The Girl and the Rabbit

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Ava skipped home from the pet shelter with a cardboard box in her arms. Inside the box was a fluffy rabbit with cream-white fur and soft light-brown patches on her ears and back. The rabbit had long upright ears with pink insides and a tiny blue collar with a silver bell. Ava named her Clover. 'You are my very own rabbit!' Ava whispered, her hazel eyes shining with joy.

At home, Ava set the box on the living room rug. Clover poked out her small pink nose and sniffed the air. Her big dark brown eyes looked around the room. Ava's mom smiled. 'Rabbits need a safe place to live,' she said. 'We can make a cozy corner for Clover.' Ava clapped her hands. 'I will give Clover the best corner ever!' she said, her dark brown side braid bouncing.

Ava found a quiet spot near the bookshelf. She put down a soft mat and a little hidey house. Clover hopped out of the box and explored. Her round cotton-tail wiggled. 'Clover likes it!' Ava cheered. She wore her favorite mustard-yellow t-shirt with the tiny carrot print and her teal overall shorts. She sat on the rug and patted her lap. 'Come here, Clover! I want to hug you!'

Clover hopped closer, curious. Ava reached out and scooped the rabbit up. Clover's ears went flat, and she wiggled. Her back legs kicked. 'Hold still, Clover!' Ava said. But Clover squirmed free and hopped under the sofa. Ava's bright smile turned into a frown. 'Why doesn't Clover want a hug?' she asked. Her freckles bunched up as she peeked under the sofa.

Ava's mom sat beside her on the rug. 'Rabbits are not like teddy bears,' she said gently. 'They need space to hop. They need fun things to chew. And they like gentle hands.' Ava thought about this. She remembered how Clover's ears had gone flat. 'So hugging too much might scare her?' Ava asked. Her mom nodded. 'Real kindness means respect,' she said. 'Not just cuddles.'

Ava decided to try again. She sat quietly on the rug and did not reach for Clover. After a while, Clover hopped out from under the sofa. She sniffed Ava's red sneakers. Then she hopped right past her. Ava smiled. 'You like to hop, don't you?' she said softly. 'I can give you space.' She watched Clover explore the room, her long ears turning this way and that.

The next day, Ava made a list of things Clover might like. She asked her mom for help. They found a cardboard tube and a wooden chew stick. 'These are for chewing,' Ava said. She placed them in Clover's cozy corner. Clover hopped over and sniffed the tube. Then she started to chew. 'Look, Mom! Clover loves it!' Ava laughed, her side braid swinging as she clapped.

Ava also learned about gentle hands. She practiced petting Clover softly on the head and back. Clover's fur was soft as a cloud. 'Nice and easy,' Ava whispered. Clover's ears stayed up. She did not run away. Ava felt warm inside. 'I think Clover likes gentle hands,' she said. Her mom smiled. 'You are learning to listen to Clover,' she said.

One afternoon, Ava brought a fresh carrot from the kitchen. She sat on the rug and held it out. Clover hopped closer, her nose twitching. Ava stayed very still. Clover took a tiny bite. Then another. 'You are eating from my hand!' Ava whispered. She did not try to grab Clover. She just watched. Clover's little bell jingled softly as she chewed. Ava's heart felt full.

Ava wanted to show Clover to her friend Ben. Ben ran in and reached for Clover. 'Can I hold her?' he asked loudly. Clover dashed under the sofa. 'Wait, Ben,' Ava said. 'Clover needs to come to you.' Ava showed Ben how to sit quietly. Soon Clover hopped out. Ben stayed still, and Clover sniffed his shoe. 'She likes you!' Ava said. 'But we have to be gentle.'

Ava began to understand. Clover did not want to be hugged all the time. Clover wanted to hop and chew and explore. Ava gave Clover a cozy corner with a soft mat, a hidey house, and fun things to chew. She used gentle hands and let Clover come to her. 'Real kindness means respect,' Ava told Clover. 'I will try my best.' Clover's nose wiggled as if she understood.

One morning, Ava sat on the rug with a book. She did not call Clover. She just read quietly. Suddenly, she felt a soft nose on her knee. Clover had hopped right up to her! Ava looked down and smiled. 'Hello, Clover,' she said softly. Clover's long ears stood tall. Her dark eyes were bright. She was not afraid. Ava felt a happy tear in her eye.

Clover hopped into Ava's lap and settled down. Her round cotton-tail was warm. Ava did not squeeze or grab. She just let Clover stay. 'You came to me,' Ava whispered. 'That means you trust me.' Clover's little bell jingled as she snuggled close. Ava's freckles danced as she smiled. 'I will always respect you, Clover,' she said. 'And I will always be gentle.'

From that day on, Ava and Clover were best friends. Clover would hop right up to Ava to say hello. Ava would sit on the rug, and Clover would climb into her lap. Sometimes Clover wanted to hop, and Ava would let her. Sometimes Clover wanted to chew, and Ava would give her a chew stick. Ava learned that friendship grows with patience and gentle hands.

Ava's mom took a picture of them. Ava wore her mustard-yellow t-shirt with the tiny carrot print and her teal overall shorts. Clover sat beside her, her fluffy cream-white fur shining. 'What a happy pair you make!' said Mom. Ava beamed. 'Clover is my best friend,' she said. 'And I know how to take care of her.' Clover's nose twitched as if she agreed.

Ava learned that pets need understanding, not just affection. They need space to hop and fun things to chew. They need gentle hands and a cozy corner. And sometimes, the best hugs are the ones that come to you. Ava looked at Clover, who was chewing a cardboard tube happily. 'Real kindness means respect,' Ava said. And Clover hopped right up to say hello.