

The Girl and the Little Donkey



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Maya pulled on her yellow rain boots and red canvas jacket. She packed her small canvas satchel with an apple and a carrot. Today was special. She was visiting the donkey sanctuary for the very first time. Her curly black hair bounced in two puffs as she skipped down the path. She could hardly wait to see the donkeys.



At the sanctuary, a tall helper named Rosa greeted her. Rosa wore a green work apron and a straw hat over her short silver hair. Her hazel eyes crinkled with a warm smile. 'Welcome, Maya! I'm so glad you came. Let me show you around.' Maya nodded eagerly, her freckled nose twitching with excitement. She felt a little shy but very curious.



Rosa led Maya past a big wooden barn and a muddy pond. 'Here at the sanctuary, we care for donkeys that need a safe home,' Rosa explained. 'Some are old, some are shy, and some just need a friend.' Maya listened carefully, her dark brown eyes wide. She wanted to learn everything about donkey care.



In a small paddock, a little donkey stood all alone. He had a soft grey-brown coat and a pale muzzle. His long floppy ears drooped, and his big dark eyes with long lashes looked sad. A shaggy forelock covered his forehead, and a white star peeked out. He wore a red halter with a tiny brass bell. He didn't even lift his head when Maya waved.



'That's Pepper,' Rosa said softly. 'He's young and healthy, but he seems lonely and bored. He needs more than food and shelter.' Maya's heart ached for the little donkey. 'Can I help him?' she asked. Rosa smiled. 'Of course! Let me teach you how to care for him properly.' Maya felt proud to be trusted.



Rosa showed Maya a soft brush and a bucket of fresh water. 'First, we brush his coat gently,' Rosa said. 'Donkeys love a good brushing. It keeps their fur clean and shiny.' Maya took the brush and spoke softly to Pepper. 'Hello, little donkey. I'm Maya. I'm going to brush you now.' Pepper flicked one ear but didn't move away.



Maya brushed Pepper's grey-brown coat in slow, gentle circles. She brushed his back, his sides, and his neck. Pepper stood still, and after a while, he let out a soft sigh. 'He likes it!' Maya whispered. Rosa nodded. 'You have a gentle touch. That's important. Animals can feel when you're kind.' Maya beamed, her gap-toothed smile wide.



Next, Maya filled a clean bucket with fresh water and set it by Pepper's fence. 'Donkeys need plenty of fresh water every day,' Rosa said. 'And they need hay and a safe place to rest.' Maya made sure Pepper's hay was dry and his shelter was clean. She wanted everything to be just right for her new friend.



'Can we take him for a walk?' Maya asked. Rosa nodded. 'Yes, but gently. Donkeys need exercise, but they also need to feel safe.' She showed Maya how to clip a lead rope to Pepper's red halter. 'Walk beside him, not in front. Let him see you. Talk to him softly.' Maya took the rope and felt a flutter of excitement.



Maya led Pepper along a quiet path. At first, Pepper walked slowly, his floppy ears low. But Maya talked to him the whole way. 'You're a good donkey, Pepper. I'm right here.' After a while, Pepper's ears perked up. He sniffed the air and took a few bouncy steps. Maya giggled. 'You're waking up, little donkey!'



Every day after school, Maya returned to the sanctuary. She brushed Pepper's coat until it shone. She brought fresh water and made sure his hay was sweet and dry. She took him on gentle walks along the same quiet path. Each day, Pepper seemed a little brighter. His big dark eyes followed Maya wherever she went.



One afternoon, Pepper did something new. He trotted to the gate when he heard Maya's footsteps. His bell jingled, and he let out a happy, rumbley bray. Maya laughed and threw her arms around his neck. 'You're happy, Pepper!' Rosa watched from the barn door. 'He's not lonely anymore,' she said. 'You've given him something special.'



'What did I give him?' Maya asked. Rosa smiled and wiped her weathered hands on her apron. 'Friendship and company. Animals need food and shelter, but they also need someone who spends time with them. That's responsible kindness.' Maya thought about this. She felt proud and warm inside. She had made a real difference.



Now Pepper was playful and affectionate. He loved to follow Maya around the paddock. He nudged her satchel with his pale muzzle, looking for a carrot. He kicked up his heels and raced around in happy circles. Maya laughed and clapped. 'You're a silly donkey, Pepper!' And Pepper brayed as if he agreed.



Maya learned that caring for an animal means more than just chores. It means being there, day after day. It means brushing, watering, and walking, but also talking, listening, and just being a friend. She looked at Pepper's white star and his floppy ears. 'I'll always come back,' she promised. Pepper nuzzled her hand.



Rosa gave Maya a small certificate that said 'Donkey Friend.' Maya tucked it into her canvas satchel. She knew the real reward was Pepper's happy face. As she walked home, Maya smiled. She had learned that responsible kindness includes companionship. And Pepper, the little donkey, had found a friend forever.