

The Girl and the Garden Snakes



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Maya loved her garden. She loved the sunflowers that nodded in the breeze and the fat tomatoes that grew red and round. But one morning, something moved under the big green leaves. A slim green-brown snake peeked out at her. Maya jumped back with a little squeak. She dropped her red sneakers and ran all the way to the front gate.



Maya sat on the front step and hugged her knees. Just then, a tall woman in a khaki shirt and a wide sun hat walked up the path. She had a warm smile and binoculars around her neck. "Hello! I'm Rosa, a nature guide," she said. "I heard a squeak. Was it you?" Maya nodded. "There's a snake in my garden!" she whispered.



Rosa sat down beside Maya. "Snakes are shy," she said. "Most garden snakes are harmless. Would you like to learn about them?" Maya thought about the snake's round amber eyes. It hadn't looked mean. It had looked curious. Slowly, she nodded. She pulled her notebook and pencil from her canvas satchel. "I can write down what I learn," she said.



Rosa led Maya back to the garden. "First, we watch from a safe distance," she said. "Stay behind the big stone. Snakes don't like loud noises or quick moves." They crouched low. The slim green snake peeked out again. Its tiny forked tongue flicked in and out. "That's how it smells the air," Rosa whispered. Maya wrote in her notebook: Twig peeks from leaves.



The snake slid out from under the leaves. A pale yellow stripe ran down its back. "Let's call her Twig," Maya whispered. Twig glided over the soil and stopped near a flowerpot. "What does she eat?" Maya asked. Rosa pointed to a small beetle. Twig's tongue flicked, and the beetle was gone. "Insects and slugs," Rosa said. "Snakes help our garden."



Rosa showed Maya how to use her binoculars. "Look through these," she said. Maya held them to her eyes and gasped. Twig's round amber eyes looked huge and kind. "I can see her tiny tongue!" she whispered. She wrote: Round amber eyes. Flicks tongue to smell. Maya felt her heart slow down. Watching was safe and fun.



A glossy grey-brown snake with dark blotches slipped under a flat stone. "That's Pip," Rosa said. "Pip is bold and busy." Pip's bright black eyes blinked. Its tongue flicked quickly. It hunted insects near the stones. "Snakes hide under stones and logs," Rosa said. "They like cool, dark places." Maya wrote: Pip hides under stones. Eats insects.



Maya wanted to see where Twig hid. Rosa showed her a warm, dry spot under the leaves. "Snakes hide where they feel safe," Rosa said. "Never lift a stone or log without looking first. And always tell a grown-up if you find a snake." Maya nodded and wrote: Look, don't lift. Tell a grown-up. She felt proud of her careful notes.



That afternoon, Maya saw Twig again. This time, Twig was shedding her old skin. "Snakes shed their skin as they grow," Rosa said. "It comes off in one piece." Maya watched the thin, papery skin peel away. "Does it hurt?" she asked. "No," Rosa said. "It's natural." Maya wrote: Snakes shed skin to grow. She drew a tiny snake with a big smile.



Maya started to feel brave. She didn't jump when Twig flicked her tongue. She didn't squeak when Pip slid by. "You're a good watcher," Rosa said. "You stay still and quiet." Maya grinned. "I'm not scared anymore," she said. "I'm curious!" She wrote in her notebook: Brave watchers stay still. Snakes are shy. Learning makes fear go away.



Back at the big stone, Maya watched Twig and Pip hunt. Twig caught a slug. Pip caught a cricket. "Snakes are helpful neighbours," Rosa said. "They eat pests that eat our plants." Maya drew a picture of a happy garden with two snakes and lots of vegetables. "I want to make a guide," she said. "A guide for safe watching."



Maya worked all afternoon. She wrote big, clear words: Watch from a safe distance. Stay still and quiet. Look, don't lift. Tell a grown-up. She drew Twig peeking from leaves and Pip slipping under a stone. She drew Rosa with her binoculars. "This is my safe watching guide!" she said. Rosa smiled. "It's perfect," she said.



The next day, Maya's friends came to play. "Want to see the snakes?" Maya asked. Her friends looked nervous. "Are they scary?" they asked. "No," Maya said. "They're shy and helpful. I have a guide!" She showed them her notebook. They read it together. Then they all crept quietly to the big stone and watched from a safe distance.



Twig peeked out. Pip slid under a stone. Maya's friends gasped with delight. "They're so small!" said one. "I like Twig's yellow stripe," said another. Maya beamed. "Learning about wildlife makes fear go away," she said. She handed out little copies of her guide. "Now you can watch safely too," she said. Her friends thanked her.



Rosa came by to say goodbye. "You're a real nature guide now," she said. Maya hugged her. "Thank you for teaching me," she said. She waved as Rosa walked down the path. Then Maya sat in the garden with her notebook. Twig sunned herself on a warm stone. Pip hunted near the tomatoes. Maya wrote: Snakes are good neighbours.



Maya's guide grew and grew. She added pages about what snakes eat and where they hide. She drew pictures of Twig's amber eyes and Pip's quick tongue. Her friends shared the guide with their families. Maya smiled. She knew that learning about wildlife makes fear go away. And she was brave enough to share that with everyone.