

Goodbye, Swallows

A Thistledown Lane story · Series 2 · Episode 3



All summer long, there had been someone very fast on Thistledown Lane. Up the lane, down the lane, round the gatepost and back again, faster than anybody.

“Morning, Bramble! Morning, Moss! Morning, Lilly!” said Skye.

That was Skye. Skye was a swallow, with a forked tail,
and a lilac neckerchief, and she never, ever stayed still.



“Morning, Skye! Are you staying to play?” asked Bramble.

“Can’t stop! Lots of flies to catch! See you in spring!” said Skye.

“She always says that. And then she comes back after lunch,” said Lilly.



“It’s her joke. See you in spring!” said Moss.

And Skye laughed, and flicked her tail, and was gone.



But the next morning, something was different. Up on the long wire over the lane, there were swallows. Not one swallow. Lots and lots of swallows, all in a row, chattering away.

“Look at them all! Is it a party?” asked Moss.

“Is it a swallow party? Can we come?” asked Lilly.

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Skye fluttered down from the wire and landed on the wall beside them. And for once, she sat quite still.

“It isn’t a party. We’re getting ready. It’s time for us to go,” said Skye.

“Go where?” asked Bramble.



“A long, long way. Over the hills, and over the sea, and over the great big desert, all the way to Africa. Where it’s warm,” said Skye.

“All that way? On your own wings?” asked Moss.

“On my own wings. There aren’t any flies to catch here in the winter. So all the swallows go where the flies are,” said Skye.



“But when are you coming back?” asked Lilly.

“In the spring. That’s why I always say it. See you in spring!” said Skye.

“That’s not a joke. That’s ages. That’s the whole winter,” said Bramble.



And Bramble felt something heavy in her tummy, and before anybody could stop her, she turned round and trotted off home.

“Bramble?” asked Skye.

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Mam was in the kitchen, stirring a big pot, when
Bramble came in and sat down with a bump.

“Hello, love. That’s a very big frown for such a little hedgehog,” said Mam.

“Skye’s going away. All the way to Africa. For
the whole winter. And I’m cross,” said Bramble.



“Are you cross? Or are you sad?” asked Mam.

“...Both. Mostly sad. I’m going to miss her,” said Bramble.

“Do you know what missing someone is, Bramble? It’s love with nowhere to go yet. You only miss the people you really like,” said Mam.



“So it’s alright to be sad?” asked Bramble.

“It’s alright to be sad. But don’t let Skye fly away without a proper goodbye. You’d be sorry all winter,” said Mam.

“But how do you say goodbye to someone who’s going to be right up in the sky?” asked Bramble.



“Well. Perhaps you make something she can see from up there,” said Mam.



So Bramble ran back up the lane, as fast as her little legs could go.

“Moss! Lilly! I’ve got an idea. We’re going to make Skye a goodbye. A big one, that she can see from the sky,” said Bramble.

“Ooh. What sort of goodbye?” asked Lilly.



“A swallow. Made of leaves. All along the top of the wall,” said Bramble.

So they fetched leaves. Brown leaves for the wings, and the darkest leaves for the back.

And two long thin leaves for the forked tail. And Moss found one tiny purple leaf, just the colour of Skye’s neckerchief.



“For her neckerchief,” said Moss.

“It’s the best swallow I ever saw. Apart from Skye,” said Lilly.

And high up on the wire, a swallow with a
lilac neckerchief looked down, and saw it.

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Down she came, one last time, and
landed right on the leaf swallow's head.

"Is that me? Is that really me?" asked Skye.

"It's so you can see us from the sky. And so you know
we'll be missing you. I'm sorry I ran off," said Bramble.



“I’ll miss you too. All of you. But I’ll come back. Swallows always come back to the very same place. To the very same barn. Even to the very same nest,” said Skye.

Just then, Old Wren hopped along the wall, his little tail sticking up, as always.

“Old Wren, why don’t you go to Africa too?” asked Moss.



“Me? Oh, no. Some of us are goers, and some of us are stayers. I’m a stayer. Wrens stay here all winter long. Somebody’s got to keep an eye on the lane,” said Old Wren.

And then, all along the wire, the swallows stopped chattering. And one by one, they lifted up into the sky.



“That’s me! Goodbye! Goodbye, everybody!” said Skye.

“Goodbye, Skye! See you in spring!” said Bramble.

“See you in spring!” said Skye.



And everybody shouted it together, as loud as they could. See you in spring! And Skye flew up to join the others, and the swallows went round the lane once, and twice, and then away, away, over the hill.

And Old Wren sat on the wall beside them, and didn't say anything at all for a while, which was exactly the right thing to say.



“It’s alright to feel sad when a friend goes away. Missing someone just means you really like them. And Skye’s coming back. In the spring. She promised,” said Bramble.

And the leaf swallow stayed on the wall all autumn long, keeping a place for Skye, until the spring.

Thistledown Lane

The lesson: **It's alright to feel sad when a friend goes away. Missing someone shows how much you like them.**

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