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Mister Moony

Katy had lived all of her life in an apartment. Just before her fourth birthday, she was told that the family was moving from the city to a town; and their new home would be a proper house. “Does that mean we’ll have a garden?” she was eager to know.

Her mother smiled and nodded. “Quite a big one,” she replied, “With grass and flowers and lots of trees. You’ll have plenty of room to play.”

“And then can I have a puppy?” asked Katy excitedly. “You said I couldn’t before because there was nowhere for it to run; but if the garden’s as big as you say...” Looking up into her mother’s eyes, the little girl was sure she could see a twinkle; and the smile seemed to have widened. “Can I? Can I?”

“Why don’t we wait until we’ve moved into the new house,” her mother said, “Then we’ll see.”

The moving couldn’t come soon enough for Katy, and the waiting for it was even worse than when they were going somewhere in the car and hadn’t arrived yet. Then, after the furniture had been loaded into a big truck and the apartment was empty, they were ready to leave. For some strange reason, Katy felt sad. She stood in the doorway and looked one last time into the bedroom she had known for so long and had never really taken much notice of until that moment. “Bye, bye bedroom,” she whispered. Feeling that she was about to cry, she blinked hard and hurried away.

The drive was a long one, but for once Katy didn’t mind. It was like an adventure, a journey to a mystery land that promised to be so, so good. As they headed out of the city, she nudged her brother who was sitting next to her. “Look Sean – the big buildings have stopped and there are just little houses.” Sean merely grunted and carried on tapping the screen of his iPad. Katy frowned. “Why are you always playing that silly thing? There’s lots to see. Aren’t you a bit interested?” Her brother grunted again which probably meant he didn’t care about anything other than his game. “Suit

yourself,” grumbled Katy, “When you have show-and-tell at your new school, you won’t have anything to show and tell about.”

After a short stretch of countryside, the houses started again and they were driving down a main street. “This is it, folks,” said her father, “Our new town.” As they were passing a collection of shops and arcades, her mother added: “And this will be our new shopping centre.” It was certainly smaller than the ones Katy had been to in the city, but somehow the shops seemed more friendly and she liked it. There was something, though, that worried her a bit. She was beginning to imagine that their house would be like those she had seen on the drive – small ones, lined up in rows along the streets; with neat, tidy gardens and fences at the front. In truth, they all looked pretty much the same, quite boring really, and she was thinking that maybe the new house wouldn’t be as grand as she had been led to believe. She soon changed her mind as they left the town behind and were winding their way along a narrow country road.

The car stopped momentarily just before a wide driveway lined with trees. A wooden sign on a brick pillar said: Carver’s Retreat. “Welcome to our new home,” announced her father. “I have no idea who Carver was, but he certainly knew how to live very comfortably, as I’m sure we will.”

In Katy’s eyes, the house was everything that had been promised and more; and the garden was truly amazing. There were so many trees that nothing could be seen beyond. It was as if they had come into their very own private world. Even Sean had started to take notice. “That would be a great one to climb,” he said, indicating a huge tree with many twisting and tangled branches. “And the house is actually pretty neat, like Hogwarts nearly. I bet there are secret passages and stuff.”

His little sister wasn’t too sure what he meant, and she didn’t know Hogwarts; but the thought of secret passages sounded a bit magical and scary. Sean said they were cool, and you could use them to go from one room to another without being seen. Katy didn’t know why anyone would want to do that; and if there were entrances to any secret passages leading from her room, she would definitely not be using them. Having made up her mind about that, true or not, while she was watching the furniture being put in her new bedroom, she couldn’t help looking at the walls and hoping that there wasn’t a secret door somewhere. One wall in particular looked suspicious, so she asked for a wardrobe to be stood against it, just in case. The last thing she wanted was Sean sneaking into her room in the middle of the night and frightening her.

As it happened, her brother wasn’t the problem. Spending the first night in her new bedroom was creepy. Sounds were different to the apartment; not only outside as the wind moaned and rustled the trees; but the house itself made noises. The creaks and groans kept her awake, and Katy was tempted to go to her parents’ room for

reassurance. Instead, she went to see Sean. “There’s nothing to be scared of,” he said, “You’ll soon get used to it.” Katy supposed he was right. Being four years older, he knew things she didn’t. All the same, she wasn’t absolutely convinced as she went back to her room.

She wasn’t there long before she had rushed back to her brother. “There’s a man outside,” she said breathlessly, “And he’s looking through my window at me!” Sean grumbled at first, not really believing her; then he grudgingly climbed out of bed and followed his sister back to her room. Katy paused in the doorway. “You go in first,” she said, “I know he’s still looking. I can see the light shining from his face.”

There was certainly a glow that lit up the room, and it was coming through the window. Sean strode over to it and pulled the curtains aside. “That’s not a man,” he declared with a small chuckle, “It’s the moon.” Katy was standing behind him, peering at the round, shiny light in the sky beyond her window. “It’s nothing to be afraid of,” continued her brother, “The moon’s out there most nights, and it hasn’t hurt you yet, has it?”

“Well, no, I suppose not,” admitted Katy, “But if it’s there most nights, how come I’ve never seen it before?”

“Because you’ve only ever lived in the city. The buildings there are too tall to see it properly; and your old room faced the wrong way.”

There was a sound in the hallway behind the children, and their parents entered. “What are you two doing up so late?” asked their father. When Sean explained about the moon, their mother said: “Sean’s right, Katy. There’s nothing to be scared of. Tell you what – come with me and we’ll go say hello to Mister Moony.”

Katy scowled at her brother. “You said the moon wasn’t a man; but Mum called him “Mister” and Mister is a man; so you told a fib.”

“Did not,” claimed Sean.

“Did so,” challenged Katy.

Their mother put up with the bickering until they were walking out into the garden; and that seemed to make Katy go suddenly quiet. She stood gazing up with her mouth open. “There he is,” said her mother, “Say hello to Mister Moony. He won’t do you any harm. In fact, he’s up there to watch over you and keep you safe.”

Katy was puzzled. “If he is actually a man, why does he shine? Dad doesn’t.”

“No, but Mister Moony is like a night-watchman,” explained her mother, “And he doesn’t just shine for you: there are lots of creatures that only come out at night, and they need to see where they are going. Mister Moony lights their way and looks after them too.”

Just then, there was an eerie hooting sound that caused Katy to grab hold of her mother’s dressing gown. Even Sean seemed a little scared until their mother explained

it was just an owl. "It's one of those creatures Mister Moony takes care of. He's a very kind moon, so let's say goodnight to him and leave him to do his job."

After that, Katy slept well at night, although she never went to sleep before saying a few words to Mister Moony. One evening in particular, she talked for longer than usual because she was excited. "It's my birthday in five days and I've asked for a puppy. If you truly are my friend, do you think you could ask Mum and Dad pretty please for one?" Katy never heard his reply, but when her birthday finally arrived, she was sure he had passed on her wishes to her parents.

Her present wasn't the wrapped kind. It was in a basket in the laundry, a tiny puppy with big brown eyes; and its black fur stuck out all over the place, so Katy decided to call him Scruff. When she asked if she could take him out to show him the garden, her father said: "Not yet. We'll keep him in the house for a few days until he gets used to it, then you can take him outside."

"But," added her mother, "You will have to keep a close watch on him, Katy. Everything will be strange for him at first, and puppies have a habit of running off. He might get lost." Katy could see the sense in that. Scruff was so small, and the garden would look huge in his eyes. Still, it would be worth waiting those few days; then the two of them could have some real fun together.

Once the time was up and Scruff was allowed out, they truly did have fun. They raced and chased, hid and seeked; although Scruff cheated most of the time; but then he was only young and didn't know any better. Katy was, however, annoyed when he bit the ear off one of her soft toys. Then she noticed how Scruff seemed to favour it and left all the other ones alone. So, she gave it to him and, funnily enough, he never did it any more damage; just slept with it in his basket as his new friend – the cute puppy and a fluffy panda minus one ear.

Each evening followed the same routine. Katy had to take Scruffy out into the garden so that he could go to the toilet before bed; and, as her older brother, Sean went with her to watch over them both. Unfortunately, he would take his iPad with him and was playing his game, not taking any notice of the other two. His gaze jerked up from the screen when he heard Katy cry out: "Scruff's gone! Did you see where he went?"

Naturally, Sean hadn't seen a thing, and all Katy knew was that Scruff had suddenly rushed off into the trees. "He probably heard something," he suggested, "Maybe a rabbit and went chasing it."

"Well, we have to find him!" said Katy desperately, "If we don't, we're in big trouble."

"He's your dog," argued Sean, "Why is it my problem?"

"Because you were supposed to be looking after us."

Unable to deny the facts, Sean started off into the trees with Katy close behind. They called the puppy's name, but he didn't come. Deeper into the wooded area they went until it was becoming too dark to see. "If only the moon was up," said Sean, "We'd be able to see where we were going."

"There can be," said Katy, sounding as if the answer suddenly seemed so obvious. "I'll go and ask Mister Moony to light up the woods."

Sean pointed up into the sky. "He's not there, Katy. Some nights he doesn't come."

"He is here," declared his sister positively, "I've seen him."

"You can't have," insisted her brother. "Look for yourself – there are only stars, but no moon."

"Not in the sky, silly," said Katy, frowning with her hands on her hips. "Even when he's not in the sky, Mister Moony is swimming in the fish pond. Didn't you know that? Honestly, for someone who's supposed to be older and smarter, you really are dumb sometimes, Sean."

On their way to the fish pond, Sean was trying to tell his sister that Mister Moony wasn't a person. He was a story character their parents had made up so that she wouldn't be afraid of the moon. "I know you're wrong," insisted Katy, "Mister Moony's real – I talk to him every night."

"And does he talk back?" asked her brother; starting to get annoyed.

"It doesn't work like that," explained Katy, "He doesn't need to talk; but I know he listens. You'll see in a minute."

Sean was still sure he was right; but as they approached the pond, he was starting to doubt himself. There certainly seemed to be a glow coming from the pond. A little closer and he had stopped in his tracks. Glowing from the surface of the water was the moon. It seemed bigger than it should have been. In fact – and he looked up into the dark sky where there were only stars to be seen – it shouldn't have been there at all!

Katy noticed her brother was standing back and said: "Come closer. Mister Moony won't bite: he's our friend; and I know he can help us to find Scruff." She turned towards the white face shining on the water and said: "Where has Scruff gone, Mister Moony? Please show us where he is."

After a moment's silence, Sean said, a little sadly because he would have liked to believe his sister: "He can't answer, Katy. He's just a reflection; no different to the one you see of yourself when you look in your mirror."

"I told you he doesn't speak," she stated positively, "Not in words; but look over there at the back of the pond." She was referring to a glow which seemed to be flowing from the moon's reflection, across the water and up onto the bank on the far side. "Come on. We have to follow it."

Sean was speechless. What he was seeing was impossible; but it was happening; and he was thinking that maybe a little of the Harry Potter stories might be true after all. With the two children hurrying behind, the strange glow led them into the forest of trees, along narrow winding paths to the furthest point that even Sean hadn't been. "I don't believe this," he was saying.

"Shush!" ordered his sister, "Listen. I can hear Scruff."

So they listened; and in the quiet of the night they heard a faint whimpering. As they came closer to it, the sound became louder until they were right next to a large bush. There was Scruff, caught in the middle of its spiky leaves, unable to move.

It took the two of them a while to free the puppy from the bush. Katy held Scruff closely as they made their way back to the house; and she was a little surprised when they didn't go straight home. Sean said he needed to go to the pond. Walking to the bank, he looked down at the glowing reflection. "Sorry I doubted you, Mister Moony. And thank you. You truly are a cool dude." He turned to Katy. "And if you're wondering," he added with a grin, "Yes, I do believe in Mister Moony. After what I've seen tonight, I really would be dumb not to."