

4-1-2010

## A Fine Pair

Stephen H. Jansen  
*College of DuPage*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jansen, Stephen H. (2010) "A Fine Pair," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 30: No. 2, Article 50.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol30/iss2/50>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact [koteles@cod.edu](mailto:koteles@cod.edu).

## A Fine Pair

Stephen H. Jansen

Old Henry could sit in front of the television for hours at a time. He loved the old black & white movies, the game shows, the sitcoms. They made him laugh. They made him cry. But most of all, they kept him company.

Get a dog, his doctor advised. The walks will keep you active. Get a cat, the neighbor lady suggested. It'll sit on your lap and warm those old bones. Get an aquarium, his son recommended. Colorful little fish swimming about can be entertaining. 'Ol Henry kind of liked the idea of sitting in his recliner watching fish at play.

BESSER'S PET EMPORIUM had every pet imaginable: slimy snails, hairy spiders, rainbow-colored fish, yapping puppies, even little white mice. Henry paused near a sign advertising "Half-Off All Gerbils".

"Those gerbils are a good deal," said a young salesman named Andrew with spiked hair and wrinkled Besser's tee shirt. "May I help you sir?"

"I'd like a pet. Perhaps a fish," Henry replied, not overly impressed with the young man nor the gerbils.

"Come with me," Andrew said. They walked down aisle after aisle of fishtanks, Andrew giving a long-winded description of each species. The warm humid air made the algae smell like stale grass clippings. After a while all the fish began to look the same.

"Shhh, listen," Henry interrupted. "What do you hear?"

Andrew tilted an ear in the air. "Nothing."

"Exactly," Henry remarked, wandering off.

A commotion at the rear of the store piqued his interest. There he found an enormous, gilded birdcage. Dozens of brilliantly colored birds fluttered from perch to perch. A cacophony of chirps, caws and little peeps resounded from the cage. The busy activity and constant noise mesmerized him. It was kind of like watching television - but in living color.

"Oh there you are," Andrew said, finally catching up to Henry. "I see you found our aviary."

"I think I'd like a bird," Henry decided.

"Good choice. Parakeets are ten percent off today."

LATER THAT EVENING Henry sat in his recliner before the television sipping a scotch on the rocks. His new roommate, Edwina, fidgeted about inside her new cage. She was jungle green with bright yellow highlights on her wings and belly. Having been at Besser's longer than any of the other birds, she'd been the easiest one to catch.

Henry took a sip of scotch, bubbling into the drink as he chuckled at the television. From somewhere behind him he thought he heard a hiccup of a laugh.

But then again, his hearing wasn't the best. After another humorous one-liner, he slapped his knee and guffawed. Again, more laughter behind him.

He swiveled his head around the room. Edwina sat still on her perch as if asleep. Henry shook his head and began counting the number of scotches he'd had when a low, breathy voice addressed him.

"So, was it my good looks or the ten percent off?"

Henry startled, turned around as far as his stiff neck would allow. Edwina fixated her pitch black eyes on him.

"You heard me. My striking beauty or the sale. Which one was it?"

Henry looked into his glass of scotch then at the parakeet. He rose from the recliner. The bird's head swiveled around as Henry circled the cage.

"Edwina, you... you talk?"

"Most parakeets talk, I, uh... what shall I call you?"

"My friends call me 'Ol Henry. But you can call me Henry," he said peering quizzically at the bird.

"Okay, Henry. As I was saying, I don't just talk. Unlike most parakeets, I think before I open my beak. What's that you're drinking?"

"Scotch."

"Buy a lady a drink?" Edwina said batting her eyelids. Her throaty, raspy voice intrigued him.

"Oh, where are my manners?" He said pouring a little scotch into the bird's water feeder. She immediately hopped over and dipped her golden beak into the feeder.

Edwina turned her shoulders sideways, dipped her chin and gazed over her shoulder at her new owner.

"So, why me?" She asked.

"Why you? Why me? Of all the parakeets in all the world, how did I deserve you?"

"Call it luck. I don't talk to just anyone, darlin'. But I happen to like you." Edwina spread her green-gold tail feathers wide as a fan. "Ahem," she said staring at his drink.

"Oh, I'm sorry, here you go," Henry apologized, pouring a little more for her.

"Well, such a gentleman."

He tried to remember where he'd heard that voice before. He'd been watching *The Big Sleep* with Humphrey Bogart earlier. That was it. Edwina's husky, seductive voice sounded just like Lauren Bacall's.

"Edwina, I know it's late but would you mind staying up with me for a while? I'm not the least bit tired."

"I thought you'd never ask, sweetheart." Edwina hopped down to the lowest rung in the cage. "So, where's the missus?"

"Ain't no missus. Hasn't been for a long, long time." Henry pulled himself up a bar stool from the kitchen counter. "My wife, well..." he rubbed his chin with his hand. "I caught her in bed with another man."

"Oh my!" Edwina gasped.

“My best friend. In our home. In our bed.”

“What a tramp.”

“That’s what I thought. Shot her dead with the revolver I kept in the dresser. Shot him in the knee.”

“You killed her?”

“Yep.” Henry said in a grave tone, swirling his drink around watching the cubes circle in the glass. He poured Edwina a bit more. She nodded in appreciation.

“Why didn’t you kill the bastard too?”

“I wanted to give him something to remember the rest of his life.”

“Did you go to prison?”

“No. Manslaughter, suspended sentence. Turned out my so called best friend had been screwin’ the judge’s wife too.”

“Reminds me of my first love.” Edwina’s black beady eyes grew larger, her chest swelled. “He was a beauty. Feathers blue as the Caribbean. Handsomest ‘keet in the aviary. One night I’m dozing on my side of the perch, lean over and his side of the perch is cool. He’s gone.”

“Flew the coop?” Henry chuckled.

Edwina shot him a stern look he avoided by tipping his glass to his face, slurping loudly.

“Caught him over in the corner with some young canary half his age.”

“I’m sorry,” Henry said.

“Not as sorry as he was. I flew over. Little chickie flies off. And I proceeded to peck out one of his eyes.”

“You did what?”

“You heard me. Pecked out his eye right then and there. Pretty boy blue spent the rest of his days flyin’ around in circles.”

“Whew, you’re one tough cookie, Edwina.” Henry climbed off his stool ambling into the kitchen for a refresher scotch. When he returned he sipped a little off the top making sure to pour some for Edwina too. She took a nip then stood to swallow but tipped back too far, almost falling off her perch. A quick beat of her wings kept her upright.

Henry watched Edwina closely as she fluttered her wings, primping herself. The combination of vibrant green and yellow feathers blended together on her chest in a muted ocean blue. And those dark, piercing eyes – Bogart would love them.

Henry and Edwina reflected on their conversation a while. An eerie almost confessional silence enveloped them both.

“Do you think we’ll go to hell for what we did?” Henry asked.

“There is no hell,” she replied.

“No hell?”

“Nope. You may come back as something else though.”

“Like a parakeet?”

“Anything. You remember those half-price gerbils?”

Henry rose and opened the birdcage door, extending his finger for her.

“Would you like to join me for a movie?”

Edwina shook her feathers presentable and hopped on. “Sweetie, I thought you’d never ask.”

## Spaceman

Eric Hart

I miss 2005. And do you remember-  
grape swishers, the chainsaw seatbelt, broken windows, and hidden cellophane  
wrappers?  
I do and I miss it like hell. Or how about-  
Long bus rides to Podunk, small town stadiums. Diesel fumes and the times we  
spent looking at  
overcast autumnal skies?  
The issue is  
I still look up to November skies with you by my side.  
You look for gradients of shade 300 miles away.