

The Birdcatcher

**LUCY
AVERY**

92 BRAND

Characters: Randall, a man, 42. He wears a black suit and a bowler hat. He has white bloodstained bandages over his eyes, tied around his head.

Kirstin, a young girl, 18. She wears a white nightdress and has bare feet. She carries a child's toy nurse's bag on her shoulder.

Kirstin stands downstage centre. She has a ball of string in her hands which stretches out into the wings. She is playing a tug of war with it that is leading her upstage.

Kirstin: When I pull, you've got to move forward. That's how it works. This was your idea.

She releases more string and moves downstage. She heaves and falls over as suddenly Randall enters and stops. She tries to pull him towards her but he won't budge.

Kirstin: Well, smile then. This is a happy occasion.

She gets up and winds up the string, putting it in her bag.

Randall: *(Grimacing)* Your feet stink. I didn't need that piece of rope. I could've followed you using my sense of smell alone, it's become quite heightened... It's cold out here, drafty. Why did you get me out of bed?

Kirstin: You weren't in bed, you were dozing by the fire. You asked me to bring you here. It's our anniversary.

Randall: Are you standing close to me? Go, stand further downwind, I don't want your stench to infect my evening stroll. *(She moves to the other side of him)* Further. Further downwind I said. *(She moves around the stage)* I told you I don't want to smell your stinky stenchy grubby little... *(He intakes a breath and exhales)* That's better, fresh air at last. Did you bring the picnic?

She goes to his jacket pocket and takes out a sandwich wrapped in cling film. She gives him half. He eats grimacing.

Kirstin: It's egg and cress, your favourite. *(He spits it out)* You said you'd be a good boy for Mummy today.

Randall: You used margarine. You know I like butter. Butter is better, has a purer flavour. The other half? *(She puts it in his mouth. He chews on it, swallowing some and spitting out the rest)* Now, do we have an iced cold beer to wash it down with? Or a chilled glass of Chardonnay?

Kirstin: I thought you'd prefer your own vomit actually! That wasn't egg and cress it was mouse and cockroach, caught from our very own kitchen!

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He gags, spits out any food he can wretch up. Kirstin laughs and takes a handkerchief from his top pocket. He snatches it from her and wipes his mouth, putting it back in his pocket.

Kirstin: *(Looking around)* It hasn't changed a bit has it? You've kept it just the same.

Randall: This is the one place I tended regularly. They'd ask me "why do you bother to tend this section? No one looks behind the hedge..."

Kirstin: Do you still remember that day?

Randall: 10 years ago today...

Kirstin: Once upon a time, on a hot summer's day...

Randall: It was March.

Kirstin: A sunny Sunday morning...

- Randall:** It was a Tuesday afternoon actually...
- Kirstin:** The summer holidays all stretched out...
- Randall:** You'd just broken for Easter. You rounded the corner and caught my eye. You looked directly at me, straight into my heart.
- Kirstin:** I was playing tennis with Erica Johnson. She hit the ball so hard it went over your hedge.
- Randall:** *(Smiling)* I had to wait a few more months before you'd...
- Kirstin:** Can I hide with you?
- Randall:** Of course you can hide with me. I've been watching you play.
- Kirstin:** I know.
- Randall:** Who are you hiding from?
- Kirstin:** Erica Johnson. *(She giggles)*
- Randall:** Do you know any songs?
- Kirstin:** Don't sing she might hear you. She's got the biggest ears you've ever seen. They're bigger than mine, see? *(She pokes her ear out)*
- Randall:** You let me touch your lobe...
- Kirstin:** You could come to my birthday party...
- Randall:** That was later. That was a lot later after I had... after we had... No point thinking like that now, those days are gone... You had such delicate fingers.

Randall starts to cry and blood seeps onto his bandages. Kirstin sits him on the floor and cuts his bandages off. There is dried blood around his eye sockets, which have been sewn shut. As she mops up the blood with cotton wool he clings to her.

- Randall:** Where did you go? Where did your beautiful butter-like body go? You were so pure. Not the gorilla you are now. The apey apelike yeti you've grown into. The thought of combing my hands through your... Everywhere, hairy hairy hair hair.

She takes a fresh bandage out of her bag and ties it around his head.

Randall: We tried to give you a razor, didn't we? But you used it on your wrists instead. That gave us a fright. And you wouldn't sit still long enough for me to do it... That first Tuesday in March my hair stood on end. I prickled at the sight of you. And the rapture visited me that day, and every day since... until... the hairy hairy hair appeared.

Kirstin: ...If that's how you really feel, maybe we've come to the end of our game... If it hurts you to even think of me... maybe I should leave.

Randall: But we've sorted all that out, haven't we? I can no longer see that which repulses me... You are alive in my mind as you were. No more apey apelike yeti to scare old Randall away...

Kirstin moves suddenly and holds Randall by the throat. He chokes.

Kirstin: I'd be careful what you say to me, Granddad. I could very easily end it all now. You think we're in the park? We're on the edge a cliff at Dover actually. I want the key. I want the key to the gate and you're going to give it to me. You've kept me here long enough.

BRAND 95

Her grip tightens. He splutters and gasps for breath.

Randall: What key? I haven't got a key. The only key I had was the key to my heart, and you stole that long ago.

She moves position holding him in a headlock.

Kirstin: Where is it? Come on Granddad, play nice, or it's onto the rocks with you.

Randall: If we're on a cliff at Dover, why can't I hear the sea? Where are the gulls? This is another one of your...

Kirstin: *(She blows on his cheek)* Can you feel it now? That's the breeze off the sea. The tide's turning. You'll be swimming with the fishes soon.

Randall: If we really are at Dover then you've found the key and we've left the park. You can't hold me like this much longer...

Kirstin: I want to go back. I want to go back to before. You've brought all this hairy hair onto me. When I have that key the gods will make me into a bird, like in those stories. I'll fly away back to my Mummy's house and I'll live happily ever after.

Kirstin's grip is weakening, Randall starts to chuckle.

Randall: Oh dear, I really have brought up a little bird brain, haven't I? A magic key that transforms you into a bird? I should've given you the Encyclopaedia Britannica rather than those story books... Poor old Tweety-pie. I told you those stories to keep you docile. Something to calm you down while I... And you want to leave me? You wouldn't know up from down!

Kirstin: You said if I opened the window the gods would strike me down dead. You said they reward good behaviour. I've been good for a long time now, I want my reward.

Randall: There's no reward for girls like you, I'm as good as it gets. Your Mummy left you all alone in the park that day. She didn't want you anymore...

96 BRAND

Kirstin: Stop lying.

Randall: Poor little Tweety-pie, Mummy didn't want her, she didn't have a home until Randall took her in.

Kirstin: Stop that! Stop it!

Kirstin shifts her weight to get a better grip, but her position is weak.

Randall: Poor little rich girl, nobody loved her...

Kirstin: Where is it? I want that key.

Randall: I know where we are. We're passed the rose garden, near the lake with the...

Kirstin: I want it now or else...

Randall: Or else what? You ungrateful little bitch. I did nothing but love you, love you and love you and love you!

Randall attempts to stand throwing Kirstin off but she grabs his arm and twists it behind his back. He yelps in pain. She holds him tight.

Kirstin: I saw you drown my pup, my baby in the lake. They'll be after you with the dogs when I'm gone. *(She spits on him)* Give me the key.

She twists his arm, he yelps.

Randall: Ok! Ok you win! It's in my hat.

Kirstin: What?

Randall: It was in my hat all along. Right under your nose, bird brain.

Kirstin squeezes him tighter then drops him, kicking him to the floor. She takes his hat and finds the key in the headband. She takes the string from her bag and ties the key around her neck, putting the extra string back in her bag. She puts the hat on and looks at him.

Randall: This is to be our farewell then? Kirstin? Angel? Are you still there? *(He sniffs to smell if she's still there)* May I request one thing before you go? Let me touch you one last time... You've got the key, you've won the game. The least you could do is let me touch you, give me something to remember you by...

BRAND 97

Kirstin: You said I was a bulgy gorilla. You said I made you sick.

Randall: That was just talk, love play... You're my angel. My perfect little angel sent from the gods to bless my heart.

Kirstin: ...Just on the face then, no lower. Just the face and the neck if you have to.

Randall stands slowly.

Randall: Do you remember that first time? I thought you might break if I touched you. But you said "It's ok, I'm not a dolly. You can't hurt me."

Randall's fingers glide over her features but suddenly his grip tightens. Kirstin convulses and a small bird flies out of her mouth and dances around them. With one hand Randall catches it and eats it. Kirstin stares at him. Randall takes his handkerchief and gags her.

Randall: We'd better get you home before the weather really turns.

He takes his bandage off and opens his eyes, he can see. He ties the bandage around her wrists, tying them together.

Randall: We'll have hot chocolate and marshmallows by the hearth if you're good.

He takes the key necklace from her, puts it around his neck and puts the hat on his head. He takes the string from her bag and ties it around her waist.

Randall: Shall I sing a song for the journey? *(He smiles)*

Curtain.