QUESTIONS TO SLEEP ON

Is Bunny Real?



Book 2 · For Lara and Zac



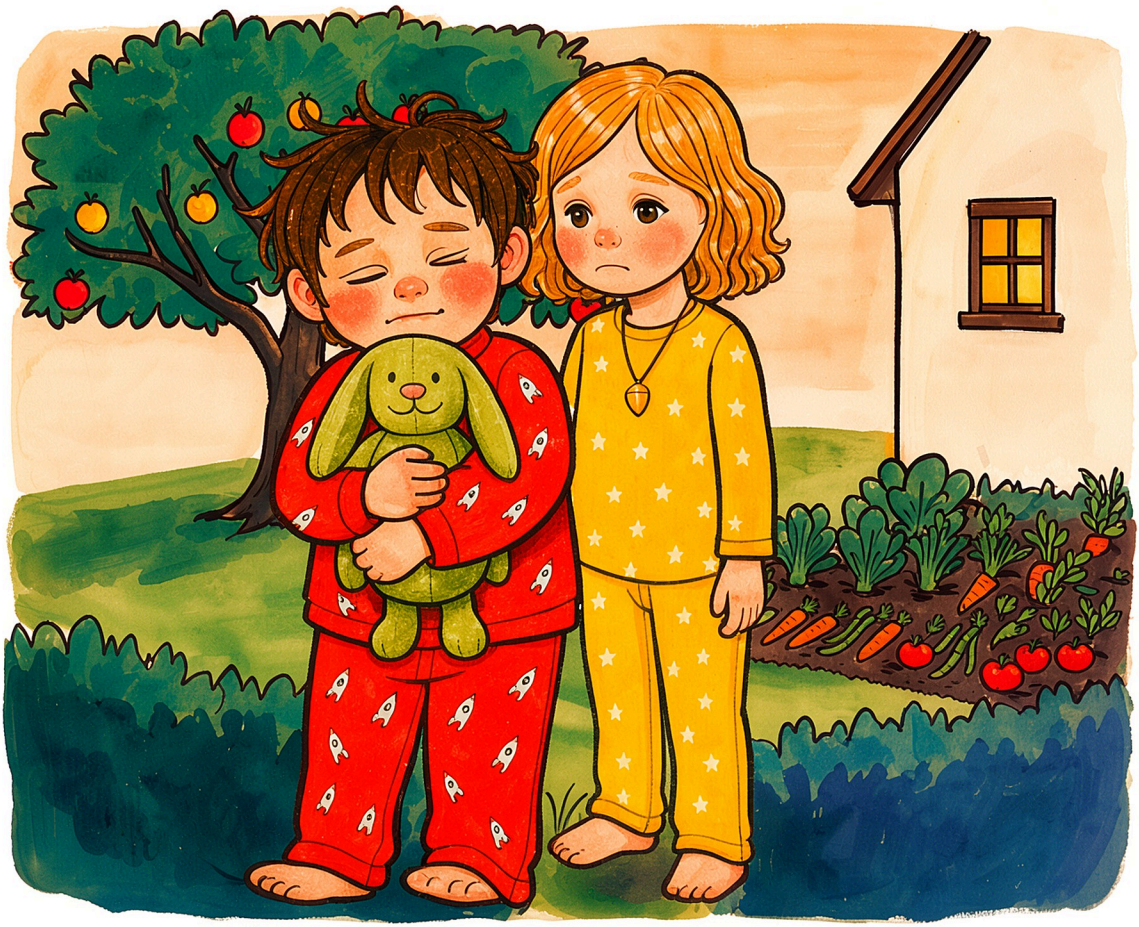
When the lamp goes warm and the garden goes quiet, Ponder comes out to wonder.

> Bunny always came too. Bunny came everywhere. Bunny had been to the beach, and the doctor's, and once, by mistake, inside the washing machine.



Zac sat Bunny on the bench. “Bunny is hungry,” he said, and gave him a twig carrot.

> Lara shook her head. “Bunny can’t be hungry. Bunny is just a toy. He isn’t real.” Zac stared at her as if she had said something terrible.



Zac hugged Bunny tight. “**Bunny is REAL!**” he said, very loudly.

> “Bunny has ears,” said Zac. “Bunny has a nose. Bunny sleeps in my bed. So there.” And he turned Bunny round so Bunny couldn’t hear any more.



Pip hopped closer. “Let’s test him. Real things eat. Eat this worm, Bunny!”

Bunny didn’t eat the worm. Bunny didn’t even look at the worm. “See?” said Pip. “Not real.” “Bunny doesn’t LIKE worms,” said Zac. Which was fair enough.



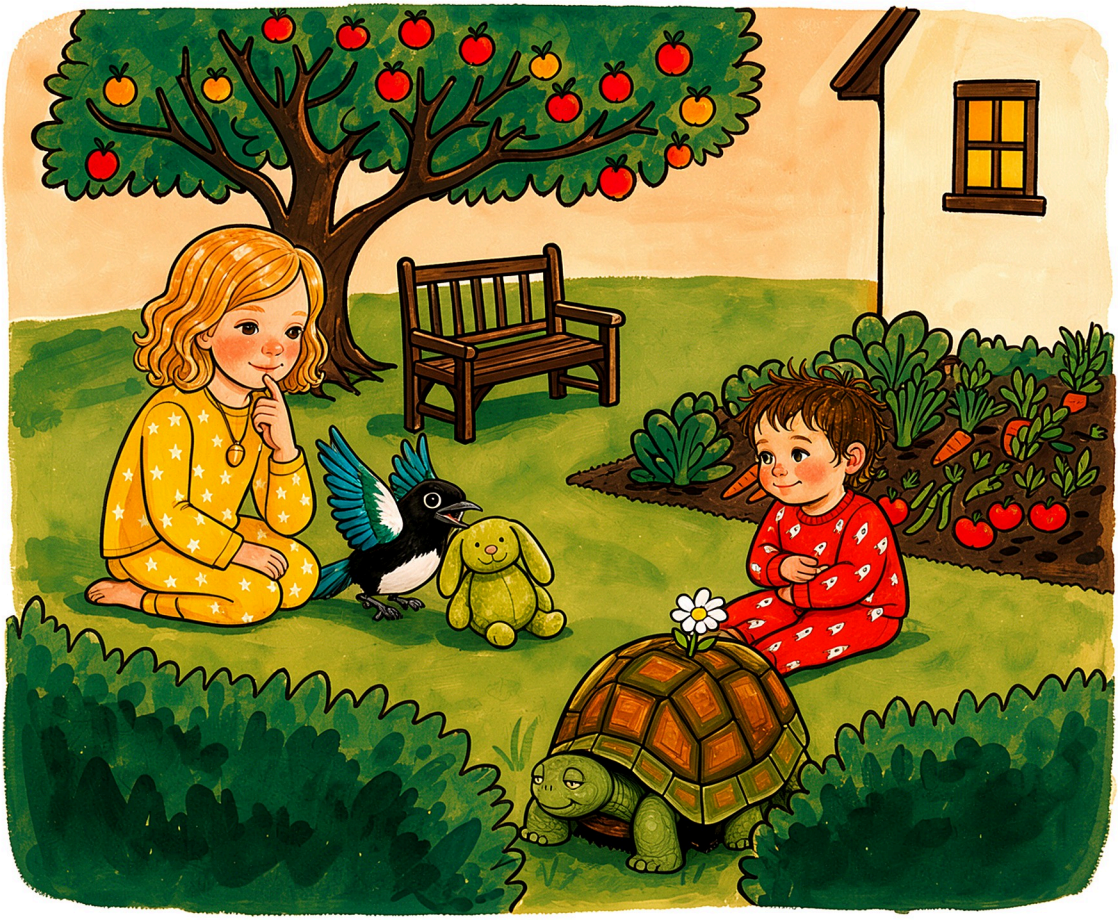
Then something hopped out from under the hedge. A real, wild rabbit!

> It was brown and soft, with a twitchy nose and twitchy whiskers. It nibbled the grass. It scratched its ear with its back foot. Then it looked at Bunny, green and floppy and still. And Bunny looked at it.



“THAT one is real,” whispered Lara. “It eats. It hops. It breathes.”

> “Bunny can’t hop,” said Pip. “Bunny can’t breathe.” Zac held Bunny up to the wild rabbit. “**Bunny is REAL!**” he said. “He’s just a different kind of real.”



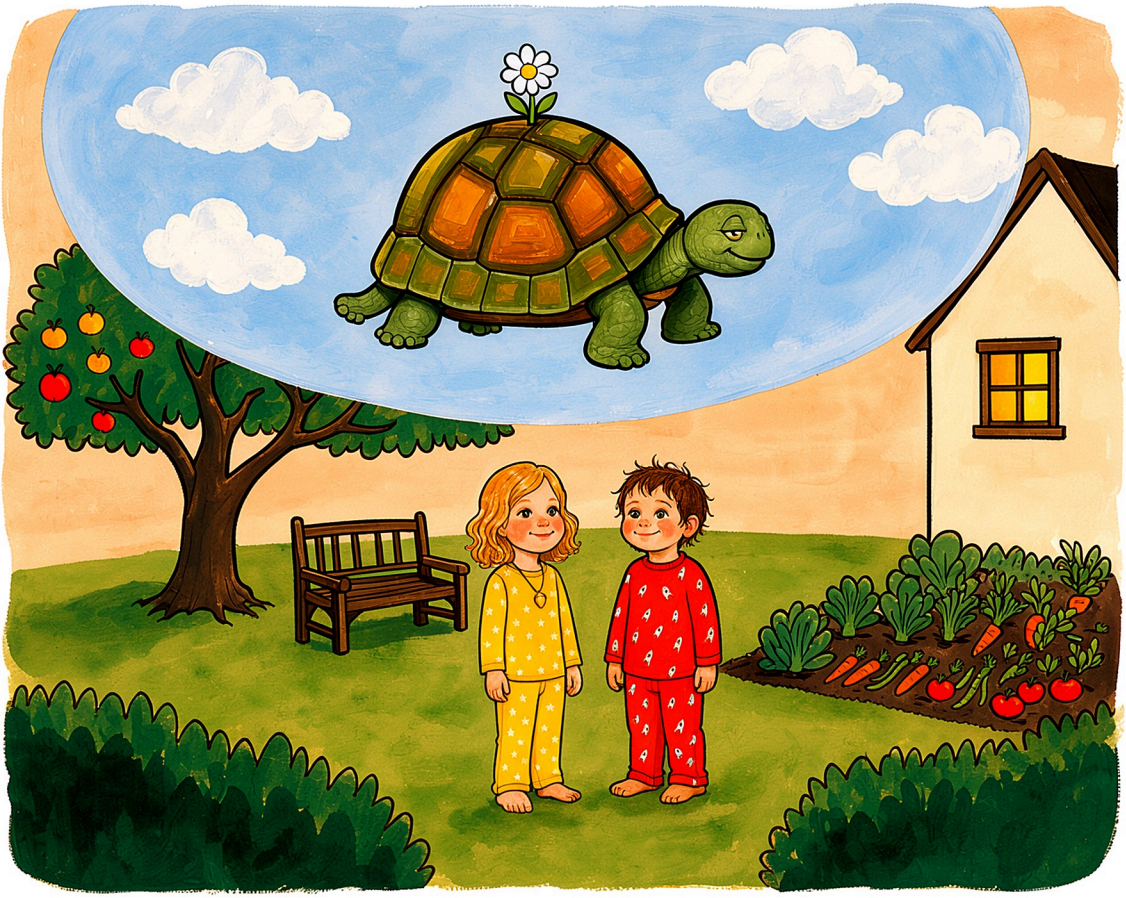
Slowly, slowly, Ponder came out of her hollow. “Hmm,” she said. “What does real mean?”

> The wild rabbit hopped away into the hedge. Lara thought hard. “Real means… you can touch it?” “I can touch Bunny,” said Zac. Pip touched Bunny with his beak, just to check. He could.



“Ponder,” said Lara, “is Bunny real? Or is he just pretend?”

> Ponder blinked one very slow blink. “Hmm,” she said. “I wonder. Can something be pretend and real at the same time? What do you think?”



“Last night I dreamed I could fly,” said Ponder. “Was my dream real?”

> “No,” said Lara. “Yes,” said Zac. “It was a real dream.” Ponder nodded slowly. “And the stories you hear at bedtime,” she said. “Are they real?” Lara opened her mouth, then shut it again. That was a tricky one.



Lara looked at Bunny for a long time. Bunny looked back with his stitched smile.

> “Bunny is a real toy,” said Lara slowly. “And a pretend rabbit. Maybe that’s a kind of real.” “Pretend,” said Pip. “Real,” said Zac. Ponder said nothing at all.



Back in bed, Zac tucked Bunny under the quilt. “**Bunny is REAL!**” he whispered.

> “Real enough to cuddle,” said Lara. She leaned over and gave Bunny a goodnight kiss on the nose. Just in case.



“Some questions are for sleeping on,” said Ponder. “Night night, Ponder.”
“Hmm. Night night. I wonder…”

> Down in the hedge, the wild rabbit was fast asleep. Up in bed, Bunny was fast asleep too. Or maybe he was just pretending.

Ponder's question

Is Bunny real?

ZAC

Point to something real in the picture. Now point to something pretend. Is Bunny real, or pretend?

LARA

Can something be pretend and real at the same time? How?



Some people think...

Bunny isn't real, because he can't eat or breathe or hop.

Bunny is real, because you can touch him and hug him and he's right here.

Bunny is a real toy and a pretend rabbit, both at once.

Or something else?

You're allowed to agree. You're allowed to disagree.

For grown-ups

The question: What makes something real? Being alive, being something you can touch, mattering to someone, or something else?

Its name: Appearance and reality; the real and the pretend. Philosophers call questions about what exists ontology.

Where it comes from: An original story. Children as young as three can usually tell pretend from real in play (see Paul Harris's research on imagination), so Zac isn't confused and doesn't need correcting. This is a puzzle to share, not a mistake to fix.

QUESTIONS, LITTLE TO BIG

1. Is the wild rabbit real? Is Bunny? (Thumbs up or down for each.)
2. Why did Lara say Bunny wasn't real?
3. Have you ever had a dream that felt real?
4. What if Bunny could talk? Would that make him more real?

WHAT THEY MIGHT SAY

Zac (3): "Bunny is REAL!", said with total conviction. Ask what makes him real rather than arguing. Three-year-olds often mean "he matters to me", which is a perfectly good kind of real.

Lara (6): Six-year-olds often reach for tests (breathing, eating, moving). Then ask whether a dream is real, or a story. Tests that work for rabbits may not work for everything.

TOMORROW

Sort a pile of things into real, pretend and not sure. Try a toy, a photo, a shadow, a drawing of a cat and a reflection in a spoon.

How to wonder together: ask, then wait. Say their words back to them. "Can you say more?" "Someone might say…" Don't say "right" or give your answer; Ponder never does. Too big for tonight? "Let's wonder about that at breakfast." (Then do.)