

The Girl and the Hummingbird



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Maya sat on the back steps of her house, her red gardening gloves folded in her lap. She wore her favorite yellow t-shirt with the green leaf print, and her green rubber boots tapped the ground. A tiny hummingbird zoomed into the garden and hovered near a single orange flower. Its wings blurred like tiny fans, and its ruby throat flashed in the sun. Maya held her breath and watched.



The hummingbird had a thin silver band on one leg. Maya named him Pip because he piped a little chirp as he darted from bloom to bloom. He sipped sweet nectar with his long, thin beak, then zipped away over the fence. Maya's round face broke into a gap-toothed smile. "Come back, Pip!" she called. She wished she had more flowers to keep him near.



Grandma Rosa came out with her straw sun hat and a packet of seeds. "I saw your little friend," she said, her hazel eyes twinkling. "If you want more hummingbirds, plant flowers they love." She showed Maya a picture of bright trumpet-shaped blooms. "These are native flowers. They grow well here and feed our bird neighbors." Maya nodded. "Let's plant a whole garden!"



They dug small holes in the soft dirt. Maya pushed in each seed with her red-gloved fingers. "How long until they grow?" she asked. Grandma Rosa smiled. "Patience, little gardener. A few weeks of sun and water." Maya watered the seeds every morning before breakfast. Some days she checked twice, just in case. She imagined Pip hovering over a sea of flowers.



One morning, a tiny green shoot poked through the soil. Maya gasped. "Grandma, look!" she shouted. Soon more shoots appeared, and then leaves, and then tiny buds. Maya's blue denim overall shorts got muddy at the knees, but she didn't mind. She pulled weeds gently and whispered to the plants, "Grow big for Pip." The garden filled with green.



The first flower opened—a bright red trumpet. Then another, and another. Orange, yellow, and purple blooms popped open like tiny surprises. Maya ran to tell Grandma Rosa. "The garden is blooming!" she sang. Grandma Rosa clapped her hands. "Beautiful! Now we wait for the hummingbirds." Maya sat very still by the flowers, watching the sky.



Pip returned! He zipped over the fence and hovered in front of a red flower. His emerald back glittered in the sunshine. "You came back!" Maya whispered. Pip dipped his beak into the bloom and sipped. Then he flew to another flower and another. Maya counted seven visits in one morning. She felt warm and happy inside, like a cup of cocoa.



The next day, a new visitor arrived. A bluebird landed on the fence with a little brown twig in its beak. Its back was bright blue, and its chest was rusty orange. It tilted its head and chirped. "Hello, bluebird!" Maya said. The bluebird swooped down to hunt for bugs among the flowers, then rested on a branch. The garden was getting busy.



More birds came. A pair of goldfinches nibbled seeds. A plump robin hopped on the grass. Butterflies floated from bloom to bloom, and a fuzzy bumblebee buzzed by. Maya's garden hummed and fluttered with life. Grandma Rosa brought out lemonade and sat with Maya on the steps. "Your little garden is a busy place," she said. Maya grinned. "It's a bird party!"



Pip came every day to sip nectar. He grew used to Maya and would hover near her red gloves as if saying hello. One afternoon, Maya saw Pip chase another hummingbird away from a flower. "Be kind, Pip!" she called. The other hummingbird had a green back and a white chest. Pip seemed to think about it, then shared the flower. Maya laughed.



Summer turned to fall. Grandma Rosa said, "Soon the hummingbirds will fly south for the winter. They need lots of food for the long trip." Maya looked at her garden. The flowers were still blooming brightly. "So our garden is like a rest stop?" she asked. Grandma Rosa nodded. "A very important one. Your flowers help them travel." Maya felt proud.



One morning, Pip was gone. Maya felt a little sad, but she remembered Grandma Rosa's words. "He's on his way to a warm place," she said. "And our garden helped him get there." She kept watering the flowers and watching the sky. The bluebird still visited, and sparrows pecked at seeds. The garden stayed lively, even without Pip.



Weeks later, Maya heard a familiar hum. She ran outside. Pip was back! He hovered over a purple flower, his ruby throat shining. "You made it!" Maya cheered. Pip chirped and sipped. Grandma Rosa came out with her straw hat and smiled. "He remembered your garden," she said. "It's his favorite resting place." Maya's heart felt full.



Maya sat on the steps and watched Pip share the garden with the bluebird and the butterflies. She thought about how one tiny seed had grown into so much. "Grandma, even a small garden can help lots of birds," she said. Grandma Rosa nodded. "Yes, little gardener. Small things can make a big difference." Maya smiled her gap-toothed smile.



The garden became a favorite stop for many traveling birds. In spring and fall, hummingbirds and bluebirds and even a warbler stopped by to rest and eat. Maya kept planting more flowers each year. Her red gloves were always dirty, and her green boots were always muddy. She didn't mind at all. She was helping nature, one flower at a time.



Maya learned that anyone can help wildlife. A few bright flowers on a balcony or in a backyard can feed a tiny hummingbird or give a tired bluebird a place to rest. She stood in her garden, listening to the hum of wings and the chirp of birds. "Thank you, Pip," she whispered. And the little hummingbird hummed back.