

The Boy and the Hedgehog



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Ben was seven years old, with light brown skin, short curly black hair, and a gap-toothed smile. He loved his garden, but he had never seen a hedgehog there before. One warm night, he tiptoed outside in his blue hoodie and red wellington boots. He carried a small flashlight and hoped to spot something magical. The garden was dark and quiet, and the stars twinkled above.



Ben switched on his flashlight and swept the beam across the grass. Suddenly, he saw a small, spiny shape near the bushes. It was a hedgehog, about 25 centimeters long, with brown and cream quills. A fallen leaf was stuck to its back, and its tiny black eyes looked at him. Ben's heart thumped with excitement. He crouched down slowly to get a closer look.



The hedgehog snuffled the ground with its pointed snout, busy and cautious. Ben whispered, "Hello, little one. What are you doing here?" The hedgehog didn't answer, but it kept searching for food among the leaves. Ben noticed its little paws and round body. He wondered where it would sleep when the night was over. He decided to ask his mum about it.



Ben ran inside and found his mum in the kitchen. She had medium brown skin, straight black hair, and a calm smile. She wore her green cardigan over a white top. "Mum, I saw a hedgehog in the garden!" Ben said. Mum smiled and said, "Hedgehogs are nocturnal, Ben. They are busy at night and need a safe, quiet place to rest during the day."



Mum explained that hedgehogs need shelter, like piles of leaves or logs, to hide in. They also need gaps in fences so they can roam from garden to garden. Ben listened carefully, his brown eyes wide. He wanted to help the hedgehog. "Can we make our garden safer for it?" he asked. Mum nodded. "We can start tomorrow," she said.



The next morning, Ben and Mum went into the garden. They built a small shelter from logs and leaves in a quiet corner. Ben checked that the hedgehog had a way in and out. He felt proud of his work. Then he had an idea. "If one hedgehog needs help, maybe other gardens need help too," he said. Mum smiled. "That's a wonderful thought, Ben."



Ben decided to make a neighborhood guide to safer gardens. He drew pictures of hedgehogs and wrote simple tips. "Leave a wild corner," he wrote. "Make a gap in your fence." "Don't use chemicals." Mum helped him print copies. Ben's guide was colorful and clear. He couldn't wait to share it with his neighbors.



Ben put on his blue hoodie and red boots and set off down the street. He knocked on the first door. Mrs. Patel answered. She was short and sturdy, with silver-grey hair in a bun, hazel eyes, and round glasses. She wore a purple floral apron over her beige dress. "Hello, Ben!" she said cheerfully. Ben handed her the guide and explained about hedgehogs.



Mrs. Patel read the guide and beamed. "What a great idea!" she said. "I'll make a hedgehog gap in my fence right away." She put on her gardening gloves and straw hat. Ben watched as she sawed a small opening at the bottom of her fence. "Now hedgehogs can visit my garden too," she said. Ben felt happy. One neighbor had joined in!



Ben continued down the street, delivering his guide to every house. Some people were busy, but they promised to read it. Others asked questions. Ben explained that hedgehogs need undisturbed spaces and shelter. He told them about the hedgehog in his garden. People smiled and said they would help. By the end of the day, Ben had visited the whole street.



A few days later, Ben noticed changes. Mrs. Patel's fence had a gap. Another neighbor had built a log pile. Someone else had stopped using slug pellets. Ben's guide was making a difference! He saw more hedgehogs in the gardens at night. They snuffled and searched for food, safe and sound. Ben felt proud of his small actions.



One evening, Mum said, "You've started something special, Ben. The whole street is helping wildlife." Ben smiled his gap-toothed smile. He thought about the first hedgehog he saw. It had just needed a quiet place to rest. Now many hedgehogs had safe gardens to visit. Ben realized that even small actions can make a big difference.



The neighbors decided to have a garden party to celebrate. Everyone brought food and talked about the hedgehogs. Mrs. Patel wore her purple apron and told everyone about her fence gap. Ben stood up and said, "Thank you for helping. Together, we made our street safer for wildlife." Everyone clapped. Ben felt warm inside. He had made a real difference.



That night, Ben went into the garden with his flashlight. He saw the hedgehog again, snuffling near the new shelter. The leaf was still on its back. Ben whispered, "You're safe now, little one." The hedgehog looked at him with its tiny black eyes, then went back to its busy night. Ben knew he had helped. He felt happy and peaceful.



Ben kept watching the hedgehogs. He learned that they need quiet, undisturbed places to sleep during the day. He made sure his garden stayed wild and safe. Sometimes he saw baby hedgehogs, called hoglets, following their mother. Ben's guide hung on many kitchen walls. The whole neighborhood was now a safer place for wildlife. Ben's heart felt full.



And so, Ben learned that wildlife needs undisturbed shelter. He learned that small actions can bring a community together. He learned that kindness and courage can make the world a better place for everyone, including the shy hedgehog with the leaf on its back. Ben smiled, knowing he had made a difference, one garden at a time.