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SF PERUSALS

Birds of a Feather

Marc Acito

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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BIRDS OF A FEATHER was first produced by the Hub Theatre in Fairfax, Virginia on July 15, 2011. The performance was directed by Shirley Serotsky, with sets by Robbie Hayes, lighting by Andy Cissina, sounds by Veronika Vorel, and costumes by Deb Sivigny. The Production Stage Manager was Eric Arnold. The cast was as follows:

SILO, LOLA, BOMBSHELL, PORKEY, GAYEST, PREENING, ANNOUNCER, GROWN-UP TANGO . . . . . Dan Crane

ROY, PALE MALE, BOMBSHELL, BETTY, GAYER, BORED, TEEN TANGO, CHASTITY WRIGHT . . . . . Matt Dewberry

BIRDER, GAY, FAT CAT SENATOR, MAN IN COVERALLS, WANNA-BE, RICHARD COHEN . . . . . Eric Messner

ZOOKEEPER, PAULA ZAHN, FEMALE BIRDER . . . . . Jjana Valentiner

The author wishes to acknowledge Helen Pafumi, artistic director of the Hub Theatre, who had the vision to know what this play was about before he did.

CHARACTERS

One woman and three men play 25 roles, broken down as follows:

ZOOKEEPER
PAULA ZAHN
FEMALE BIRDER

ROY
PALE MALE
BOMBSHELL
BETTY
GAYER
BORED
TEEN TANGO
CHASTITY WRIGHT

SILO
LOLA
BOMBSHELL
PORKEY
GAYEST
PREENING
ANNOUNCER
GROWN-UP TANGO

BIRDER
GAY
MAN IN COVERALLS
FAT CAT SENATOR
WANNA-BE
RICHARD COHEN

SETTING

New York City, in and around Central Park.

TIME

Early 21st Century

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This is a play about love. It's also about a bunch of other things, but if you keep love foremost in your mind, you can't go wrong. (That's true of life, as well.) So the pairings in the casting are very specific. But since love was meant to be shared, the cast of 4 actors can be enlarged up to 22.

For the emotional resonance of the play to deliver, the actors playing Roy and Silo should play Teen Tango and Grown Tango, respectively. Likewise, if you split the roles of Roy/Pale Male into two actors, you should also split the roles of Silo/Lola for balance.

If desired, the 11 principal roles can be assigned to 6 or 8 actors as follows:

6 actors

Roy / Teen Tango
Silo / Grown Tango
Pale Male
Lola
Zookeeper / Female Birder / Paula
Birder / Richard

6 actors

Roy / Teen Tango / Pale Male
Silo / Grown Tango / Lola
Zookeeper / Female Birder
Paula
Birder
Richard

8 actors

Roy / Teen Tango
Silo / Grown Tango
Pale Male
Lola
Zookeeper / Female Birder
Paula
Birder
Richard

As for the secondary roles, feel free to divide them up any way you wish.

You should also feel free to play around with the gender-bending casting. The point of the play is that the essential need to bond transcends not just gender, but humanity. So it makes just as much sense for a male actor to play a female bird as it does for a female actor to play a male bird. Indeed, I welcome seeing a production in which the human characters are cast gender-blind, as well.

Which leads me to a word about style. The quickest way to kill the heart and soul of my writing is to camp it up. The language is already height-

ened; if the performance is, too, not only do the laughs disappear, but so does the emotional connection. So don't confuse an actor playing across gender with drag, or an actor playing an animal with a cartoon.

All of the historical events of the play are true – my only flight of fancy was to wonder what these real-life animals would have felt if they had interior lives like those of humans. So the best way to figure out how the animal characters talk and move is to imagine what they would do if they were human.

These principles apply to the set and costumes, as well. I prefer you keep both as simple as possible, avoiding hyper-realism as well as caricature. My set descriptions are meant to evoke an image, not be taken literally; the same goes for projections.

Lastly, while the play is divided into two acts, it's just short enough that it can be played as one without intermission.

This play literally came to me in a fevered dream. I was in bed with the flu, unable to raise my head off the pillow, when it occurred to me that these two avian dramas (and the bird-brained human behavior they inspired) happened across Central Park from one another at the same time. As soon as I could reach for my computer, the play flowed out in that way you hear about but seldom happens. I wrote the first draft in eleven days. It was and is, as the saying goes, a labor of love.

I hope it is for you, too.

New York, June 1, 2013

For Floyd Sklaver,

My Leading Man,
First…Foremost…Forever

ACT ONE
PART ONE: MATING

SCENE ONE

(A screen full of snow. The channel changes. Images of romance appear – perhaps Ross and Rachel, Rhett and Scarlett, "You had me at hello" – click, click, click until landing on Paula Zahn on CNN. The date on the crawl reads August 25, 2007.)

ANNOUNCER. *(offstage)* And now, *Paula Zahn Now*. With Paula Zahn…Now.

PAULA. *(on screen)* We're going to spend the next hour on one of the most controversial subjects in America – gender, sexuality and what makes some people straight and others gay.

(Onstage, **PAULA ZAHN** *appears – poised, glamorous, game face on. She carries a copy of* And Tango Makes Three.*)*

PAULA. It's part of CNN's series on probing homosexuality.

(The "Probing Homosexuality" logo appears.)

A recent CNN poll on attitudes toward homosexuality shows that fully eighty-two percent of Americans are sick and tired of giving their opinions on homosexuality. But, lucky for us, there's still that eighteen percent who can't stop talking about it. So let's start by looking at the controversy over the most banned book in America for three years running, *And Tango Makes Three.*

(The cover of the book appears on the screen.)

A children's picture book about Silo and Roy, two male chinstrap penguins in the Central Park Zoo who pair-bonded and raised a chick together.

(CNN fades away as the image changes to the real penguins in the rocky landscape of the Central Park Zoo penguin house.)

PAULA. *(cont.)* This is their true story, and of the hawks who nested on the side of my building, and of the birdbrained human behavior they caused. All the facts are completely true.

Except birds can't talk.

(She and the image fade as the lights come up on a rocky landscape that slopes down to a pool of water barricaded by plexiglass and up to a wall of blue sky.)

*(***ROY** *enters, an effeminate male with a big heart. To us, he appears fastidiously dressed in human clothes, but he is in fact a penguin. Using his feet, he studiously nudge-nudge-nudges a bowling ball-sized rock.)*

*(***SILO** *enters, fresh from a swim. He is masculine and serious, a penguin you'd like to have a beer with. He glances nervously at the audience as he searches for someplace secluded.)*

*(***ROY** *sits on the rock he's been pushing. Seeing* **SILO**, *he clears his throat.* **SILO** *doesn't pay attention.* **ROY** *clears his throat again.)*

SILO. You sick?

ROY. No.

SILO. It's all this recirculated air.

*(***ROY** *coughs)*

See? Penguins living indoors. It's not natural.

ROY. Silo!

SILO. What?

*(***ROY** *jerks his head toward the rock.)*

What?

*(***ROY** *jerks his head again.)*

You've re-decorated.

ROY. Oh, c'mon.

*(***ROY** *jerks his head more urgently.)*

SILO. Are we playing charades? Lemme see, one word, sounds like –

ROY. Look!

SILO. At what?

ROY. Our egg.

*(***SILO** *looks at the rock.)*

SILO. That is not an egg.

ROY. Yes it is.

SILO. No it isn't.

ROY. Yes it is.

SILO. No it isn't.

ROY. That's a fine way to talk. After all, it's yours.

SILO. No it isn't.

ROY. Yes it is.

SILO. That is impossible. We are both males. And it's a rock.

ROY. *(covering the egg's "ears")* Sssh. Not in front of the c-h-i-c-k.

SILO. That is not a c-h-i-c-k. It is an r-o-c-k. You d-o-r-k.

ROY. Sticks and stones, Silo…

SILO. I am just trying to get you to face facts.

ROY. The truth isn't always black and white.

SILO. We're penguins. Everything is black and white.

ROY. *(referring upstage)* What about the Great Blue Wall?

SILO. That's not real. And neither is your egg.

ROY. I choose to believe otherwise.

*(***ROY** *sits on the rock, humming "Rock-abye Baby".)*

(From the audience, a flash bulb goes off. **SILO** *shields himself, repelled.)*

SILO. *(to* **ROY***)* What are they staring at? If they want to see a show, they should go to Times Square. *Phantom's* on twofers.

ROY. I hear *Wicked* is better.

SILO. If you like that kind of thing.

ROY. *(singing)*

IT'S TIME TO TRY DEFYING GRAVITY…

SILO. Roy!

ROY. Jeez, who peed in your herring?

SILO. You're embarrassing me.

ROY. In front of who?

*(***SILO** *shoots him a look.)*

ROY. – m.

SILO. The featherless birds. In the dark. With the strange wings.

*(***ROY** *peers out at the audience.)*

ROY. They're called "people".

*(***ROY** *waves at the crowd.* **SILO** *knocks his hand down.)*

SILO. Sure, because all day they peep at us. Like we're freaks of nature. Just because we're both male.

ROY. They can't tell the difference. Hell, sometimes I can't tell the difference.

SILO. I can.

(A **ZOOKEEPER** *enters, wearing a down vest and rubber boots, a bucket in hand. She is a Plain Jane, neither young nor old. Much in the way the penguins are at home in the water and awkward on land, she's most at home at the zoo, and off-balance in the world.)*

ROY. Please. We have no external dingle dangles. Besides, who cares if they know we're gay?

SILO. I am not gay.

ROY. Hah!

SILO. I am not. Our *relationship* is gay.

ROY. Ooh, lunchtime! Nummy, nummy, nummy.

(The **ZOOKEEPER** *feeds them krill.)*

SILO. Sexual orientation is an artificial construct. A modern paradigm to codify behavior and put us in boxes.

ROY. Someone's been listening to the zookeepers.

SILO. I love you, not your gender.

ROY. Why?

SILO. That's just how I am.

ROY. No, why *me?*

SILO. Now you're fishing.

ROY. Isn't that what penguins do?

*(***SILO** *wipes* **ROY***'s bib.)*

SILO. I love you because you get krill juice on your bib.

(He refers downstage to the plexiglass.)

I love you because you make me forget we live in a prison, trapped behind that Wall of Hard Sky.

I love you because when you look at me, you see a white bird with a black back.

ROY. Of course, silly. What do you see?

SILO. A black bird with a white front.

ROY. Huh. Never thoughta that.

SILO. That's part of your charm. Why do you love me?

ROY. Dunno. I prefer to lead the unexamined life.

SILO. So introspection is my responsibility.

ROY. And frivolity is mine. C'mon, grumpydump. This place isn't so bad. We've got each other. And room service. And soon we'll have our –

SILO. Don't say it.

*(***ROY** *mouths the word "chick".)*

ROY. Don't you want a family?

SILO. Why? I have you.

ROY. I'm not a family.

SILO. Yes, you are. You and me makes two and us makes three. Isn't that enough?

ROY. I guess so, but I still want a –

*(***SILO** *shoots a warning look.)*

– baby like creature.

SILO. Believe me, if we could have one, I would. For starters, it would be our ticket out of here.

ROY. Huh?

SILO. Haven't you noticed? Whenever any of us has a chick, the Room Service people take the whole family beyond the Great Blue Wall for a vacation. It's yet another special right rewarding heterosexual behavior.

ROY. Why do they do that?

SILO. Because if we lived in the wild as nature intended, we would move inland on our own, keeping our chicks away from the water until they were old enough to swim. But since we're stuck in this ice house, they pack us up in crates and take us on vacation until the chick is grown.

ROY. Where do we go?

SILO. We don't go anywhere.

ROY. Excuse me. Where do *they* go?

SILO. Between this prison and the next there lies the land they call the Outside.

ROY. The Outside?

SILO. Where the Great Blue Wall goes on forever and birds can fly.

ROY. Flying birds? Puhleeze.

SILO. It's true.

ROY. Then we should definitely hatch our –

SILO. Roy, you can sit on that rock as long as you want trying to turn it into an egg, but there is no magic in your ass.

ROY. I beg to differ.

(Lights fade on **ROY**, *leaving* **SILO** *alone with his thoughts.)*

SILO. I ask every bird who comes back from the Outside to tell me what it's like. And they talk of things called trees that extend up, up, upper still, opening onto an Everywhere of Blue where something called clouds

swim on the wind. I want to see the thing they call grass and flowers and garbage. And bugs and crumbs. But most of all, I want to know everything about the bird they call Pale Male.

(On the screen appears the image of the real **PALE MALE***, a magnificent redtailed hawk.)*

His brow so noble, his wingspan twice as wide as he is tall, his red tail soaring like a trail of blood against the Everywhere of Blue.

When I sleep, I dream of being borne on wings that double my chest in size, wings of desire that make me the envy of all the somethings below.

"Look at him up there," the somethings cry. "If only we could be him, that magnificent creature."

But that isn't the Way of the Penguin.

(He begins to peel off the trappings of his penguin clothes.)

SILO. From top to bottom, back to front, we're designed to be hidden: our bellies stark white so the predators below in the sea think we're the sunlight dancing on the water; our backs so black the predators above can't see us in the ocean depths. An entire species camouflaged. Unseen.

But underneath my slick plumage lies a cushion of air that keeps me buoyant, floating safely between the predators above and below. And in that narrow pocket I tuck away my secret self.

(A second hawk joins **PALE MALE***, this one darker and larger.* **LOLA** *swoops and dives with the first, performing an aerial ballet. From offstage comes ten seconds of impassioned squawking.)*

SCENE TWO

(The image changes to reveal the cornice of 927 Fifth Avenue, an elaborately filigreed limestone building, upon which sits a huge twig nest.)

*(***PALE MALE** *swoops in, a self-confident operator in an expensive clothes, a celebrity aware of his value, an Upper East Side Master of the Universe. He scans the sky, waiting for the appearance of* **LOLA***, a young headturner, a trophy wife in training. She lands and they share a post-coital sigh.)*

PALE MALE. Wow, baby. You were amazing.

LOLA. No, you were amazing.

PALE MALE. No, you.

LOLA. You.

PALE MALE. You.

LOLA. You.

PALE MALE. Okay, me.

LOLA. And this nest…

PALE MALE. Those spikes are there to keep away the pigeons, but I use them to anchor the twigs.

LOLA. Genius.

PALE MALE. Just wait till we've renovated.

LOLA. We? What makes you think I'm nesting?

PALE MALE. We mated, didn't we?

LOLA. That doesn't mean we're mates. *(She looks out at the view.)* So this whole park is yours?

PALE MALE. Top of the food chain, baby.

LOLA. Must be nice.

PALE MALE. This is one of the most exclusive People Mountains on the island. You know who lives here? Paula Zahn and Mary Tyler Moore. But not together. 'Cuz they're both female.

LOLA. Wow.

(beat)

Who are they?

PALE MALE. Jeez, you are young. Paula and Mary are magical shapeshifters. They walk among us yet their phantom selves appear on the flickering light box.

LOLA. What's a flickering light box?

PALE MALE. Now you're really makin' me feel old. The featherless birds worship them in their nests. I'll show you sometime. You can see it through their Walls of Hard Sky.

LOLA. I'll check my schedule.

PALE MALE. And you know who else has been on the flickering light box?

LOLA. Me?

PALE MALE. No, me.

LOLA. You?

PALE MALE. Hell, yeah. Profiles, news reports, squawk shows…

LOLA. Are you a shapeshifter, too?

PALE MALE. Well, I don't like to brag.

LOLA. There's no need to be modest. You can't help it if you're extraordinary.

PALE MALE. You really understand me, don't you? (*He gives her a once-over.)* I can't believe how frickin' hot you are.

LOLA. I take care of myself. I fly several hours a day, eat a low-rat diet…

PALE MALE. I'm really glad you're here, Lila.

LOLA. Lola.

PALE MALE. Like I was saying, lots of hawks fly over Manhattan, but I'm the first who ever stayed and built a nest on a People Mountain.

LOLA. Get out!

PALE MALE. I'm tellin' ya, I'm a big deal.

LOLA. Is that why all the featherless birds gather across the street?

PALE MALE. Damn paparazzi. I can't go anywhere without them gaping at me: "Look! He's got a rat! Look, he caught a pigeon!" Losers.

LOLA. Do you mind the attention?

PALE MALE. It's the price of fame.

(He waves to the crowd.)

LOLA. It must be a lot of pressure – always feeling like you have to be on. Never having a private moment. It's so invasive.

PALE MALE. It can be. But I feel obligated to them.

LOLA. Why?

PALE MALE. I seem to bring some meaning to their empty lives. I mean, the things they squawk about. Have a listen at that Wall of Hard Sky.

(Lola leans against the window and the silhouettes of **RICHARD COHEN** *and* **PAULA ZAHN** *appear. Like* **PALE MALE, RICHARD** *is an Upper East Side Master of the Universe.)*

RICHARD. *(offstage)* Oh, crap, there's another hawk.

PALE MALE. That's Richard Cohen, Paula Zahn's mate. He's the leader of the people pack.

PAULA. *(offstage)* Calm down, Richard, they're not doing any harm.

RICHARD. *(offstage)* Sure, if you don't mind having Lyme disease outside your window.

PALE MALE. *(to Lola)* I don't have Lyme disease.

RICHARD. *(offstage)* Every time we walk out the front door we risk getting pelted with bloody pigeon guts and half-eaten rat carcasses.

LOLA. He says that like it's a bad thing.

PALE MALE. Those two just peck, peck, peck at each other.

RICHARD. *(offstage)* And with another one, there's bound to be chicks – again.

PALE MALE. Okay, that's enough.

RICHARD. *(offstage)* And that'll bring even more crazies staring into our windows with their telescopes.

LOLA. What did he say?

PALE MALE. You better step back.

LOLA. Why? Is Richard Cohen a predator?

PALE MALE. Don't worry. I'll protect you.

(This impacts **LOLA**.*)*

LOLA. Promise?

PALE MALE. Promise.

*(***LOLA** *settles in, pleased.* **PALE MALE** *spreads his wings.)*

PALE MALE. So…

LOLA. So…

PALE MALE. What do you wanna do?

LOLA. What do *you* wanna do?

PALE MALE. I want to swoop around the sky with you.

LOLA. Uh-huh.

PALE MALE. Then grab your talons in mine…

LOLA. Oh.

PALE MALE. …shift your tail feathers to the side…

LOLA. Ooh, shift my feathers.

PALE MALE. Then twist my cloacal opening around yours…

LOLA. Oh, yeah.

PALE MALE. …while we hurl headlong in a death spiral…

LOLA. I love danger.

PALE MALE. Thrusting into each other…

LOLA. Yes.

PALE MALE. …for seven to ten mind-blowing seconds.

(The lights dim. In the darkness, the hawks shriek for seven to ten mind-blowing seconds.)

SCENE THREE

(The rocky landscape.)

(The **ZOOKEEPER** *appears. When she opens her mouth to speak, it's clear she's from Staten Island, but that doesn't mean she's not smart.)*

ZOOKEEPER. I went to my senior prom with Tommy Zapputi, who played the lead in our high school production of *Bye, Bye Birdie.*

That should've been my first hint.

Afterwards, we drove around in his mother's Dodge Dart, then climbed in the back seat and lost our virginity in the parking lot of the Staten Island Ferry. When we were done, he said, "Thank you. Now I know for certain that I'm gay."

So I wasn't surprised when Silo couldn't mate with a female bird.

*(***SILO** *stands awkwardly with a* **PENGUIN BOMBSHELL**. *They remain silent a long time. Finally:)*

SILO. I'm sorry.

BOMBSHELL. It happens.

(The **BOMBSHELL** *takes off her wig and hands it to* **SILO**, *who becomes the* **BOMBSHELL** *for* **ROY**.*)*

ZOOKEEPER. So we tried her with Roy instead.

*(***ROY** *takes one look at her and runs screaming in the other direction.)*

ZOOKEEPER. Anyone who says animals don't have feelings hasn't spent enough time with them.

It seemed really unfair to me, particularly when I had negligent birds like Betty and Porkey.

(Enter **BETTY**, *a blowzy battle-axe in curlers and* **PORKEY**, *a bruiser in one of those beer drinking hats.* **BETTY** *tries to sit on two bowling-ball sized eggs, but she falls between them.)*

PORKEY. You birdbrain.

BETTY. Who ya' callin' birdbrain?

PORKEY. You, birdbrain.

BETTY. Well, if you're so smart, you figure it out.

PORKEY. Fine.

*(***PORKEY** *tries stacking one egg on top of the other.)*

BETTY. Careful, you'll break 'em like last time.

PORKEY. I know what I'm doing. *(He holds them in place.)* Now come sit.

BETTY. I don't think…

PORKEY. Sit, woman, sit!

(She sits on the eggs. He lets go of them, sending **BETTY** *and the eggs tumbling to the ground.)*

BETTY. Birdbrain.

(Lights dim.)

ZOOKEEPER. Luckily, my boss, Rob Gramzay – terrific guy, smart, sensitive, good-looking…gay – he saw what was happening and decided to take one of Betty and Porkey's eggs.

(The **ZOOKEEPER** *takes one egg from under a bored* **BETTY**. **PORKEY** *looks around.)*

PORKEY. Where's the other egg?

BETTY. I thought you had it.

PORKEY. Why would I have it?

BETTY. Oh, yeah, like I'm supposed to remember everything.

*(***BETTY** *and* **PORKEY** *become* **ROY** *and* **SILO**.*)*

ZOOKEEPER. Then Rob sneaked it into Silo and Roy's nest.

(She takes **ROY***'s rock and replaces it with the egg.* **ROY** *sits down on it, humming "Rock-a-bye, Baby" while* **SILO** *glances nervously at the audience.)*

ROY. So…?

SILO. So…?

ROY. So…?

SILO. You lost weight.

ROY. No.

SILO. You changed your feathers.

(silence)

What?

ROY. Look!

SILO. Where?

ROY. It's an egg.

SILO. Not again.

ROY. No, really, look.

*(***SILO** *walks around the egg. He sniffs it. He picks it up and listens to it. Hearing something, he drops the egg in shock, but* **ROY** *catches it just in time, cradling it in his arms.)*

SILO. How'd you…

ROY. I don't know.

(They gaze in amazement at the egg.)

SILO. It's a miracle.

(The lights change to a sun-dappled green, transforming the rocky landscape into the bucolic beauty of Central Park.)

PART TWO: NESTING

SCENE FOUR

(A **BIRDER** *with a binoculars enters, an Average Joe, neither young nor old. He's from the Bronx and sounds like it, but that doesn't mean he's not smart. Most people probably underestimate him.)*

BIRDER. Two hundred and fifty days a year. That's how many times I climb into a hole in the ground, ride in an aluminum can to Manhattan that stops below a building where I go up to an office with no window. I'm like a very large mole – with computer skills. But it was one of those perfect-this-hardly-happens-in-New-York-Goldilocks kinda days - y'know, not too hot, not too cold – just right. So I decided to get a slice and take a walk in the park.

So I'm perambulatin' along the east side by the model boat pond and I see all these people set up with telescopes and binoculars, gawkin' at some building on Fifth Avenue. And at first I think, "Friggin' paparazzi, they're probably lookin' at Woody Allen's apartment" – he was havin' his technically-not-incest-but-c'mon-you-banged-your girlfriend's-daughter thing at the time – but then I see it's all kinds of people – young, old, rich, poor. Like the M-thirty bus broke down and left them all there waiting for the next one.

(A **FEMALE BIRDER** *appears.)*

BIRDER. So I ask this chick "What're ya lookin' at?" And she hands me her binoculars, which, if you think of it, was a very generous and un-New York-like thing to do, though I didn't say it at the time, which I regretted 'cuz she was nice-lookin' in a Goldilocks kinda way - not too hot, not too cold, just right. But I'm distracted because I look up and there he is.

(An image of **PALE MALE** *appears upstage. The awed* **BIRDER** *watches, well, like a hawk – suddenly still, contained, focused.)*

BIRDER. *(cont.)* A hawk – a real bird of prey – soaring back and forth in front of this swank pre-war building next to Woody's.

And, I, I, I, I couldn't breathe, I – I mean, to stand in the middle of Manhattan and see something so… well, it made me wanna, I dunno, rip off my clothes or bang a drum or get drunk and puke in the gutter or do what I did, which is just keep lookin'.

Then I look up and right above this fancy stonework with cherubs and whatnot there's this nest like eight feet wide. Do you know how much it costs to buy an apartment in that building? I do, because I have no life. Ten mill. At least. And – get this – just to be considered for the co-op you gotta have liquid assets of four times the value of the apartment. That's forty million in liquid assets. Who's got that kind of money? I can tell ya' who becuz I'm a dork. An investment banker, a hedge fund manager, television legend Mary Tyler Moore and her cardiologist husband, Doctor Robert Levine, CNN anchorperson Paula Zahn and her real estate developer husband Richard Cohen and some people who are just rich for a living. Eleven apartments on twelve floors because one of them is – wait for it – a duplex. A duplex! I live in a fifth floor walk-up in the Bronx with a bouncer named Tito who leaves pubic hair on the soap.

I tell ya', those hawks kick ass.

(He focuses his binoculars on the nest, which appears upstage.)

SCENE FIVE

*(***LOLA** *sits alone. Bored. Restless. Finally,* **PALE MALE** *swoops in.)*

LOLA. Finally! I'm starving. Did you bring take-out?

*(***PALE MALE** *drops a dead pigeon in the nest.)*

LOLA. Oh.

PALE MALE. I thought you were starving.

LOLA. I'll save it for later.

PALE MALE. You don't like pigeon?

LOLA. I asked for a squirrel. Or a rat.

PALE MALE. Pigeons are just like rats. With wings.

LOLA. *(muttering)* Tell that to your last mate.

PALE MALE. What did you say?

LOLA. Nothing.

PALE MALE. No, go ahead. You've been snapping at me all day.

LOLA. Maybe if you weren't so busy entertaining your fan club –

PALE MALE. See, just like that.

LOLA. – you'd know what the Richard Cohen is saying up here behind this Wall of Hard Sky.

PALE MALE. What's he saying?

LOLA. That I'm your fourth mate, you cloacal opening.

PALE MALE. I can explain.

LOLA. Then why did I have to hear it from him and the Paula Zahn?

PALE MALE. I've been meaning to tell you, but, what with the nest and the eggs…

LOLA. How long does it take to say "I was mated three times"? I'll tell you: less time than it took me to say it just now because, unlike me, you wouldn't have to say "How long does it take?"

PALE MALE. Calm down.

LOLA. I lose my mind for seven to ten seconds of feather-curling mid-air passion and now I'm mated to a stranger.

PALE MALE. I made your feathers curl?

LOLA. Pale!

PALE MALE. What do you want to know?

LOLA. Who were they? Where did you meet? Were you happy? How many chicks did you have? What did they like to do? Were they pretty? What happened to them?

PALE MALE. They died, okay?

LOLA. I know. I'm sorry.

PALE MALE. If you knew, then why did you ask?

LOLA. I wanted us to squawk about it.

*(***PALE MALE** *turns away.)*

LOLA. I know it must be hard…

PALE MALE. Then let's drop it.

LOLA. I would, but…

PALE MALE. But what?

LOLA. One of them ate a poisoned pigeon.

PALE MALE. Are you implying I'm a serial killer?

LOLA. You are a bird of prey.

PALE MALE. She caught it herself.

LOLA. And you're certain you can tell the difference between a healthy pigeon and a poisoned one?

PALE MALE. I'm still alive, aren't I?

LOLA. But the mothers of your chicks aren't.

(He picks up the pigeon and throws it off the building. The **BIRDER** *is thrilled.)*

PALE MALE. Any other questions?

LOLA. How many children do you have?

PALE MALE. Oh…twenty.

LOLA. Whoa.

PALE MALE. Three.

(Now **LOLA** *turns away.)*

What?

(She starts to cry.)

That's a perfectly normal number.

LOLA. I know.

PALE MALE. Then what's wrong?

LOLA. You're like one of those Walls of Hard Sky. I can see in, but I can't touch anything. You have a whole life – three lives – that you won't share with me.

PALE MALE. Because survival is all about what's next: Find the food. Find the mate. Make the nest. Make the chicks. Find the food. Find the mate. Over and over again. Until it's over.

LOLA. Is that all?

PALE MALE. That's the Way of the Hawk. We don't fly backwards.

LOLA. Don't you ever wonder if there's anything else to life beyond eating and hunting and mating?

PALE MALE. Course not. I'm a guy.

LOLA. But I'm not.

PALE MALE. What do you want?

LOLA. I want you to look at me.

PALE MALE. I look at you.

LOLA. No you don't. Not really. You barely give me a glance as we fly in and out of the nest.

PALE MALE. My eyes are for predators and food.

LOLA. And your fans.

PALE MALE. What's that supposed to mean?

LOLA. It's lonely at the top of the food chain.

*(***PALE MALE** *scoffs.)*

Don't give me that face.

PALE MALE. What face?

LOLA. This face.

(She imitates him.)

PALE MALE. You'll have plenty of company once you hatch the chicks.

LOLA. But that means even less time for our relationship.

PALE MALE. Why are females obsessed with "our relationship"?

LOLA. Oh, something about actually getting to know our life partners. We're funny that way.

PALE MALE. Fine. What do you want to squawk about?

LOLA. What you think. What you feel. What I think and feel.

PALE MALE. Okay, let's start with you.

LOLA. No, you.

PALE MALE. You.

LOLA. You.

PALE MALE. You.

LOLA. Okay, me. I think and feel… *(This is hard to admit.)* …that you don't like me very much.

PALE MALE. That's a stupid thing to say. Why would you think that?

LOLA. Because you say things like "that's a stupid thing to say."

PALE MALE. But it *is* a stupid thing to say. Of course I like you.

LOLA. Couldn't you say it nicely?

*(***PALE MALE** *concentrates.)*

PALE MALE. *(nicely)* That's a stupid thing to say.

LOLA. I meant the part about liking me.

PALE MALE. Squawk is cheap, Lola. How about the thousands of things I *do* for you?

LOLA. Like what?

PALE MALE. The nest I built. The food I hunt. The eggs I babysit.

LOLA. When you're the father, it's not called babysitting. It's called parenting.

PALE MALE. I'll have you know I help out in the nest twice as much as most males.

LOLA. And the mere fact you call it "helping out" means you think it's my responsibility to sit on the eggs.

PALE MALE. It *is* your responsibility.

LOLA. Says who?

PALE MALE. Nature. Biology. Yet I'm willng to transcend that.

LOLA. Because you love sitting on your tail and getting your picture in *The New York Times*.

PALE MALE. That's not true.

LOLA. So what am I supposed to do? Applaud you for doing what's only fair? I'm not one of your fans.

PALE MALE. Those fans happen to think I'm the father of the decade.

LOLA. I'm sure you are.

PALE MALE. You don't sound convinced.

LOLA. No, I am. I just don't know what a decade is.

PALE MALE. You're just hormonal.

(She shoots him a murderous look.)

And by hormonal I mean beautiful.

LOLA. The gay penguins divide up their tasks equally.

PALE MALE. What gay penguins?

LOLA. Down in the zoo. Haven't you heard about them?

PALE MALE. Maybe. All penguins seem kinda gay to me.

LOLA. They're Central Park's newest avian celebrity dads. And they each take turns –

PALE MALE. Wait - they've got a chick?

LOLA. A little girl.

PALE MALE. Where's the mother?

LOLA. Don't know.

PALE MALE. That's not right. Two males raising a chick.

LOLA. Why not?

PALE MALE. Because a chick needs a father and a mother.

LOLA. But –

PALE MALE. I oughta know. I've done it twenty-seven times.

LOLA. I thought you said twenty-three.

PALE MALE. That chick is gonna grow up confused. Those queers could make it gay.

LOLA. I'm not sure you can make anyone gay.

PALE MALE. Exactly. You're not sure. Are you?

*(***LOLA** *ponders this, troubled)*

Are you willing to take that risk? Don't you want to do everything you can to insure our chicks grow up happy and healthy?

LOLA. Of course.

PALE MALE. Gay penguins. That's probably why so many of the featherless birds watch me from the boat pond. It's not safe for them to bring their kids to the zoo. The world's going mad down there. Black is white and up is down and no one's following the rules.

LOLA. You didn't become the first hawk in Manhattan by following the rules.

PALE MALE. That was different.

LOLA. How?

PALE MALE. It just was.

LOLA. But –

PALE MALE. Listen, sperms plus egg equals chick. Neat. Simple. Perfect. But sperms plus sperms? That just equals a sticky mess.

LOLA. Uh…ew.

PALE MALE. It's not me. It's biology. We can't change it.

LOLA. I choose to believe otherwise.

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