

The Girl and the Water Vole



Aysel Banu YAVUZAL

The Girl and the Water Vole

Aysel Banu YAVUZAL



Maya loved the stream near her house. Every morning, she pulled on her yellow rain boots, zipped her red hooded jacket, and hurried down the path with her green canvas backpack bouncing behind her. She carried a little notebook and a pencil, ready to write down everything she saw. The water gurgled over smooth stones, and the willow trees swayed gently in the breeze.



One sunny day, Maya sat very still on the grassy riverbank. She heard a soft rustle in the tall plants. Then she saw it: a small brown water vole peeking out from the bank. Its fur was soft brown, its nose blunt and rounded, and its tiny ears were almost hidden. It had small dark eyes that blinked at her. Maya held her breath, not wanting to scare it away.



She wrote in her notebook: 'Water vole! Small, brown, shy.' At school, she asked her teacher about water voles. Her teacher said, 'They live along streams and rivers, but they need healthy riverbanks with lots of plants.' Maya wanted to know more. She asked if there was someone who could tell her about the stream near her home. Her teacher smiled and gave her a phone number.



On Saturday, Maya met Mr. Ellis by the stream. He was tall and sturdy, with pale skin, short grey hair, green eyes, and a short grey beard. He wore olive-green work trousers, a khaki vest with many pockets, brown boots, and a wide-brimmed sun hat. 'Hello, Maya,' he said with a warm smile. 'I hear you've met one of our water voles.' Maya nodded, her dark eyes sparkling.



Mr. Ellis explained that water voles are shy animals that need safe places to hide and food to eat. 'They love plants along the riverbank,' he said. 'But many of the native plants have disappeared. Without them, the water voles have nowhere to live.' Maya looked around. The riverbank was mostly bare dirt and short grass. She felt sad for the little vole she had seen.



'Can we help?' Maya asked. Mr. Ellis nodded. 'There's a supervised project to restore native plants along the stream. Children can join, with grown-ups watching carefully.' Maya's face lit up with a gap-toothed grin. 'I want to help!' she said. Mr. Ellis gave her a list of plants that would grow well there, like marsh marigold and purple loosestrife.



The next weekend, Maya joined Mr. Ellis and some other children by the stream. They wore gloves and carried small trowels. Mr. Ellis showed them how to dig little holes and place the baby plants carefully. 'Plants hold the bank together,' he said. 'They give water voles food and cover.' Maya planted a tiny marsh marigold and patted the soil around it gently.



Every week, Maya visited the stream to check on the plants. She watered them when the weather was dry and pulled out weeds that tried to crowd them. Sometimes she saw the water vole again, peeking from the bank. It would watch her with its small dark eyes, then disappear with a soft plop into the water. Maya wrote in her notebook: 'Vole swam today! Long thin tail.'



As the weeks passed, the plants grew taller and stronger. Green leaves spread along the riverbank, and bright flowers began to open. Mr. Ellis showed Maya how to spot water vole burrows in the bank. 'Look for small, round holes about the size of an apple,' he said. Maya found three! She felt proud that the voles were making themselves at home.



One afternoon, Maya brought her friend Sam to see the stream. They stood quietly and watched a water vole swim across the water. Its long thin tail trailed behind it, and its brown fur looked sleek and wet. 'It's so cute!' Sam whispered. Maya nodded. 'And there's another one,' she said, pointing to a vole nibbling on a plant stem near the bank.



Then Mr. Ellis called them over. 'I have something special to show you,' he said. He led them to a spot where the plants were thick and tall. 'Watch,' he said softly. Maya and Sam crouched down. Soon, they saw a mother water vole with two tiny babies. The babies waddled behind their mother, their little noses twitching. Maya's heart swelled with joy.



Mr. Ellis told them that the water voles were doing well because the riverbank was healthy again. 'Native plants give them food, shelter, and safe paths along the stream,' he said. Maya looked at the green bank and the sparkling water. She thought about the first day she saw the water vole, and how much had changed since then. She felt a warm glow of pride.



That evening, Maya told her family all about the project. 'We planted plants, and now the water voles have a home,' she said. Her mother smiled. 'You helped make a difference, Maya.' Maya drew a picture of the water vole in her notebook and wrote: 'Healthy riverbanks support wildlife.' She decided to keep visiting the stream to make sure her plants kept growing.



The next spring, the riverbank was bursting with green plants and colorful flowers. Maya saw water voles swimming and nibbling along the bank. She also saw dragonflies, butterflies, and birds visiting the stream. Mr. Ellis said, 'This is what a healthy stream looks like. You and the other children did a wonderful job.' Maya beamed with happiness.



Maya still wears her yellow rain boots and red jacket when she visits the stream. She carries her green backpack with the nature badge and her notebook. Sometimes she sits quietly and watches the water voles. She knows they are shy, so she keeps still and smiles. She feels like a friend to the little brown animals who live by the water.



Now Maya knows that even small actions can help nature. She tells her friends, 'If you want to help wildlife, start with plants. They feed animals and give them homes.' She is proud of the cheerful project, and she loves watching the water voles play along the healthy riverbank. Every visit to the stream feels like a new adventure, full of gentle surprises.