

The Bedtime Book

That won't wash with Molly by Brit Bildøen

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Molly won't go to bed. She simply refuses. Because when she lifted her duvet to crawl into bed, Corky wasn't there. Corky always waits under the duvet for Molly to come to bed. So why isn't he tonight?

- Mum, where's Corky? Molly shouts.
- In bed waiting for you, I should think, mum replies from the living room.
- No, he's not! He's not there!
- Well, then he probably just fell off, says mum.

Molly looks down on the floor. She checks under the bed, checks under the wardrobe. And she looks carefully at all her toy animals. There's Miss Zebra, and Julian the monkey, and Lily the lamb, and there's the green centipede that she won last summer at the fun fair. And in the chair sits the big yellow teddy bear Hughog that she got for her second birthday, and a small teddy called Ebony, and of course Allwhite the polar bear. But Corky is not with the other animals. Corky is a toy dog. He has brown, curly fur and yellow eyes. His ears are large and knotty which make them perfect for cuddling before falling asleep. Of all Molly's animals and teddy bears, Corky is the only one allowed to sleep in her bed. And he likes it there. He never runs away. Since Molly lost Rubadub on her way to the nursery one day, she doesn't dare take any of the animals with her outdoors anymore. Rubadub was a big rabbit that her nanna knitted for her. Molly cried for four days on end after he disappeared. Mum put up notes on all the lamp posts all the way to the nursery, but alas, Rubadub still didn't show up. That's when Molly got Corky. And Corky is never let out of the house. The intention was that he was never let out of the bed either. But now the bed's empty.

- Mu-um! MUM-MY! Molly insists until mum finally comes running. Mum looks the same places as Molly. Under the bed. Under the wardrobe. In the chair. Even on top of the bookshelf and behind the curtains.
- How weird, says mum. - I changed the bed sheets this morning and can't recall having seen him.
- He never goes anywhere, Molly whimpers.
- It's true. He really doesn't, says mum.
- He doesn't like leaving the room, says Molly.
- True, says mum.
- He doesn't like leaving the bed either, says Molly.
- Right, says mum. - So he can't have gone far. I'm sure he'll show up in the morning.
- Noooo! Molly howls. - Find him at once!
- Please go to bed dear, says mum. - We'll find him tomorrow, I promise.

At this moment Molly puts on what mum calls her ambulance voice. It's a high-pitched kind of wail that no one can bear to listen to for long.

- I want Corky! she whines. - I won't go to bed without Corky!

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– There, there now, says mum. - Go to bed and I'll look for him. I'll search the whole house and as

soon as I find him I'll come straight back to you.

But by now Molly is crying more than whining. And between gasps and sobs she repeats

– I won't go to bed! I won't go to bed!

Mum sighs.

– Come with me and help look then, she says. But Molly slides to the floor where she lies

kicking and crying and shouting.

– Corky..... Corky.....Corky!

But Corky is not coming. Neither is mum.

– I'm looking! mum shouts from the hall.

Lying like that, screaming her head off, wears Molly out. But there is no way she can go to bed without Corky. Absolutely no way. So she screams a bit more. Then she decides she wants to find out what mum is up to. She pads along in her red pyjamas. There are little white hearts on it, white hearts with LULLABY written on them. She got the pyjamas from her mum. Mum is in the kitchen. She just stands there staring out of the window.

– You said you were going to look for Corky.

– I did, mum says. - And now I'm thinking. Thinking is an important part of searching. If we think before we search, that can save us a whole lot of work, you see.

Molly takes a peak behind the kitchen curtains. There is nothing there but a small yellow ball. She pushes the ball and it drops to the floor. Her nose is full of snot and she gives a hard sniff. Mum must have finished thinking, because she walks mumbling into the living room and checks under the sofa cushions.

– Corky hasn't been near the sofa, whispers Molly to herself. She sniffs again.

– What's that, Molly-darling? Asks mum.

She stands in the doorway. Molly lifts her head up. Her eyes are brimful with tears. They start rolling down her cheeks, one by one. Maybe they will never stop?

– Corky, she whimpers. - I want Corky.

– Oh Molly, says mum with a sigh. - We'll just keep looking then. But first let's get you to the bathroom, wash your face and blow your nose, ok?

She bends down to pick Molly up.

– Good heavens, what a big girl you've become, she moans.

In the bathroom the washing machine is humming away. Molly likes to watch the clothes and the foam and the water whirling round and round. She spots her pink pyjamas. And there's something white and there's the bed cover with the brown teddies and there's the...

– Corky! Molly exclaims.

– Yes, yes, still looking, says mum.

– Corky's in the washing machine!

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Mum comes over to see for herself. And just then the spinning stops and foam runs down the glass door. It's not easy to tell things apart in there. Mum bends over and squints.

– Are you sure? she says.

– Yes yes yes! Molly cheers. - I saw him! I saw Corky! It was him!

The washing machine hums quietly and then starts up again. The pink pyjamas rub against the glass. And there's Corky's head. He looks at them for a second, then disappears again. And then a glimpse of his curly fur.

– The mystery's solved! mum says. - Corky must have followed as I put your bed clothes in the washing machine.

Molly laughs. It's fun watching Corky in there. He can be out of sight for pretty long, and then suddenly there he is, all fur and paws and snout.

– But now that we know where Corky is, you'll go to bed, right? mum says.

– No, Molly says firmly.

She sits down in front of the washing machine. She'll sit there until Corky is done.

– But Molly dearest, mum says with a slight quiver in her voice. - Corky's in the machine and he's still got rinsing and spinning left, and after that the tumble dryer. It'll take hours! Go to bed now, I will put Corky next to you as soon as he's done and dry.

But Molly refuses. She will NOT go to bed without Corky. She wants to sit right there watching him spinning round and round through the little glass in the door. Mum tries to persuade her. Molly can tell by her voice that she will probably give up pretty soon. And before long mum shrugs her shoulders and leaves the bathroom. Molly stays seated on the floor. It's nice and warm. And it gets even better as mum brings her duvet, now it's soft and even comfier. Molly places herself so that she can best keep an eye on Corky getting a wash. But after a little while her head starts bobbing down. And then Corky is left to spinning without an audience, Molly has fallen asleep on the bathroom floor.

It's morning as Molly wakes up. She's in bed with Corky in her arms. He smells like soap, and his fur is even curlier than before. Mum stands next to the bed looking clever.

– How did I end up here? Molly asks.

– I carried you, says mum. - You, the duvet and Corky. A pretty heavy bunch, I'll tell you.

– Please make sure Corky isn't caught up in the bed clothes again, mum...

– I'll do my very best, says mum with a smile

- ... because there is really no need for him to be THIS clean, says Molly.