

Honorable Mention – Children’s Fiction

Foluso O’Dwyer
*Rheni and the
Little Green Bird*

Rheni and the Little Green Bird

Long time ago in a town far away, somewhere in Africa; there lived a girl with her parents.

They were very poor and could not buy fancy clothes and toys for her.

Rheni was her name. She was beautiful, kind and always happy; at least most of the time. She sometimes wished she had beautiful clothes like some of the other girls she knew. But, she reasoned with herself 'that means I have to have a different father and mother'.

No, no, and no! she told herself. I would not trade my father and mother for any other in the world! They are the most loving father and mother in the whole wide world. Rheni's face brightened as these thoughts came to her mind. She wondered if her other 6-year old friends' fathers still throws them up in the air like her father does.

Whenever she could, Rheni would look at and play with everything around her that was beautiful and free and would not cost her parents any money.

She would pluck beautiful wild flowers and put them in her hair.

She watched colorful birds fly in the sky and wished she could have beautiful clothes. 'Oh! how I would love to dress in fancy clothes' she said to herself.

The butterflies were her favorite. But, they were impossible to catch!

They do not fly so high like the birds. They stop often and land on the flowers. But as soon as Rheni got near to catch them, they flew away.

'I will not give up trying to catch the butterflies', she told her mother one day. 'They have to let me know how they make their wings so colorful'.

Rheni's parents tried to explain to her that birds, butterflies and flowers were created that way but that people have to work and get a lot of money so that they can buy fancy, colorful clothes. But, Rheni could not understand.

One night, it rained and rained and rained. Rheni slept deeply and woke up late. Her mother allowed her to sleep as there was no school that day.

When Rheni finally woke up, the sun was high up in the sky. The birds were singing on the trees and there were butterflies everywhere.

"I am going to catch butterflies at the backyard", she called out to her mother as she dashed out of the house.

As always, the butterflies flew away before Rheni could catch them.

Suddenly, she noticed a bright green color under the bushes. A fallen butterfly, she thought. She tip toed near it, careful not to scare the butterfly away.

When she was within reach, she grasped the butterfly.

"Oops"! She muttered, "It's not a butterfly! It's a little bird"

The bird was wet and cold. It wiggled weakly in Rheni's palm.

Rheni ran inside the house to show the bird to her mom.

"Rheni, this poor little bird is injured. Her nest probably got soaked with the rain yesterday and she fell down", her mother explained.

"What shall we do"? Rheni asked her mother.

“First, we will make her warm then we will feed her with bits of dry crumbs and seeds”, Rheni’s mother replied.

Rheni and her mother took care of the little green bird for five days.

On the sixth day, the bird’s wings fluttered and she hopped around the room.

The next day, she flew around the room and perched on the windowsill looking out through the closed window.

“The bird is now well enough to go back into the wild,” Rheni’s mother told her.

Rheni reluctantly opened the window and the bird flew away. She was sad to see the bird leave.

~~Rheni and the little green bird. Page 3~~

Not long afterwards, the king sent out an announcement.

He needed six-year old boys and girls to perform a chore in his palace. Whoever did best would be given a lot of money and his or her family will become very rich.

There was a lot of excitement in the town. No one knew what the chore was but everyone wanted to be rich.

Rheni was 6 years old and her family could do with some money too.

The boys and girls will stay in the king’s palace for four weeks. They would each have a room. The king’s servants will bring their meals to their rooms. They will not be allowed to talk to anyone. They will stay in their rooms and perform the chore all by themselves.

“I cannot do without seeing my brothers and sisters and parents for four whole weeks!” some of the children said.

“I cannot stay in a room by myself”, some others said.

Rheni said to her parents, “I am going to carry out the king’s chore. I am going to miss you terribly but I want you to be rich”.

“That’s so sweet of you dear, but nobody has any idea what the chore is”.

“Maybe it is drawing a picture”, Rheni’s mother said.

“A picture”? Both Rheni and her father asked at the same time.

“Well, if they are to draw on a very large cardboard; I suppose it will take several days to complete”, she answered.

They talked about it for a long time and so did several families, but no one knew the answer.

Rheni went to register for the competition along with other children.

A few days later, one of the king’s messenger came to inform Rheni’s parents that she was among the ten children chosen for the competition.

Finally, the great day arrived. The king’s messenger went from door to door and collected all ten children.

They said tearful goodbyes to their parents but soon settled down to make friends with each other before they each went to their individual rooms.

They told themselves that it would be nice to live in the palace for four weeks and that they might even be treated like princes and princesses for four weeks.

They had their first meal together and were then led to their individual rooms.

Rheni’s room like the other rooms was beautiful. It had a beautiful bed, a bathroom, a small porch overlooking a beautiful garden and a beautiful side table on which sat a small plant.

‘I could sleep in that bed all day’, Rheni thought to herself as she touched the beautiful soft bed covers.

“That will be all for now, Rheni”, the king’s housekeeper said.

Rheni jumped into attention. She has not been listening to the lady.

“Pardon me ma’am, I was not paying attention”.



The housekeeper smiled, "I said your chore is to take care of the plant by your bedside and bring it with you when your four weeks is over".

Rheni looked at the housekeeper in disbelief. She looked from the woman to the plant and from the plant to the.....

It was then she realized that the woman has left the room.

.....take care of the plant by your bedside..... The Housekeeper's voice seemed to echo in the room over and over again.

Rheni moved near the side table and looked at the plant. "It is a real plant", she said to herself. When she first entered the room, she thought the plant was a decoration. How does one take care of a plant? It is not a pet. I doubt if I can share my meals with her. Is it even a boy or a girl? Are plants even girls and boys?

These thoughts raced through Rheni's mind as she sat down on the carpet looking at the plant.

Knock, knock, knock, the door opened and a servant brought in breakfast.

Rheni woke up. She had fallen asleep on the floor!

A day has passed and she has no clue yet how to take care of the plant.

Mothers sing to their babies, she thought. Since the plant was so tiny, maybe singing some songs will make it grow.

Rheni sang and sang for the next two days but the plant did not grow.

Next, she thought of clapping to cheer the plant into growing.

Clap, clap, clap, she went on all day until her hands were sore. But, the plant failed to grow.

She then came up with a bright idea! She was going to dance and make the plant happy enough to grow. After all, everybody said she was a good dancer.

Rheni danced and danced all day and night for a whole day until her body ached.

The plant did not seem to grow.

She woke up one morning very sad. She has been in the palace for five days and the plant was not growing.

She opened the the door to the porch and stood outside on the porch. "The plant is not growing, I am very sad", she said to herself.

There was a little green bird who saw Rheni as she stepped out onto the porch.

The bird wondered if this was the girl that helped take care of him a long time ago.

He perched on the porch to take a closer look but poor Rheni did not take any notice. She was too sad.

The bird saw that Rheni was very sad.

Just then, Rheni repeated that the plant was not growing.

'Chick, chick, chick, give it some water, give it some water, make it grow, chick, chick, chick'.

Rheni was startled! There was a green bird on the porch! As she turned round to look at the bird, it flew away.

She wondered what she heard when the bird was singing.

'Did he say, give it some water, make it grow'? She asked herself.

She decided to try some water. If it does not work, then it will be added to the list of the things she tried.

After a few days of watering, Rheni could see that the plant was growing.

She stood on the porch again wishing she could see the green bird and thank him.

The green bird was up on a big tree watching Rheni. She did not look sad. Her plant must be doing better, he thought.

'Chick, chick, chick, Give it some sunshine, put him out on the porch, chick, chick, chick,' Rheni turned round quickly. All she saw was the green tail of a bird flying away.

The following day, Rheni gave the plant some water and brought it with her to the porch.




GUTHRIE
GREENHOUSE
GROWN IN Guthrie, Oklahoma 73044
11.03 FL OZ (325 mL)

'Dry leaves, dry leaves, plants love to eat dry leaves. Chick, chick, chick', the bird sang the next day.

Dry leaves? Rheni was sure she heard the words correctly, but how would she get dry leaves when she was not allowed to leave the room! The plant has no mouth that she could see, so how is the plant going to eat the dry leaves?

Rheni tossed in her bed all night long. Her little mind could not sleep.

In the morning, she suddenly thought of an idea.

When the king's servant brought in her breakfast, Rheni asked her if she could request for a special side dish in the afternoon.

"I will have to check with the head cook" she replied

"And what will that be?" she asked.

"Some dry leaves in a bowl" Rheni replied.

The servant opened her eyes wide in disbelief but because she was used to not questioning the Royal household, she quietly left the room.

Rheni watered her plant and brought it out onto the porch for the day's sunshine. She looked at the plant closely for a long time. She still could not figure out how the plant would eat the dry leaves.

Knock, knock, knock. "Your lunch tray is here", announced the servant.

As soon as the door closed after the servant, Rheni flipped open the food tray. True enough, in place of the desert, there was a medium sized bowl filled with dry leaves!

Bowl in hand, she dashed onto the porch gazing from one tree to the other to see if by chance the green bird would be there to tell her what to do.

She forgot all about her lunch and sat looking at the bowl of dry leaves. She must have dozed off as she felt a gentle breeze and her eyes opened.

'Chick, chick, chick. Rheni eats bread crumbs; plant eats leaf crumbs. Chick, chick, chick. Crumble, crumble, crumble, chick, chick, chick'.



Rheni took a dry leaf in between her two palms and crumbled it. To her surprise, it turned almost to dust! She emptied it all onto the plant. The crumbled leaf almost all fell onto the sand in the pot.

She looked at the mess she made. "The leaf is hardly visible anymore," she said to herself.

She crumbled all the remaining dry leaves and poured it on the plant. Then she watered the plant as usual and left it on the porch in the sunshine.

All day, she wondered if she did the right thing.

Towards the end of the day she suddenly heard:

'Chick, chick, chick, way to go Rheni! Way to go Rheni! Chick, chick, chick'.

She looked up quickly and saw her little friend and teacher flying off.

Yes, friend and teacher! She has been thinking of the little green bird as a teacher and friend.

For several days, Rheni continued giving the plant some water and bringing it out into the sunshine.

The plant grew and grew. By now, Rheni can now actually see that the plant is bigger and greener.

'Chick, chick, chick, way to go Rheni! Way to go Rheni!' was the bird song that filled the air.

Finally, the four weeks ended. It was time to bring out the boys and girls for the king to see each and everyone's plants.

Rheni's plant was green, big and beautiful. But, what if everyone's was bigger?

She did not know what to do for one whole week!

"I have tried my best", she said to herself.

She carried her plant carefully with both hands and walked into the hall.

"Ahh"!!! People gasped as she entered.

There were a lot of people seated and most of the other boys and girls were in the room with their plants.

Rheni's plant was by far the most beautiful.

The king called her out and gave her the reward.

A very happy Rheni ran towards her parents, she could not wait to tell them about the green bird.