

# The Girl and the Tree Kangaroo



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Maya loved the rainforest more than anything. Every morning, she put on her yellow shirt with green leaves and grabbed her magnifying glass. She kept a satchel full of notebooks and pencils. In her satchel, she wrote down every animal she saw. Today, she wanted to find a very special animal: the tree kangaroo.



Maya's curly black hair bounced in two puffy buns as she ran to the forest edge. Her friend Leo hurried behind, his blue kangaroo shirt bright in the sun. 'What are we looking for?' Leo asked, his freckles wrinkling. 'A tree kangaroo!' Maya said. 'They live high in the treetops!' Leo's eyes went wide. 'Up there?'



Uncle Ben, the forest ranger, met them at the trail. His wide hat shaded his crinkly eyes. 'Tree kangaroos are shy,' he said. 'They climb high and hide in the leaves.' He opened his field notebook and showed a picture. 'Their long tails help them balance. Their strong claws grip branches. And they need the rainforest to survive.'



Maya and Leo followed Uncle Ben under the giant trees. The leaves made a green roof above them. 'Look up,' Uncle Ben whispered. Maya lifted her head. Far above, a reddish-brown shape moved slowly. 'Is that a tree kangaroo?' she gasped. 'Yes,' said Uncle Ben. 'A mother, I think.' Maya's heart thumped with excitement.



The tree kangaroo had a golden belly and a dark face. Her long tail hung down like a rope. She wrapped her paws around a thick branch. 'She's beautiful,' Maya whispered. The tree kangaroo blinked her big amber eyes. She looked calm and gentle. Maya noticed a thin vine bracelet around one wrist. 'Who put that there?' she wondered.



Uncle Ben explained, 'Tree kangaroos are marsupials. They carry their babies in a pouch, like kangaroos. But they live in the treetops, not on the ground. They eat leaves and fruit. They need tall trees and thick branches. Without the forest, they cannot survive.' Maya wrote everything in her notebook.



Leo asked, 'Why don't they live on the ground?' Uncle Ben smiled. 'Their long tails and strong claws are made for climbing. They sleep in the branches and leap from tree to tree. The rainforest is their home. But their home is getting smaller because people cut down trees.' Maya frowned. 'That's bad,' she said.



Maya wanted to help. 'We can teach people about tree kangaroos!' she said. 'If they know how special they are, they will want to protect them.' Uncle Ben nodded. 'That's a great idea. But how?' Maya thought hard. Then she grinned. 'I'll build a model of the treetop habitat. A big, colorful one!'



Maya and Leo gathered materials. They found twigs, leaves, and moss. Uncle Ben gave them a cardboard box and some clay. Maya used brown clay for the tree trunk. She made a tree kangaroo with reddish-brown fur and a golden belly. She added a long tail and tiny claws. 'It looks just like her!' Leo said.



Maya worked carefully. She made branches from twigs and stuck them in the clay. She added green leaves for the canopy. She hung a small blue cloth for the sky. 'This is the treetop,' she said. 'Tree kangaroos live here, high above the ground. They need the forest to hide and find food.' Leo watched, amazed.



Leo asked, 'Can I help?' Maya smiled. 'Yes! You can make a baby tree kangaroo for the pouch.' Leo made a tiny joey from orange clay. He placed it in the mother's pouch. 'It's so cute!' he said. Maya added flowers and vines. She put a small bowl of water for a stream. The model looked like a real rainforest home.



Maya and Leo carried the model to school. They set it on a table and invited their friends. 'This is a tree kangaroo,' Maya said, pointing. 'She lives in the rainforest treetops. Her long tail helps her balance. Her claws help her climb. She needs the forest to survive.' The children leaned in close. 'Wow!' they whispered.



Leo pointed to the tiny joey. 'The baby lives in the pouch,' he said. 'It's a marsupial, like a kangaroo.' Maya showed the leaves and branches. 'The forest gives them food and a safe place to sleep. But if we cut down the trees, they have nowhere to go.' The children looked worried. 'We don't want that!' said a girl named Ana.



Maya smiled. 'We can help! We can plant trees and tell others about tree kangaroos.' Uncle Ben came to visit. He wore his ranger hat and carried his binoculars. 'Your model is wonderful,' he said. 'It teaches people about forest habitats. And you can help by keeping the rainforest safe.' The children cheered.



That afternoon, Maya and Leo went back to the forest. They sat quietly and watched the tree kangaroo. She nibbled leaves and stretched her long tail. Maya felt proud. She had learned so much. And she had shared it with her friends. 'I'm glad we made the model,' Leo said. 'Me too,' said Maya. 'Now everyone knows how special tree kangaroos are.'



Uncle Ben gave Maya a small badge with a leaf on it. 'You're a junior ranger now,' he said. Maya wore it proudly. She knew that learning about animals was fun. But helping them was even better. The rainforest was a treasure, full of amazing creatures like the tree kangaroo. And Maya would always do her part to protect it.