

The Girl and the Rescue Pony



Aysel Banu YAVUZAL

The Girl and the Rescue Pony

Aysel Banu YAVUZAL



Maya loved Saturdays best of all. On Saturday mornings, she pulled on her red rain boots and blue overalls and walked to the stables at the edge of town. The stable owner, Mr. Alden, always had a job for her. Today, he had a special one. "We have a new pony," he said, his bushy grey eyebrows lifting. "Her name is Pepper, and she needs a gentle friend."



Maya followed Mr. Alden past the other stalls. At the very end, in a quiet corner, stood a small pony with a cream and chestnut patched coat. Pepper's dark eyes were wide and watchful. Her shaggy forelock fell over her white blaze. She stood very still, as if she hoped no one would notice her. "She came from a rescue farm," Mr. Alden said softly. "She's nervous around people."



Maya's friend Rosie appeared at the stable door, a carrot sticking out of her purple hoodie pocket. "Is that the new pony?" Rosie whispered, her brown eyes bright. Maya nodded. "She's shy," Maya said. "I want to help her feel safe." Mr. Alden smiled, his deep smile lines crinkling. "That's the right idea," he said. "Trust takes time. Let's start by just standing quietly near her."



Maya stepped slowly into the stall. Pepper's ears flicked back, and she took a small step away. Maya stopped right where she was. She didn't reach out or rush. She just stood still and let Pepper look at her. "It's okay," Maya said in a soft, low voice. "I'm not going to hurt you." Pepper blinked her dark eyes but didn't move away again.



The next day, Maya brought a small bucket of fresh hay. She set it down gently and stepped back. Pepper watched her from the corner, her fluffy mane falling over her face. "Go on," Maya whispered. "It's for you." Pepper took one slow step, then another. She stretched her neck and sniffed the hay. Then she took a bite. Maya's heart did a happy little hop.



Mr. Alden showed Maya how to hold out her hand flat and still. "Let her come to you," he said. Maya practiced with a piece of carrot. Pepper stretched her nose forward, then pulled it back. Maya waited. She didn't move a muscle. After a long moment, Pepper's soft lips brushed her palm and took the carrot. Maya grinned so wide her freckles stretched.



Rosie cheered quietly from the stable door. "She did it!" Rosie whispered, her gap-toothed grin showing. Maya nodded, her hazel eyes shining. "She's starting to trust me," she said. Every day after that, Maya moved slowly and spoke softly. She brushed Pepper's coat with gentle strokes. She cleaned her hooves and refilled her water. Pepper stopped stepping away when Maya came near.



One windy afternoon, a loose gate banged in the yard. Pepper jumped and skittered to the back of her stall. Her eyes rolled, and her ears flattened. Maya didn't chase her. She stood quietly and spoke in a calm, steady voice. "It's just the wind, Pepper. You're safe." Slowly, the pony's ears came forward again. She took a step toward Maya.



Maya began to lead Pepper around the paddock with a soft blue rope. At first, Pepper stopped every few steps and looked around. Maya waited each time, patient as a stone. "You're doing great," she murmured. By the end of the week, Pepper walked beside her without stopping. Her steps were calm and steady. Mr. Alden watched and nodded. "She's learning to feel safe."



Rosie brought more carrots from her pocket. "Can I try?" she asked. Maya showed her how to stand still with a flat hand. Rosie held out the carrot, and Pepper nibbled it right away. "She likes you!" Maya said. Rosie laughed. "She's brave now," Rosie said. "She wasn't brave at first." Maya nodded. "Trust grows little by little," she said. "Like a plant."



One morning, Pepper was waiting at the front of her stall. When Maya opened the gate, the pony walked right up to her and nuzzled her shoulder. Maya wrapped her arms around Pepper's warm neck. "You trust me," she whispered. Mr. Alden saw it all. "That's a big sign of confidence," he said. "She chose to come to you."



Maya decided to celebrate every small step. When Pepper ate from her hand without pulling away, Maya gave her an extra scratch behind the ears. When Pepper took five calm steps beside her, Maya said, "Good girl!" Each little moment showed their trust was growing. Rosie made a small sign that said "Team Pepper" and hung it on the stall. Pepper didn't mind at all.



Then came a day when Mr. Alden asked Maya to lead Pepper all the way to the far paddock. It was a long walk past the big horses. Maya felt a flutter in her tummy. But she took a deep breath and walked slowly. Pepper followed beside her, her ears up and her steps steady. They walked together, calm and sure. Maya's confidence grew right along with Pepper's.



At the far paddock, Pepper trotted a little circle and then came back to Maya. Her dark eyes were bright, and her fluffy tail swished. "Look at her!" Rosie called from the gate. Mr. Alden clapped his leather-gloved hands. "She's not the same shy pony we met," he said. Maya smiled. "She was brave all along," she said. "She just needed time."



That evening, Maya sat on an upturned bucket and Pepper stood close by. The sun was setting, and the stable was quiet. Maya thought about all the small steps. The first carrot. The first calm walk. The first time Pepper came to her. "Trust is like a garden," Maya said softly. "You have to water it every day with kindness and patience."



Mr. Alden gave Maya a small blue ribbon that said "Gentle Friend." Rosie cheered, and Pepper nuzzled Maya's hair. Maya hugged the pony tight. "We did it together," she said. The girl and the rescue pony stood side by side, friends at last. And Maya knew that every gentle step had led them here, one small, brave moment at a time.