



The Picture Book Learned Hello

Tonya set her small backpack on her bed and pulled the zip open with both hands. It made a neat, important sound. Tomorrow she would go back to school, and she wanted to be ready. But her tummy felt like it had one small pebble inside it.

The window still wore the paper stars from the holiday. Their edges glowed in the lamplight. Tonya looked at them, then at the backpack. “What if the classroom feels all different?” she asked Mama.

Mama sat beside her on the bed. “It may feel a little different at first,” she said. “You have not seen it for a while.” Tonya remembered the classroom: the low tables, the paint jars, the book shelf, and her teacher’s blue chair.

“I’ll make a plan,” said Tonya. She opened her yellow notebook and drew a square for the classroom door, then tiny squares for the tables. She tried to fit every chair, every cubby, and every box of crayons onto one page.



Soon the page was packed with wobbly squares. Tonya stared at it. Her classroom looked less like a room and more like a very busy sandwich. “That did not help,” she decided, closing the notebook.





Next she chose her striped pencil and slipped it into the backpack. Then she put in the notebook. The pencil rolled through the open bag, popped out the other side, and disappeared beneath the bed.

Tonya got down on her knees. Mama held the lamp while Tonya reached carefully under the bed. Out came one slipper, a silver button, and at last the pencil, wearing a little dust moustache. Tonya laughed so suddenly that the pebble in her tummy gave a tiny jiggle.

On the shelf beside the bed stood her picture book, *The Little Red Boat*. Tonya had read it many times during the holiday. In it, a girl on a harbour bench sees another child looking lonely and says, “Hello. Would you like to look at my boat?”





Tonya opened to that page. She touched the painted red boat with one finger. The girl in the book did not know everything about the other child. She did not have a grand plan or a crowded notebook. She had only said hello.

Tonya sat up straight. “Tomorrow, I can say hello to my teacher,” she said. “And if someone is sitting by themselves, I can smile at them.” It was not a giant thing to do. It was a small thing, but it fitted in her hand.

She put the picture book into the backpack beside the notebook and pencil. This time she pressed the zip slowly, guiding the cloth away from its teeth. Zzzzip. The backpack closed all the way.

Mama placed the backpack on the chair for morning. Tonya brushed her teeth, washed the dust moustache from her hands, and climbed into bed in her blue pyjamas. The paper stars at the window were pale now, and the room had become still.





From her pillow, Tonya could see the small backpack waiting with its familiar book inside. Tomorrow did not have to be the whole classroom at once. It could begin with a door, a hello, and one smile. Her breathing grew slow, and soon she was asleep.





Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

On the evening before returning to school, Tonya packs her backpack and finds a small, brave way to face tomorrow. With Mama nearby, she turns a worried feeling into a simple hello and falls asleep ready for the morning.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

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

AND TOMORROW...

The next morning, Tonya may discover who smiles back when she opens the classroom door.





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5 minutes of reading



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