

Years 5 & 6

3rd Place: Gaurika Gandhi

Year 6, Australian Christian College Darling Downs

### **Whispers of the Forest: The Chosen One and the Squirrel**

The night was eerie and unsettling. As I lay in bed, the creaking sounds echoed through the silent house, and a cold draft sent shivers down my spine. Something was disturbing my peaceful slumber, and my curiosity got the better of me. Determined to put my mind at ease, I reluctantly left the comfort of my warm bed and ventured into the darkness of the house.

With each step, the unease grew. I followed the sound, which seemed to be coming from the corner of the living room. As I approached, my heart skipped a beat. There, amidst the shadows, I saw a small, furry, squirrel-like creature whimpering softly. It was injured and in pain. Concern and compassion flooded my heart, pushing aside any fear or hesitation.

Quickly, I fetched a first aid kit. It looked up at me with grateful eyes, like it knew I was trying to help. As I tended to the creature's wounds, I marvelled at his resilience and the silent strength that emanated from his small body. It was as if he possessed a wisdom beyond his years, a deep understanding of the world that transcended his physical form. I fashioned a cosy bed for it using a soft blanket and a cushioned box. "What's your name? Let's call you Shadow!"

Exhausted from the late-night rescue, I retreated back to my room and fell into a deep sleep.

The night, in fact, was not the first time Shadow had encountered danger. He had always been a nimble and resourceful squirrel, able to navigate the treacherous branches and leap from tree to tree with ease. But fate had dealt him a harsh blow, leaving him injured and vulnerable.

Shadow was not always a creature of the forest. He had been born in a lush meadow, nestled beneath the protective shade of a majestic oak tree. His family, a bustling community of squirrels, taught him the ways of survival and the importance of unity.

As he grew older, Shadow developed a keen sense of curiosity that surpassed his siblings. He often ventured beyond the boundaries of their meadow, exploring the nearby woods and the secrets they held. It was during one of these escapades that tragedy struck.

A fierce storm swept through the forest, raging with unrelenting fury. Shadow, caught in the chaos, was thrown from his perch high up in the trees. He plummeted to the ground below, his small body crashing against the unforgiving earth.

In the aftermath of the storm, Shadow lay motionless, pain coursing through his broken limbs. It was in that vulnerable state that he caught the attention of a predator, a vicious fox who sensed an easy meal. But fate intervened, and he struggled away to find help.

When I woke up the next morning, I eagerly went to check on Shadow, hoping to see him resting peacefully in its bed. To my surprise, the bed was empty. Panic and confusion swirled within me. Did Shadow escape? Did he disappear? Was it all just a dream?

Feeling a pang of disappointment, I went about my day, trying to put the strange events behind me. As I walked home from school, lost in my thoughts, I noticed a familiar furry figure darting through the bushes nearby. My heart leaped with joy. It was Shadow from the night before!

Driven by a mixture of curiosity and a newfound connection, I followed him into the depths of the nearby forest. The dense foliage and towering trees enveloped us, casting dappled shadows on the forest floor. My steps were guided by Shadow's presence, as if it had a purpose in leading me deeper into the unknown.

Finally, we arrived at a small clearing, where a stone well stood tall and weathered. The furry creature turned to face me, and to my astonishment, it spoke. Its voice was soft and melodic, echoing through the tranquil forest.

"You are the chosen one," Shadow said, his eyes gleaming with wisdom.

"I am the guardian of this well, and I have been waiting for you."

Confusion mingled with excitement as I asked, 'Waiting for me? But why?'

Little did I know that his journey mirrored my own? Like me, he had faced adversity and found himself on the brink of despair. But the well in the forest had chosen him to be its guardian, just as it had chosen me to be the recipient of its gift. Shadow had waited patiently, fulfilling his duty until the destined moment when our paths crossed. Shadow's gentle voice filled the air once again.

"By treating my wounds and showing compassion, you have proven yourself worthy. Now, I offer you a gift. Throw me into the well, and you shall be granted one wish." My mind raced, overwhelmed by the possibilities. What would I wish for? Happiness, world peace, or something more personal? As I pondered, Shadow patiently waited, knowing the gravity of the decision before me.

Finally, I made my choice.

"I wish for the power to bring healing and hope to those in need," I declared, my voice resonating with conviction.

With a knowing smile, he nodded. I gently lifted it in my hands and, with a mix of trepidation and determination, I tossed him into the well. As he disappeared into the depths, a blinding light engulfed the clearing, and a surge of warmth coursed through my veins.

When the light subsided, I stood there, feeling a profound shift within myself. The forest seemed more vibrant, teeming with life and possibility. I knew that my wish had been granted, and now it was my responsibility to use this newfound power for the greater good.

From that day forward, I dedicated my life to helping others. I became a healer, offering comfort and solace to those in pain. Whether it was through my words, actions, or simply lending an empathetic ear, I embraced my role as the chosen one, spreading healing and hope wherever I went.

The small, furry, squirrel-like Shadow had fulfilled his purpose, bestowing upon me the gift of compassion and the ability to make a difference in the lives of others. As I journeyed through life, I cherished the memory of that night, Shadow, and the well that granted me a wish. It reminded me that I had the power to shape the world with my choices.