

## Bring in the Beavers!



It was the fifth straight day of heavy rain in the town of Leith. If it kept on pouring for much longer, the river would swell with rainwater and flood the town. All the citizens of Leith would have to flee their homes and find safety on higher ground. Anna and her parents stayed glued to the television set, nervously listening to the weather reports.

For now, the weatherman said, the situation was still safe, but helicopters were ready to lift people away at any moment if the rain did not stop soon. Anna felt her palms grow sweaty as she saw the frightened expressions on her parents' faces. Her parents never looked scared. They were used to the rain, since Leith was located in the rainy country of Scotland, but it had never, ever poured like this before. The town had cancelled school in case of a sudden emergency, so all Anna could do was try to read her favorite detective stories and hope for the rain to stop. Luckily, it did. When she awoke the next morning the skies were sunny and clear. It was a miracle. They had been spared from a terrible natural disaster.

Everybody in Leith breathed a great sigh of relief, but they knew they had to take action. Nobody wanted to face this flooding danger again. The day after the downpour stopped, the Mayor of Leith called a town meeting. Anna went along with her parents to find out more. She really did not want all her books and toys, and her pet dog Noodles, to get washed away in a flood.

At the meeting, the Mayor presented three experts who had different ideas about solving the problem. One man suggested they build a concrete dam upstream to block the river's path. With such a big dam, the river would never overflow into Leith, even in heavy rain. Another lady suggested building a different structure, a high stone wall all around Leith to stop floodwater from getting in. The last speaker, a small, slender man with a heavy Scottish accent, had what seemed to be the craziest idea of all.

“You see,” he said, “if we just bring some beavers back into our landscape, we might be able to kiss our problem goodbye. About 400 years ago, there were thousands of beavers roaming around the Scottish countryside. Our ancestors killed most of them off because they enjoyed hunting them for their warm fur. What our ancestors didn’t realize was that we need to keep beavers alive for our own safety. The beaver builds dams in the rivers out of sticks, mud, and leaves. These dams are strong enough to stop a river from flooding in heavy rain. If we bring the beavers back, we can solve our problem by working with nature.”

After the three experts spoke, the Mayor asked the citizens of the town to think for a week and then vote for the best plan. Anna’s father said, “That last guy is crazy. He thinks he can solve the flooding problem with beavers? Really, how silly.”

Anna’s mother looked very thoughtful. “You know, Fred,” she said. “It’s worth a try. What harm can it do? If workmen build just one concrete dam or a stone wall, it won’t be as useful as several dams built by the beavers. And besides, beavers are very cute, and they build beautiful dams out of things they find in the forest. Concrete dams are not nearly as beautiful.”

There was much whispering and discussing all over town until the final vote was cast. Anna secretly hoped that the beaver plan would win. She had always wanted to see a beaver in real life. Since Leith was in the countryside, and everyone in town loved nature and animals, Anna suspected that the rest of the town might be on her side. When the vote finally came in, Anna was proven right. They would bring in the beavers!

Over the next two years, scientists brought beavers in from other parts of Scotland, and set them free upstream and in the countryside around Leith. Everyone noticed a difference. It rained and rained, but the river did not even come close to overflowing because of three dams the busy beavers had already made. For her fourth grade field trip, Anna’s teacher brought her class into the countryside to see the beavers at work. They watched in awe as the furry creatures hurried back and forth from the dam carrying twigs and bark in their claws.

Beavers almost seemed like furry, cute little people. Before they left, Anna and her classmates shouted out a loud “thank you” to their animal friends for saving their town.