

Name: _____

A Persian Folktale

The Merchant and the Parrot

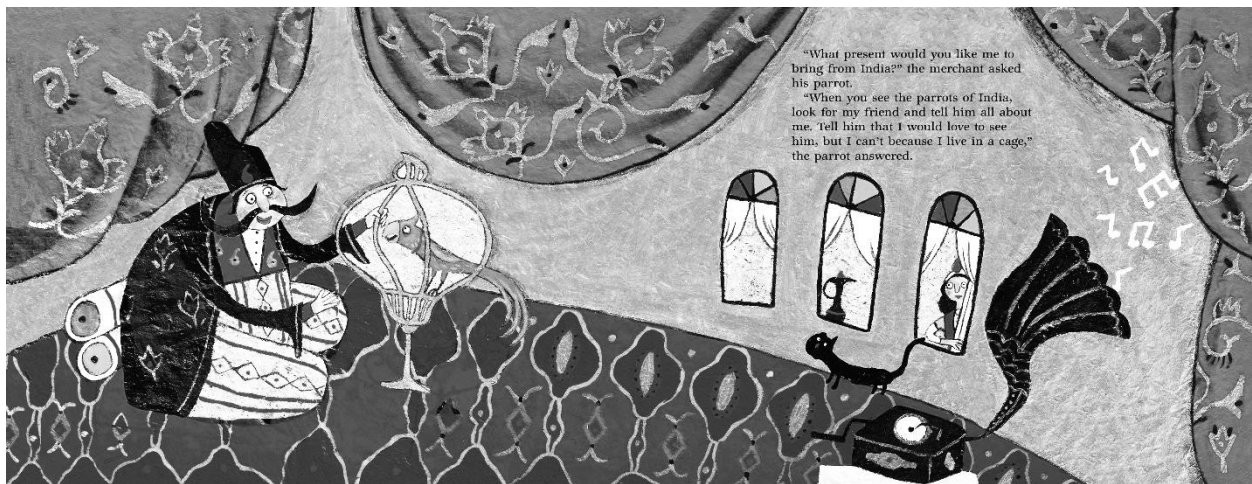
Once, long ago, in the land of Persia, there lived a wealthy merchant. This merchant owned an exotic parrot from India which he had gotten during one of his many trips to far off lands. He kept the parrot in a golden cage in his shop, where the bird was admired by everyone who saw it. For not only was the parrot exceptionally beautiful to look at, but it could talk and sing as well.



Now, the merchant loved the parrot dearly, and he did everything he could think of to keep the bird happy and content. Still, the parrot missed its home and longed to be back with its kind in the wild.

One day, the merchant decided to travel again to India to buy new goods for his shop. Before setting out on his journey, he asked his friends and family what they would like him to bring back for them.

He asked the parrot also, "What gift can I bring you from India, my pretty pet?"



"I don't want any gift," replied the parrot, "but when you pass through the Indian wilderness and see the wild parrots flying free, please give them a message from me: Ask if they remember me. Tell them I miss them terribly and wish I were there with them. Tell them I hope to return to India someday."

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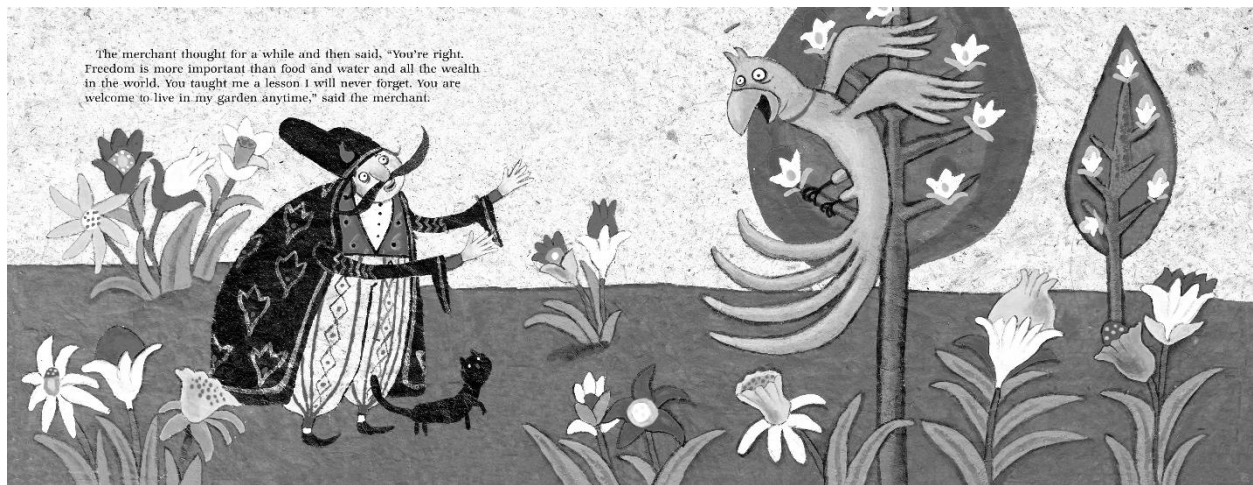
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"But, my dear parrot," said the merchant, "you have the nicest toys, all the food you can eat, and the most wonderful golden cage with swings, mirrors and bells."

"Yes," said the parrot, "be sure to tell the wild parrots about my golden cage."

"Of course," said the merchant. "I'll do all that you ask."

Sure enough, the merchant's trip to India took him through a thick tropical forest where he saw wild parrots playing and singing among the branches of the trees. The merchant called out to them and told them all about his own parrot and its wonderful golden cage. Then, true to his word, he delivered the parrot's message exactly as the parrot had given it to him.



The wild parrots listened to the merchant's words carefully. When he had finished with the message, the merchant asked the birds if any of them would like to send a reply to their cousin in Persia. But the birds only stared at him in silence, saying nothing.

Then, suddenly, one of the parrots began to tremble and shake. A moment later, it dropped out of its tree and fell to the ground. The other parrots flew down to it and started to cry, but the poor bird just lay there on its back with its tiny feet sticking up in the air.

The merchant felt certain that his words had somehow caused the little bird's death, and he sorely regretted having delivered the fateful message.

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When he got back to Persia, the merchant told his pet parrot the sad story of what had happened in the forest. He had no sooner finished speaking than the bird started to shake violently and fell off its perch—just as the parrot in the forest had done.

The merchant was stricken with grief. With tears in his eyes, he lifted the senseless bird out of its cage, thinking to bury it in the garden. But, no sooner was the parrot out of the cage, than it spread its wings and flew out an open window to safety of a tall tree.



"What's this?!" cried the amazed merchant. "Are you really alive?"

"Yes, alive and free," replied the bird. "The parrot you spoke of taught me how to gain my freedom. Thank you for bringing me his secret message. Now, I can rejoin my cousins in India. Goodbye." And with that, the parrot flew off, leaving the bewildered merchant to wonder over all that had happened.

THE END