

The Girl and the Barnacle Goose



Ebru Mina TOMURCUK

The Girl and the Barnacle Goose

Ebru Mina TOMURCUK



Every autumn, Maya stood on the hill behind her house and waited. She wore her yellow raincoat over a teal jumper and red rubber boots. Her green canvas satchel held pencils and rolled-up paper. Then came the sound she loved: honk, honk, honk! A barnacle goose flew over the rooftops, black neck stretched out, white face shining in the wind.



Maya called the goose Honk. Each year he flew over her town with his broad wings spread wide. His breast was black as night, his belly white as snow. On one leg shone a small silver ring. Maya wondered, "Where do you come from, Honk? Where do you go?" She promised herself she would find out one day.



Grandma Ruth lived at the end of the lane. She wore a lavender cardigan and wire-rimmed glasses, and she always carried a thermos and notebook. "Geese are great travelers," she told Maya. "They follow the same route every year, from cold northern lands to warm wetlands." Maya's dark brown eyes grew wide. "Then I will follow Honk and make a map!"



Maya packed her green satchel with pencils and paper. Grandma Ruth held her hand, and together they set off. They walked past the marsh at the edge of town, where tall reeds swayed and ducks paddled. "Look," whispered Grandma Ruth. "Honk is resting. Barnacle geese need safe places to eat and sleep on their long migration."



Honk honked softly and spread his white wing patches. He rose into the sky, and Maya and Grandma Ruth followed along the winding path. They crossed a wide green field and climbed a small hill. From the top, Maya could see the whole wetland shining like a mirror. "This is the first stop on my map," she said, sketching it carefully.



Next, Honk led them north, over rocky hills and cold, clear lakes. The wind ruffled Maya's two puffy buns. "Brrr!" she laughed. Grandma Ruth poured hot cocoa from her thermos. They watched Honk dip down to a quiet lake, where he floated beside other geese. "Cold northern lands," Grandma Ruth said. "He rests here before flying on."



Days later, Honk turned south again. Maya and Grandma Ruth followed him along a river, past farms and forests. They saw herons and swans and tiny darting fish. "Every place he stops is a habitat," Grandma Ruth explained. "A home for resting, eating, and staying safe." Maya drew each stop with bright pencils, humming as she worked.



Maya's map grew colorful and crowded. It showed cold lakes, green wetlands, a winding river, and the warm marsh near her town. She drew a little goose at every stop. "But how does Honk know the way?" she asked. Grandma Ruth smiled. "Geese are clever. They remember the route, and they follow each other. Safe places connect the whole journey."



Back home, Maya showed her map to her friend Pip. Pip was tall and lanky, with short curly ginger hair and a red backpack. "Wow!" he said, his green eyes shining. "Honk flew all that way? We should share this at school!" A bandage on his elbow wiggled as he waved his arms. "Everyone should know geese need safe habitats."



At school, Maya unrolled the big map on the wall. Her round face beamed, and her gap-toothed smile showed. Pip helped her point out each stop along the route. "Here Honk rests," Maya said. "Here he eats. Here he sleeps." Her classmates leaned in close, tracing the lines with their fingers. "The goose needs all these places," Pip added cheerfully.



A boy raised his hand. "What if a place disappears?" Maya thought for a moment. "Then Honk has nowhere to rest," she said. "That's why we must protect habitats. When places are connected, wildlife can travel safely." Grandma Ruth nodded from the doorway, her wire glasses glinting. "Every safe habitat is a gift to the animals."



The class decided to help. They planted reeds near the marsh and hung a poster about wildlife. Pip brought bird badges for everyone, and Maya drew tiny geese on each one. "We can protect habitats right here," Pip said. Maya added a new bright star to her map, right over her own town. "This is our stop," she announced proudly.



On a bright morning, Maya stood on the hill again. Honk, honk, honk! There was Honk, winging over the rooftops with his flock. Maya waved her colorful map high. "Safe travels, Honk!" she called. Her yellow raincoat flapped in the wind, and her two hair buns bounced as she jumped.



Grandma Ruth came to stand beside her, lavender cardigan warm against the breeze. "You made something wonderful," she said softly. "A map that shows how every place matters." Maya looked at the winding route, from cold northern lakes to the warm marsh. "Every stop protects Honk," she said. "And every friend can help protect them."



Pip arrived with their classmates, all carrying the poster they had made. Together they watched the geese fly on. Maya flipped her map over and wrote with her brightest pencil: When we protect habitats, wildlife can travel safely. Her cheerful, colorful map showed that connected places help geese, and every animal, year after year.



That evening, Maya hung her map above her bed. She could hear geese calling far away, soft and steady. She thought of cold lakes, green wetlands, and the warm marsh near home. "Goodnight, Honk," she whispered. Someday she would follow the whole route again. And every year, when the geese flew over, she would be ready to help them home.