

The Magpie and The King

Long time ago, in a faraway land
lived a king, in a castle, tall and grand.
But though he was rich, and of gold he had plenty
he smiled, almost never, as his life it was empty.
And each day he'd sit in his room full of treasure
and rue the cruel fact that it gave him no pleasure
as the thing he missed most just couldn't be bought:
companionable friendship - of the commoner sort.
One day there alighted on the royal window sill
a magpie that spoke, said, 'I mean you no ill
but you're clearly unhappy and in need of some mates
so, let's get you beyond the old castle gates!'
Said the king, 'Can I trust you? What's in it for you?'
but in place of answer the bird simply flew
and picked up a ring and a bracelet then said
'Do these make you happy?' The king shook his head.
'Alas! My dear magpie, if truth be told
There has to be more to life than mere gold
but tell me, my friend, what do you propose?'
'Well, the first thing,' he cawed, 'is a new set of clothes!
And a shave, and a haircut, so no-one will know
that it's your royal highness that I've got in tow.
I'll meet you tomorrow at noon round the back
of the old castle wall, by the old wooden shack.'
So the king, as arranged with the bird, the next day
dressed up like a peasant and made his own way
to the woodcutter's hut for his rendezvous
where the magpie explained what he had to do.
'Now King, don't be anxious, and try to relax,

and be sure to avoid all talk of tax.

Talk of sport, or the weather, but one thing is critical:

steer clear, over beer, of all things political!

The king nodded sagely and practised his lines

and mentioned (not once) rich food or fine wines, or

banquets or jousting or something or other

to make one suspicious and so blow his cover.

The bird, by now, had grown all the bolder,

listening while perched on the king's royal shoulder

said 'Great, you've now got it, the alehouse awaits!

I wish you good fortune and a bunch of new mates!

With that he was gone and the king was once more

Standing, alone, by the thick alehouse door...

...Well, enough to relate, the hours flew by

With such mirth and laughter till sunrise was nigh!

Then the king waved farewell to his newly-found mates

And made for the castle and its twenty-foot gates

then snuck in the back by a secret trapdoor

to his empty bedchamber on the twenty-first floor.

'Oh my God! It's all gone! All my jewels, all my treasure!

But, can I claim that it gave me real pleasure?

And - will I miss it? Truly, I'll never!

And look! In its place - a black and white feather!

His head he threw back and he roared with delight

And he never more slept a happier night!

500 words

