

Bird, Brained

Ardent Lee could hear the buoy bell ringing disconsolately in the distance but it was too dark to see anything beyond the receding foamy water. She shivered as the frigid wind picked up, knowing a late-season Nor'easter would hit in the next few hours, and knowing this was her last chance. She raised her arm and threw the glass bottle into the darkness. A moment later she was startled to hear a cry of pain over the crashing of the waves. Or was it just a sea gull screeching somewhere out beyond the breakers? She waited, breasts heaving, eyes squinting into gloom, but she heard no more. She picked up her skirts, turned, and fled up the beach, her long, thick hair flowing out behind her like a veil. Now all she could do was to wait.

Hours later, Ardent Lee was sound asleep in her yurt perched high on a cliff above the sandy shore. She was awoken by a thump on the door. Then another. Thump, thump, thump. She hurried to the door, pulling her wrapper tight around her neck. She looked through her peephole and saw only the trees whipped into frenzies by the storm.

“Hark. Who is it?” she ventured, her voice warbling with fear.

She was answered by a thump and nothing more.

“Please, dear wayfarer-in-the-night and/or vagabond-harboring-ill-intent,” Ardent Lee said, “I am a solitary woman, alone and isolated in the wilderness, clad only in semi-

diaphanous nightclothes, aroused from sleep without showering, and lacking the benefit of makeup. Surely, you can not expect me to open the door on such a night as this?"

Another thump, louder this time. Still she saw nothing through the peephole. Her curiosity piqued, she undid the latch, opened the door a crack, and peeked out. No one was there. But just as she was about to shut the door again, there was a thump in the vicinity of her fuzzy slippers. Looking down, Ardent Lee saw a seagull, its long beak wedged into familiar looking glass bottle. She opened the door wider to get a better look.

The seagull shook its head violently, causing the bottle to detach and fly into the yurt. It rolled noisily across the room and landed under Ardent Lee's bed.

"Drivel!" the seagull squawked. "Frothy, rambling twaddle!"

"I beg your pardon?" Ardent Lee said, her heart racing at full gallop.

"Your short story," the seagull spat, pushing his way into the yurt. "To use the vernacular, it stinks."

"I do not believe, sir," Ardent Lee exclaimed, closing the door against the night, "that you were called upon to express an opinion on my little scribbles, my forays into lucubration, my attempts at..."

"You beaned me with it," the seagull said. He ruffled his wings and shook off droplets of rain like a dog. "I believe that gives me the right to comment on it."

"Sir," Ardent Lee said, drawing herself up indignantly, "that manuscript, and its accompanying letter of introduction and SASE, was addressed explicitly to a New York editor of the highest stature, a veritable pinnacle of the publishing industry. It was not to be tampered, meddled or interfered with by a member of the feathered tribe, a fowl, a stormy petrel."

The sea gull narrowed his eyes. “I’m a seagull. What’s with all the fancy words? Your nightclothes aren’t semi-diaphanous. They’re flannel pajamas, for crying out loud. PJ’s. Where’s all this wasted hot air coming from?”

Ardent Lee glanced over at her Victorian writing table. It was laden with all manner of writing paraphernalia -- feathered quills, incense candles, dream-catchers, amulets, plot-wheels, a bust of Barbara Cartland, a signed 5 X 6 portrait of Danielle Steele, a book of commonly misspelled words, and...

“You’re abusing a thesaurus, aren’t you?” the seagull said, following her gaze.

“I am not, sir,” Ardent Lee said, perspicuously moving the ample yet generally pleasing lower half of her body to block his view of her penning place, and the aforementioned tome.

“I’m going to have to take that thesaurus away from you,” the seagull said

“Nooooo,” Ardent Lee cried in anguish like a shorn lamb. “I cannot let that transpire.”

“And I can’t let you keep it,” the seagull said “To let you keep it would be....”

“Wrong, unjust, injurious, objectional, unwarranted, iniquitous, immoral, an abomination?” “Ardent Lee offered helpfully.

The seagull took a couple of steps back and unfolded his wings. “I was going to say bad.” Then he flew at her. Unfortunately, the yurt was small, and the seagull needed a few feet of running space before takeoff. Consequently, the seagull was only able to lift four feet off the ground before crashing into Ardent Lee’s firm, alabaster breasts. His neck was broken instantly.

“Sheez,” Ardent Lee said, “everybody’s a critic.” She got out her broom and swept the feathered creature outside. Tomorrow, she thought, she would awaken early and bury the bird at the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea. She would write him a lovely eulogy, 5,000 words minimum, and post it at the local Laundromat bulletin board. The people there appreciated good writing.