

## ***The Parrots Plight***

One day, the king was taking a walk in the garden with Tenali Ramanna. They talked with each other in a friendly manner and together admired the fleecy white clouds, the luxurious gardens, the colorful fruit laden trees and the flower scents that wafted through the air. The day was indeed very pleasant and the king couldn't have been in a better mood.

As they walked back to the palace, they heard a screeching noise. The king smiled as he recognized the screech. It came from his beloved and most cherished pet- the royal parrot. Ramanna also followed the king as he entered the palace. The parrot had a room of its own. Inside the room a beautiful golden cage stood embedded with all the precious stones.

The parrot, a very bright colored creature was sitting perched on a tiny swing made of gold. It wore a diamond necklace around its neck. It was beautiful bird and when it saw the king it began to talk like a good old friend. Ramanna noticed that the cage was carpeted with a lush Kashmir spread and the silver bowl that contained water for the parrot gleamed in the sun. An assorted selection of nuts and berries from all the corners of the land lay on a golden plate which bore the bird's name intricately carved in silver on the side.

The king spent a few minutes talking to his dream pet and Tenali stood silently beside them not uttering a word. The king seeing that Tenali remained silent asked him "What are you thinking Tenali?" "I am thinking about this parrot my Lord" he replied. "So what about him? Isn't he a beauty?" asked the King. "Yes, I guess he is Lord" replied Ramanna. "Of course he is!" There is no doubt about that. So what are you wondering at?" demanded the King. "I am wondering my Lord , if...." "Well what are you speculating Tenali ? Out with it soon. I am fed up with your long pauses and sighs," said the King, a little impatient that the usual quick was dragging. "Well, I was wondering whether the bird was happy, my Lord," replied Ramanna.

"Happy? You must be out of your mind Tenali!" thundered the King. "Look at this parrot. Is he not happy? See the finery with which he is surrounded. No other bird has the opportunity to perch on my fingers. No other bird in the entire

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universe has a cage like this. How dare you say that he is not happy!" "Forgive me my Lord for contradicting you," replied Tenali humbly, "but still I think that he is not happy deep within"

"Why on earth do you think so? Has he expressed anything to you?" asked the King a little concerned. "No, the parrot doesn't talk to me as he does to you my Lord. But I know that he is not happy. I do agree that your parrot has indeed everything a man could wish for. But he is a bird my Lord. And birds need to be up in the sky and not in a cage. Look at all those birds outside my Lord. I find your parrot looking at them quite often."

The King looked at the birds outside and said "He may not have the freedom to fly around like them. But he doesn't have to go searching for his food and shelter like the rest either. He is not unhappy for sure!"

"I may sound impudent my Lord, but I totally disagree with you on this. Birds should be free to fly and soar up in the sky. Golden cages can't replace the freedom they long for. It's very lonely for your parrot hereafter you have gone. Just imagine yourself my Lord in this place all shut up till someone comes to see you? Can you really be happy even if you had the best bed to lie on and the best food to eat?"

The King became angry and shouted "How dare you argue with me Tenali ? I know for sure that my parrot is happy. I will not agree with you." Unmoved by the angry king, Tenali simply replied, "I'll surely not agree this time with you either my Lord. Your parrot is downright miserable." The King couldn't bare it anymore. He became furious and screamed "Get out of my sight Tenali. I don't want to see your face ever again."

The King walked out of the room and shut it with a bang. He didn't go to the court. He missed his lunch, tea and dinner and none including the queen dared to go near him, afraid of his anger. The next morning the king woke up tired and hungry. His anger had cooled down to a great extent and he wanted to eat well to makeup for the previous day. He summoned his courtiers for food. After a while he heard a knock at the door. The door opened and in front of him

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stood a strange creature holding his food tray. The creature wore human clothes but his head was nothing but a blackened pot with 2 holes for the eyes. The king screamed in fright and yelled for his guards. All of them came and stood around the strange black creature not having courage to catch him. The king asked him, "Who are you? What brings you here to my place?" From inside the depths of the pot came a meek voice, "My Lord, your loyal servant Tenali Ramanna"

"Tenali Ramanna! How dare you come to me? I told you never to show your face again, isn't it?" thundered the king. "I have kept your orders my Lord. That's why I am wearing a pot on my head- to cover my face," replied the witty minister.

The king was so shocked to find Ramanna inside the pot that he stood speechless for a moment. Then his anger melted away and he burst out laughing. He laughed so hard till tears came rolling down his cheeks.

The guards and courtiers, who were terrified to even go near the king the previous day because of his anger, heaved a huge sigh of relief and grinned at each other, well pleased at the change in the King's mood. When he calmed down, the king said "Ramanna! How clever you are! Remove the pot off your head. I need to talk to you."

The king dismissed the guards and he pulled Ramanna to his room and said, ""Ramanna! Please forgive me. I have realized that I was wrong. I thought over whatever you said all through the night. Yes, birds do need their freedom indeed. The first thing we need to do this morning is to set him free. Please forgive me for being so angry with you. I shall never again do so."

"I am so glad to hear your decision my Lord," replied Ramanna removing the pot off his head." I hope and pray that your parrot is happy wherever he is. I am sure my Lord that even if you release him, he will come and visit you often in our gardens. He will not forget your friendship though he is free."

"I hope so Ramanna! But I will be happy even if he does not return. After all he belongs to the sky and not to a golden cage. And Ramanna, here is a bag of gold and gift for opening my eyes. Please do feel free to come to me whenever you wish. I am so proud to have you to advise me." Handing Ramanna the bag of gold, the King headed to the other end of his palace to release the parrot.