



# The Golden Cage

1 One day, a wealthy king saw a young woman working in his fields. The young woman's face was lit up by her laughter, and the king's loneliness pierced him like an arrow.

The king could not forget her laughing face. He sent a troop of soldiers to fetch her.

When she was brought before him she cast her eyes down at the marble floor.

"Look up," he said, "and be happy. For today is your lucky day."

She looked up as she was told. There was no happiness in her face.

2 "I have brought you here," he told her, "to make you my wife. Never again will you dress in sackcloth, but from now on, in silk and satin. Here you will eat your fill of the finest produce of our land. From this day forward, you will no longer have to endure the harsh toil of the fields. I will make you a queen."

"But your majesty," she said, "I'm a simple person. I would not be happy living in a palace such as this. It is not my world."

3 "Nonsense," said the king. "This is a far better world than the one you come from. I will make you happy here."

"But your majesty ..." she said.

"No more," said the king. "Go now. Your dressmakers are waiting to transform you from peasant girl to princess."

What could the young woman do, but obey?

4 Very soon she was married to the king. There was a magnificent ceremony. A grand feast and extravagant entertainments followed the ceremony. But throughout it all, the new queen never smiled. Not once.

Days went by, and then weeks. "You have everything now. Why do you never laugh?" the King asked her. "You used to laugh when you had nothing. You surely could not

have enjoyed poverty more."

5 "It was a hard life, it's true," she said, "but there are many priceless pleasures in life, even for the poorest of the poor."

"Name one," said the king.

She shrugged. "Oh, listening to the singing of the birds while we worked in the fields," she said.

"Then the singing of birds shall fill our home," he said.

He had two-dozen songbirds captured. A golden birdcage was placed in every room that she used.

6 But weeks went by, and then months, and though the singing of the birds filled the palace, still the queen never smiled. Not once.

At last, in despair, the king begged his wife again to reveal what would make her happy. "I'd like to see some friends from my village," she said.

A young man from her village was sent for. He was a poor poet. The king was not impressed by his poems and songs, which were about the world of the poor, a world the king did not know. The songs and poems were not funny — and nobody laughed.

7 Afterwards, the queen asked if she could talk to the poet alone. The two young folk withdrew to another room. Very soon the king heard the music of his wife's laughter coming from behind the closed door. But instead of making him happy, it made his heart ache.

It was agreed that the poet would stay that night as a guest in the palace. He would leave early the following morning. That night, the king asked his wife, "Are you happier now?"

"Thank you for allowing me to see my friend," she said, but she did not smile.

In the morning, the king woke to find the bed empty. His wife had gone.

An hour later, the palace was surrounded by singing birds. They flew high, freed from their cages by a heartbroken hand.



## Questions

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|---|--|
| <p>1 The king saw the young woman</p> <p>a working in his fields.</p> <p>b singing.</p> <p>c laughing alone.</p>  | <p>4 What did the king capture to make his wife happy?</p> <p>a a young poet</p> <p>b songbirds</p> <p>c golden cages</p>  |
| <p>2 Why did the king want to marry the young woman?</p> <p>a because of her beauty</p> <p>b because of her wealth</p> <p>c because of her laughter</p> | <p>5 The poet</p> <p>a had never set foot outside of his village</p> <p>b understood the world of poor people</p> <p>c impressed the king with his poems and songs</p> |
| <p>3 What was magnificent about the king's wedding?</p> <p>a the ceremony</p> <p>b the feast</p> <p>c the entertainments</p>                            | <p>6 Who freed the songbirds?</p> <p>a the queen</p> <p>b the king</p> <p>c the poet</p>   |

## Vocabulary

Match the words from the text to the clues.

The brackets show the text sections ( ).

*withdrew extravagant nonsense  
despair captured*

- 7 Something that makes no sense (3)  
8 Excessive and over the top (4)  
9 Caught and imprisoned (5)  
10 Great misery and hopelessness (6)  
11 Took away or removed (7)

## Grammar

Find a **noun** (person, place or thing) in these sentences from the text.

- 12 The king could not forget.  
13 There was a magnificent ceremony.  
14 He was a poor poet.  
15 The palace was surrounded.

## Back To The Text...

- 16 The illustration on the front cover is most likely described  
a in section 4.                      b in section 6.
- 17 In which part of the library would you find this text?  
a fiction                                      b non-fiction
- 18 Prediction: What is likely to happen in the future?

- a The queen will return to the palace.  
b The queen will begin to laugh again.

## Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a The king had the songbirds captured.  
b The king sent for the poet.
- 20 a The king sent the young woman to the dressmakers.  
b The king placed golden cages in every room.
- 21 a They held a great wedding ceremony.  
b The queen asked to see the poet alone.

## Think About This

- 22 The king was most impressed by the woman's  
a beautiful face.  
b laughing face.  
c unspoilt face.
- 23 In the end the poet  
a kidnapped the queen.  
b upset the queen with news from the village.  
c helped the queen escape.

## Challenge Option

Vocabulary: How many words can you make from the word GOLDEN?

