Sarita and the Elephant Bird

Written by Linda Rae Liss
Illustrations by George Carrara

Read Aloud

Characters

Sarita

Anvi

Elephant Bird
In the forest, Sarita had a secret best friend. She was a gigantic elephant bird named Anvi. Sarita felt she had something in common with Anvi. They were both different. Sarita could not run, and Anvi could not fly.

Anvi was gentle and friendly, but the people of Sarita’s village were afraid of her because she was so bizarre. Sarita’s own mother was terrified of the strange giant bird that lived in the forest. She always warned Sarita, “Don’t go into the forest. A big, dangerous bird lives there!” So, Sarita kept their friendship a secret.
One day, an apple farmer who lived in the neighboring orchard passed through Sarita’s village. The farmer was on his way home from selling his apples at the market, and didn’t realize that apples were falling out of his wagon onto the road. The only horse in Sarita’s village saw the delicious apples falling out of the cart. He broke through his fence and began to munch on the apples. As the horse went from apple to apple he roamed further and further away from the village.

Sarita had a pointed beak and big feet with 3 sharp claws, but she only ate fruit. Since Anvi couldn’t fly, she had to eat apples that fell to the ground. Sarita observed that the fruits on the trees were too high for her or Anvi to reach alone, but she had a clever idea. If Sarita turned her crutch into an apple picker and rode on Anvi’s back, she would be able to reach the fruit for her friend. Anvi would spend their days exploring deep into the forest. Sarita loved to ride on Anvi’s back and see the trees woosh by as Anvi ran through the forest faster than any person could run. Every day when the sun set, Anvi would bring Sarita to the edge of the forest and the two would go back to their own homes.

Sarita and Anvi would spend their days exploring deep into the forest.
Later that day there was a big commotion in the center of the village. Sarita and her mother walked over to the crowd to see what was going on. “A monster has eaten our horse! I saw giant footprints with 3 sharp claws near the horse’s broken fence!” exclaimed the village elder.

“It must have been the elephant bird that lives in the forest!” shouted Sarita’s mother.

Sarita was scared to speak up, but she was even more afraid something bad would happen to her friend, Anvi. Sarita stepped forward into the circle of adults and pleaded, “It couldn’t have been the elephant bird, she is gentle and friendly and only eats fruits and plants.”

The village elder was appalled that a child would dare to contradict an adult. “This is no place for a child, go home!” he scolded.
Sarita went back to the village to tell everyone what she had discovered. She pushed her way into the circle of people who had gathered in the village hopeful that her new discovery would change peoples’ minds. Sarita said to the villagers, “I made a discovery! The elephant bird could not have eaten the horse! The horse broke out of its pen and walked down the road.”

Sarita’s mother interrupted her. She grabbed Sarita by the arm and scolded her in front of everyone, “How dare you interrupt the adults! We have a very serious problem, and we don’t have time for your childish games. Go home!” Sarita walked away with tears in her eyes.

First, Sarita looked closely at the fence. She observed that the fence was broken from the inside, not the outside. “Ah,” she thought, “maybe the horse broke the fence.”

Next, she observed that the horses’ footprints went down the road away from town. The elephant bird’s footprints went directly into the forest. “So the horse broke the fence,” Sarita exclaimed. She decided to make a plan to prove that Anvi was innocent and didn’t harm the horse. She would go to the horse’s pen and look for clues to what really happened.

Sarita knew she had to figure out what happened to the horse, or else her friend Anvi would be blamed by the people in her village. She went to the horse’s pen and looked carefully at the footprints. She noticed that the horse’s footprints went in a different direction than Anvi’s.

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Sarita arrived at the elephant bird’s nest, just as the villagers were approaching. “We need to get out of here, Anvi!” Sarita said as she climbed onto Anvi’s back.

A man from the village shouted, “I see the monster. Let’s catch it!”

Sarita held onto Anvi’s feathers as the elephant bird sprinted away from the crowd as fast as she could.
Sarita and Anvi ran down the road, following the horse's hoofprints until they came to an apple orchard. They went into the orchard and who should they find, but the horse happily munching away on apples.

“There you are!” Sarita exclaimed with delight. She climbed down from Anvi to grab the horse.
The villagers were surprised to see Sarita so far away from her home and even more shocked to see the horse alive.

“How did you know the horse was in the orchard?” asked the village elder.

Sarita explained, “The elephant bird’s name is Anvi and she is my friend. She only eats fruit so I knew that Anvi couldn’t have harmed the horse. I looked for clues around the horse’s pen to find out what really happened. First, I observed that the fence had been broken from the inside. Next I observed that there were hoofprints leading down the road. Then, I followed the hoofprints. Finally, I found the horse eating apples in the orchard.”

The village elder smiled and said to Sarita, “That was very clever Sarita, I’m sorry we didn’t listen to you.”
Elephant Bird Facts

- Lived in Madagascar off the coast of East Africa
- Became extinct in the 1600’s
- Closest living relative is the Kiwi bird of New Zealand
- Weighed 500 KG (1,100 lbs)
- 3 Meters Tall (9.8 Feet)
- Their eggs were bigger than a human head

Everyone in the village valued Sarita for her cleverness and bravery. The other children always wanted Sarita to play with them, and she used her wits to help Anvi. From that day on, Sarita’s and Anvi’s lives changed. No one was afraid of the elephant bird anymore, and Anvi was welcome in the village. Even Sarita’s mother became good friends with Anvi and fed her fruit from the tree next to their home.
Inspired by the story: The Elephant Bird

DEDICATED TO
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