

The Girl and the Alpaca



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On a bright Saturday morning, Lily skipped down the lane to Farmer May's farm. Her curly dark-brown hair bounced in two puffy buns, and her canvas satchel thumped against her hip. She loved visiting the farm more than anything. Farmer May waved from the gate, silver hair shining under her straw hat. "Ready for a farm adventure, little helper?" she called. Lily nodded so hard her buns wiggled.



The farm was full of noisy life. Chickens clucked, a goat bleated, and bees hummed in the clover. Lily followed Farmer May past the barn and stopped at a small fenced yard. Inside stood one alpaca, all alone. Her fleece was cream-white and fluffy, like a cloud that had landed on the grass. A red braided collar with a tiny silver bell hung around her neck.



"This is Pepper," said Farmer May softly. "She's gentle and shy." Pepper lifted her head and looked at Lily with large dark-brown eyes and long, long lashes. She had a small tuft of fluff on top of her head and a soft rounded snout. Lily waved. Pepper's bell gave a tiny tinkle. "Hello, Pepper," Lily whispered. Pepper blinked and stepped closer, curious.



Lily leaned on the fence and watched Pepper nibble grass all by herself. "Doesn't she have friends?" Lily asked. Farmer May shook her head. "Pepper came here alone. Alpacas are herd animals, Lily. They feel happy and safe when they live together. A lonely alpaca gets sad and worried, even with plenty of grass and sunshine."



Lily frowned. "So she needs a family of alpacas?" Farmer May nodded. "A herd. They eat together, play together, and rest side by side. When one is scared, the others keep watch." Lily looked at Pepper, who stood very still at the fence, watching the far hills. "I think she's waiting for somebody," Lily said. "Then we should help her," said Farmer May.



Lily opened her satchel and pulled out a small notebook and a stubby pencil. "Let's make a plan," she said. First she drew a wide green field with a fence all around. Then she drew little fluffy shapes with long necks, one, two, three, four. "Alpacas need space to walk," said Farmer May. "And shade, and fresh water, and a soft dry place to sleep."



They walked the farm together, looking for the perfect spot. Lily found a flat field beside the orchard with a big oak tree for shade. "Here!" she said. "There's room to run, and the tree keeps the sun off." Farmer May measured with long strides and smiled. "Good eye, Lily. This is a peaceful place. Now we need a herd to fill it."



Farmer May knew farmers who had alpacas needing a good home. "I'll make some calls," she said. Lily fed Pepper hay through the fence while they waited. "You'll have friends soon," Lily told her. Pepper sniffed Lily's hand, and her warm breath tickled. The little silver bell tinkled whenever Pepper moved. "See? Your bell is happy," Lily laughed.



The next day, a truck rumbled up the lane and lowered its ramp. Out stepped a tall tan alpaca, then a grey one with fluffy legs. A small black cria trotted close to its mother. Lily counted out loud: "One, two, three, four!" Some of the alpacas wore pastel ribbons on their ears. Pepper stood frozen by her fence, watching them all arrive.



At first the new alpacas stayed in their own pen, sniffing and shuffling. Pepper hummed a low, soft sound. The grey alpaca hummed back. Lily clapped her hands. "They're talking!" Farmer May laughed. "That's how alpacas greet each other. Let's finish the big enclosure so they can be together. Then we'll see real friendship happen."



Everyone worked together. Farmer May hammered posts and stretched the wire fence, her strong arms swinging the mallet. Lily carried small bundles of hay and filled the water trough. "Careful, it's heavy," said Farmer May. "It's for sharing," Lily puffed, and kept going. The mixed herd watched from their pen, eyes bright and curious, soft coats fluffing in the breeze.



At last, the gate swung open. The tan alpaca stepped forward, then the grey, then the black cria, then the brown one. Pepper stood still at first, her bell tinkling softly. Then she walked slowly into the field. The others gathered around her, sniffing and humming. Pepper hummed back. Her long lashes blinked, and her round snout lifted.



Soon the whole herd was grazing side by side in the sunshine. The cria kicked up its heels and raced in happy circles while Pepper watched. Then Pepper pranced right after it, fluffy fleece bouncing. Lily laughed and laughed. "Look at her now! She isn't lonely at all." Farmer May wiped her hands on her green overalls and grinned. "That's what a herd does, Lily."



That evening, Lily sat on the fence with her satchel in her lap. The alpacas rested under the oak tree, all close together like a fluffy blanket. Pepper lay in the middle with her red collar bright against cream fleece. Every now and then her little bell tinkled as she shifted. "She's home," Lily whispered. Farmer May nodded. "You did that, little helper."



On the walk home, Lily thought about Pepper and the herd. Animals need each other, she decided, just like people do. Friends to eat with and play with. Friends to rest beside. She smiled her gap-toothed smile and hugged her satchel tight. "Can I visit Pepper every Saturday?" she asked. "Every single Saturday," said Farmer May. "And bring your friends too."



So Lily did. Every week she came with kindness and sharing, and sometimes she brought other children to meet the herd. They watched the alpacas eat, play, and rest side by side. Pepper grew content and playful, always humming to her friends. And Lily always said the same thing: "A herd is a family, and everybody needs one."