

The Boy and the Pika



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One crisp morning, a boy named Leo pulled on his bright yellow rain jacket and red hiking boots. He packed his green backpack with a rolled-up sketchbook and a pencil. Today he was going to climb a big mountain for the very first time. His dark eyes sparkled with excitement as he looked up at the rocky peaks. "I wonder what lives up there?" he said.



The mountain path was rocky and steep. Leo climbed higher and higher, past tall pine trees and patches of snow. The air grew cool and fresh. He heard a tiny sound—like a squeaky toy. Leo stopped and listened. There it was again! He tiptoed toward a pile of rocks and peeked behind a big gray boulder.



There sat a small, round animal about the size of a large potato. It had soft gray-brown fur, big dark eyes, and short rounded ears. Its tiny paws held a mouthful of green grass. Leo gasped. "Hello, little one!" he whispered. The pika twitched its whiskers and stared back. Leo slowly pulled out his sketchbook and began to draw.



The pika scurried down from the rock and disappeared into a crack. Leo waited quietly. Soon the pika popped back out with a fresh mouthful of grass. It ran to a spot between the rocks and dropped the grass onto a growing pile. Leo sketched every move. "You're making a hay pile!" he whispered. The pika seemed to nod and dashed off for more.



All morning, Leo followed the pika. The little animal gathered grass, leaves, and tiny wildflowers. It carried them in its mouth and added them to the hay pile. "Why do you need so much?" Leo asked. The pika paused and squeaked, as if to say, "Winter is coming!" Leo wrote in his sketchbook: Pikas are busy little farmers.



Leo noticed the pika never went far from the rocks. When the sun grew warm, it stayed in the cool shadows. "You like it cool, don't you?" Leo said. The pika flicked its ears. Leo drew a thermometer and wrote: Pikas need cool places. He saw other pikas darting between the rocks, each with its own pile of grass.



Suddenly, a loud rumble echoed across the mountain. Leo looked up and saw dark clouds. "A storm is coming!" he said. The pika squeaked and hurried to its hay pile. It pushed more grass into a crack between the rocks. Leo helped by placing a few dry stems near the entrance. The pika gave a tiny chirp of thanks.



The storm passed quickly, but the wind had scattered some of the hay. Leo helped the pika gather the lost grass. "Your home is so high up," Leo said. "It must be hard to live here." The pika looked at him with big dark eyes. Leo drew the rocky mountain and wrote: Pika habitat—high and rocky.



Later, Leo saw a family of hikers walking off the path. Their boots crushed tiny plants. "Please stay on the trail!" Leo called out. The hikers looked surprised but smiled and stepped back. The pika peeked from its rock. Leo felt proud. He wrote in his sketchbook: Fragile mountain—we must be careful.



As the sun began to set, Leo sat on a rock and watched the pika add the last bits of grass to its hay pile. "You're all set for winter," Leo said. The pika squeaked happily and nibbled a stem. Leo drew a cozy hay pile with a tiny pika inside. He felt warm inside, even though the mountain air was chilly.



Leo realized something important. The pika's mountain home was fragile. One wrong step could hurt it. "I'll tell everyone to protect this place," he promised. The pika twitched its nose and scurried onto Leo's boot. It looked up at him as if to say, "Thank you, friend." Leo gently shook its tiny paw.



On the way down, Leo told every hiker he met about the pikas. "Stay on the path and keep the mountain cool and clean," he said. Some people listened, and some even took pictures of his sketchbook. Leo felt like a mountain guide. He knew that even small actions could help the fragile alpine world.



Back home, Leo opened his sketchbook and drew a big picture of the pika and its hay pile. He wrote: Pikas gather grass all summer to eat all winter. They live high on rocky mountains and need cool places. Their home is fragile—handle with care. He hung the drawing on his wall.



That night, Leo dreamed of the mountain. He saw the pika snug in its hay pile, safe and warm. He saw the rocky peaks shining under the stars. He heard the tiny squeak of a friend. In his dream, the mountain was healthy and full of life. Leo smiled in his sleep.



The next morning, Leo told his class about his adventure. He showed them his sketches and explained how pikas prepare for winter. "We must protect their mountain habitat," he said. His classmates cheered. Leo felt happy. He knew that even a small boy could make a big difference for the tiny pika.



And whenever Leo sees a mountain, he remembers the little pika with the big dark eyes. He remembers the hay pile and the cool rocks. He remembers that mountain homes are fragile. So he walks softly, stays on the trail, and tells others to do the same. Because every small friend deserves a safe home.