

The Girl and the Little Caracal



Ebru Mina TOMURCUK

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Maya loved wildcats. She read about them in books and drew them in her sketchbook. Her favorite was the caracal, a wildcat with tall, tufty ears that lived in dry, sandy places. She kept a list of every wildcat she hoped to see one day. The caracal was at the top of her list, and she dreamed of meeting one in the desert.



One morning, Maya packed her canvas satchel with her sketchbook and pencils. She put on her yellow t-shirt, khaki shorts, and red sneakers. Her dark curly hair bounced in two short puffs as she walked. 'I'm ready to explore the desert,' she said. She hoped to spot a caracal, even just a glimpse.



The desert was wide and golden. Maya saw sandy dunes, dry bushes, and a bright blue sky. She sat on a rock and opened her sketchbook. 'If I were a caracal, where would I hide?' she wondered. She drew the open space and the sheltering bushes, and she waited patiently. She listened to the wind and watched for any movement.



Suddenly, a small shape moved near a bush. Maya's heart beat fast. It was a little caracal! Its sandy tan fur blended with the desert, and its tall black-tufted ears stood up like antennas. Its amber eyes watched her curiously. 'Hello, little caracal,' Maya whispered softly. She did not want to scare it away.



The caracal had a white chin and chest, and long legs that made it look graceful. Around its neck was a thin woven cord collar with a tiny wooden tag. Maya wondered who had put it there. The caracal twitched its tufted ears and took a cautious step toward her. It seemed playful but also careful, as if deciding whether to trust her.



Maya stayed very still. She slowly reached for her sketchbook and began to draw. The caracal watched her pencil move. Then it turned and trotted a few steps away, looking back as if to say, 'Follow me.' Maya stood up quietly and followed the little caracal. She wanted to learn what it needed to be happy in this dry, sandy habitat.



The caracal led Maya to a hidden spot behind some rocks. There was a small den, sheltered from the hot sun and wind. 'This is your shelter,' Maya whispered. She drew the den and the rocks. The little caracal sat beside her, its amber eyes shining. Maya saw how the den kept the caracal safe and cool.



Next, the caracal ran into the open desert. It leaped and chased a grasshopper, its long legs springing. Maya laughed. 'You need open space to run and play,' she said. The caracal dashed back and forth, its short tail flicking. Maya sketched the wide, open space and the joyful caracal. She understood that freedom to move was important.



The caracal sniffed the air and pounced near a bush. It caught a small mouse and ate it quickly. Maya realized the caracal needed enough food to eat. 'The desert gives you food,' she said. She drew the bush and the little mouse. She knew that a healthy habitat meant plenty of prey for the caracal to hunt.



As the sun began to set, Maya sat with the caracal. She looked at her sketches and thought about what she had learned. The caracal needed open space, shelter, and enough food. It also needed people to protect its home. 'I want to help you,' Maya said. The caracal blinked its amber eyes and rubbed against her arm.



Maya had an idea. She would make a colorful guide with her own drawings. She would show people how to protect the caracal and its desert home. She opened her sketchbook and began to plan. She drew the caracal's tufted ears, its sandy fur, and its white chin. She wrote simple words about its habitat and conservation.



Back home, Maya worked on her guide. She used bright colors and clear pictures. She drew the open space, the sheltering den, and the food the caracal needed. She wrote, 'Wild animals like the caracal need safe, healthy habitats to live and grow.' She added tips on how to keep the desert clean and quiet. Her guide was almost ready.



Maya brought her guide to school. She showed it to her friends. 'This is the little caracal I met,' she said. 'We can help protect it.' The children looked at her drawings with wide eyes. One child with glasses pointed at the tufted ears. 'How can we help?' they asked. Maya smiled. 'We can share this guide and keep the desert safe.'



The children read Maya's guide together. They learned about the caracal's habitat and conservation. They promised to keep the desert clean and to never chase wild animals. Maya felt proud. Her colorful guide taught people how to protect the caracal and its home. The children passed the guide around, eager to learn more.



One day, Maya returned to the desert with her sketchbook. She sat quietly near the hidden den. After a while, the little caracal appeared. Its tall, tufty ears stood up, and its amber eyes sparkled. It seemed happy and healthy. Maya knew her guide had helped. The caracal needed open space, shelter, and food, and now more people would protect them.



Maya smiled as the caracal trotted into the open desert. She knew that wild animals like the caracal need safe, healthy habitats to live and grow. And she, a girl with a sketchbook and a big heart, had made a difference. She would keep drawing, keep learning, and keep sharing her colorful guide with everyone she met.