The Little Zebra's Secret

Aysel Banu YAVUZAL

The Little Zebra's Secret

Aysel Banu YAVUZAL

On the wide green grassland lived a little zebra with a soft black and white striped coat. Her round fluffy ears swiveled at every sound, and her big dark brown eyes were always a little shy. She wore a small sky-blue scarf tied at her throat. Most days she stood quietly near the tall grass, watching the other animals play.

One warm morning, a tall bird stepped out of the golden light. She had fluffy golden-tipped feathers, a long pinkish neck, and huge warm amber eyes that sparkled like honey. A thin braided grass necklace hung around her neck, with a tiny flower charm that glowed. The little zebra stared. She had never seen anyone so tall and so kind.

The ostrich bent her long neck down low. "Hello, little one," she said softly. "I am new to this grassland. Will you walk with me?" The zebra's tiny hooves shuffled in the dust. She felt shy, but the amber eyes were so warm. "I am Zara," she whispered, and the ostrich smiled. "Then let us walk, Zara."

They walked side by side through the waving grass, the tall bird and the small striped zebra. Zara told her new friend about the rabbits and the gazelle calf and the bushbaby who lived nearby. The ostrich listened and nodded. "What a friendly place," she said. "But I wonder, is there anything here that nobody knows about?" Zara blinked her big brown eyes.

The ostrich lifted her glittery wing tips. "I can feel secrets in the grass," she said. "Somewhere nearby, the wind smells of flowers." Zara's fluffy ears stood up. She knew a way through the tall grass, a path she had never dared to follow. "There is a place," she whispered. "I found it once, but I ran away. It was too big and too bright."

"Show me," said the ostrich gently. So Zara led the way, her small hooves pattering, her sky-blue scarf fluttering behind her. The grass grew taller and taller until it brushed their faces. The ostrich's long legs stepped over fallen branches. "I am right here," she said. "We are brave together." Zara took a deep breath and kept walking.

Then the grass opened like a curtain. Before them lay a hidden garden, full of tall swaying grass and bright flowers in pink, yellow and blue. Little butterflies danced on the petals, and soft sunlight fell in golden patches. Zara gasped. "This is the secret," she whispered. "Nobody knows it is here." The ostrich's flower charm glowed brighter than ever.

They explored the hidden garden all afternoon. The ostrich nibbled sweet seeds while Zara peeked behind every flower. "It is beautiful," said the ostrich. "But a secret this lovely should be shared." Zara's ears drooped low. "What if the others do not like it?" she asked. "What if they laugh at me for keeping it?" Her voice was very small.

The ostrich knelt down in the grass. "Being scared is all right," she said softly. "But hiding something wonderful can feel heavy, like carrying a big stone." Zara looked at the flowers and thought of her friends. She wanted them to see this place. She wanted to see their happy faces. Yet her little hooves felt stuck to the ground, and her heart thumped.

Days passed, and Zara kept the garden to herself. When the rabbit asked where she went each morning, she only shrugged. When the gazelle calf invited her to play, she said she was busy. Her secret sat on her shoulders like a heavy stone. The ostrich walked beside her and waited patiently. "I am here," she said, "whenever you are ready."

One evening, Zara sat by the tall grass and sighed. "I want to tell them," she said. "But my words get stuck." The ostrich wrapped a warm wing around her. "Courage is not loud," she said. "Courage is a small step, taken even when your legs are shaking. Say one sentence. I will stand beside you." Zara nodded slowly. Her heart still thumped, but a tiny spark had lit inside.

The next morning, Zara called the animals together. Her voice wobbled at first. "I have a secret," she said. "There is a hidden garden in the grassland, and I want to share it with you." The rabbit's ears shot up. The gazelle calf bounced. The bushbaby's round eyes went wide. "Show us!" they cried. Zara smiled, and the spark inside her grew into a warm glow.

She led them through the tall grass, and the ostrich walked beside her the whole way. When the grass parted, the animals gasped at the bright flowers and the dancing butterflies. "It is real!" cheered the rabbit, her red leaf bobbing. They ran laughing through the garden, and nobody laughed at Zara. They only said thank you, again and again.

Zara stood in the sunshine and felt lighter than she had in days. The heavy stone was gone from her shoulders. "I was so scared to tell you," she said. "But I am glad I did." The ostrich's amber eyes shone. "You found your courage," she said. "And you found it in the very place you feared." They smiled at each other among the flowers.

From that day, the hidden garden was hidden no more. The animals came to visit every morning, and the garden grew brighter with their laughter. Zara wore her sky-blue scarf proudly and greeted everyone at the gate of tall grass. "Welcome," she would say, "to our secret place." And the ostrich would nod wisely, her flower charm glowing in the sun.

Zara learned something wonderful that summer. A secret kept alone can feel heavy, but a secret shared with friends turns into joy. She still had shy days, and her big brown eyes still blinked at loud noises. But when she felt scared, she remembered the ostrich's words. Friendship made her brave, and brave hearts make the best gardens grow.