

Andrea Jackson

Canary

Trying to lift Solange out of her depression, her mother has sent her a hat. Her mother is always sending her perky clothing from the Florida boutiques. Blue-and-white sailor blouses with brass buttons, flamingo scarves. Solange puts them in a drawer with the tags still on, "Perma-Prest." The hat is green, crocheted, with crocheted flowers and a yellow crocheted bird. In a vague act of defiance she puts it on and walks out into the world. Anonymous, in the world's ugliest hat. In college Solange declaimed "Wherefore art thou...?" with elegant diction and a knowing smile. The football captain sought her out; she rejected him as superficial. She wanted solitude to find herself. She has no money now, no energy. She is emaciated and slumped, wonders if she has osteoporosis—no milk, no exercise. She is 30, looks 40, and has a job as an invisible person, reading books on tape. On the street, a former friend approaches. Jessa, a sorority sister who became a mountain climber. Her hair is sleek, her jogging suit shiny Patagonia. Her eyes show, for just an instant, shock, dismay. Solange performs a desperate story about the hat. "It honors an old Quaker couple, holdouts on their farm against the encroaching city. A fledgling canary fell into an abandoned well on the property, and the old man, trying to rescue it, tumbled in. The firemen came. The old man had put the bird onto the brim of his hat. As they lowered the rope ladder he chanted 'God is love' and his wife pressed a fireman's arm and said 'Peace be with you.' After they carried the old man up the ladder the bird flew away, surprising everyone." From under the hateful hat, Solange makes her eyes smile, fixes them on Jessa's, tries to force Jessa to see her, still, as one of the real people.

Andrea Jackson's fiction and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming online in *Superstition Review*, *Kaleidowhirl*, *The Hiss Quarterly*, *Triplopia Review*, *Poetry Midwest* and *Opium Magazine*, and in print in *Margie*, *Rhino*, *caesura*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *The Eleventh Muse*, *Periphery: A Magical Realist Zine*, *The Binnacle*, and the anthology, *New Harvest: Jewish Writing in St. Louis 1998-2005*. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Missouri – St. Louis and has received two Pushcart nominations and one nomination for the Best of the Net anthology.