Mickey and Harriet

by David Plumb

Ellie's got two parrots. She owns the house down the block to the left where the golf club owner fixes her grounds and garage because he can't stop working on his vacation. You'd think he moved in, what with his silver SUV out front and bags of mulch and paint and wires and poles and every other damn thing you need to go on vacation. Nothing like a widow with two parrots and free time to bring in some extra change.

Mickey, the parrot was adopted from an alcoholic family. So says Ellie. He watches TV all day, as if he had a choice. An Oatmeal, no a Quaker parrot. Little guy, he is. Green with gray feathers on his neck and forehead. A hint of blue here and there. Maybe a foot tall. Lots of baseball with this bird. Right in the middle of the day, maybe Ellie turns on the set, or maybe he's whacko from the booze hound, the bird yells HOME RUN HOME RUN, or OUT ON FIRST. The day I stop by Ellie is calming the Shih-tzu who was, until that very moment barking at me because I stepped up on the lawn. Needless to say, I'm ready when Mickey, somewhere inside screams GORGEOUS. Maybe he is dreaming about a feathered friend he jumped on back when.

He sounds like my kind of bird. He's certainly must have his ups and downs in that household. Ellie tells me he likes to say, and he says it with a slight lilt. “Bud Light. Bud Light.” Sometimes he says something new Ellie can't remember because she always clicks the remote past sports. Something-if-ication. The bearded boys on the commercial who think they're men, say it is liquid-fi-something.

Ellie doesn't drink, so the parrot, Mickey is in recovery. Plus Ellie is celibate to the nth degree. She told me some guy in a red Mercedes pulled up next to her when she and the Shih-tzu were out walking and made a pass at her.

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“I was in a white robe. He should have known. I'm Jewish.”

It kind of reminded me of the cartoon The Flying McCoy's where Moses stands by the Red Sea parting and the followers are crossing. Moses says, “This gives me a great idea for a water park.” I didn't say that to Ellie.

I said, “Thank God you're there for Mickey.”

Mickey has a friend, Harriet. Harriet is a *Severe* Macaw. That's the breed. *Severe*. She's green. A good pet. That's what Ellie says standing on her newly painted garage floor. White paint. Times two. The Shih-tzu stands between us for protection, the black and brown cat of hers, no name, or maybe she didn't tell me, slinking off toward the garden hose to the right. Harriet stands straight up on her perch some of the time. But she keeps falling off. Plunk. Just like that. She's perched up there and all of a sudden, PLUNK. She's on the floor flapping in silence. Ellie has been taking her to the Vet to the tune of $5000 plus. Balance problems, she has. To say the least. I'm thinking, maybe a lower perch like next to the floor, but then you set up a war between the Shih-tzu, whose name is RIP and no name cat. That might not work. Maybe padded boards under the perch or a padded rug close to the floor. Plus I don't think Mickey would help her. Gorgeous or not, he's got his beak zonked on the TV.

I thought maybe I'd take Harriet in, but Lorna says no pets. Lorna used to have a collie and a cat, both dead now. That was before ewe got together and she loved her dog. It used to ring the doorbell, she says. But now, no pets. Too much trouble. No dogs. I like that. I don't want to put the dogs in a Bed and Breakfast every time I want to get out of here which is like every day in the summer. The humidity picks you up and drags you off in a muff of thick and leaves you panting like the dog only worse. On the other hand, maybe I could handle Harriet the parrot. I'll design a roost.

I yell to Lorna. “How about a new parrot?”

She's running the damn vacuum under my desk and she nearly takes off my big toe. Talk about pets. She is in love with this vacuum cleaner. No perch needed here. Here it comes WOOOOOOOOMMMMM, sucking dust that isn't there, fragments of blips and circus tents. Who the hell knows? I love Lorna. If isn't one thing, well let's not go there. I love Lorna. I'll put the vacuum in the casket, but no pets. I'll be right beside her.

So while I'm thinking about all of this, I stop over to see Harriet, the little parrot who can't talk back. Once in a while, Harriet slips a little on the perch, but she's trying. You got to hand it to her at twenty-four years old. I know she can make forty... I stand in the living room with Harriet and right across the room beyond the coffee table with two yellow napkins and a copy of last month's AARP Magazine, Mickey the parrot watches me between glances at the TV, which is on silent mode. I keep thinking he'll say GORGEOUS, or HOME RUN. Mickey doesn't say squat. Mickey watches. What can I say? We all try as best we can.