

The Girl and the Squirrel



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Ruby loves her garden more than anywhere else in the world. Every morning, she pulls on her mustard yellow raincoat and green rubber boots. She runs outside to see who is visiting. Today, the garden is full of chattering and rustling. Ruby smiles her gap-toothed smile and listens. The garden is waking up, and Ruby is ready for another day of watching and wondering.



Ruby's garden is full of tall, leafy trees. They stretch up, up, up into the sky. Birds sing in the branches, and bugs buzz in the flowers. But Ruby's favorite visitors are the squirrels. They are small and quick, with russet-orange fur and cream bellies. Their big bushy tails curl over their backs like fluffy question marks. Ruby could watch them all day long.



One squirrel is especially bold. It has tufted ears and big glossy black eyes. It holds an acorn in its tiny paws. Ruby names it Nibbles. Nibbles leaps from branch to branch, never falling. Then it digs a small hole in the grass and hides the acorn. Ruby giggles. 'You're saving that for later, aren't you, Nibbles?' she whispers. Nibbles twitches its nose and dashes up the old oak tree.



Ruby's mum comes out with her teal gardening apron and brown work gloves. She kneels beside Ruby. 'The squirrels are busy today,' Mum says with a gentle smile. Ruby nods. 'They're hiding nuts for winter,' she says. Mum points to the tallest trees. 'Those old trees give them homes and safe places to play. Squirrels need trees like we need houses.' Ruby looks up at the branches and thinks about that.



That afternoon, a truck rumbles down the street. Ruby watches from her window. A man in a hard hat talks to her dad. Dad wears his olive flannel shirt and round glasses. He listens and nods slowly. Ruby creeps closer to hear. 'The old trees might have to come down,' the man says. 'They're getting too old and might fall.' Ruby's heart thumps. 'No!' she whispers. 'The squirrels need those trees!'



Ruby runs to her dad. 'Please don't let them cut down the trees!' she says. Her big brown eyes are wide and worried. Dad kneels down and takes her hand. 'I don't want that either, Ruby,' he says calmly. 'But we need to make sure everyone is safe. Let's think about what we can do.' Ruby bites her lip. Then she gets an idea. 'We can show them how important the trees are!' she says.



Ruby and Dad go outside to count the squirrels. They see Nibbles and two other squirrels chasing each other around the trunk. They watch one squirrel leap between two branches. Another squirrel carries a leaf to its nest. Ruby draws pictures of everything in a little notebook. 'Look, Dad!' she says. 'The trees are full of squirrel homes. We have to protect them.' Dad smiles and pats her shoulder. 'You're right, Ruby. Let's make a plan.'



Ruby and her family gather in the kitchen. Mum makes a pot of tea. Dad spreads out a big map of the garden. 'We need to show the tree expert why these trees matter,' Dad says. Ruby jumps up. 'I can draw the squirrels and their nests!' she says. Mum nods. 'I'll write a letter to the town council,' she says. 'And we can put up signs to keep people from hurting the trees.' Everyone has a job to do.



Ruby works hard on her drawings. She uses bright colors for the squirrels and green for the leaves. She draws Nibbles hiding an acorn. She draws a squirrel family in a cozy nest. Mum writes a letter explaining how the old trees give food and shelter to wildlife. Dad builds a small wooden sign. 'Protect our trees and wildlife,' it says. Ruby paints a squirrel on it. The sign looks wonderful.



The next day, Ruby and her family put the sign in the garden. Ruby feels proud. But then the man in the hard hat comes back. He looks at the sign and scratches his head. Ruby's tummy flutters. She takes a deep breath and walks up to him. 'Excuse me,' she says. 'The squirrels live here. Please don't cut down their trees.' The man looks surprised. He kneels down to listen.



Ruby shows the man her drawings. She tells him about Nibbles and the other squirrels. 'They need the trees for homes and safe places to play,' she says. 'Just like we need our houses.' The man looks at the pictures carefully. 'You've done a lot of work,' he says. 'I didn't know there were so many squirrels here. Maybe we can find a way to keep the trees safe.' Ruby's face lights up with a big, gap-toothed grin.



The man talks with Ruby's mum and dad. They decide to trim only the dead branches. The healthy trees will stay. Ruby helps Dad put up a small fence around the oldest tree. It keeps people from stepping on the roots. Mum brings out lemonade for everyone. The sun shines through the leaves. Ruby watches Nibbles peek out from a branch. The squirrel seems to wink at her. Ruby waves. 'We did it, Nibbles!' she whispers.



Weeks go by, and the garden grows greener. Ruby sees more squirrels than ever. They chase each other around the trunks and leap between branches. Nibbles has a family now—three tiny babies with fluffy tails. They peek out of a hole in the old oak. Ruby watches them every morning. She knows the trees are their home. And she knows she helped keep it safe.



Ruby's family is proud of her. 'You made a big difference, Ruby,' Mum says. Dad nods. 'You showed us that even a young girl can help wildlife.' Ruby smiles. She looks at the tall trees and the busy squirrels. She feels warm inside. She knows that taking care of nature is important. And she knows that one small voice can make a big change.



Now Ruby has a new routine. Every morning, she puts on her mustard raincoat and green boots. She fills a little bowl with nuts for the squirrels. Then she sits quietly and watches. Nibbles comes close, holding an acorn. Ruby giggles. The garden is a happy, leafy home for her squirrel friends. And Ruby is their friend too.



Ruby learned that wildlife deserves safe habitats. The old trees give squirrels homes and safe places to play. And Ruby's garden will always be full of chattering squirrels and rustling leaves. She knows that even a small person can do big things. All it takes is kindness, courage, and a little teamwork. And maybe a pocket full of nuts for your friends.