

The Girl and the Miniature Donkey



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Maya pulled on her yellow rain boots and clipped her tool belt snug around her red overalls. Today was special: she was visiting the animal sanctuary with Farmer Ellis. She skipped down the muddy path, her two curly buns bouncing. At the gate stood a tall man in a straw hat and plaid shirt, smiling warmly. "Welcome, Maya!" said Farmer Ellis. "We have a new friend for you to meet."



Farmer Ellis led Maya to a small paddock behind the barn. Inside stood a miniature donkey, no taller than Maya's shoulder. He had a soft grey-brown coat, a cream muzzle, and long fuzzy ears that twitched this way and that. A blue halter with a tiny brass tag circled his head. "His name is Pippin," said Farmer Ellis. "He's three years old and a bit shy."



Maya knelt down slowly so she wouldn't scare him. Pippin peeked at her from behind his long lashes. "Hello, little one," she whispered. The donkey took one tiny step, then another, until his cream muzzle was close enough to sniff her hand. Maya giggled as his warm breath tickled her fingers. "He likes you," said Farmer Ellis. "But he needs more than just friends to be healthy."



Farmer Ellis showed Maya around the paddock. "Miniature donkeys may be small, but their needs are big," he explained. "Pippin needs fresh water every day, good hay to eat, and a safe place to run and rest." Maya looked around. The water bucket was tipped over, the hay was scattered, and a loose fence board wiggled in the wind. "Oh dear," she said. "Pippin deserves better."



Maya studied the paddock with careful eyes. The grass was too tall and scratchy for Pippin's short legs. The fence had a gap where he could wander off. And the little shelter was dusty and dark. "Can I help fix it?" she asked. Farmer Ellis's crinkly green eyes sparkled. "I was hoping you'd say that," he said. "Let's make a list of what Pippin needs."



They sat on a hay bale and wrote a plan. First, clean, fresh water. Second, sweet hay and a salt block. Third, a strong fence with no gaps. Fourth, a cozy shelter with soft bedding. Maya read the list aloud, and Pippin's long ears swiveled toward her voice. "That's a lot for one little donkey," she said. "But he's worth it," said Farmer Ellis. "Small animals have substantial needs."



Maya started with the water. She scrubbed the bucket until it shone, then filled it with cool, clean water from the pump. Pippin trotted over and took a long, noisy drink. "Good boy," Maya said. She hung the bucket on a sturdy hook so it wouldn't tip. Farmer Ellis nodded. "Clean water is the first step to a happy donkey," he said. "You're doing great."



Next came the fence. Maya pulled on her thick gloves and picked up a hammer. Farmer Ellis showed her how to tap the loose board back into place. Maya hammered carefully, her tongue sticking out in concentration. Pippin watched from a safe distance, his fuzzy ears perked. When the last nail was in, Maya tugged the fence. It held firm. "Strong and safe!" she cheered.



The grass was next. Maya grabbed a small sickle and began to clear the tall weeds. It was hard work, and soon her arms were tired. But she thought of Pippin's short legs and kept going. Farmer Ellis raked the cuttings into a pile. "A clean paddock keeps a donkey from getting scratches and sores," he explained. Maya wiped her forehead and smiled. "Almost done," she said.



Finally, the shelter. Maya swept out the dust and spread a thick layer of fresh straw. She hung a soft brush on a nail and placed a salt block in the corner. Pippin stepped inside and sniffed the clean straw. Then he turned around three times and lay down with a happy sigh. "He loves it!" Maya whispered. Farmer Ellis chuckled. "You've made a cozy home."



Maya looked around the paddock. The water sparkled, the hay was fresh, the fence stood straight, and the shelter was warm and dry. Pippin trotted over and nuzzled her shoulder with his cream muzzle. "You did all this for me?" his big dark eyes seemed to say. Maya hugged his fuzzy neck. "Every bit," she whispered. Farmer Ellis smiled. "Kindness makes a big difference."



As the sun began to set, Maya sat on the fence and watched Pippin play. He kicked up his heels and ran little circles in the clean grass. Then he came to the fence and rested his head on Maya's knee. "He's happy," she said. Farmer Ellis nodded. "Because you cared enough to learn what he needed. Small animals have big needs, and you met them all."



Maya thought about everything she had done. She had fixed the fence, cleared the grass, and made the shelter cozy. But the most important thing was kindness. "I'm proud of you," said Farmer Ellis. "You saw a problem and worked hard to solve it." Maya beamed, the gap between her front teeth showing. "Pippin is worth every minute," she said.



Pippin gave a soft, rumbley bray and trotted to his water bucket. He took a long drink, then nibbled sweet hay from his rack. Maya watched him with a warm, full heart. "He's healthy and happy," she said. Farmer Ellis put a hand on her shoulder. "Thanks to you. You've learned that even tiny animals need lots of love and attention."



Before leaving, Maya gave Pippin one last brush. His grey-brown coat gleamed, and his long ears relaxed. "I'll come back soon," she promised. Pippin blinked his long lashes and pressed his nose to her cheek. Farmer Ellis handed her a small notebook. "For your next visit," he said. "Maybe you'll help another animal." Maya hugged the notebook tight.



On the walk home, Maya's yellow boots squelched in the mud. She thought about Pippin and his cozy new paddock. She had learned that care means more than just feeding and watering. It means paying attention, working hard, and loving with your whole heart. "Small animals have substantial needs," she said aloud. And she knew she would always be ready to help.