

The Girl and the Hedgehog Hospital



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On a drizzly Saturday, Maya pulled on her mustard-yellow raincoat and red wellington boots. She was going to the wildlife rescue center with her class. Her curly black hair bounced in two puffy buns as she skipped along the path. She carried a canvas satchel with a notebook and pencil inside. Maya had a thousand questions ready. She always did.



At the center, a tall woman in a white coat met the group. "Welcome! I'm Dr. Penny Quill," she said, her green eyes crinkling behind rectangular glasses. A hedgehog badge hung from her lanyard. Maya's hand shot up. "Do you have a hospital here?" she asked. Dr. Quill smiled. "We do—a very special one. Follow me."



Dr. Quill led them to a cozy room lined with soft nests. Tiny hedgehogs snoozed under warm blankets. "This is our hedgehog hospital," she said. "We rescue hedgehogs that are hurt or sick and help them get better." Maya's dark brown eyes grew wide. "Real hedgehogs?" she whispered. "Real prickly patients," Dr. Quill said. "And they need expert care."



A lanky boy in an orange hoodie waved from beside a nest. "Hi! I'm Toby, junior volunteer," he said with a wide grin. He wore a volunteer badge on a string. "I can show you around." Maya nodded eagerly. Toby pointed to a round hedgehog with a bandaged paw. "That's Bramble. He scraped his paw on a fence. He's recovering nicely."



Bramble snuffled out from his knitted blue blanket. His cream face twitched, and his black button eyes peeked at Maya. "He's shy but curious," Toby said. Maya held out her fingers. Bramble sniffed them with his twitchy nose. "He likes you!" Toby laughed. Maya beamed. "He's my favourite prickly friend already," she said. "But how do you help him heal?"



Dr. Quill joined them, clipboard in hand. "First, we keep him warm," she explained. "Hedgehogs need heat to recover. We use warm beds and soft blankets." She showed Maya a nest with a gentle heat pad underneath. "Then we clean the wound and wrap it in a tiny bandage." Maya wrote in her notebook. "Warm bed, clean wound, bandage," she murmured.



"What do hedgehogs eat?" Maya asked. Toby grinned. "Tasty snacks! We give them special food—cat food, mealworms, and sometimes scrambled eggs." He showed her a dish of little kibbles. "But we have to be careful. Hedgehogs can't eat just anything." Maya nodded. "So feeding them takes know-how too," she said. "Exactly," said Dr. Quill.



Next, Dr. Quill showed Maya how to check a hedgehog's health. "We weigh them, listen to their breathing, and look at their quills," she said. She gently held a small hedgehog in a towel. "We also give them medicine if they need it." Maya watched closely. "It's like being a hedgehog doctor," she said. "It takes real skill," Dr. Quill agreed.



Maya had a question. "What happens when a hedgehog is all better?" Dr. Quill smiled. "We release them back into the wild, in a safe place with lots of leaves and bugs." Toby added, "But only when they're strong enough. We check everything first." Maya's gap-toothed smile grew. "So they go home again!" she said. "With the right care," Dr. Quill said.



Maya thought about all she had learned. "Can I help?" she asked. Toby nodded. "We need fun learning materials for kids. Posters, maybe a game." Maya's hand flew up. "I love making posters!" She pulled out her notebook. "I can draw hedgehogs and write facts." Dr. Quill smiled. "That would be wonderful. Kids need to know how to help."



Maya and Toby got to work. Maya drew a big hedgehog with a bandaged paw and wrote, "Warm beds help hedgehogs heal!" Toby added a maze game where kids led a hedgehog to a safe nest. "This is fun!" Maya said. "And it teaches real facts," Toby said. They made a poster about tasty snacks and another about gentle handling. Maya's satchel was full of colourful papers.



Dr. Quill checked their work. "These are brilliant," she said. "You've explained expert care in a way kids will understand." Maya felt proud. "I learned that helping animals isn't just about being kind," she said. "It's about knowing what to do." Dr. Quill nodded. "Exactly. Kindness and knowledge together." Toby high-fived Maya. "Teamwork!" he said.



Before Maya left, she visited Bramble one last time. He snuffled at her fingers and nibbled a tiny piece of egg. "You'll be home soon," she whispered. Bramble twitched his nose as if to say thank you. Maya smiled. She knew that with warm beds, tasty snacks, and expert care, even tiny hedgehogs can heal. And she had helped tell the world.



On the bus home, Maya hugged her notebook. She thought about Bramble and all the prickly patients. She thought about Dr. Quill's careful hands and Toby's cheerful help. She couldn't wait to share her posters at school. Her teacher would love them. Her friends would learn how to help hedgehogs too. Maya's heart felt full and warm.



That night, Maya told her family all about the hedgehog hospital. "Did you know hedgehogs need warm beds?" she asked. "And special snacks?" Her little brother listened with wide eyes. Maya showed him her drawings. "When I grow up, I want to help animals like Dr. Quill," she said. "But I already started—by teaching others."



Maya learned that helping animals takes real knowledge and skill. She also learned that sharing what you know can make a big difference. The hedgehog hospital taught her that even small creatures deserve expert care. And with kindness, teamwork, and a little learning, anyone can help. Maya smiled, ready for her next adventure. She knew she would always be a friend to hedgehogs.