortest thing of all: “Mrrr. Time.” Last came Fluff the hare, the fastest messenger in the Land. She held out a letter. It had just four words in it: “We’re waiting for you.” *Lily* held the letter close. It was warm, as if someone had only just been holding it. Home is where they wait for me.

They all set off together.



Through the Rustling Wood, where the leaves whispered goodbye. Over the meadow, soft as a rug. And down to the river of stars, where stars floated like dumplings in soup and chimed softly: “Tink.” On the bridge the wind was blowing. Everyone held on to each other — paws, tails and arms. *Lily* and Max held hands. “One, two, three — here I go!” laughed *Lily*. Those words always help when you’re scared. And right now it was just fun. On the far bank a storm blew up. The wind howled — whoo-oosh!



— and blew the lantern out. Dark. So *Lily* closed her eyes and began to remember. Her own bed, the cool side of the pillow. The shelf of little treasures. The key that hums “mmmm”. Biscuit waiting at the door. With every memory the lantern glowed brighter: a blink, then a steady light, then a bright one. And the storm gave up.

When *Lily* opened her eyes, a house stood in the middle of the Land. Her very own house, with her window and her curtain. The windows glowed, and the door smelled of supper.

At the door stood the ones who love her. “Hoo-hoo. You didn’t come home,” said Luna the owl. “Home came for you.” The sky rang: “Ting!” The twelfth moon is lit! And all twelve shone out — in a ring, like a clock that says “home”.



Luna the owl gave *Lily* the key. “For keeps. The door opens both ways. It always could.”

“I learned from you too,” she added. The friends waved: “See you soon!” Not “goodbye”, but “see you soon”. Otto waved all eight arms and didn’t say sorry once. *Lily* woke up in her own bed. The key lay on the pillow, warm. On the shelf, everything glowed at once. A whole land of friends — behind one little door.

• ♦ •
The End

ONE THOUGHT FOR TONIGHT

Home is the people who love you, wherever you are.

BEDTIME QUESTION

Who would you think of to light your lantern again?



Good night, *Lily!*



This book was *made especially* for Lily