

The Beaver's Birthday Boat



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Down by the river, where the water sang softly over smooth grey stones, lived a cheerful beaver named Benny. He wore a red bandana around his neck and a little tool belt with a wooden hammer. Benny loved to build, and he loved his friends even more. Every morning he pattered along the bank, tapping trees, collecting sticks, and humming a happy tune. The river was his favorite place in the whole wide world.



Benny's birthday was coming soon, but Benny did not want presents for himself. He wanted to give his friends something special instead. All week he worked secretly behind a tall pile of driftwood, measuring and sawing and hammering. Splash, tap, tap! His darker flat paddle tail thumped the ground with joy. On the very last evening, he stepped back to look at his surprise and smiled a wide toothy smile.



There, on the grassy bank, sat a wonderful little boat. It had a curved wooden hull, a flat deck for sitting, and a tiny striped sail that fluttered in the breeze. Benny had built it for a birthday picnic on the river, with baskets of berries and honey tucked under the seats. He imagined his friends laughing on the water, and his round amber eyes sparkled. It was the best idea he had ever had.



Benny placed his paws against the boat and pushed with all his might. He pushed until his little ears went pink. But the boat did not budge, not even an inch. It was far too heavy for one small beaver to move alone. Benny sat down on the grass with a thump, his paddle tail drooping. "Oh dear," he sighed. "My lovely boat is stuck right here."



Just then, a soft grey rabbit came hopping down the path. It was Hazel, wearing her yellow polka-dot apron with a letter tucked in the pocket. Her long ears stood up tall when she saw the boat. "Benny! It's beautiful!" she cried. "But how will we get it to the river?" Her twitchy pink nose wiggled with excitement. Benny shrugged. "I don't know," he said sadly. "It's much too heavy for me."



Hazel did not wait a single second. "Then we shall push together!" she said, and she planted her quick little feet in the soft grass. "Ready? One, two, three, push!" Benny pushed from the back, and Hazel pushed from the side. The boat wobbled just a tiny bit. Then it settled back down with a soft creak. "It moved!" gasped Hazel. "A little!" laughed Benny. "But we need more help, I think."



Down the woodland path came a great big bear, tall and broad and shaggy brown. It was Bramble, wrapped in his blue striped scarf. He carried a jar of honey and a gentle smile. "I heard someone needs a hand," he rumbled softly. When he saw the little striped sail, his dark eyes went wide. "A boat! For a picnic? What a wonderful idea, Benny!" He set down his honey jar carefully.



Bramble rolled up his sleeves and put his strong paws on the hull. "On the count of three," said Hazel, and they all pushed together. The boat slid forward, crunching over the grass. But then it stopped again near the top of the bank. The river was still a long way down. "It's heavier than I thought," Bramble admitted, scratching his round ears. "We need one more helper, perhaps."



At that very moment, a tiny hedgehog came bustling through the ferns. It was Pip, wearing a little green knitted vest, with his spiky brown quills bouncing as he hurried. "Did somebody say boat?" he squeaked. "Did somebody say picnic?" He saw the boat and clapped his little paws. "Oh, it's the finest boat I ever did see!" Then he frowned at the big heavy hull sitting in the grass.



Hazel had an idea. She pulled a long rope from her apron pocket. "Pip, you are small and quick," she said. "You can pull from the front, up on the bank, where it's safe." Pip puffed out his chest. "I can do that!" he declared, his shiny dark eyes full of determination. Benny tied the rope carefully. "Everyone ready?" asked Hazel. "Ready!" they all called, and the little team got into place.



Hazel counted loudly: "One! Two! Three! PUSH!" Bramble pushed with his strong paws, Benny shoved with his sturdy back, and little Pip tugged the rope with all his might. The boat creaked, wobbled, and then began to move! It slid across the grass, faster and faster, until at last it went SPLASH into the cool blue water and bobbed happily on the river.



"Hooray!" cheered everyone, hopping and bouncing with joy. Pip flopped onto the grass, laughing, his quills all ruffled. Benny hugged Hazel, and Bramble gave a big rumbly laugh. Benny looked at his friends, and his round amber eyes grew shiny. "You all helped me," he said softly. "I could not have done this alone. Thank you, every one of you." The boat floated by the bank, waiting for its passengers.



Everyone climbed aboard, one by one. Bramble sat in the middle, gentle and careful, so the boat stayed steady. Hazel unpacked the baskets of berries and honey. Pip perched at the front like a tiny captain, pointing at dragonflies. Benny untied the rope and pushed off with his paddle tail. The little boat drifted out onto the sparkling river, and the friends began their picnic.



What a picnic it was! They ate sweet berries and shared honey on warm bread. Hazel told funny stories, and Pip giggled so hard he nearly rolled off the deck. Bramble pointed out a heron standing still as a statue. Benny looked around at his friends, all together on the water, and felt a warm glow in his chest. His thoughtful gift had brought everyone such joy.



As the sun turned the river golden, Benny thought about the whole day. The boat had been too heavy for one beaver, but it had been just right for four friends working together. "Next time," he said with a grin, "I'll build a bigger boat!" Everyone laughed. "And we'll all help push it!" said Hazel. "Even me!" squeaked Pip, puffing out his little green vest.



The little boat drifted gently home as the sky turned pink and purple. Benny learned something that day, and his friends did too. A thoughtful gift brings happiness, and a gift shared with helping hands brings even more. Together, they had made a birthday to remember, floating right there on the singing river. And in the quiet evening, four friends smiled all the way home.