The Otter's Pebble Election

Ebru Mina TOMURCUK

The Otter's Pebble Election

Ebru Mina TOMURCUK

The river sparkled in the morning sun. Ollie the otter floated on his back, a small handful of colored pebbles resting on his tan belly. He loved election day. All the river animals would choose a new leader. Ollie kicked his short sturdy legs and swam toward the big flat rock where everyone gathered. Today would be special.

Bramble the beaver stood on the rock, his flat tail slapping the water for attention. He wore a woven reed satchel full of red and blue pebbles. 'Listen up!' he called, his big orange teeth flashing. 'Each animal gets one pebble. Red for Lark the heron, blue for me. Drop your pebble in the clay pot. Then I count them.'

All around the rock, the river animals lined up. Turtles, frogs, ducks, and even a sleepy old catfish waited their turn. Lark the heron stood tall on her long yellow legs, a blue ribbon tied around one leg. She looked proud and important. Ollie watched carefully with his bright friendly dark eyes. Something felt wrong, but he couldn't tell what.

Ollie noticed a tiny shimmer of silver near the water's edge. It was Pip the minnow, leading a school of small fish. They darted back and forth, their translucent fins waving. But when Pip swam up to Bramble's satchel, the beaver shook his head. 'No pebbles for minnows,' Bramble said. 'You're too small to vote.' Pip's large round dark eyes looked sad.

Ollie's whiskers twitched. He swam over to the minnows. 'Did you get a pebble?' he asked gently. Pip's small whiskered mouth opened and closed. 'No,' Pip whispered. 'Bramble says we're too small. But we live here too. We need shallow water to lay our eggs. Nobody ever asks what we need.' Ollie felt a warm ache in his chest. This wasn't fair.

Ollie swam back to the big rock and climbed up. He stood beside Bramble, his chocolate-brown fur dripping. 'Bramble,' he said, 'the minnows have no pebbles. They can't vote. But they are river animals too.' Bramble frowned and clutched his reed satchel. 'The rules say only animals with hands can vote,' he said. 'Minnows don't have hands.' Ollie shook his head. 'That's not fair.'

Lark the heron stepped forward on her long spindly legs. 'The otter is right,' she said, though she looked a little uncomfortable. 'I want to be leader of all the river. But I forgot about the minnows.' Her sharp yellow beak turned toward the tiny fish. 'What do you need, little one?' Pip darted up, brave and hopeful. 'Shallow, safe water for our eggs,' Pip said.

Bramble opened his reed satchel and looked inside. 'I have extra pebbles,' he said slowly. 'But not enough for every minnow.' Ollie held out his own handful of colored pebbles. 'Take mine,' he said. 'I can share.' The other animals began to murmur. The turtles and frogs and ducks looked at each other. Then one by one, they offered pebbles too.

Soon there was a small pile of red and blue pebbles for the minnows. Bramble counted them out carefully. 'One for each minnow,' he said. Pip's large round dark eyes shone. 'Thank you,' Pip said. 'But we don't just want pebbles. We want you to listen to us. All of us, big and small.' The animals nodded. Bramble's bossy voice grew soft. 'We will listen,' he said.

The election began again. This time, every animal got a pebble. The minnows dropped their pebbles into the clay pot with tiny splashes. Bramble counted them all, his flat tail twitching with excitement. 'Lark has ten red pebbles,' he announced. 'I have eight blue pebbles. But the minnows voted for Lark too!' Lark the heron looked surprised and pleased. Her blue ribbon fluttered in the breeze.

Before the final count, Ollie raised a paw. 'Wait,' he said. 'We should all listen to what every animal needs. Not just the ones with the most pebbles.' Pip the minnow swam to the middle of the circle. 'The river is our home,' Pip said. 'We need clean water and safe places to hide. Please remember us.' The animals listened quietly. Even Bramble stopped counting.

Lark the heron stepped forward. 'I promise to listen to all the river residents,' she said. 'Big and small. I will make sure the minnows have shallow water for their eggs.' Bramble nodded. 'I will help,' he said. 'I can build small pools with my strong paws.' The other animals cheered. Ollie smiled. Fair decisions came from hearing every voice, no matter how tiny.

Then Bramble announced the winner. 'Lark is our new leader!' he said. The animals clapped and splashed. Lark the heron bowed her long neck. 'Thank you,' she said. 'But I couldn't have done it without Ollie and Pip. They showed us that everyone deserves a vote.' Ollie's bright friendly dark eyes sparkled. He felt proud of his small friends. The minnows darted happily around his paws.

That evening, the river animals held a celebration by the sparkling water. Fireflies danced over the surface. Bramble passed around sweet berries from his reed satchel. The minnows swam in and out of the shallow pools Bramble had built. Lark the heron stood tall and watched over everyone. Ollie floated on his back, his thick tapered tail swishing gently. 'This is what a river should feel like,' he said.

Pip the minnow swam up to Ollie. 'Thank you for seeing us,' Pip said. 'You gave us pebbles, but you also gave us a voice.' Ollie smiled. 'You were brave,' he said. 'You spoke up, even though you're small.' The other animals gathered around. 'From now on,' Bramble said, 'we will always listen to every voice. Big or small.' Everyone nodded. The river murmured its agreement.

And so the river animals learned a gentle lesson. Fair decisions require listening. The smallest voice can hold the biggest truth. Ollie the otter kept a few colored pebbles in his paw, a reminder of the day the minnows got their vote. As the stars came out, the animals celebrated together by the sparkling water, happy and united. The river flowed on, peaceful and fair.