

The Boy and the Goose



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Henry pulled on his red rain boots and zipped his yellow raincoat. Today was special: he was visiting the animal sanctuary with his green backpack. In his pocket, he carried a small notebook for writing down everything he saw. Henry loved animals, but he was a little nervous too. What if the animals did not like him?



Maya, a tall woman in a green uniform, welcomed Henry at the gate. She wore round glasses and her long black braids were tied back. 'You must be Henry,' she said with a gentle smile. 'I hear you're a great noticer. We have a new goose named Greta who could use a friend.' Henry's eyes grew wide with curiosity.



Maya led Henry to a grassy yard with a small pond. A plump goose with soft grey-white feathers stood there. She had an orange beak and a blue band on her leg. When she saw them, she stretched her long neck and let out a loud 'HONK!' Henry jumped back and hid behind Maya. 'She sounds angry!' he whispered.



Maya knelt beside Henry and spoke calmly. 'Greta isn't angry,' she explained. 'Geese honk to say hello and to stay close to each other. That loud honk was her way of greeting you.' Henry blinked. He wrote 'honk = hello' in his notebook. 'Really?' he asked. 'So she's not mad at me?' Maya shook her head. 'She's just being friendly.'



Henry took a small step forward. Greta stretched her neck again and honked even louder. This time, Henry did not hide. He watched her bright blue-grey eyes and noticed her feathers were fluffed up. 'She's excited,' Maya said. 'Geese talk with their voices and their bodies. A stretched neck means she's curious.' Henry nodded and wrote that down too.



Just then, Oscar arrived. He was an older man with a short grey beard and kind wrinkles around his eyes. He wore denim overalls and a straw hat. 'How's our noisy girl?' he asked with a chuckle. 'Henry's learning goose talk,' Maya said. Oscar grinned. 'Good! Greta needs a calm place to explore. Her flock is coming soon, and they need space to feel safe.'



Henry looked around the yard. It was nice, but a little busy. The gate banged in the wind, and the path was narrow. 'Maybe we could make it calmer?' Henry suggested. Oscar nodded. 'That's a fine idea. A calm space helps geese feel safe, and safe geese are happy geese.' Henry felt proud that his idea was heard.



Together, Henry and Oscar got to work. Oscar held wooden planks while Henry painted them bright blue. They built a low fence with a quiet gate that would not bang. Maya brought soft straw for a cozy corner. Henry checked his notebook and said, 'Geese like to see each other, so let's leave gaps in the fence.' Oscar smiled. 'Smart thinking, Henry!'



As they worked, Greta waddled closer. She honked softly, a low 'honk-honk.' Henry listened carefully. 'That's a quiet honk,' he said. 'Is she saying something different?' Maya nodded. 'Yes! Soft honks mean she's content. Loud honks mean excitement or warning. You're learning fast, Henry.' Henry beamed and wrote 'soft honk = happy' in his notebook.



Soon, other geese arrived from the sanctuary. They honked and flapped their wings. At first, Henry felt worried again. But then he remembered: honks are just talking. He stood still and watched. The geese stretched their necks and bobbed their heads. 'They're greeting each other,' Henry said. 'Just like Greta greeted me.' Maya clapped her hands. 'Exactly!'



The new space was ready. The blue fence looked cheerful, the gate was quiet, and the straw was soft. Henry opened the gate slowly. Greta stretched her neck and honked loudly. Henry did not jump. 'Hello, Greta!' he said. She waddled forward, and the other geese followed. They explored the calm space, honking softly to each other. Henry felt warm inside.



Greta came close to Henry and tilted her head. Then she gave a soft 'honk.' Henry knelt down and held out his hand. Greta gently nibbled his fingers. 'She likes you!' Maya said. Oscar laughed. 'You've made a friend, Henry.' Henry's gap-toothed smile stretched wide. 'I'm glad I learned her language,' he said. 'Now I know she's not angry. She's just saying hello.'



From that day on, Henry visited Greta often. He brought his notebook and wrote down new goose sounds. He learned that a hiss means 'step back' and a fast honk means 'follow me.' Understanding Greta made everything more fun. They played hide-and-seek around the straw, and Greta always found him with a loud honk. Henry laughed and honked back.



One rainy afternoon, Henry wore his yellow raincoat and red boots. Greta loved the rain. She splashed in puddles and honked with joy. Henry splashed too. 'You're a noisy friend,' he said, 'but I like you.' Greta nibbled his boot lace. Henry giggled. 'That means you like me too, right?' Greta gave a soft honk. Henry was sure it meant yes.



Maya and Oscar watched from the gate. 'Henry has a gift,' Maya said. 'He listens.' Oscar nodded. 'And he's kind. That's what makes a good friend for any animal.' Henry waved at them, his freckled face glowing. He felt proud that he had helped make the sanctuary a better place. 'Friendship is easier when you understand each other,' he said.



As the sun set, Henry said goodbye to Greta. 'See you tomorrow,' he whispered. Greta stretched her neck and gave one last loud honk. Henry honked back, and everyone laughed. On his way home, Henry thought about all he had learned. Understanding animals keeps us safe and makes friendship more fun. And sometimes, a loud honk is just a friendly hello.