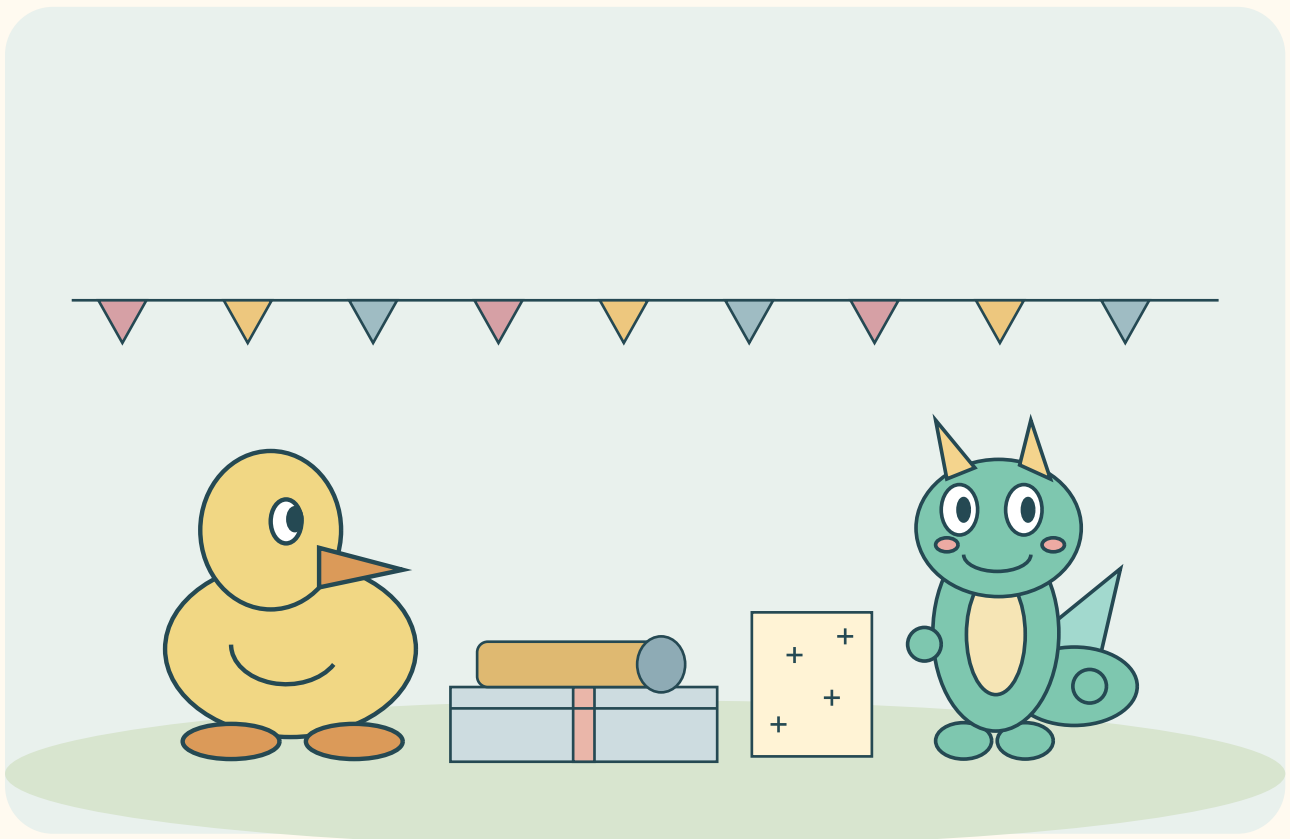


FINN & FRIENDS

Mabel's Almost-Secret



One birthday surprise.
One duck with rather a lot to say.

LITTLE STORY HARBOR

Ages 6–9 • Illustrated read-aloud edition

Mabel the duck was very good at talking.

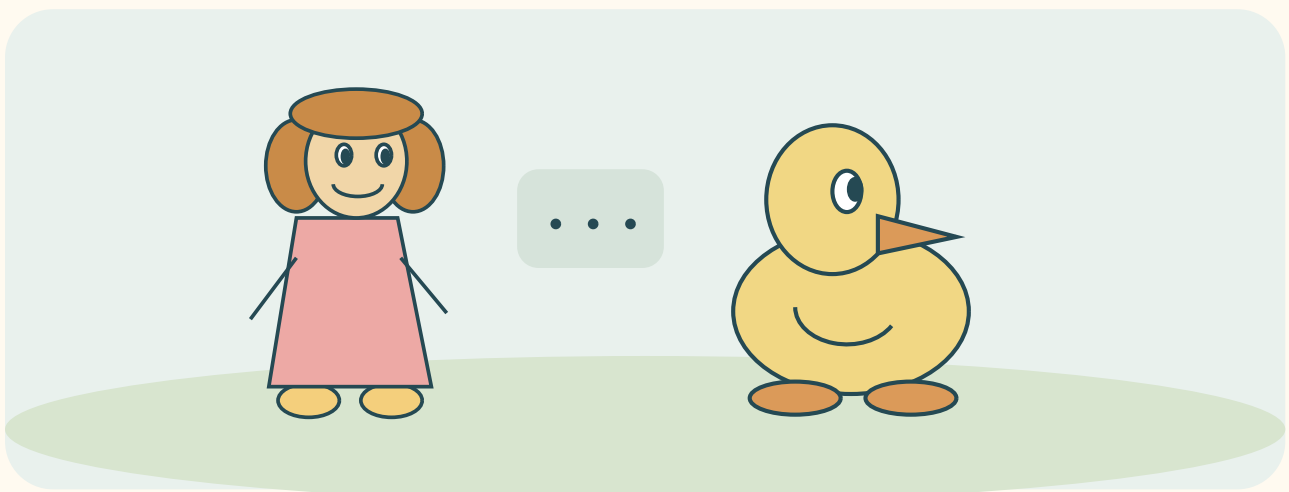
She could talk while walking.

She could talk while swimming.

She could even talk while eating, although nobody particularly enjoyed that.

But there was one thing Mabel was not good at.

Keeping secrets.



So when Lily told her on Monday that they were planning a surprise birthday party for Finn, Mabel was delighted.

And terrified.

"A secret?" she whispered.

"A birthday surprise, just until Thursday," said Lily.

Mabel nodded seriously.

"You can trust me."

"Good."

"I won't tell anyone."

"Excellent."

"Not even Finn."

"Especially not Finn."

Mabel gasped.

"Finn doesn't know?"

Lily stared at her.

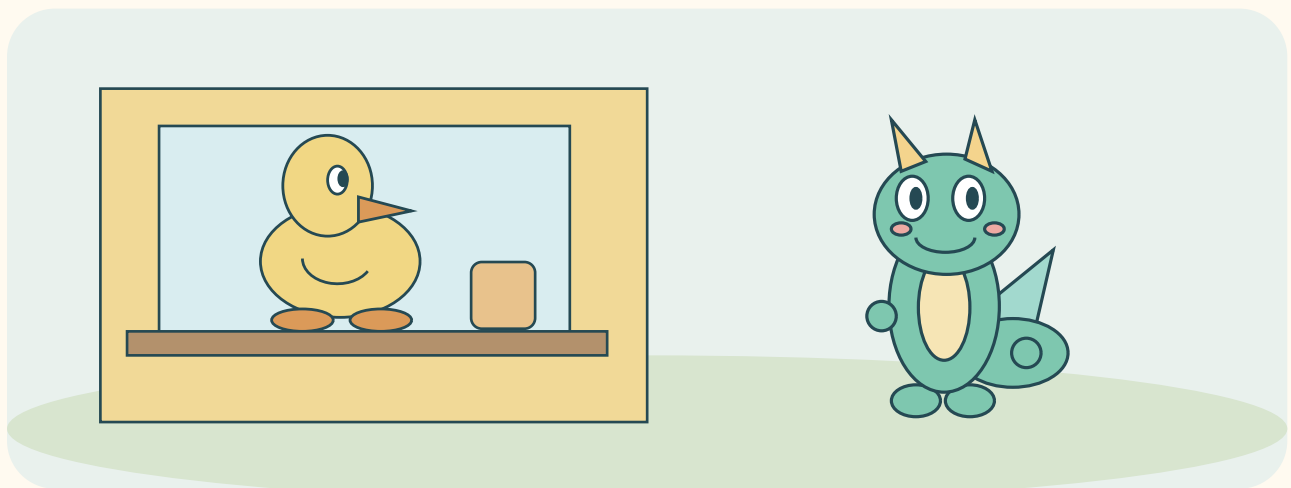
"Mabel. That's what makes it a surprise."

"Oh, yes," said Mabel.

She zipped her beak.

At least, she pretended to.

Ducks don't have zippers.



The trouble began at breakfast.

Mabel was eating toast when Finn walked past her window.

"Good morning, Mabel!"

Mabel jumped.

"GOOD MORNING, FINN! THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING SPECIAL HAPPENING ON THURSDAY!"

Finn blinked.

"All right."

"NOTHING INVOLVING CAKE!"

Finn looked puzzled.

"Are you all right?"

"PERFECTLY!"

Finn walked away.

Mabel sank beneath the table.

"Oh, dear."

By lunchtime, she had told three people that she wasn't allowed to talk about Thursday.

One of them was the baker.

One was Mr. Moss.

And one was a confused squirrel who hadn't asked.

Lily found her sitting beside the pond.

"Mabel, have you told Finn?"

"No!"

"Good."

"Although I may have mentioned that nothing special is happening on Thursday."

Lily covered her face.

"And that there's no cake."

"Mabel!"

"But I didn't tell him about the party!"

Lily sighed.

"Please. No more hints about the party. You can still talk about everything else."

Mabel nodded.

Then she held her beak shut with both wings.

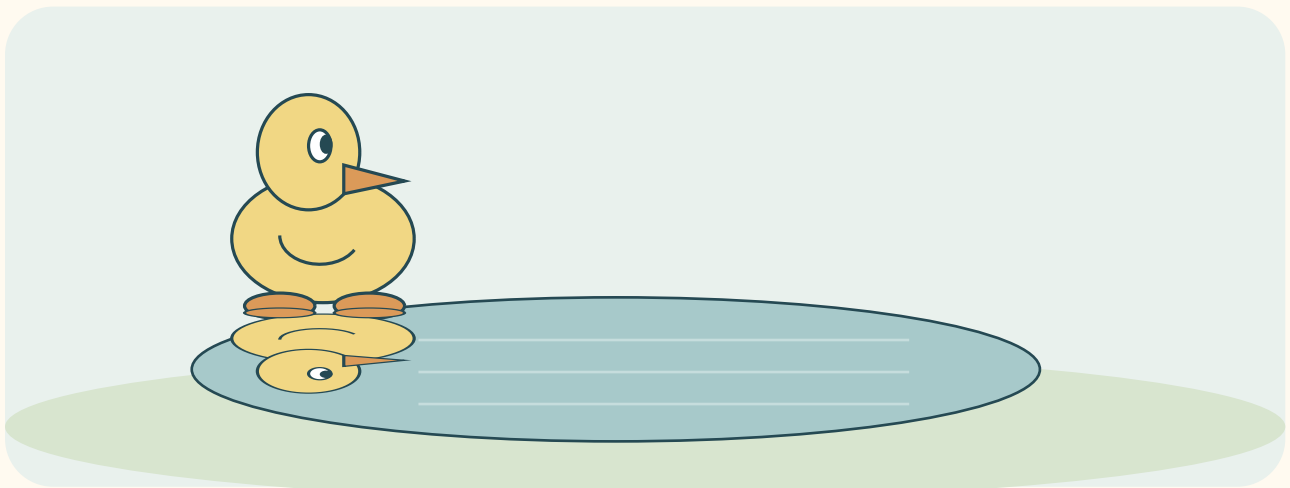
She kept it shut all afternoon.

When Pip asked her whether she wanted to play, she shook her head.

When Mr. Moss asked whether she had seen his watering can, she shook her head again.

When a bee landed on her nose, she made a very strange noise.

"Mmmmmph!"



By evening, she was exhausted.

"I don't think secrets are healthy," she told her reflection in the pond.

Her reflection agreed.

Or at least it looked as if it might.

On Thursday morning, Finn woke up feeling rather strange.

Everybody was behaving oddly.

Pip had hidden a large box behind his back.

Lily had flour on her nose.

And Mabel had been shouting about Thursday for three whole days.

Finn sat on his doorstep.

"Perhaps everyone is planning something," he said.

Then he smiled.

"How nice."

At three o'clock, Lily invited him to the meadow.

Finn arrived.

Nobody was there.

He looked around.

"Hello?"

Suddenly, everyone jumped out from behind the bushes.

"SURPRISE!"

Finn leaped into the air.

The gust from his wings lifted Pip's party hat.

It sailed through the air.

Mabel squeaked.

Mr. Moss reached for it and missed.

And Lily shouted, "THE CAKE!"



The hat landed point-first in the frosting.

Finn landed in the middle of the blanket.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

Lily lifted the hat out. There was a neat cone-shaped dip in the frosting.

"A tiny dragon landing pad," said Pip.

Everyone laughed.

Then Finn saw the decorations.

The presents.

The cake.

His friends.

"For me?"

"Of course!" said Lily.

Finn looked so happy that Mabel nearly cried.

"I DIDN'T TELL HIM!" she announced.

Lily laughed.

"No, Mabel. You didn't."

Mabel puffed out her chest.

"I am excellent at keeping secrets."

Just then, she remembered something.

"Oh! Finn! I almost forgot. Lily got you a—"

"MABEL!"

Mabel clapped her wings over her beak.

Too late.

Finn looked at Lily.

"A what?"

Lily sighed.



"A telescope."

There was a silence.

Then Finn smiled.

"Really?"

Mabel looked miserable.

"I've spoiled everything."

Finn shook his head.

"No, you haven't."

He looked at the long, ribbon-wrapped box.

"I've never had a telescope."

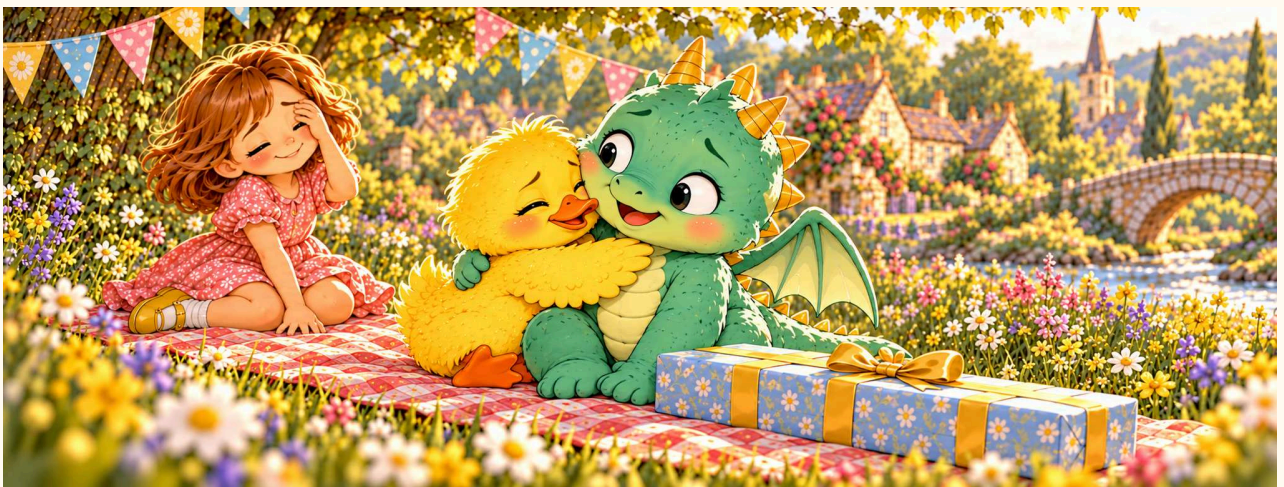
Then he looked at Mabel.

"And now I have something wonderful to look forward to tonight."

Mabel brightened.

"Really?"

"Really."



She hugged him.

Then she whispered, "There's a little star map inside the box, too."

Finn laughed.

Lily groaned.

And Mabel, who had finally run out of secrets, felt much better.

The End.

An original story with original vector and painterly illustrations, created with AI assistance and editorial review. For shared reading with an adult. Estimated read-aloud time: 5-7 minutes; not a timed listener test.