

# The Rain Bird

Joanne Bloch (retold  
folktale)  
English





In a country called Gabon, a little village stood at the very edge of a forest. In the heart of this forest, in the highest branches of an enormous tree, lived a very special bird – the bird that made rain.

For as far back as the villagers could remember, they had taken the time to keep this bird happy. They saved scraps of bread, pieces of fruit and fresh coconut milk, and every week or two a group of villagers took these delicacies into the forest. When they had laid them at the base of the tree, one of them played a simple tune on the thumb piano.





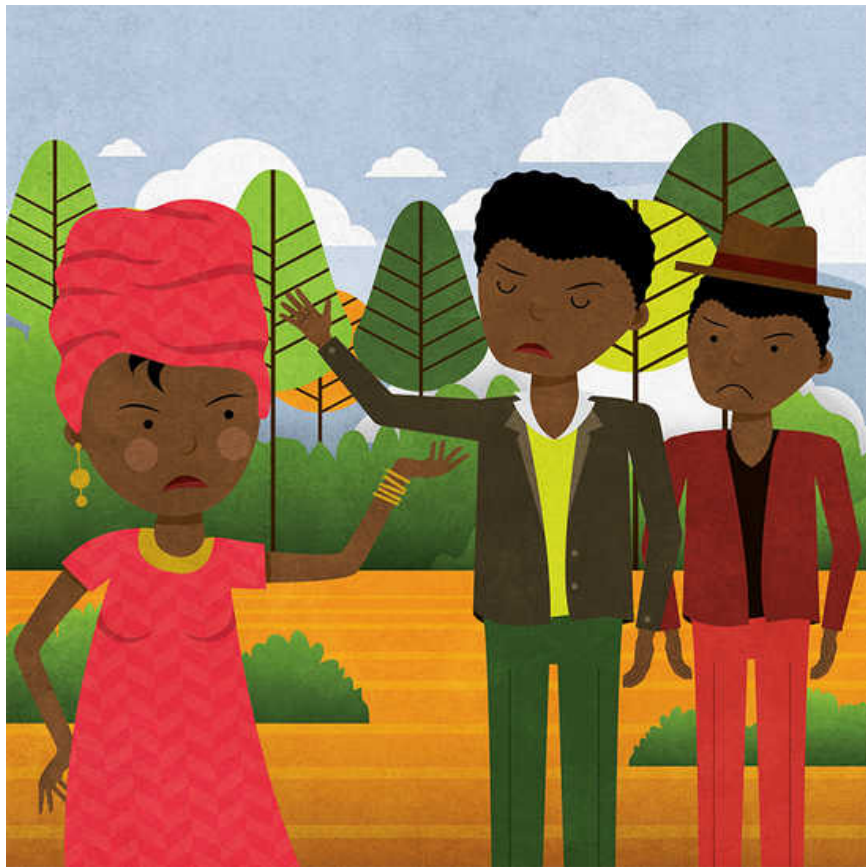
After a while, the bird flew down to the ground to eat and drink. When she had finished, she began to sing the most beautiful song.

At the same time, she raised her dark, shiny blue wings, and within minutes, the rain began to fall.



This went on for many years.  
Because the rain fell regularly, the  
crops grew abundantly and there  
was plenty of food in the village.

But gradually things began to  
change. Somehow, the villagers  
were always busy and they began  
to neglect the rain bird. "It will rain  
anyway," they said. "It's time to  
stop spoiling that silly old bird!"



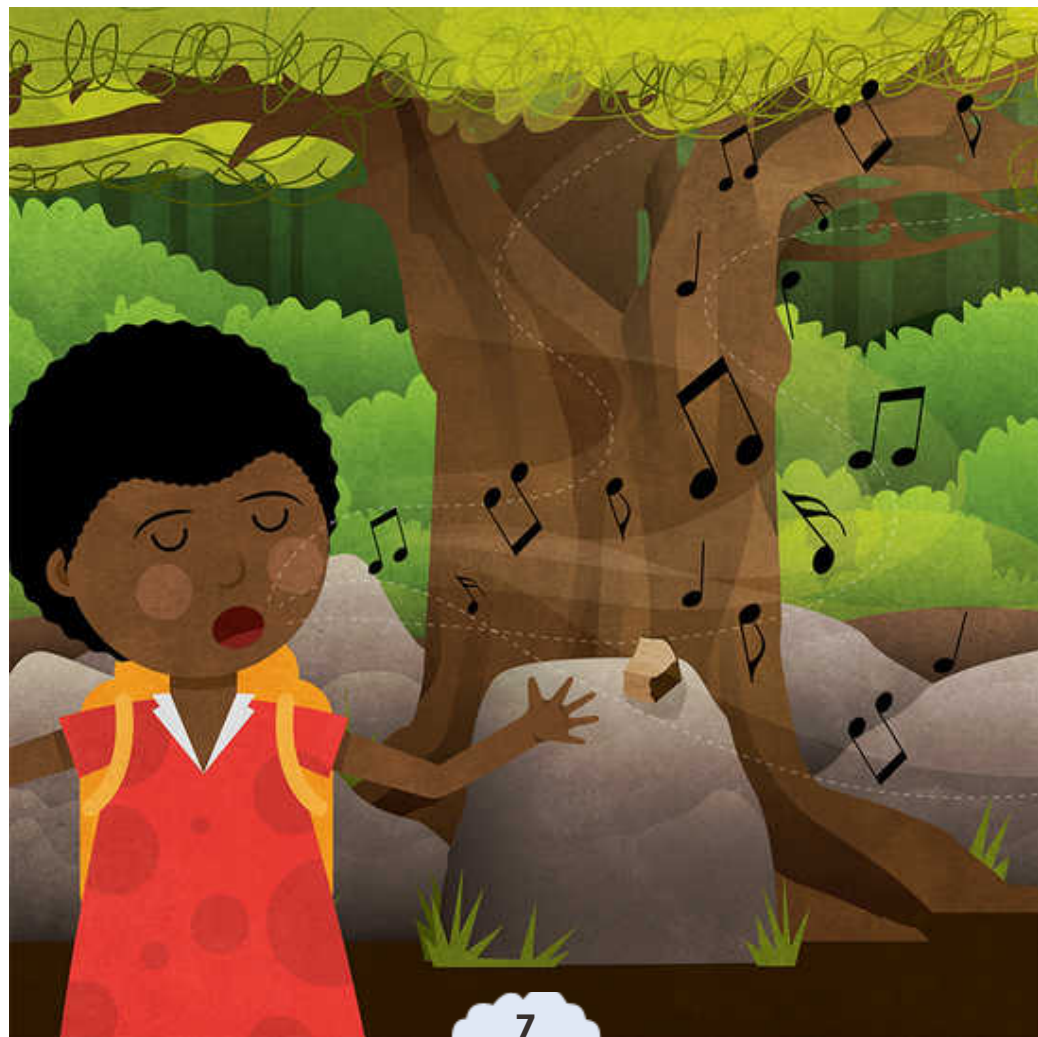


But the people were wrong. When they stopped looking after the bird, the rain stopped falling.

The crops began to dry up and die, and the animals grew thin and weak. Still, nobody in the village went into the forest to feed the bird that brought the rain. Now they were all too busy trying to find money to buy food in the neighbouring town.

One scorching day, a young girl called Ketti decided to go into the forest after school. "At least it will be cool in there," she thought to herself. She walked and walked, and after some time, she came to the tall tree in which the rain bird lived. Ketti stared up at the tree.

Suddenly, she remembered how her granny had taken her into the forest to feed the bird when she was still a tiny child. Ketti opened her school bag and pulled out a piece of bread left over from her lunch. Carefully she laid the bread at the base of the tree. Then, because she had no thumb piano with her, she sang an old song that she had known all her life.







With a loud whooshing sound, a beautiful blue bird swooped out of the branches above Ketti's head and began to eat the bread. When the bird had finished, she opened her mouth and sang a few pure, high notes.

Then she raised her shiny wings and all of a sudden Ketti heard the rumble of thunder. By the time she reached her home, giant rain drops were pelting down, cooling the baking red earth.

Ketti was very happy, until she told her parents what had happened. "Don't be silly!" scolded her mother. "Nobody believes that bird has anything to do with the rain anymore!"

"Your mother is right," said Ketti's father. "The drought has been broken now and we will be fine. Don't go wasting good bread feeding that greedy old bird again!"

Though Ketti didn't argue with her parents, she felt sure they were wrong. "If only Granny were still alive," she said to herself, "she would have believed me!" But Ketti's granny had died a few years earlier. The only thing Ketti had left, was her granny's old thumb piano.



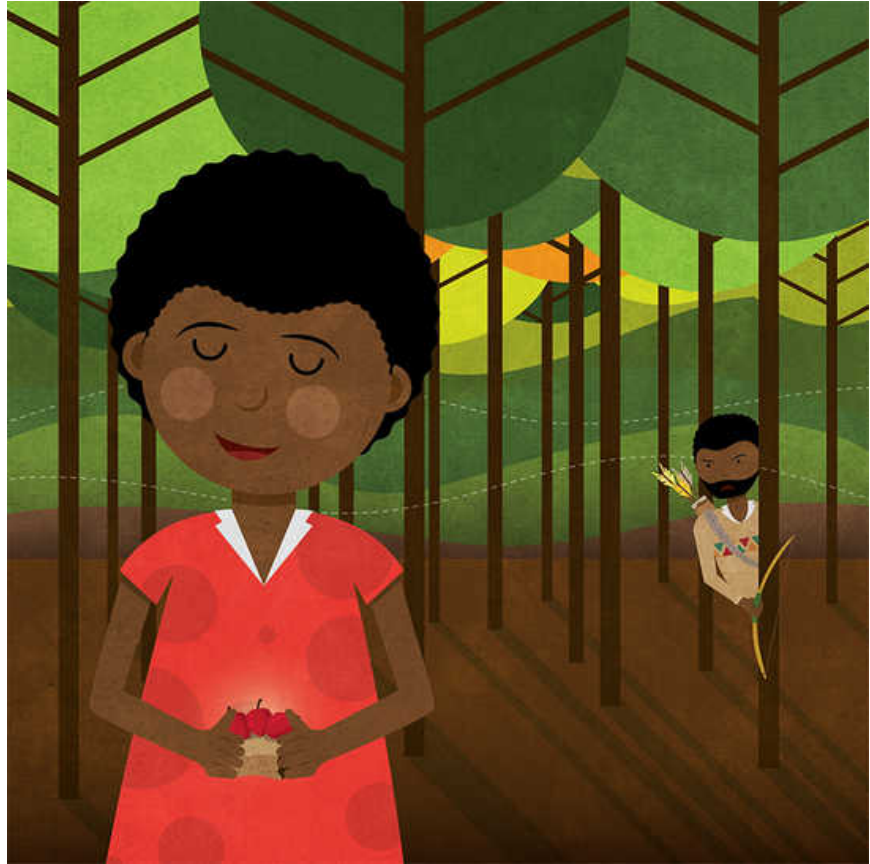


Two weeks passed and there was no more rain. The crops began to shrivel up again and the hungry animals' ribs began to stick out even more. The sun beat down mercilessly from a glaring blue sky.

"I don't care what they say!" thought Ketti. "We need rain. I'm going to feed the bird again tomorrow!"

So, early the next morning, after taking a slice of bread and a handful of red berries from the kitchen, Ketti slipped out of the house. She began to make her way to the centre of the forest.

What she didn't realise, was that her father was also awake. When he saw what his daughter was doing, he realised that she was going to feed the rain bird again.

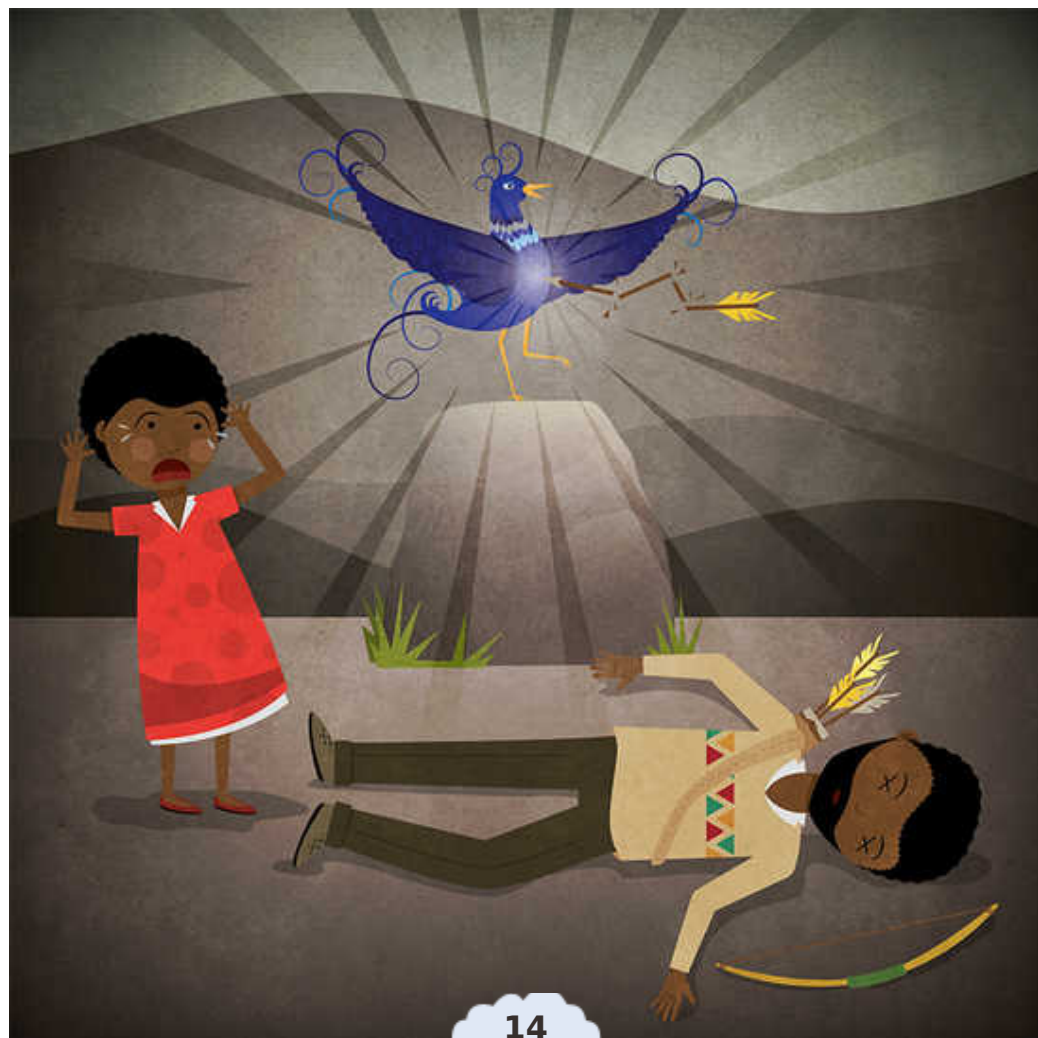


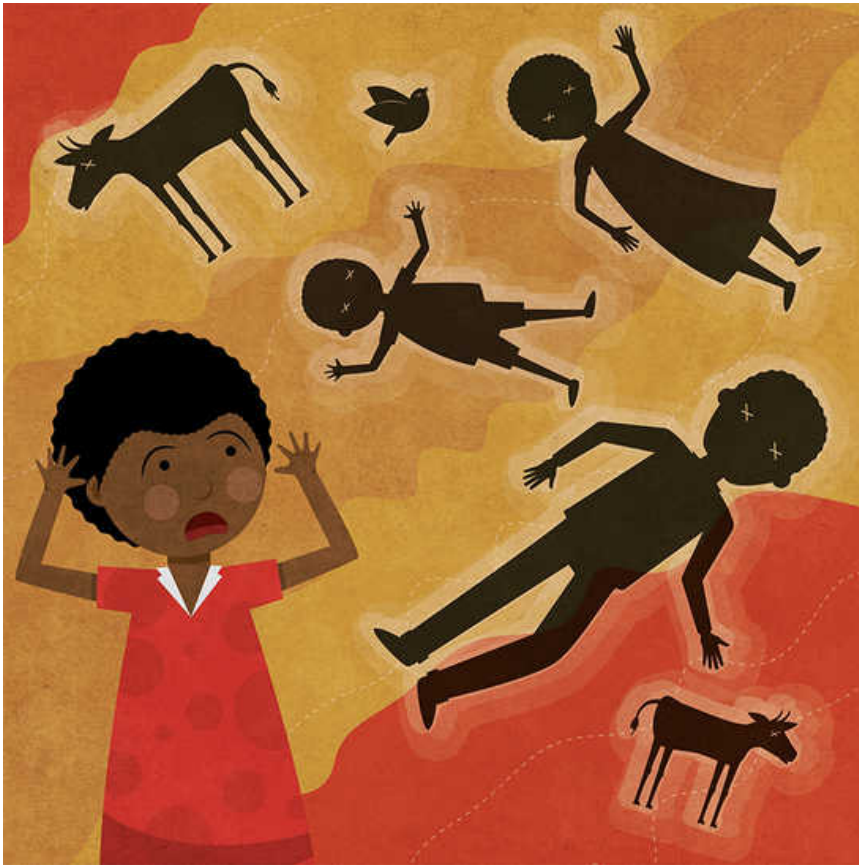


"I'll teach that disobedient child a lesson!" he said to himself angrily. He snatched his bow and arrows and silently followed Ketti into the forest.

Just as the bird flew down to eat the food that Ketti had set out for it, her father raised his bow and released his deadly arrow. The arrow flew straight into the bird's heart. The bird let out a piercing shriek.

Terrified, Ketti spun around – just in time to see her father fall down, stone dead. Ketti screamed and turned around – just in time to see the arrow fall harmlessly from the bird's glossy body. Then the bird, unharmed, swooped up into the highest branch of the tree.





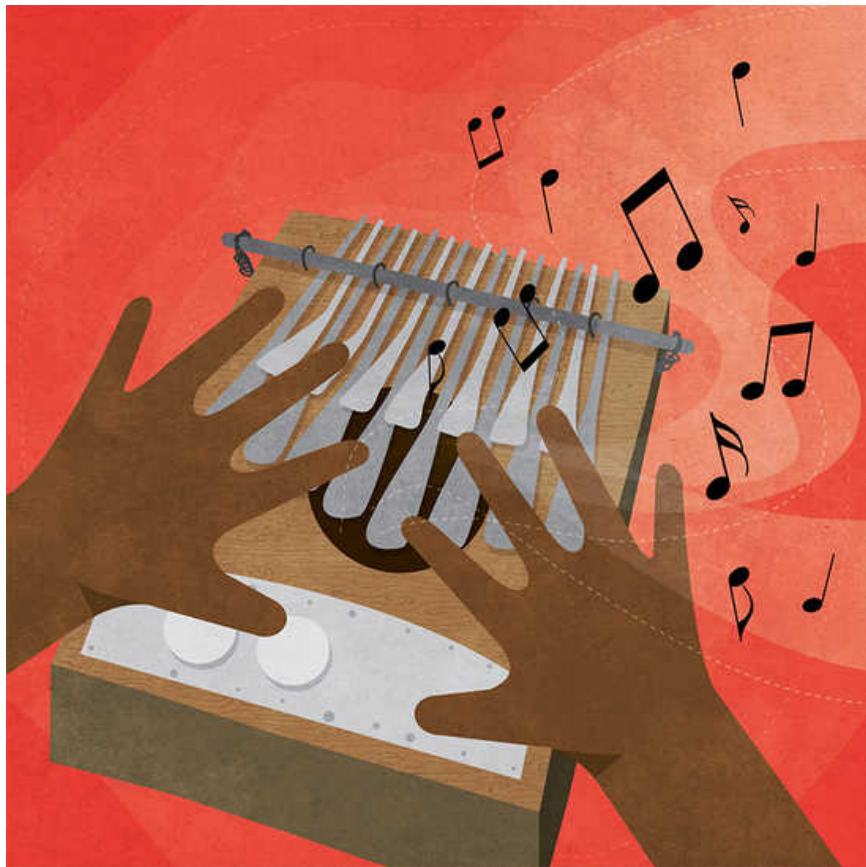
Ketti raced out of the forest to a scene of utter devastation. Every animal and every person she saw lay dead on the ground. With a pounding heart, she ran all the way back to her home.

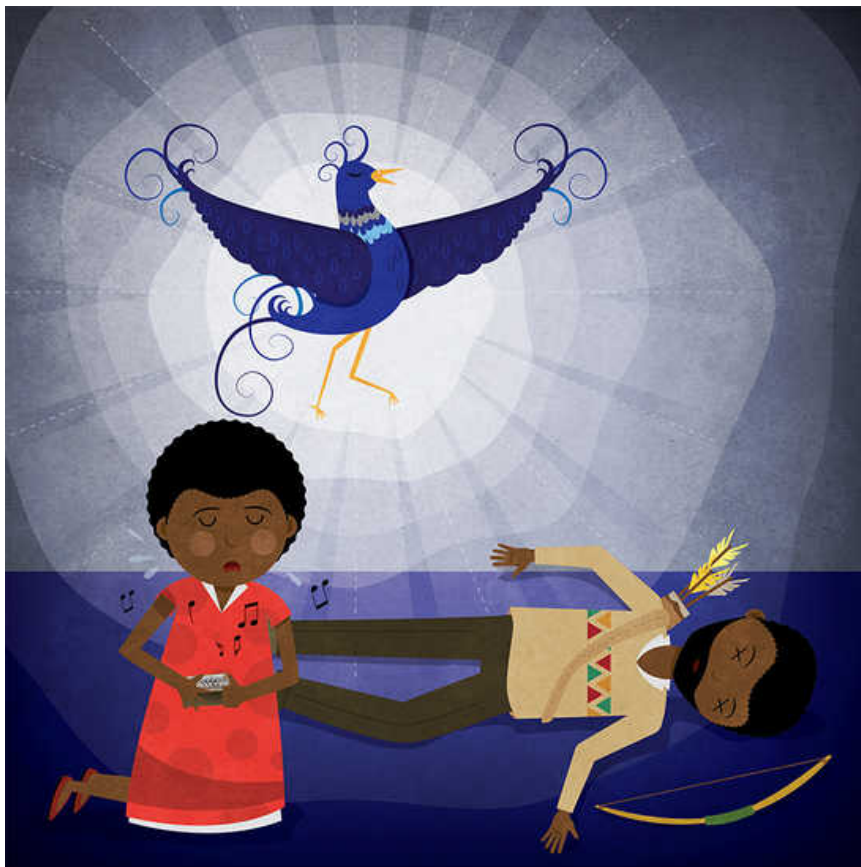
She quickly found her granny's old thumb piano. "This is my only hope!" she thought. "The rain bird is angry. I have to make her happy again! I HAVE to!"

Half an hour later, Ketti was back at the base of the big tree. Her body was drenched with sweat and she was gasping for breath. A few paces away from her lay the lifeless body of her father.

Ketti looked away quickly, and with trembling hands, began to play the thumb piano.

She played and played, until her fingers hurt.





Finally, what she wanted most in the world happened. Down swooped the bird as if nothing had happened. The bird ate some of the berries still lying on the ground and sang a few notes. Then, as Ketti played on, the bird raised her wings. Ketti heard a rustle behind her.



It was her father who had woken up.  
"I'm sorry!" he said again and again  
to the big, blue bird.  
Then he held out his hand to his  
daughter and they walked slowly  
back to the village. In the village all  
the people and animals were alive  
again.





That night the villagers held a meeting. They all agreed that they had learned a valuable lesson. And from that day onwards, not one week passed without a special trip to the forest to feed the bird that brought the rain.

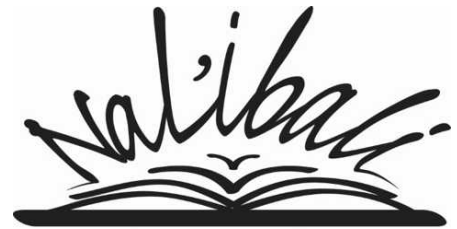


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Writer: Joanne Bloch (retold folktale)

Illustration: Wiehan de Jager and Nalibali

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