

The Girl and the Jellyfish



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Maya skipped into the aquarium with her yellow raincoat-style jacket flapping and her red sneakers squeaking on the floor. Her dark curly hair bounced in two short puffs. In one hand she held a spiral sketchbook; in the other, a pack of coloured pencils. "Look at all the fish!" she said, her large dark brown eyes wide. But then she saw a tank glowing soft blue. Something inside was floating, pale and strange.



The jellyfish drifted like a slow, glowing cloud. Its bell was translucent pale pink, about the size of a dinner plate, with soft glowing edges. Long, ribbon-like tentacles trailed below like gentle ribbons. Maya's round cheeks went still. She took a small step back. "It has no face," she whispered. "And those long strings might sting." She felt a little shiver, even in her warm yellow jacket.



"That's Pearl," said a kind voice. A woman in a blue shirt knelt beside Maya. "She's a jellyfish. She moves by pushing water and then floating. Would you like to watch?" Maya nodded slowly. Pearl's bell pulsed, then relaxed. The jellyfish glided forward, then drifted back, calm and graceful. Maya's small gap-toothed smile flickered. She opened her sketchbook and clicked a red pencil. "Maybe I can draw her," she said.



Maya sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the tank, her blue jeans bunched at her knees. She watched Pearl pulse and drew a soft curve. "First, the push," she said, her pencil scratching. She drew a little arrow pushing water away. Then Pearl floated, and Maya drew a long, slow line. "Then the float," she said. Her round cheeks lifted. Drawing made the jellyfish seem less strange and more like a puzzle to solve.



Pearl drifted close to the glass, her soft pink bell glowing in the blue water. Maya leaned in, her nose nearly touching the tank. "Her tentacles are like ribbons," she said. She drew thin, wavy lines drifting down. "They don't grab. They just float." She added a tiny glow around the bell. Her dark eyes followed Pearl's gentle pulsing. "You're not scary," Maya whispered. "You're just... floating." Her yellow jacket sleeve brushed the floor as she drew.



A boy about her age stopped beside her. "Is that a jellyfish?" he asked. "Aren't you scared?" Maya looked at her drawing, then at Pearl. "I was," she said. "But look—she pushes the water, then floats. It's like a slow dance." She showed him the curved arrow and the long float line. The boy smiled. "That's cool," he said. Maya felt a warm little glow inside. Drawing had made her brave enough to explain.



Maya turned to a new page in her spiral sketchbook. She drew Pearl big and small, pushing and floating, floating and pushing. Each drawing showed a gentle push, then a long, soft float. She added tiny bubbles. "She never hurries," Maya said. "She just goes with the water." Her pencil moved faster now, happy and sure. The jellyfish's soft glow seemed to fill the tank, and Maya's fear felt smaller and smaller.



A family with a stroller stopped to watch Maya draw. "What are you making?" asked a little girl. Maya held up her sketchbook. "This is how Pearl moves," she said. "She pushes, then floats. See?" She pointed to the arrows and wavy lines. The little girl nodded. "She's pretty," she said. Maya beamed, her gap-toothed smile wide. "She is," Maya said. "And she's not scary at all when you understand her."



Pearl pulsed again, and her bell rippled like a soft pink heart. Maya watched the water push away, then the long, slow float. She drew each movement carefully. "First the push," she said, drawing a curl. "Then the float," she said, drawing a long, smooth line. She made a little book of Pearl's dance. "I'm going to show my mom," she said. "She thinks jellyfish are scary too. But now I can explain."



Maya stood up, her red sneakers planted firmly. She held her sketchbook open like a treasure map. "Pearl pushes the water away," she said to the boy and the little girl. "Then she floats. That's all. She doesn't chase. She doesn't bite. She just glides." Her voice was clear and strong. The children listened. Maya felt brave and happy. Her drawings had turned a strange, glowing creature into a friend she could understand.



Pearl drifted right up to the glass where Maya stood. For a moment, the jellyfish seemed to look at her, though it had no eyes. Maya didn't step back. She put her hand on the glass, gentle and still. "Hello, Pearl," she whispered. "I understand you now." The jellyfish pulsed softly, glowing pink and calm. Maya's fear floated away, just like Pearl, drifting up and out of sight. Her round cheeks glowed.



"You're brave," said the woman in the blue shirt, smiling. "Lots of people are afraid of jellyfish. But you watched and drew until you understood." Maya hugged her sketchbook. "Drawing helped," she said. "I could see each push and float." She looked at Pearl one more time. The jellyfish glided in slow circles, tentacles trailing like ribbons. "I'm not afraid anymore," Maya said. "I'm happy." Her dark eyes sparkled.



Maya sat on a bench by the tank and drew one last picture: Pearl, big and glowing, with a little girl in a yellow jacket beside her. "This is us," she said. "Understanding each other." She wrote three words at the bottom: PUSH, FLOAT, FRIEND. The boy and the little girl clapped. Maya's mom arrived and peered at the drawing. "That's beautiful," she said. "And not scary at all." Maya grinned. "That's what I learned," she said.



On the way home, Maya held her sketchbook on her lap. "Mom," she said, "did you know jellyfish push water to move? And then they float?" Her mom smiled. "I didn't know that," she said. "You can teach me." Maya opened her book and showed each drawing. The car hummed, and Maya's words tumbled out, happy and sure. Her fear was gone, and in its place was something warm and brave.



That night, Maya taped her best drawing above her bed: Pearl the jellyfish, pale pink and glowing, with arrows showing each gentle push and float. She looked at it before sleep.

"Understanding replaces fear," she whispered, trying out the big words. They felt true. She hugged her sketchbook and smiled her gap-toothed smile. The jellyfish that once seemed strange was now a friend she understood.



"Can we visit Pearl again?" Maya asked the next morning. Her mom nodded. "Yes," she said. "And maybe you can draw more of her dance." Maya packed her coloured pencils. She felt brave and happy, ready to learn more. She knew now that when something seems strange, watching and drawing can help. Understanding makes fear float away, just like a jellyfish gliding gently through blue water.