

# Conceived in a Cage

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4.4.2010

Veronica passed the threshold of the door tapping her umbrella three times to shake off the moisture. It wasn't raining hard, it was just the kind of weather that adds to an already sour morning. She would have left the umbrella at home, but she was wearing her new wool coat and didn't want it to get that odd post rain smell that was always much worse in the city. The waiting room was empty so she allowed herself a smile thinking this was a sign that the sour morning would turn into a decent day. She walked over to the receptionist and signed in. Not looking up, the receptionist handed her a clip board full of papers, Veronica firmly whispered that she was a returning patient; the receptionist looked up and then nodded to the empty seats. She took the queue and sat down.

As she settled in, positioning her leather carrier bag in the seat next to her (ensuring that nobody walking in would invade her personal space), she heard a squawk. Veronica didn't look up thinking it was an odd noise made by the receptionist, but then she heard it again, but louder. This time she did look up to find a large golden cage hanging from a pole in the corner of the room. Sitting in this cage was a large parrot. Veronica stared at the bird, the bird stared back. It moved from the large perch and grabbed the front of the cage, exposing it's belly to her. The parrot started shaking up and down and bobbing left to right making soft throaty noises. Veronica became entranced by the creature's dance. The bird responded to the attention by making very loud screeching calls.

"Percy! Please be quiet!" the receptionist squawked back at the bird. "Pay no attention to him, Doc's wife bought him two years ago but couldn't stand the noise, so he brought Percy here to "cheer up the clients". The receptionist made air quotes with her fingers when she said "cheer up the clients", which Veronica loathed. She also loathed birds.

From a young age, birds always seems to single her out and embarrass her. When she was five, a seagull attacked her at the beach and stole the peanut butter and jelly sandwich her mother made just for her. Over the course of her 26 years on the planet, she was defecated on by random airborne birds on seven separate occasions; once in a moving car with only a small portion of her arm out the window. Last year at her cousins wedding, a released dove got disoriented and flew right into her face. Everyone made jokes for the rest of the night and to this day some of her cousin's friends mention it when they see her.

Percy's squawks became increasingly louder, the receptionist turned up the TV which just seemed to agitate the bird more. She attempted to ignore the beast by taking her eyes away, looking down at a magazine she brought (she would never touch the magazines left in the waiting room due to all the residual bacteria left on the pages from other patients). As she pretended to read, she mentally questioned the taste of the doctor's wife. Who the hell buys birds and keeps them in a cage? Hasn't society evolved past that? What do people do with the birds? Can you expect the bird to be happy in cage in a miserable waiting room it's entire life? She didn't want to go down that thought path - didn't want to feel too sympathetic for the bird. She read that birds were the decedents of dinosaurs, specifically Velociraptors. She saw Jurassic Park - she knew how cunning those creatures were; millions of years of evolution is just going to make them smarter. She glanced at the Percy, he was still staring at her.

She focused on her upcoming wedding, and her thoughts turned to the most recent fight with her mother. She insisted on white flowers, but Veronica wanted vibrant color in her wedding. She wanted blood red roses, which her mother thought looked tacky, but Veronica felt that it represented life. Percy was mostly red. He was still staring at her.

Veronica decided to stare the bird down and show him who is boss. She locked her eyes on the one eye focused on her. Percy didn't blink and she made a point not to either.

Eventually he perceived this staring contest as the challenge that it was and began to squawk and screech loudly. She had no idea birds could fill a room with that much sound. There was nothing melodic about the noise, it just sounded like a car alarm. A warning. Veronica didn't back down, she kept staring. Percy just got louder.

He once again positioned himself in the front of the cage, exposing his belly... and (Veronica now noticing) his anus. She wasn't sure if he somehow managed to expose it more, but she was very aware of it now. Green flecks of bird feces covering the white feathers surrounding the area. She was disgusted with herself and the bird: a normal woman doesn't look at bird assholes, but she felt that Percy was doing it on purpose, to make her quit this game they were playing. She didn't. Percy continue to dance and screech.

The noise was unbearable, she didn't know how the receptionist and nurse could handle the sheer volume and still answer the phones. She was going to say something to them, but she felt guilty like she instigated this situation. The bird's stare was stubborn and defiant. Veronica brainstormed ways of silencing the bird. She kept coming back to grabbing the cage, opening the door and letting it fly away. The bird would surely not last a day in freedom. But what if the bird followed her to work or home. Would it sit outside her window watching, screeching? Impossible. Was it?

She got up moving closer to the cage. Percy's dance became more forceful, the cage kept rocking. Veronica glanced back at the receptionist but she still had her head down, it must be common for patients to approach the bird for a closer look. A closer look indeed. The bird's beak was opening slowly, like it was getting ready to strike; it DID remind her of a dinosaur. As Veronica put her finger to the latch holding the cage to the hook, she felt a tap on her shoulder, it was the nurse. "Is Percy bothering you? He seems really riled up this morning, I think we are going to put the cover on the cage and let him relax. By the way, Doctor Williams is ready for you. Head on back."

Veronica was snapped out of her trance of poor intention and fumbled her way into the back room. As the nurse was putting the cover on the cage, Percy slid down to the bottom (the only uncovered area left) and left Veronica with one last stare. Veronica changed doctors the next day. She also gave up her fight for red flowers.

Years later, on a rainy morning similar to the one when she met Percy, she caught a flash of red and green flying away from the maple tree in her yard. She thought of Percy and wondered if he wanted her to take that cage and throw it out the door that morning. Did he know her feelings about his species? Did Percy know her intentions or did he even put the idea in her head himself? Did he ever get out? She stared out of her kitchen window, wondering if something might be staring back.