



The Saffron-Backpack Badger

Percy pressed both paws against the bright brass button at the bus stop. Far down the cobbled lane, the Number Seven bus was rolling past the mushroom clock tower. Its silver bell went ding-ding, and Percy's tummy gave a much smaller, wobblier ding. Today he was riding to the library by himself.

His mother stood beside him under the blue stop sign, holding the library book Percy had chosen for return. He tucked it into his saffron-yellow backpack, next to his apple core for later. Then she handed him a square route card. On one side was a picture of the grand library entrance. On the other were three round numbers: 1 Fern Gate, 2 Clock Pond, 3 Library.

“Three stops,” Percy said, though the words felt much bigger than three.

“You know what to do if you feel muddled,” his mother said. Percy did know. He could look at the next number, listen for the stop name, and keep his card in his paw. At the library entrance, she would be waiting after walking there by the flower-market path. Percy nodded, but he held the card so tightly that its corners bent.

The bus sighed to the curb. Its door folded open like two shiny beetle wings. Percy climbed aboard, showed the driver his route card, and said, “Library, please.” The driver, a broad old tortoise in a navy cap, smiled from behind the wheel. “Three stops, young badger. I call every one.” Percy chose a window seat with a red cushion and waved as the bus pulled away.

At first, riding was splendid. The bus glided over a bridge where goldfish-shaped clouds drifted below. It passed a bakery whose chimney puffed cinnamon-colored bubbles. Then the bus rattled through a tunnel of tall hedge arches, and every sound changed at once. Wheels clacked. A baby griffin chirped. Someone’s umbrella snapped shut. Percy could not tell how far they had gone.



His paws began to prickle. What if Fern Gate had already gone by? What if the library stop came while he was staring at the bubbles on the window? He nearly stood up to ask the driver, but then he saw the bent corner of his card. Percy flattened it carefully against his knee. “One first,” he whispered.

The bus slowed beside an arch braided with ferns. The driver called, “Stop one, Fern Gate!” Percy touched the big 1 with one claw. A family of moles got off carrying a basket of purple turnips, and the doors closed again. Percy breathed out. One was not a mystery anymore. One was done.

Between the next stops, the road curled around Clock Pond. Enormous lily-pad ferries bobbed there, each with a bell on its mast. Their bells rang across the water, almost like the bus bell, and Percy’s ears twitched. For one jumpy moment, he wondered whether that meant they should get off. Then he looked down at his card. The next number was 2. He listened for the driver’s voice, not the pond bells.

“Stop two, Clock Pond!” called the driver. Percy tapped the 2. Now only 3 remained. He sat taller in the red seat. When the bus turned past a row of stone book-shaped houses, he opened his backpack just enough to check that the library book was still there. Its green cover winked up at him. He zipped the bag shut and listened even more carefully.



Ahead stood a tall building with arched windows like open pages. But the bus had not stopped yet. Percy's heart gave one eager thump. He did not rush to the door. He held his card, waited for the bus to slow, and listened. "Stop three," said the driver warmly. "Library!" Percy touched the 3, pulled the cord, and when the doors opened, climbed down at the familiar stop sign.





His mother was waiting by the library entrance, just as she had said, with a grin as wide as the front steps. Percy hurried to her and lifted his route card. “I did one, then two, then three,” he said. “And I listened to the driver, even when the pond bells were noisy.”

Inside, Percy slipped the green library book into the return slot. It disappeared with a gentle thump. Then he chose a new book about a moon that kept losing its hat. He tucked it into his saffron-yellow backpack, where the route card rested safely beside it.

Before they went in among the shelves, Percy looked once through the tall glass doors at the Number Seven bus rolling away. It did not seem quite so enormous now. It was simply a bus with stops, names, and a friendly voice. Percy gave the little card one proud pat and followed his mother into the library.



Good night.

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After the story

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Percy takes his first solo bus ride to the library, using his route card and listening carefully at each stop. This gentle evening tale celebrates growing confidence and the comfort of a loving reunion.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

Percy soon discovers that the moon-hat book has a library map tucked between its pages.

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A watercolor illustration of a badger with black and white fur, looking out from behind a bookshelf. The background shows a library with various books, a clock, and a window with a plant.

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7 minutes of reading

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