

The Girl and the Wild Ponies



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On a bright windy morning, a small girl named Lily walked along the sandy beach with her mother. She wore a yellow sun hat and a sky-blue sundress with tiny white dots. Her red sneakers went crunch, crunch, crunch on the shells. The sea wind blew her wavy dark brown hair across her freckled nose. Then, far down the shore, she saw something moving.



Lily stopped and squinted her bright brown eyes. A herd of wild ponies was running along the water's edge! Their shaggy coats were brown, chestnut, black, and piebald patches. Their long manes and tails flew in the sea wind like little flags. Sand puffed up under their sturdy short legs. Lily's mouth opened into a small gap-toothed smile.



'Mama, look!' Lily whispered, pointing. Her mother pushed her sunglasses up on her short curly black hair and smiled. 'Wild ponies,' she said softly. 'They live right here on this beach. This is their home.' Lily watched the ponies kick up their heels and gallop together as one happy herd. She had never seen anything so free in all her life.



Lily took one step forward. Then another. The ponies looked so soft and friendly, and one little foal had a white patch on its face. 'I just want to pet them,' Lily said. 'I want to say hello.' She lifted her red sneaker to run toward the herd. Her heart went thump, thump, thump with excitement and wanting.



Her mother gently caught her hand. 'Wait, sweetheart,' she said in her calm, kind voice. 'Wild ponies need their space. If we run up close, we might scare them. A scared pony could get hurt, or a mother might run off from her foal.' Lily looked at the little foal and bit her lip. She did not want to scare anyone.



'Can we watch them from here?' Lily asked. Her mother nodded and sat down on the warm sand. Lily plopped down beside her and pulled off her little canvas backpack. She hugged her knees and watched the herd from a safe distance. The ponies did not even look up. They went on grazing and flicking their tails.



From far away, Lily could see so much. One chestnut pony nibbled the salty grass near the dunes. Two young foals chased each other in happy loops, kicking up little clouds of sand. An old black pony stood still and let the wind ruffle its long mane. They looked calm and easy among themselves, like one big family.



'Why do they stay on the beach?' Lily asked. Her mother pointed along the shore. 'This is their home,' she said. 'They eat the grass, drink the fresh water, and rest in the dunes. Out here, they have everything they need. They are free.' Lily thought about that word. Free. It felt big and wide, like the windy sky above the waves.



Lily noticed a family walking up the beach with a barking dog. The ponies lifted their heads and shuffled their hooves. The mother pony moved her foal behind her. 'They look worried,' Lily whispered. Her mother nodded. 'When ponies feel crowded, they get nervous. That is why visitors should keep their distance. It helps the ponies stay safe and free.'



Lily watched the family turn their dog away and walk in a wide circle around the herd. Slowly, the ponies settled down again. The foals went back to playing. The old black pony dropped its head to graze. Lily let out a breath she did not know she was holding. 'They are happy again,' she said. 'Because those people gave them room.'



Then the herd began to move. First one pony trotted, then another, and soon all of them were running together along the wet sand. Their windblown manes streamed behind them, and the foals kicked up their heels. Lily jumped up and clapped her hands. 'Look how happy they are!' she cried. 'They run like the wind!'



Her mother smiled and stood beside her. 'That happiness is what freedom looks like,' she said. 'They can run because they have a home here, and room to be wild.' Lily pressed her hands together. She understood something new and warm inside her chest. Watching from far away was not missing out. It was letting the ponies be exactly who they were.



Lily reached into her canvas backpack and pulled out a little notebook. She drew a pony with a flowing mane and a foal with a white patch on its face. Under them she wrote, in her best letters: GIVE PONIES SPACE. 'So nobody forgets,' she told her mother. Her mother gave her a squeeze. 'That is the kindest kind of love,' she said.



That afternoon, Lily met other children on the beach. 'Did you see the ponies?' asked a boy with sandy knees. Lily nodded her freckled nose. 'Yes! But we have to stay far away,' she said. 'Wild ponies need their space and their home. If we get too close, they get scared.' The children listened, and they all watched the herd from a safe, quiet distance.



On the way home, Lily told everyone she met. She told the lady selling ice pops and the man folding beach chairs. 'Wild ponies live on this beach,' she said. 'It is their home, and they need room to run free. The kindest way to love them is to watch from far away.' Her mother smiled her soft smile all the way to the car.



Now Lily keeps her drawing of the ponies above her bed. She remembers the wind in their manes and the foals playing in the sand. She knows that wild ponies need their home and their freedom, just like the sea needs the shore. And she tells everyone she can: keep your distance, watch quietly, and let them run. That is how you love a wild thing best.