The Turtle and the Heron
Jane MEADOW

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Once there was a quiet pond, round as a button and bright as a coin. Dragonflies skimmed the water, and reeds whispered in the breeze. In the soft mud at the edge lived a turtle named Tilly. She had a smooth patterned shell of brown and green, and she carried a little leaf satchel across it. Tilly liked to watch the world from low down, where small things happen.

One morning, a tall heron came wading through the reeds. His blue-grey feathers shone, his long thin legs stepped lightly, and a little red scarf was tied around his neck. His bright yellow eyes blinked down at Tilly. "Hello," he said. "I'm Heron. Is this your pond?" Tilly smiled with her gentle wrinkled face. "It's our pond," she said. "Would you like to share it?"

Heron loved the pond. He stood on one leg and told Tilly about the far-off places he had seen. Tilly showed him the tiny worlds near the ground: a beetle's door, a snail's slow trail, a hidden nest of feathers. "You see the big picture," said Tilly. "You see the small details," said Heron. They became the best of friends, and the pond felt warmer with two.

But the summer grew hot and dry. Day after day, the sun beat down, and the pond shrank smaller and smaller. The mud cracked into puzzle pieces. "Oh dear," said Tilly. "Our pond is going away. What will we do?" Heron looked worried too. "We need a new home," he said. "But where?" They sat together by the shrinking water, thinking hard.

"I can fly high and look around," said Heron. "I'll find us a safe new pond." He spread his wide wings and lifted into the sky. Tilly watched him grow smaller and smaller. She felt a little worried, but she trusted her friend. "Fly carefully!" she called. "I'll wait right here." The wind ruffled her leaf satchel, and she settled down to wait.

High above, Heron soared in wide circles. He saw fields and hills and roads. Then, far away, he spotted a shining blue pond, tucked between green hills and tall trees. "Perfect!" he said. "Safe and clean and full of water." He flew back down to Tilly, his red scarf fluttering. "I found it!" he said. "A lovely pond, not too far."

Tilly was happy, but then she looked at the ground. "I can't fly," she said. "And the way is long. There might be dangers." Heron nodded. "You're right. How will we get there together?" Tilly looked down low, at the ground. "Let me look," she said. "I see things close up. Maybe I can find a safe path." She began to explore.

Tilly walked slowly around the dry pond. She peeked under bushes and between rocks. "Here's a shady path," she said. "It goes under the willow trees and along a little stream. There's shelter from the sun and places to hide." Heron listened carefully. "That sounds safe," he said. "We can travel together. You lead the way on the ground."

"But how will I know where to go?" asked Tilly. "I can't fly up to see." Heron thought. "I'll fly ahead and call down to you," he said. "I'll tell you which way to turn." Tilly nodded. "And I'll tell you if the path is safe," she said. "We'll use both our views!" They packed Tilly's satchel with a few berries and started on their journey.

The journey was long, but they made it fun. Heron flew above and called, "Turn left at the big oak tree!" Tilly walked below and answered, "The path is clear here!" When the ground was too rocky, Heron found a smoother way. When the sun was too hot, Tilly found a cool, leafy tunnel. They helped each other, step by step and wing by wing.

Then they came to a wide, dry field. The sun blazed down, and there was no shade anywhere. Tilly felt tired. "I don't know if I can cross this," she said. Heron landed beside her. "I can see a line of bushes on the other side," he said. "It's not far. We can do it together. I'll fly low and cast a shadow to keep you cool."

So Heron flew just above Tilly, his wings making a gentle shade. Tilly walked as fast as her sturdy legs could go. "You're doing great!" called Heron. "Just a little farther!" Tilly laughed. "Your shadow is better than a parasol!" They crossed the hot field and reached the cool bushes. "We did it!" said Tilly. "Teamwork!" said Heron. They shared a berry and rested.

Finally, they saw it: a shining blue pond between green hills and tall trees. "There it is!" cried Heron. "Just as I saw from above!" Tilly hurried forward. "And the path led us right to it," she said. "Just as I saw from below!" They stood together at the edge of their new home. The water sparkled, and the reeds whispered welcome.

The new pond was perfect. There were lily pads for Tilly to rest on and shallow water for Heron to wade in. "We make a good team," said Tilly. "We surely do," said Heron. "You see the small things, and I see the big things." They smiled at each other. "Different views help," said Tilly. "And friends help most of all," said Heron.

From that day on, Tilly and Heron shared the new pond with all the creatures who came. They told the story of their journey: how the heron flew high and the turtle looked low, and how together they found the way. "Teamwork makes hard things easier," said Tilly. "And more fun!" added Heron. They knew that no challenge is too big when friends face it together.

So if you ever see a tall heron with a red scarf and a small turtle with a leaf satchel by a pond, you'll know them. They are the best of friends, and they always will be. They learned that seeing things from different views helps solve problems, and that working as a team makes any journey brighter. The pond ripples softly, and the friends are home.