



# The Little Eland

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On the wide, sunny savanna, a little eland calf stood beside his mother. His warm tan coat had faint white stripes on the sides, and his short spiral horns were just beginning to bud. He wore a thin woven grass anklet on one front leg. The grass swayed, and the sky stretched bright and blue. "What a big, beautiful world," he whispered.



The little eland loved to explore, but he always stayed close to the herd. His long soft ears twitched at every sound, and his big dark brown eyes watched the horizon. One morning, he trotted to the edge of the grass and saw a tall bird standing very still. The bird had grey and white feathers and a crest of black feathers on its head.



The bird turned its bare orange-red face toward the eland. "Hello there, little one," it said cheerfully. "I am a secretary bird. I can see far from up high." The eland noticed a single bright blue feather tucked into the bird's crest. "I am a little eland," he said. "My legs are strong, but I am small." They smiled at each other and became friends.



Every day, the two friends met near a flat-topped acacia tree. The secretary bird showed the eland how to stamp its long yellow legs to scare up insects. The eland showed the bird how to find the sweetest grass. They laughed and played, and the savanna felt like a happy home. "Friends make everything better," said the eland.



One afternoon, dark clouds rolled across the sky. The wind blew hard, and the first big raindrops splashed on the dusty ground. The little eland hurried to shelter with his herd. The secretary bird fluffed its feathers and waited under a bush. The rain fell and fell, drumming on the leaves and filling every little hollow. It rained all night long.



When morning came, the sun peeked out, but the savanna was not the same. The ground was muddy and soft, and puddles shone everywhere. The little eland stepped forward and his small hooves sank into the mud. He pulled them out with a squelch. "Oh no," he said. "This is tricky ground. I am strong, but I am worried about crossing."



The herd needed to reach the fresh grass on the other side of the muddy flat. But every step looked risky. Some places were deep and squishy, and some looked dry but were not. The little eland's long ears drooped. "I don't know which way is safe," he said. "I wish I could see over the tall grass."



The secretary bird came striding over on its long yellow legs. "Don't worry," it said. "I can help. I can see far from high up." The bird flapped its grey and white wings and flew up to a tall, dead tree. From there, it looked across the whole savanna, its sharp dark eyes missing nothing.



"I see a path!" called the secretary bird. "It goes around the deep mud and over the firm ground. Follow the line of small white stones." The little eland looked where the bird pointed. He could see the stones shining in the sun. "But I must lead the herd," he said. "Will you guide me?" "Of course," said the bird. "That is what friends do."



The little eland took a deep breath. He stepped forward carefully, one small hoof at a time. The secretary bird flew from tree to tree, calling out directions. "A little to the left! Now straight ahead!" The herd followed the eland, and the eland followed the bird's voice. The muddy ground squelched, but the path stayed firm.



Then the little eland came to a wide, muddy patch. He stopped and his knees trembled. "I can't see the stones anymore," he said. "What if I sink?" The secretary bird landed beside him. "You are strong and brave," it said. "I will fly low and show you each step. We are a team." The eland lifted his head and nodded.



The bird flew just above the mud, hovering and pointing with its long hooked beak. "Step here, then there," it said. The little eland watched the bird's shadow and placed his hooves exactly where it showed. Step by step, he crossed the tricky patch. Behind him, the herd followed safely. The eland's heart felt big and proud.



Finally, the little eland stood on dry, firm ground. The whole herd was safe. The secretary bird landed beside him and tucked its blue feather neatly. "You did it!" said the bird. "We did it together," said the eland. "Your sharp eyes and my strong legs made a perfect team." They touched noses gently, and the sun warmed their backs.



The herd grazed on the sweet green grass, and the little eland felt happy. He looked at his friend, the secretary bird, standing tall on its long yellow legs. "Different talents help solve problems," said the eland. "You can see far, and I can lead the way." The bird nodded. "And friendship makes us braver than we are alone."



From that day on, the little eland and the secretary bird were always together. When the rains came and the ground turned muddy, the bird flew high to spot the safe path, and the eland led the herd across. Everyone crossed the savanna safely and happily, thanks to teamwork and friendship.



And if you ever visit the sunny savanna, look for a little eland with a grass anklet and a secretary bird with a blue feather. They will be there, helping each other and everyone else. For they know that no problem is too big when friends work together, and every safe path is better when shared.