Many years ago I knew a little bird whose name was Tico. He would sit on my shoulder and tell me all about the flowers, the ferns, and the tall trees. Once Tico told me this story about himself:

When I was young, I had no wings. I sang like the other birds and I hopped like them, but I couldn't fly. Luckily, my friends loved me. They flew from tree to tree, and in the evening they brought me berries and fruits gathered from the highest branches.

Often I asked myself, “Why can’t I fly like the other birds? Why can’t I soar through the big blue sky over villages?”

And I dreamed that I had golden wings, strong enough to carry me over the mountains far away.

One summer night I was awakened by a noise. A strange bird was standing behind me.

“I am the wishingbird,” he said. “Make a wish and it will come true.”

I wished I had a pair of golden wings. Suddenly there was a flash of light and on my back there were wings, golden wings, shimmering in the moonlight. The wishingbird had vanished.

Cautiously I flapped my wings. And then I flew. I flew higher than the tallest tree. I was happy.

But when my friends saw me swoop down from the sky, they frowned on me and said, “You think you are better than we are, don’t you, with those golden wings. You wanted to be different.” And off they flew without saying another word.

Why were they angry? Was it bad to be different? I could fly as high as the eagle. Mine were the most beautiful wings in the world. But my friends had left me and I was very lonely.

One day I saw a man sitting in front of a hut. He was a basket maker and there were baskets all around him.

There were tears in his eyes. I flew onto a branch from where I could speak to him.

“Why are you sad?” I asked.
“Oh, little bird, my child is sick and I am poor. I cannot buy the medicines.”

“How can I help him?” I thought. And suddenly I knew. “I will give him one of my feathers.”

“How can I thank you!” said the poor man happily. “You have saved my child. But look! Your wing!”

Where the golden feather had been, there was a real black feather, as soft as silk.

From that day, little by little, I gave golden feathers away and black feathers appeared in their place.

I bought many presents—for a poor puppeteer, an old woman, and a fisherman who got lost at sea . . .

And when I had given my last golden feathers to a beautiful bride, my wings were black.

I flew to the big tree where my friends gathered for the night. Would they welcome me?

They chirped with joy. “Now you are just like us,” they said. We huddled close together.

I was so happy and excited. I couldn’t sleep. I remembered all the people I had helped with my feathers.

“Now my wings are black,” I thought, “and yet I am not like my friends. We are all different. Each for his own memories, and his own invisible golden dreams.”