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Maya pulled on her yellow rain boots and ran into the garden. The morning was fresh and dewy, and everything smelled of wet grass. She loved this garden more than any other place. Today, she wanted to find something special. She looked under the bushes and behind the flowers. Then, she heard a tiny rustle in the leaves.

Maya knelt down quietly. There, in the corner by the fence, was a small hedgehog! Its brown spiny coat was dotted with dew, and its cream face twitched as it snuffled. Maya's eyes grew wide with wonder. She watched the little creature explore, its tiny black eyes shining. She knew she had to help it.

Maya ran to find her mum, who was in the kitchen. 'Mum, there's a hedgehog in our garden!' she said. Her mum smiled, her freckles crinkling. 'How wonderful!' she said. 'Hedgehogs need our help, you know. They need food and safe places to hide.' Maya nodded, her gap-toothed smile bright. 'Can we make our garden a happy home for them?'

Maya's dad came out, wearing his blue checked shirt. He put on his work gloves and tool belt. 'Let's see what we can do,' he said. Maya led him to the hedgehog's corner. The hedgehog had curled up under a bush. 'We need to keep it safe,' Maya said. Her dad nodded. 'We can plant native shrubs that give hedgehogs food and cover.'

Mum joined them with her wide sun hat and orange apron. She carried a book about hedgehogs. 'Hedgehogs like to travel from garden to garden,' she explained. 'But fences and roads can be dangerous. We can make safe paths for them.' Maya listened carefully, her hazel eyes sparkling. 'So they can visit without getting hurt?' she asked. 'Exactly,' said Mum.

The family got to work. Dad dug holes for new plants while Maya helped. They chose native shrubs like hawthorn and hazel. 'These will give hedgehogs berries and insects to eat,' Mum said. Maya patted the soil around a little shrub. 'And cozy places to hide,' she added. The hedgehog watched from a safe distance, its snout twitching.

Next, Dad showed Maya how to make a safe path. They cut a small gap in the bottom of the fence. 'This little doorway lets hedgehogs pass through,' Dad said. Maya clapped her hands. 'So they can go to other gardens safely!' she cheered. They made another gap on the other side. The hedgehog snuffled closer, curious about the new openings.

Days passed, and the garden began to change. The new shrubs grew greener and fuller. Maya checked the hedgehog's corner every morning. One day, she saw the hedgehog snuffling among the plants. It wore a tiny leaf stuck on its spines like a hat! Maya giggled. 'You like your new home, don't you?' she whispered. The hedgehog looked up and blinked its tiny black eyes.

Mum showed Maya how to leave out a shallow dish of water. 'Hedgehogs get thirsty,' she said. Maya filled the dish carefully. Dad added a small pile of logs for hiding. 'This will make a cozy nest,' he said. Maya felt proud. 'We're helping the hedgehogs,' she said. Her parents smiled. 'Yes, we are,' said Mum. 'And it's all because you noticed.'

One evening, Maya saw two hedgehogs on the safe path. They snuffled and explored together. Then another hedgehog appeared! Maya ran to tell her parents. 'More hedgehogs are coming!' she said. Dad looked out and smiled. 'The word must have spread,' he said. 'Our garden is becoming a busy, cheerful place.' Maya watched the little animals, her heart full of joy.

Maya noticed that the hedgehogs loved the native shrubs. They nibbled berries and hunted for insects. But she also saw that the path needed some help. Some stones had rolled into the gap. 'Dad, the path is blocked!' she called. Dad came with his gloves. 'Good catch, Maya,' he said. Together, they cleared the stones and made the path smooth again. 'We have to keep it safe,' Maya said.

Mum brought out a book about hedgehogs. They read that hedgehogs can travel a mile each night. 'That's why safe paths are so important,' Mum said. Maya thought for a moment. 'We could tell our neighbors about the gaps,' she said. 'Then they can make safe paths too!' Her parents beamed. 'What a good idea,' said Dad. 'Small actions can help animals everywhere.'

Maya made little signs with pictures of hedgehogs. She and Dad visited the neighbors. They showed them the gaps and explained how to help. The neighbors smiled and agreed to make their own safe paths. Soon, the whole street had a network of tiny doorways for hedgehogs. Maya felt proud. 'We're helping them travel safely,' she said. The hedgehogs seemed to thank her with happy snuffles.

Now the garden is full of life. Hedgehogs snuffle and explore among the plants, their spiny coats brushing against the leaves. Maya sits quietly and watches them. She thinks about how it all started with one little hedgehog. 'Even small actions can help animals,' she says to herself. Her family smiles, knowing she has learned something wonderful.

The hedgehogs are happy and safe. They have food, water, and cozy places to hide. The safe paths let them visit other gardens without danger. Maya watches them come and go, her hazel eyes shining. She knows that her kind choices made a difference. 'I'm so glad we helped,' she says. Her dad puts an arm around her. 'We couldn't have done it without you, Maya.'

The garden is a busy, cheerful place now. Maya's yellow boots splash in puddles as she checks the hedgehogs. She feels proud that her family worked together to help the little animals. 'Small actions can help animals,' she says again, and she knows it's true. With a gap-toothed smile, she promises to keep helping, one small action at a time.