



What Fits in My Pocket?

Juno pressed both hands against the blue nursery door. “I cannot go in,” she said, though the door was not shut. It stood wide open, with Miss Bea smiling beside it and a row of tiny rain boots underneath the bench. Juno’s yellow jumper felt scratchy at the neck. Her tummy felt as if she had swallowed a worried little hedgehog. Mum held Juno’s red backpack, and Juno held Mum’s coat very tightly. “I want to say goodbye without crying,” Juno whispered. Then her eyes filled anyway.

“We could do our biggest wave,” said Mum. She gave a wave so enormous that her sleeve flapped. Juno tried. She lifted one hand, waggled two fingers, and made a sound like a squeaky gate. But when Mum took one step toward the grown-up gate at the end of the hall, Juno’s waggling hand grabbed Mum’s coat again. The tears came plopping out. Miss Bea brought a box of tissues, but tissues could only catch tears. They could not make goodbye smaller.



Miss Bea knelt beside Juno. “Would you like to look at our picture timetable?” she asked. On the classroom wall were pictures in a row: a sun for arriving, paint pots for painting, a plate for lunch, a bed for rest time, fruit slices for snack, and a red front door for home time. “That last picture means someone comes back,” said Miss Bea. Juno peered at the red door. She liked knowing where Mum would come from, but the pictures seemed very far away. She still could not let go.





Mum stayed for two minutes by the puzzle table while Juno put one green tractor piece in its place. Then Mum gave her a kiss, said, “I will meet you after nursery,” and went out. Juno cried into Miss Bea’s cardigan for a while. After that, she saw a boy rolling dough into a snake. The dough snake needed eyes. Juno chose two raisin eyes and pressed them on. At snack time, Mum had not come yet. At story time, Mum had not come yet. But after the red-door picture on the timetable, there she was at the real nursery door, with Juno’s red backpack and a very familiar smile.

At home, Juno tipped the contents of her backpack onto the kitchen table: one painting of a purple cat, one lost mitten, three crumbs, and a shiny button that belonged to nobody. “Mum always comes back,” she said, putting the mitten aside. “But my tummy does not know.” Mum nodded. “Perhaps your tummy needs something small to remember with.” Juno thought of the dough snake’s raisin eyes, the red-door picture, and Mum’s hand in hers.





From the craft tin, Mum found a scrap of red felt. Juno chose it because it was the same colour as the home-time door on the timetable. Mum cut a heart shape, and Juno drew a wobbly yellow circle in the middle with a fabric pen. “This is my pocket heart,” Juno declared. She tucked it into the front pocket of her yellow jumper, then took it out, then tucked it back in again. It was soft, flat, and exactly the size of her palm.

“What else shall our goodbye have?” Mum asked. Juno did not want another enormous wave. “A hand squeeze,” she decided. She squeezed Mum’s hand once. Mum squeezed back once. “One squeeze means I love you,” said Mum. Juno considered this very seriously. “And the pocket heart means you come after nursery.” “Yes,” said Mum. “And we will say the same words.” Together they practised: “See you after nursery.” Juno said it to Mum at the kitchen door, then at the bathroom door, then while Mum hid behind the curtain and pretended to be the red front door. That made Juno laugh so hard that she nearly dropped the heart.





The next morning, Juno carried her red backpack to the nursery entrance. Her worried tummy was there too, bumping about inside her. At the blue door, she slipped her hand into her pocket. The pocket was empty. Juno froze. “My heart!” she gasped. She tipped out a crayon, a crumpled tissue, and the shiny button that still belonged to nobody. No heart. Her eyes made their ready-to-cry face.

Mum did not rush away. “Where did you last use it?” she asked. Juno looked down at her jumper. A red point poked from the cuff of her sleeve. When she had hugged Mum in the hall, the heart had slid through the little gap inside the pocket and travelled down her arm like a quiet mouse. Juno pulled it free. “Sneaky heart,” she said. Miss Bea chuckled, and even Juno’s tummy gave a small, surprised wiggle instead of a worried one.





At the door, Juno held Mum's hand. She wanted to cling. She wanted Mum to come to the paint table and stay until lunch and perhaps until the red-door picture. Then Juno felt the felt heart in her fist. She looked at Miss Bea, who was holding out a tray of clay and buttons. Juno took one long breath. "One squeeze," she said. She squeezed Mum's hand. Mum squeezed back. "See you after nursery," said Mum. Juno swallowed, put the heart safely in her backpack's zipped front pocket, and walked through the blue door beside Miss Bea.

The clay was cool and brown. Juno rolled it into a round cake, pressed the shiny nobody-button on top, and made three more button biscuits for the play kitchen. When the tears tried to return, she touched the pocket heart through the backpack pocket. Then she went to the picture timetable. "Paint, lunch, rest, snack," she read in her own way, tapping each picture. "Then red door." Miss Bea helped her make a red felt flag for the top of her clay cake. "That is for home time," Juno explained.





After snack, after the last song,
and after Juno had carried her clay cake
carefully to the drying shelf, Miss Bea
turned the red-door picture over. There
was Mum at the real blue door, just
as promised. Juno ran to her, backpack
bouncing, and held up the pocket heart.
“It fitted,” she said. Mum took her hand.
Juno gave one squeeze, and Mum gave
one back as they walked home together.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Juno discovers that a small handmade pocket heart and a loving hand squeeze can make nursery goodbyes feel safer. By home time, she is ready to walk through the blue door with courage.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

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

AND TOMORROW...

Juno wonders whether her pocket heart might help her try the tall climbing frame at nursery tomorrow.





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9 minutes of reading



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