

Story: The I'iwi Who Disliked Getting Wet

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Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

She wasn't vain, though she might have been. Her feathers ranged from deep black with white accents to the fiery orange-red that complimented her long curved beak. In short, she was an i'iwi, and those are feathers any bird would wear with pride.

Some birds are vain, and those birds might settle and resettle their feathers with their beak or their feet. They might avoid rainfall that would slick their feathers across their body, which can end up looking pretty sad and messy. Wet red feathers might look shiny and glossy, but they might also look dull and out of place. There are birds who would worry about that.

She wasn't one of them. She kept herself neat because feathers in their places are more comfortable. She liked to greet other birds with some sense that she'd respected them by looking good. No, she wasn't vain. But.

She didn't like getting wet. She didn't like it much at all.

Wet feathers might be glossy or they might be dull, but mostly she thought they were chilly and cold. And, well, wet. She didn't like the sensation of drops pooling along her skin. Feathers are pretty good at shedding water, but they're not as good as an umbrella or a raincoat. Eventually the rain seeps in, and she just didn't like it.

"Yuck," she said during one rainstorm. "I hate rain."

A friend heard her complaint, which she'd made many times before. "You always say that," he replied.

"I always hate rain," she said. "Always."

"Well, if you always hate rain," said her friend, "have you ever thought of finding shelter?"

As it happens, she'd tried it. She'd tried trees with thick canopies of leaves. The rain got through. She'd tried gaps in the branches. They let water in, too. The saddest failure had been when she found a lava tube and settled there. To her horror, the rain poured in through the opening and flooded floor. Water rising from below, she thought, wasn't any better than coming down from above. She told her friend so.

“Well, you can fly. Fly someplace without rain,” he told her, rather annoyed.

“All right. I will,” she said, and flew out into the rain.

Fortunately for her, she flew west across the center of the island toward Kona. I’m afraid she’d have found more rain, not less, here on the Hilo side. Sure enough, she found herself flying out from under the clouds as they exhausted their rain upon the slopes of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. Soon she flew over the sunny grasslands west of the mountains.

And she saw nothing to eat.

She flew back and forth, looking for ohī’a or mamane trees, and while she saw one or two, she certainly didn’t see a forest. It took a while for her to realize the truth: the trees she relied on relied in turn on rain. They needed the water that annoyed her, in order to provide her with the nectar that she needed.

Hungry, she turned back toward home, flying back beneath the clouds still shedding their rain. Back on the branch with her friend, she began sipping nectar from the damp flowers, with raindrops speckling her feathers.

“You’re back,” said her friend. “Didn’t you find sunshine?”

“I did,” she said, “but it turns out that rain isn’t so bad. At least the trees think so, and,” she paused to take another sip, “if they think so, I do, too.”

by Eric Anderson