

The First Frost

A Thistledown Lane story · Series 2 · Episode 5



One morning, Thistledown Lane woke up and it had gone white. Every leaf, every blade of grass, every spider's web, all sparkly with frost.

"Ooh! Ooh! It's cold! My paws are cold!" said Lilly.

"It crunches. Listen. Crunch, crunch, crunch," said Moss.



“It’s the first frost. Mam said it was coming.
It means winter’s on its way,” said Bramble.

And then up the lane came somebody so big and
so fluffy that at first nobody knew who it was.

“Sorrel? Is that you? You’ve gone all puffy!” said Moss.



“It’s my winter coat. It grew in all thick, ready for the cold. I’m extremely cosy,” said Sorrel.

“Can I feel? Oh! It’s like a cloud!” said Lilly.



Everybody, it turned out, was getting ready for winter. Just in different ways.

“I’ve got a seed store. Under the gatepost. Seeds, and more seeds, and a few more seeds in case,” said Moss.

“And I’ve buried my acorns. All over the woods. I don’t know where any of them are, but I’ve buried them,” said Lilly.

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“And I’ve got my coat,” said Sorrel.

“And I’m hungry,” said Bramble.

“You had breakfast,” said Moss.



“I know. I’m still hungry. I’m hungry all the time. I was hungry in the middle of the night. I was hungry while I was being hungry,” said Bramble.

“Perhaps your tummy’s getting ready for winter too,” said Sorrel.

And Bramble’s tummy gave a great big rumble, so loud that a robin on the wall flew away in surprise.

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“...I think I’d better go and see Mam,” said Bramble.



So Bramble went home, where Mam had a pot bubbling on the stove, and a big bowl already waiting on the table.

“There you are. I thought you might be along. Sit down, love,” said Mam.

“How did you know I’d be hungry?” asked Bramble.



“Because it’s the first frost. Every hedgehog in the world is hungry today,” said Mam.

And Bramble ate the whole bowlful, every bit of it, and then she looked at the empty bowl, and thought about it.

“Mam… why am I so hungry all the time?” asked Bramble.

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“Because soon, when the cold really comes, hedgehogs make a cosy nest of leaves, and sleep for most of the winter. A long, long sleep. And to sleep that long, a hedgehog needs to be nice and round first,” said Mam.

“A long sleep? All winter?” asked Bramble.

“Not yet. Not for a little while. But soon. So you eat up, and you get nice and round, and when the time comes, you’ll be all ready,” said Mam.

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“Will you be sleeping too?” asked Bramble.

“I will. Just along the hedge from you. Now. Would you like some more?” asked Mam.

“...Yes please,” said Bramble.

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That evening, as the sky went pink and the frost came back, the friends heard the most enormous twittering coming from the old wall.

It was Old Wren. And with him were his cousins. Lots and lots of little wrens, all fluffed up, all talking at once.

“My cousins. They’ve come for the cold nights. They always do,” said Old Wren.



“Hello, cousins! Where are you all going to sleep?” asked Lilly.

“In there!” said the cousins.

And everybody looked at the hole in the old wall. It was a very small hole. It was a hole for about one wren.

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“You can’t ALL fit in there!” said Moss.

“Oh, we can. On a cold night, wrens squeeze in together, all snug, and keep each other warm. Show them, cousins,” said Old Wren.

“Squeeze in, squeeze up! Squeeze in, squeeze up!” said the cousins.



“Only it’s a bit hard and chilly in there this year.
The old moss has all blown away,” said Old Wren.



“Then we’ll help. Everybody bring something soft,” said Bramble.

So off they went, as fast as they could in the cold. And Lilly came back with moss from her drey. And Moss came back with a big puff of thistledown. And Bramble came back with the driest leaves she could find. And Sorrel came back with a tuft of his old summer fur.



“I don’t need it any more. I’ve got my new coat,” said Sorrel.

And they tucked it all into the little hole, soft and dry and warm,
until it was the cosiest hole on the whole of Thistledown Lane.

“Well. That’s the best it’s ever been.
Thank you, all of you,” said Old Wren.



And then, one after another, the little wrens hopped into the hole, squeezing and wriggling, while everybody said it together. Squeeze in, squeeze up! Squeeze in, squeeze up!

“Squeeze in, squeeze up!” said the cousins.

Until at last there was only Old Wren left on the wall.
And somehow, there was still just room for one more.

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“Goodnight, all. Thank you for sharing,” said Old Wren.

“Goodnight, Wren. Goodnight, cousins,” said Moss.

And the friends walked home under the first stars, with cold paws and warm tummies. And Bramble was very quiet, because she was thinking about the long sleep.

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“Mam says it’s coming soon. The long sleep,” said Bramble.

“Then we’ll help you get ready too.
Like we helped the wrens,” said Lilly.

“That’s what friends are for,” said Sorrel.

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“Everybody gets ready for winter in their own way. Some grow coats, and some store seeds, and some eat and eat and eat. But it’s easier when you share. Just like the wrens. Squeeze in, squeeze up,” said Bramble.

And that night, the frost came down again on Thistledown Lane.
But inside the old wall, it was the warmest it had ever been.

Thistledown Lane

The lesson: **Everybody gets ready in their own way, and sharing makes it easier for all of us.**

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