

The Girl and the Little Octopus



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Maya loved the aquarium more than any other place in the world. Her yellow raincoat-style jacket swished as she walked, and her green fish backpack bounced behind her. She pressed her nose against the glass of the octopus tank and watched eight little arms curl and wave. "Octopuses are the smartest animals in the sea," she whispered to herself. Today, she was going to prove it.



Inside the tank, a little octopus the size of a kitten peeked out from behind a rock. Its coral-orange skin was covered in tiny darker spots, and its big amber eyes blinked at Maya. The octopus floated closer, curling one arm in a friendly wave. Maya waved back, her gap-toothed smile glowing. She knew right then they would be friends.



A tall guide with short wavy grey hair and round glasses walked over. Her teal polo shirt had a small octopus badge, and her red lanyard swung as she leaned down. "That's our little octopus," she said warmly. "Octopuses can open jars, solve puzzles, and even recognize faces. They're incredibly smart." Maya's dark brown eyes grew wide. "I want to show everyone!" she said.



"How can we show the visitors?" Maya asked, tapping her chin. The guide smiled. "Maybe we can build a puzzle for the octopus to solve." Maya's curly black hair bounced as she nodded. She pulled a notebook from her fish backpack and started drawing. "Jars with lids!" she said. "And treats inside!" The guide clapped her hands. "Perfect! Let's get some jars."



Maya and the guide gathered small plastic jars with screw-on lids. They filled them with tasty treats like shrimp and crab. Maya placed the jars on a low ledge near the octopus tank. The little octopus watched from the water, its amber eyes following every move. "Do you think it can open them?" Maya asked. "Just wait and see," the guide said with a wink.



The guide announced to the visitors, "Gather around! Maya has a special puzzle for our octopus." People crowded near the tank. Maya's heart beat fast, but she stood tall in her red sneakers. She lowered the first jar into the water. The little octopus floated closer, curious. Its eight arms curled around the jar, and everyone held their breath.



The octopus wrapped its arms around the lid. With a gentle twist, it unscrewed the top. Inside was a juicy shrimp! The octopus pulled it out and ate it happily. Maya cheered. "It did it!" The crowd clapped. The guide smiled proudly. "Octopuses are problem-solvers," she said. "They can open jars just like this one."



Next, Maya placed a jar with a trickier lid. This one had a small latch. The octopus studied it, its big amber eyes focused. It used one arm to flip the latch and another to twist the lid. Pop! The lid came off. Inside was a piece of crab. The octopus munched it while the crowd gasped in delight.



Maya's green fish backpack bounced as she jumped with joy. "It's so smart!" she shouted. The guide nodded. "Octopuses can even solve mazes and remember solutions for days." Maya looked at the little octopus, who was now juggling a small shell with its arms. "I wish everyone knew how clever they are," Maya said. "Then we can show them more!"



For the final puzzle, Maya put three jars in a row. Each had a different lid: one twist, one flip, one pull. The octopus floated over, its coral-orange skin shimmering. It opened the twist lid first, then the flip, then the pull. Treats tumbled out, and the octopus gathered them with its curling arms. The crowd erupted in cheers.



The guide led the applause. "Maya's puzzle shows us that octopuses are intelligent in their own way," she said. "They use their arms and their brains to solve problems." Maya beamed. "Smart can look many ways," she said. "Like opening jars or remembering faces. The little octopus shows that being clever comes in all shapes and sizes."



The little octopus swam to the front of the tank and pressed one arm against the glass, right where Maya's hand was. Maya pressed her palm to the glass too. "We're friends," she whispered. The octopus blinked its amber eyes as if it understood. The guide smiled. "It seems you've made a lasting friend," she said.



As visitors left, many stopped to thank Maya. "I never knew octopuses were so smart," one boy said. Maya nodded. "They are! And they're kind, too." She looked back at the tank, where the little octopus was waving goodbye with two arms. Maya waved back, her heart full. She knew she would never forget this day.



The guide gave Maya a small sticker of an octopus. "You're a great teacher," she said. Maya stuck it on her fish backpack. "I just wanted to show everyone," she said. "And you did," the guide replied. "You showed that intelligence takes many forms. That's an important lesson." Maya smiled, her gap-toothed grin shining.



On the bus home, Maya thought about the little octopus. It had opened jars, solved puzzles, and made a friend. She realized that being smart isn't just about schoolwork. It's about curiosity and problem-solving and kindness. The little octopus had all of those. Maya decided she would tell everyone she knew.



That night, Maya drew a picture of the little octopus for her wall. Under it, she wrote: "Smart comes in all shapes and sizes." She fell asleep dreaming of eight curling arms and big amber eyes. What a happy day at the aquarium! And what a wonderful friend she had made.