

The Girl and the Wallaby



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Maya skipped up the path to the wallaby sanctuary, her green canvas backpack bouncing with every step. Her yellow t-shirt had a wallaby printed right on the front, and her curly black hair puffs bobbed under the sunny sky. She could hardly wait to see real wallabies for the very first time. 'I hope they like me,' she whispered to herself.



At the gate, Mr. Aldi tipped his wide-brimmed hat and smiled a crinkly smile. He wore a khaki ranger shirt with a green sanctuary logo and carried a cloth pouch of feed at his belt. 'Welcome, Maya!' he said. 'The wallabies are waiting to meet you.' Maya's dark brown eyes grew wide with excitement as she stepped inside.



Mr. Aldi led Maya to a grassy clearing where a red-necked wallaby stood munching quietly. Her soft grey-brown fur had a reddish nape, and a tiny joey peeked from her pouch. 'This is Rosie,' Mr. Aldi said, 'and her baby is Pip.' Maya crouched low and whispered, 'Hello, Rosie. Hello, little Pip.' Rosie's pink nose twitched, and her gentle dark eyes watched Maya kindly.



Rosie hopped closer, her long tail balancing her as she moved. Pip poked his fluffy head from the pouch, his oversized ears swiveling. 'Wallabies use their tails like a fifth leg,' Mr. Aldi explained. 'And they thump the ground to warn their family of danger.' Maya nodded, watching closely. 'So they talk to each other,' she said. 'Just like we do!'



Pip wriggled out of the pouch and stood on wobbly legs, his short tail twitching. He sniffed the grass, then hopped right up to Maya's red sneakers. She held very still, and Pip nibbled a blade of grass beside her. 'He's so small,' Maya breathed. 'And his ears are bigger than his head!' Mr. Aldi chuckled. 'He's still learning to hop straight.'



Rosie showed Maya how wallabies eat. She nibbled fresh grass and leaves, then licked her paws clean. 'They graze in the morning and the evening,' Mr. Aldi said. 'In between, they rest in the shade.' Maya pulled a small notebook from her green backpack and drew a quick sketch of Rosie chewing. 'I want to remember everything,' she said.



Next, Mr. Aldi showed Maya the resting spot under a gum tree. Rosie lay down with Pip curled against her tummy, his tiny nose tucked under her chin. 'Wallaby mothers groom their joeys and keep them close,' Mr. Aldi said softly. 'Families stay together and look out for one another.' Maya thought of her own family and smiled. 'They love each other,' she said.



Pip grew sleepy and crawled back into Rosie's pouch, wriggling until only his big ears and bright eyes showed. Rosie licked his head gently. 'He'll stay in there until he's big and strong,' Mr. Aldi said. 'The pouch is like a cozy sleeping bag that moves with his mother.' Maya giggled. 'A sleeping bag with legs!' she said.



Maya sat quietly and watched the wallaby family for a long time. She saw Rosie nuzzle Pip and thump her tail softly when a strange noise came from the bushes. 'They protect each other,' Maya whispered. 'They're a family, just like mine.' She felt warm inside, as if she had made two new friends.



On the way back, Maya asked Mr. Aldi lots of questions. 'Do wallabies get happy? Or sad?' Mr. Aldi smiled. 'They do. They feel safe when their family is near, and they get frightened when they're alone. That's why we treat them gently.' Maya nodded. 'So we should be kind to them,' she said. 'Because they have feelings, too.'



That night, Maya spread her drawings on the kitchen table. She remembered Rosie's gentle eyes and Pip's wobbly hops. 'I want other kids to know about wallaby families,' she said. Her mother gave her paper and crayons, and Maya began to write and draw. Page by page, her picture book took shape.



Maya drew Rosie munching grass, Pip peeking from the pouch, and the family resting under the gum tree. She wrote simple words: 'Wallabies love their babies. They eat and rest together. They keep each other safe.' She drew a girl with curly puffs watching quietly, just like she had. 'This is my story,' she said proudly.



The next day, Maya brought her finished picture book to the sanctuary. She showed Mr. Aldi, who read every page with a crinkly smile. 'This is wonderful, Maya,' he said. 'You've shown everyone that wallabies have families and feelings, just like us.' Maya beamed. 'Can I read it to the other visitors?' she asked.



Maya sat on a bench near Rosie's clearing and read her book aloud to a group of children. She turned each page slowly, showing her drawings. The children leaned in, wide-eyed. 'Wallabies feel happy and scared, just like you and me,' Maya said. 'So we should always be gentle and kind to them.' The children nodded and clapped.



Rosie hopped close, Pip peeking from her pouch. The children stayed quiet and still, watching with respect. Maya smiled at her wallaby friends. 'Thank you for teaching me,' she whispered. Mr. Aldi gave her a small badge with a wallaby on it. 'You're a true friend to wildlife,' he said. Maya's gap-toothed grin stretched from ear to ear.



On the way home, Maya hugged her picture book. She knew that understanding animals helps us treat them with kindness and respect. She thought of Rosie and Pip, safe and happy in their sanctuary. 'I'll always love and protect wildlife,' she said. And she did, one story at a time.