



# A friend to birds

A story written by Michel Piquemal (based on an Algonquian tale)  
and illustrated by Sophie Beer



**S**tag Heart lived with Little Moon, but they had no children.

This made them very unhappy.

So one morning, when Little Moon announces that she is expecting a baby, Stag Heart is overjoyed.

At last, Little Moon gives birth... and it's a boy.

Stag Heart is as proud as can be. "One day, this child will become the chief of our tribe!" he rejoices.

Stag Heart visits a shaman sorcerer, and asks him to find a name for his son, a name fit for a mighty chief.

The shaman takes the child in his arms, then raises him in the air, exclaiming, "Welcome among us... Little Bird!"







Little Bird? How disappointing for Stag Heart to hear this!  
That isn't the name of a mighty chief!  
All the same, Stag Heart decides that he will make a great hunter of his son.  
As soon as Little Bird can stand up on his legs, Stag Heart begins to train him.  
He teaches him to walk long distances in the forest without making noise.  
He teaches him to swim in freezing water.  
He makes him a bow and gives him hunting lessons every day. His father tries  
to teach him to shoot arrows, but Little Bird always misses the target.  
Little Bird is a dreamer. He often has his head in the clouds, as if fascinated  
by his friends in the sky. And his first words are, "Bird... Bird..."







Years go by... Stag Heart has to face the fact: Little Bird will never be a great hunter.

So Stag Heart decides to turn him into a warrior.

He trains him to wrestle, but the child doesn't try hard and always ends up flat on the ground.

Stag Heart feels desperate. He is sure of one thing. It's that name "Little Bird" that is to blame.

So Stag Heart decides to send his son to the top of a hill. This is where he will have to stay for several days. And if Little Bird dreams of a bear or another fearless animal, then he will be named after it instead. This is a custom of his people.



At dawn, Stag Heart accompanies his son to the top of the hill. "Listen to the voices of the forest," he orders. "Welcome the dreams they send you. And this way, you can take on the name of a strong bear or a fierce puma."

"But I prefer listening to birds singing," Little Bird replies.

"No!" shouts Stag Heart, and he returns to the village.



Little Bird stays alone. The trees are filled with birds who make such pretty music... With a smile on his face, Little Bird hums the words,

"feathers, feathers, feathers... wings... fly in the sky..."

Suddenly he spots, on a nearby branch, a lovely redbreast singing. Little Bird closes his eyes and falls asleep. He begins to dream...

Little Bird lifts off from the ground. Yes! He raises his arms to beat his wings... He feels enormous strength in his body. Strength that lets him fly to the sky.



The next day, following the orders of the village chief, Stag Heart agrees to go and fetch his son at the top of the hill.

But Little Bird has vanished. The whole tribe looks for Little Bird until nightfall.

The next day, they look for him again, shouting and calling out to him. But Little Bird is nowhere to be found.







After a few more days, the tribe decides to abandon their search. Only Stag Heart continues. He feels guilty. He begins to understand how harsh he was. At night in his dreams, Stag Heart often sees his son turning into a bird and flying free and happy in the sky.

One day, when Stag Heart is sitting near a spring, he notices a redbreast singing. He hears a few notes rising higher and higher, like a warning. "Does it want to tell me something?" Stag Heart wonders. He stands up and spins around suddenly, narrowly avoiding being pounced on by a cougar! He points his arrow at the beast and shoots it before it can jump again.





Stag Heart realised at that moment that the redbreast was his son! Little Bird protected him from the cougar. Gradually, his heart began to feel lighter. And the whole clan was surprised, because Stag Heart the great hunter began to love music and birdsong!

**THE END**