

The Feather from Afar

One Sunday morning in a village called *Wellingara*, Kemo found a feather stuck in the orange tree behind his house. It was not like the feathers of the regular backyard birds. This one was a bright, shiny blue with a golden edge. It looked like a little piece of the sky had fallen right into his yard.

"Mba, look!" Kemo ran to the *bantaba* [shady meeting place] holding it up to the early sun. Mba adjusted his glasses. His eyes were old now and he looked at the soft feather. He smiled.

"Ah, a traveler left this. It belongs to a *Krinkrin*, Kemo. When it gets freezing cold across the big ocean, she flies thousands of miles just to find our warm sunshine."

Kemo stared at the tiny feather. "From another country? Just flying all by itself like that?"

"Yes," Mba said. "Birds know a secret that people forget. Maps have borders, but the wind and the trees don't. To a bird, the whole world is just one big home."

That afternoon, Kemo could not stop thinking about the traveler bird. He looked up. The sky was huge and blue. He wondered if another kid on the other side of the ocean was looking up at the exact same sky right now. He walked down to the community well to fetch water. He watched his bucket splash into the deep, cool water. Mba always said that clouds carry water across the sea, drop it on the ground as rain, and then scoop it back up into the sky.

Kemo dipped his fingers into the bucket. It felt cool. He thought about how this exact water could have been a raindrop on a leaf in a faraway jungle last month. Now, it was right here in his bucket.

The next morning, Kemo took his football down to the *Mboyo* field [football field]. He and his friends kicked the ball around, laughing and running, sharing a piece of tapalapa bread after football practice. The wind chased dust clouds across the dirt, blowing higher and higher until they went over the roofs. That same wind carried seeds from the baobab trees and wonjo plants, dropping them in new places to grow.

"Hey, Kemo! Catch!" shouted his friend Lamin, kicking the ball high. Kemo stopped the ball with his foot. He looked around and smiled. The cool wind on his face, the birds in the trees, and the water in the well all belonged to everyone. Nobody could buy the sky. Nobody could lock up the wind.

When he went home, Kemo carefully put the feather inside his favorite book. He did not need to catch the bird to keep it. Just knowing they shared the same world was enough. He sat under the *bantaba* [shady meeting place] as the sun went down, turning the clouds bright orange and purple.

The world felt huge, but also small enough to fit right inside his heart.