



The Book He Doesn't Choose

Ages 6-9



Chapter 1: The lion on the shelf

The lion book is waiting in the same place.

It has a yellow cover, a sleepy lion, and a little mouse holding a spoon. Dudy knows every picture. He knows the words before Tatty reads them.

Tonight, Tatty takes it down.

"Our lion?"

Dudy looks at the mouse's spoon. He looks at the lion's enormous paw.

"Yes," he says.

Tatty opens it. Dudy leans against him.

The first page has a tree. The second has the mouse. On the third page, the lion yawns so widely that Dudy usually yawns too.

Tonight, Dudy doesn't yawn. He asks how many pages are left.

Tatty stops reading.

"Are you tired?"

"No."

Dudy looks across the room at a new book about a little train.

Then he looks back at the lion.



Chapter 2: A very loyal reader

The next night, Dudy chooses the lion before Tatty can ask.

He puts the train book behind it on the shelf. If he can't see the train, perhaps he will want the lion again.

The mouse still has its spoon. Dudy wishes it would use a fork just once.

At the wide yawn, he turns two pages together.

"We miss a bit," Tatty says.

"I know that bit."

"You know all the bits."

Dudy nods.

That should be a good thing. Knowing the bits used to make him glad.

He remembers pointing to the tree before Tatty reached that page. Tatty always let him say the mouse's last line. Those nights are still nice to remember, even while tonight feels much longer.

Now he keeps thinking about the train's red wheels. He pulls his foot beneath him and listens to the lion's last page.

"Tomorrow too?" Tatty asks.

Dudy says yes quickly, as if the book can hear him.



Chapter 3: The question at breakfast

At breakfast, Mommy puts her blue tichel neatly over all her hair. Dudy brings the lion book to the table.

"Do you think I liked this when I was smaller?"

"Very much. You asked for it almost every night."

"Then I have to like it now."

Mommy looks at him.

"What makes you think that?"

Dudy touches the sleepy lion.

"Otherwise I wasn't telling the truth before."

Mommy pulls out the chair beside him.

"When you asked for the lion before, did you enjoy it then?"

"Yes."

"And what would you like tonight?"

Dudy looks toward the room where the books are.

"The train."

He says it quietly. It feels like saying something unkind about an old friend.



Chapter 4: Two different nights

Mommy finds a picture of Dudy sitting on Tatty's lap. He is smaller in the picture. The lion book is much bigger against his knees.

"Look at your shoes," she says.

They are the little blue shoes with straps. Dudy remembers them.

"They don't fit now."

"You liked wearing them then."

Dudy looks at his socks. Nobody asks him to squeeze back into the shoes to prove that.

"I don't have to dislike the lion," he says.

"No. You don't have to dislike it to choose something else."

"Can I still read it another day?"

"Of course. You can decide when you get there."

Mommy doesn't put the lion away forever. She doesn't promise Dudy will love the train more.

She puts the picture back in its album and carries the book to the shelf.

Chapter 5: A page he doesn't know

Tonight, Tatty sits on the bed. Dudy brings the train.



"What happens in this one?" Tatty asks.

"I don't know."

Dudy likes not knowing this time.

On the first page, the train waits at a tiny station. On the second, a goat stands on the platform with a basket.

"Is the goat going on?" Dudy asks.

"Let's see."

They turn the page together.

The goat's basket is full of hats. Dudy laughs because none of the hats fits its horns.

He doesn't count the pages that are left.

At the end, Tatty closes the book. "That goat has a problem."

"Two problems," Dudy says. "Two horns."

The lion sits on the shelf across the room. Dudy isn't angry with it. It isn't a bad book.

It is a book he likes on some nights and doesn't choose on this one.

Before Tatty turns off the lamp, Dudy asks whether the train can stay beside his bed.

"For tonight," he adds.