The Basket That Wasn't Hungry

A Leaf for Everyone

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Ages 3–5





Something tapped inside Capybara's picnic basket. Tap, tap. Come a little closer. Capybara had an important question for that basket. “Are you hungry too?” The basket said nothing. Of course it didn't. It was a basket. But it was holding three broad leaves, and Capybara wanted every last leaf out. Today, Gecko was coming to share a picnic by the Great River. The leaves would be their plates.



“When the basket is empty, we'll be ready! I want us to eat together.” Capybara spread out a mat for Gecko and a mat for herself. Beside them waited a little bowl. She lifted a leaf from the basket and set it on her own mat. Then she lifted another. It nestled right on top of the first. “A lovely big plate. And an even bigger plate!”



The leaves slid against each other. Swish, swish. One leaf was still in the basket. Two leaves were on Capybara's mat. Gecko's mat had none. Just then, little footsteps stopped beside it. “I brought fruit for our picnic. Where shall I put it?” Capybara glanced at Gecko's bare mat. Then she glanced at the leaf still in the basket. Her ears lifted. She had a new idea.



“The basket needs a plate!” She took out the last leaf, tucked it beneath the basket, and sat back. Now the basket was empty. Surely the picnic was ready. But Gecko was still holding the fruit. There was still no leaf on Gecko's mat. “Does the basket like fruit?”



Capybara leaned toward the basket. She waited. It didn't reach for the fruit. It didn't open a mouth. She tapped its side with one paw. “No mouth. No tummy. Oh. You aren't hungry at all.” Gecko sat down beside her. He kept the fruit close, ready for their picnic. Capybara's paws went still. Emptying the basket had not made a place for her friend. She needed a different plan.



“Stop and check. What do we need?” She looked at Gecko. He needed a leaf plate. She looked at her own mat. She needed one too. The basket only needed to hold things. Capybara took a slow breath. “Stop and check. What do we need?”



This time, Capybara started with her friend. She lifted the basket off its leaf and slid that leaf onto Gecko's mat. “One for you.”



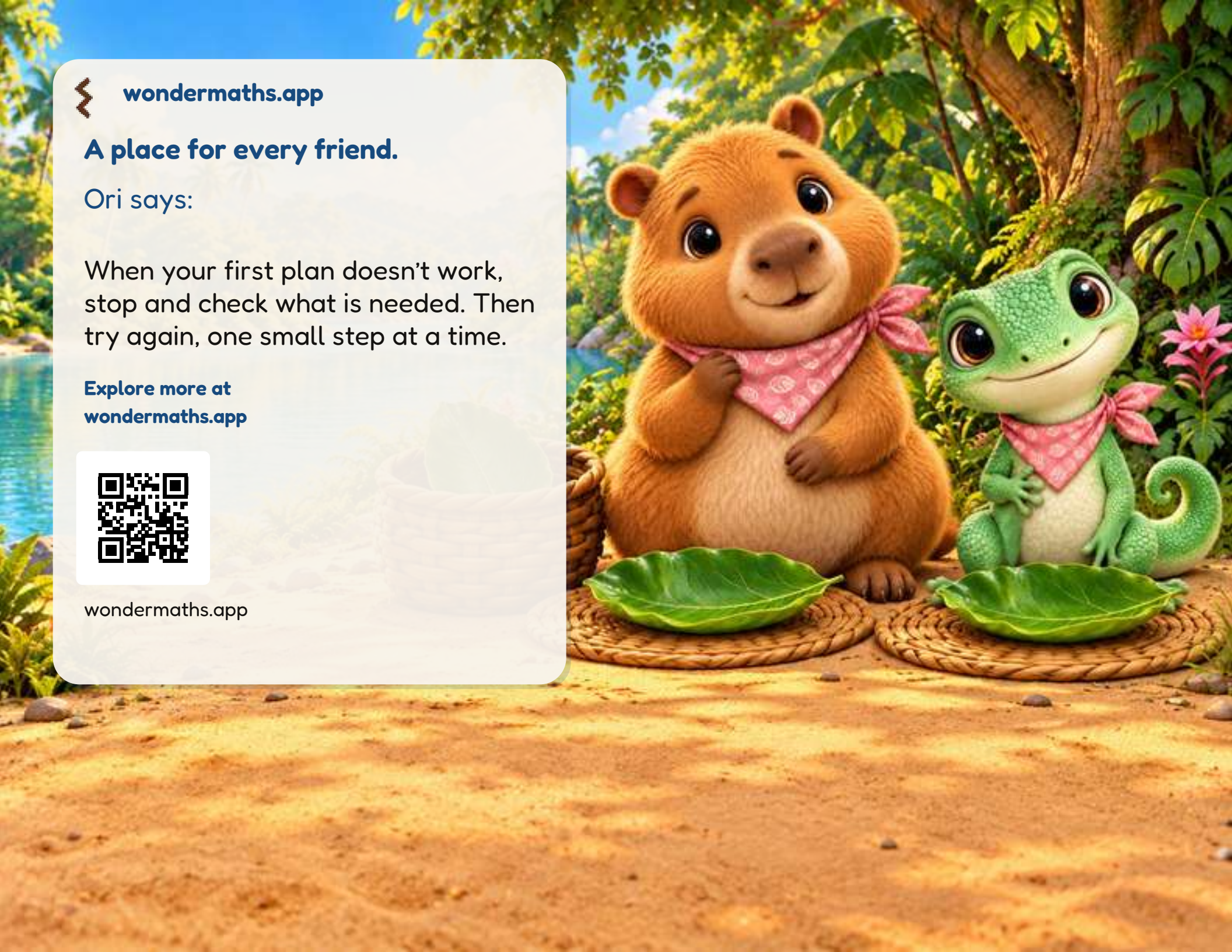
Then she separated the two leaves on her own mat. She left one in front of herself. “And one for me.” She put the extra leaf back in the basket. One plate for Gecko. One plate for Capybara. One spare leaf waiting. The basket wasn't empty anymore. But now both friends had somewhere to put their fruit. “You saved a place for me.”



Capybara's shoulders softened. That was what she had wanted all along. Gecko shared out the fruit, and the friends ate together. When they finished, Capybara lifted the spare leaf and laid it gently over the fruit left in the bowl. “Stop and check. What do we need? A little cover for later.”



The spare leaf made a fine little lid. Capybara nestled the covered bowl into the basket. Now it held tomorrow's picnic. And this time, she was happy to leave something inside. Little one, when your first plan doesn't work, stop and check what is needed. Then try again, one small step at a time.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Ori says:
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