

The Girl and the Quokka



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Maya stepped off the ferry onto Rottnest Island, her green canvas backpack bouncing. She held her notebook and pencil tight, ready to sketch every animal she saw. Her little brother Finn ran ahead, his toy camera swinging on its string. "Wait for me!" Maya called, her curly black hair buns bobbing as she chased him down the sandy path.



The island was full of surprises. Tall trees whispered in the wind, and bright flowers dotted the grass. Maya spotted a sign that said 'Quokka Crossing.' "What's a quokka?" Finn asked, his freckled nose wrinkling. Maya opened her notebook. "I don't know yet," she said, "but I'm going to find out!" She loved discovering new things.



Suddenly, a small furry creature hopped out from behind a bush. It was about the size of a cat, with soft reddish-brown fur and a gentle smile. "Oh!" Maya breathed. "It's the friendliest animal ever!" The quokka blinked its dark eyes and twitched its rounded ears. Finn squealed and ran toward it, arms wide for a hug.



"Stop right there!" called a voice. A tall ranger in a khaki uniform hurried over, his wide-brimmed hat shading his face. "That quokka is wild, and we need to give it space." Finn froze, his arms dropping. The quokka stayed calm, but Maya noticed its small blue park tag. "Why can't we hug it?" Finn asked, his lip quivering.



Ranger Tom knelt down, his hazel eyes kind. "Quokkas look happy, but they're wild animals. They need room to feel safe. If we crowd them or feed them, they can get scared or sick." Maya wrote in her notebook: 'Quokka = wild, needs space.' "So we just watch?" she asked. "Yes," said Ranger Tom. "Watching quietly is the kindest thing we can do."



Maya watched the quokka nibble grass, its tiny paws holding a stem. It did look friendly, but now she understood. "Its smile is just how it looks," she whispered. "It doesn't mean 'come closer.'" Ranger Tom nodded. "Exactly. Respect means giving animals the quiet space they need to stay healthy and safe." Finn slowly lowered his camera and took a photo from afar.



Back at the visitor center, Maya had a great idea. "I'm going to make a guide for kids!" she announced. "A cheerful guide about watching animals without feeding them or crowding them." Ranger Tom's eyes lit up. "That's a wonderful idea, Maya. I'll check your facts." Maya grabbed her pencil and began to sketch a smiling quokka with a big speech bubble.



She drew a quokka with a sign: 'Please give me space to be wild.' She added tips: 'Watch quietly,' 'Never feed,' 'Stay on the path.' Finn helped by drawing a little camera and a heart. "Can I test it on other kids?" he asked. "Of course!" Maya said. She felt proud. Her guide could help everyone learn to respect wildlife.



The next morning, Maya and Finn tested the guide on the boardwalk. A group of children gathered around a quokka, squealing and reaching out. "Wait!" Maya called, holding up her guide. "Look at this!" The children paused and read her sign. "Oh, we should give it space," one girl said. They stepped back, and the quokka relaxed, nibbling grass calmly.



Ranger Tom walked over, smiling. "Your guide is working perfectly," he said. "You're teaching others to respect wildlife." Maya beamed. "It's fun to watch them when they're not scared," she said. Finn nodded, snapping a photo from a respectful distance. The quokka looked up, its gentle smile seeming to say thank you. Maya felt warm inside.



That afternoon, Maya added more pages to her guide: 'Quokkas are wild, not pets,' and 'Quiet voices keep animals calm.' She drew a picture of Finn giving a thumbs-up from behind a rope. "This is the most important part," she told Ranger Tom. He read it and nodded. "You've captured the heart of wildlife watching."



Ranger Tom printed copies of Maya's guide to hand out at the ferry terminal. "You're an official wildlife guide now," he said, winking. Maya's cheeks flushed with pride. She looked at her notebook, full of sketches and notes. She had learned so much. "I want to be a ranger when I grow up," she said. "Or a wildlife artist," said Finn, holding up his camera.



On the ferry ride home, Maya watched the island shrink in the distance. She thought about the quokka's friendly face and how she had almost made a mistake. "I'm glad we learned to give space," she said. Finn nodded, scrolling through his photos. "Me too. My pictures are better when the animals are happy."



Back at school, Maya shared her guide with her class. She told them about quokkas and how to respect wild animals. Her teacher hung the guide on the wall. "You're a great teacher, Maya," she said. Maya smiled, her gap-toothed grin wide. She knew that even small actions can make a big difference for wildlife.



Maya kept her notebook close, always ready for the next adventure. She knew that friendly-looking animals still need space, and she wanted to tell everyone. "Maybe I'll make guides for other animals too," she said to Finn. He giggled. "And I'll take the photos!" They high-fived, ready to explore and protect.



That night, Maya drew one last picture: a quokka with a little blue tag, smiling from a respectful distance. She wrote at the bottom: 'Wild animals need space, even when they smile.' She closed her notebook, feeling happy. She had learned to respect wildlife, and she would never forget the girl and the quokka.