Yellow Canaries

By Rebecca Smillie

Mr. Arthur Paxton was a simple man with a strict routine. Every morning he woke up at

6:05 sharp, made a cup of black coffee, and then settled into the chair that sat at the head of his

kitchen table with the newspaper of the day. Arthur had a method of reading his newspaper. He

started with the last page because he believed the best stories were nuzzled in between the

headlines and the advertisements. Brightly displayed at the top of the page was the headline,

“Local School Receives Large Donation.” “Boring,” Arthur muttered to himself as he moved on.

He scanned past the political section, the unusually large missing persons report, and came upon

an advertisement that caught his eye. It read, “Yellow Canaries for Sale. Vibrant colors, excellent

singers.” Arthur stared at it for a moment, trying to remember if he’d ever seen it before. But he

had never seen this advertisement, which was uncommon. Most of them were old and tired, like

the blurb for the Glamorous Ladies Hair Salon that Arthur had seen every day. “Let your hair be

your first priority,” it had said for as long as Arthur could remember.

The yellow canary advertisement was fascinating to Arthur. Arthur read the fine print

underneath, “Come visit Mrs. Aves at 21 North Beakfield.” Arthur realized that 21 North

Beakfield was only a block away from his work. He decided to swing by there on his walk home.

By now the time was drawing close to 7:10, and he would need to leave for work soon. Arthur

clipped the advertisement out of the newspaper, tucked it into his pocket, and then set out for

Work.

Every day, Arthur walked to work. He wore a tweed jacket, a white dress shirt, and a

black tie. The tie was a gift from Arthur’s mother. She said it complimented his hair, and she was

right. Arthur wasn’t a man with distinctive features, but he had shiny, crow black curls, which

framed his face well.

Just as Arthur had planned, on his way back from work that day, he retrieved the

advertisement from the pocket of his corduroy slacks and followed the address to a quiet side

street perpendicular to the road of his employment. It was cobblestone, and it was obviously not

Well-traveled.

There it was, 21 North Beakfield, a small building sandwiched between two, tall, empty,

dilapidated buildings. If you weren’t looking for it you would have never noticed this

establishment with no windows and a narrow walkway, sprinkled with the occasional feather.

Arthur walked up to the door and knocked. After waiting for a couple of minutes with no answer,

he decided to check the address again to make sure he was in the right place, but before he could,

the door creaked open to reveal a short, portly woman.

The women had a multicolored bandana covering ash blonde hair. Her eyes were small,

and each pupil almost filled the entire eye. Her nose was also small, and very high on her face,

and her thin lips, that had almost no pigment to them, were stretched into an uncomfortable

Smile.

“Please,” she chirped, “Come in.” Arthur stepped through the threshold, ducking in order

not to hit his head. The first room was small, and every wall was covered with layered textiles

and patterned curtains. The room was bathed in yellow light, having quite a few lamps for such a

small room. It was tropically humid.

“So you must be Mrs. Aves, the bird doctor, right?”

“Yes, I do love my birds. Now please, sit down,” Mrs. Aves gestured to a small brown

couch. “Let me get you a drink.” She glided over to a large bar cart crowded with multiple kinds

of glassware, all filled with brightly colored fluids. Arthur watched her carefully as she slowly

prepared his drink. She mixed a blue substance from a martini glass, a purple fluid from a large

decanter and so on for quite some time. When she was finally done, she quickly stirred the

beverage with a small spoon, and picked it up, revealing that the drink was bright yellow.

Confused, Arthur took the drink, scrutinized it, and wished he had watched the color of the drink

more closely while she was mixing it.

“How...h-how did you get such a vibrant yellow, I mean...I saw what you mixed in there

And-”

“Just try it,” Mrs. Aves squawked as she watched Arthur eagerly.

Arthur was not accustomed to drinking strange liquids that strange ladies gave to him,

especially if they were as intriguing a color as this one was, but Mrs. Aves had invited him into

her shop, and it seemed as though she didn’t get visitors often. He cautiously sipped the amber

cocktail. The drink was unlike anything he had ever tasted before. It was twangy with fruity

notes and a spicy aftertaste. The flavors confused Arthur, but they didn’t disgust him.

“What’s in this?” he asked.

“Secret recipe,” Mrs. Aves replied smugly as she swooped back to her rocking chair. The

two sat there for some time in silence, which was only interrupted by the creaking of Mrs. Aves’

rocking chair. “So what brings you to my shop?” Mrs. Aves asked.

“I was hoping to see your yellow canaries,” Arthur said.

“Okay then,” Mrs. Aves crowed as she abruptly hopped up to her feet. “Follow me.” She

led Arthur through a long hallway to a large yellow door, took a keyring out of her pocket, and

began to unlock the four different locks on the door.

“Why do you have so many locks?” Arthur asked. Mrs. Aves stopped and stared directly

into Arthur’s eyes.

“To keep them from escaping,” she replied, completely deadpan.

Finally, the door was unlocked. As soon as it opened, Arthur was hit with the sound of

hundreds, maybe even thousands of birds chirping. Behind the yellow door was a small room,

filled with yellow canaries packed like sardines, all screeching at the top of their lungs. The

canaries had small eyes bulging out of their heads and were an ungodly hue of yellow. They

were restless, flying back and forth and bumping into one another. Arthur couldn’t shake the

weird feeling he got from this room, but something seemed to keep him from leaving. The longer

he stayed, the more dizzy he began to feel. Soon the room was spinning, and the birds were in a

panicked state, like this was something they had seen before, but something they couldn’t stop.

Arthur fell to his knees and began coughing uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Mrs. Aves stood calmly

next to him. The coughing became more and more violent until Arthur was coughing up blood.

In his last moments of consciousness, he looked down to see a pool of blood. With his last hack,

he coughed up a single yellow feather, which slowly floated through the air before resting atop

the red puddle.

The next day another young man came to Mrs. Aves’ shop. Mrs. Aves invited him in and

gave him a similar drink to the one she had given Arthur. She then led him to the canary room,

per the young man’s request. There was one canary, in particular, that stood out to the young

man since it was screeching more vigorously than all of the others. The man looked down to

examine the bird and noticed it had a single black hair on its otherwise yellow head.

“How unusual,” he said. As he stared at the bird, it slowly became more and more

blurry, he fell to the ground, and the last words he heard from Mrs. Aves were, “Yes, quite

unusual.”