The Boy and the Secret Goose
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On Maple Tree Farm lived a boy named Theo. He had messy sandy-brown hair that stuck up like straw and bright green eyes that noticed everything. His red shirt was always dusty and one overall strap always flopped loose. What Theo noticed most was Greta the goose. She honked at everyone who came near the old shed.

Greta was large and plump, with white feathers and soft grey wing tips. A faded red ribbon hung loosely around her neck. Whenever children ran past the shed, she stretched her wings wide and honked, 'Honk! Honk! Keep away!' The children thought she was the grumpiest goose on the farm. Theo wondered why.

One sunny morning Theo sat on the fence and watched. A little girl skipped toward the shed, and Greta honked until she ran off. A farmer walked near, and Greta honked again. Theo tilted his head. Greta did not look mean. She looked worried. Her dark round eyes kept flicking back to the shed door. 'What are you hiding?' Theo whispered.

Theo waited until Greta waddled to the pond for a drink. Then he tiptoed to the shed and peeked through a crack in the door. Inside was dusty and quiet. Old toys lay everywhere: a patchwork teddy with one button eye, a wooden train engine, a cloth doll with yarn hair, and a red spinning top. And something small moved near the teddy bear.

Theo pushed the door open, just a little. A tiny brown mouse stood on her hind legs, wearing a scrap-fabric apron with a little blue button sewn on. Behind her, three baby mice peeked out from under a dusty train. 'Oh!' said Theo. 'You live here!' Mama Mouse nodded. 'Please don't tell anyone,' she squeaked softly.

Just then, a loud 'HONK!' filled the shed doorway. Greta rushed in, wings spread protectively. She had seen Theo slip inside. 'Honk! Honk!' she cried, standing between Theo and the mice. Theo put up his hands. 'I won't hurt them,' he said gently. 'I promise.' Greta slowed down and looked at him. Her dark eyes were round and careful.

Greta lowered her wings and let out a quiet, rumbly honk. Mama Mouse scurried forward. 'Greta has guarded us all winter,' she explained. 'She honks to keep noisy feet away from our little home.' Theo's mouth fell open. 'So that's your secret!' he said. Greta blinked at him and wobbled her head, almost like a nod. His freckled nose crinkled in a smile.

Theo knelt beside the pile of lost toys. The teddy's patches were faded, and the doll's yarn hair was tangled. 'Where did all these come from?' he asked. 'Children lose things,' said Mama Mouse. 'The wind blows them in, or they get left behind. Greta brings the small ones here to keep us warm.' The wooden train and the doll sat proudly beside the bear.

Theo looked around the drafty shed. Cold wind whistled through the cracks, and the toys were damp with dust. 'This isn't cozy at all,' he said. 'The mice need a warmer home.' Greta honked in agreement. 'And the toys should go back to their owners,' Theo went on. 'Someone misses this teddy, I bet.' The little button eye seemed to shine.

Theo hurried home and came back with a wooden crate, soft hay, and an old woolen scarf. Greta carried hay in her beak, one tuft at a time. Together they lined the crate until it was warm and snug. Mama Mouse clapped her tiny paws. 'It's a palace!' she squeaked. The baby mice tumbled happily into the hay, squeaking with joy.

Next, Theo gathered the lost toys and loaded them into a little red wagon. Greta waddled proudly beside him, and Mama Mouse rode on the soft scarf on top. Theo walked to the village square and called out, 'Lost toys! Lost toys, come and see!' One by one, children hurried over with wide eyes. 'My teddy!' cried a girl, hugging the one-eyed bear.

A boy whooped when he saw the wooden train. A small girl gently picked up the cloth doll and brushed its yarn hair. 'I thought it was gone forever,' she whispered. The red spinning top danced back to its owner, too. Greta stood in the middle of it all, honking cheerfully. The children stared at her. 'Greta?' they said. 'Grumpy Greta?'

Theo laughed and shook his head. 'Greta isn't grumpy at all!' he said. 'She was guarding the mice in the shed. She honks to keep them safe!' The children looked at the plump white goose with her faded red ribbon. Suddenly, Greta didn't look grumpy one bit. She looked kind and proud and a little bit shy, all at once.

That afternoon, everyone helped. The children carried the new crate house to a snug corner of the shed, safe from the wind. They filled it with hay and the soft scarf. Mama Mouse and her babies wiggled inside, warm and happy. Theo tied a fresh ribbon around Greta's neck. 'Now everyone knows your secret,' he said, and Greta gave a soft, happy honk.

From that day on, children came to visit Greta instead of running away. They brought her bits of bread and sat quietly while the mice snoozed in their cozy home. Theo and Greta became the best of friends. He learned to notice what others missed, and she learned that some visitors are kind. The shed was never quiet and never lonely again.

Sometimes things are not what they seem. A honking goose might really be a gentle helper. A dusty shed might hide tiny friends and forgotten treasures. Theo learned that looking closely and asking kindly can turn a grumpy stranger into a friend. And on Maple Tree Farm, everyone learned that appearances can be misleading, and friendship can be found in surprising places.