

Starstruck

By Frederick William Schroeder IV

I couldn't have been more than three  
when we journeyed to Florida  
to see the rulers of the aquatic realm.

The Great Shamu,  
the sharks and dolphins,  
those stinky fish  
did not excite me.

Why did we spend thousands  
on luxury hotel rooms, amusement park passes,  
and brunch with Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and Goofy?  
I wouldn't remember any of them.

There was one attraction I was after:  
the fabulously elegant flamingos.

It was for them that we drove  
two days straight  
in a van packed with children's carseats,  
an air conditioner  
coughing stagnant, summer air.

I pinched my baby sister  
when she delayed our viewing  
of the magnificent bird.

For that, I sat on the bench  
while she fed the stingrays.

I pouted,  
Stupid, stinky, baby sister,  
and looked for any signs  
of my pink, feathered friends.

They were close,  
I just knew it,  
so I broke away,  
not thinking about the worry I'd cause.

Somehow or another, I found what I'd come for.  
Just up the path,  
their hooked necks hovered, still,  
like pink S's  
over a pond of sparkling champagne.

What kept me from petting  
their fabulously fluffy feathers,  
was a barred gate,  
sharp, tall and cold.

I pressed my face through,  
watching their beautifully still bodies,  
hoping they'd notice me.

I may have first encountered them  
in a National Geographic,  
or perhaps even a coloring book,  
before ever seeing them  
in flesh and feather.

In those books I never saw  
that in the pond, our reflections  
were nearly the same:  
pale, pink and blurry.

In the presence of animal kingdom celebrity,  
I continued watching, daydreaming,  
barely noticing the frantic shouts  
of adults surrounding me.

The flamingos tiptoed towards me  
with the grace of a runway star,  
barely breaking the water's surface.  
They posed, just for me.  
I held my breath  
and only wished that someone  
had taken our photograph  
before hauling me back to my family.