

## An Adventure in Space (...when Mummy went alone)

The back of his dew-sodden pyjamas was icy against his skin. He lay there, shivering, fingers laced under his head, watching the silver-brushed dome above. Beside him lay his best friend, worn fur glittering with droplets of condensation. His oldest playmate, his guard against nightmares – his teddy bear.

He'd been out here for hours, ever since the sky had draped herself in star-spangled black velvet. It was long, long past the time when he should've been warm in his bed, roaming his technicoloured dreamworld. But no one had called him in.

Tonight, he had got ready for bed all by himself, without any chivvying. And he had had to be extra proud of himself for it because there had been no one else to praise him.

Because *she* was up there, somewhere on that sparkly black screen he stared at. He just had to find her. Mummy in her spaceship.

She had to be there. After all, Daddy had told him she was with the stars now.

But it had been ages. His favourite frog-pyjamas were soaked through, and he was freezing. But he couldn't get up now; it wouldn't be fair to Toby. He had promised the bear he'd show him Mummy's spaceship. He had promised Toby, it was going to be amazing. Best friends couldn't break their promises.

But where was Mummy?

She must have been really excited, because her Gruffalo-voice wasn't working properly at bedtime last night. He remembered, her eyes had gone all shiny when he told her so.

Daddy was crying this morning. Proper, grown-up crying – long glistening streams of tears. The way *he* had cried once when he thought he had lost Toby.

Daddy must've really wanted to go with Mummy.

Why did Mummy want to go alone?

When he had asked Daddy why he was crying, Daddy had just shaken his head. And given him a hug. A bone-crushing, rib-cracking bear-hug. And he had felt the teardrops splashing onto his head like rain. He didn't like this kind of rain. Daddy shouldn't cry. It felt as wrong as Mummy's anger did.

So he had gone to look for Mummy. Because Mummy knew how to make things right.

He had looked in the kitchen, but the surfaces were tidy. So Mummy couldn't have been there.

He had looked in the sitting room, but there was an echoing, heavy silence there which made him feel sort of empty inside.

He had looked in the garden, but the colours were starting to blur because of the haze of tears in his eyes, and the relentless brightness had his head aching.

He even looked under his bed, and in his cupboard, hoping against hope that Mummy would spring out, laughing. But Mummy wasn't anywhere.

His little shoulders had started to shake with sobs. Where had Mummy gone? Finally, he had gulped down the rest of his tears – hard as marbles in his throat – and gone to ask Daddy. Daddy's voice had trembled like the lonely leaves of Autumn as he said,

“She’s gone, Andrew.” He knew *that*.

“Gone where?”

“To...the stars. She’s with the stars, son. Maybe you’ll see her some nights.”

So a smile had crept onto his face. He couldn’t wait to tell Toby. His Mummy! On a spaceship!

But a lot of people didn’t seem very pleased about it. They seeped in, invariably grim, figures dressed in black with frowns carved into their faces. They patted Daddy on the back and murmured words of condolence.

They stemmed the rain from Daddy’s eyes.

But he still looked all wrong.

But it was night now. Time for Mummy’s red and white spaceship to appear. So where was she?

A cool breeze sighed through the air and raised goosepimples on his arms.

He wondered, if he thought it hard enough, and said please nicely enough, would the wind carry a message to Mummy, high up in the clouds?

He would say he was glad she was having an adventure up in space, but when was she coming back?

What were the stars like?

Had she seen any Martians yet?

Was the moon really made of cheese?

Was she having fun?

And why hadn’t she said goodbye?