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Otis

Jessie Pascarelli

Otis is an ugly bird. At times during his long, tedious life, he has looked nearly presentable, but mostly, no. He is supposedly the smartest breed of parrot, which might be true. It didn't seem to take him long to figure out that his life was shit and to start acting accordingly. Grandma blames the ring of feather-less skin around his neck on stress and the carpet of red tail feathers at the bottom of his cage on the changing seasons. The glint of malevolence in his beady eye has never suggested "stress" to me. More like a pit bull in the wrong body. When he was younger, apparently he used to be quite the talker. Now, however, when he's perpetually at our house for "bird-sitting," he mainly whistles, clucks, and repeats his ironically sad catchphrase: "I can talk, can you fly?"



One day, my whole family gathered around his cage when he started making a noise like a Suburban going through a wood chipper. He seemed normal enough: the same predatory stare, the same defensive crouch on his perch. The only difference was that he wasn't imitating my Grandma's sneeze or my Grandpa's minute-long whistling symphonies. Now, when he opened his mottled black beak, he let out a deep rumble of internal organs putting up one, last fight. We pretended to be worried. One of us even mentioned taking him to the vet. But none of us could hide behind our downturned mouths the soar of hope in our bellies.

But, no. Otis continued to make the noise for weeks without any visible sign of deterioration. It turned out he was just imitating the garbage disposal.