



The Green Crown of the Highlands

By abeh anya



In the high, misty mountains of the Bamenda Highlands in Cameroon, lived a young girl named Manka'a. Every morning, she woke up to a symphony of whistles, chirps, and songs coming from the thick forest that wrapped around her village like a green blanket. Manka'a loved the birds more than anything else, and she spent her time trying to whistle back to them.

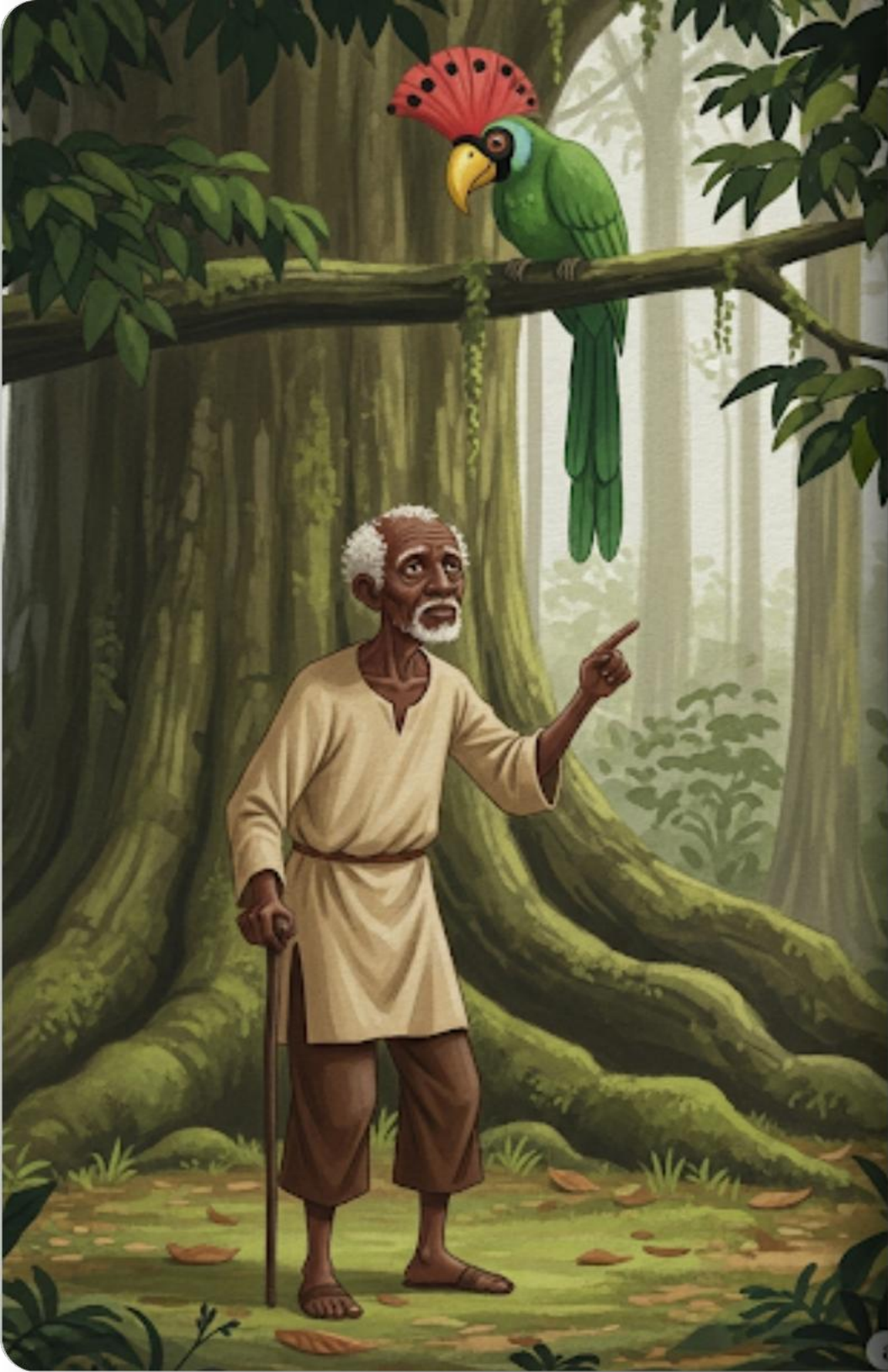




One afternoon, Manka'a went walking with her grandfather, Pa Nji. He was the wisest man in the village and knew the name of every tree and every creature. "Listen, Manka'a," Pa Nji whispered, stopping near a giant mahogany tree. "Do you hear that deep 'kow-kow-kow' sound? That is the king of our forest."



High up in the canopy, a flash of bright red and deep green darted between the leaves. It was Turie, the Bannerman's Turaco. Turie was a special bird with a regal red crest on his head and shimmering wings. He only lived here, in these specific mountains of Cameroon, and nowhere else in the entire world.



Pa Nji pointed to where Turie was nibbling on small wild fruits. "Turie and his family are the guardians of the forest," he explained. "But they are in danger, Manka'a. Their home is getting smaller every year because people are cutting down the trees for firewood and farms."



Manka'a looked around and saw a patch of land where the trees had been cleared away. The ground looked lonely and bare without the shade of the leaves. She felt a pinch in her heart. If the forest disappeared, where would Turie sleep? Where would he find his favorite fruits? Without the forest, the beautiful songs would fall silent.





Suddenly, Turie fluttered down to a lower branch, much closer to Manka'a than ever before. He tilted his head, looking at her with his bright eyes. Manka'a realized that the birds couldn't speak for themselves. They needed a friend to help protect their habitat so they could keep the Highlands green and full of life.





Pa Nji knelt down and picked up a small seed that Turie had dropped. "The birds do more than just sing," he told Manka'a. "When they eat fruit and fly across the mountains, they drop seeds in new places. Turie is a gardener! He plants the very trees that keep our air clean and our water flowing."



Manka'a decided she wouldn't just wait for the trees to grow. She and Pa Nji spent the whole afternoon gathering seeds and planting young saplings in the clearing. "Every tree we plant is a new room in Turie's house," Manka'a said proudly as she patted the soil around a tiny stem.



Years later, the clearing was gone, replaced by a grove of tall, strong trees. Manka'a stood on the same hill where she used to whistle, watching a whole family of Turacos fly over the forest. The Highlands were safe, the water was cool, and the "kow-kow-kow" of the forest king echoed louder and more joyfully than ever before.

