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Dharma's Dinner

by Zoé Carroll

I feel guilty, God knows, about all sorts of things, but not about our last meal together and all that it entailed.

There are few things more sad than a relationship that has dwindled out of love and into a stasis of ambivalence and complacency. It would have been easy to stay; I wasn't being mistreated, other than being taken for granted and, I suppose, neglected. Who doesn't want to be reassured, if only occasionally, that they are the most important person in the world to someone else?

He was often away for weeks on end, and I became used to being on my own in our house. I wasn't completely on my own though. He had a parrot. An African grey parrot. Her name was Dharma and she was, apparently, incredibly intelligent. He loved her, and she adored him. She would sit contentedly on his hand while he operated his computer and he would fuss the back of her neck absentmindedly as he thought. The two of them had a special relationship. It was sickening.

The bird did not like me. She saw me as a competitor for the man's attentions and when I entered the room did one of two things. She would vie for his attentions all the more, or she would fly to the top of her cage and look down on me from her vantage point, sneering. In the world of birds, you see, a higher eye level gives you superiority and she thought herself superior in all aspects to me.

When he was away she would be vile to me. She would bite and scratch me whenever I tried to put her food into her cage. If she escaped during this process she would fly high up to the curtain pole and screech at me from her perch. There was no love lost between us.

When I finally decided that I needed to be of more value to someone and that I was unable to remain in an average relationship, I told him that we needed to talk. And so, over a spicy curried dish, I told him that I was leaving, straight after dinner, and that I had found a place to live nearer to my work. I watched him eat with my hand over my mouth, in the way that a child stops themselves from smiling or saying something that they shouldn't.

He took it all very well considering. I would have liked more of a fight, obviously, but his lack of shock or devastation confirmed to me that my course of action was appropriate and strengthened my resolve.

“I hope you and your bird will be very happy together!” I called over my shoulder as I closed the front door behind me.

I can only imagine his distress when he sought his blessed bird after I had left found his darling Dharma gone.