



Nora Makes a Goodnight Circle

“Mum!” called Nora, sitting bolt upright beneath her soft blanket. Her bedroom was dark except for a thin stripe of hallway light under the door. “My wardrobe has grown a giant arm!”

Mum came in wearing her blue dressing gown and knelt beside Nora’s bed. She switched on the little night-light, which made a round yellow moon on the wall. The giant arm became Nora’s cardigan, dangling from the wardrobe handle. Nora giggled, though only a tiny bit. Mum tucked the blanket under Nora’s chin, kissed her forehead, and left the bedroom door open a hand’s width.

Nora hugged her patchwork blanket and listened. Click! Something sounded from inside the wall. “Mum!” That was Call Number Two. Mum explained that the radiator was cooling down after warming the room. “It is making its bedtime stretches,” she said. Nora tried a stretch too, toes pointing under the blanket. Then Mum gave another kiss and stepped back into the hallway.



For a little while, Nora watched the yellow moon from her night-light. Then the door made a very small creeeeak. “Mum!” Call Number Three. Mum pushed the door gently until it rested against Nora’s red doorstop, shaped like a sleepy ladybird. “The door wants to stay here,” said Mum. “It will not sneak shut.” Nora inspected the ladybird with one finger and nodded.



Mum had barely reached the hall rug when Nora heard a soft thump from under her bed. “Mum!” Call Number Four. Together they looked, with Mum holding the night-light’s glow close by. A wooden block had rolled from Nora’s building basket and bumped the skirting board. Nora put it back herself, right in the middle of the basket, where it could not make any more surprises.

Next came a flickering shadow on the ceiling. It bobbed. It stretched. It looked, Nora thought, exactly like a wiggling octopus in a hat. “Mum!” Call Number Five. Mum lifted the corner of Nora’s blanket. The shadow wiggled too. “Oh,” said Nora. She waved the blanket once, watched the octopus wave its eight pretend arms, then tucked the blanket firmly around her legs. “No more dancing blanket,” she told it.



Nora tried shutting her eyes. From the hallway came a tiny clink-clink. “Mum!” Call Number Six. Mum showed her the hallway shelf, where the house keys swung after the front door had been closed downstairs. They were settling against their hook. Nora watched until they stopped. “The keys are going to sleep before me,” she said. “They are very fast sleepers.”





Back in bed, Nora had an idea. “I need a guard,” she said. Mum did not fetch one. “What could be a guard?” she asked. Nora chose her round pillow first and stood it against the wall. Then she set her picture book beside it, cover facing out. Her blue stuffed rabbit, Hops, went at the foot of the bed. “Guard pillow. Guard book. Guard Hops,” said Nora. This seemed excellent until Hops slowly tipped over with a plop.

“Mum!” Call Number Seven. Nora pointed at Hops, who was now upside down with his long ears on the floor. Mum bit her lip to keep from laughing. “Is he defeated?” Nora asked. “He may be doing a headstand,” said Mum. Nora picked Hops up and made him sit beside her pillow instead. “Guard Hops needs to sit down,” she decided.





Nora lay back, but the dark corner by the wardrobe still looked enormous. “Mum!” Call Number Eight. Mum came to the doorway, but Nora held up her hand. “Wait. I will try.” She pulled the night-light a little nearer with its safe little base, until its yellow moon shone across the floor. The corner became a corner again, with her cardigan and her socks basket. “Not enormous,” Nora said. “Just cluttery.”





A floorboard gave a low groan in the hallway. “Mum!” Call Number Nine. Mum was already close. “That was me shifting my feet,” she said. Nora listened to Mum’s slippers shuffle once, then stop. The house did make noises. Mum made noises. Nora made noises too, especially when she swallowed or scratched her nose. She was thinking about this when a car passed far away and a pale line of light slid across her ceiling.

“Mum!” said Nora for the tenth time. Mum came in and sat on the floor beside the bed. Nora’s face was worried, but not as worried as before. “I keep needing you,” she whispered. Mum looked around the room. “I do leave the bedroom,” she said, “but what stays?” Nora looked. Her soft blanket stayed. Her yellow night-light stayed. Hops stayed sitting up. Her book stayed. The ladybird held the door open, and Mum’s voice was only just beyond it.





Nora climbed out of bed and made a circle all by herself. She laid the blanket around her pillow like a soft nest. Hops sat on one side. The picture book went on the other. The night-light made its yellow moon at the circle's edge. "These are my goodnight things," Nora said. Mum helped smooth one blanket corner, but Nora chose where every other thing belonged. Then she climbed back into the middle.

Mum tucked Nora in, kissed her forehead, and gave the blanket one gentle pat. "Goodnight, Nora." "Goodnight, Mum," said Nora. Mum stepped into the hallway, leaving the door open its hand's width. Nora could see the ladybird, the yellow moon, and Hops's ears beside her pillow. The dark parts of the room were still there, but they looked like places where familiar things were resting.





Nora listened once more. The radiator clicked. A key gave the tiniest clink. Somewhere, Mum's slipper brushed the hall rug. Inside her goodnight circle, Nora pulled the blanket snug beneath her chin. "Everybody is here," she murmured. Her eyes closed before she could count another call.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Nora learns that each mysterious bedtime sound has an ordinary, comforting source. With Mum close by, she makes a circle of familiar goodnight things and settles safely to sleep.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

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

AND TOMORROW...

The next evening, Nora wonders whether her goodnight circle can help a visiting cousin sleep in the guest room.





Nora Makes a Goodnight Circle

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8 minutes of reading



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