

# A WONDERFUL FRIENDSHIP

Written by  
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Translated by  
Melissa Mann



A young rhino walked with his mother, looking for bushes and eating the leaves from the lower branches.





His mother looked at him fondly and said, “Son, you’re now a big, three-year-old rhino. It’s time for you to head off on your own and fend for yourself.”

“But I like being with you, Mom!”

“I like being with you too, Son. But I can’t take care of you forever. That’s just the way it is for black rhinos. When you turn three, it’s time to go out into the world on your own, to learn to be independent and to take care of yourself.”

“But I don’t want to be alone.”

“It’s not so bad. You’ll get used to it and you’ll be a free and happy rhino!”





Dispirited, the youngster said goodbye to his mother  
and went off to discover the world on his own.

“Goodbye, Son!”

“Goodbye, Mom!”





While he was walking, a beautiful bird landed on his back and began pecking him.

“Hey, who are you?”

“Me? My nickname is tickbird, but my real name is oxpecker.”

“Ox-what?”

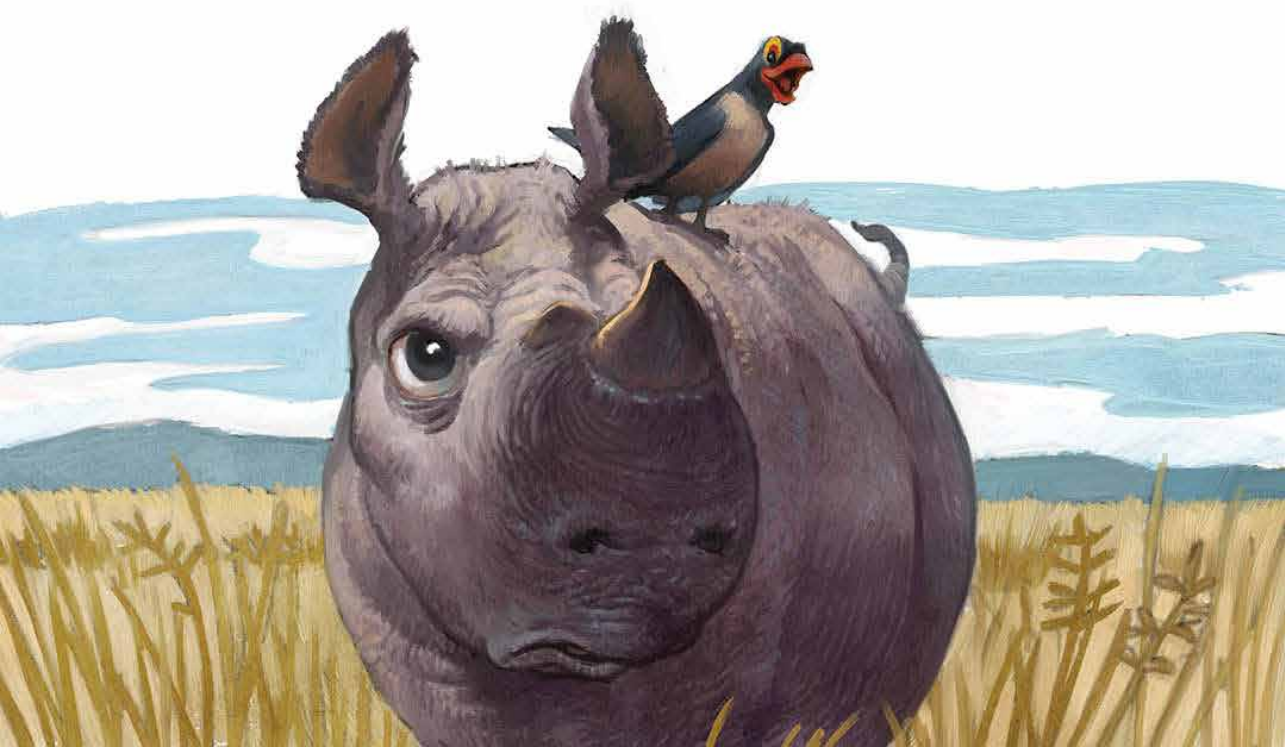
“Red-billed oxpecker.”

“I’m not an ox. I’m a rhinoceros. So you can go away! I don’t want you on my back!”

“My name is oxpecker, but I am quite content landing on the backs of all sorts of large mammals like giraffes, buffalos, zebras, impalas and rhinoceroses – like you.”

“You may like rhinoceroses, but I don’t like you. You keep pecking at my back... ouch!”

“Stop complaining! Your skin is thick and you know full well my pecking doesn’t hurt a bit; if anything, it tickles you.”





“What are you doing?”

“I’m eating the ticks clutching your skin. They suck your blood and make you weak. I also like to eat fleas, flies, maggots and other bugs that are harmful to you. So if you let me sit on your back, we both win. You get parasite-free skin, and I get a decent meal. I enjoy food, and you enjoy cleanliness, health and peace.

“Peace? With you pecking at my back? Not sure I’m buying it.”

“And I have other qualities you’ll soon discover if you choose to live with me.”

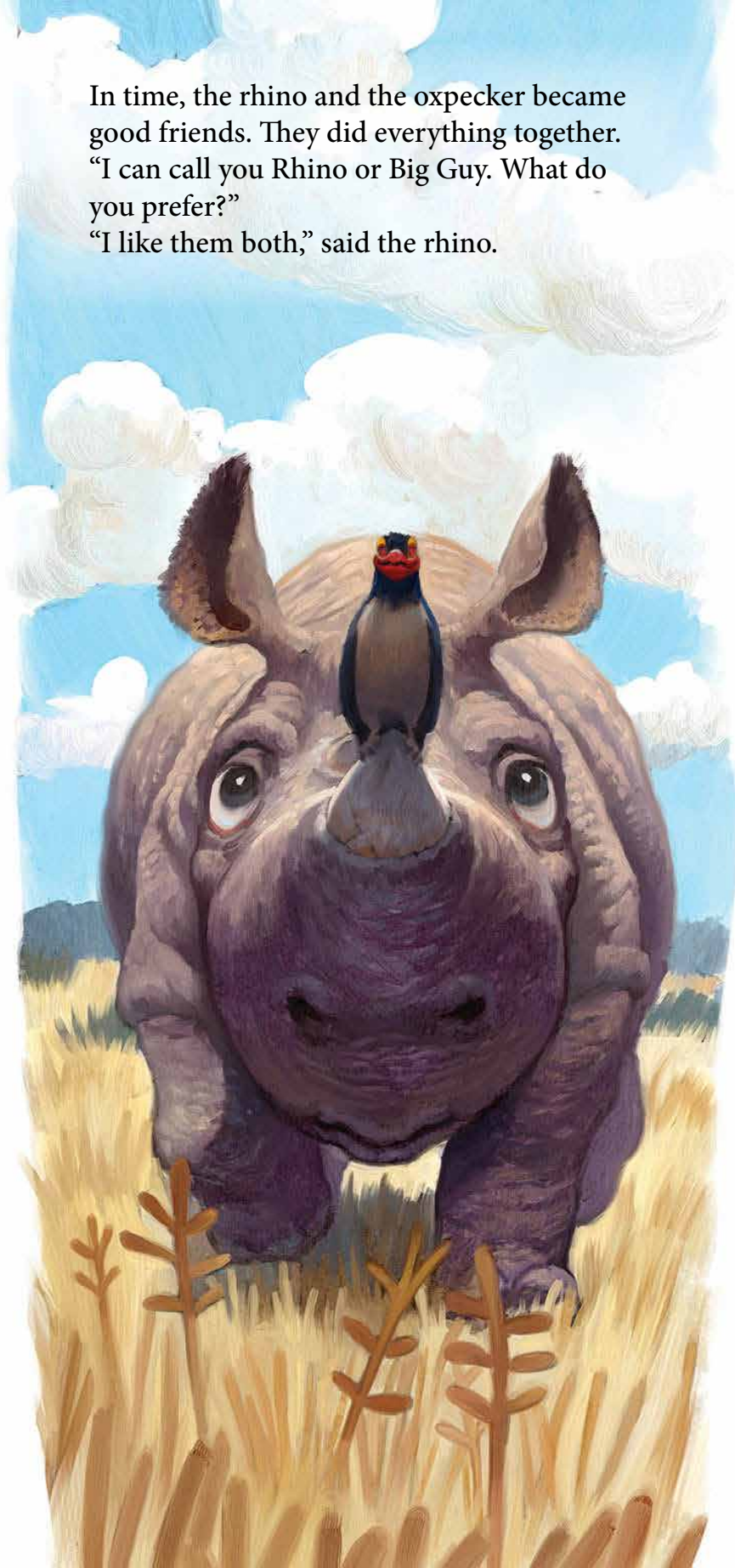
“Fine. You can stay on my back.”

The rhino had played hard to get but was actually happy to have found some company.



In time, the rhino and the oxpecker became good friends. They did everything together. "I can call you Rhino or Big Guy. What do you prefer?"

"I like them both," said the rhino.





Rhino dropped a huge mound of poop on the ground.  
“Hey, Big Guy, what are you doing?” asked the bird.  
“I’m marking my territory, showing the other animals that  
this is my place.”



He then walked a little further up and peed.  
“Wow, your pee goes really far!” exclaimed the bird.







The oxpecker stuffed his beak into the rhino's ear.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Yum, that was scrumptious!” replied the bird.

“What are you eating in there?”

“Oh, I forgot to mention that I also love to eat earwax.”

“Gross!”

“Yuuuum! It's delicious!”

“Hey, that tickles!”

One night, while the rhino was sleeping....

“Danger!” cried the bird, “Run!”

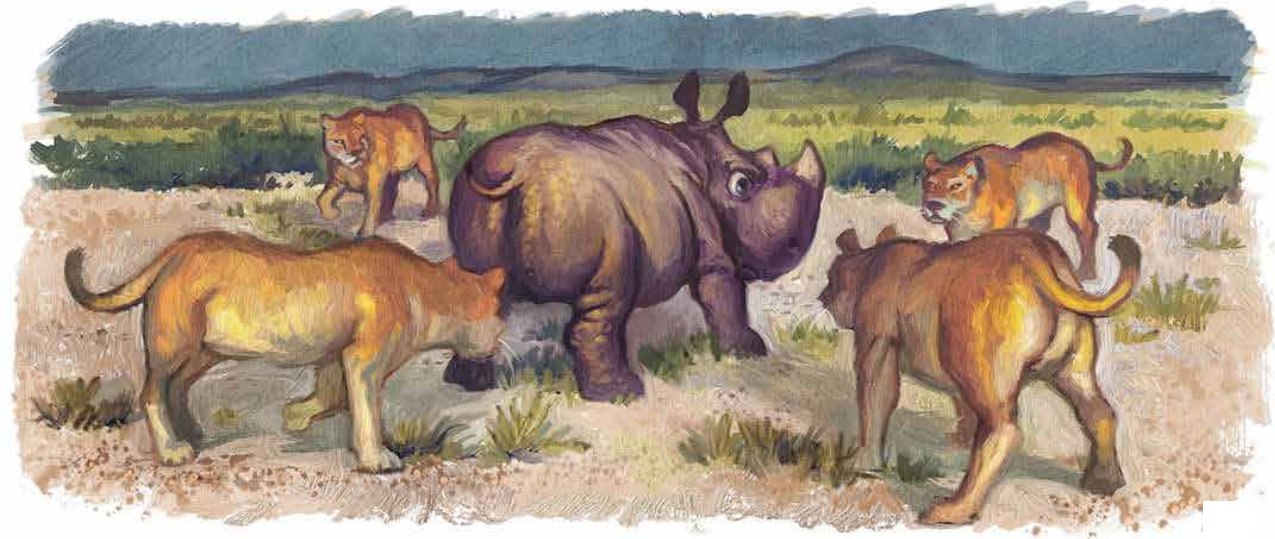
The bird flew off.



The rhino woke up and took off running.  
Four hungry lionesses went chasing after him...



...and cornered him.





Then a lioness jumped on the rhino and tried to bite him. But he rammed his horns into her, and she backed off.



The other three lionesses attacked in unison. They bit Rhino on the neck, leg and butt. Still, their sharp teeth were unable to penetrate Rhino's thick skin.



He thrust his head upwards and rammed his horns into one of the lionesses so hard it sent her flying.



That's when the other lionesses got scared and gave up. Bravo! Rhino had turned the tables and was now chasing after the lionesses, who darted off just as quickly as they had come.





Free from danger, the rhinoceros was now able to calm down a bit. The bird came back and landed on him.

“Congratulations, Big Guy! You were very strong and brave!”

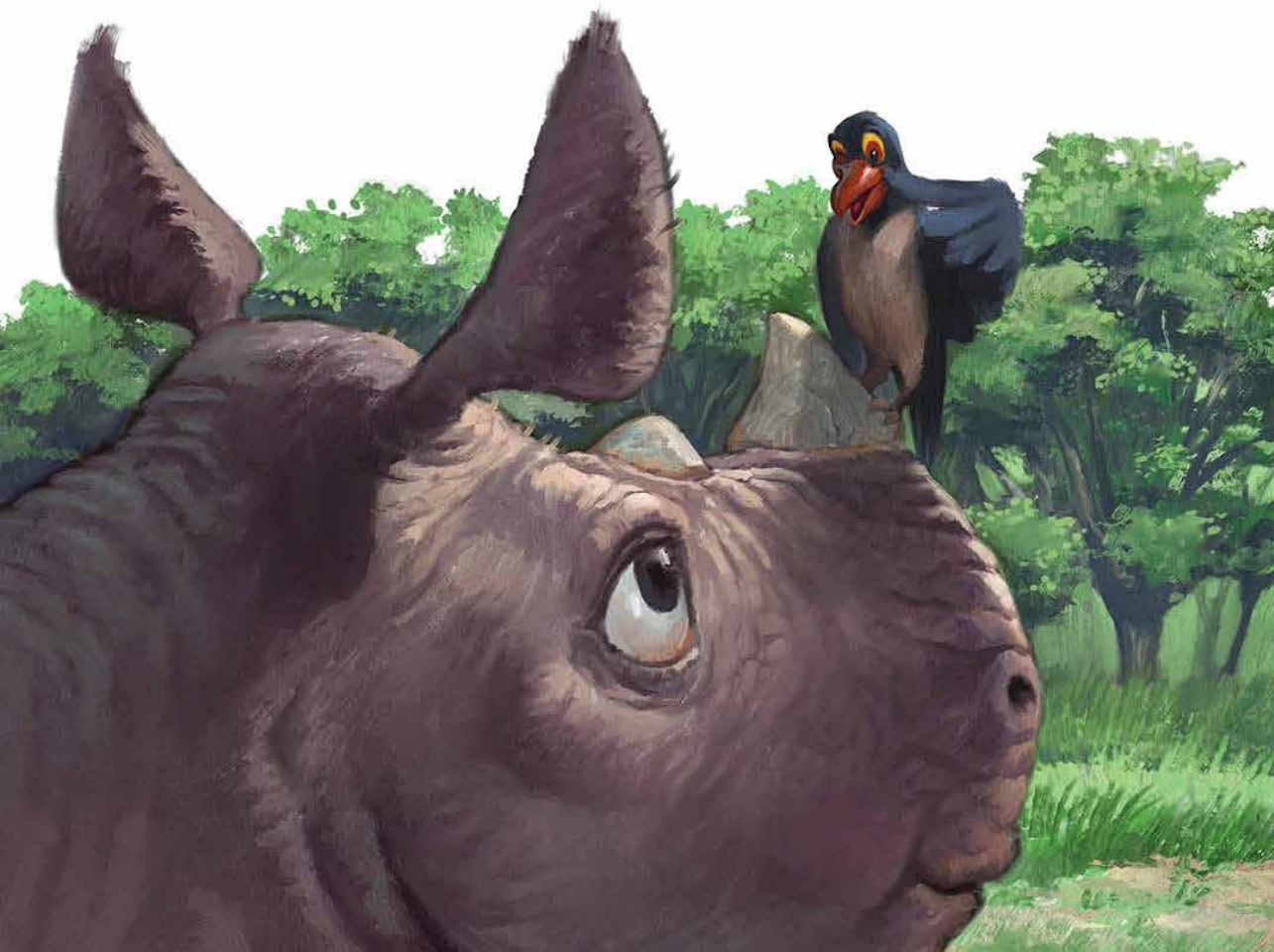
“You flew off and left me alone.”

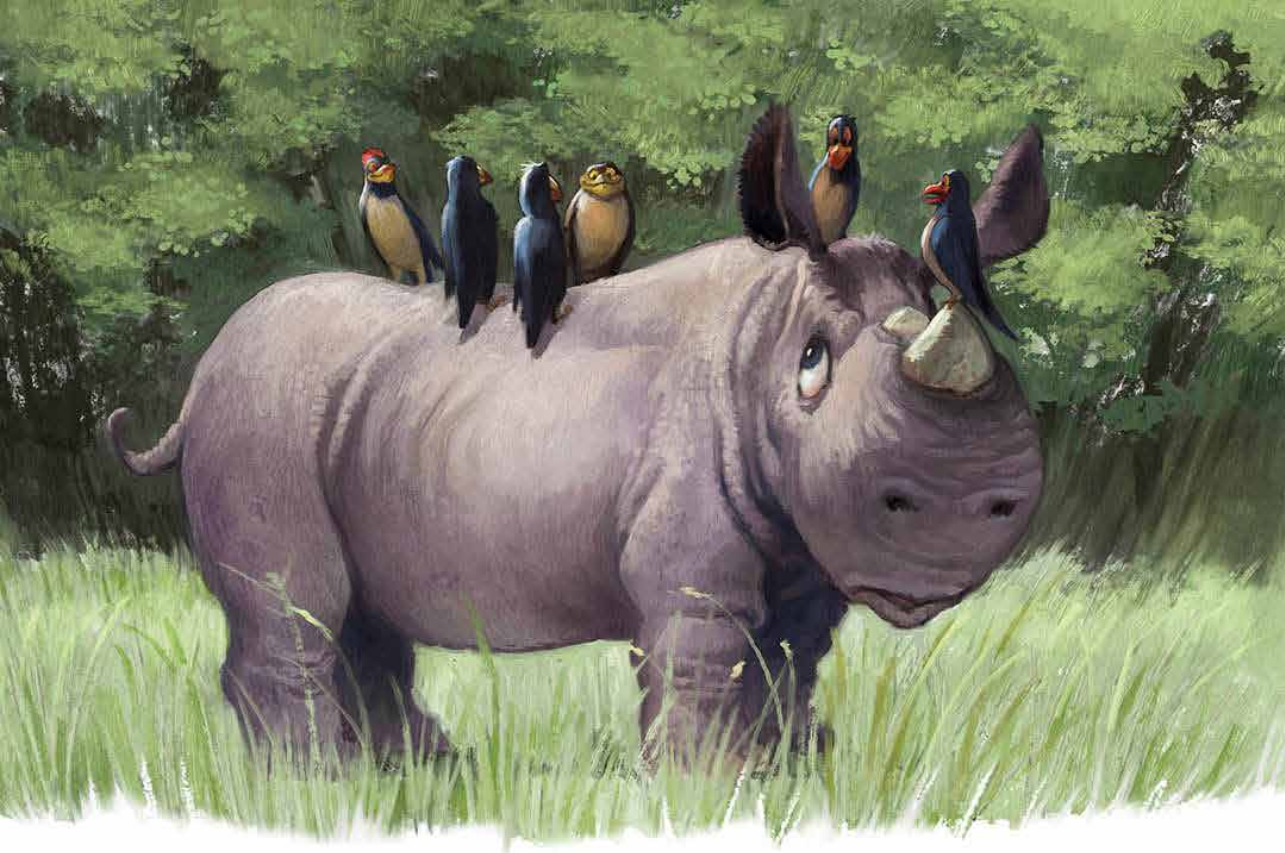
“Look at my size! Did you expect me to face off with lionesses?

There wouldn’t have been a feather left on me to tell the story.”

“I hadn’t even noticed the lionesses until you screamed. Thanks for warning me!”

“You can count on me! I have excellent eyesight. If I see any danger, I squawk.”





Another time, several oxpeckers landed on the rhino's back.

"Who are they?" asked Rhino.

"They're my relatives," replied the oxpecker.

"Tell them to go away! There are too many of them."

"You're covered in ticks, and the birds are very hungry."

"They're tickling me. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold your rhinos. Your skin will be clean and parasite-free in no time."



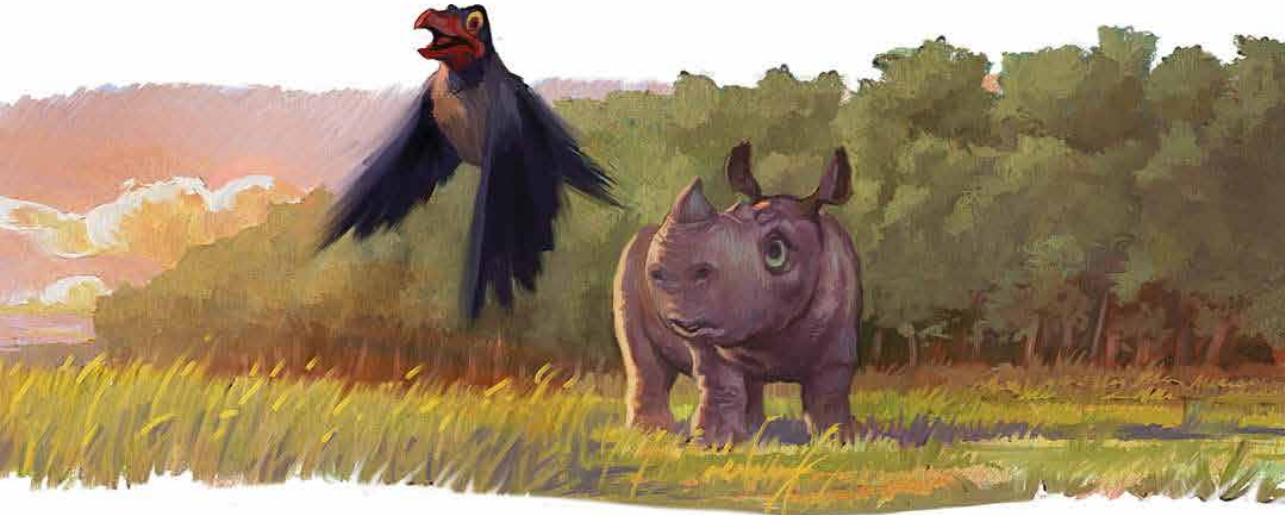
Late one afternoon, as the sun was setting on the African savannah, the bird suddenly cried out: “Danger!”

“What is it?”

“Men approaching.”

“Men? What animal is that?” asked the rhino.

“I don’t quite have them figured out,” the bird answered. “Some just look at us and don’t do anything at all. But there are others who can be very dangerous. So I’m going to scream and fly off.”



In the distance was an African grandfather and his grandchildren. He pointed to the sky. “See that bird? That’s the oxpecker. When you see one of them screaming and flying, be careful! It means there are big animals around, and they can be dangerous.”



The rhino could see the three humans and thought, *But they're so small. How can they be dangerous? Their mouths are tiny. They won't be able to bite me.*

He locked eyes with one of the boys, who jumped back, startled.

“Look! A rhino, Grandpa!”

“Hold still! If we don't get close, it won't do anything to us.”



And, indeed, the rhino just walked away.





Later, Rhino spotted a female rhino.

“Look, it’s my mother! Wow, she had a calf. I’ll go over and talk to her.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” advised the bird.

“Why not?”

“Because a female who has just had a baby doesn’t like anyone coming too close.”

Rhino observed her from afar.

“I can’t see well from this distance. Tell me what my brother looks like.”

“Your little sister is very cute!”

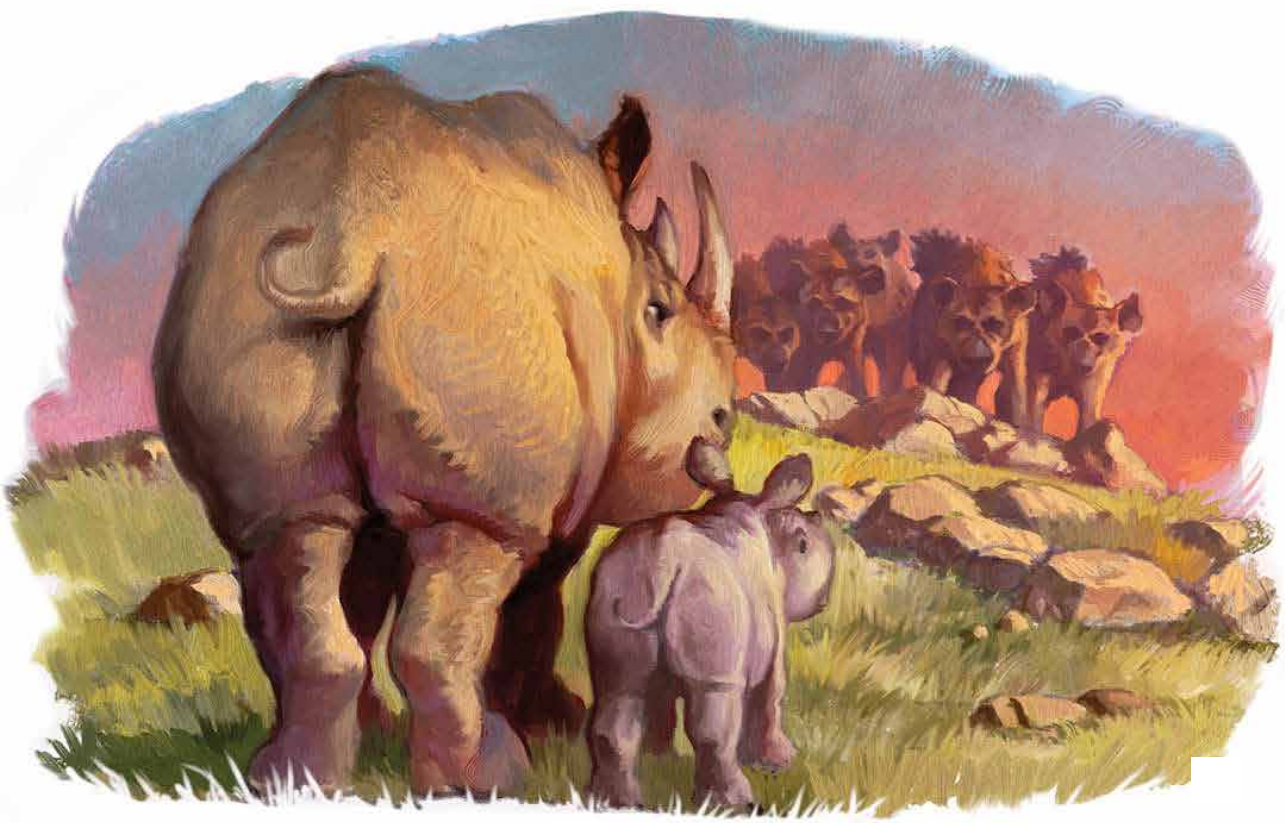
“Oh, I’ve always wanted a sister. When she turns three, and Mommy sends her away, I’m going to invite her to live with me, or rather, with us.”



Suddenly the bird shouted, “Danger! Hyenas on the prowl.  
Your sister’s skin is still thin. The hyenas will devour her in a flash.”



In a matter of seconds, the hyenas closed in.  
The mother rhino tried to protect her baby.  
But it was clear she wouldn't be able to do it alone.





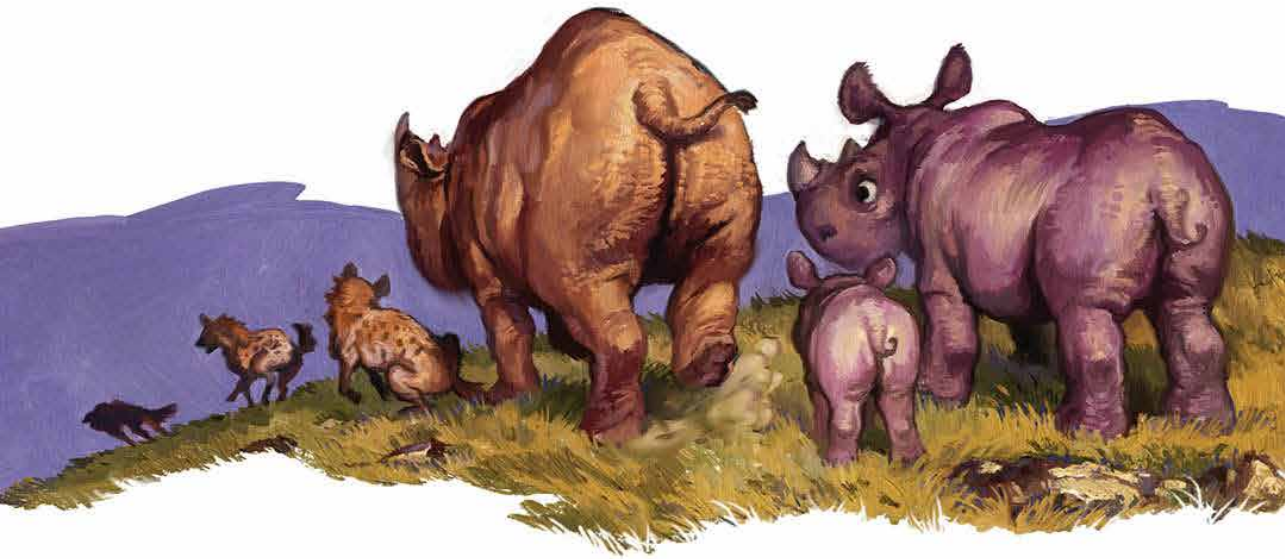


So Rhino ran toward the hyenas, and they backed off a little. But pretty soon they had surrounded Big Guy and his mother, who together had formed a kind of wall to protect the calf. The hyenas started to get dangerously close and were just about to attack...

But Rhino became enraged and charged with all his might at the hyena leading the pack. He rammed his horns into her and sent her flying.



The mother rhino also lunged at the other hyenas. They were so scared that they eventually gave up and turned back.



The rhinos breathed a sigh of relief.

“Are you both all right?” asked Rhino.

“Yes, we are. Thanks to you, my son. You saved your little sister.”

“We saved her, Mom!”

Rhino was happy that he had been able to help his family. His sister came up to him.

“Hi, are you my brother?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Wow, you’re so big and strong! I want to be like you when I grow up.”

“You will be, for sure.”

“Do you want to play with me?”

He looked at his mother.

“You can stay with us, Son. But only for a few months until your sister gets older and can stand up for herself better.”

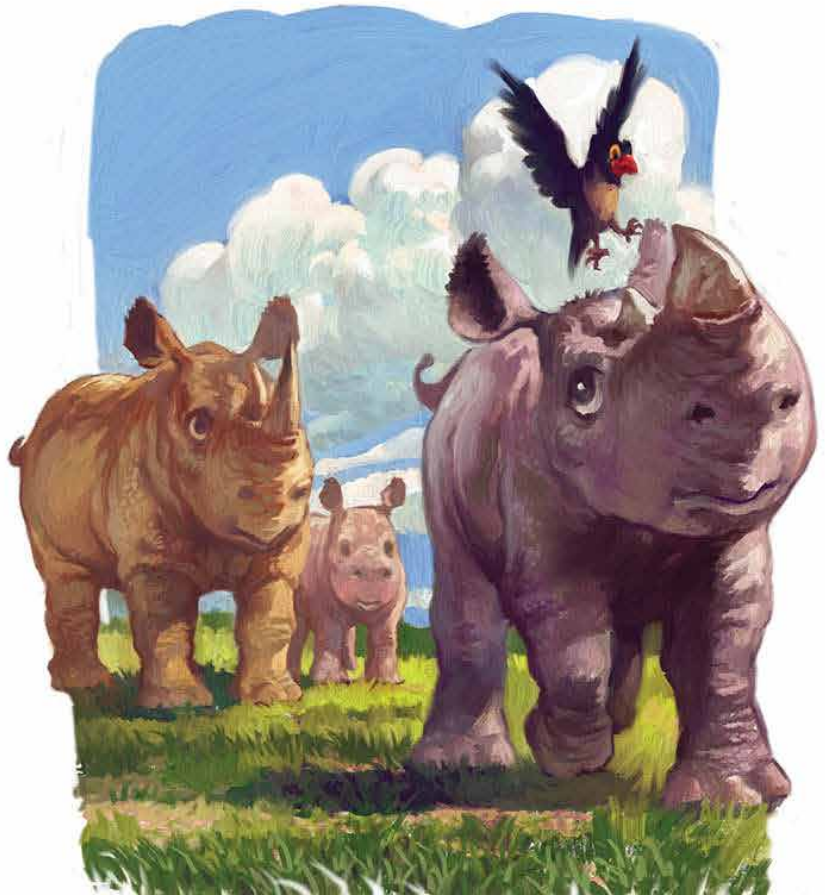






Rhino was happy to get to know his sister and to have the chance to live with her and his mother for a while.

A few months later, after his sister had grown a bit and become stronger, Rhino said goodbye to her and to his mother and headed back to his adventures – alone but for his trusty friend, the oxpecker.



Once, Rhino walked into a sharp branch that punctured his skin. A bunch of oxpeckers soon landed on him and started pecking at the wound. The friendly oxpecker tried to chase them away, but they didn't want to leave.

“Sorry about those nosy relatives of mine.”

“Why do they want to peck at my wound?” asked the rhino.

“It’s their instinct,” replied the oxpecker.

“But you don’t do that.”

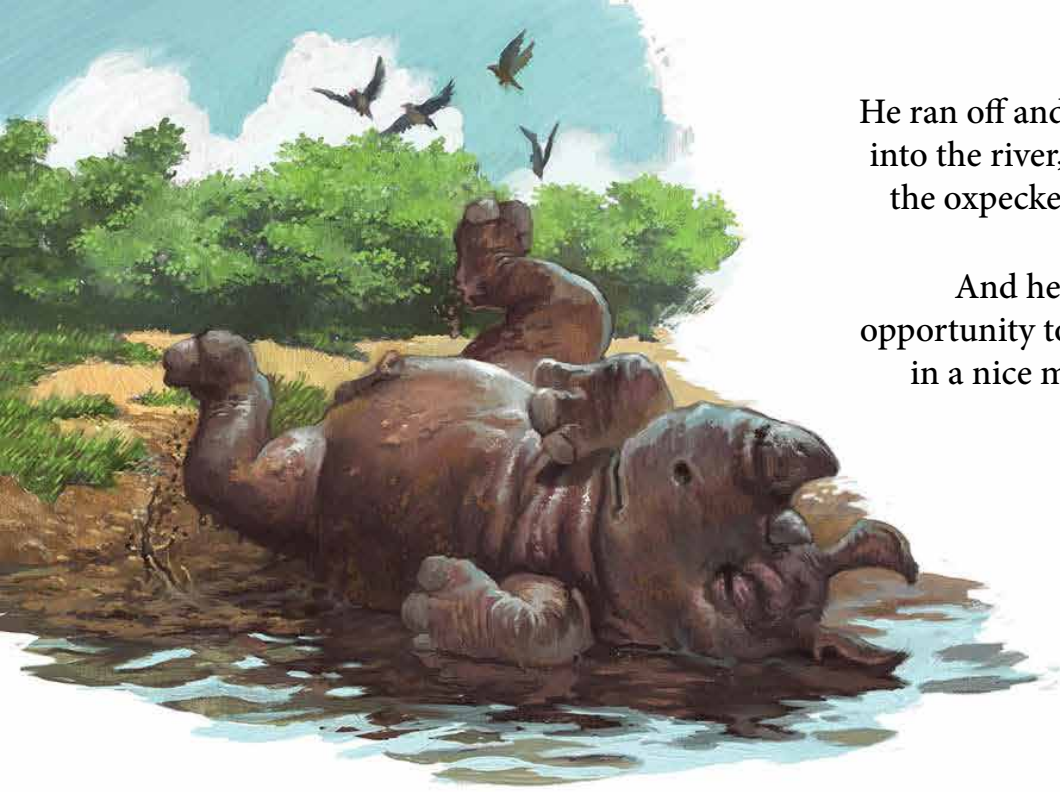
“That’s because I’m your friend. I really do want to go pecking at your wound, but I hold myself back because otherwise the wound won’t heal.”



“I’m going to put a stop to this!” exclaimed Rhino.





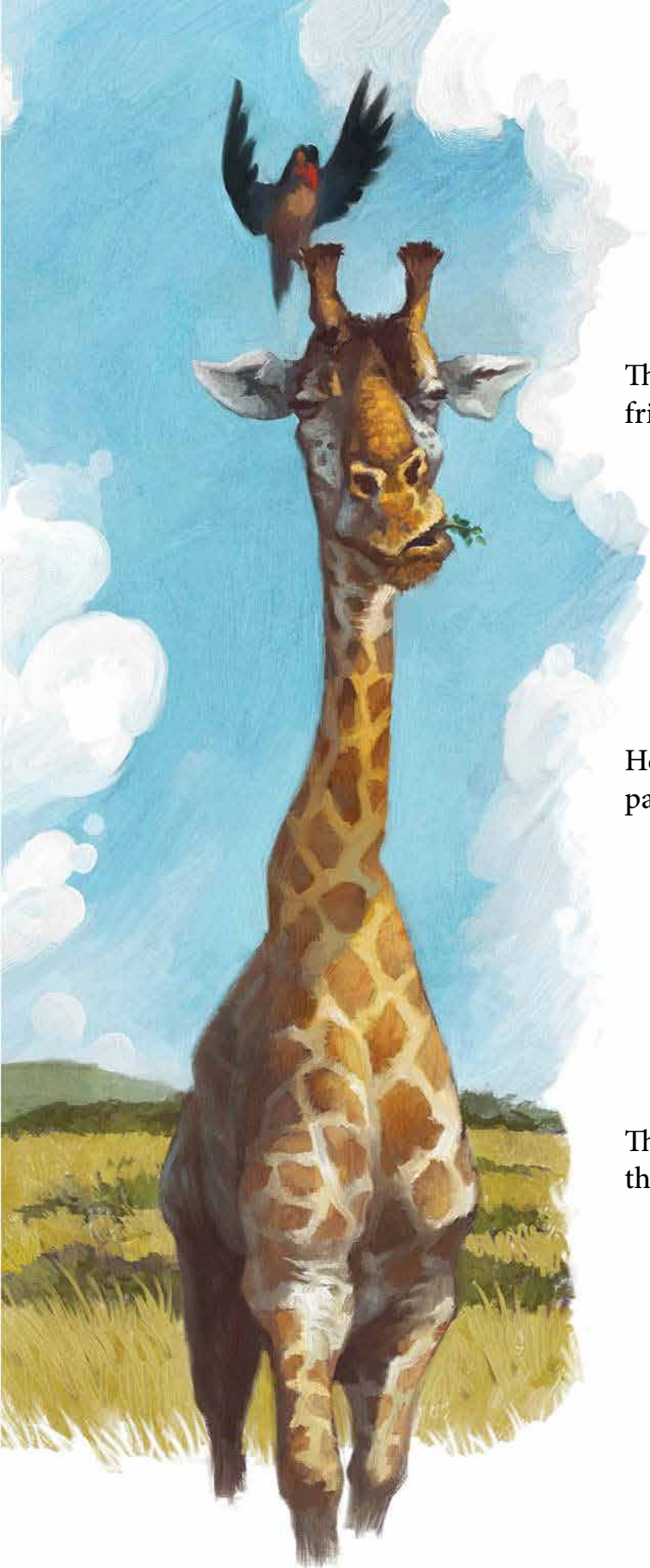


He ran off and jumped into the river, sending the oxpeckers flying.

And he took the opportunity to cool off in a nice mud bath.

Later, his oxpecker friend landed on him again and said, “I’m going to stay away from you for a few days so I won’t be tempted. My instinct is telling me to peck at your wound and to suck the delicious blood from it, but I refuse to give into the temptation. Goodbye!”





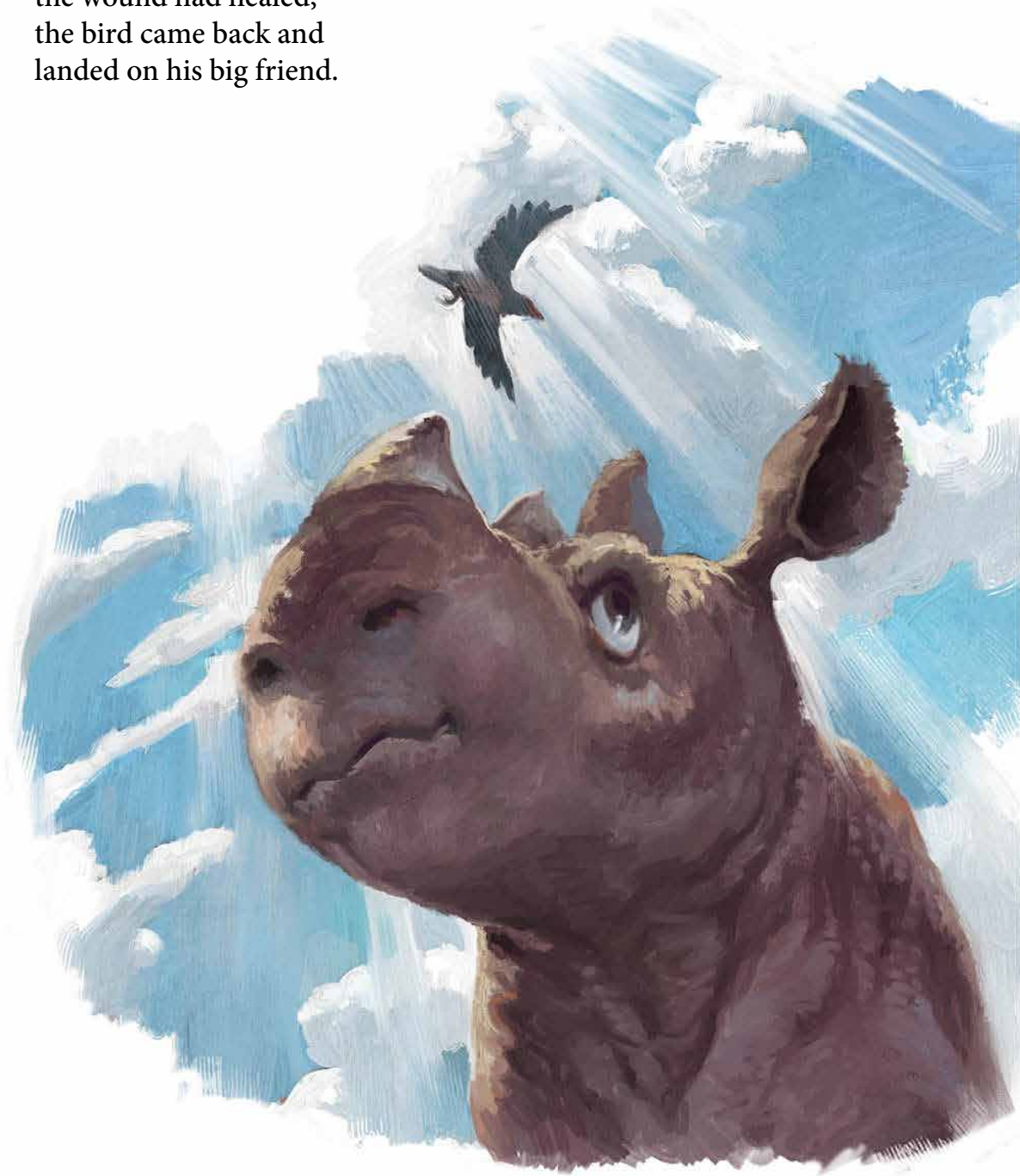
The bird took leave of his friend so as not to harm him.

He spent a few days accompanying a beautiful giraffe.

The rhinoceros missed the oxpecker.



A week later, once  
the wound had healed,  
the bird came back and  
landed on his big friend.



The two were happy to be together again.



One quiet night, while the two were sleeping, the bird awoke.

“Danger!”

“What is it?”

“Men approaching.”

“Men? The good type or the bad type?”

“I think it’s the bad type. Run! Go!”



The men closed in on the rhino with their jeep, and Rhino took off in a desperate run.



One man aimed a rifle and fired a shot.  
Rhino quickly changed direction and dodged the bullet.



The men in the jeep continued to chase the frightened animal.  
The hunter aimed his rifle and fired again. The bullet grazed  
the rhino, who ran as fast as he could.





Then Rhino headed into some thick bushes and cleared a path by pushing aside the vegetation with his powerful horns. The jeep tried to follow the trail, but the bushes and trees were too dense. That is how Rhino successfully escaped the hunters.





When everything calmed down, the bird landed on the rhino once again.  
“I am so grateful, friend, you saved my life!” Rhino said thankfully.  
“Congratulations for running so fast and escaping! I’m proud to be your friend. You must be the fastest rhino in all of Africa!”  
The two were very happy.



## Several years later...

“My life is coming to an end,” said the bird.

“What do you mean?”

“A rhinoceros lives between 35 and 50 years. An oxpecker only lives 15. My time has come.”

“Time for what?”

“To leave.”

“Where to?”

“I don’t know. But I must go. It was so good to live by your side. You’re my best friend!”

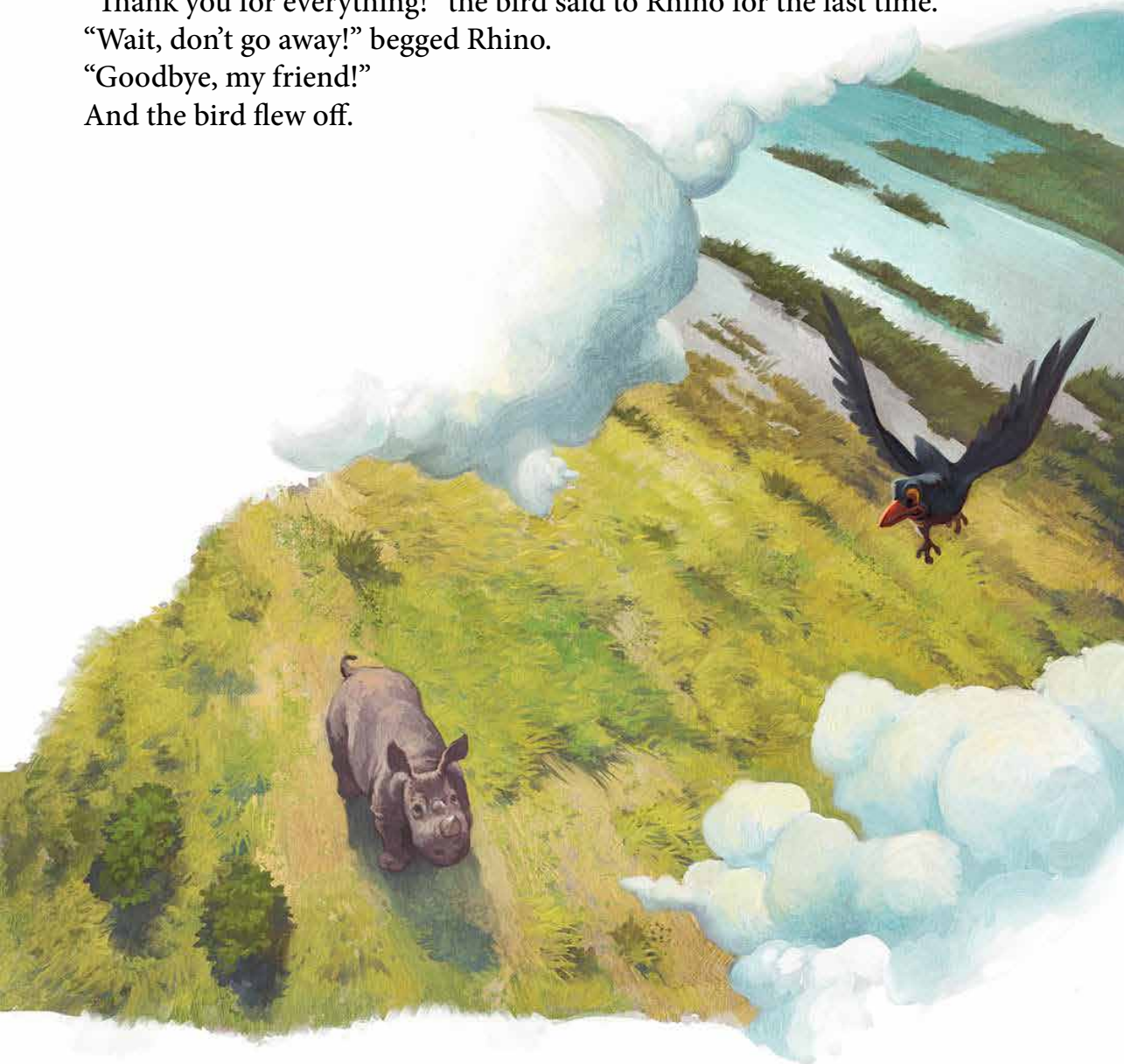
“You’re my best friend too.”

“Thank you for everything!” the bird said to Rhino for the last time.

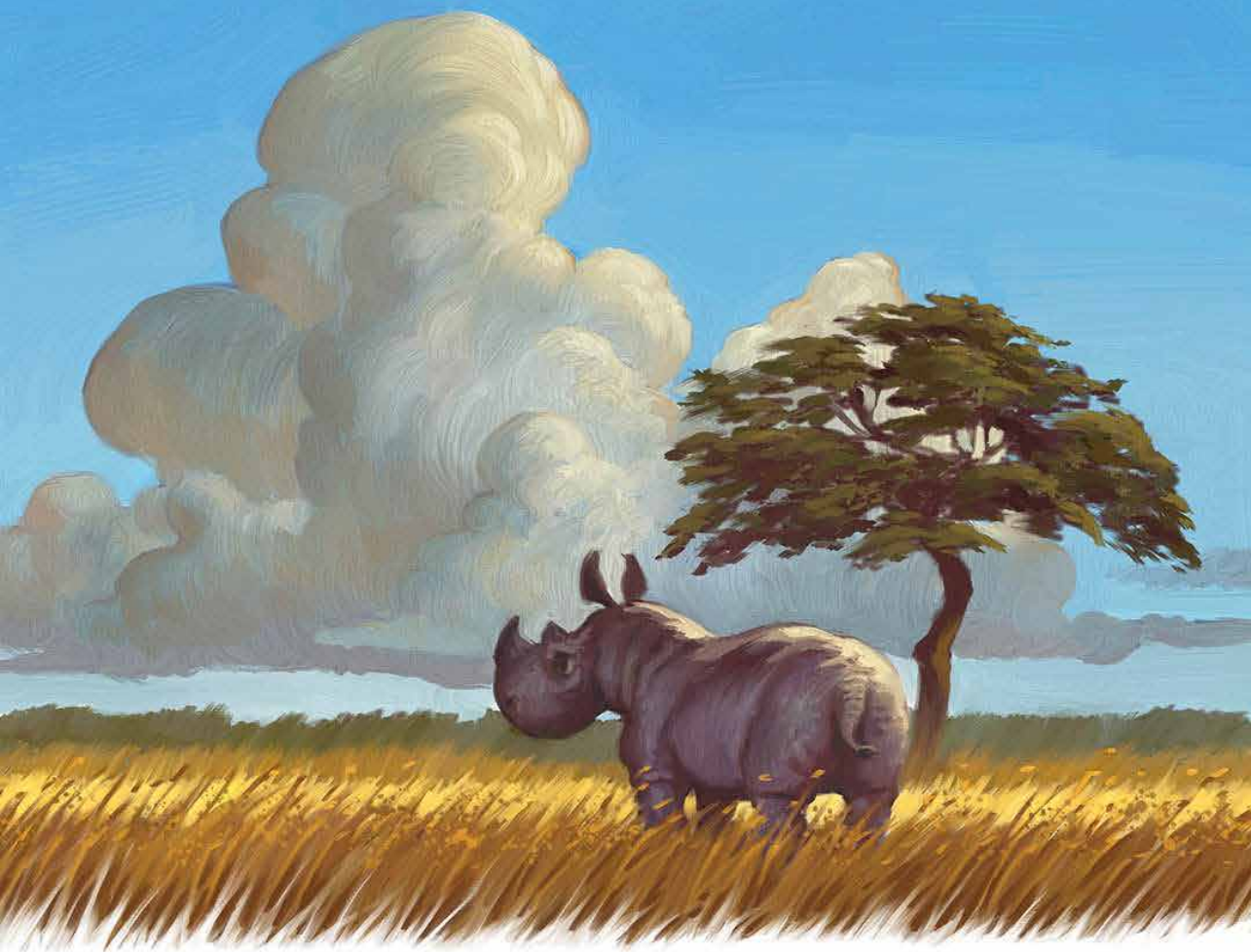
“Wait, don’t go away!” begged Rhino.

“Goodbye, my friend!”

And the bird flew off.







Saddened, the rhinoceros walked along and thought to himself, *My friend has left. I don't know where he went, but I feel deep down that he is all right. I will miss him, but I have to be strong and go on living my life.*

Days later, a bird landed on the rhino and started pecking.

“Hey, who are you?” Rhino asked.

“I’m a yellow-billed oxpecker. I eat the parasites...

... off of my skin. I know what you do.”

“Might I accompany you?”

“My pleasure,” the rhino replied, “Of course you can!”

“Thank you! You won’t regret it.”

“I know I won’t.”



The rhino was very happy to have found a new friend. And so was the yellow-billed oxpecker.



A few months later...



“My friend, can you see who that is  
off in the distance coming towards us?”

“It’s a female rhino,” replied the oxpecker, “with a beautiful little companion perching on her horns.”





The female rhino was very curious  
and came walking up to Rhino.

In that instant, the rhinos fell in love and so did the oxpeckers.



And two beautiful and happy couples were formed.





## Further Information:

The black rhinoceros is a species native to eastern, southern and central Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola. It stands about 1.5 m (5 ft) tall, can be up to 4 m (13 ft) long, and weighs more than 1,000 kg (2,200 lbs)! Rhinos can run up to 40 km per hour (25 mph). Their skin is really tough, sometimes more than 7 cm (2.5 in) thick.

There are two species of rhinos in Africa: black rhinoceroses and white rhinoceroses. Despite their names, they are practically the same color and range from brown to gray in hue. The only thing that sets them apart is that black rhinos have a more pointed mouth and eat leaves from plants and bushes, while white rhinos have more of a square mouth and graze on grasses.

They both have two horns. Contrary to popular belief, their horns are not bones, but are actually made of keratin, which is exactly what fingernails are made of. The horns continue growing throughout rhinoceroses' lives. Rhinos use their horns to defend against predators and to interact with other rhinos – in other words, to help determine which are the most dominant rhinos.

Rhinos can sleep standing up or lying down, and love to bathe in mud puddles or sandy riverbeds. They are experts at blazing trails through the bush by forcibly pushing the vegetation out of the way. Rhinos mark their territories with pee and poop, and they sometimes form huge poop piles that can be more than 1 m (3 ft) high. Males have backward-facing penises, so they spray streams of urine backwards, just like females.

Byrdyak



White Rhino

JohanSwanepoel



Black Rhino

White rhinos are considered a near-threatened species, and there are only about 18,000 individuals in Africa. Sadly, the critically endangered black rhinos are faring worse than their white rhino cousins. There are only about 5,600 black rhinos in all of Africa.

Rhinoceroses are in danger of extinction because of poaching driven by a demand for their horns. Rhino horns are mostly smuggled to China and Vietnam since rhino horn powder is believed to have medicinal properties in traditional Asian medicine. There is no scientific proof of this claim. In some North African and Middle Eastern countries, rhino horns are used to fashion the handle of ornamental daggers that are used as status symbols.

Two subspecies of African rhino have recently become extinct. The western black rhinoceros went extinct in 2011. The northern white rhino lost its last male in 2018, and now only two females remain.

There are three other rhinoceros species native to Asia. About 4,000 Indian rhinos live in India and Nepal. And Indonesia is home to the most endangered rhinoceros species: the Sumatran rhino, with fewer than 80 individuals, and the Javan rhino, with only 75 individuals left.

Musat Christian

Michel Viard

Tobias Nowlan



Indian Rhino

Sumatran Rhino

Javan Rhino

### How Can We Help Rhinoceroses?

By supporting the organizations that work for the preservation of these animals. Visit the websites of [Save the Rhino International](#) and [International Rhino Foundation](#) and follow them on social media. You can also visit [WWF/rhino](#), and search on Google for [National Geographic Society/rhinos](#). By knowing and following the work of these organizations you already make a small contribution to protecting rhinos. And if you can make a monetary donation to any of them, that would be even more helpful.

September 22 is World Rhino Day.



**Oxpeckers** are endemic to the savannas of Africa. The red-billed oxpecker measures around 20 to 22 cm (8 in) head to tail. The yellow-billed oxpecker is a bit larger, measuring up to 25 cm (9 in) head to tail.

These birds spend all day collecting and eating ticks, flies, fleas, lice, worms and fur larvae from their hosts. They also eat rheum from the eyes and secretions from the ears, nose and mouth. They do the general cleaning. It's a relationship known as mutual symbiosis. The term symbiosis comes from the Greek word for "living together" and essentially refers to some form of long-term interaction between different biological organisms. In other words, there is some form of relationship between two species that is beneficial to both.

The only disadvantage in the case of rhinos and oxpeckers is that oxpeckers often peck at rhinos' wounds, causing them to take longer to scab over and heal. However, one research has suggested that this behavior also has a beneficial side, as it keeps wounds clean and free of flies.

Rhinoceroses benefit when oxpeckers rid their bodies of blood-sucking parasites. Blood loss leads to a loss of energy in rhinos and can put them at a disadvantage when it comes to avoiding predators, mating or just going about their day-to-day business. Oxpeckers do not remove all the parasites that cling to rhinos but they largely keep mass infestations under control.

Henk Bogaard

Steve Holroyd



Red-billed-oxpecker



Yellow-billed-oxpecker

Oxpeckers also prove beneficial to their hosts by providing them with an early warning system. Birds are generally more vigilant than most large animals, and when startled, they fly off noisily, screeching and squawking in typical fashion. This tells their large animal hosts to be on the lookout and gives them time to respond to potential threats. It also serves the dual purpose of alerting humans to a possible encounter with dangerous wild animals. By observing oxpeckers flying up and down or by noting their easily recognizable calls, humans are warned of the presence of potentially dangerous animals.

In Swahili, the oxpecker is called askari wa kifarua, which literally means “the rhino’s bodyguard.”

Unfortunately, oxpeckers have been wiped out of many areas of Africa where pesticides have been applied to cattle to kill parasites. This treatment has unintentionally killed the birds that feed on these parasites.

Scientists are studying the possibility of reintroducing oxpeckers to areas where they have gone extinct precisely to protect the rhinos in those areas. When accompanied by their “bodyguards,” rhinoceroses are more alert and stand a better chance of escaping poachers.

Nature Picture Library / Alamy Stock Photo





## About the Author



Flávio Colombini

Flávio is a writer and filmmaker who has made it his life's mission to tell stories that are exciting, that relay positive messages and that foster the joy of reading in children of all ages.

He wrote this book because he fell in love with rhinos and wants to help preserve this wonderful animal that faces serious threats of extinction.

His books are available for low prices in the best e-book stores. He wants children who cannot afford printed books to have access to quality literature through e-books that can be read on a computer, tablet or cell phone.

If you would like to browse the other books he has written and movies he has made, visit his website: [www.flaviocolombini.com/english](http://www.flaviocolombini.com/english)

## About the Illustrator



Hugo Araújo

Hugo has been drawing since he was a child, when he would recreate the characters he had encountered in his books and comics.

Nowadays he primarily produces illustrations for international comic books and for Brazilian textbooks and children's books.



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A young rhino must leave his mother and go off into the world. He feels sad and lonely until a bird comes along and offers to keep him company. Together they face many dangers and enjoy a wonderful friendship.

