

## PARROT KING

**H**e emerged in a world of moist green.  
When he shouted, seeds and fruit came.

One day he stretched out his wide and  
brilliant new plumage, and away he flew.

**F**or three years he ruled the heights. His  
kingdom ranged from the jungle canopy  
to a low, treeless place where strange dull  
creatures lived in huge wooden nests. The  
creatures left seed offerings, until one day  
vines fell from the sky to trap his wings.

**H**e rode the vast, salt sea in an iron cage  
on a stinking wooden nest, calling down  
curses upon his captors. The iron snapped  
his scarlet tailfeathers and wore at his sharp  
beak before the taste of the air changed, and  
sounds arose, and the creaking nest ceased to  
push forward through the plunging waters.

**T**he cage bars carried him to a place of birds  
and creatures driven mad by iron. After some  
days he was taken to a dry and quiet room where  
a dry and quiet old woman fed him seeds and  
fruits, and taught him new and appealing sounds.  
Though her own plumage was grey and she cut his  
blue flightfeathers, he recited the sounds back to  
her, and she was happy. There he lived for many  
years, until the old woman grew drier and then  
altogether quiet. His cage went to a young man's  
nest where things were far less quiet, with shouting  
and passion and many others continuously in and  
out. Although they too were dull in plumage, they  
were pleased when the parrot repeated their sounds,  
and brought him tribute of sweet fruit and rich nuts.

**O**ne night men came to the nest, breaking its door  
to drag the loud young man away. They took the bird  
back to the place of mad creatures for a day, two days.

**A** man came then. They studied each other. A cloth  
went over the iron cage, and it moved. The air changed,  
and the old sounds of creaking wood returned. After a  
night, the cage moved, the cloth came off, the door was  
opened. But this time, the old woman was not there to  
clip the blue feathers. The bird beat his glorious wings in  
the air, and he flew, for the first time in years he flew—a  
swoop past the wooden deck, a circle around a great black  
ripple of skull and crossbones, then to the heights where taut  
vines hung from bare-leafed trees. Canvas grew all around.

The sun was hot; wind tickled his royal breastfeathers; he  
shouted a recitation in hard joy, surveying his new courtiers  
gathered below. Their crestfeathers ran from black to golden;  
their bodies were clothed in rainbow; their chief was as brilliant  
as the bird himself, with a plume even a king might envy.

**B**ut it was a pair of the creatures that most interested him: a  
man as grey as the old woman, but intense with energy, a woman  
as thin as the young man, but without the noisy passion. So  
the king of parrots took up his position at the top of the leafless  
trees, tipping his head at the grey man and the thin woman,  
sidling down the smooth, flat branch towards them.

**T**hey were quite the most interesting creatures  
he had seen since leaving his distant jungle.

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The Scarlet Macaw of this brief tale plays a role in **Pirate King**. If you wish to use images related to the novel, here are a few suggestions:

Lisbon (Harbor; castle; Alfama district; botanical gardens; Avenida Palace hotel)

Cintra, Portugal (Castelo dos Mouros)

Morocco (Rabat and Salé; Moroccan houses—the *dar* and the *riad*.)

Sailing ships—brigantines

Gilbert and Sullivan (*The Pirates of Penzance*)

1920s moving-picture crews

Sherlock Holmes, Mary Russell, Fernando Pessoa

And of course, Pirates!

