

It's always the birds. No one believes me, but it's true. One time a flamingo unfolded its leg and spoke to me through the bars that were keeping me back. She told me her secrets. I will not be sharing those.

Another time a pigeon stole a meatball from my spaghetti.

*On top of spaghetti/ all covered in cheese/ I lost my poor meatball/ to a bird named Maurice.* That's not how the song goes, but that is how it went. The bird didn't tell me his name. That would be ridiculous. I read it on the collar around his neck.

But this time was different. I'm not so sure it wasn't real. Or I am sure it did happen but reality is something no one can over grasp. Or Spring Grove should've kept me for a few more weeks.

Janet is a good friend of mine. We met when we were just seven years old. We met again at Spring Grove. I was the only one who was a patient. I felt embarrassed at first, but then the little cup she gave me each day grew heavier. I only hang out with her for the pills now. But she also likes drugs. So sometimes I'll let her do them with me.

Last Wednesday I went over to Janet's. I only planned to buy some stuff off of her, but then she showed me her new parrot.

"His name is Harold," Janet said.

"He looks like a Jonathan," I said. We both stared at him.

"I know." Without looking at me, she continued, "I have to go to work. You can watch Harold for me."

"No, I can't."

"There are some papers on the table over there that tell you how to take care of him." I looked at the table she gestured at to see papers of all colors covering the entire surface.

“Why are they rainbow?”

“They’re not.” Janet left.

I stayed.

The parrot really did look like a Jonathan.

Janet’s medicine cabinet didn’t close. There were too many pill bottles. I was sure she would be happy when she got back and found out she could close the medicine cabinet again. But then, my pockets didn’t zip.

I walked back to the living room. I had to, you see. I am living. The parrot is living. So the living room. Harold didn’t look at me. And I didn’t take it personally. I don’t look at me. Well, I did when I was helping the medicine cabinet, just for a moment. I forgot to close my eyes.

Harold’s home had bars. But they were gold. And they had designs in them, vines with grapes. I went to the kitchen. Maybe Janet had real grapes.

She didn’t. But she did have the ingredients to make lasagna. I had never successfully made lasagna before, but it was always my dream. Janet was working the night shift. I had time.

I went back to Harold. He looked depressed. He looked at me.

He said to me, “You look depressed.”

“I’m not. I’m making lasagna.” I opened his cage. He didn’t move. “Can parrots have lasagna?” I asked.

“How should I know?”

“Well, you’re a parrot.”

“Exactly.”

I decided parrots could have lasagna and said, "I'm making lasagna. You can have some. But you have to come to the kitchen."

"Are you lonely?"

"Yes." I turned around and went back to the kitchen. Harold flew after me.

I've never been told how to make lasagna, and I've never seen a recipe. I just knew I knew how to make it. One time it would work.

As I was pulling eggs out of the fridge, I said to Harold, "I'm going to make it from scratch."

Harold was cleaning himself under his wing. He didn't even lift his head when he said, "This isn't your kitchen."

"Janet is working a twelve hour shift."

Harold looked at me. "She is."

"I'll keep the kitchen clean."

I finished pulling out the rest of the ingredients while Harold finished cleaning himself. I poured flour onto the kitchen counter. A lot. I started shaping it into a volcano, but stopped. Harold was judging me.

"What?"

"You didn't wash your hands."

"How do you know?" I wanted to put the parrot back in his cage. But I didn't want to.

"I've been watching you. The last thing you touched before making the lasagna was my door. I am a bird. I am not clean. Not clean enough for cooking standards."

I went to the sink and washed my hands.

I cracked almost all of Janet's eggs and dropped them into the flour volcano. The last egg I gave to Harold. If he can be depressed, he can crack an egg. I can crack an egg. He dropped it on the counter. I picked it up, opened it the rest of the way, and poured the egg over the rest.

While kneading the flour and eggs together, I thought about life. It's the only appropriate thing to do. Anyone who has made lasagna would understand. But Harold has never made lasagna. He didn't understand.

He hopped closer to the dough while asking, "What are you doing?"

"Thinking that I could probably live forever if I tried. There's no proof otherwise until I die. Or that I could die when I get home. My pockets are full enough. I am empty enough." I stopped kneading for a moment. "What are you doing?"

"Thinking that you're an idiot."

I frowned. "Why?" I asked.

"I didn't want to know what you were thinking. I was asking about the lasagna."

"Oh."

"If you can live forever, I can be the first parrot to make lasagna." Harold didn't look depressed when he said things like that.

"You don't have hands."

"You are mortal."

"But I haven't died yet. How do I know that I will ever die?"

"Because all humans die. And you don't seem like someone who is living much longer."

I opened my mouth, then closed it, then "You're right... But all humans *so far* have died. I could be the first to not," I said.

"Then I can be the first parrot to make lasagna."

I looked around before asking, “Does Janet have a computer?”

“How should I know? My house is in the living room and Janet doesn’t let me out.”

“Is that animal cruelty?”

“If we find the computer we can find out.”

I nodded my head and wiped my hands on my jeans, leaving white hand prints behind.

“Do you want a ride?” I asked Harold.

He flew onto my shoulder. We checked the pantry first. It wasn’t there. I looked at the rainbow papers. Maybe they knew. They only knew that Harold couldn’t be unsupervised because he would try and kill himself. *Don’t leave Harold alone*, the pink paper read. We moved throughout the rest of the house, making sure to check every room. The final door led to the master bedroom where a computer sat on a desk across from the bed.

I turned my head to look at Harold. He leaned his head forward to give me a better view.

“What are the chances she doesn’t have a password?” I asked.

Harold didn’t answer. Instead he flew from my shoulder to the desk, stepping on the space bar in the process. The computer screen lit up, already open on a Google tab.

“The chances are high,” Harold said.

“Funny.” I pulled out the desk chair and sat down. “We have two items on our agenda; ‘Has a parrot ever made lasagna?’ and ‘What defines animal cruelty for parrots.’”

I searched for the first agenda. “No.” I read on for a moment. “Well, Harold, looks like you could be the first.” He looked happy. I don’t know how because he cannot have expressions. Maybe it was more that I felt he was happy. He did ride on my shoulder. That must have connected us somehow.

“I’m gonna do it. I’m gonna be the first.” His feathers ruffled with his words. I thought then that if he ever tried to become a world leader, I would follow him. “Now, am I being abused?”

I looked it up. I took a few minutes to read through different articles. Harold was also looking at the screen, but I didn’t think he could read.

“It seems a little complicated,” I said. “There aren’t many laws about animal cruelty for birds, but it seems like there are nonlegal parameters. Your cage is quite large and has everything you need, which is the basic requirement. However, keeping a bird in a cage 24/7 could be a sign of neglect. So I guess that means you qualify. But…” I stopped talking.

“But what?”

“Janet just doesn’t seem like the person who would do something like this. Janet abuses drugs; not animals.” I grinned. She was always nice to me. She gave me the heavier cup.

“You are the first to let me out of my cage since I got here yesterday.”

“Yesterday?!” I stared at Harold for a moment and then started laughing. “Yesterday. You have only been here since yesterday.”

“Yes.”

“Do parrots have any concept of time?” I wasn’t saying I have any concept of time, especially in the last few years, but Harold was really on a whole other level.

“If I don’t have any concept of time, then I wouldn’t be able to answer that question. Considering I wouldn’t have any concept at all about time.”

“Let me explain something. You have been here a day. Yes, Janet has not let you out, but wait to be concerned about it when at least one week has gone by.”

He cocked his head. I stood up. He flew back to my shoulder. We didn't move for some minutes.

Until, "Move." I did not move.

"Did you try to die?" I asked.

Harold did not move.

"Because the papers seem to say so."

We did not move.

"Please teach me how to make lasagna."

I nodded and walked to the kitchen.

Four hours later (according to the clock on the oven) I pulled a homemade lasagna out of the oven. My mouth watered. I wondered if parrots' mouths water, or beaks? I didn't feel like asking Harold. He was resembling too close to a mirror at the moment.

I pulled out two plates from Janet's cabinet and only one fork. I assumed that Harold wouldn't need one. The lasagna was quite large and smelled like immortality. I served both me and Harold.

I asked Harold, "Have you had lasagna before?"

"No." He didn't take his eyes off his plate.

"Well then," I placed the food before him. "Bon appetit."

Right when I finished speaking, Harold threw his head down and began eating. I stood there fascinated for a moment, watching the way he ate. Only once he finished his entire slice, did I remember to even start mine.

He had sauce on his beak. I will never again see someone or something eat with such vigor and love. I didn't even ask what he thought about it. I just gave him another slice.

For almost an hour, we both stood in the kitchen eating lasagna. We ate the whole thing. We didn't speak a word. I truly did believe that I would live forever. At that point, I was convinced we both would. An image of me and Harold opening a lasagna business kept playing in my head.

"You look more like a Jonathon than a Harold." I used a napkin to wipe the sauce from Harold's beak.

"And I don't even know your name."

"What name do I look like?"

"Harold."

"But you are Harold."

"And you said I look like a Jonathon. So if I don't look like a Harold, you can."

"You make a good point."

Janet got back a few hours later. By then, the kitchen was clean once again. I couldn't replace the foods I had used. My plan had been to save some lasagna for her, but when lasagna grabs hold there's not much you can do. Harold was back in his cage, and I was ready to leave.

I came back to Janet's house a week later, claiming to need more pills. Well, not claiming. I did need some. When I walked into the living room, I saw that Harold's cage was missing.

"Where's Harold?"

"Harold's dead." A pause.

"You left him alone?" A pause.

"He just died."



A pause.

I stopped thinking I could live forever.

“Don’t leave me alone.”