

The Boy and the Nightjar



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In a small house at the edge of the woods lived a boy named Sam. He was eight years old, small and wiry, with warm brown skin and short curly black hair. His green jumper had leaf patches on the elbows, and his red wellington boots were always muddy. Sam loved birds more than anything else. Every evening, he took his canvas satchel and went out to watch them.



Sam carried a small sketchbook and a pencil everywhere he went. He drew the robin on the fence and the sparrows in the hedge. He drew the swifts that screamed across the sky. His dark brown eyes missed nothing, and the freckles across his nose crinkled when he smiled. 'Birds are the best hiding game,' he whispered to himself. 'You just have to look carefully.'



One warm evening, Sam sat under a big oak tree. The sun was setting, and the woods grew quiet. Suddenly, a strange churring sound filled the air. It sounded like a tiny engine humming. Sam froze and listened. He had never heard that sound before. 'What bird makes that noise?' he wondered, his heart beating fast.



Sam crept toward the sound, step by step. He crouched low, like a bird-watcher in a nature book. The churring came from a branch just above his head. Sam squinted, but he saw only bark and shadows. He tilted his head this way and that. 'Where are you?' he whispered. The churring stopped. Everything was still.



Then Sam saw it. A nightjar sat on the branch, perfectly still. Its mottled brown and grey feathers looked exactly like tree bark. It had a pale collar stripe and tiny whisker-like bristles around its beak. Its large dark glossy eyes stared back at him. 'You're hiding in plain sight!' Sam gasped. 'How clever you are!'



Sam sat down slowly, not wanting to scare the bird. He opened his sketchbook and began to draw. He drew the nightjar's bark-patterned feathers and its flattened resting pose. He drew its big reflective eyes and its long wings folded like a cloak. The bird stayed perfectly still. Sam noticed a small silver leg ring on one leg. 'Someone else has watched you too,' he whispered.



For a long time, Sam drew and watched. The nightjar did not move. It looked like a piece of the tree. Sam learned that the bird's camouflage was its superpower. It could hide from danger and from curious boys. 'You are a master of disguise,' Sam said softly. He carefully shaded the feathers with his pencil.



When the sky grew dark, Sam packed up his sketchbook. He walked home with a big smile. His red boots squelched in the mud, but he did not mind. He had made a new friend, even if the friend did not know it. All night, he dreamed of bark-patterned wings and big glossy eyes.



The next morning, Sam hurried to school. He could not wait to show his drawings. In class, Miss Amara, with her kind smile and round glasses, asked if anyone had news. Sam raised his hand shyly. 'I saw a nightjar,' he said. 'It was hiding on a branch, and I drew it.' Miss Amara's eyes twinkled. 'Come and show us, Sam,' she said.



Sam walked to the front of the class. He pinned his drawings on the board. His classmates leaned forward. Leo, a sturdy boy in a blue T-shirt with a dinosaur print, gasped. 'I can't even see it in the drawing!' he said. Sam pointed to the bird's shape. 'That's the point,' he said. 'Its feathers look just like bark.'



Miss Amara smiled warmly. 'Sam has shown us something important,' she said. 'Nature is full of hidden wonders. We just need to look carefully.' She pointed at the drawing on the board. 'Who would like to go outside and look for camouflaged creatures?' Every hand shot up. Leo jumped out of his seat. 'Let's go!' he cheered.



The whole class went into the school garden. Sam led the way, his sketchbook in hand. 'Look for things that are still,' he said. 'And listen for strange sounds.' The children spread out and peered at bushes and tree trunks. Leo stared at a brown leaf for a whole minute. 'I thought it was a moth!' he laughed.



Sam found a caterpillar that looked like a twig. Miss Amara spotted a grasshopper the color of grass. Everyone was amazed. 'I never knew so much was hiding!' said Leo. Sam smiled, his gap-toothed grin wide. 'Careful watching helps you see,' he said. The class nodded. They had learned a secret of nature together.



Back in class, the children drew their own pictures of camouflaged creatures. Leo drew a stick insect on a twig. Another girl drew a frog on a lily pad. Sam walked around and helped his friends notice details. 'Look at the patterns,' he said. 'That's how they blend in.' Miss Amara watched them all with a happy sigh.



At the end of the day, Sam sat under the oak tree again. He thought about the nightjar and his classmates. He felt proud that his drawings had helped everyone see nature differently. 'Being curious is like having a superpower,' he told himself. He opened his sketchbook and began to draw a new bird. The woods were full of stories, and he wanted to find them all.



From that day on, Sam's classmates looked more carefully wherever they went. They noticed the birds in the park and the insects in the grass. Sam kept watching and drawing, always patient, always curious. And sometimes, in the evening, he heard the churring sound and smiled. The nightjar was still there, hidden in plain sight, waiting for someone to look.