

Henry and Mudge and the Bedtime Thumps

Rylant, Cynthia

Henry and his big dog Mudge were going to the country with Henry's parents. Henry was reading comic books. Mudge was chewing his toenails. They were going to visit Henry's grandmother. Henry's grandmother had never met Mudge. So Henry worried. He worried that Mudge might drool on her skirt. He worried that Mudge might eat her coffee table. But mostly he worried that Mudge might have to sleep outside. Mudge had never slept outside before. And if Mudge slept outside, Henry would be alone, trying to sleep in an empty room in a strange house in a dark yard in the country. Henry read his comic books and worried. The longer he rode, the more he worried. Soon he began to bite his fingernails. Chew, bite. *Spit*. Chew, bite. *Spit*. Henry bit his fingernails, Mudge chewed his toenails, and the car drove on.

After riding for a long time, Henry and Mudge saw the grandmother's house. It had a birdbath and a garden full of corn. Henry and Mudge looked at each other. Their fingernails and toenails were very short. Henry's grandmother came outside. She had a big smile and a polka-dot dress. Mudge took one look at her and his tail wagged and wagged and wagged. "Hello, sweetie," Henry's grandmother said to Henry. She hugged him tight. "Hello, sweetie," Henry's grandmother said to Mudge. She hugged him tight. Henry's grandmother wiped dog drool off her sleeve, and they followed her in to the house.

Henry's grandmother's house was very small. It had a lot of tables, and things on the tables. Henry looked at Mudge, and for the first time wished that Mudge was smaller. Shorter. Thinner. Mudge looked like an elephant in a phone booth. And before too long, Mudge knocked a pink flamingo off of a table. "Aw, Mudge," Henry said. Henry's father gave Mudge a look. Then Mudge knocked a

wishing well off of a table. "Aw, Mudge," Henry said. Henry's father and Henry's mother gave Mudge a look. Then when Mudge knocked a bowl of peppermints off of a table, Henry's father and Henry's mother and Henry's grandmother gave Mudge a look. And Henry's father said, "Outside." Mudge was put out. Henry gave everybody a look.

After dinner, Henry played outside with Mudge. They loved the birdbath, Mudge especially. It was like a giant water dish just for him. When it was dark, Henry's father called Henry in. "What about Mudge?" asked Henry. "He has to sleep outside," said Henry's father. "Outside?" said Henry. Henry looked at Mudge, sitting in the dark country yard. Henry was afraid. He was afraid Mudge would be lonely. He was afraid Mudge would be sad. But mostly he was afraid Mudge would be asleep if Henry needed to be saved from a bear or a bobcat or a giant moth or a mouse. Henry gave Mudge a tight hug, and then went inside, biting

his fingernails. When he was washed and in bed, Henry lay in the dark. His eyes were big. His heart was pounding. His knees were shaking. Then WISH! FLOP! A moth! Henry jumped out of bed! He ran to the front door! "Mudge!" he called out in a loud whisper. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* Mudge wagged his tail from under the porch table. "Hi Mudge," Henry said as he crawled under the table, too. He was glad to see Mudge. Mudge was glad to see him. Mudge licked Henry's face and smelled his ears and shook his hand. Then Henry laid his head on Mudge's big chest, and finally he slept a good sleep at the strange house in the dark yard in the country. And when the Moth flew by, Mudge ate it.