



Five Stars for Snuffle

Snuffle the hedgehog planted his counting pebble on a flat patch of earth beside his grassy nest. It was smooth, round, and blue-grey, with one white stripe that looked like a tiny grin. Above him, the first star had winked awake. "One," said Snuffle. He nudged the pebble forward with his nose. Tonight, before he climbed into bed, he would count every single star over his meadow.





He sat very still, except for his nose, which kept twitching because the meadow smelled of clover stems and damp soil. "Two. Three. Four." The stars appeared one at a time at first, as if they were shy guests arriving at a party. Snuffle counted the bright ones, the faint ones, and one that seemed to tremble above the bent fence post at the meadow's edge. Each time he said a number, he pushed his counting pebble a little farther along its neat dirt track.





By twenty-seven, Snuffle had made a system. He counted from left to right, then from the tallest clump of grass to the old dandelion stump, then back again. He scratched little arrow marks beside the track with one careful claw. "No star shall escape," he declared. A beetle crossed an arrow, paused on the line, and marched away with it on one shiny foot.

At forty-three, a moth flapped past Snuffle's face. He clapped both paws over his nose before he could count it by mistake. At fifty-nine, he spotted two stars so close together that they looked like pinpricks in the same piece of paper. He leaned first one way, then the other. They stayed separate. "Fifty-nine and sixty," he whispered, relieved. This was serious work.

The sky deepened. More stars slipped into view between the ones he had already counted. Snuffle frowned at a patch near the crooked willow shadow. Had those three been there before? He searched for an arrow mark, but his arrows pointed at the ground, not the sky. Still, he kept going. "Seventy-eight. Seventy-nine. Eighty..." His counting pebble rolled over a small root and gave a hopeful little bump.





When Snuffle reached one hundred, he puffed out his chest. "One hundred stars!" Then he looked up to find number one hundred and one. The space where he expected a single star held five. Beyond those, he saw seven more, thin and silvery. At the far side of the meadow, where the sky had looked plain a moment ago, a whole sprinkling had appeared. Snuffle blinked hard. The stars did not go away. They only seemed to multiply.





"One hundred and one," he tried. But was that the bright point above the dandelion stump, or had he counted it at sixty-four? "One hundred and two... no, perhaps eighty-six?" The numbers began to slide about in his head like peas on a plate. He hurried his counting pebble along the dirt track, but the track ended at the nest. He made another track. Then another. Soon there were so many arrows that even the beetle would have needed a map.

A soft shape settled on the low branch of the willow at the meadow's edge. It was Brindle, the owl, with speckled brown feathers and wide amber eyes. She had been watching Snuffle trace circles around his nest. "Are you digging a very small railway?" she asked. Snuffle sighed. "I am counting every star, but new ones keep arriving, and now my numbers are all blurry."





Brindle tipped her head. "They were there all along, mostly. Your eyes are noticing more as the light fades." Snuffle stared up, offended on behalf of his eyes. "Then how can anyone ever finish?" The owl tucked one wing close. "Perhaps they cannot. Some beautiful things are not made to be finished. A meadow does not need every blade measured before it feels soft. A song does not need every note caught in a jar before it can be heard."





Snuffle looked at his scratched-up ground and then at the enormous sky. He wanted to say that he had promised himself every star. Yet the promise had made his paws ache, and he had barely looked at the stars while chasing their numbers. He picked up the counting pebble in both paws. "If I cannot count them all," he said slowly, "I could count the ones I know best." Brindle gave a quiet, pleased hoot. "That sounds like a fine kind of finishing."

Snuffle chose carefully. "One," he said, pointing to the bright star over the dandelion stump. "It is the first one I saw." He found the trembling star by the fence post. "Two, the shivery one." Then came the close pair, though he counted only the left-hand star because it seemed friendlier. "Three." A steady star above the willow was four. Last, he chose a small clear star directly over his grassy nest. "Five," Snuffle said. He set the pebble beside it in the earth, white stripe facing up.





Snuffle lifted his nose to the rest of the sky. "Thank you for all the stars I did not count," he said. The meadow did not answer in words, but the grass gave a tiny rustle as he turned home. Brindle remained on her branch, round and watchful. Snuffle curled into his soft nest of grass, with five favorite stars above him and far more shining beyond them. The blue-grey counting pebble rested by the entrance, and this time it did not need to move at all.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Snuffle tries to count every star over his meadow, but the darkening sky keeps revealing more. With Brindle's gentle help, he discovers that choosing a few favorite stars can be its own perfect ending.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

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

AND TOMORROW...

The next evening, Snuffle notices that the beetle has drawn a very determined line straight toward the moon.





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8 minutes of reading



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