

The Boy and the Secretarybird



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Kito lived at the edge of the savanna, where acacia trees spread wide and the grass whispered in the wind. He was nine years old, small and wiry, with warm brown skin, tight black coils of hair, and freckles across his nose. In his canvas satchel he carried a sketchbook and pencils. He loved drawing the unusual birds that swooped and strutted across the grassland.



Every morning, Kito sat on a smooth rock and watched the birds. He drew hornbills with curved beaks, guinea fowl with speckled feathers, and tiny waxbills that flickered like sparks. He filled page after page with wings and legs and tails. But one tall bird made him stop and stare. It had long pinkish-grey legs and a crest of black feathers. It walked proudly across the grass.



Kito's best friend Nia found him sketching. She was ten, tall and sturdy, with two puffy afro puffs and a gap-toothed grin. 'What are you drawing today?' she asked. 'That tall bird with the funny crest,' Kito said. 'It's called a secretarybird,' said Grandmother Amara, coming up behind them. She carried a wooden walking stick and wore her orange and blue patterned dress. Her silver hair was wrapped in a cloth.



Grandmother Amara told them about the secretarybird. 'She has the sharpest eyes,' she said. 'She can spot a grasshopper from far away. Her long legs let her walk for miles and stomp on prey.' Kito drew quickly, his dark brown eyes wide. Nia pointed at the small blue band on the bird's leg. 'Look, she's marked,' Nia said. 'We can call her Seka.' Kito smiled and added the band to his drawing.



That night, Kito had an idea. He would start a wildlife illustration project. He would study every unusual bird in the savanna and draw each one. Nia nodded. 'I'll help,' she said. 'We can make a big book and show everyone.' Kito's red sneakers tapped with excitement. He pulled out his sketchbook and wrote in big letters: THE SAVANNA BIRD PROJECT.



The next day, Kito and Nia followed Seka the secretarybird. They watched her stride through the grass on her long legs. Suddenly, she stopped and tilted her head. Her sharp amber eyes fixed on something small and brown. Then—stomp!—her foot hit the ground. She swallowed a grasshopper in one quick gulp. Kito sketched every move. 'Her legs are like walking sticks,' Nia said. 'And her eyes are like telescopes,' Kito added.



They found other birds too. A kestrel hovered high above, its sharp eyes scanning the grass. It dropped like a stone and caught a mouse. 'Sharp eyes help it hunt,' Kito said, drawing the kestrel's pointed wings. Then they saw a flock of guinea fowl pecking together. One bird stood guard while the others ate. 'They work together,' Nia said. 'Teamwork!' Kito drew the guard bird standing tall.



Kito's sketchbook filled with birds of every kind. Each bird had its own way to survive. The secretarybird had long legs and sharp eyes. The kestrel had keen sight. The guinea fowl had teamwork. Kito drew arrows and notes beside each picture. He showed Grandmother Amara his drawings. 'You see,' she said, 'different adaptations help each bird live and grow.' Kito nodded. His project was growing too.



At school, Kito told his classmates about the project. 'We want to make a big book of savanna birds,' he said. 'Can you help?' Everyone cheered. They drew birds, wrote facts, and painted backgrounds. Nia organized the pages. Kito drew the main pictures. The classroom filled with color and chatter. The project was becoming a happy celebration of nature.



One afternoon, a strong wind blew across the savanna. It rattled the windows and bent the acacia trees. Kito and Nia were outside with their drawings. A gust lifted the pages into the air! 'Oh no!' cried Kito. Pages swirled everywhere—birds flying away on the wind. Kito ran after them, his red sneakers kicking up dust. Nia chased a page that tumbled toward a thornbush.



Nia stopped and shouted, 'Wait! Let's work together like the guinea fowl!' Kito skidded to a halt. 'One guard, one gatherer!' he said. Nia nodded. 'You stand on the rock and spot the pages. I'll catch the ones that land.' So Kito climbed up and pointed. 'Over there! Behind the acacia! Near the fence!' Nia ran and gathered every page. They worked as a team, just like the birds they studied.



Grandmother Amara saw them from the porch. She smiled her gentle smile. 'Just like the secretarybird,' she said. 'Sharp eyes and quick legs—and teamwork.' They stacked the rescued pages and counted them. One page was still missing—the drawing of Seka. Kito's shoulders drooped. 'We'll find it,' Nia said. 'We'll search together.' She took his hand, and they walked back toward the savanna.



High in an acacia tree, something fluttered. Kito looked up. His drawing of Seka was caught in the branches, waving like a flag. Nia found a long stick. 'Your turn to climb,' she said. Kito climbed carefully while Nia held the stick steady. He reached out and grabbed the page. Seka the secretarybird walked by and tilted her head, as if to say, 'Well done.' Kito laughed with relief.



They brought the rescued pages inside, and the whole class helped put the book together. Grandmother Amara brought glue and ribbon. Every page was in its place. The book was called 'Birds of the Savanna.' On the last page, Kito wrote: 'Different birds have different ways to survive. We can learn from them.' Nia drew a picture of the children working together, just like the guinea fowl.



On the day of the celebration, the village gathered under a big tree. Kito held up the book, and everyone clapped. Nia pointed out her favorite birds. Grandmother Amara told a story about the secretarybird. Seka herself walked by in the distance, tall and proud, her black crest shining. Kito smiled. His drawing project had brought everyone together.



As the sun set, Kito sat with Nia and Grandmother Amara. 'We used teamwork when the wind blew,' he said. 'Just like the birds.' Grandmother Amara nodded. 'That's the lesson,' she said. 'Different adaptations help birds live and grow. And when we work together, we can do anything.' Kito looked at his sketchbook, full of birds and friends. He felt happy and proud. The savanna was full of wonders, and he had drawn them all.