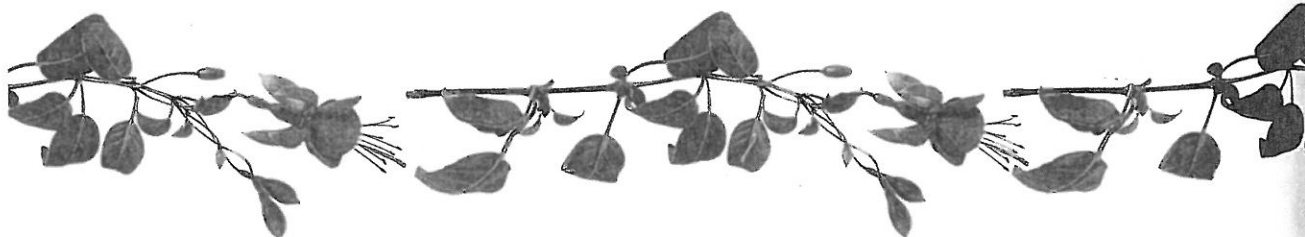


Hummingbirds in Thistle (1955), Walter Anderson. Watercolor. Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, Mississippi, courtesy of the family of Walter Anderson.





The Legend of the Hummingbird



retold by Pura Belpré

Between the towns of Cayey and Cidra,¹ far up in the hills, there was once a small pool fed by a waterfall that tumbled down the side of the mountain. The pool was surrounded by pomarosa trees,² and the Indians used to call it Pomarosa Pool. It was the favorite place of Alida, the daughter of an Indian chief, a man of power and wealth among the people of the hills.

1. Cayey (kā-yā') . . . Cidra (sē'drā): towns in Puerto Rico.

2. pomarosa (pô-mā-rô'sä) trees: trees, found in the West Indies, that bear an applelike fruit; also spelled *poma rosa*.

One day, when Alida had come to the pool to rest after a long walk, a young Indian came there to pick some fruit from the trees. Alida was surprised, for he was not of her tribe. Yet he said he was no stranger to the pool. This was where he had first seen Alida, and he had often returned since then to pick fruit, hoping to see her again.



*And the great
god Yukiŷū took
pity on her
and changed her
into a delicate
red flower.*

He told her about himself to make her feel at home. He confessed, with honesty and frankness, that he was a member of the dreaded Carib³ tribe that had so often attacked the island of Boriquen.⁴ As a young boy, he had been left behind after one of those raids, and he had stayed on the island ever since.

Alida listened closely to his story, and the two became friends. They met again in the days that followed, and their friendship grew stronger. Alida admired the young man's

courage in living among his enemies. She learned to call him by his Carib name, Taroo, and he called her Alida, just as her own people did. Before long, their friendship had turned into love.

Their meetings by the pool were always brief. Alida was afraid their secret might be discovered, and careful though she was, there came a day when someone saw them and told her father. Alida was forbidden to visit the Pomarosa Pool, and to put an end to her romance with the stranger, her father decided to marry her to a man of his own choosing. Preparations for the wedding started at once.

Alida was torn with grief, and one evening she cried out to her god: "O Yukiŷū,⁵ help me! Kill me or do what you will with me, but do not let me marry this man whom I do not love!"

And the great god Yukiŷū took pity on her and changed her into a delicate red flower.

Meanwhile Taroo, knowing nothing of Alida's sorrow, still waited for her by the Pomarosa Pool. Day after day he waited. Sometimes he stayed there until a mantle⁶ of stars was spread across the sky.

One night the moon took pity on him. "Taroo," she called from her place high above the stars. "O Taroo, wait no longer for Alida! Your secret was made known, and Alida was to be married to a man of her father's choosing. In her grief she called to her god, Yukiŷū; he heard her plea for help and changed her into a red flower."

"Ahee, ahee!" cried Taroo. "O moon, what is the name of the red flower?"

3. Carib (kär'ŷb): a Native American people of the West Indies.

4. Boriquen (bô-rê'kën): an early name for Puerto Rico.

5. Yukiŷū (yôo-kê-yôô').

6. mantle: covering.

“Only Yukiú knows that,” the moon replied.

Then Taroo called out: “O Yukiú, god of my Alida, help me too! Help me to find her!”

And just as the great god had heard Alida’s plea, he listened now to Taroo and decided to help him. There by the Pomarosa Pool, before the moon and the silent stars, the great god changed Taroo into a small many-colored bird.

“Fly, *Colibrí*,⁷ and find your love among the flowers,” he said.

Off went the *Colibrí*, flying swiftly, and as he flew, his wings made a sweet humming sound.

In the morning the Indians saw a new bird darting about among the flowers, swift as an arrow and brilliant as a jewel. They heard the humming of its wings, and in amazement they saw it hover in the air over every blossom, kissing the petals of the flowers with its long slender bill. They liked the new bird with the music in its wings, and they called it Hummingbird.

Ever since then the little many-colored bird has hovered over every flower he finds, but returns most often to the flowers that are red. He is still looking, always looking, for the one red flower that will be his lost Alida. He has not found her yet. ❖

7. *Colibrí* (kò-lē-brē’).



Pura Belpré

1899–1982

“My vivid imagination . . . kept scenes that impressed me as a child very alive.”

Filling a Need Pura Belpré, author and puppeteer-storyteller, was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States in the 1920s. Beginning in 1921, she worked in the New York Public Library as that library’s first Hispanic librarian. Belpré realized there were no books of folklore from Puerto Rico on the shelves. She set about expanding the library’s Puerto Rican folklore programs.

Honored Storyteller Belpré grew up in a family of storytellers and was fluent in Spanish, English, and French. She incorporated her Spanish ancestry into her puppet shows as well as her books to provide young people with a way of learning more about Puerto Rican culture. Her other works include *Juan Bobo and the Queen’s Necklace: A Puerto Rican Folk Tale* and *Once in Puerto Rico*. In 1978 Belpré was honored for her distinguished contribution in Spanish literature by the Bay Area Bilingual Education League and the University of San Francisco.