

Heart-to-Heart: A Tale Where Silent Voices Reach Hearts

*The rivers are thick with oils and rotting pollutants,
The forests are falling like valorous soldiers in war
who selflessly fight to protect the people,
The greed of man has scarred the Earth,
Man has terrified the mother who holds her children close
So, the sky rains because it weeps, the volcano erupts in rage
Humans build homes after they destroy caves and nests.
I do not belong in the world where humans do not hear heart-to-heart with nature*

The Capture

BOOM! SMASH! GUNSHOTS — BAM! BAM! BAM! Screams. Wounds. Cries for help. Blood. The air exploded with terror, and the birds screamed, wings thrashing as they fled into the shuddering sky. Utter chaos. A grisly horror. Hunters stormed the forest, capturing gorillas and other primates. They threw nets that swallowed the air, and when a male gorilla charged forward to protect his child, they shot him dead. The mothers screamed. The children cried for mercy not in words, but with trembling arms reaching through the bars as if to beg: *We are innocent! We have not done anything!* Their teary eyes seemed to plead, but no one listened. They were all captured, shoved into rusted cages, and loaded onto trucks bound for sale.

The hunters won. The cruel humans slaughtered the very word humanity with their actions. Today, they won.

The Lab

Jason flipped the switch, and the lab flooded with light. At once, cries and shrieks echoed through the room. Jason was the caretaker of the animals in Dr. Johnson's laboratory, where she studied the intelligence of primates. He and the other caretakers began each day by feeding them and cleaning their cages before the scientists arrived. Rows of large iron cages lined the lab, their metal bars gleaming under the fluorescent lights. At the far end sat one large enclosure that felt different. Inside was Koko II, the gorilla with eyes as deep and dark as a quiet, heavy night. Her eyes held so much sadness it almost hurt to look at them.

Dr. Johnson had often said that Koko II could understand more than a thousand signs. However, lately, Koko II had grown quiet, her movements slow, her gaze distant. Jason wondered if she missed the forest, she once called home. The door creaked open. "Kenny, stay close to me," said Dr. Johnson as she stepped in, carrying her clipboard. Beside her walked an eleven-year-old boy, small and thin, his curious dark brown eyes admiring the animals in the lab. Kenny was deaf, and he couldn't speak either. He could not hear her words, but he read her lips and nodded. Dr. Johnson was the head scientist and Kenny's mother.

The Boy Who Spoke with Silence

Kenny loved the lab. It was the only place where he did not feel judged, and where silence belonged to everyone. At school, silence made him stand out. When he first started 6th grade, he was the new kid, the quiet one who read lips and carried a small notepad. Bullies whispered behind him and twisted their words so Kenny could not read them properly. Once, at lunch, he caught a boy saying "boring world" to tease him. Kenny did not need to hear the sound; he could see the laughter in their eyes. The sight stung.

In the lab, no one laughed at his silence. The animals never teased or turned away. They looked right back at him, with their steady eyes, as if they understood that we do not need words to talk; we can still communicate if we learn to listen to each other's hearts. He slowly walked past the cages, meeting each animal's gaze. But when he reached the biggest enclosure, he stopped.

Inside sat a female gorilla with shiny black fur that looked almost like velvet in the light. Her long, thick fingers were gently holding a banana, but she was not eating; she was holding it and staring into emptiness. There were other primates making noises, but she was not affected. Her eyes were round, light brown, and deep with sadness. It felt like she had stories hiding in them, about trees, wind, and the home she lost. She looked strong enough to bend the bars, but she did not. She just sat there, calm and quiet. A small sign on the glass said KOKO II. Dr. Johnson told Kenny she had named her after the real gorilla Koko, who once learned to communicate with people using sign language. She hoped this new gorilla Koko II would help scientists understand how deeply animals could think and feel.

Koko II sat near the glass now, her giant hands resting in her lap, her eyes soft and sad. Kenny lifted his hand and signed, *Hello*. Koko II blinked, then copied him: *Hello*. Kenny tried another word: *Friends*. She shaped her fingers to say: *Friends*. And just like that, something special sparked, and a deep bond formed between them, building a bridge between man and nature.

One rainy afternoon, heavy raindrops pounded on the glass windows, frightening Koko II. Her frightened eyes darted to the ceiling, then to Kenny. *What is wrong?* he signed. Koko II pressed her palm to her chest, *scared, sad*. Then her hands flashed quickly: *tree, fire, baby, gone*. She

slapped her arm, *bang*, and pressed her chest again, *hurt*. Kenny froze. She was remembering the day the hunters came, and she lost her home. He placed his hand over his heart and signed, *Sorry*. For a moment, their hands spoke louder than any voices could ever speak. It felt like time stood still, witnessing their connection in silence. Nature ached to be listened to, and it was happening in that moment.

Dr. Johnson was stunned. She saw her son and the gorilla were not just exchanging words in sign language but sharing memories. Kenny turned to his mom and signed; *she remembers her forest. Her family. Her pain*. Dr. Johnson whispered, "How do you know?" He signed: *Because she told me*. Then, with calm certainty, he added, ***Mom, I belong where humans live heart-to-heart with nature.***

The Awakening

Kenny stared at the TV screen in his mom's office within the lab. The evening news was on, and the news captions read: *Dream Builders Realty plans to clear 400 acres of protected forest for luxury homes*. The news video showed pictures of tall trees being torn down by huge heavy bulldozers. This was an eerie recap of the visions Koko II had mentioned. Kenny's hands clenched with rage. He signed fast, his movements sharp. *No! They can't! That's Koko's home! That's everyone's home!* Tears filled his eyes. *Why do people keep taking and taking?* he signed, slamming his notebook shut. Kenny cried his heart out. He felt as if he was about to witness the horror Koko II went through and there is absolutely nothing, he could do about it. He felt so helpless. This was the first time when he wanted to scream loudly and tell the world to stop, but he could not. Dr. Johnson knelt beside him, resting a hand on his shoulder. "You don't need a loud voice to be heard," she said softly. "You already have truth, purpose and passion in your heart, and there is nothing that can stand against what is right." She looked into his eyes. "Maybe you belong to the ones who protect, to the ones who remind people what home really means. If you speak with your heart, they will hear you." Kenny looked toward Koko II's enclosure, with tears still running down his face. Then he signed slowly, *Koko II can tell them. She can show them*. Dr. Johnson nodded and said, "then let us make them listen."

Dr. Johnson and her team reached out to the local news agency to arrange for a press conference. As soon as the word got out that a 6th grader and a gorilla would stand up to the Dream Builders Realtor company, every news company wanted to be there. Before the reporters arrived, another news clip played on the screen, this time about Richard Osbourn, the owner of Dream Builders Realty. The news captions showed, *Osbourn's company previously cleared 120 acres of forest for a shopping complex*, another headline showed: *Dream Builders Fined for Violating Environmental Protection Laws*. Then another headline, *Flourishing green forest destroyed by Dream Builders Realty, for Luxury Golf Course*. Kenny felt his stomach twist and he signed fiercely, *He keeps ruining nature, and nobody stops him*.

Soon, cameras filled the lab, and everyone crowded together to witness the impossible. Koko II sat calmly behind the glass, and Kenny stood beside her outside. Koko began to sign, *Tree. Cut. Home. Gone. Baby cry. Help.* Kenny translated it into sign language, *She says the forest is our home too. When we hurt it, we hurt ourselves.* The room immediately filled with surprised, curious murmurs, and just then, the back doors burst open. A man in a bright white suit walked in, flashing his gold watch, chains, and a cigar between his teeth, and a black hat tipped low over his eyes. Two bulky assistants followed him like shadows. He looked so clean, like someone who never got dirt on his shoes, but carried plenty in his heart. Dr. Johnson stiffened. "That's Richard Osbourn," she whispered. "Owner of Dream Builders Realty."

Kenny's stomach twisted. There was something about Osbourn that did not feel right, his arrogance, the grin, the sidekicks, all of it reminded him of the bullies at school. The ones who needed backup to feel big. The ones who thought silence meant weakness. However, this time, Kenny did not look away, he looked straight at Osbourn, unblinking, and drop dead serious! Osbourn puffed his cigar and smirked. "So, this is the show everyone is talking about, a gorilla lecture?" He chuckled, smoke curling around his gold chain. "We build dreams, kid, not jungles." Kenny signed sharply, "Yeah, more like dream-and-homewreckers." A few reporters laughed, and Osbourn's grin cracked. "Watch your tone, boy." Kenny responded signaling, *Watch the Earth you are breaking.* This was not like school where Kenny hid from the bullies. Here he wanted Osbourn to see him. Osbourn waved his cigar. "You think feelings build homes? People need houses. Trees can grow somewhere else."

Koko II rose to her feet moving her long arms and signaling fiercely: *Human hurt. Earth hurt. Same.* Kenny spoke again in sign language, *She says when you hurt the Earth, you hurt yourself. What kind of dream is that? Nature wants to protect everyone, when you destroy trees and forests, you are hurting the climate, which will in turn hurt all species.* Osbourn roared, "You expect me to take moral lessons from a boy and a gorilla? Throw some more bananas in her cage and give her a swing, that will shut her up." Kenny looked Osbourn straight in his eyes and signed, *Your words do not matter. Everyone can see what you are really doing. Even Koko understands the Earth better than you do.*

Dr. Johnson stepped forward. "Maybe it's time you listened, Mr. Osbourn." He said nothing. His eyes shifted from Kenny to Koko II. Koko II pressed her palm to the glass, and Kenny matched hers. It was like two worlds standing together, unafraid.

Where We Belong

Months passed, and the lab felt different, somehow calmer. Dr. Johnson had arranged outdoor time for Koko II, so she spent her mornings under the trees watching the sunlight, tress, birds and the wind play with her soft fur. Kenny joined her almost every day. Sometimes they did not sign at all, they just sat together and watched the sunlight.

The rivers run clear again
The forests rise like brave survivors,
Today, humanity won! The sons and daughters showed up for their Mother
Nature. They saved their mother's other children.
The sky opened with bright light.
The birds sang the song of victory, and the wind danced.
I belong here, where humans connect heart-to-heart with nature.