

Best friends

One day, Emily was walking in the park near her home when she heard the tiniest of squeaks. “Who’s there?” she asked, a bit scared.

“Squeak!” came the sound again.

This time she thought that she’d rather walk around and check where the voice was coming from.

She peeked behind a bush and what did she find? There, lying on the grass, was a little squirrel! He was frightened, and dirty and seemed to be very hungry and thirsty.

“Oh, you poor thing!” Emily whispered. “You must be lost.” She gently scooped him up. There were no squirrels near her home or in the park or on the playground, so she decided to take this squirrel home and feed him and pet him.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you,” she said.

When she got home, her mother was baking a cake. “Who’s that cake for, Mom?” Emily asked.

Her mother looked surprised. “Oh, have you forgotten?!”

“Forgotten what?”

“That tomorrow it’s.... Oh, what’s that in your hand?” asked her mom, a bit taken aback.

Emily held up the squirrel. “Mom, I found this poor squirrel behind a bush. Can we please feed him, and may I keep him as my pet? Otherwise he won’t be able to survive, there is no food for him, and he has no friends or family in the park or on our playground.”

Her mother smiled. “If you take good care of him, yes, you can keep him at least for some time. Don’t forget that he’s a wild animal and might want to return into the wilderness. But if you prove to be a really responsible pet owner, we’ll get you another pet, one that you can have for ever. Because we know you love animals, dear,” her mother said.

Emily’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Thank you, Mom!”

Emily decided that the squirrel needed a bath first. Her mother thought it was a good idea, so off they went into the bathroom ready to bathe the tiny creature. Emily filled the sink with warm water and made sure it wasn’t too hot or too cold. In the meantime, her mother gave the squirrel some nuts and then Emily carefully washed him with gentle animal soap, carefully avoiding his eyes and mouth. She gently rubbed the foam on the creature. He seemed to be enjoying his bath, probably because he wasn’t hungry and started to feel comfortable in the warm water. Soon he was perfectly clean. Emily dried him until he was fluffy with a soft towel. “Perfect!” she said. “I’ll call you Butter.”

Butter twitched his little nose, like he was saying *thank you*.

The next day the whole family, including Butter, went out to the park for a picnic. When they reached their favourite place, her mother opened the bag she was carrying. There was a cake in it.

“Surprise!” said her father. “Happy birthday, Emily!”

“Oh my! How could I forget it was my birthday?” Emily laughed. Butter got a few peanuts from the cake that he could eat without getting a tummy ache.

Emily watched Butter jumping around on the branches of the trees. He was happy, but she noticed he kept looking toward the woods.

Over the next few weeks, Emily took really great care of Butter. She fed him, played with him, and watched him explore. They often went for walks as well, and soon they found a small grove not far from their house, where Butter enjoyed spending time playing around in the trees. And because he still was a wild animal, eventually he decided to stay there: One day, Butter found a cozy hollow in a tree. He seemed to smile.

Emily hugged him. “I’ll miss you, Butter.”

Butter squeaked softly and disappeared into his new home. But he visited Emily often, later he even introduced his children and grandchildren to her.

In the next few days, Emily was a bit sad, but then her mother said: “You’ve taken care of Butter so well. Now you’re ready for your own real pet. Tomorrow we’ll get one.”

The next morning, they drove to the local animal shelter. Emily ran inside before her parents even got out of the car. She wanted them all! She loved the dogs that were wagging their tails, the cats that were purring loudly, the parrot that repeated what you said, but she could have only one pet. Eventually, her eyes fell on a shy little cat hiding in the corner of her cage. She picked her up gently. “Hello, Paws,” Emily whispered.

Paws purred and nuzzled Emily. She had been a sad stray, but now she had a forever home and a loving family.