

*In his debut collection of humorous short stories, Larry Levy delves into a myriad of subjects that run the gamut from fear of costumed birds to comic interpretations of eternal return.*

## **Wait Awhile**

by Larry Levy

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WAIT  
AWHILE

LARRY LEVY

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## A Bird in the Hand

So, I went to this Halloween party in Baltimore last night at the request of a writer/friend who was known around town for giving outrageous political parties. He thought I'd enjoy myself because I was also a writer even though I wrote for an "insipid social rag" as his newspaper referred to our magazine. Now I really don't care much for Halloween shindigs because I'm not any good at making costumes. The last time I held a needle and thread I sewed my thumb and forefinger together. This caused me to inadvertently give the 'okay' sign to my neighbor who then backed up into my father's brand-new BMW. So, to play it safe, I went casual.

I made it to the party about fifteen minutes late and sure enough everyone was dressed up in costume. There were a few striking pussycats and one or two witches whose broomsticks I envied. But I felt uncomfortable like an observer in a war zone just hoping neither side would take a shot at me thinking I was on the other's side. I noticed a guy in the corner with an eye patch in soldier's garb giving me the evil eye. He lifted up the patch to get a better look at me because that was in fact his better eye.

I was nervous and needed a drink. I went over to the bar and got in line behind a guy dressed as a turtle who was taking *forever*, so I lit up a cigarette to pass the time. Another guy in a rabbit

costume approached me, put his left paw to his mouth and said, “hey man, you got another fag?” Just then the turtle grabbed the rabbit by the throat. They wrestled each other to the ground and began rolling around in circles. It turned out the turtle was a gay turtle who had just come out of his shell and thought the rabbit was talking about him. So, I stepped over both of them, got my jack and coke from the bartender and went on my way.

I took a seat on an unoccupied sofa in another room. Then this guy dressed like a giant seagull with only a left wing sat down next to me. As he turned his head toward me I found myself staring into a pair of beady eyes that reminded me of my Uncle Harry who would stare deeply into your eyes and then pick your pocket. This crazy bird had the same look. So, there we were eye to eye and neither of us said anything – it was a strange moment. I broke the ice and asked him, “what’s with the bird getup?” He lifted up his left arm revealing a name tag that read, *Jonathan Livingston Siegel*. I had to laugh.

“Great! Here I am, sitting on a sofa on a Saturday night in NYC, at a party I didn’t even want to go to, talking to a left winged nut dressed like a bird who thinks he’s Jonathan Livingston Seagull. What could be better?” I yelled, agitated by the presence of this overstuffed seagull.

“Hey man, what’s your problem?” the bird fired back.

“Sorry Siegel. Listen, it’s not your fault. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* is one of my favorite novellas but I have this issue with all birds large and small so don’t take it personally” I replied, lowering my voice. I told him the following story.

“When I was a young boy my father took me to my first baseball game. We were living in Baltimore at the time and the Orioles were in town. It was the summer of 1995. I loved the

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game, the team, and in particular the team mascot, the orange and black Oriole Bird. We were sitting on the third base side and during the game my dream came true. The Oriole Bird made his way over to our section and I got to shake his hand. I remember staring into his beady eyes and being mesmerized as any kid would by those giant plastic peepers that never moved.

All of a sudden, this guy gets up and punches the bird in the beak. He hit the bird so hard his head gear flew off and landed on top of the third base umpire who missed an important call. I couldn't tell if the laughter from the crowd was directed toward the umpire who looked like an Egyptian Gargoyle, or the Oriole Bird rolling around on the ground with his beak flattened like one of those cartoon characters on television. The cops came over and escorted the guy out of the stands who then spent the next three days in the hoosegow watching Hitchcock's *The Birds* as punishment. I was mortified. I cried and cried; the same crocodile tears when it became apparent that Santa Claus was my older brother Sydney. It was a harrowing experience for me that day to learn that a real man lived beneath the orange and black bird costume I had grown to love.

I never went to any more baseball games. I also went through this period where I refused to eat chicken or turkey. My mother still reminds to this day of the grief I put her through and the little yellow pill she needed to "tranquilize her mind" as Mick Jagger used to say. One evening while dining at a fancy restaurant, my uncle who was a fine man in many respects despite his tendency to lick his finger and stick it in your ear while you were talking, ordered pheasant under glass. Once again, I saw those beady eyes staring at me. I was outraged! I jumped up from the table, grabbed my uncle by the throat and made him spit out his food. This incident caused a rift between my uncle and my father that lasted for two years.

But reconciliation was just around the corner. At the beginning of the baseball season in 2013 my uncle called off the war and in the spirit of good will gave my father and I two tickets to an upcoming Orioles game. We drove down to The Yard and before we went to our seats we decided to get some food. As we approached the concession stand two guys were getting their picture taken with the Oriole Bird. I grew excited and nervous at the same time. Even though I was now an adult I still wanted to get a picture with my childhood hero. So, I waited my turn. Just as the photographer said, “cheese” one of the guys grabbed the Oriole Bird by the nuts and gave them a good twist. The bird screamed out in pain and knocked the guy down. A scuffle ensued and the cops arrested the man grabbing him by the nuts as some sort of biblical retribution. It turned out the guy was the infamous “nut-grabber” who had been terrorizing team mascots up and down the east coast for years. When asked why he would do such a thing the nut-grabber replied, “well, it is common knowledge that a bird’s testicles are on the inside, so I wanted to find out if it was true.” Needless to say, I was distraught from the entire spectacle. So, you see Siegel, when you turned your head to look at me I went back to a dark place.”

“Sorry man, I didn’t mean to freak you out” he said, trying his best to neutralize the situation. “It’s amazing how many people refuse to take walking, talking costumed wildlife seriously – you have no idea what I’ve been through” he continued, empathizing with my pain.

He looked my way again. His beak opened up slightly and he said, “I have to give a speech in an hour and perhaps you could help me?” I nodded in the affirmative and finished my drink. He continued. “I’m really torn. I want to give a dynamic uplifting speech and use Jonathan Livingston Seagull’s life as a metaphor. I always loved the novella and its positive message about self-



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improvement. So, I want to tell people that what is most important in life is reaching new heights; that making more money and achieving greater fame and fortune is a good thing. I know this will appeal to the conservatives in the room and there are many of them here tonight. On the other hand, (lifting his left arm), I want to assure my friends on the left the exact opposite – that there are more important things than money, moving faster, and getting ahead – that there is nothing wrong with a simple moderate life.”

“So, what should I do?” he asked. I said, “look, I’m an independent and I don’t want any trouble. I just came from a terrible fight in the other room between a turtle and a rabbit and I don’t want to get involved. But since your speech takes both sides and is non-committal you should be just fine. Politicians do the same thing every day.”

Then came the announcement. My friend the host, with microphone in hand, asked if Jonathan Livingston Siegel would please come to the podium. I gave Siegel the obligatory thumbs up as he walked past me. He took the podium and started to address the crowd. The audience was divided. On the left side were several pussy cats, the turtle, and a few social workers. On the right side were six mice, the soldier with the eye patch, a few of the aforementioned witches, and the rabbit who now had an ear missing.

Siegel began - “Dear Friends: I have given this much thought. There is more to life than just making money.”

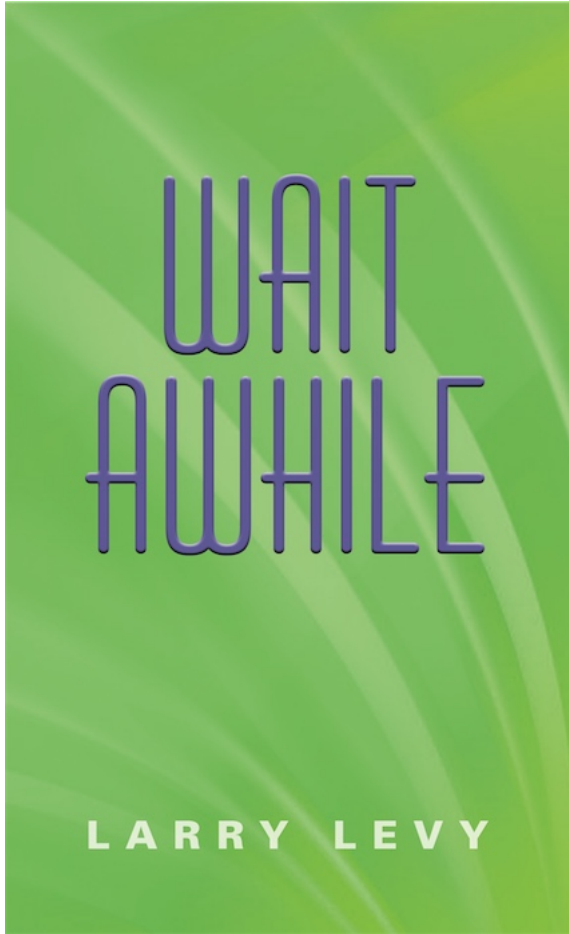
At that moment, the soldier with the eye patch and the rabbit with a missing ear emerged from the crowd and approached the podium where Siegel was speaking. The soldier pulled out a pistol and shot Seigel in the chest. Siegel fell to the ground in a *thump* – and not a normal kind of thump – this was a thump that

only a radical leftist could make. Then the two men pulled Siegel by the legs and started dragging him to the door. Siegel's clawed feet came off and the men were left with the fake feet in their hands and Siegel still on the floor. When they realized their mistake, they broke into some soft shoe to entertain the crowd. They danced over to Siegel and pulled him by his real feet and then disappeared out the door.

About thirty seconds later all three returned and each took a bow. Then everyone turned toward me and began laughing. The entire scene was staged at my expense. Apparently, my friend the host who knew about my paranoid leanings toward costumed fowl tipped off everyone at the party well before I had arrived. It was a nightmare. All the political posturing was done to draw me in to make me think I had an important story to write.

Then Siegel took off the top off his costume and yelled in my direction, “hey man, it’s me, the Oriole Bird, remember?”

I was so angry and humiliated I lunged at the half man, half bird. Here was the person who once gave life to my childhood hero, the Oriole Bird, now back again as a political manifestation of one of my favorite novels. I didn’t care that Siegel was a leftist like myself; I was too confused to be rational. So, I grabbed him by the throat and started choking him until the soldier and rabbit pulled me off and tossed me out of the apartment. I got myself together, took the stairs down to the lobby, and walked out of the building. I hailed a cab and went down to Little Italy. I ordered *Chicken Fra Diablo*, called my mother, and then went home and slept more soundly than I had in years.



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