



A BEDTIME STORY ABOUT

Theo and the Night Light

For Theo, from Mum and Dad. Mr Buttons appears by kind permission.



Written only from what Hannah told us about Theo.



The duck who knocked

Actually, this story starts with a knock.

Not on the front door. On the window. Theo was in bed with Mr Buttons tucked under his chin, one short ear and one long ear pointing at the ceiling, when something went tap, tap, tap on the glass.

He sat up. Outside, on the window ledge, stood a duck. A proper canal duck, brown and neat, with a yellow safety helmet on her head. The helmet was far too big and had slid down over one eye.

“Evening,” said the duck. “Are you Theo? The one who builds the duck hotels?”

Theo nodded. Priya helped, but he did most of the roof.

“Good,” said the duck. “Because we have a problem on the canal, and I was told to fetch a builder.”



CHAPTER 2

The problem on the canal

The problem, it turned out, was the night light.

“You know the big round one,” said the duck, whose name was Marjorie. “Up there. It's gone out.”

Theo looked past her. She was right. The sky above the canal was the colour of a blackboard and the moon was simply not there.

“The ducklings can't sleep without it,” Marjorie said. “Nor can the heron, and when the heron can't sleep nobody can. We need somebody to go up and fix it, and everybody knows that if a thing needs fixing you fetch a digger, and if you need a digger you fetch Theo.”

This was, Theo felt, exactly right.

He put on his wellies over his pyjamas. He put Mr Buttons in the front pocket of his dressing gown, ears out so he could see. Then he climbed onto the window ledge, and Marjorie said “Hold on to the helmet,” and they were off, down past the bins and along the towpath to where the water was.



The hallway

Now, to get to the moon you have to go the long way, and the long way goes through the dark bit.

Not the hallway at home, the one between Theo's room and the bathroom. A different dark bit, under the canal bridge, where the towpath goes black for about eleven steps.

Theo stopped at the edge of it.

“Actually,” he said, “I don't really do dark bits.”

Marjorie took off her helmet, turned it upside down, and shook it. Out fell a torch, two flapjacks wrapped in paper, and a very small spade.

“Grandma Jo sent these,” said the duck. “She said you'd be hungry, and she said the torch is for the dark bit, and she said to tell you the dark bit is the same towpath as the light bit, just with the lamps off.”

Theo thought about this. He ate half a flapjack. He gave the other half to Mr Buttons, who did not eat it, so Theo ate that too.

Then he switched on the torch and walked eleven steps, counting out loud, and on step twelve he was out the other side and the ducklings cheered.

The digger

On the far bank, waiting in the reeds, was the digger.

It was yellow. Of course it was yellow. It had a scoop at the front the size of a bath and treads instead of wheels, and when Theo climbed into the seat the seat was exactly his size, which is how you know a digger is yours.

“Where is the moon, though?” he asked.

“Fell in,” said Marjorie. “Rolled off its hook and went plop. It's at the bottom by the lock, and it has gone out because moons do not like being wet.”

So Theo drove the digger very slowly to the edge of the lock, and lowered the scoop, and felt around in the dark water the way you feel for a sock under the bed. Something round and heavy and cold rolled into the scoop.

He lifted. Up it came, dripping and grey and about the size of a space hopper. The moon, with weed on it.

“Right,” said Theo. “Towel.”

The night light

There was no towel. There was, however, Mr Buttons, who was very soft and had been washed so many times he was practically a towel already.

Theo rubbed the moon dry with the rabbit. He rubbed the top and the sides and the bit underneath, and where he rubbed, the moon began to glow, faint at first, then yellow, then the proper silver-white of a night light left on a hand's width through the door.

“Actually,” said Theo, “it just needed drying.”

The digger raised its scoop as high as it would go. Marjorie flew up with the hook in her beak. Together they hung the moon back on the sky, and the canal went bright all along its length, and the ducklings fell asleep in a row, and somewhere in the reeds the heron said thank you in a very deep voice.

Then Marjorie flew Theo home, along the towpath, past the bins, in through the window, and he got into bed with his wellies off and his rabbit in and his door open a hand's width.

“Three books, the bear song, and the moon,” said Mum from the doorway, who had noticed nothing at all. “Night, Theo.”

“Night,” said Theo. “Actually, Mum, the moon is mostly dry now.”



“Good,” said Mum. “I’m glad.”

And outside, on the window ledge, a very small yellow helmet sat where a duck had left it, which Dad found in the morning and could not explain.

The end.