

It's a Secret!

 COLOR THE PICTURE



The night was cold and clear and so quiet that you could hear the snow settle. *Tink... tink...* went little bits of ice, falling off the branches. Above Sunny Square, the stars were out, and the squash lantern glowed on the Wishing Tree.

Everybody met by the Swap pile after dark.

Ricky had his list. Under THANKS FIRST, it said: HEDGEHOGS. OLD BADGER. And then, in smaller letters, some new ones that Benji had heard all week with his big, sharp ears: the mouse family in the hollow oak, whose seed pantry got wet. The beaver kits, whose mama had a sore paw. The old crow by the river, who sat alone on his branch every night.

"How did you hear all that?" asked Mr. Monkey.

Benji's ears twitched. "I listen," he said softly. "Everybody's busy talking. So I listen."

Ricky looked at Benji. Then he looked at the pile. Benji was the smallest one in the whole woods. Ricky had the most presents in the whole woods. And Benji had told him exactly where they needed to go.

So they sorted the presents into bundles, one for every door on the list. A soft woolly mitten for the crow. A bag of dry seeds for the mice. Bundles and bundles.

But Mr. Monkey was looking at the bundles and frowning.

"Mr. Moose," he said. "These are all things nobody wanted. The Swap stuff. The extras." He looked at the

hedgehog bundle. "The little hedgehogs are coughing. Some extras isn't enough."

Mr. Moose thought about the candle on Daddy Moose's table. Daddy hadn't given the lantern his extra candles. He had given it the last one.

"Maybe everybody adds one thing," he said slowly. "Not an extra. Your own best thing."

Everybody got very quiet. Then Bruno went home to his den, and came back with the best piece of his honeycomb, the part with the most honey in it. He looked at it for a long, long time. "For the coughing," he said, and put it in the hedgehog bundle. "Honey is good for coughing."

Sammy put in her three shiniest acorns. Shiloh put in a big soft bundle of his own wool, the wool he'd been saving all fall to stuff his pillow. "For their nest," he whispered.

Mr. Monkey climbed all the way up to the treehouse and came back down holding something behind his back. It was a banana. The biggest one of the whole summer. He had been saving it since the last banana plant gave its last banana, and he had looked at it every single night.

He held it for a moment. It was a very good banana.

Then he put it in the old badger's basket. "He's never had a banana," said Benji.

"Now he will," said Mr. Monkey.

Daddy Monkey came along too, with his coil of vines and his bag of tools over his shoulder. "For the badger's

roof," he said, and winked.

Then Benji taught them the thump-song, so they could talk without talking.

"One thump means stop," he whispered. He thumped his back foot once on the snow. *Thup*. "Two thumps means go." *Thup-thup*. "Three thumps means HIDE." *Thup-thup-thup*.

"Let me try," said Bruno. He lifted his great big foot and brought it down on the snow. *THOOOM*.

Every tree in Sunny Square shook. Snow slid off every branch at once, *FWUMP-FWUMP-FWUMP-FWUMP*, and landed on everybody's heads.

"Haw haw haw," whispered Bruno, covered in snow. "That's a big stop."

"Hee hee hee," whispered Mr. Monkey, covered in snow too.

So they set out into the dark, carrying the bundles and the little lantern. They went to the mouse family's hollow oak. They tucked the seeds right inside the hollow, by the tiny door. Then Mr. Moose packed a little cup out of snow, Ricky stood a stub of candle in it, and Mr. Monkey lit it from the squash lantern. A tiny snow lantern, glowing by the door.

"It's a secret," whispered Mr. Monkey.

They went to the beavers' lodge. They went to the old crow's branch, where Sammy zipped up to tie on the woolly mitten, and the crow, still fast asleep, tucked his whole head right into it without waking up.

"He likes it," whispered Sammy.

"Hee hee," went Benji.

At every door, a bundle. At every door, a little snow lantern.

"It's a secret," whispered Mr. Monkey every time. And every time he got a little more excited, and he whispered a little louder.

At the old badger's den, Daddy Monkey climbed up on the caved-in roof in the dark and fixed it, one branch at a time, so quietly that the badger never woke up. They could hear him snoring inside. *Grrrrnk-who. Grrrrnk-who*. They set the basket of leftovers by his door, with the banana right on top, and lit a little snow lantern beside it.

"IT'S A SECRET," whispered Mr. Monkey, so loud it wasn't really a whisper anymore.

"Mr. Monkey," whispered Mr. Moose. "That was a shout."

"It was a whisper-shout," whispered Mr. Monkey.

"Ha-ha-ha," laughed Mr. Moose, very softly.

The last stop was the hedgehogs, past the little waterfall, under the big old oak. It was a long way, and it was very late. They crept up to the tiny round door in the snow. Ricky set the bundle down: the soft wool, Bruno's honey, Sammy's acorns, and a warm little blanket from the pile. Mr. Monkey lit the last snow lantern.

And the tiny door started to open.

Thup-thup-thup! went Benji. HIDE.

Everybody dove behind the nearest snowdrift. Mr. Monkey, Mr. Moose, Ricky, Benji, Sammy, Shiloh. And Bruno. But the snowdrift was small, and Bruno was big. He got his head behind it. He got his shoulders behind it. But his great big round furry bottom stuck straight up out of the top, right in the light of the snow lantern.

Mama Hedgehog stepped out of the door. She looked at the bundle. She looked at the little glowing snow lantern. Then she looked up, very slowly, at the big furry bottom sticking out of the snowdrift.

Nobody breathed.

Mama Hedgehog looked at that bottom for a long time. Then she smiled a very small smile, picked up the bundle, and went back inside. She didn't say anything. She just closed the door.

Through the little door, they heard her voice. "Look, my littles. Somebody left us honey. Somebody loves us."

"Who?" asked a tiny voice.

"Somebody who wants it to be a secret," said Mama Hedgehog. And they could hear that she was smiling.

Behind the snowdrift, Mr. Monkey grabbed Mr. Moose's leg and squeezed it, so hard, because he was so happy he could hardly stand it.

They walked home through the dark woods, slowly, and everywhere they looked, there were little lights. One by the mouse family's oak. One by the beavers' lodge. One under the old crow's branch. One by the badger's mended roof. And far behind them, one by the tiny door under the big old oak.

"She saw you, Bruno," whispered Shiloh.

"She saw my bottom," said Bruno. "That's not the same."

"Hee hee hee," whispered Mr. Monkey.

"Why can't they know it was us?" asked Shiloh.

Mr. Moose thought about it. "Because then they'd think they had to give us something back," he said. "And then it's a swap again."

"What a day!" said Mr. Monkey, back in Sunny Square, very quietly. "Benji heard everybody who needed something. Everybody gave their best thing, and I gave my banana. Bruno thumped so hard all the snow fell down. We left little lights at every door. I whisper-shouted. And Mama Hedgehog saw Bruno's bottom, but she didn't tell."

Mr. Monkey whistled, and Mr. Moose hummed, and together they sang, as softly as they could:

*We are better together,
Moose and Monkey forever.*

And all through Wonderful Woods, little snow lanterns glowed by doors in the dark, and nobody inside knew who had put them there.

Let's Talk

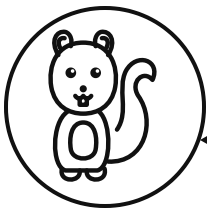
- 1 Everybody added their own best thing to the bundles. What did Mr. Monkey give the old badger?
- 2 It is St. Nicholas Day! What could you give in secret?

Your Turn

Today you give your shoe money away in secret! Draw who it will help. Shh!

It is for _____.

SAMMY'S JOKE



What has a neck but no head?

Unscramble the letters to finish the joke. The picture is a clue!



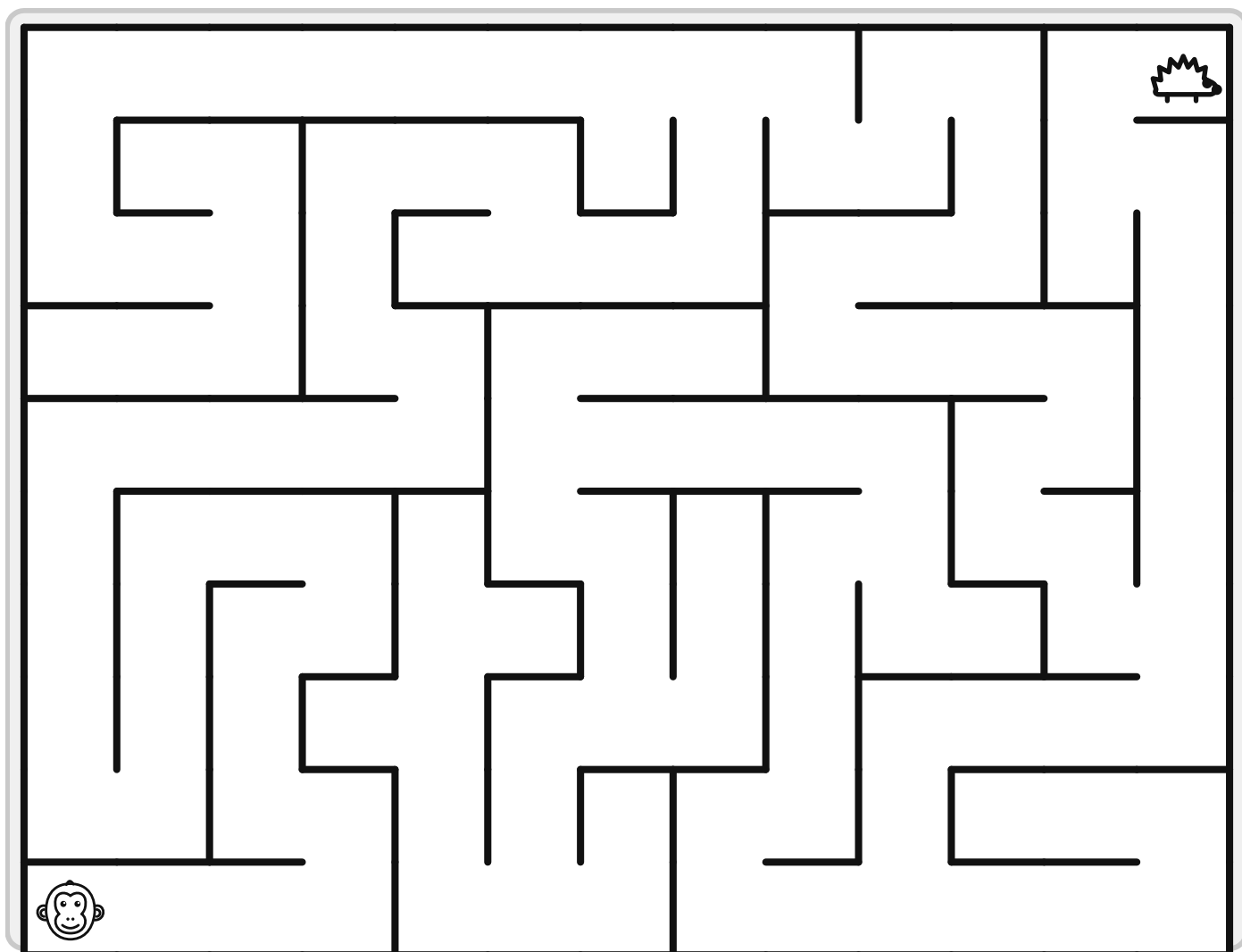
CLUE



A _____!

☆ The Night of the Doors

Help Mr. Monkey carry the secret gift to the hedgehogs' door. Start at Mr. Monkey.



Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

A Gift at the Den

It is dim. Tip, tap, tip.

, , and  get to a den.

 sets a gift on the step. Zip! Run!

 jumps in a big drift. His rump is up!

The mom at the den gets the gift.

“A gift! It is from a pal!” said the mom.

The mom is glad.  is glad, in the drift.

PICTURE WORDS  Bruno  Benji  Mr. Monkey

For grown-ups: New words to learn by heart: from.



Color a star each time you read it.

My Gift

Trace the dark word, then the light words. What did you give, and who got it? Fill in both spaces.

I gave

to

Song Day: Mystery Picture

Today's song is "Do You Hear What I Hear?" Sing or listen while you color each space by its number.

① yellow ② light blue ③ dark blue

