

The Girl and the Alpaca



Jane MEADOW

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Hannah was a shy girl with light brown skin and wavy dark hair that she often tucked behind her ears. She wore a mustard-yellow jumper and red wellington boots. Every morning, she walked with her mum to the animal sanctuary near their home. Hannah loved animals, but she felt nervous around new people. At the sanctuary, she hoped to find a quiet place where she could feel safe.



Mrs. Patel ran the sanctuary. She had warm brown skin, silver-streaked hair, and kind eyes behind glasses on a beaded chain. She wore a green polo shirt and a canvas apron. 'Hello, Hannah,' she said with a smile. 'Would you like to help care for one of our animals? We have a gentle alpaca named Poppy who needs a friend.' Hannah nodded, her heart beating fast. She wasn't sure what to expect.



Poppy was a fluffy cream alpaca with a soft caramel patch on her back. She had long eyelashes and calm, dark eyes. Around her neck was a red halter with a small brass heart tag. When Hannah approached, Poppy didn't rush or make a sound. She simply looked at Hannah with a gentle, unhurried gaze. Hannah felt her shoulders relax. 'Hello, Poppy,' she whispered. 'I'm Hannah.'



Every day after school, Hannah visited Poppy. She brushed Poppy's thick fleece until it shone. She filled Poppy's water bucket and brought fresh hay. Poppy stood patiently, never pushing or rushing. Sometimes she nuzzled Hannah's shoulder with her soft nose. Hannah began to talk to Poppy about everything—her day, her worries, her dreams. Poppy listened with her calm, dark eyes, and Hannah felt a warm glow inside.



As the weeks passed, Hannah and Poppy became best friends. Hannah learned that Poppy loved carrots and a gentle scratch behind her ears. She also learned that Poppy was afraid of loud noises. When a truck rumbled by, Poppy trembled. Hannah would stand close and speak softly. 'It's okay, Poppy. I'm here.' And Poppy would calm down. Being kind to Poppy made Hannah feel braver too.



Mrs. Patel noticed how Hannah cared for Poppy. 'You have a gentle touch,' she said one afternoon. 'Poppy trusts you, and that's a special thing.' Hannah smiled, her freckled nose crinkling. She was proud of the trust she had built. 'I think Poppy helps me too,' Hannah said. 'When I'm with her, I don't feel so shy.' Mrs. Patel nodded. 'Animals have a way of bringing out our courage.'



One day, Mrs. Patel gathered all the volunteers. 'We're having an open day next month,' she announced. 'People from the town will visit the sanctuary. We want to show them how we care for our animals.' Hannah's heart sank. Open day meant crowds and noise. 'Will I have to talk to people?' she asked quietly. Mrs. Patel patted her shoulder. 'Only if you want to, Hannah.'



Hannah worried about the open day. She imagined standing in front of strangers, and her tummy flipped. But then she thought of Poppy. Poppy was calm even when things were new. Poppy didn't rush; she took her time. Maybe Hannah could do the same. She practiced speaking to Poppy. 'This is Poppy,' she said. 'She's my best friend.' Poppy blinked her long lashes and gave a soft hum. Hannah felt a little braver.



The open day arrived. The sanctuary was buzzing with people. Hannah held Poppy's red halter and led her to a grassy spot. Poppy stood quietly, her cream fleece shining in the sun. Hannah's hands were sweaty, and her heart thumped. But Poppy leaned her long neck down and gently touched Hannah's cheek. 'You can do it,' Poppy seemed to say. Hannah took a deep breath.



Mrs. Patel announced, 'And now, Hannah would like to tell you about Poppy.' Hannah's legs felt shaky. She looked at the crowd and then at Poppy. Poppy's dark eyes were calm and patient. Hannah remembered all the times she had talked to Poppy in the quiet barn. This was just the same, only with more people. She clutched Poppy's halter and took a step forward.



Hannah's voice was small at first. 'This is Poppy,' she said. 'She's an alpaca. When I first met her, I was very shy.' The crowd listened quietly. Hannah took another breath and continued. 'Poppy never rushes. She is gentle and kind. Taking care of her has helped me feel brave.' She told them about brushing Poppy's fleece and feeding her carrots. 'Poppy is my best friend.'



As Hannah spoke, her voice grew stronger. She looked at the people and saw friendly faces. Mrs. Patel smiled and nodded. Poppy stood beside her, a warm, steady presence. Hannah even answered a question from a little boy about what alpacas eat. 'They love hay and carrots,' she said, and the boy grinned. When she finished, the crowd clapped and cheered. Hannah's cheeks turned pink, but she was smiling proudly.



After the open day, Hannah felt different. She still liked quiet times with Poppy, but she also found it easier to talk to new people. She made friends with the little boy who had asked about carrots. She helped Mrs. Patel show other visitors around the sanctuary. 'You were wonderful,' Mrs. Patel said. 'Poppy is lucky to have you.' Hannah hugged Poppy's neck. 'We're lucky to have each other,' she whispered.



The sanctuary became Hannah's favorite place. Every day, she brushed Poppy and fed her, and they shared quiet moments together. Poppy's gentle nature reminded Hannah to be patient with herself. When she felt shy, she thought of Poppy's calm eyes and took a deep breath. The friendship between the girl and the alpaca grew stronger, and Hannah's courage grew right along with it.



Sometimes, new children visited the sanctuary. They were shy or nervous, just like Hannah had been. Hannah would introduce them to Poppy. 'She's very gentle,' Hannah would say. 'Take your time.' And she would show them how to brush Poppy's fleece. The children would smile, and Hannah felt happy to pass on the kindness that Poppy had given her.



Hannah learned that gentle companionship can build courage. Poppy never hurried her; she simply stood by her side, steady and calm. And Hannah discovered that when you care for someone else, you also find strength in yourself. The girl and the alpaca were best friends, and together they made the sanctuary a warmer, braver place for everyone who visited.