The Girl and the Aardvark

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Maya was a girl who asked questions all day long. Her curly black hair bounced in two puffy buns as she chased answers. One warm evening, she sat on her back steps with her notebook, watching the sky turn pink. 'What happens outside when I'm asleep?' she wondered, pushing her round glasses up her nose. Her dark brown eyes sparkled with curiosity.

That night, Maya woke to a strange scratching sound. She tiptoed to the window in her yellow raincoat-style jacket and teal t-shirt. The moon was full and bright. Something small and low was digging near the garden fence. 'What is that?' she whispered. She grabbed her green canvas backpack and slipped outside, her red sneakers quiet on the grass.

In the moonlight, Maya saw a wrinkly creature with long rabbit-like ears and a pale snout. It had powerful claws and a thick tail. Around its neck was a small blue neckerchief. 'Hello,' Maya said softly. The creature looked up with small black eyes. 'I'm an aardvark,' he said. 'I'm looking for termites.' Maya's mouth opened in surprise. She had never seen an aardvark before.

'Termites?' Maya asked, kneeling down. 'Yes,' said the aardvark. 'They're my favorite food. I come out at night because I'm nocturnal.' He showed her his long, sticky tongue. 'I use my claws to dig into termite mounds, then my tongue catches them.' Maya wrote in her notebook. 'So you sleep during the day?' she asked. 'Exactly,' he said proudly.

Maya watched as the aardvark dug near a termite mound. His big claws worked fast. 'Aren't you scared of the dark?' she asked. 'No,' he said. 'The night is my friend. It keeps me safe and cool.' He flicked his tongue and caught a termite. 'Every creature has a job,' he said. 'Mine is to keep termite numbers in check.' Maya nodded, amazed.

The aardvark told Maya about other nocturnal animals, like owls and bats. 'We all have special senses for the night,' he said. Maya's eyes grew wide. 'I wish I could stay up all night,' she said. The aardvark smiled. 'You have your own job,' he said. 'You're curious. That's important too.' Maya felt proud. She drew a picture of him in her notebook.

As the sky began to lighten, the aardvark yawned. 'I must go home now,' he said. 'The sun is coming.' Maya waved goodbye. 'Thank you for teaching me,' she said. 'You're welcome,' he replied. 'Remember, even strange creatures like me have a role.' He disappeared into his burrow. Maya walked back to her house, her head full of new ideas.

The next morning, Maya couldn't wait to share her adventure. She ran to school with her green canvas backpack bouncing. In class, Mr. Okafor, her teacher, noticed her excitement. 'You look like you've discovered something wonderful,' he said, his warm brown eyes crinkling. Maya nodded. 'I met an aardvark!' she announced. The class gasped.

Leo, a boy with sandy blond hair and a backwards green cap, raised his hand. 'An aardvark? What's that?' he asked. Maya explained everything she had learned. 'They eat termites and come out at night,' she said. 'They're nocturnal.' Leo looked skeptical. 'How do you know?' he asked. Maya held up her notebook. 'I saw one!' she said. Mr. Okafor smiled. 'Let's learn more about termite-eating animals,' he said.

Mr. Okafor gave the class a project. 'Let's make a display about animals that eat termites,' he said. Maya's hand shot up. 'I can draw the aardvark!' she said. Leo helped pin up pictures. 'What else eats termites?' he asked. Maya remembered the aardvark's words. 'Many animals do,' she said. 'They all have a role in nature.' The class worked together, cutting and pasting.

Maya drew a big picture of the aardvark with his long tongue catching termites. She added stars for the night sky. Leo found facts about other termite-eaters, like anteaters and some birds. 'Wow,' he said. 'I didn't know so many animals ate termites.' Maya smiled. 'Every species has a role,' she said. 'Even the strange ones.' Mr. Okafor nodded. 'That's right,' he said.

The display was bright and colorful. It showed aardvarks, anteaters, and birds, all with labels. Maya stood proudly beside it. 'The aardvark is nocturnal,' she told the class. 'He comes out at night to find food.' Her classmates listened, amazed. Leo raised his hand. 'So the aardvark helps keep termite numbers down,' he said. 'That's important!' Maya nodded, her dimple showing.

Mr. Okafor praised the class. 'You've all worked hard,' he said. 'Maya's discovery taught us that every creature, no matter how strange, has a special job.' The children clapped. Maya felt warm inside. She looked at the display and thought of the aardvark. She couldn't wait to tell him about it. That night, she hoped to see him again.

A few nights later, Maya saw the aardvark again. She told him about the display. 'My classmates loved it,' she said. The aardvark twitched his long ears. 'I'm glad,' he said. 'It's good to learn about nature.' Maya nodded. 'I learned that every species matters,' she said. The aardvark smiled. 'You're a good student,' he said. 'And a good friend.'

From that day on, Maya kept learning about animals. She shared her notebook with her friends. Leo even started a nature club. Mr. Okafor put the display in the school hallway for everyone to see. Maya often looked at it and remembered her nighttime adventure. She knew that curiosity was a wonderful gift. And she knew that every creature, big or small, had a role in the world.

Maya sat on her back steps with her notebook, watching the stars. She thought about the aardvark and his blue neckerchief. She thought about termites and how every animal had a job. She smiled, her gap-toothed grin bright. 'The world is full of wonders,' she whispered. And she couldn't wait to discover more.