HAZEL

AND THE GENTLE HANDS

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Hazel the hedgehog loved hugs. She loved giving squishy-squashy hugs to her soft pillow, her bouncy ball, and even her favorite oak tree in the garden.

Hazel’s arms would wrap round and round, while she sang her happy little hum, "Hug, squeeze, snuggle, please!"

But Hazel’s hands were prickly, just like all hedgehogs’ hands, and sometimes, her hugs surprised her friends!

One sunny morning, Mama Hedgehog waddled in with a special surprise—three wiggly, pink baby hedgehogs bundled in a basket. Their tiny noses wiggled and their fuzzy bellies shivered.

"They’re as cuddly as marshmallows," whispered Mama. "But remember, Hazel: babies need gentle hands."

Hazel nodded with bright, eager eyes. She’d never seen such little hedgehogs before. She bounced on her toes, ready for the biggest, snuggliest hug!

Hazel twirled over to the basket, arms open wide. But when she leaned in for a hug, Mama gently tapped her paws.

"Softly, softly," Mama murmured. "Let's show our love with a gentle pat."

Hazel watched as Mama softly stroked the babies' tiny backs, barely rustling their sleepy fur.

Hazel reached out one paw, slowly, slowly, and gave the littlest baby a delicate pat-pat.

The baby stretched and squeaked—a happy sound! Hazel giggled, her cheeks turning rosy-pink.

"Gentle hands, gentle hands," she whispered with a proud wobble. "Gentle feels just as nice as squishy-squashy!"

All afternoon, Hazel practiced gentle hands. She patted her pillow with a feather-light touch and tickled her ears with her careful claws.

She even helped Mama scoop up the babies' scattered toy acorns, always remembering, "Gentle hands, gentle hearts."

"Is this gentle?" she'd ask Mama. Mama would smile and nod.

Later, Hazel’s friend Bella Bunny came hopping by to see the new babies. Bella had big fluffy feet and long, springy arms. She liked hop-hugs best.

Hazel showed Bella how to pat the babies’ soft backs, both friends whispering, "Gentle as a whisper!"

The babies wriggled and yawned, feeling safe and snuggly under careful paws.

But then—OOPS! Baby hedgehog number two rolled out of the basket onto a crinkly leaf.

Hazel's heart skipped. She wanted to scoop the baby up and snuggle tight, but she remembered: Gentle hands, gentle hearts.

Very slowly, with careful paws, Hazel and Bella tucked the baby safely back into the basket. The baby blinked, then curled up safe and sound.

Mama Hedgehog smiled. "Hazel, you have the gentlest hands I've ever seen! You helped your friend learn too."

Hazel blushed and gave her finishing touch—the softest hedgehog kiss on each tiny forehead.

Now, everyone—the babies, Bella, and even Hazel—felt warm and safe, wrapped in gentle hugs and giggles.

That night, Hazel slid under her mossy blanket and thought about her day.

"Gentle hands can show big love," she hummed. "And they make little friends feel oh-so-brave."

She closed her eyes, dreaming of baby giggles and the magical wonder of gentle hands.

Before You Drift Off...

How did Hazel show her love to the baby hedgehogs using gentle hands?

Can you think of a time you used gentle hands with a pet, baby, or friend?