

The Badger and the Duckling



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At the edge of a wide, sunny pond, a tiny duckling named Dottie paddled in circles. She had soft yellow down, a small orange bill, and a thin blue ribbon tied around her neck. Her family was somewhere in the tall green reeds, but Dottie had swum a little too far. "Hello?" she peeped. "Where did everybody go?" The reeds only whispered back.



Dottie climbed onto the muddy bank and shook her fluffy tail. Everything looked the same—green stems, green stems, and more green stems. She was lost, and her little webbed feet felt very small. Just then, a striped face popped out of a burrow. It was Bram the badger, with grey fur and a green canvas satchel. "You look worried, little one," he said kindly.



Bram knelt down so his dark eyes were level with Dottie's round ones. "I'm looking for my family," she said. "They were swimming near the big lily pads." Bram tapped his satchel with one sturdy paw. "Then we shall find them together," he said. "The reeds are tall, but they are not so tricky if we help each other. Shall we go?" Dottie nodded bravely.



The two friends set off into the tall reeds. Bram's short legs were steady on the mud, and Dottie rode on his shoulder, peeping directions. "Left! No, right!" she said, and Bram laughed. Soon they came to a wide puddle that blocked the path. Dottie tilted her head. "I can swim," she said, "but you are much bigger than me." Bram smiled and found a flat stone.



Bram placed the flat stone in the puddle, then another and another, making a little stepping path. "Hop across," he said, holding out his paw. Dottie hopped from stone to stone, wiggling her tail for balance. On the last stone she slipped—but Bram caught her gently. "Well done!" he said. "One puzzle solved." They both giggled, and the reeds seemed a little friendlier.



Next, a thick curtain of vines hung across the path. Dottie pulled at one vine, but it would not budge. "These vines are too strong for me," she said. Bram studied the tangle with his small dark eyes. "We must work together," he said. "You tug the low ones, and I will lift the high ones." They pulled and lifted, and the vines swung open like a curtain.



Behind the vines sat a grumpy old frog on a lily pad. "Nobody passes without answering my riddle!" he croaked. Dottie's feathers trembled, but Bram gave her a gentle wink. "What has a bill but cannot pay?" asked the frog. Dottie thought hard, then laughed. "A duckling!" she quacked. The frog blinked, grinned, and hopped aside. "Clever little duck," he said.



The path led to a muddy hollow where the ground squished and squelched. Dottie's tiny feet sank right in. "Oh no!" she cried. "I'm stuck!" Bram opened his green satchel with its wooden button and pulled out a sturdy little twig. He laid it across the mud like a tiny bridge. Dottie waddled along it, safe and dry. "You are a very good helper," she said.



As they walked, Dottie told Bram about her family. "My brothers always splash," she said, "and my mother sings a funny song when she calls us." Bram listened and smiled. "Then we will listen for that song," he said. He told her about his burrow, with its soft moss bed and a shelf of shiny pebbles. "You must visit someday," he said.



Suddenly, a dragonfly buzzed right past Dottie's bill, and she jumped. "Follow that dragonfly!" she squeaked. The dragonfly zipped and zoomed through the reeds, and Bram and Dottie hurried after it. It led them around a bend, past a sleepy turtle, and straight to a wide, open patch of water. "Look!" said Dottie, her round eyes shining.



Far across the water, Dottie heard a funny, wobbly song. "Quack-quack-quackle!" it went. She gasped and flapped her little wings. "That is my mother's song!" Bram lifted her high so she could see. There, near the big lily pads, a duck and four ducklings paddled in the sunshine. "Your family!" said Bram. "You found them, Dottie!"



But the water was wide and deep, and Dottie was only a tiny duckling. "I can swim it," she said bravely, "but I wish you could come too." Bram shook his head gently. "Badgers do not swim well," he said. "But I will stand right here and watch until you are safe." Dottie hugged his paw. "You are the kindest friend I ever met," she said.



Dottie slipped into the water and paddled as fast as her little feet could go. Bram stood on the bank, waving his paw. "Keep going!" he called. Her mother saw her and sang louder, and her brothers splashed to welcome her. Soon Dottie was home, safe among her family, with her blue ribbon still tied neatly. She turned and waved back at Bram.



That evening, Dottie waddled back along the bank to find Bram. "My family says thank you," she said. "And I brought you a shiny pebble for your shelf." Bram's dark eyes twinkled. "A pebble from a friend is the best kind," he said. They sat together as the sun went down, and Dottie told him every splashy detail of her homecoming.



From that day on, Bram and Dottie were the best of friends. She visited his burrow, and he walked with her through the reeds. Sometimes they answered the frog's riddle just for fun, and they always laughed. Dottie learned that wandering too far is a little scary, but a kind friend can turn a lost afternoon into a wonderful adventure.



And whenever Dottie's mother sang her funny song across the pond, Bram listened from the bank and smiled. Kindness had brought a badger and a duckling together, and their friendship grew and grew, like the tall green reeds around the pond. Dottie kept her blue ribbon, and Bram kept his shiny pebble—two small treasures from a very big adventure.