Knightscapes

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Confusion: a sad state of affairs;  
However, we all have been invited to attend.  
We accept the invitation without hesitation  
Without knowledge of purpose or cause,  
But we all knowingly pretend.  

We arrive at the ceremony  
With a blank, expressionless stare.  
We scan the unfamiliar territory  
With a cautious eye and skeptical glare,  
Hoping for a familiar face.  

We saunter across the room,  
Corner to corner, end to end,  
Desperately searching for an explanation  
For the reason behind this function  
Which we all made time to spend.  

We steadily increase our pace,  

Losing faith and energy toward our efforts  
We disappointingly make our way to the exit door.
ERIKA TILOTTA
Pinwheel
Attempting to Make Sense of My Oncoming Transition in Time With Poincare’s Conjecture:

Is it too soon to conclude that the end of my life will come naturally? Will time allow me to draw my last whispery breath in old age: peacefully? Or, will my life here on Earth of incandescent misery? If so, literal death will arrive as a holocaust. Its unholy winds will reduce me beyond all implied numerology. Thus, becoming at last a vanishing point of mere absurdity, I’ll be nothing more than an oxymoron at best. A manifold lacking the proper properties to satisfy a simple conjecture of three-dimensional topology. They’ll be no algebraic proof for a theorem of my circumstance. Or, a way to juxtapose the negative integers to make sense of my new unworldly elegance. I’ll be a forgotten homology: an outmoded, extinct propriety. Though part of the mystery is that I’ll be no more or less than I was before, a function of time – memory, being, and a hypothetical infinite.

Topology is the mathematical study of shape. It is the study of properties of an object that do not change under continuous deformations. The Poincare Conjecture is essentially the first conjecture ever made in topology: it asserts that a three-dimensional manifold is the same as the three-dimensional sphere precisely when a certain algebraic condition is satisfied. A manifold is an abstract mathematical space.
ELAINE REISMAN
The Weighted Cloak

I’d like to wear life backwards
Read all night, and sleep by day
I’d like to grab what time forgot
And see you here today
What laughter would resound again
What smells that I adore
Your way, now gone forever
When death closed its weighted door.
Naturally, As Fate Would Have It

This poem is dedicated to my fabulous prince, who offers me the world and more. Our paths coincidentally crossed, the road lit by the light of the moon.

The fog rises, disappears, 
Floats to another place to call home. 
In the distance, there stands a figure - 
Tall, broad, poised, yet alone. 
The glassy lake appears still, 
Undisturbed by wind or heat. 
In the waters, there swims a figure- 
Petite, independent, yet incomplete.

These two souls 
Inadvertently meet, united by what? 
Searching for reasons is futile, 
The answer is simply: by luck.

Fate is a funny idea: 
Accepted by many; skeptical to some. 
Perplexing to the hopeless 
But believed to inevitably come.

Time is a bittersweet character: 
Desiring the future, the past we miss; 
However, these two minds know 
That every second is meant to cherish.

Love is an intangible thing 
Known to all yet understood by few; 
But these two hearts pace in rhythm 
Together - as lovers naturally do.
JESSIE RIBUSTELLO
Concerned Lilly
Glaring at me
Pouncing on my heart
Piercing my core
Screaming, screeching to a halt
Only to fast-forward every motion, memory, and thought
Just to knock the wind out
Gasping for air
Hoping to be there
Thud
As if it stopped
But I’m here and awake
JENNIFER THAI
If Life Were

If life were simple, pure, predictable,
There would be no push nor pull,
A smooth surface without stains,
Luster and sunlight would appear dull.

Time ticks but bells don’t chime;
No noises heard, no outward cries.
A silent life, rhythm less bore;
A language spoken but song denied.

Romance is nonexistent, absent;
No kisses given, no letters sent;
An absolute avoidance of joy and fancy;
A whole heart to whom none can lend.

If life were simple, pure, predictable;
There would be no push nor pull.
Thus, we must inhale, digest the best
To keep our happiness, satisfaction full.
ERIKA TILOTTA
Don’t Wake Me

Don’t wake me.
I like it here.
No more pain.
No more coldness.

Don’t wake me.
Fond memories returning.
I am not alone.
It’s not dark.

Don’t wake me.
Though my body is fetal
In a womb of sheets,
I am not afraid.

But the time is short.
So please don’t wake me.
Let me no longer daydream of sleep.
LORIANN R. BESPALKO
Masonville, New York
ERIKA TILOTTA

Before the Shiva

“What have I become, my sweetest friend?
Everyone I know goes away in the end.
And you could have it all, my empire of dirt.
I will let you down, I will make you hurt.
If I could start again, a million miles away,
I could keep myself, I would find a way.”

-Johnny Cash, *Hurt*

Past and Present

I wasn’t bothered by the fact that my stepmother was dying. It is something that I am used to. Death is a part of life. It has always been a subject that I have used in my poetry and stories. I made a man get killed by a train, funny; a man about to be stabbed, haunting; a love story, tragic; a death of a pet, sad; and a sparrow killed by a hawk, ironic. So, how would the effect of the death of someone I knew for eight years hit me?

ceiling; a pathetic attempt to give someone hope. Tubes with clear and yellow liquids were being pumped into her, and a tube in her neck for breathing. Both of her legs were tightly wrapped. She began with surgery for her legs to increase circulation, and ended with sepsis that decreased her life span.

I’m not a cold person. Showing certain emotions is very hard for me to do. For my entire life, I felt weak. Everything caused me pain and no one cared. Adults told me to be strong, but they didn’t understand the logic of a child. In return, I refused to show sympathy and sadness. I ignored the hurt caused from my past so badly that I can barely remember my past at all.

Helene was the opposite. She managed to show all the emotions in her face. She was happy, but there was something bothering her. She would be angry, but she would laugh about it. And although we were friends, she was warm and I was cold. Differences attracted simply as that. Death is a part of life.
My mother told me to visit the hospital, which I rarely did. Not because I didn’t want to go, but because I couldn’t do anything. Only watch, watch as the machines showed random numbers, as a line rose and dove on a screen, the steady drops of liquid in the IV. Other than that, I would play with any type of ring I was wearing.

The nurse said that there was so much liquid being pumped into her, it was pouring out through her skin. I left feeling that she was cheated. I was given a butterfly made out of gold and rubies while she was given a butterfly painted on her ceiling. A painful reminder, that like the butterfly, she was in her last stage.

There were pieces of cloth that resembled puppy housebreaking pads around her arms and legs. I froze. She was awake. What do I do? I didn’t realize I was staring her in the face. Then for the first time in months, she moved her arm. I felt her skin; dry. She looked down at my hand and I thought she was staring at my ring. It was in the shape of the butterfly with ruby stones. Her butterfly ring, given to me a few years ago, but was too small for me to wear at the time. She gave me things out of love like any parent did.

I walked toward her until I was staring her in the eye. I couldn’t say anything. Time in months, she moved her skin; dry. She looked down I thought she was staring at the shape of the butterfly with ruby ring, given to me a few years ago, but was too small for me to wear at the time. She gave me things out of love like any parent did.

She began to move her head, struggling to talk, but she couldn’t. I just looked at her face for a minute. Sometimes people don’t know what to say, but they still understand each other.

My hand began to feel wet as her pores opened and I removed my hand. With that, she fell asleep.

I felt feeling that she was cheated. I was given a butterfly made of gold and rubies while she was given a butterfly painted on her ceiling. A painful reminder that, like the butterfly, she was in her last stage.

Before the Shiva

Helene died a few days later. I didn’t cry. Not because I would not, but because I could not. I blame this on not visiting her often in the hospital. Out of sight, out of mind.
I had been to Catholic funerals and a Buddhist funeral, but never a Jewish funeral. Not

Her casket was wooden, held together with only wooden pegs. It was just a normal box, a normal box with a body inside. Cocooned in only a white sheet, a bonnet tied to her head, and a triangle-shaped weight holding an eye closed, she was almost unrecognizable. If only they put on her glasses, the kind where one of the lenses always popped out, she would be Helene.

The rabbi spoke in Hebrew and in English as the casket was lowered. I stared at it until it went out of sight. I didn’t hear what the rabbi was saying. I didn’t say anything. I didn’t see anything else. I didn’t feel. I was numb.

And then, someone picked up a shovel and I was slammed with the most horrible sound I ever heard. The sickening sound of a thud hitting something strong, but hollow. My eyes began to water, but I didn’t blink. It sounded again. I swallowed hard, feeling my heart sink. Again. I couldn’t look away; I knew what I was seeing, but I just couldn’t ignore it. Again. I was shaking. Again. I could smell the fresh dirt in the wind. Again.

That’s when realization sunk in: she’s gone. She’s not coming back. She’ll never call and wish me a goodnight.

I never noticed that the people were passing the shovel around until it came to me. My cheeks felt wet and my heart was beating fast. My strength was shattered; I felt everything.

I stepped back, refusing to show my face. There was no shame in those tears. For the first time in eleven years, I felt exhausted. I was tired of holding back my emotions, only to filter them for poetry and stories. Things that Helene would never read anymore.

The whole time, I felt that I was strong because I didn’t show emotions. That when I had to fight I would have a clear head. But during that time, I had been fighting back my emotions and making them stronger.

Nervously, my hand went to my other hand, which wore a ring and played with it. Her Ring. My comfort. Her happiness. My butterfly. Her death. My Shiva.
SOFIA X. SOTO
Living the American Dream

You grow up living in a country
   Where they tell you lies.

Usually, when you are too naïve
   And believe:

   To get an education for that
      Dream job from 9 to 5.
      You’ll get great pay
      And two weeks vacation time.
      Have fun and enjoy,
      For this is the time of your life.

That’s living the American Dream.

   Ha! Ha! Ha!
   I laugh at all these lies.

For getting an education takes money,
   And time.

Eventually, stressing and struggling
   To succeed and get that degree.

   No one works a job from 9 to 5.
      Especially, with great pay
      And two weeks vacation time.
      It is all about the hours you can get,
      Receiving lousy pay;
Barely making it by, seeing no vacation time.
   This is the time of your life?
      What life?

   Ha! Ha! Ha!
I laugh in the face of fun and enjoyment.

   It must be a bad joke.
   Keeping your head above water;

Now, that’s living the American Dream.
CHRISTINE FARGNOLI
Smiles in July
CHRISTINE FARGNOLI
How To Be Contemptible

Let’s be bitter.
Turn children’s faces into sour, puckering messes of discomfort.

Let’s be mean.
Pour gallons of unhappy truths on unsuspecting pedestrians.

Let’s be greedy.
Steal from the rich, steal from the poor, steal from Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

Let’s be arrogant.
Cock our hats over our eyes, hold up our chins, and turn away our noses.

Let’s be short-tempered.
Yell at sleeping babies and praying nuns until they weep.

Let’s be deceiving.
Lie to the honest sliver within our souls.
CHRISTINE FARGNOLI
The Contents of War

We’re teetering on destruction and relief, war and peace.
Though we seek an end to the confrontation,
Avoiding the situation only postpones the distress.

When our grandfathers fell, we prayed and cried.
And today? Some smirk and cynically declare, “It suits them right.”
Yet where does sarcasm deliver us?
Into further scorn and division, until there is no more leather to chew.
Can we bite the bullet and take a step back in time?
The barrel is pointed straight at our temples, not at our teeth.

We will lose good men.
The bad ones will make a sour name for themselves and then bring the others to shame.
The dead won’t be able to speak, won’t be able to testify for their honor.

But where there is much despair, there is abundant hope.
We will remember the era past in a generation from now.
When our children see this flag wave high, they will stand tall and be proud.
JUSTIN FELIX
Misnomer

My mind wraps itself around topics unstoppable.
It’s like a rainstorm in New Jersey that’s gone tropical.
Every obstacle has left abrasions within my optical,
And the optimal situation has become improbable.

I search for pain without even knowing,
Traveling through hell, didn’t even know where I was going.

Following through this sea of people,
This disgusting rat-infested race of “sheeple.”

A delusional state of mind, soul, and being,
It’s got me running away, I’m done, I’m fleeing.
Now I’m seeing what life may be like without pain,
One day goes by, maybe without rain.
I see the sky, but all in vain.
Loyalty became nothing but a game.
I die only knowing what used to be my name.
This standoff is unbearable!
Our eyes cross at high noon,
the dust never given time to settle.
I reach for the ivory handle,
the most delicate part of my favorite weapon.
My other hand graces past my white handkerchief,
an innocent attempt at undying surrender.
But I choose the pistol,
ironclad with precious cargo to deliver.

Bid me to move too slow?
I am outmaneuvered by your ebony revolver.

yours grazes my shoulder,
mine whips past your ear.
I fall back and shutter,
become the faint lady inside me.
Corset tight, hairpins, white gloves.

My kerchief recovers,
becomes my last and only comfort,
fanning and patting my forehead.
Should I wave it high,
making it clear that I surrender?
Or should I lose the white gloves,
stand strong in the dust?
I contemplate this mixed decision as the tumbleweed approaches.
JESSIE RIBUSTELLO
9-11-01
DOROTHY NOGUERAS
The Measure of a Man

Not – “how did he die?” – But, “hoe did he live?”
Not – “what did he gain?” – But, “what did he give?”
These are the units to measure the work of a man as a man, regardless of birth.

Not – “what was his station in life?” – But, “had he a heart?”
And – “how did he play his God-given part?”
Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer, to bring back a smile,
to banish a tear?

Not – “what was his shrine?” Not – “what was his creed?”
But – “had he befriended those in need?”
Not – “what did the sketch in the newspaper say?”
But – “how many were sorry when he passed away?”
ELAINE REISMAN
A Summer Vacation at Our Villa in St. Martin

A crab rattles the open latticework
that borders the window
by our front door. Out of his usual realm
he is slow and clumsy. We have come here
every winter since our children were young. Then,
the house was filled with laughter. Now,
they are grown, and we are much older.
The summers are hot here. The breezes are stronger,
And the days are longer. Our house is quiet.
In the morning our sons sleep with their young brides
While we sit awake and stare in silence
At the illimitable stock-still sea.
But we were supposed to grow old together

I think back on those haunting words,
The last words I’d heard,
Spoken by the one I loved.

Taken back to a time,
When everyone around me,
Left me behind.

Was left with me, myself and I,
And school.
And only for a moment,
A boyfriend/lover/friend.

Had to be independent,
Started to stress and struggle.

Then, my boyfriend/lover/friend’s job
Assigned him an important project,
Sending him states away.
He wanted me to go with him,
Be with him, live with me.
But I could not,
For I was in college on a scholarship,
And could not jeopardize that.

He could not understand,
And left for his job,
Left me behind.
Again, was left with me, myself and I,
    And school.

    Had to grow up,
    Be an adult.

    Three months passed by,
And my boyfriend/lover/friend came back.

He had sought me out and wanted to talk.
    He wanted to get back together.
    Be with him, live with him.
    But I could not.
For this time I was not the same girl he left behind;
    I changed.

    He could not understand,
And said, “I know we’re young,
    But grow old with me.”
    I replied, “What? You left me,
    I can’t.”
I could not stop thinking how I already grew up,
And now, my age just has to follow.
So, I looked him straight in the eye,
    And said, “Goodbye,"
    And walked away;
    Leaving him behind.

But, not without hearing his heartbreaking
    Last words to me:

    “But we were supposed to grow old together.”
ERIKA TILOTTA
Water
LASHAWN JOHNSON

What is Love?

If I could right for you the wrongs in the world,
I would keep you safe, out of harm’s reach, as if you were precious gold
Never lead you astray to decay
Love you forever and a day as mother does a child.
So don’t question my love for you today.
Just learn to except that my love is for real.

This love here is more like a skill that takes time to define.
You must look deep within rather than reading in-between the lines.
Love allows you to let go of all negative aspects of life.
“So what if he does not love me anymore?”
“So what if she has moved on?”
At least I can say I know how to love
And knowing how to love has to start with me.
What Have You Done?

I never thought I’d be weak,  
But now I find myself fighting to be strong  
I don’t know what’s happened to me,  
Something’s gone so very wrong.

There used to be days of fun and bliss  
Filling me with never-ending happiness.  
I don’t know where those days are hiding  
But away my happiness is slowly sliding.

What did you do to me?  
You took away my innocence.  
You filched my joyfulness.  
You stole my friends,  
Threw out the love they once had for me.  
You’ve left me with…nothing.

Nothing at all.

Except you.

What have you done?
JUSTIN FELIX
I’ll Forgive You

I’ll forgive you for being unjust.
I’ll forgive you for taking my wages.
I’ll forgive you for breaking my trust.
And for censuring what’s written on my pages.

I’ll forgive you for burning my flag.
I’ll forgive you for blocking my roads,
I’ll forgive you for relentlessly expecting me,
To carry the burden of all your loads.

I’ll forgive you for caging me and my people.
I’ll forgive you for condemning me as a child.
I’ll forgive you for hating definitions of equals.
I’ll forgive you for all your contradictions compiled.

I’ll forgive you for mocking and laughing as we weep,
As we battle the hurricanes, as we die in our sleep.
I’ll forgive you Vieques, I’ll forgive you for murder.
I’ll forgive you for taking my brothers even further.

I’ll forgive you for it all,
When it’s all written and set,
I promise I’ll forgive you,
But I swear,
I won’t forget.
ERIKA TILOTTA
Captured Spirit
The girl always had a loss for words,
Chronically haunted by the esprit de l’escalier.
When they came to her
I was usually too late and they fell out of her mouth clumsily
Making stiff competition for her frustrated tears
But that’s not all,
Her body equally lacked grace, eternally falling over herself.
Sometimes she wondered if she was destined to trip over afterthoughts for a lifetime.
I met my doom one Monday morning on my way to school. My body started to buzz with fear four blocks away: identical twins ahead, time to freak. Every step brought more of them into view. At the corner of the street they only looked like floating Easter eggs with boobs, by mid-block they had wobbled into overweight middle-aged clones— I couldn’t help but stare. As if their mutual existence wasn’t scary enough, the boobied eggs dressed the same.

What kind of sick pleasure did they get playing mind tricks on us individual folk? The Only thing more annoying than trying to figure out which Olsen twin was playing Michelle at a given scene on “Full House” is playing “who’s who” with live carbon copies.

The closer they came the faster the buzz, the wider I stared. The ladies stopped in front of me. What do they want? Could they smell fear, too? They stood like Stephen King’s double trouble at the end of the hallway, “Come play with us.” No, I can’t, I got to go to school. Don’t eat me... please?

“Excuse me, do you have the time?” They said. Simultaneously!

I froze. “Uuhuuuh...”

I powerwalked the hell out of there—even made it to school 10 minutes early.

If I had a twin, I’d go crazy, it would be an endless acid trip.

Whoa, that’s me across the room but not me at the same time. It thinks for itself but it looks like me. If I punch it in the face, would I feel it? “Weeeeeeeeiiird.” I’d poke my twin in the face numerous times to make sure it was real.

There could be a bizarro Yahaira walking around, peeking behind trees observing me from a distance like those books about the Loch Ness monster and other myths talked about. A peeping me-but-not-me, I shudder to think about the possibility.

While many people find this anomaly cute, twins are just nature’s cruel joke on the rest of humanity. They’re the root of all evil (“Children of the Corn,” anyone?), the ultimate example of conformity—they walk the same, talk the same, and you can’t help but wonder—do they even fuck the same? They probably do if they still dress the same at 50-something.

Who wants to play a game of shadow that never ends? Not me.
LORIANN R. BESPALKO
Writer’s Block

The author. He writes for hours
Upon hours. Then, he stops.
   He places down his pen.
Oh, no. What comes next?
A love affair? No. A murder?
   No, that’s not right either.
What should he WRITE?
Ah! That’s it! He begins again.
   No, NO, that can’t happen,
   Never mind.
He tears it up, throws it out.
   Wait! Another idea!
   He picks up his pen.
No, he doesn’t like that either.
   He tears it up, but this time
The pieces float to the floor.
This goes on for hours, upon hours.
When his wife comes home at five,
She has another floor-full-of-itsy-papers mess
   To clean up. Again.
JESSIE RIBUSTELLO
Blooming Flower
SOFIA X. SOTO

Burning Bright

As I go forward in this world

Like the sun,
I will shine.

I am intelligent,
confident
Strong,
And sophisticated.

No one will stand in my way.
I will bypass all roadblocks;
Never giving up on my dreams
And strive to succeed in life.

Through education and all life experiences,
Always burning bright.
“DAN! WAKE UP! YOU’RE GOING TO BE LATE,” the woman yelled up the stairway. Turning quickly, she walked back to the kitchen to finish the dishes in the sink. “IT’S ALMOST SIX! DON’T FORGET THE ROPE!” she bellowed, raising a dish from the foamy water.

She heard her husband’s footsteps descending the stairs, the creak of the front door opening, and then its sudden slam. For more than thirty years, their pattern didn’t change: wake up, wake-up, Dan, make coffee, yell to wake up Dan for a second time, get the newspaper, turn on the radio, yell at Dan again, check for chores needing to be done, yell at Dan, and then Dan leaves. He was a fisherman and needed to get to the boat before it left at six-thirty; five days a week. If it weren’t for her, he would never get up in the mornings. And if it weren’t for El, she didn’t know what she would do.

Over the years, Dan began to talk less and less to his wife. It didn’t help that he was gone early in the morning till three in the afternoon. And when he came home, he went straight to the garage. It was his workplace, his haven. It was where he stored rope, hooks, tools, and repairing materials for the boat. He would be there until ten at night, mixing chemicals, coiling rope, and organizing nuts and bolts. He never ate dinner until ten. Even during the night, Dan would wake up and go downstairs because he had trouble sleeping. She tried to talk to him then but gave up when he said he was too tired. They were both in their fifties and it seemed as if they were already dead.

This was a problem because she needed a conversation. She tried to talk to Dan, but he was quiet and at some point, no longer listening. No matter how much she complained, moaned, and yelled, he would only look at her and say very little.

Five years ago, she saw El. He was in a pet store, picking at his gray feet with the same gray colored beak. She went in, looking curiously at the caged bird. A large, white cockatoo with yellow feathers on his crest on the top of his head. As she entered, the crest rose straight up, showing the only bright colors on his body. Just as curious, he climbed off his perch and clung to the bars of the cage. Tilting his head to one side, staring at her with one beady, black eye, he opened his mouth.

What came out was the wolf whistle. She stepped back and laughed. It didn’t end there. Gracefully climbing back to his perch, he tilted his body one way and ran sideways down to the end of the perch. It was as if he was dancing or doing the limbo sideways. The more the women seemed interested in the bird, the more he showed off. He bobbed his head, and flapped...
his large wings, and preened his feathers, one by one.

It was when she turned around that El did something amazing. She was starting to walk away from the white cage when she heard “hello.” She looked for the speaker, but the only person was at the counter in the back of the store. Glancing back at the cage, El looked at her. “Hello,” he repeated. The cockatoo could talk. This is what she wanted.

Bringing El home was easy. El played with the toy rope in his cage, rang his toy bell, whistled, said “hello” at everything. He shrieked whenever she left the room. “Pay attention to me” is what he would say if he could. She would whistle and he would reply with a mimic or a different sound. The way to tell he was happy was by the height of his crest. She would walk by and say “Pretty bird. El is a pretty bird.” The bird paid attention to her and whistled. Some time later in the day, she managed to pet him. He didn’t move away. Instead, he stood there and brought his beak to her arm. He didn’t bite, but licked with his gray, dry tongue. It was, according to the pet shop owner, a sign of curiosity and affection.

At ten in the night, El did something unsuspecting. He was walking back and forth when he suddenly froze. He tilted his head, eyeing the door. The yellow feathers on his head closed like a fan as his crest went down.

Dan entered the house. He saw the cage and became confused. El leaned forward on the perch and lowered his head.

“What’s this?” Dan asked as he walked toward the cage.

“That’s El! I saw him in the pet store. He was so adorable and smart that I fell in love with him! He’s an Eleanora Cockatoo and has a name, El, it’s from Eleanora, but I don’t know why they didn’t give him a different name. An actual male name. But the name El is creative, don’t you think? He can whistle, he can dance, he plays with his bell and chews on his rope. Oh! And he can talk too! Why, he said ‘hello’ to me fifty times today! He is so beautiful and nice. He is soft! I pet him and he didn’t even bite me!”

Her husband stared at the bird and rubbed his chin. Suddenly, El jerked his head forward, crest down, and hissed. Wings away from his side, but half folded, his mouth frozen, open in a fierce pose. He was no longer a cockatoo, but a hawk.

Dan frowned and walked out the front door. The wife looked at the bird. “Don’t do that, you naughty bird.”

But El did it every time Dan went past the cage. To this very day, El is quiet when her husband is around. El had become another pattern in the household: during chores or afterwards, the wife and the cockatoo would talk. After five years his vocabulary rose to:
“Pretty bird,” “How are you,” “You’re pretty,” “My bell,” “Yes,” “No” and a few other phrases. He was able to tell time! Whenever the clock hit an hour, he would call out the number of chimes it made and announce the time. He also could sing *Jingle Bells* and whistle the theme from *The Andy Griffith Show*.

One morning, the woman came down the stairs and did her regular routine. Except this time she uncovered the birdcage before she made the coffee. Looking behind him, El had his head turned so that he lay it on his back. His feathers were puffed up keeping him warm.

“Hello, pretty bird!” she said. She was rewarded with El waking up and facing her. He stretched his wings and legs slowly and trembled his body to loosen old feathers.

“How are you, pretty bird?”

“Pretty bird! Pretty, pretty bird!” El answered. “Six o’clock! Rope!”

She froze and then *new* word! How exciting! And, yes, you like your rope rope? Can you say ‘My “My bell!” El returned His crest rose and he began roundings of the room. chores and to yelling at

During the entire day, El new word every now and came in, she went to him a new word today! I his toy rope in his cage! He’s lately! Climbing and chewing it! He just said it early this morning! You should have heard it! It was as cute and amazing as when he learned the other words! He’s so smart!” Dan didn’t care. Days passed, then weeks, and the woman began to grow nervous. El continued to say “rope” more than other Words. He also stopped Saying the time and Insisted that every hour was “Six O’ Clock.” she tried saying the correct time and other words, but El rarely spoke them.

El continued to say “rope”, more than other Words. He also stopped Saying the time and *Insisted* that every hour was “Six O’ Clock.” she tried saying the correct time and other words, but El rarely spoke them.

Smiled. He had said a “It’s not six o’clock yet. don’t you? Is that your rope’?”

and bobbed his head. to investigate the sur-

The wife returned to her Dan. would talk and say the then. When her husband in excitement. “El said think he’s talking about been playing with it

Another thing that made her nervous was the announcement on the radio. A convict
had escaped while being transported. The announcer didn’t say what he was convicted of, except that he was very dangerous. The only thing that came to her mind was a murderer. A was on the loose and her husband didn’t come home until three.

“Dan, I’m worried about El. He has been only saying rope and six o’clock. I tried to get him to say other words, but he refuses. Maybe he’s sick. I don’t know what it’s from. I change his water everyday. Maybe he’s bored of his bird seed. Maybe he wants less fresh fruit. Perhaps he wants more peanut treats. Could it be that he is molting? When he starts to molt, he does get a little quiet, but that only lasts a few days. Maybe he wants his cage cleaned three times a week. Could that be it? Or he wants a new toy. Maybe that’s why he is repeating. He wants a new rope toy! But then why is he repeating six o’clock? That’s not like him. Oh, and did you hear that a prisoner escaped? Probably a murderer. What do you think?”

Dan didn’t respond. Instead, he retreated to the garage.

The next morning, the wife woke up and scrambled out of bed. “Dan, wake up,” she said as she started to leave the dark room. She climbed down the stairs and walked past the birdcage. She didn’t take off the bird cover. Better to let El sleep a little longer. If he was sick, he deserved to have some more sleep.

Turning on the coffee, she heard a noise behind her. It had been faint and quick. She jumped and turned in the darkness. Nothing. She couldn’t see anything. There was only the silhouette of the counter. Everything was surrounded in darkness.

“Hello? Is anyone there?” she said softly.

“Hello!” screeched a familiar voice. “Rope! Hello! Rope! Rope!”

The woman let out a sigh of relief and immediately felt stupid. The scare was not from the radio announcement of that convict, but it had been El. She walked through the doorway, “El, you scared me. I…”

Something went around her neck and tightened. Panic set in as she tried to scream. She couldn’t. Her hands went to her neck, scratching at the rough, thick cord. Something solid came up from behind her, warm and moving. She began to kick at her attacker’s legs. Nothing...

El watched from an open slit on the cage cover as his owner fell. His crest had rose at the sound, but then lowered. He tilted his head and watched with one eye as a shadow walked past. It dragged behind it a long thing that resembled a snake. The shadow walked out the front door.

Then silence followed until the clock chimed. And the cockatoo responded with the correct time.

“Six o’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! Six O’clock! ROPE.”
CHERYL WRIGHT VEE
Silence

Silence.

Calm. cool, serene
silence.

Soft vibrations
of a darkened sky.

Twinkling stars
and
tinkling streams.

Echoes of a
mumbling canyon.

Silence,
cool,
serene.