The Warthog's Watercolors
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The savanna stretched wide and golden under a big blue sky. Dust puffed up in little clouds whenever the wind rolled by. A warthog trotted along a path between the tall dry grasses. He had a bristly grey-brown hide, a coarse mane along his spine, and two curved tusks that wiggled when he sniffed. His small amber eyes were always looking for something interesting.

The warthog's flat snout twitched at the smell of warm earth and dry grass. His short tufted tail flicked back and forth as he walked. He liked mornings best, when the acacia trees threw long shadows on the ground. He sniffed near a fallen branch and stopped. Something square and shiny sat in the dust, half hidden by leaves.

It was a small wooden box with a latch that clicked open. Inside lay little cakes of color: red, yellow, blue, green, and more. Beside them sat a brush with soft bristles. The warthog had never seen anything like it. He poked the red cake with his snout and a bright smudge appeared on his nose.

He carried the box to a flat rock near a puddle. He dipped the brush in water and touched the red cake, then dragged it across a smooth leaf. A red streak appeared! He tried yellow next, then blue. The colors ran together in a muddy puddle. His first picture looked like a jumble of brown splotches.

The warthog kept painting. He painted the puddle, the rock, and the sky above. The sky came out too orange. The acacia tree looked like a fuzzy green blob. He sighed and looked at his messy leaf. 'Maybe I am not very good at this,' he mumbled. But he did not stop. Something about the colors made him feel warm inside.

High above, a hornbill swooped down and landed on a branch. Her glossy black feathers shone, her white belly flashed, and her long orange beak curved like a smile. Her quick dark eyes spotted the colorful leaves. 'What are those?' she chirped, hopping closer. 'They are so bright!' The warthog ducked his head shyly.

'They are just messes,' said the warthog. 'I found a box of watercolors and tried to paint the savanna.' The hornbill tipped her head and looked closely at each leaf. 'A mess? No, no! Look at this one. That orange sky looks like our evening. And this green blob really does look like a tree!'

The warthog looked again. Maybe the colors did look a little like the savanna, after all. The hornbill flapped her long tail. 'We should show everyone!' she said. 'The zebra loves color. The elephant is wise and kind. They should see these watercolor paintings!' The warthog's ears went back. 'What if they laugh?'

'They will not laugh,' said the hornbill. 'I will help you display them.' She flew off to find the others. The warthog painted faster, adding a yellow sun, a blue puddle, and long green grass. His brush danced across the leaves. Paint smudged his snout and cheek, but he did not care. He was having fun.

The hornbill returned with the zebra. The zebra's black and white stripes rippled as she trotted over. Her large dark eyes went wide. 'Wow! Did you paint all of these?' she asked. 'How did you make that orange? Why is the puddle so blue?' The warthog's small amber eyes peeked up. 'I just mixed the colors,' he said softly.

Word spread across the savanna. The zebra galloped from group to group, chattering about the paintings. 'Come see! The warthog made pictures with colors!' Soon a crowd of animals gathered. The elephant came last, his big ears flapping slowly. His long trunk swung gently, and his kind dark eyes crinkled when he saw the colorful leaves spread on the rock.

The elephant lifted his trunk and trumpeted softly. 'Let us make a proper display,' he said. 'We will lean the paintings against the termite mound so everyone can see.' The zebra helped line them up. The hornbill perched on top and fluffed her black and white feathers. The warthog stood beside his paintings, his tufted tail trembling just a little.

One by one, the animals looked at the watercolors. There was the orange evening sky, the blue puddle, and the green acacia tree. 'This one is my favorite,' said a small voice. 'It looks like home.' The elephant nodded. 'Art shows us what we see every day, but in a new way.' The warthog blinked. He had never thought of it like that.

Then the elephant raised his trunk high and let out a deep, happy rumble. 'Hooray for the warthog!' he called. The zebra cheered. The hornbill clapped her wings. All around the savanna, animals stomped and flapped and trumpeted. The warthog's shy face broke into a wide grin. Paint still smudged his snout, and he wore it proudly.

The hornbill landed beside him. 'See?' she said. 'You had a talent all along.' The warthog looked at his messy, colorful leaves and then at his new friends. 'I did not know,' he said. 'It just appeared, like a surprise.' The zebra laughed. 'The best surprises are the ones you find in the dust!'

That evening, the sun painted the sky orange and pink. The warthog sat with the hornbill on the flat rock, a fresh leaf in front of him. He dipped his brush and began again. The savanna had taught him something important: talent can appear when you least expect it. Sometimes it just takes a box of watercolors and a friend who believes in you.