

Aviary

by S.H. Gall

I am a 33 year old drag queen, and I frequently confuse my dreams with reality.

Each morning, I awake to a research project: what has actually occurred, and what was a dream? Today I woke up believing I'd lost a pound, so I weighed myself, and I was right. This was reality. Good for me.

And there was a condom wrapper on the floor. I don't know what that means. I smell myself and I smell like myself and no one else. Did I *eat* a condom?

They say we shouldn't drink water from plastic bottles, because that plastic bottle emits a chemical very similar to synthetic estrogen. As a drag queen, I drink exclusively from plastic bottles. It's my duty. I also enjoy breakfasts of Special K cereal in berry-flavored yogurt. It's tart and also sweet and crunchy and also mushy.

Scientists have found that the albatross can fly and sleep simultaneously. If this is the case, how on earth does the albatross define and construct reality?

On further reflection, the albatross's condition is not much different than sleepwalking in humans.

That reminds me. When I was six, I got lost in a strange city on a family vacation and found myself in an aviary.

There were parrots everywhere. I walked and walked until there were penguins instead of parrots; then I walked into a hawk exhibit, thinking maybe Dad would be there. He wasn't. My whole family was somewhere outside the aviary.

Hours later, exhausted, I begged an albatross for help. His beak was like the hold of a ship. It opened, and words poured out. I listened, entranced by avian poetry.

“FREEZE!”

It was a man very much like Dad, but dressed as a security guard.

It seems I've somehow gotten *inside* the albatross habitat. There are people gawking at me behind a wall of glass.

I lunge for the exit, am brought down by a Thorazine dart. After several hours in a faceless morass of starched white figurines who chirp incoherently, I wake up, and breathe. “It's OK,” I tell myself. “How ridiculous to think I was ever six years old.”

Based upon a word/topic prompt from Meg Pokrass's website.

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