

The Girl and the Rescue Hen



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On a bright Saturday morning, Maya skipped down the gravel path to Sunny Hollow Farm. Her yellow rain boots squished in the mud, and her green satchel bumped against her hip. She had waited all week for this visit. Farmer Jo waved from the barn door, her straw hat glowing in the sun. "Come meet our newest neighbor," she called. "She's a rescue hen named Pip."



Maya followed Farmer Jo past the red barn and the sleepy sheep. In a cozy corner of the yard stood a small wooden coop. Inside, a plump hen sat very still. Her feathers were rust-orange with creamy speckles, and one wing tip drooped a little. She had no tail feathers at all. A soft blue band circled her left leg.



"Where did Pip come from?" Maya asked, kneeling in the dirt. Farmer Jo leaned on the fence. "A rescue group brought her here last spring. She had a hard start, but she's safe now." Maya pressed her round cheek to the wire. Pip's bright amber eyes blinked slowly. "Hello, Pip," Maya whispered. The little hen tilted her head but did not move.



Maya sat with Pip for a long while. The hen scratched once, then stopped. She pecked at a leaf, then stopped again. She looked around as if waiting for something that never came. Maya frowned. "Farmer Jo, Pip seems bored. She just sits and stares." Farmer Jo nodded. "Hens are clever birds. They need things to do, just like we do."



Maya pulled a notebook from her green satchel. "What kind of things?" she asked. Farmer Jo smiled and tucked her gloves into her pocket. "Hens love to search for food. In the wild, they spend all day scratching and pecking. It keeps their bodies busy and their minds happy." Maya bit her pencil. "So Pip needs a game," she said. "A foraging game!"



Maya looked around the farm for ideas. She found a shallow box, a clean tray, and a bag of chicken feed. Farmer Jo brought soft hay and a handful of dried mealworms. "These are safe treats," Farmer Jo said. "We'll sprinkle them where Pip can peck." Maya's dark brown eyes sparkled. "Let's hide them so she has to search!"



First, Maya filled the tray with loose hay. She scattered tiny mealworms and seeds through it. Then she placed the tray inside Pip's little yard. Pip peeked out of her coop. She stepped forward slowly, one foot, then the other. Her droopy wing brushed the ground. She stared at the tray with her amber eyes wide.



Pip stretched her neck and gave a curious little cluck. Then she pecked at the hay. A seed popped out! She gobbled it up and scratched again. Hay flew in tiny golden puffs. Another treat! Pip's head bobbed faster and faster. Her red comb wiggled with excitement. Maya clapped her hands softly. "She likes it!"



Next, Maya made a hanging treat. She tied a cabbage leaf to a string from the fence rail. Pip watched it swing. She jumped and pecked. The leaf spun round and round. Pip chased it in happy circles, her feet scratching quick little patterns in the dirt. "Hens are clever," Maya said. "She figured it out all by herself!"



Farmer Jo brought an old cardboard tube and a small pile of straw. "Try hiding treats inside," she said. Maya stuffed the tube with straw and seeds. Pip poked her beak inside. She wiggled and pulled until a seed rolled out. Then another! Pip flapped her good wing and gave a proud little squawk. Her tail stump wiggled happily.



The afternoon sun grew warm. Maya sat on an upturned bucket and watched Pip play. The rust-orange hen pecked and scratched and searched. She was not bored anymore. She was busy and bright-eyed. "Look at her," Maya said softly. "She's like a different hen." Farmer Jo smiled. "That's enrichment, Maya. You gave her a joyful day."



Maya reached out her hand. Pip stepped closer. Her amber eyes blinked, calm and curious. Maya sprinkled a few seeds on her own wet boot. Pip pecked them gently, one by one. Her blue leg band glinted in the sun. "I think she likes me," Maya whispered. Farmer Jo laughed. "She does. You noticed what she needed."



Maya had an idea. "Can I make a foraging plan for every day?" she asked. Farmer Jo handed her a pencil. "That would be wonderful." Maya drew little pictures: a hay tray on Monday, a hanging leaf on Tuesday, a straw tube on Wednesday. "Pip will have something fun to do all week!" she said proudly.



When it was time to go home, Maya knelt beside the coop. Pip had scratched a small hollow in the dirt and sat in it, cozy and content. Her droopy wing rested at her side. "Goodbye, Pip," Maya said. "I'll come back soon with new games." Pip clucked softly, as if she understood every word.



On the walk home, Maya's yellow boots were muddy and her green satchel was full of drawings. Her curly puff buns bounced as she skipped. She thought about Pip's bright eyes and busy feet. "Small things make a big difference," she said to herself. "A few seeds and a little searching made Pip's whole day happy."



Farmer Jo called after her, "See you next week, little hen keeper!" Maya waved and smiled her gap-toothed smile. She had learned something wonderful: hens are curious and clever, and kindness can turn a boring day into a joyful one. All the way home, she planned her next foraging game for her new friend.