AN ADVENTURE IN GREENVALE FOREST

Nocciolino and the Secret of the Last Oak



An APPO Method fable about money

English edition

The Forest of Plenty

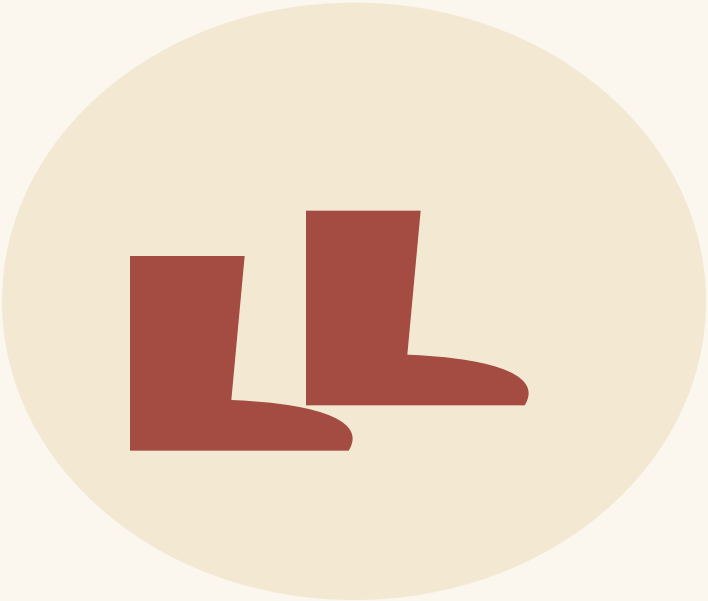
In Greenvale Forest, hazelnuts were much more than a snack. Everyone took them in exchange for bread, clothes and tools. Nocciolino worked at the Great Oak storehouse, sorting the nuts harvested in the valley.

He earned three hazelnuts a day. He liked his job, especially when he crossed the square with his scarf flying behind him. That Saturday, bunting fluttered all over the market.

“One day I’ll have the finest house in the forest!” he told his hedgehog friend. “And I’ll have a back with no prickles!” said the hedgehog. They both laughed.

CHAPTER 1

The Red Boots



The Red Boots

Nocciolino had already spent two hazelnuts on supper and one on firewood. Then he spotted a pair of red boots that cost four hazelnuts. “You already have boots,” said the hedgehog.

“But these make a glorious noise when I jump in puddles!” The merchant offered to let him pay later. Nocciolino agreed. When he got home, he found that the boots pinched.

He put them beside three almost-new pairs. The next day he bought a lantern, even though he already had one. His house was filling up with things. His purse stayed empty.

CHAPTER 2

The Mystery of the Invisible Backpack



The Mystery of the Invisible Backpack

Ernesto the badger ran the lending stall. “Four hazelnuts again today?” he asked, opening his ledger. “Yes. I’ll be working again tomorrow!” said Nocciolino. Ernesto showed him the earlier entries, but the squirrel was in a hurry to meet his friends.

Each day he earned three hazelnuts and spent seven. Each day he owed four more. After seven days, he owed twenty-eight. But Nocciolino couldn’t see those twenty-eight missing hazelnuts.

All he saw were the packages he carried home. And that was all his friends saw, too.

CHAPTER 2

The Owl Does the Sums



The Owl Does the Sums

Sofia the owl invited him into her library. She laid three real hazelnuts and seven leaves on the table. “The leaves are your expenses. Put one hazelnut on each leaf you can pay for.” Four leaves were left bare.

“Those are promises to pay. They don’t disappear when you close the ledger.” Sofia drew a backpack and put four stones in it for each day. “Imagine carrying it everywhere. Nobody can see it, but it’s yours.”

Nocciolino frowned. “So I can have a house full of things and still not be rich?” “Exactly. You have to count what you owe, too.”

CHAPTER 3

The Day the Forest Went Quiet



The Day the Forest Went Quiet

That night Nocciolino dreamed he was running to the market with a backpack full of stones. The faster he ran, the heavier it grew. When he woke, he hurried to the storehouse to ask for an extra shift. The door was shut.

It hadn’t rained for weeks, and the hazel trees in the valley had produced hardly any nuts. The last sacks had been sold. The storekeeper explained that he could no longer pay the workers.

“Not even three hazelnuts?” asked Nocciolino. “Not even one for now.” The forest looked exactly as it had the day before. And yet everything had changed.

CHAPTER 3

A Promise He Couldn’t Keep



A Promise He Couldn’t Keep

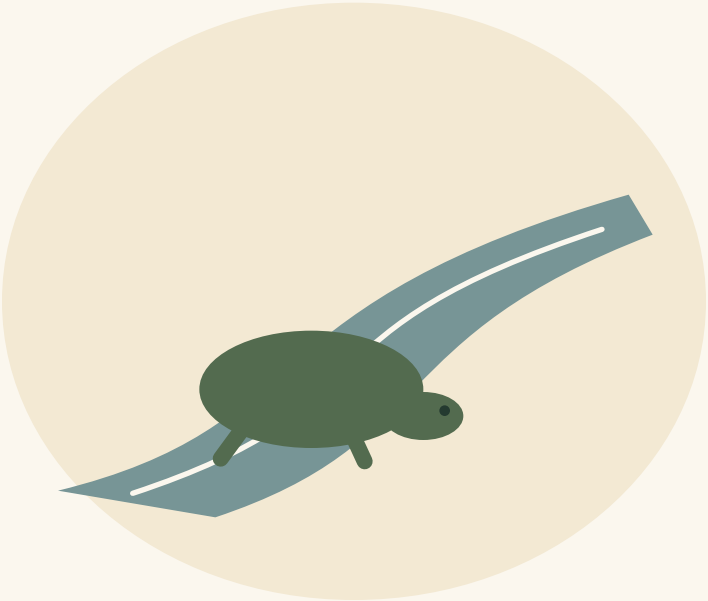
Ernesto was waiting outside the Great Oak. “You promised to start paying me back today.” Nocciolino lowered his ears. “Could you lend me some more? Then I could pay back what I owe you.” The badger shook his head.

“That would only put the problem off. I have to return the nuts other animals trusted me to look after, too.” Nocciolino realised his debt affected others. He went home, opened the cupboard and found a single hazelnut.

He wanted to hide under the bed. Instead, he took his ledger and went to find Sofia.

CHAPTER 4

Advice from the Wise Animals



Advice from the Wise Animals

Sofia took him to see Tobia the tortoise, who had known the forest since before there was a market. Tobia pointed to a stream that had shrunk to a trickle. “Otters used to swim here. We thought the water would never run out.”

“And now?” “Now we use less, protect the springs and look for other ways to get what we need.” Nocciolino looked at the dry stones. “So I should find another forest full of hazelnuts?”

“Perhaps. But if you empty it the way you emptied the first, you’ll only put the problem off. Look for a source that can last, and learn to take care of it.”

CHAPTER 4

Agata’s Pantry



Agata’s Pantry

Agata the ant welcomed them into a room full of jars. “These aren’t all for me,” she said. “Some are for winter, some for emergencies, and some are for planting.” Nocciolino told her about his unworn boots.

Agata suggested selling them at the second-hand market. “What if nobody buys them?” “Then you’ll have learned that what something costs and what it’s worth can be quite different.” She gave him a bowl of soup.

“You can’t go without food to pay a debt. Take care of what you need to live first. Then make a plan you can keep.”

CHAPTER 5

Beyond the Forest



Beyond the Forest

Olivia the fox made maps. She unrolled one on the table. “Here’s Willow Valley. Here’s an old mill. And here’s a path nobody takes anymore.” Nocciolino pointed at a patch of green. “Hazel trees?”

“I don’t know. A map can’t promise you riches.” Olivia lent him a compass and taught him how to recognise safe paths. “Keep an eye out for things you haven’t seen before. Ask yourself what other animals need.”

The squirrel set off with bread, water and his ledger. For the first time, he carried a list of things to find out instead of things to buy.

CHAPTER 5

The Broken Bridge



The Broken Bridge

At the stream, he found a bridge that had collapsed. On the far bank, a hare was struggling with a basket of herbs. “I haven’t been able to get to market since the bridge broke,” she called. Nocciolino stepped across the dry stones and helped her carry the basket.

The hare offered him a hazelnut for his trouble. He stared at it, surprised. He hadn’t picked it or borrowed it. He had earned it by solving a problem. “How many other animals need to get across?” he asked.

“Nearly everyone in the valley!” said the hare. Nocciolino wrote that down in his ledger.

CHAPTER 6

The Old Mill



The Old Mill

Ivy covered the old mill. Its wheel no longer turned, but someone had piled planks and willow twigs under the porch. Nocciolino knocked. A beaver in a sawdust-covered apron opened the door.

“Looking for flour? The mill’s been closed for months.” “I’m looking for work,” said the squirrel. Bruno held up a broken basket. “The animals need baskets to carry their goods. I can make them, but I can’t deliver them all.” Nocciolino thought of the hare.

“I know the market. I could help.” The beaver smiled. “First let’s see if you can weave a twig.”

CHAPTER 6

The First Basket



The First Basket

Nocciolino’s first basket looked like a squashed hat. The second had a hole in the bottom. On his third try, Bruno showed him how to choose bendy branches without harming the willows.

“We leave some shoots where they are. Otherwise, next year we’ll have no material left.” Nocciolino nodded. He knew where that story led. Together they worked out what the materials would cost and how much time each basket would take.

They’d only sell baskets if somebody actually wanted them. After a few tries, Nocciolino made a sturdy one. “That’s a skill you’ve learned,” said Bruno.

CHAPTER 7

Back to the Market



Back to the Market

Nocciolino took his baskets to the square and began taking orders for small repairs. Some animals walked right past, and one day it rained so hard the market was empty. In time, he was making an average of five hazelnuts a day after paying for his materials.

Five hazelnuts. He decided to spend three on living costs, put one towards his debt and save one for emergencies. On days he earned nothing, he’d adjust his plan.

Sofia checked his figures. “Now you’re doing something today to make tomorrow a little easier.”

CHAPTER 7

The Stones Disappear



The Stones Disappear

Ernesto agreed to the new plan. Nocciolino would repay one hazelnut on each day he could afford it, with no extra interest. The squirrel also sold his red boots and put the money towards his debt.

Each time he paid, Ernesto crossed out a bit of what he owed. Nocciolino pictured a stone coming out of the backpack. It took longer than a week. There were hard days, a basket he had to make all over again, and a fever that kept him at home.

When the last payment finally came, Ernesto shook his paw. “You don’t owe me anything now.” Nocciolino stepped outside, light as a leaf.

CHAPTER 8

The Forest of a Thousand Possibilities



The Forest of a Thousand Possibilities

In spring the animals planted new hazel trees, repaired the bridge and set up a workshop where they could teach one another different trades. Agata saved the seeds, Olivia explored new routes and Bruno taught the others to mend their tools.

Nocciolino suggested leaving some of the harvest for nature and finding more than one way to make a living. “When will the first hazelnuts grow?” asked a little rabbit.

“Some years from now,” said Tobia. “Trees take their time.” Nocciolino smiled. “There’s plenty we can learn while we wait.” Nobody knew what trouble might come next. But now the forest had more ways to face it.

CHAPTER 8

The Secret of the Last Oak



The Secret of the Last Oak

One evening Nocciolino went back to the Great Oak. Sofia was sitting beneath its branches. “I’ve worked out your secret,” he said. “There’s no such thing as a map to an endless supply of hazelnuts.” “So what’s the secret?”

“We can take care of the nuts we have, learn new trades and look for new opportunities while the old ones are still there.” Sofia closed her book. “And your backpack?” Nocciolino laughed.

“That’s where I keep my tools now!” From the hill they could see the bridge, the workshop and the young hazel trees. The forest had learned how to build its own future.