



Arnaut de Carcassès
Tale of the Parrot
(Novas Del Papagai)

translated by

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In a garden enclosed by a wall
in the shade of a leafy laurel,
I heard a parrot discoursing
on the subject I will relate to you.
He had come before a lady 5
and brought her greetings from afar.
"My lady," he said to her, "God save you!
I am a messenger, and may it not displease you
if I tell you why I have
come here to you in this garden. 10
The best knight who ever lived,
the most distinguished and full of joy,
Antiphanor, the son of the king
who gave a tournament in your honor,
sends you a hundred thousand greetings, 15
and prays you, through me, to love him.
For without you he cannot be cured
of the lovesickness which makes him languish;
no doctor can help him at all,
but you have it in your power. 20
You can cure him, if you are willing;
if you will only send to him, by me,
a jewel which he may wear for your love,
then you will release him from his sorrow.
By my faith, I will tell you more 25
about why you ought to grant him your mercy:
for, if it please you, he would rather die for you
than live happily for another."
With that, the lady replied to him

and said, "Friend, from where have 30
 you come here, and what do you seek?
 You seem too eloquent to me!
 When you dare to say that I should give
 a jewel, or offer one
 to any Christian man at all, 35
 you exert yourself in vain.
 But since I find you so amiable,
 you may, in this garden,
 speak to me and say what you wish,
 for you will not be attacked or captured. 40
 But I am very sorry, for love of you,
 since you are so noble and good,
 that you dared to give me such advice."
 "And I, my lady, am astonished 45
 that you do not love him with a good heart."
 "Parrot, I would have you know
 that I love the most capable man in the world."
 "And who is that, lady?" "My husband."
 "It is never right for the husband 50
 to be all powerful:
 You may certainly love him, openly,
 but then, in secret, you should
 love the man who, loving, dies
 for your love, without deception."
 "Parrot, you are far too good a speaker. 55
 It seems to me that if you were a knight
 you would know very well how to entreat the ladies.
 But still, that won't prevent me
 from asking you the reason why
 I should commit such treason against 60
 the man to whom I've pledged my faith."
 "Lady, I will surely tell you:
 Love has no respect for oaths,
 and the will follows desire."
 "You speak very well, God help me, 65

but, for all that, I have defeated you already;
 I love my husband more than anything
 there is in all the world, in good faith,
 and I don't want any other lover.
 How could you dare advise such impropriety, 70
 saying that I should love where my heart is not?"
 "Lady, I am not saying anything improper.
 It seems to me that you are getting angry.
 Still, if you wish to listen to me,
 you cannot reasonably defend 75
 yourself from loving Antiphanor.
 I grant you, it is right and proper
 that you should, in public,
 love your husband more than all others;
 but then you should have mercy 80
 on the man who is dying for your love.
 Do you not remember Blancaflor,
 who loved Floris, without deception,
 or Iseult, who loved Tristan,
 or Thisbe, when she went to the 85
 gates to speak with Pyramus,
 and no one could dissuade her?
 You may find a model in any of these.
 What good would it do you if Antiphanor
 should languish and die for your love? 90
 The god of Love and his power –
 I know that they will repay you ill,
 and I myself, I will say
 all the evil I can about you,
 if you will not grant me soon that 95
 if he loves you, you love him."
 "Parrot, may God advise me,
 again I tell you that I am astonished,
 for you know how to speak so well.
 And since you want so much to entreat me 100
 on behalf of Antiphanor, your master,

I beg you, by the god of Love,
 go away, you have been here too long,
 and I pray you to tell him
 that I will soon agree 105
 and that I will reveal my desires to him.
 If he still wants so much to love me,
 you may give him this much encouragement,
 that, through your prayers, I will love him,
 and that I will never separate from him. 110
 Take him this ring for me; there is
 none more beautiful in the world, I think,
 with this ribbon embroidered with gold,
 and let him receive it, for my friendship.
 Be sure that you don't delay, 115
 and you will find me again in this garden."
 With that, the parrot replied, saying,
 "Lady, may God reward me,
 it is an excellent gift,
 and I will take it to him, truly. 120
 Since you are so well disposed toward him,
 I will greet him on your behalf.
 Lady, may God, Who never lied,
 grant you Antiphanor as your love,
 and let me see, within a year, that you 125
 love him with all your heart, without deception."
 With that, they ended their conversation.
 Then, since he cared greatly
 for the lady and Antiphanor,
 he went from the garden of joy, 130
 without delay, straight to his master
 and told him all that he had done.
 He began first to speak
 of the great worth and beauty
 of the lady, may my faith assist me, 135
 and in that, he acted with courtesy.
 Then he said, "My lord, no one

will ever raise a parrot
 who will speak as well for his master's
 as I have done, for your love. 140
 I went secretly into the garden;
 I didn't want any one to be
 able to follow my tracks,
 for I would rather be free than a captive.
 I found the lady, truly, 145
 and I offered your love to her,
 and she sends you this ring,
 the most beautiful in the world, I think,
 with this ribbon embroidered with gold, so you
 would take it for her friendship. 150
 Take it for her love,
 and may God give you benefit and honor from it.
 But I have no idea why
 we don't carefully take the opportunity
 to make our way into the garden: 155
 I'm not sure what advice to give you about this:
 but my idea would be to set fire to the tower
 and to the roof, for your love.
 Once the fire has been lighted,
 you can enter easily, 160
 make your approaches to your lady,
 hold her in your arms and embrace her."
 Antiphanor replied quickly,
 "First return to the meeting-place,
 and please, speak with her; 165
 then, reveal these plans to her."
 With that, the two of them separated.
 The parrot is certainly a loyal
 and sincere friend to him.
 He flies toward the garden, 170
 finds the lady under a pine tree,
 and greets her in his language:
 "Lady, may God Who created you

grant you what you most desire
 and preserve you from evil and difficulties, 175
 that is, if you are willing
 to love your knight as loyally
 as he loves you, without fail."
 "Parrot, may God advise me,
 if all the world were mine, 180
 I would give it all, with a willing heart,
 for the love of Antiphanor.
 But this garden is too well enclosed,
 and the guards never rest.
 They must watch until the morning, 185
 and they do not relax, all night long."
 "Lady, do you have no plan?"
 "I do not, and I am not surprised
 that you don't either."
 "But, lady, I do! Hear me out. 190
 I will return to my master,
 whom I left, lost in thoughts of love.
 Before nightfall, I will bring him here

 and lead him to the foot of the wall. 195
 I will bring, if it please you, Greek fire,
 with which I will set fire to the belfry,
 the tower and the roof.
 And when the fire has caught,
 they'll all come running at once, 200
 for they'll want to put it out at all costs.
 Then you must not delay!
 Prepare for him, and let him in,
 and then you will be able to speak with him.
 If this seems to you to be a good plan, 205
 in spite of what the jealous man may think,
 you may have delight with him,
 and lie together with him, in one bed."
 With that, the lady said, "It pleases me.

Go now to get him at once." 210
 With that, the parrot went
 to Antiphanor, who was waiting for him.
 He found him on his horse,
 all equipped with his armor;
 he wore his helmet and his hauberk, 215
 and his iron greaves as well;
 he had on his spurs of gold,
 and his sword was fastened at his side.
 The parrot came before him.
 "Lord," he said, "in my opinion 220
 tonight you will see that which
 you most love, in good faith.
 Your lady requests, through me,
 that you come to her directly.
 Be off! And ride quietly 225
 so that no man may hear you as you pass,
 and no one may know anything
 about your plans, unless they guess.
 But still we need the Greek fire
 in an iron or steel pot. 230
 I will take it in my claws—
 give me some right away."
 On the spot, Antiphanor
 gave him as much of it as he wanted.
 They rode so hard that 235
 by nightfall that were near the tower.
 The watchmen cried out from the belfry:
 one went to look, and passed the news along:
 they would keep watch until the morning,
 and not relax, all night long. 240
 With that, Antiphanor dismounted
 and took off all his equipment,
 putting it near the horse,
 keeping only his steel sword,
 which he wanted to keep fastened to his side: 245

but there was no need, you may believe me.
 Fearlessly, securely,
 he moved toward the foot of the wall.
 The parrot, from the other side,
 went into the garden, for he was anxious 250
 to start the fire, since he had
 left his lord alone, but fearless.
 First he came before the lady,
 as if he was a sparrowhawk;
 he stopped right at her feet, 255
 and then said to her at once,
 "Lady, I have left my lord
 disarmed, at the large gate.
 Prepare for him, and let him in,
 while I go set fire to the castle." 260
 "Parrot, in my prudence,
 I have made all the preparations.
 I have the keys of the castle with me,
 here, on this cushion.
 Go, set fire to the castle!" 265
 I do not believe that any bird
 ever performed such a daring exploit
 as this, or even attempted it.
 And the parrot, without being seen
 270
 next to the tower, near the terrace,
 went to set fire to the roof.
 The fire took hold in four corners,
 and the cry rose up at once:
 they all cried "Fire!" with one voice. 275
 The lady came to the gate,
 and opened it, without the permission
 of the watchmen, and against their will.
 Antiphanor came into the garden,
 and in a bed beneath a laurel 280
 he lay down with his lady.

No one could possibly tell
 what delight there was between those two,
 nor which enjoyed the other more.
 It was their belief, it seems to me, 285
 that this was their paradise.
 There was ecstasy in their engagement,
 and the fire was quickly extinguished:
 they doused it with vinegar.
 The parrot thought he would die, 290
 he was so afraid for his master.
 He came to them as quickly as he could,
 and stopped quite near the bed,
 and said, "Why don't you get up?
 Come on now, you must separate, 295
 for the fire has been completely extinguished."
 Antiphanor was heartbroken.
 He rose, and then he said,
 "Lady, what do you wish to command me?"
 "Lord, that you exert yourself 300
 to behave as valiantly as you can
 in this world, as long as you live."
 She went toward him and kissed him three times.
 Antiphanor departed quickly,
 like the son of a king, on his charger. 305
 So says Arnautz de Carcassès,
 who has addressed many an entreaty to ladies,
 to teach a lesson to husbands
 who want to keep a watch on their wives.
 Let them follow their own ways: 310
 that would be better, for in that case
 no one will be at fault.