

LVW Flash Fiction Contest 2017

THIRD PLACE

Pink Flamingoes

by John A. Frochio

"I found them at a yard sale. Aren't they precious?" said Heather, bright and bubbly as a glass of champagne.

Aaron Menschen stared blankly at the two pink flamingoes standing out like sore thumbs in his front yard. He was not fond of pink flamingoes, neither the real ones that strutted in a zoo nor the plastic ones that cluttered pristine suburban lawns. And these two beauties did nothing to sway his opinion.

After a long moment of stunned silence—which he hoped gave his wife a clue about his true feelings—Aaron said, "Precious wasn't the first thing to come to my mind, dear."

"They're happy. They're fun. I'm sure you'll come to appreciate them."

"I'm sure," he said unconvincingly.

Tacky was the first word that came to his mind. Now garden gnomes—those were his kind of lawn ornament.

As the days trudged by, Aaron grew to hate the plastic birds more and more. He tried to ignore them, averting his eyes when he passed near them, but he found this tactic next to impossible.

One day, after waking from a particularly pleasant dream in which he drove the pink flamingoes to a remote location and tossed them into an abyss, he looked outside and found the birds staring right at him. They appeared to be gawking at him with an air of arrogance.

His heart raced. Unnerved, he stormed into the kitchen where his wife was making breakfast.

"Why are they facing the house?"

She smiled warmly. "What are you talking about, dear?"

"The pink things, you know. They're staring at the house."

"Well, I surely didn't move them. I prefer for them to be watching the rising sun."

They went to the window. The birds were back in their original positions.

"You see, dear. Nobody moved them. You haven't had your morning coffee yet."

"But . . . Must be some kid's prank."

"I don't know who would do such a thing. Maybe they're possessed by murdered flamenco dancers named Consuela and Conchetta." She returned to the kitchen chuckling.

He grumbled. *Yeah, laugh it up.*

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After work Aaron stalked around his yard, skirting the plastic birds. Not finding anything suspicious, he went inside.

He glanced out the front bay window as he passed by. The birds were several feet closer, staring at the house.

He ran outside, shouting, "Okay, where are you, you little rug rats?"

No one was around. He scoured his front and back yard. Nothing.

When he returned to the front yard, the birds were back in their original spots.

"I don't believe this is happening."

He went inside and found Heather.

"Where did you say you got those birds?"

"Yard sale."

"Whose yard?"

"Old Man Bartleby's."

"Didn't he die?"

"Yeah. Not long after his wife passed away. His son's getting rid of everything. He was a hoarder. Lots of junk. No surprise, huh?"

Aaron bit his tongue. *Yeah, junk.*

He said, "He was an ornery cuss. He never did like me."

"He was never too fond of people in general."

But I did something he never forgave me for. I bet those pink flamingoes are his revenge on me.

That night he had a nightmare about Old Man Bartleby and his evil eye, staring, staring ...

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The next morning he peeked behind the closed curtains. A pink flamingo head was pressed against the glass, staring at him with an eye as evil-looking as Old Man Bartleby's. He jumped and let out a yelp.

His wife called, "What's wrong, dear?"

"Nothing. Just . . . stubbed my toe."

"Be more careful."

He peeked again. Both birds were against the windowpane now. He hastily closed the curtain.

There was a knock on the door.

"Don't open it!"

His wife came out.

"What's the matter with you? It's just a FedEx delivery."

When he left for work, the flamingoes were waiting for him at the end of his front porch. Heart beating rapidly, he went out around them, half-expecting them to follow him. But they remained where they were as he got in his car and backed out of the driveway.

Why are you acting so silly? Damn pranksters!

He was stressed and ineffective at work. Several of his co-workers commented on his odd behavior. He brushed them off with a forced laugh.

When it was time to leave for the day, he busied himself with trivial tasks, delaying the inevitable. Eventually he forced himself to leave.

He pulled in the driveway.

No flamingoes.

Now what?

Maybe Heather gave them away. Unlikely. Someone stole them? That would be great, but doubtful.

He went inside.

Nervously he looked around. No birds. No wife, either. Her car was still in the driveway. Maybe visiting a neighbor?

He called her cell. It rang in the bedroom. She never left her cell phone.

He began to worry. Something was wrong.

He went outside.

And stopped.

The birds were back, staring at him from the end of the front porch.

He raised his fist, shouting, "It's you, Old Man Bartleby! I know it. You never forgave me for killing your old tree. It was a nuisance. I took matters into my own hands. So you're going to haunt me now, is that it?"

He noticed his wife's favorite scarf, white with pink stripes, wrapped around one of the bird's long necks.

His eyes bulged.

"What have you done with my wife?"

He fumed and paced.

"You did something to her, you monsters. I'm the one you want, not her."

He leaped at the offending birds.

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When Heather returned home, she retrieved her scarf from the flamingo. "How did that get out here?"

She screamed when she found her husband on the living room floor. The coroner said it was a heart attack.

That evening, while mourning her husband, she wondered briefly why the pink flamingoes in her front yard were facing a garden gnome, eye to eye, as though ready for a scuffle.

THE END

John Frochio grew up and still lives among the rolling hills of Western Pennsylvania, specifically in New Brighton. For a living, he develops and installs computer automation systems for steel mills. A member of the Pittsburgh Worldwrights since 2011, he has had stories published in anthologies Triangulation 2003 and Triangulation: Parch (2014), Interstellar Fiction, Beyond Science Fiction, Twilight Times, Aurora Wolf, Liquid Imagination, SciFan magazine, Time Travel Tales anthology (Chappy Fiction, 2016), and Visions VII: Universe anthology (Lillicat Publishers, 2017), as well as non-sf novel Roots of a Priest (with Ken Bowers, Booklocker, 2007) and sf&f collection Large and Small Wonders (Byrne Publishing, 2012). He happily won second place in the LVW Flash Fiction Contest in 2012. His wife, Connie, is a retired nurse and his daughter, Toni, is a flight attendant.