

The Girl and the Sparrow



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Maya loved her garden more than anywhere else. She had warm brown skin, curly black hair in two puffy buns, and a gap-toothed smile. She wore her yellow t-shirt, blue denim overalls, and red rubber boots. Her small wooden trowel was her favorite tool. One sunny morning, she stood in the garden with her grandpa, ready to plant something new.



Grandpa Lee had short white hair and a neat white moustache. He wore a green flannel shirt and a straw sun hat. He carried a watering can and smiled at Maya. "Today we plant native shrubs," he said. "They will help the birds and the bees." Maya's big dark brown eyes grew wide with wonder. She pulled on her green gardening gloves and picked up her trowel.



Maya dug little holes in the soft brown soil. She placed each small shrub gently in the ground. "These plants will grow tall and strong," said Grandpa Lee. "They will give food and shelter to many birds." Maya patted the soil around the roots. She watered each plant with care. "I can't wait to see the birds," she said.



The next morning, Maya ran to the garden in her red rubber boots. She saw a tiny sparrow sitting on a new shrub. The sparrow had brown and grey streaked feathers, a cream belly, and a black bib under its beak. Its bright black eyes looked right at her. "Hello, little sparrow," Maya whispered. "Welcome to my garden."



The sparrow chirped boldly. It hopped from branch to branch, as if it owned the place. Maya laughed. "You are a brave one," she said. "I will call you Pip." Pip tilted his head and chirped again. He seemed to like the name. Maya sat very still, and Pip came closer. Soon they were friends.



Pip the sparrow loved the native shrubs. He found tiny seeds and insects to eat. He hid among the leaves when the wind blew. Maya watched him every day. "Grandpa, why does Pip like these plants so much?" she asked. Grandpa Lee smiled. "Native plants are like a cozy home for birds," he said. "They give food and shelter."



Maya learned that native plants are plants that have always lived in this place. They know how to grow here, and they help the birds and insects that live here too. "So by planting them, I am helping Pip?" she asked. "Yes," said Grandpa Lee. "And many other birds, too." Maya felt proud of her little garden.



One morning, Pip brought a friend! A second sparrow landed on the shrubs. Then another, and another. Soon a whole flock of sparrows was hopping and chirping in the garden. Maya clapped her hands with joy. "Look, Grandpa! Pip brought his friends!" The garden was full of busy little birds.



Maya noticed other birds, too. A robin with a red breast pecked at the ground. A blue jay squawked from a branch. Tiny finches fluttered among the leaves. The garden was becoming a happy, noisy place. "The word is out," said Grandpa Lee. "Your garden is a bird hotel!" Maya giggled at the thought.



Maya wanted to know more. She asked Grandpa Lee about the plants. He showed her how the shrubs made berries and seeds. "Birds eat the berries," he said. "And they hide in the branches when they need rest." Maya touched a tiny green berry. "So my garden gives them dinner and a bed," she said. Grandpa Lee nodded.



Maya decided to add even more native plants. She saved her pennies and bought a small bush with bright flowers. She planted it near the others, patting the soil just right. Pip watched from a branch, chirping as if to say, "Good job!" Maya felt happy. She was making the garden even better for her bird friends.



As the days grew warmer, the shrubs grew taller. The garden was now a green tangle of leaves and flowers. Birds came from everywhere. They sang and fluttered and built nests. Maya sat quietly on a rock, watching. Pip landed on her knee. "You brought all your friends," she whispered. Pip chirped softly, and Maya felt warm inside.



Grandpa Lee sat beside her. "You see, Maya," he said, "when we plant native plants, we make a home for wildlife. Birds need food, water, and shelter. Your garden gives them all three." Maya looked around at the busy, cheerful place. "I am glad I planted them," she said. "And I am glad Pip came first."



Now Maya's garden is always full of birds. Sparrows splash in the birdbath. Robins hop on the lawn. Finches flit through the shrubs. Maya knows every chirp and song. She greets each bird like an old friend. Her garden is a happy, busy place, and she is never lonely there.



Maya learned that small things can make a big difference. A few native shrubs turned her garden into a bird paradise. She learned that native plants support wildlife, and that friends can be feathered or not. Pip still visits every day, and he always brings a friend or two. Maya smiles her gap-toothed smile.



If you ever visit Maya's garden, you will hear a chorus of chirps. You will see a little girl in red boots and a brave sparrow named Pip. They are the best of friends. And all because Maya planted native shrubs, and a little sparrow came to stay. The end.