

The Girl and the Little Hedgehog



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Maya loved her garden more than almost anywhere. She had light-brown skin, two short braids, and a gap-toothed smile. Every evening, she put on her yellow rain boots and blue dungarees and explored. She carried a small green satchel with a pencil and paper inside. The garden was full of flowers, bushes, and secret corners. But Maya had never seen a hedgehog there before.



One quiet night, Maya sat very still under the apple tree. The moon was up, and the garden was dark and peaceful. Suddenly, she heard a rustle in the leaves. Something small and round moved near the flowerbed. Maya's big brown eyes opened wide. She crept closer, step by step, to see what it was.



There, in the soft grass, was a little hedgehog! It was palm-sized and round, with brown spines tipped in pale cream. Its tiny black nose sniffed the air. Maya gasped with delight. 'Hello, little one,' she whispered. The hedgehog curled up tight, like a prickly ball. Maya sat very still and waited, her heart beating fast.



After a moment, the hedgehog uncurled. It looked at Maya with bead-like dark eyes. Then it scurried under a bush and disappeared. Maya wanted to know more. She ran to find Grandma Rose, who was sitting on the porch in her lavender cardigan. 'Grandma, I saw a hedgehog!' Maya said. 'What does it eat? Where does it sleep?'



Grandma Rose smiled, her round glasses glinting. 'Hedgehogs are nocturnal,' she said. 'That means they sleep in the day and wake at night. They need quiet, safe places to live. Your little visitor is probably looking for food and a cozy corner.' Maya listened carefully. 'So I should be quiet at night?' she asked. 'Yes,' said Grandma. 'And you can help by making your garden safe for wildlife.'



Maya thought hard. She wanted to help the hedgehog. 'I know!' she said. 'I'll make a garden safety checklist.' She pulled out her pencil and paper from her green satchel. Grandma Rose nodded. 'That's a wonderful idea,' she said. 'What will you put on it?' Maya chewed her pencil, thinking about the little hedgehog and what it needed.



First, Maya wrote: 'Keep the garden quiet at night.' She remembered how the hedgehog had curled up when she moved. 'No loud noises,' she told Grandma. 'And no running around after dark.' Grandma Rose smiled. 'That's a good start,' she said. 'Hedgehogs need peace and quiet to feel safe.' Maya drew a tiny hedgehog next to her words.



Next, Maya wrote: 'Leave safe corners for wildlife.' She looked around the garden. There were piles of leaves, a woodpile, and a bush with a hollow underneath. 'The hedgehog can hide there,' she said. 'And I won't tidy everything away.' Grandma Rose nodded. 'Yes, little shelters are important. Hedgehogs need a place to rest during the day.'



Then Maya wrote: 'Don't disturb the hedgehog at night.' She thought about how she had crept up close. 'I should watch from far away,' she said. 'And not touch it.' Grandma Rose agreed. 'Wild animals need to feel safe. If you leave them alone, they will visit again.' Maya added a star next to that rule. She wanted the hedgehog to come back.



Maya finished her checklist and read it out loud. 'Keep the garden quiet. Leave safe corners. Don't disturb the hedgehog.' She felt proud. Grandma Rose gave her a hug. 'You are a good friend to wildlife,' she said. Maya put the checklist in her satchel. She couldn't wait for night to come again. She wanted to see if her rules would work.



That evening, Maya waited quietly by the window. The garden was dark and still. She didn't run outside. She didn't make a sound. Then, just after the moon rose, she saw a small shape near the flowerbed. It was the hedgehog! It sniffed around, uncurled, and explored. Maya smiled. Her checklist was working. The hedgehog felt safe.



The next morning, Maya showed her checklist to Grandma Rose. 'It worked!' she said. 'The hedgehog came back.' Grandma Rose clapped her hands. 'You see? Quiet and safe places make a big difference.' Maya decided to add one more thing to her checklist: 'Tell others about hedgehogs.' She wanted everyone to know how to help.



Maya made copies of her checklist and gave them to her neighbors. She told them about the little hedgehog and how it needed quiet nights. Her neighbors promised to help. They kept their cats inside at night and left a corner of leaves for wildlife. Maya felt happy. Her garden was becoming a friendly place for animals.



Weeks passed, and the hedgehog became a regular visitor. Maya often watched from her window, quiet as a mouse. Sometimes she saw the hedgehog with a fallen leaf stuck on its spines. It snuffled and foraged, happy and safe. Maya's checklist hung on the fridge, a reminder of her promise. She had helped a little creature feel at home.



One night, Grandma Rose joined Maya at the window. 'You have made a real difference,' she said. 'The garden is quieter now, and the hedgehog is thriving.' Maya smiled her gap-toothed smile. 'I'm glad,' she said. 'It's nice to have a hedgehog neighbor.' They watched the little creature together, wrapped in the peaceful night.



Maya learned that caring for wildlife starts with small, kind actions. Her garden safety checklist was simple, but it made a big difference. Now the garden is a quiet, friendly place for the little hedgehog and other creatures. And Maya knows that even a child can help nature, one quiet night at a time. The end.