

The Girl and the Elephant



Jane MEADOW

The Girl and the Elephant

Jane MEADOW



Priya skipped up the dusty path, her green backpack bouncing. Her red sneakers were already dusty, and her two braids swung with every step. She could hardly wait to see the elephants. Today was her special day at the sanctuary. She had saved her allowance for weeks to buy the ticket. Now the adventure was about to begin!



Mrs. Rao met Priya at the gate, wearing her wide sun hat and holding a clipboard. "Welcome to the sanctuary!" she said with a warm smile. Priya's dark eyes grew wide as she looked around. She saw big ears flapping and long trunks swinging. The air smelled of hay and warm earth. "Are those real elephants?" Priya whispered.



Mrs. Rao led Priya to a shady spot under a big tree. "Meet Tara," she said softly. Tara was the biggest elephant Priya had ever seen. Her grey skin was wrinkled like an old map, with pink freckles on her trunk. She wore a green and gold rope collar with a wooden name tag. Her amber eyes looked kind and wise.



Tara rumbled a deep, gentle sound. "That's how elephants talk," Mrs. Rao explained. "They make rumbles we can feel in our chests." Priya put her hand over her heart. She could feel the rumble! "What is she saying?" Priya asked. "She's saying hello," Mrs. Rao said. "And she's telling the other elephants that a new friend has come."



Just then, a small elephant calf wobbled over. He had fuzzy hair on his head and a red string bracelet on one leg. "This is Kavi," said Mrs. Rao. "He's two years old and very curious." Kavi curled his short trunk up and sniffed Priya's braid. Priya giggled. "He tickles!" she said. Tara wrapped her trunk around Kavi, keeping him close.



Mrs. Rao showed Priya how elephant families stay together. "Tara is the matriarch," she said. "She guides the herd and protects the little ones." Priya watched as Tara gently nudged Kavi away from a thorny bush. "She's like a grandma," Priya said. "Exactly," said Mrs. Rao. "Elephants care for each other for their whole lives."



Priya had so many questions. "How do they find each other?" she asked. Mrs. Rao explained that elephants make rumbles too low for humans to hear. "They can talk across many miles," she said. Priya's mouth dropped open. "That's amazing!" she said. "They have secret voices!" She watched Tara and Kavi touch trunks, as if sharing a private hello.



All afternoon, Priya followed Tara and Kavi. She saw how the older elephants stood guard while the calves napped. She saw how they shared water and dusted each other with dirt. "They really take care of their families," Priya said. Mrs. Rao nodded. "That's what a sanctuary does too. We protect them, just like they protect each other."



At the visitor center, Priya saw a big empty board. "We want to teach visitors about elephant families," Mrs. Rao said. "But we haven't had time to make a display." Priya's eyes lit up. "I could help!" she said. "I love making things." Mrs. Rao smiled. "That would be wonderful. Let's plan it together."



Priya and Mrs. Rao sat at a wooden table with paper and crayons. Priya drew Tara with her big ears and gentle eyes. She drew Kavi with his funny fuzzy head. "We can show how they talk with rumbles," Priya said. "And how they hug with their trunks!" Mrs. Rao wrote the words while Priya drew the pictures.



Back at home, Priya worked on her exhibition every evening. She made a big poster of an elephant family. She glued on pink freckles, just like Tara's. She tied a tiny green and gold rope collar on a toy elephant. "Compassion means protecting animal families too," she wrote carefully in her best handwriting.



On the day of the exhibition, Priya set up her display in the visitor center. She hung her poster and placed her toy elephant at the front. When the first visitors came, Priya took a deep breath. "Elephants talk with secret rumbles," she said. "And they take care of each other, just like us!" The visitors leaned in to listen.



Mrs. Rao brought Tara and Kavi to a nearby clearing. The visitors watched as Tara wrapped her trunk around Kavi. Priya pointed to her poster. "See? That's how they hug!" she said. Kavi curled his trunk and let out a tiny trumpet. Everyone laughed. "He's saying hello!" Priya said. "And he likes the exhibition!"



At the end of the day, Priya sat on a bench with Mrs. Rao. "You did a wonderful job," Mrs. Rao said. "You taught people about elephant friendship and conservation." Priya smiled her gap-toothed smile. "I just wanted to help," she said. "Because I love Tara and Kavi." Mrs. Rao nodded. "That's what compassion means."



Tara ambled over and gently touched Priya's shoulder with her trunk. Priya felt the warm, rough skin and smiled. "I'll come back to visit," she promised. "And I'll keep telling people about you." Tara rumbled softly, as if she understood. Kavi peeked out from behind Tara's leg and flapped his ears.



On the ride home, Priya looked out the window and thought about Tara and Kavi. The sun was setting, painting the sky pink like Tara's freckles. Priya hugged her green backpack. She knew that protecting animal families was a big, important job. And she was ready to help, one little rumble at a time.