The Girl and the Swans

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Maya loved the lake best of all. On Saturday mornings, she pulled on her yellow rain boots, buttoned her blue overalls over her striped shirt, and clipped her red hair clip into her wavy black hair. She packed her green satchel with her sketchbook and pencils. Today, she hoped to draw something special. The lake sparkled under the soft morning sun. Maya hurried down the path, her boots crunching on the gravel.

At the water's edge, Maya stopped still. A family of swans glided across the lake! The cob swan was large and pure white, with a long curved neck and an orange beak. His broad wings rested against his sides. Behind him swam the pen swan, creamy white and gentle, with an orange beak and a thin silver band on her leg. And behind her came three fluffy grey cygnets, paddling in a line.

Maya sat on a flat rock and opened her sketchbook. She drew the cob first, his neck like a question mark. Then the pen, so calm and quiet. The cygnets were tiny and fluffy, with dark grey beaks and big feet that paddle-paddled in the water. Maya smiled. "You're a family," she whispered. Her pencil moved quickly, trying to catch their shapes. The swans didn't seem to notice her. They floated like soft white clouds.

Then a family with a barking dog arrived. The dog ran toward the water, and the cob swan spread his wings wide. He hissed a warning. The pen swan gathered the cygnets close and paddled quickly toward the reeds. The three grey cygnets peeked out from the tall grass, their tiny eyes wide. Maya's heart thumped. "They're scared," she said. She wished everyone would be quieter and give the swans space.

The family called their dog back and walked away. Slowly, the swans came out of the reeds. The cob glided in front, watchful and calm. The pen followed with the cygnets swimming in a neat row behind her. Maya watched them settle. She thought about how the swan family needed room to feel safe. She looked at her sketchbook and had an idea. "I can help," she said to herself.

Maya spent the next days drawing. She drew the cob swan with his wings spread, and the pen with her gentle arched neck. She drew the three cygnets peeking from the reeds. Then she drew pictures of people being careful: a child standing far back, a dog on a leash, a quiet family watching. She wrote simple words in big letters: Keep your distance. Stay calm. Never chase. Give them space.

Maya showed her pictures to the park ranger, Mr. Chen. He smiled. "These are wonderful, Maya. We need a visitor guide like this." Together, they made a big poster with her drawings and tips. They put it on the sign near the lake. The poster said: Welcome to Swan Lake. Please help our swan family feel safe. Keep a safe distance. Stay quiet and calm. Keep dogs on a leash. Enjoy watching from afar.

The next Saturday, Maya returned to the lake. She saw people reading the new guide. A little boy pointed at her drawing of the cygnets. "Look, they're fluffy!" he said. His mother smiled and said, "We'll watch from here, okay?" They stayed on the path, far from the water. Maya felt proud. Her guide was helping. She sat on her rock and opened her sketchbook again.

The swan family glided by. The cob swan led the way, his white feathers bright in the sun. The pen swan arched her neck and kept the cygnets close. The three grey cygnets paddled in a line, their big feet working hard. They didn't hurry. They seemed peaceful. Maya drew them as they swam. She noticed how the cob swan watched the path, but he didn't hiss. He seemed to know that people were keeping their distance.

More visitors came. A family with a picnic blanket sat far back, their dog tied to a tree. Two children watched through binoculars. Everyone spoke in soft voices. Maya heard a girl whisper, "The guide says stay calm." The swans floated near the reeds, dipping their beaks into the water. The cygnets climbed onto a small island of mud and flapped their fluffy wings. Maya drew the scene, feeling warm inside.

Then a boy ran toward the water, chasing a ball. The cob swan lifted his head and opened his wings a little. Maya jumped up. "Wait!" she called. "Please stop! The swans need space!" The boy stopped and looked at her. His cheeks turned pink. "I didn't see them," he said. Maya pointed to the guide. "See? Keep a safe distance. That way the swans feel safe, and we can all watch them." The boy nodded and picked up his ball.

The boy's mother came over. "Thank you," she said to Maya. "That was a good reminder." She called her son to sit with her on the grass. The cob swan slowly closed his wings and settled back on the water. The pen swan led the cygnets out of the reeds. They swam in a line again, calm and peaceful. Maya let out a breath. "It worked," she said. "Kind words help, too."

That afternoon, Mr. Chen asked Maya to add more to the guide. "Could you draw the swan family for the big sign?" he asked. Maya nodded. She drew the cob, the pen, and the cygnets, with a happy family watching from the path. Underneath, she wrote: The swans are a family. They need space and quiet, just like us. Be kind. Watch and learn. Mr. Chen printed a big copy and put it by the lake.

Weeks passed. The guide became part of the lake. Visitors read it and smiled. They kept their distance and stayed calm. The swan family grew used to the quiet watchers. The cygnets grew bigger, their grey down turning whiter. Maya visited every Saturday and drew new pictures. Sometimes the cob swan looked her way and dipped his beak, as if to say thank you. Maya felt like the lake was a happier place for everyone.

One morning, Maya brought her little cousin Lila to the lake. Lila was six and had never seen swans before. Maya showed her the guide. "We have to be quiet and keep back," she said. They sat on the rock and watched the swan family glide by. The cob swan was grand, the pen gentle, and the cygnets playful. Lila's eyes went wide. "They're beautiful," she whispered. "And they feel safe because we gave them space."

Maya smiled and opened her sketchbook. She drew Lila watching the swans, and the swans watching Lila from a safe distance. It was her favorite drawing yet. The sun sparkled on the lake, and the swan family floated peacefully. Maya knew that wild families need room to feel safe. And with kindness and respect, everyone could share the lake. She closed her sketchbook and whispered, "Same time next week."