

WHY THE PARROT REPEATS MAN'S WORDS

A tale from Thailand

In ancient times man kept lorikeets in their homes where they were taught to speak. These small birds were very intelligent. They learned to share their own thoughts, not just the words taught to them by man. But, one event occurred that changed all that.

It all began when a farmer saw one of his neighbor's buffalo's wandering in his rice field. The farmer killed and butchered the buffalo for himself. So as not to get caught, the farmer hid most of the buffalo meat in one of his out-buildings.

The next day, the neighbor came looking for his buffalo. When he asked the farmer if he had seen it, the farmer said he had not. Just then, the farmer's lorikeet spoke up. He told the neighbor that the farmer killed and butchered the buffalo and hid part of it in his out-building.

The neighbor looked in the out-building and found a butchered animal. The farmer said it was other meat, not the neighbor's buffalo. Because the neighbor didn't know who to believe (the farmer or the lorikeet) he took the matter to court. The trial was to

take place the next day.

The farmer who killed and butchered his neighbor's buffalo came up with a plan to save himself. That night he put his lorikeet into a large pot then placed a cloth over it. Outside it was clear and bright; with lots of shining stars and a full moon. Inside the bird saw nothing but darkness. Throughout the night the farmer tapped the pot and dripped water on it. In this way, the bird thought it was thundering and raining.

The next morning the farmer and his lorikeet went to his trial. The neighbor told the judge what the bird told him. The judge asked the bird to repeat its story; and it did. At this point, the farmer who killed and butchered his neighbor's buffalo asked the judge if he could trust the word of a bird over that of a man. He asked the judge to pose another question to the bird; such as what kind of night had just passed.

The judge agreed and asked the lorikeet what the past evening was like. The lorikeet told the judge it was dark and stormy. The farmer then asked if he was to be condemned on the testimony of this bird. The judge declared the farmer innocent. He also commanded that people no longer keep lorikeets in their homes to care for, as if they were part of their family.

Unfortunately, the man who killed and butchered his neighbor's buffalo was set free, and all lorikeets were sent back to the forest.

One day, parrots arrived in the forest. One told a lorikeet that his kind spoke the language of man. Lorikeet welcomed the parrots but warned them against man. Lorikeet told the parrot that if they go live with man, they should never speak their own minds; that they should only repeat back the words taught to them by man. Lorikeet told the parrot about the time that the farmer tricked it into thinking that a clear evening was stormy.

Parrot thanked the lorikeet for its council. So, when man learned about parrots and took them into their homes, the parrots only repeated words back to their humans. They never said out loud their true thoughts, least man resent them. To this day, parrots will only say words they are taught by people even though they are full of their own thoughts.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta.

Inspired by the following tale:

“Why the Parrot Repeats Man’s Words” found in, Best-Loved Folk-Tales of the World, selected and with an introduction by Joanna Cole. Illustrated by Jill Karla Schwarz; NY: Anchor Books, c1982, pp 563 – 565

