

# *A Bird Named Topaz*



By Kaluba Emma Musakanya

*Once upon time*, in a faraway forest, lived a little wood nymph bird named Topaz. Her teal wings shone like jewels in the light of the sun and her breast feathers were the colour of violets. Topaz used to fly free in the sky with not a care in the world. Her only desire was to sing out her sweet and melodious tune for all to hear. The other birds so envied it. What they did not realise was that even though her sound was sweet, the hidden words of her song were not. Topaz's heart was heavy and full of emptiness but she laced those feelings with the honey sounding melody.

Even though Topaz was a little bird, she had a big secret. *Her heart did not beat and it made her body cold.*

Every night, when the moon was high in the sky, she would look up and wonder, *'If my heart does not beat, am I alive? If my heart does not beat, will I ever feel warmth?'*

As time passed, causing the seasons to change from crimson leaves to ivory snow, the tune of her song grew colder than ice. Her high orchestral notes began to sound shrill and she could no longer hide the emptiness that filled her heart.

Her only hope, she finally decided, was to find help from the Dragon who lived in the belly of Fire Mountain.

The Dragon sold promises to the forest animals to fulfil their hearts' deepest desires and the creatures of the forest followed him because they believed his lies. Loathing consumed the Dragon's soul, but his words were full of charm which drew the unknowing animals in.

Little Topaz knew no better.

While the forest was sleep, Topaz flew into the mouth of Fire Mountain.

The heat filled the mountain as it spewed ash and smoke, but Topaz felt nothing; she only shivered from the cold.

When she reached the belly of the mountain, she came face to face with the Dragon. He was waiting patiently, for he had known she would come.

The Dragon was long and sinewy, with a tail that split into three, like a pitchfork. It waved back and forth as he lay there covered in the molten lava.

*“Tell me little bird,”* the dragon inquired. *“What can I do for you?”*

*“Oh Dragon, I feel so cold and empty,”* chirped Topaz. *“What will make this feeling stop? I bask in the light of the sun all day, yet my body remains cold and my heart unmoving in my chest. I desire warmth, Dragon. I just wish to feel warm.”*

*“Fly to the sun, young bird,”* said the Dragon in a hypnotic voice. *“The sun is large and warm. It is so large that even you will not be able to withstand the heat it gives off.”* The Dragon smiled with a false kindness that Topaz did not notice.

*“But if it’s so hot, won’t the sun burn me?”* she asked worriedly.

*“Of course not! You will feel warm and not so alone. Fly into the sun little bird and let your heart begin to beat. This is the only way for you to find the happiness you seek.”* There was a masked darkness in his eyes as he spoke and his grin grew. *“So, my little wood nymph, fly.”*

Poor little Topaz listened to the dragon and did what he suggested.

Every day she would fly towards the sun. Higher and higher she flew, telling herself that if she could just touch the sun, then maybe the song in her heart would be happy and her body would feel warm.

When her fellow forest creatures saw her actions, they understood what little Topaz was doing because they, too, had tried to reach the sun. They knew she

would be hurt, but they knew she was stubborn and would need to learn the lesson for herself.

There were a few in the forest, however, who did not want the little bird to learn such a horrible lesson and they tried to stop her, but she refused to listen to them.

They said to her, *“Little bird, please don’t fly to the sun, you will get burned.”*

*“Little bird do you not know that before you reach the sun, you’ll freeze in the black abyss beyond our world?”*

*“Little bird if you fly out in the open, there are great big predators who will see you and hurt you.”*

There was one warning, more alarming than all of the others, which lingered like a constant doubt in her mind.

It was her conscience and it whispered, *“Little Bird, the Dragon lied to you.”*

Topaz would stubbornly shake her head until the thought would fall to the ground and she yelled at all those who tried to dissuade her.

*“Can’t you see that everything I want is up there?”* She would flap her tiny wings hard and fast in childish frustration. *“All I see is a great big world and a sun that will give me peace. Can’t you see it is where I must go?!”*

It was impossible to stop her. All her friends could do was watch, knowing the danger she was putting herself in. Day by day they watched her flying higher and higher until the fateful day came; Topaz, the little wood nymph, had finally got close enough to the sun and was burnt.

Like the Dragon had said, the sun was too large for her to not feel its warmth, but as its ferocious heat began to pass through her, she realised her heart was still not beating. The sun’s rays beat so hot on her wings and she knew she was too close.

But it was too late!

Fear washed over her and she frantically tried to fly away, but the sun's fire had caught on her wings and began to burn them.

She yelled out in pain, but she was too far away to be heard and her feathers slowly began to fall.

She came crashing down from the sky and landed heavily on the ground. Her wings had been burnt to black and the topaz in her feathers was no longer there.

Unable to move, she lay on the ground, waiting for help. Her song had been taken from her and she wept.

*"Topaz what happened?"* asked the wisest Hare in the forest when he saw her injured body. He was old and grey with eyes that did not see so well, but he had seen her terrible fall. The Hare had been one of those who warned her before, and it saddened him to see her like this.

Topaz sobbed and sobbed and through her tears she choked: *"The sun burnt me. The Dragon promised me warmth but the sun took my wings from me. They are broken and burnt and I will never fly again. And I still feel so cold."*

The wise Hare looked down at Topaz's wings. He did not have the heart to tell her that though the feathers would grow back, their topaz would be gone forever. Even though her wings would mend, she would never fly again.

Instead, he gently gathered her up and treated the wounds on her little body. As her wounds began to heal, Topaz only used her pain as an excuse to sulk and be unruly.

The Hare could see that this would do her no her no good and so he made a decision to send Topaz away to another land.

*"No good will come of her being here. Perhaps if she is away from this place she will find a new path,"* he told the other animals.

A large Crow allowed Topaz to fly on his back to make her journey easier.

It took three days for them to arrive in that other land and for three days Topaz thought about how different things would have been if she had not listened to the Dragon.

When the crow landed, Topaz hopped off. As she looked around, she recognised that land. She had lived there when she was a hatchling with her family. Much time had passed since she had last been there and many things had changed.

Her wings were almost fully healed, but there was still an ache in her heart. Day and night she would wander the forest to continue her search for a cure, but she found nothing.

She searched and searched until one day, she stumbled upon an ancient Yew tree.

All kinds of creatures would gather around the Yew tree and Topaz longed to know the secrets it held. Stories would be told about how this was a place for the sick and the weak and for the humble and meek. It was place where you could learn about a great magic; the most powerful magic in the world.

Whenever she could, little Topaz would visit the Yew tree, desperate to know more about this magic. She had heard that the magic was from the Phoenix, whom the Yew tree belonged to. He was the only Phoenix to ever exist in this world and he was the one who held the magic inside himself.

Many years before, the Phoenix had been burnt for claiming that he alone could control the magic he had. Threatened, the forest animals had burnt him. But just when they all thought he had died, he rose from his ashes and his ashes now protected those whom he loved. His ashes brought healing to them and changed them from the inside out. He made all their broken pieces whole.

Nothing else could do this.

Topaz listened to the stories of how his ashes would give you another life; a life to follow him and to be more like him.

*“It’s magic!”* Topaz whispered to herself one day in awe as she stared at the tree in wonderment.

A large Eagle overheard her and she replied, *“It is magic.”*

Topaz stared at the Eagle and saw that she had a scar across her one eye and she only stood on one leg. But Topaz noticed that she stood tall and seemed to be at peace.

*“But if the Phoenix’s ashes make you new, why do you still only have one leg? Would your leg not have grown back and your scars be taken from you?”* asked Topaz.

The Eagle responded, *“My leg was not what needed to be fixed, it was my heart. None of our hearts are whole until the Phoenix makes them whole for us.”*

*“But if I cannot fly I am not whole, and if you have one leg you are whole not either,”* said Topaz.

*“If you are at peace Topaz, you won’t need to fly. The Phoenix can fix your heart and change your desires. You will exist in a peace that you never knew was possible and your heart will be full.”*

Topaz listened intently, but she was still curious about the Eagle and so she asked, *“How did you lose your leg?”*

*“A serpent caught it and wouldn’t let go. The Phoenix saved my life. Not having my leg reminds me of where I would have been if it were not for him.”*

That night, when Topaz had asked so many questions about the Phoenix, she went to her nest and tears fell from her eyes. *If only she knew about the Phoenix and his gift. If only someone had told her about him before.*

But for the first time she was filled with hope because she understood that following the Phoenix would be the only thing that would give her a new song to sing.

And then she heard it.

There was a thud in her chest that had never been there before. It was soft and steady, like a drum, and she knew what it was.

It was sound of her heartbeat. She suddenly felt the warmth of blood rush in her veins and she knew that her life had just began.

As the days passed, Topaz would visit the Yew tree. The creatures who gathered there could see that she was changed and they celebrated with her. And yet, despite all the goodness around the Yew tree and from its creatures, Topaz still couldn't shake the guilt of flying too close to the sun and listening to the Dragon.

Something inside her kept her from sharing how she felt. So instead of confiding in others, she would go to the Yew tree and talk to all her forest friends, but she would never tell them about how close she had flown to the sun. She hid that secret in her heart. She thought they would not understand why she had been so foolish and reckless.

*"How could they ever understand my actions?" she would say to herself. "They all seem so perfect and happy. They would not know what it's like to have broken and burnt wings as a constant reminder of who you once were."*

Instead of opening up, she did her best to hide her wings. But they were still there and with each passing day, she felt more guilty and more alone. She desperately wanted to tell one of the other creatures why her wings got burnt. She wanted to share her pain, but she was too scared of what they would say to her. She feared they would mock her and judge her and so Topaz made a decision that day to keep it all to herself.

One day her sadness became deep and strong and as she visited the Yew tree, a bright bushy-tailed Fox passed her and asked, *“Are you well little Topaz? Tell me what’s wrong”*.

All Topaz could do was cry. Still too afraid of what others would think, she shook her head violently and in a tiny voice said, *“I will be fine.”*

At night, Topaz would cry herself to sleep in her nest, feeling terribly lonely and isolated, despite having a whole new family at the Yew tree. Her shame grew more and it made Topaz go to the Yew tree less and less.

After a few weeks of Topaz not visiting the Yew tree, a little maroon canary, named Red, came to the shrubbery where Topaz lived. Red was full of energy and sang happily wherever she went. She built a temporary nest opposite Topaz just for two nights because Red needed to pick some flowers that grew by the shrubbery. She chattered to Topaz about many things; sharing things about herself that Topaz would have never expected.

Topaz thought to herself, *“I think I can share things with Red too, things that have been weighing on my heart.”* She began to share with Red, but she did not share about flying to the sun.

When Red left two days later, Topaz went to bed that night thinking. *“Perhaps I have made a friend.”* She went to sleep and in her dream she heard a loud and soothing voice call her name.

*“Topaz,”* it called to her. *“My little Topaz.”*

In her dream Topaz was staring at the magnificence of the large Phoenix who looked down at her. His wings were so wide that as they flapped, the trees shook and the mountains moved. The feathers of his body were gold and silver plated. They shone ever so brightly. His eyes were like the embers of a flame.

She cowered, afraid, but the Phoenix’s voice was gentle when he spoke.

*“Little Topaz, why have you let the sadness in your heart continue for so long? Why have you not sought out comfort?”*

Confused, Topaz blinked a few times and spoke softly. *“I- I don’t want it to continue. I have tried to speak to the other animals at the Yew tree, but how could they understand?”*

*“What could they not understand, Topaz?”* asked the Phoenix gently.

Topaz felt ashamed and hid her face away from the Phoenix.

*“I know all the anguish you feel. I am the one that gave your heart pulse and gave it the warmth you so desperately desired. I know all its pain and yet you still do not even tell me about your sorrow?”*

*“I was so ashamed,”* admitted Topaz, hanging her head low.

*“The comfort you searched for was from the other animals, but you did not seek comfort in me. My wings can shake the mountains from the Earth and remove even the strongest tree from its roots; they are your shelter. My chest is as broad as the ocean and stronger than diamonds; it is your shield.*

*My back can lift the world and the air in my lungs breathed life into you; it is your strength. You heard all these stories about me. Why did you not come to me first?”*

*“Oh Phoenix I am sorry. I did not know any better. I was foolish. I thought I was wise once my heart began to beat, but now I see that there is still so much to learn and understand. The loneliness has been overwhelming me because I believed I could not tell the others about my wings and I did not even think to tell you first.”*

*“Topaz, if you give me your burden, I will carry it for you. You can only handle the trials in your life once I hold them with me.”* The Phoenix’ kind eyes looked at Topaz with such love and compassion that Topaz was broken in spirit by her foolishness.

*“Little one, those at the Yew tree are your family. If you want be able to share your burdens with them, you need to show you care. They are there to love you, but you must love them first without any expectations. Or will you continue to judge them unfairly?”*

*“What if they don’t accept me?”* argued Topaz.

*“I accepted you and that is far more valuable than any acceptance you will receive from the other animals. And next time, Topaz, seek comfort from me first or you will always feel alone.”*

The Phoenix began to raise his great wings and fly into the sky. *“Do not judge the others in the Yew tree. They might pleasantly surprise you.”*

Topaz watched as the mountains gave way and even the sky itself seemed to open as the Phoenix flew away. He was glorious. He seemed to shine like the sun.

The next morning, Topaz woke up and remembering her dream, rushed off to the Yew tree, determined to find Red.

Once she did, she told her what had happened when she listened to the Dragon and had flown too close to the sun. She also told Red about the guilt that had overwhelmed her and made it hard for her to go to the Yew tree. She shared that sometimes it was still painful for her to accept the fact that she would never fly again and that her feathers would no longer shine like topaz.

Empathy filled Red and she hugged Topaz, holding her for a long time.

*“I cannot give you your wings back, but I can give you my friendship and hopefully that will help the next time something is lost to you,”* whispered Red.

There was no judgment from Red, only kindness. She was just willing to listen and she cried with Topaz. Red’s tears showed Topaz such tender love and she continued to care for her new friend with no expectations.

Topaz realised how wrongly she had judged Red and knew she had accused all the animals of the Yew tree unfairly. She understood what the Phoenix had told her and began to try, little by little, to show them love.

And as she did that, the most surprising thing happened - many of them showed her love and kindness back. The truth was many of them already loved Topaz, but she had chosen not to see it before.

Over time, Red and Topaz became birds of a feather.

One particular day, Red met a lovely swan whom she told Topaz about. *“We like this swan, her name is Plum,”* Red would always say.

Eventually Topaz met Plum and Red was right, she was lovely. She was tall and slender and loved being surrounded by lilac flowers. Her feathers were plum coloured with shining highlights and she glided around her lake with gentle speed. She was just as kind to Topaz as Red had been, and in time, when they became good friends, she said to Topaz, *“I think I will keep you.”*

And just like that, Topaz, who had no friends, now had two friends who loved her dearly. Topaz’ friends became her family and her little family grew with all types of birds from all over the forest.

As her new family kept growing, Topaz knew she would eventually need to return to her home where she had burnt her wings. She had to face her past. This time the journey was only hard because of her special friends she left behind.

The animals of her old forest had not forgotten about how many times Topaz had flown too close to the sun and how she had ignored their warnings.

Sometimes they reminded her, and other times they did not. Topaz soon found out that she was not the only one there who had burnt her wings.

The difference was that her heart had been made whole and she no longer worried about her burnt wings because the Phoenix had taken care of making sure she was complete on the inside.

Even though she was far away from her new family and friends, she never felt as alone as she had before the Phoenix's magic and filled her heart with warmth and peace.

She also knew that when she sang her song, whether it was one of sadness or of happiness, it would be heard by her friends and it would be full of joy.

But first and foremost, it would be heard by the Phoenix and that is what mattered most.

*The End*

# *A Bird Named Topaz*

A story for 8-11 year olds

Topaz is a little bird who has a big secret. Her story begins when she visits Fire Mountain and follows the Dragon's advice and she flies too close to the sun. Now she has been banished to another land in order to hopefully find a cure for her cold and empty heart that doesn't beat. It is there that the sad little Topaz hears about the Phoenix from the forest creatures who live around the Yew tree and how her life and heart are changed in ways she never expected.

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About the author: [Kaluba Emma Musakanya](#)



*Kaluba is Zambian but has lived in South Africa, Japan, and Malaysia. She currently lives and works in in her hometown of Lusaka in Zambia. When she is not working, she loves writing, especially Fantasy and Science Fiction stories. Her other passion is drawing and illustrating. A Bird named Topaz is her first children's story.*

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