

The Little Tern



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On a bright summer morning, the little tern flew high above the wide sandy beach. His white body shone, his long pointed wings tipped and turned, and his black cap looked like a tiny hat. He had a bright orange-red beak and a forked tail that steered him through the salty wind. Below him, the sea rolled in and out, soft and blue.



Down on the warm sand stood a round plover with sandy brown and white feathers. A black band crossed her chest, and her big dark eyes blinked in the sunshine. She hopped on short pale legs and tidied a small hollow in the sand. A fluffy chick peeked out from under her wing. "Hello up there!" she called.



The little tern swooped down and landed beside her. "My name is Pip," he said, folding his long wings neatly. The plover smiled. "I'm Pearl," she said. "Welcome to our beach." She tucked a small shell charm under her wing, and Pip wore a woven grass band on one leg. Right away, they became best friends.



All morning they played together by the water. Pip soared high and told Pearl what he could see: boats, waves, and silver fish. Pearl showed him how to sweep the sand clean with quick little kicks. "A tidy nest is a happy nest," she said. Pip laughed and flapped his forked tail. "I like tidying from the sky!" he chirped.



Nearby, other terns and plovers were making their nests too. Some scraped small hollows in the sand, and some laid speckled eggs. But the birds worried. "Summer crowds are coming," said an old gull. "People bring umbrellas, kites, and big noisy feet." Pearl looked at her fluffy chick. Pip looked at the nesting birds below. "We need a plan," they said together.



Pip had an idea. "You are good on the sand, and I am good in the sky," he told Pearl. "Let's build a safe nesting area before the crowds arrive." Pearl nodded fast. She drew a circle in the sand with her short beak. "We can make nests here, where the grass grows tall," she said. "And we can keep it clean and quiet."



They got to work right away. Pearl kicked away sticks and swept the sand smooth with her pale legs. She dug shallow hollows, one by one, and lined them with tiny pebbles. Her plump body waddled busily from nest to nest. Pip flew above and called down directions. "A little more to the left!" he sang. "Perfect!"



Other birds came to help. Terns carried bits of soft grass and dropped them gently. Plovers patted the grass into cozy circles. The baby chicks watched with wide eyes and chirped happily. "Teamwork is quick work," Pearl said, sweeping the last grain of sand. Pip circled above and cheered, his orange beak shining in the sun.



Soon the nesting area was ready. It sat behind a low wall of smooth stones, away from the busy path. Each family had a neat hollow, and each hollow held a speckled egg. Pip landed beside Pearl and looked at what they had made. "It looks like a little bird village," he said. Pearl smiled. "A safe little village," she answered.



Before long, the summer crowds arrived. Bright umbrellas opened like flowers, kites danced in the wind, and happy voices filled the air. But the nesting area stayed calm and quiet behind its stone wall. Pip flew high, high above the beach, his long wings spread wide, watching everything below.



"Danger near the path!" Pip called one afternoon. A big beach ball rolled toward the nests. Pearl ran fast on her short legs and stood right in front of it. "This way is quiet," she said, and a kind child steered the ball away. All the baby birds stayed safe. Pearl looked up at Pip and waved a wing.



From then on, they made a perfect team. Pip watched from the sky and warned the colony. Pearl kept the sand clean and watched from the ground. When the sun grew hot, Pip found shady spots. When a hungry gull came close, Pearl called the chicks under the tall grass. Together, nothing got past them.



One evening, a sudden wind blew across the beach. It tossed sand and rattled the tall grass. Some little chicks cried out, scared of the noise. Pip swooped low. "Follow me!" he called. Pearl led the chicks into a deep, cozy hollow, and all the families huddled close, warm and safe, until the wind went quiet.



After the wind, the sky turned pink and gold. Pearl smoothed the sand again, and Pip counted every chick. Not one was lost. The whole colony gathered on the quiet beach. "Hooray for Pip!" chirped the terns. "Hooray for Pearl!" sang the plovers. The two friends shared a happy smile as the sun sank into the sea.



All summer long, the nesting area stayed safe and happy. Speckled eggs hatched into fluffy chicks, and fluffy chicks learned to run on tiny legs. Pip and Pearl watched them play by the water. "Friendship is like a good nest," Pearl said softly. "Warm, and made together." Pip nodded and tucked his beak under his wing.



When autumn came, the crowds went home and the beach grew quiet again. Pip and Pearl stood side by side on the clean white sand, remembering their busy, happy summer. The little tern still wore his grass band, and the plover kept her shell charm. "Same time next year?" chirped Pip. "Same time," said Pearl. "Together."