

Sylvie and Silas and the Secret Seeds

ONCE THERE were two young children named Sylvie and Silas. They lived in a busy town with lots of streets and sidewalks and shops and every day the children would walk to school paying attention to the stop signs and the traffic. There were a few trees down town and some bushes and flowers but not very many. It was more of a gray town than a green one. Sylvie and Silas knew though, that if you explored the vacant lots and edges of people's yards and especially the giant hedgerow that grew along the south side of town, that you would find all sorts of things like egg shells and seeds, deer tracks, salamanders, and porcupine quills.

While their friends were driven away after school to violin lessons and gymnastics and soccer, Silas and Sylvie snuck off to run wild and explore the bits of natural habitat found around town. They loved running and jumping, balancing on logs and stonewalls, rolling down the hill, climbing trees, building stick forts, and finding treasures to put in their pockets like round stones and exoskeletons of insects and acorns.

One day as Sylvie and Silas were hunting among the tall reeds and rushes by the side of the highway playing hide and seek, Sylvie suddenly stopped and called out to Silas.

"Look! She cried. There was a beautiful bird's nest. They looked inside. (*Ask: What do you think they saw?*) Silas thought they would find eggs and Sylvia thought the mother bird would be there too, but when they looked inside they saw only an empty nest. They looked closer and saw that there was something in the bottom of the nest. Hundreds of tiny brown and black seeds. As they peered closer and closer a tiny shriek startled them. "Are you stealing my winter storage food!!!!!" screamed a tiny voice. Sylvie and Silas looked down to behold a little brown mouse wagging his paw at them and looking very indignant. "Oh no, said Silas. We were just looking though I was hoping to take the nest home to show mom and dad. Are these your seeds?"

"Yes," said Little Brown Mouse, "these are my seeds. The birds give us their nests when fall comes so we can have a place to store our seeds for the winter. If you take this nest home I won't have enough food for the winter," he wailed.

"We won't, we promise," Sylvie reassured him. "Actually," she said, "do you want us to help you gather more seeds?" Little Brown Mouse looked happy for the first time since they had met and extended his hand. "Yes! I would love help and now we can be friends."

So Sylvie and Silas followed their new friend all around the wild parts of town filling their pockets with seeds, learning where to look for them and which ones to gather.

Word got out that two human children were helping Little Brown Mouse and the next day when they were out gathering seeds, Goldie the Goldfinch showed up and said he needed to speak with the children.

“I hear you are helping the mice find seeds,” she said. “The birds of the hedgerow have a proposal to make if you can join us at the giant oak tree before dark.”

Sylvie and Silas were excited to know what this secret mystery proposal was and they promised to be there. They had to run home for dinner so their parents wouldn't get worried and then they snuck out again into the chilly autumn air as the shadows began to lengthen on the road and the sun started to go down.

They ran to the giant oak tree and climbed to the top. There was Goldie and Little Brown Mouse and all of their friends. A cheer went up from the animals when they saw Silas and Sylvie emerging out of the leaves at the top of the tree.

“Hooray! You made it!” Goldie exclaimed.

After introductions were made, Goldie shared their idea.

“If you want to help us gather seeds, we would love for you to help us and take the seeds all around the town and scatter them far and wide so that new flowers grow and more seeds and more food is produced. Let's turn this town green and into a place that has food and habitat and beauty for all creatures!

To do this work, we are going to give you each a small pouch. These will be your seed gathering pouches. Some seeds you can scatter and others you can bring back to us to store for the winter. And in return for all of this help, we will help you gather acorns and learn how to make acorn flour to turn into pancakes at the end!”

Sylvie and Silas cheered and thanked the birds and mice. This was a wonderful plan!

Sylvie and Silas decided to sleep in the hedgerow that night against milkweed stocks and goldenrod fluff so they could get busy and start collecting seeds in the morning.

Sylvie and Silas went out whenever they could and filled their pouches with seeds. They only took some seeds though, never all of them from a plant because they knew that a bird or a mouse would need some too!

After many days of scattering seeds, Sylvie and Silas finally made acorn flour with help from their animal friends. They washed the acorns, ground them up into flour, and added the flour to a pancake recipe and cooked pancakes over a small fire in the parking lot near the hedgerow. They were delicious! And the birds and mice had stored away enough seeds themselves for the long cold winter.

Winter came and snow covered the ground. When spring finally came and Sylvie and Silas noticed lots of tiny green shoots coming up out the earth all around town! And by the summer time, all of the seeds they had scattered had turned the town green! Now there was milkweed and goldenrod and so many other flowers blooming and all the birds and mice and bees had food and the people were so happy!

THE END

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