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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

MY DAD'S A BIRDMAN

by David Almond

SAMUEL FRENCH

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MY DAD'S A BIRDMAN

My Dad's A Birdman was first performed at Young Vic Studio in 4 December 2003. The performance was directed by Josie Rourke, with design by Christopher Oram, lights by Colin Grenfell, sound by Emma Laxton, choreography by Nikki Amuka-Bird, and composition by Lucas Santana. The casting director was Amy Ball, the dialect coach was Neil Swain, and the movement was directed by Christian Darley. The cast was as follows:

LIZZIE CROW	Sarah Ozeke
JACKIE CROW	Peter Forbes
AUNTIE DOREEN	Lesley Nicol
REGISTRAR / MR MINT	John Kirk

CHARACTERS

LIZZIE CROW – a girl
JACKIE CROW – her dad
MR POOP – registrar of The Great Human Bird Competition
AUNTIE DOREEN – an anxious relative
MR MINT – Lizzie's Head Teacher
WOODPECKER WALLIE – An entrant in The Great Human Bird Competition.
THE PEDALLER – An entrant in The Great Human Bird Competition.
ELASTIC EDDIE – An entrant in The Great Human Bird Competition.
LENNIE THE LOP – An entrant in The Great Human Bird Competition.

SETTING

Newcastle, a city by the River Tyne in North Eastern England.

TIME

Present day.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

We all want to fly, don't we? To soar freely above the earth. Here's a tale about a lass called Lizzie and her bereaved dad, Jackie. Poor Jackie's taken to his bed, but now he sees the chance to transcend his fallen state. He'll become a birdman! He'll make a pair of wings, and enter The Great Human Bird Competition. He'll fly across the River Tyne and win a thousand pounds. Best of all, Lizzie decides to make a pair of wings for herself and to join him! Once I started creating this play, it put on its own wings and took on its own life. Here came Mr Poop collecting competitors' names. Here came down-to-earth Auntie Doreen and her dumplings. And Lizzie's Head Teacher, Mr Mint. And a stream of contestants from across the world, all with their barmy methods of propulsion. The play was produced first at the Young Vic, directed by Josie Rourke. It was on again at the same theatre in 2010, directed by Oliver Mears, and with music from The Pet Shop Boys. There have been productions in Russia and Brazil. I gave the play another form, rewrote it as a novel that's been published all around the world. Maybe everyone loves to see their

yearnings brought to life. Maybe all of us wonder, If I get these wings just right this time, will I be the one at last to truly fly?

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For David Lan

ONE

An ordinary spring morning in Twelve Lark Lane. **LIZZIE***'s in the kitchen, dressed for school. She fills the kettle, puts bread in the toaster, sets the table for two, goes to the kitchen door.*

LIZZIE Dad! Daddy! Dad! It's time to get up! If you don't get up now, I'll come up there and... I'll count to five. One, two, two and a half... Daddy!

DAD All right, Lizzie! All right!

LIZZIE Downstairs now!

DAD *enters, all disheveled, in a dressing gown.*

Don't look at me like that.

DAD No, Lizzie...

LIZZIE Look at the state of you. What one earth have you been doing up there?

DAD Been dreaming, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Dreaming! What a man! Now sit at the table and sit up straight.

DAD Yes, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Drink your tea and eat your toast.

DAD Yes, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Eat it properly, Dad. Chew it. And swallow it.

DAD All gone. See?

LIZZIE Don't be silly, Dad. You've got to look after yourself. You can't go on the way you are. Can you?

DAD No, Lizzie. Certainly not, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Good. And what plans have you got for today?

DAD I'm going to fly, Lizzie. Just like a bird.

LIZZIE Are you, now?

DAD Yes. And I'm going to enter the competition.

LIZZIE What competition?

DAD The Great Human Bird Competition, of course! Have you not heard about it? It's coming to town! The first one to fly across the River Tyne will win a thousand pounds. And I'm going to enter. I'm going to win! I'm going to make my mark at last.

He runs and flaps his arms.

Are me feet off the floor? Are they? Are me feet off the floor?

LIZZIE Maybe you are going to fly like a bird, but make sure you get washed and shaved and get some fresh air and get some good lunch inside you. OK?

DAD Yes, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Oh, and Auntie Doreen said she might pop round today.

DAD Auntie Doreen! Not her again!

LIZZIE Yes. Her again. She'll bring you down to earth.

DAD But Lizzie.

LIZZIE Never mind But Lizzie. Auntie Doreen loves you, just like I do. And she worries about you, just like I do. So be nice to her.

She tugs his clothes, smooths his hair.

What am I going to do with you?

DAD Don't know, Lizzie.

LIZZIE Don't know, Lizzie. I don't know if I should leave you on your own.

DAD Course you should. You got to go to school and do your sums and your spellings. Go on. Bye-bye.

LIZZIE All right. I'll go. Now give me a kiss bye-bye.

They kiss each other. **LIZZIE** *gets her school bag. She gives a last warning.*

Now, remember.

DAD Yes, Lizzie. Wash. Shave. Good lunch. Fresh air. Be nice to Auntie D.

LIZZIE That's right.

DAD And I'll remember to fly.

LIZZIE Oh, Dad!

DAD Bye-bye.

LIZZIE Bye-bye.

DAD *ushers her out. She reluctantly leaves.*

DAD Go on. I'm fine. Ha!

He flaps his arms.

Tweet tweet! Tweet tweet!

He hooks a piece of unswallowed toast from his mouth, flicks it away.

Toast!

He regards the air, chases a fly, catches it, pops it in his mouth, smacks his lips.

Yum yum! That's better!

He crawls on the floor. He catches a bug. He inspects it, pops it in his mouth.

Yum yum! What good's toast to a man like me. A man like me needs bugs and flies and centipedes.

He catches another fly, eats it. He wipes his mouth. He flaps his arms as if to fly.

Are me feet off the floor? Hahaha! Course they're not. Not yet.

He looks around.

But they will be. If she only knew...

He takes a key from his pocket, opens a cupboard, takes out his wings.

Come on, my beauties. Are they gorgeous, or are they gorgeous? Just wait till Lizzie sees. Just a week to go. Just one week to go. Fly across the river and win a thousand pounds. I can't wait. I'm going to win.

MR POOP *calls from outside.* **DAD***'s engrossed, and doesn't hear.*

MR POOP Entries for The Human Bird Competition! All entries for The Great Human Bird Competition!

DAD And she will be so proud!

He catches another fly, smacks his lips, begins to put the wings on...

MR POOP Any entries for the Great Human Bird Competition?

DAD Eh?

MR POOP Entries for The Great Human Bird Competition!

DAD What? Aye! Me! Mister! Me!

MR POOP *appears.*

MR POOP You? You wish to enter The Great Human Bird Competition?

DAD Aye! I mean, Yes, please, mister.

MR POOP *produces a form.*

MR POOP My name is Mr Poop.

DAD Yes, please, Mr Poop, sir.

MR POOP Name?

DAD Jackie.

MR POOP Jackie what?

DAD My name is Jackie… Crow!

MR POOP Are you sure?

DAD Aye! I mean, Yes, sir, Mr Poop.

MR POOP Jackie Crow. Occupation? What job do you do, Mr Crow?

DAD Birdman. I think I used to do something else, but now I can't remember what. I'm a birdman!

MR POOP Birdman. Method of propulsion?

DAD Eh?

MR POOP Method of propulsion. How are you going to fly, Mr Crow?

DAD Why, with me wings, of course.

He puts his wings on.

Aren't they lovely? They're nearly done. A stitch here, a pin there, a nail there, a feather there. Oh, and a beak and a crest, of course.

He gets the headpiece and puts it on.

You'll have seen nowt like this, I'll bet.

MR POOP Wings, beak, crest.

DAD And I've got faith.

MR POOP Faith, Mr Crow?

DAD Aye, faith, Mr Poop. I know I can do it, you see. I believe I can do it.

MR POOP The competition will be intense, Mr Crow. They're coming from all around the world. There's a feller from France that's screwed wings to his bike. There's a lass from Japan with a ten-foot pogo stick. There's a bloke from Brazil with

an umbrella on his head and a propeller on his bum. They're bringing parachutes and catapults and whizzers and spinners and giant springs and...

DAD And I've got me wings and me faith.

MR POOP You're aware of the dangers? Bumps on the head, broken bones, cuts and bruises, drowning in the river. Falling from the sky is not recommended.

DAD Falling? D'you think a man like me is going to fall. Give us that pen!

MR POOP Sign here, Mr Crow. And here. And also here.

He signs.

Entry accepted! We will see you next Sunday, Mr Crow. Take-off is at 10 a.m. And I'd advise the wearing of a good helmet.

MR POOP *leaves.*

DAD Helmet! Look at that crow out there. Look at the way it hangs in the air. Look at the way it flaps and flaps and flies so easy. That's the way to do it.

He closes his eyes, imitates the crow.

LIZZIE *slips back into the room and watches him. He's so engrossed, he doesn't notice her.*

I'm in the air. Are me feet off the ground yet? They are! It feels like they are!

Opens his eyes.

Ha! Parachutes and pogo sticks! They'll all be splashing in the river going, "Help! Help!" and I'll be flapping over them. Hello, down there! And I'll wave down at Lizzie, and she'll say, That's my Dad up there! That's Jackie Crow! My Dad's a birdman! He's the greatest birdman and the greatest Dad there's ever been!

He inspects himself. He breathes deeply.

You got to believe, you see. You got to truly believe you can do it. Today I'll do it. Today will be the day I'll really fly.

He flaps his wings and prepares for flight. Nothing happens. He trots around the room, flapping his arms. Nothing happens. He makes some adjustments to the wings.

A few little adjustments. A little twist here, a little tweak there.

He clears the table, then climbs onto it. He breathes deeply. He flaps his wings. He jumps. He crashes to the floor. He ponders. He adjusts again, gets onto the table again.

Onward and upward. One, two, three. Blast off!

He crashes to the floor again.

Ow, me back! Aagh, me knee! Ouch, me head!

LIZZIE Dad, man! Dad!

DAD I nearly did it, Lizzie! I was nearly away that time! My feet were... What you doing here?

LIZZIE I was worried. And I was right. You could break your back, man!

DAD Break me back! Do you like me wings?

He takes them off. She inspects them, reluctantly admires them.

Aren't they lovely? I thought you'd gone to school. What about your sums and your spelling and your... Mr Mint won't be a happy man.

LIZZIE Mr Mint! He'd understand that a man in your state needs looking after! Is this a blackbird's?

DAD Aye. And these is pigeons. And magpies. And thrushes. And look at the size of these crows and how strong these seagulls is. Oh, and this little tiny linnets, and chiffchaffs, and Jenny wrens.

LIZZIE Lovely.

DAD It's amazing what you find lying on the ground under the trees. Dropped feathers everywhere.

LIZZIE But it cannot work.

DAD Yes, it can. Get the wings right. Get the jumping and the flapping right. Believe in it, and up you go! I'm too fat, though.

LIZZIE Eh?

DAD I'm too blooming fat. Look at this belly. That's what's holding me back. Did you ever see a fat bird? Did you ever see a wobbly bird? Course you didn't. And what do they eat?

He snatches a fly from the air, eats it. And another.

LIZZIE Dad, man!

DAD They eat bugs, flies, berries and seeds and worms. They do not eat your Auntie Doreen's dinners!

He snatches a bug, eats it.

Yum yum!

He whistles like a bird. A bird whistles from outside. He caws like a crow. A crow caws from outside.

See! It's working! Caw caw! Caw caw! It's all for you, Lizzie. You'll be so...

LIZZIE But, Dad, I don't need you to a be a birdman. I just need you to be my dad.

He whistles again. **AUNTIE DOREEN** *calls from outside.*

AUNTIE DOREEN Jack! Jackie!

DAD Oh, no. Is she here already?

AUNTIE DOREEN Jackie!

He heads out for the garden, cawing.

DAD Time for the garden. Hello, little wormies!

Here I come!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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