

# Why the Parrot Repeats the Words of Men

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In the olden times when the earth was young, all the birds knew the language of men and could talk with them. Everybody liked the parrot, because he always told things as they were, and they called him the bird that tells the truth.

This bird that always told the truth lived with a man who was a thief, and one night the man killed another man's ox and hid its flesh.

When the other man came to look for it in the morning, he asked the thief, "Have you seen my ox?"

"No, I have not seen it," said the man.

"Is that the truth?" the owner asked.

"Yes, it is. I have not seen the ox," repeated the man.

"Ask the parrot," said one of the villagers. "He always tells the truth."

"O bird of truth," said they to the parrot, "did this man kill an ox and hide its flesh?"

"Yes, he did," answered the parrot.

The thief knew well that the villagers would punish him the next day, if he could not make them think that the parrot did not always tell the truth.

"I have it," he said to himself at last. "I know what I can do."

When night came he put a great jar over the parrot. Then he poured water upon the jar and struck it many times with a tough piece of oak. This he did half the night. Then he went to bed and was soon fast asleep.

In the morning the men came to punish him.

"How do you know that I killed the ox?" he asked.

"Because the bird of truth says that you did," they answered.

"The bird of truth!" he cried. "That parrot is no bird of truth. He will not tell the truth even about what happened last night. Ask him if the moon was shining."

"Did the moon shine last night?" the men asked.

"No," answered the parrot. "There was no moon, for the rain fell, and there was a great storm in the heavens. I heard the thunder half the night."

"This bird has always told the truth before," said the villagers, "but there was no storm last night and the moon was bright. What shall we do to punish the parrot?" they asked the thief.

"I think we will no longer let him live in our homes," answered the thief.

"Yes," said the others, "he must fly away to the forest, and even when there is a storm, he can no longer come to our homes, because we know now that he is a bird of a lying tongue."

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So the parrot flew away sorrowfully into the lonely forest. He met a mocking-bird and told him what had happened.

“Why did you not repeat men's words as I do?” asked the mocking-bird. “Men always think their own words are good.”

“But the man's words were not true,” said the parrot.

“That is nothing,” replied the mocking-bird, laughing. “Say what they say, and they will think you are a wonderful bird.”

“Yes, I see,” said the parrot thoughtfully, “and I will never again be punished for telling the truth. I will only repeat the words of others.”

1. What does the thief do at the start of the story?

2. Why do the villagers ask the parrot about the ox?

3. Why does the thief put the jar over the parrot's head, pour water over the jar, and strike it with a piece of oak?

4. What does the mockingbird say that people will think if the parrot just repeats what they say?

5. What do you think that this story says about human beings?

## **ANSWERS**

1. steals and kills another man's ox
2. because the parrot always tells the truth
3. to make the parrot think there was a storm that night
4. that the parrot is a wonderful bird
5. that humans are dishonest, shallow and self-absorbed