The big mistake

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It was a nice, lazy day along the river. Everything was very quiet. The only noise was Little Bird chirping softly while he cleaned Hippo's big, flat teeth.

Hippo was enjoying getting his teeth cleaned. He lay with his head out of the water, his mouth wide open. The sun warmed him and before he knew it, he was drifting off to sleep. He dreamt of a big juicy patch of grass floating right by him and, in his dream, he took a big bite and swallowed.

"You ate Little Bird!" The voice woke Hippo up with a fright. It was one of the flamingos. He looked very angry! His pink face was turning red!

"You ate Little Bird," he shouted again, pointing his wing at Hippo.

"I would never!" Hippo defended himself. "I eat grass, not little birds! Besides, Little Bird is my friend! I wouldn't eat him!"

"I saw you! He was cleaning your teeth, and you swallowed him up!"

Hippo remembered his dream. Now he was scared! Had he swallowed his friend by mistake? Then, as he climbed out of the river, he heard a familiar chirping sound. It was Little Bird!

Hippo looked all around to see where Little Bird was. At last, he realised that the sound was coming from inside his tummy. He had swallowed his friend!

"See? I told you!" said Flamingo. "You ate Little Bird!"

"I ... I didn't mean to ..." Hippo cried, "We need to rescue him. We have to get him out of my tummy!"

By now all the animals living along the river had come closer to find out what was going on. They started coming up with plans.

"Let's send some small fish down into your tummy. They can lead the way for Little Bird to swim back out," said Monkey. But hearing this, all the small fish quickly swam away.

"We can use one of my teeth to cut your stomach open and save Little Bird," suggested Lion. Hippo didn't think that sounded like a good idea!

"What are we going to do? Little Bird can't stay in my tummy forever!" said Hippo. But he just couldn't think of any better ideas. Perhaps he should let Lion cut open his tummy and take out Little Bird. He was just about to agree to it when wise old Owl came to the rescue.

"Calm down, everyone," said Owl. Everyone listened. "Get me a big feather," he ordered.

Quickly, one of the birds flew down to where Flamingo stood and brought back what Owl had asked for.

"Wonderful!" said Owl as he flew down to the ground in front of Hippo. "Now open your mouth as wide as you can, and I am going to climb inside!" he said.

"Don't do that! He is going to eat you too!" Monkey warned.

"Oh, be quiet!" Owl told them. But softly he said to Hippo, "You had better not! Whatever you do, do not close your mouth while I am in there!"

Owl climbed inside Hippo's huge and scary jaws! Then he began to tickle Hippo's throat softly with the feather. At first it only made Hippo giggle, but then suddenly...

"Gha...gha...ghaaaaa!" Hippo coughed, and Owl and Little Bird came flying out of his mouth! Both of them were dripping with hippo spit. Little Bird hugged Owl and then rushed to hug Hippo too.

"I am so sorry!" said Hippo.

"Don't feel bad," said Little Bird. "I should have woken you up when you fell asleep. I know you didn't mean to. It was just a mistake, and besides, I am perfectly alright."

Hippo and Little Bird turned to Owl who was busy washing his wings in the river. "Thank you, Owl. You saved the day!" they said.

"Pleasure!" said Owl, washing the last bit of spit out of his feathers. "Now, if everyone could be quiet, I can go back to sleep."

Owl flew back to the hollow of a big tree that was his home. All the other animals went back to their own business. Flamingo's face went back to its usual pink colour, but he was still shaking his head.

"Silly bird! He eats you but you still stay friends," he muttered. Then he went back to his spot, stood on one leg and fell asleep.

"I really am sorry," said Hippo to Little Bird again. "I understand if you don't want to clean my teeth again."

"But then you will get toothache!" answered Little Bird. "We'll just make sure that you don't fall asleep while I'm doing it. Now let's go and find you some juicy grass to eat. I'm sure you must be hungry."

And off they went.

* Have you ever made a big mistake? What happened, and how did you feel about it?

* What happened to make you feel better afterwards?

* Little Bird and Hippo were still friends even though Hippo had nearly eaten Little Bird. Do you think it is important to forgive others if they made a mistake? Why do you say so?