

The Girl and the Squirrel



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Maya pulled on her red rubber boots and stepped outside. The autumn air felt crisp and cool. She wore her mustard-yellow raincoat and carried her green canvas satchel. A spiral notebook was tucked under her arm, and a pencil sat behind her ear. Today, she wanted to explore the forest near her house. Leaves crunched under her boots as she walked down the path.



The forest was full of color. Red, orange, and yellow leaves hung from the branches. Some leaves twirled down like little dancers. Maya stopped to watch them. She took a deep breath. The air smelled like earth and leaves. She pulled out her notebook and wrote: 'Autumn is here. The forest is beautiful.' Then she put the pencil back behind her ear.



Suddenly, a rustle came from a nearby oak tree. Maya froze and listened. A small squirrel with russet-orange fur dashed down the trunk. It had a creamy white belly and a bushy tail. The squirrel held a big acorn in its tiny paws. Maya whispered, 'Hello, little squirrel.' The squirrel twitched its tufted ears but didn't run away. It seemed very busy.



Maya sat down quietly on a fallen log. She didn't want to scare the squirrel. The squirrel scampered to a hole in the ground and dropped the acorn inside. Then it dashed back up the tree. Maya watched with wide eyes. 'What are you doing?' she wondered. She took out her notebook and drew a quick sketch of the squirrel. She wrote: 'Squirrel with acorn.'



The squirrel, whose name was Nutkin, didn't stop for a moment. He raced up and down the tree, gathering acorns and hazelnuts. His bright black eyes scanned the ground for more food. Maya noticed a small pile of nuts near the tree. Nutkin picked them up one by one and carried them to his secret storage spots. Maya wrote: 'Squirrel is collecting nuts. Why?'



Maya decided to follow Nutkin quietly. She stayed a few steps behind, hiding behind bushes. Nutkin led her to a hollow log. He stuffed hazelnuts inside. Then he covered the opening with leaves. Maya peeked from behind a bush. 'He's hiding food!' she whispered. She drew the hollow log and wrote: 'Squirrel hides nuts in a log.'



Nutkin also dug small holes in the soft earth. He dropped seeds and acorns into each hole. Then he patted the dirt down with his tiny paws. Maya counted five holes. 'That's a lot of hiding spots,' she said to herself. She sketched the holes and added a note: 'Squirrel buries seeds.' Her pencil moved quickly across the page.



As Maya watched, another squirrel appeared. It chattered at Nutkin. Nutkin chattered back. Then they both dashed off in different directions. Maya giggled. 'They're talking!' she said. She wrote: 'Squirrels talk to each other.' She wondered what they were saying. Maybe they were sharing news about the best places to find nuts.



Nutkin returned with a mouthful of seeds. He looked at Maya and twitched his nose. Maya stayed very still. Nutkin came closer, just a little. Then he dropped a tiny hazelnut near her boot. 'For me?' Maya whispered. She didn't move. Nutkin picked up the nut again and scurried away. Maya smiled. 'He's too busy to share,' she thought.



Maya opened her notebook to a fresh page. She drew Nutkin with his bushy tail and acorn. She wrote: 'Squirrels collect food in autumn. They store it for winter.' She looked at her drawing and felt proud. She added: 'Nutkin is a busy squirrel.' Then she drew a small map showing the tree, the log, and the holes. 'This is my autumn wildlife journal,' she said.



The sun began to sink lower in the sky. Maya knew it was time to go home. She stood up and brushed off her jeans. 'Goodbye, Nutkin,' she called softly. Nutkin paused on a branch and looked at her. His black eyes sparkled. Then he went back to work. Maya waved and started walking home. Her boots crunched on the leaves.



On the way home, Maya thought about Nutkin. She realized that squirrels collect and store food to get ready for winter. When the cold months come, they have plenty to eat. 'Preparation helps animals survive,' she said. She couldn't wait to write that in her journal. She hugged her notebook to her chest.



At home, Maya sat at her kitchen table. She spread out her drawings and notes. She wrote: 'Squirrels store food for winter. This helps them live through the cold.' She drew a picture of Nutkin with a big acorn. Then she added a drawing of the forest in autumn. Her journal was full of colors and facts. She felt like a real scientist.



The next day, Maya went back to the forest. She found Nutkin near the oak tree. He was still busy, but he seemed to recognize her. He chattered softly. Maya sat on her log and watched. She added more notes to her journal. She drew Nutkin digging a hole. She wrote: 'Squirrels work hard in autumn.' She felt happy to see her friend again.



Maya showed her journal to her family. They loved the drawings and the notes. 'You are a good observer,' said her mom. Maya beamed. She decided to keep exploring and writing. She wanted to learn more about how animals prepare for winter. Her autumn wildlife journal was just the beginning.



As the leaves continued to fall, Maya kept her journal close. She knew that Nutkin was ready for winter, and she was ready too. She had learned that getting ready ahead of time helps animals live through the changing seasons. And she had made a new friend in the forest. She smiled and wrote: 'The girl and the squirrel.'