

Henry and Mudge under the Yellow Moon

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In the fall, Henry and his big dog Mudge took long walks in the woods. Henry loved looking at the tops of the trees. He liked the leaves: orange, yellow, brown, and red. Mudge loved sniffing at the ground. And he liked the leaves, too. He always ate a few. In the fall, Henry liked counting the birds flying south. Mudge liked watching for busy chipmunks. Since one was a boy and the other was a dog they never did things just the same way. Henry picked apples and Mudge licked apples. Henry put on a coat and Mudge crew one. And when the fall wind blew, Henry's ears turned red and Mudge's ears turned inside out. But one thing about them was the same. In the fall Henry and Mudge liked being together, most of all.

Henry loved Halloween. He loved to make jack-o'-lanterns. He loved to make paper bats. And most of all he loved to dress up. But there was one thing about Halloween Henry did not like: ghost stories. And Henry's mother loved to tell ghost stories. Every Halloween she put on her witch's hat, lit candles, and told ghost stories. She thought Henry liked them because he told her he liked them. But really he hated them. They scared him. He was afraid to tell her that. But this year Henry had Mudge. Mudge would be with him. Henry would not be afraid of the ghost stories. So Halloween night Henry's mother put on her hat and lit her candles. She invited Henry and Mudge and some of Henry's friends to listen to ghost stories. It was dark outside. A big yellow moon was in the sky. It was dark inside, except for the candles and one jack-o'-lantern. Henry got close to Mudge on the floor. Henry's mother began.

First she told a story about a man who lost his head. Henry shook. His friends shook. Then she told a story about a cat in a graveyard. The candles made shapes on the walls. Henry shook harder. Then Henry's mother began telling a story about a pair of shoes that went looking for someone's feet. The shoes, she said, came out only at night. And they walked up and down the streets, looking. "You could hear them," she said softly. "They went CLICK...CLICK...CLICK...CLICK." Henry's mother tapped her own shoe on the floor. "CLICK...CLICK...CLICK," she whispered. But when she stopped tapping, Henry still heard something. Something in the room. Something in the room under the yellow moon. Henry held his breath. Something went CLICK...CLICK...CLICK...CLICK. But faster. Henry's whole body shook. It was someone walking faster and faster.

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. What was it? Henry's mother bent down. "Mudge?" she said. Henry knew his mother was scared, too, if she needed Mudge. "Mudge?" she said again. The clicking got louder. *The shoes are coming!* thought Henry. He put his head in Mudge's neck. Now the clicking was louder than ever. "Mudge," Henry's mother said, "stop chattering." Chattering? Henry put his ear near Mudge's mouth. And Mudge's teeth went CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. It wasn't a pair of shoes! It was Mudge! And he was more scared of the yellow moon and the dark room and the witch's stories than anybody else! *Poor Mudge,* thought Henry. Henry stopped shaking and put his arms around Mudge's big head and held Mudge tight. Then they listened to the next story about a chair that rocked all by itself. But Mudge clicked all the way to the end.

In November, Henry's Aunt Sally always came. She came one week before Thanksgiving. She left one week after Thanksgiving. That is why Henry did not like Thanksgiving. Because Henry did not like Aunt Sally. *She talks too much*, Henry thought. *She eats too much*, Henry thought. *She hogs the TV*, Henry thought. Henry wishes Aunt Sally would stay home. Aunt Sally had not yet seen Henry's dog Mudge. *I bet she hates dogs*, Henry thought. Oh, how he wished Aunt Sally would stay home. But she didn't.

She came one week before Thanksgiving, right on time. Aunt Sally came into Henry's house. She was talking and talking and talking. She went right into the kitchen with Henry's father. Henry knew what Aunt Sally would be doing in the kitchen. Henry went in the backyard to find Mudge. At last, Henry thought that Aunt Sally must be finished talking and eating. So he went back inside with Mudge. They walked into

the kitchen. Aunt Sally was still eating. "Good grief!" she yelled. Henry and Mudge stepped back. *I knew she'd hate dogs*, Henry thought. Aunt Sally looked at Mudge. "Good grief!" she said again. But then she took a cracker off her plate. She threw it to Mudge. SNAP! went Mudge's mouth. And the cracker was gone. Henry looked at Mudge. Henry looked at Aunt Sally. "Great dog," Aunt Sally said. She put a cracker in her own mouth. "Want one?" she asked Henry. "Sure," said Henry.

He sat down with Aunt Sally. She still ate too much. She still talked too much. But all of her talk this time was about Mudge. And *that* was different. Aunt Sally talked about Mudge's sweet eyes. She talked about Mudge's strong chest. She talked about Mudge's soft fur. She talked about Mudge's good manners. And she fed Mudge lots of crackers. This year, Henry knew, he was going to like Thanksgiving.

This year, Henry knew, he really had something to be thankful for!