

The Bird Seller (Dream Project, Revised)

JASON, a man nearly 31 years of age, enters a pet store. The pet store is owned by a sole proprietor, LUCY, a 40-year old black woman. The store is stocked solely with birds.

LUCY: Can I help you?

JASON: Yes, yes. I'd like to buy a bird.

LUCY: Well, haven't you come to the right place! Let me show you what I have.

JASON: Wait...wait. Do you know why I want to buy a bird?

LUCY: No...but probably as a pet. (She snacks on bag of popcorn.)

JASON: May I?

LUCY: Sure.

JASON: (Grabs a handful of popcorn.) Thanks. (Beat.) You know, my sister's a lesbian.

LUCY: What the fuck?

JASON: I'm just saying, my sister is a lesbian.

LUCY: Why do you bring that up?

JASON: You just remind me of my sister, that's all.

LUCY: So you walk in here and you peg me as a lesbian, just because I remind you of your sister?

JASON: Is that a problem?

LUCY: I would say so. Do you have to classify me? Or did you think that might get you better service or a discount or something? As you can see, business isn't booming, if you look around.

JASON: (chuckling) You know, my sister has a chip on her shoulder, too.

LUCY: (enraged) What the fu—are you drunk or something?

JASON: Ohh, a little bit, yeah. So?

LUCY: Why don't you just get the hell out of my store! I don't need this.

JASON: Wait! Wait! I'm sorry. Yes, I'm a little drunk. I'm sorry. Next week is my birthday, and I'm starting early. I'm not looking too forward to it.

LUCY: And that's supposed to become my problem? A bird won't help you—neither will pegging me as a dyke—which I am, but, but, but—I don't need this. Go to fuckin' Petco.

JASON: I did!

LUCY: You did?! You went to fuckin' Petco?!

JASON: Yeah, I did. They're closer to home, and, and—well, I left the bar, and Petco was across the street. But it's like they're all 17 and stoned in there. I couldn't get any service.

LUCY: You went to fuckin' Petco...

JASON: I won't do it again, I swear.

LUCY: You went to fuckin' Petco!

JASON: I said I'm sorry! Look, I have tremendous respect for independent businesses. I had a few myself once. But Petco is so big, and it was right across the street—please, I just want to buy a bird.

LUCY: I'm not sure I should even sell you one now! I mean, how do I know you're not going to kill it? Here you are, drunk at 2 in the afternoon. What kind of bird parent are you shaped up to be? How do I know you won't kill it?

JASON: I—(tearing up)—I have a cat, and four tropical fish. Well, two died over the summer, but...the rest are all happy and healthy. Why does everybody question me? Is it so bizarre to want a bird? I have a girlfriend too—she's still alive.

LUCY: You mean boyfriend.

JASON: No, I mean girlfriend.

LUCY: But you said your sister was—

JASON: Oh my god! I *should* go back to Petco—I don't need this!

LUCY: I'm sorry—it's just—are you *sure*?

JASON: How can I not be? I mean, I thought about it, but—nope, it's not there. I even tried once or twice. But when I walk down the street, men don't exactly turn my head, if you know what I mean.

LUCY: I'm not sure I know what you mean. What do you mean?

JASON: I mean, I walk down the street, and it's the legs—the tits—you would understand—those short skirts, their asses—I'm sorry, this is totally sexist—but that's what turns my head. I'm the head-turning guy, although I hate to admit it. I never used to be—but this time of year—they all dress so, so—provocatively. I can't help it. I never act on it, of course. I have a girlfriend, after all.

LUCY: You are so typical.

JASON: Why are you all so alike? Always defining, categorizing. You *do* have a chip on your shoulder, just like my sister. None of you ever bother to think about me, nor should you, I guess. Who would feel sorry for the white, middle-class, straight guy? I don't even ask for sympathy, I gave

that up. But where I'm from, I'm the minority, I'm the anomaly. I have to justify myself for being straight. It's not even worth it anymore...everyone waiting for the other shoe to drop, everyone looking for "the signs"—you know. I flick my wrist and everyone raises eyebrows, even her. I am who I am—not necessarily masculine, a little too sensitive—and I refuse to change—I tried, I have lowered my voice, acted like one of the guys, but...but, I am who I am—and there is only one me. I'm different. You should understand that, after all, being black *and* a lesbian!

LUCY: Ohh, you expect me to feel sorry? Hon, you have noooo idea...

JASON: No, Ma'am, you have no idea...

LUCY: (extinguishing her cigarette) All right, that's it. Get out!

JASON: But why!

LUCY: Ma'am? You call me Ma'am? What am I, 60 years old? You come in, drunk, pigeonhole me, give me your rich white boy sob story—

JASON: I'm not rich—

LUCY: —and I'm only 40! And you come in here like you have the world's weight on your shoulders, and you don't have shit to worry about. Is that your complaint? That you don't have anything to worry about?

JASON: I have plenty to worry about! I'm becoming extinct! Or at least *incredible!* I used to think differently, but I'm back here now! And I'm poor, by the way, and I have no edge, by the way, and I'm—I'm—I'm like some fucking relic. And I'm only 31! And I haven't done anything wrong, and I am good to those around me, and yet, yet, I have to adapt. So forgive me! This is me adapting. It's not like I owned slaves or anything—

LUCY: Get out.

JASON: ...I've been nothing but accepting—

LUCY: Get out.

JASON: And yet...and yet, I'm supposed to feel sorry for being typical!? For *striving* to be typical!? Can I tell you the shit I have put myself through to be typical? I'm afraid to succeed at this rate, and when I do I hide it! I don't want to be center stage—I don't want it, but I do, because it seems like I'm too normal to even be granted it!

LUCY: GET OUT!

JASON: Please, PLEASE! I just want to buy a bird! (Collapsing off the stool and falling to the floor, sobbing.) I just want to buy a bird...I didn't mean it...I mean, you sell birds, I have money, please just let me buy a bird. (He continues to sob.)

LUCY: Well, go to fucking Petco!

JASON: (composing himself and sitting up on the stool) Wait, look—look! I have \$300 in cash in my wallet. I will buy any bird. I will pay you \$300, even if the bird costs \$10. I want to do this for you.

LUCY: Ohh, for me? And you say you're not rich. Ha! Do you know anything about money?

JASON: No, I don't, apparently, which is why I'm willing to spend \$300 for a fucking bird! And that's why I'm not rich! This is my rent money!

LUCY: Well, congratulations. A man who wants to blow all his money on a bird, and risks his home to do so. Now I *know* I shouldn't sell you no damn bird. What would your "girlfriend" say?

JASON: It's my decision.

LUCY: Have her in here, and let her tell me that. After that, I'll sell you any bird you want, at cost.

(Beat)

JASON: I dream of them.

LUCY: (startled) What?

JASON: I dream of them. It started first with flying dreams. But it got worse after that. At first, I flew—like Neo in *The Matrix*—but I was 10 years old and that movie never existed. I flew a lot. I think that's common, right? Flying dreams? But then it got to be more—birds, birds, birds. Last night it was a—I don't know—but it was small, and red, yellow, green, and blue. And it was trapped. I tried to save it, but it was stuck. It flew into the house and I tried to free it, but it was so stuck I couldn't do it or me much good. I chased it around a labyrinth. And it never got free. All I wanted to do was free it. After the birds, there were hot air balloons, helicopters—all flying. Then came the airplanes.

LUCY: I dream of airplanes...

JASON: You do? I dream of all sorts of stuff, not just flying and birds and shit like that. I had catacombs the other night. One night, my hand was being covered by brown wax and I thought "Disease?" I dream of my grandfather a lot—Boppa. Never got to say goodbye. Those are the hardest. Where is he? I wonder. Everything's trapped in my dreams—trying to get out or trying at least to get somewhere else. I want to get somewhere else, that's for sure. Or else someone wants to

get to me, but I'm not sure why. It's all collage, multi-roomed, fragmented. But the birds keep it together—they point to another place—

LUCY: I dream of airplanes...

JASON: —And there it's all color. Sometimes my family's there. One night—(laughing)—I swear to God! My girlfriend is running up a hill toward me, wearing chaps. Friggin' chaps! And not much else. Her ass was bare. It was the most bizarre thing. One night in my dream, my Mom called, and it was 7 a.m. here. That would be 4 a.m. her time. What would a call like that do to you? Is it worse in real life than in a dream? Somebody's got to be dead, that's for sure—there's no other reason for her to call. And they're all dying, they're all dying...it's either cancer, or Parkinson's, or Alzheimer's, or dementia, but—but—they're all going. And it hits me in my sleep. But when the birds—it sets me free, it's so free, and I can fly anywhere I want to...

LUCY: I dream of airplanes...

JASON: I know! And I get it! That chance to be free, that chance—I think I must have been a bird in my former life, or maybe in my future life—why else the airplanes, the hot air balloons, the trapped bird...so you see why I want a bird? I want this out of my dreams. I dream of Boppa, I dream of disease, of the deceased, of catacombs and of being trapped, of being free, and more—but I can't change much of that. But I *can* buy a bird. And I can give it a good life. I can't bring Boppa back, and I can't say goodbye. I can't. But I can buy a bird. And I can give it a good life. And maybe I can set it free, one day, where it belongs. It's better than watching it die here in your store, which is what will happen if you don't sell it, and in which case we might as well—

LUCY: I lost my partner in 9/11.

JASON: Oh...oh...I'm—

LUCY: No, No, No!! Don't be. But—but—that's why I dream of the airplanes.

JASON: I mean, I mean—I'm so—

LUCY: Hon, I told you once, I won't tell you again. Now stop with your fucking rambling and hear mine, OK? (Jason nods.) She was Muslim. But that didn't stop us. When they hit, my family pretended to be sorry, but they weren't, really. I think they were glad. Thought she might have had something to do with it. And they were sure happy I wasn't an "active" lesbian anymore, especially with an "Arab." And watching them pretend to be sorry—that was the worst—except for the dreams. Sometimes in my dreams, I watch it from her eyes. Sometimes in my dreams, I know what's happening, but I can't stop it...and *sometimes*, in my dreams, I'm the pilot, and I can't change the wheel...(she starts to sob)...in my dreams, I kill her...and she's there, watching it approach her desk, and she can't stop it and I can't either...

JASON: I—I'm sorry. Look—I—I—what's your name?

LUCY: (sobbing) Lucinda. My friends call me Lucy.

JASON: What am I to call you?

LUCY: (barely composing herself) You can call me Lucy.

JASON: Ok, Lucy, look. I'd like to buy a bird.

LUCY: (laughing) I sell BIRDS! BIRDS DAMMIT! All 'cuz I want them to be free—not killing, not flying into buildings, not killing...

JASON: Lucy, I'll take it home, I'll give it a good life.

LUCY: They ought to be able to fly!!! But here they are trapped...but...afterwards, I didn't know what to do, and I had some money, and I just thought—why not trap the flying? Why let it get out of control? If we can't stop it, at least we can control it—others don't have to die—

JASON: Lucy? Lucy?

LUCY: (wiping her tears) *What?*

JASON: (hesitating at first) Boppa went the same way.

LUCY: Really?

JASON: Yeah, really. I never got to say goodbye. I'm thinking that if I buy a bird—well, at least the birds might leave my dreams, and then I can see more of Boppa. And this I can have in real life.

LUCY: (finally composed) OK. I'll give you your damn bird. But you better be back—for food, a new cage once it gets older, and the like. You promise me?

JASON: I promise, Lucy.

LUCY: You call me Lucinda until we get closer.

JASON: Ok, Lucinda. Now can we pick out a bird?

LUCY: Well, what did you have in mind?

JASON: Well, red, yellow, green and blue...not too big, not too small.

LUCY: (taking him over to a cage with a brightly-colored parakeet) This is just the thing! I think this will start off you right.

JASON: Are you sure there's nothing bigger?

LUCY: But you've never had a bird before—this is a great start, don't you think?

JASON: For where we're headed? I'm not sure—you don't think I can get something bigger? I mean, a toucan or something?

LUCY: I think this is a great start.

JASON: Ok, I'll take your word for it. How much?

LUCY: \$300.

JASON: What the fu—

LUCY: Kidding, hon, kidding. Take it home. It's \$30. You didn't think I was going to rob you after all that, now, did you?

JASON: I guess not.

LUCY: So you really do dream of birds, do you?

JASON: All the time. But I dream of more.

LUCY: Like what?

JASON: I'll tell you later.

LUCY: Tell me now.

JASON: I dream of the tango, I dream of the salsa. I dream of midnight blues which we taint with scorching yellows of the meringue, relentless reds of the mambo that I render insignificant in their pursuit. I dream of yellow islands that I own with my friends. I dream of everybody loving me. I dream of more, too. Would you like me better if I told you that?

LUCY: Perhaps.

JASON: I wish you'd told me that. I need reassurance. As bold as I am, I am still alone.

LUCY: We all are, Hon. I dream of letting them—never mind. Here she—

JASON: No wait—what were you going to say?

LUCY: Never mind—

JASON: No, wait—what were you going to say?

LUCY: I said never mind—

JASON: And I said, "No, wait."

LUCY: Fuck. Fine. I—I —wanted to say that—that—that—that I dream of letting them go. Of letting them go. I just want them to go. They're in cages. Like prison. But I can't. Someone has to watch over them. So that's me, that's who I am, after all the, the—after all.

JASON: So, let's let them go.

LUCY: No, I can't.

JASON: Why not?

LUCY: Because what else do I have? What the fuck else do I have? An empty nest. And it's empty enough already.

JASON: Lucinda—I'll be back for food next week.

LUCY: Fuck next week! I want to let them go. I want to let them go now. And you're going to help me. Open up all the cages.

JASON: Are you sure?

LUCY: No. But open them up.

JASON: Are you sure?

LUCY: Yes! Open them up!

JASON: No...no, no. I can't.

LUCY: Good. Good. Now you understand.

JASON: Not sure I do—

LUCY: --and I'm not sure either, hon, but that's the way the cookie crumbles.

JASON: Lucinda?

LUCY: Call me Lucy.

JASON: Lucy?

LUCY: Yeah?

JASON: Let's let them go. Fine. Let's let them go.

LUCY: Fine. You ready?

JASON: No.

LUCY: Neither am I. So I'll see you next week, then?

JASON: Yes, you'll see me next week.

(Blackout)