

THE BIRDS

BY

CONOR McPHERSON

FROM A STORY BY

DAPHNE DU MAURIER



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE BIRDS
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The world premiere of THE BIRDS was presented by The Gate Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, opening on September 29, 2009. It was directed by Conor McPherson; the set and costume designs were by Rae Smith; the lighting design was by Paul Keogan; the sound design was by Simon Baker; and the original music was by Fionnuala Ní Chiosáin. The cast was as follows:

DIANE Sinéad Cusack
JULIA Denise Gough
NAT Ciarán Hinds
TIERNEY Owen Roe

THE BIRDS received its American premiere at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on February 25, 2012. It was directed by Henry Wishcamper, the design was by Wilson Chin, the costume design was by Jenny Mathis, the lighting design was by Matthew Richards, and the sound design was by Scott W. Richards. The cast was as follows:

DIANE Angela Timberman
JULIA Summer Hagan
NAT J.C. Cutler
TIERNEY Stephen Yakam

CHARACTERS

DIANE, late forties/fifties

JULIA, twenty

NAT, forties/fifties

TIERNEY, fifties

PLACE

A house in the countryside.

NOTE

It would be preferable if stage management remained invisible for this play. In the first European production the actors made any necessary changes to the set between scenes themselves. This way we also get an opportunity to watch them living together.

Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. He said to him, "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat that fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day."

—Genesis 2:16-17

*I am the eye with which the Universe
Beholds itself, and knows it is divine.*

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Song of Apollo*, 1820

THE BIRDS

Scene 1

In the darkness we hear Diane's voice through speakers. It should sound intimate. We hear her thoughts. Lights onstage gradually reveal an isolated house in the countryside.

DIANE. (*Voiceover.*) I met the man on the road. We had both abandoned our cars and decided to take our chances cutting through the fields. We broke into a house beside the water and locked ourselves in. The waves of bird attacks continued for the next two days, punctuated by terrifying hours of inexplicable silence. The man, who said his name was Nat, was sick. I nursed him while he slept through a restless delirium. And that night was the last broadcast we ever heard. (*New England in the near future. It is night. The shutters are closed. We hear birds rustling outside the house. A fluttering of wings here and there. Nat is asleep. Diane is trying to tune in a radio. All she gets is static with the odd voice trailing in and out. She adjusts the dial and begins to pick up a signal as voices fade in. Throughout the broadcast, random voices and sounds obscure what's being said. There is chaos in the studio from where the broadcast is coming.*)

VOICE 1. Okay, so centres, aid centres, places where people can feel safe, somewhere to sleep. They know there's a meal there ...

VOICE 2. I never said that. I can't say that.

VOICE 1. Yes, but they can ...

VOICE 2. There are people there, they seem organised, maybe it's safer there, that's what we're ...

VOICE 1. We're saying Mountstewart, St Thomas, Port Argus ...

VOICE 2. Port Argus won't be able to take the strain.

VOICE 1. Well, Lowtown, Newchurch?

VOICE 2. Well ... And Winford, we think, although ...

VOICE 3. (*Distant, off-mic.*) No ...

VOICE 1. Sorry, what?

VOICE 3. No, there was no ... eh ...

VOICE 2. From Winford ...

VOICE 1. Don't go to Winford.

VOICE 2. No, what we are saying is what we can't confirm. I'm not trying to tell people where to go. I'm saying that I've been given this advice, that I have received ...

VOICE 1. (*To 3.*) What's the situation with Winford?

VOICE 3. (*Unintelligible.*)

VOICE 2. Because, I wouldn't even have said St Thomas myself.

VOICE 3. (*Distant.*) There are people there ...

VOICE 1. There are people there. One could go to St Thomas ...

VOICE 2. So it seems but ...

VOICE 1. City Councillor John Little announced today that if he couldn't organise a quorum here tonight in Mountstewart that he will propose a ... I can't read this ...

VOICE 4. Listen the situation is ...

VOICE 1. Sorry, Doctor Brodie, you want to come in there.

VOICE 4. The situation is (*Interference.*) simply because no one could have prepared for a ... (*Interference.*)

VOICE 2. This is what I'm saying, we are all in the same situation, but there's no point in ...

VOICE 3. (*Distant.*) They got into the gym at Cottonhills last night ...

VOICE 1. Sorry, what?

VOICE 3. They got into the gym at Cottonhills last night so ...

VOICE 4. You see, once they're in ...

VOICE 2. We're talking about crows, seabirds, robins, sparrows! I mean you think a man could ... a grown adult can ...

VOICE 4. Yes, but your average gull is big! Four or five or six pounds in weight coming straight down out of the sky, easily reaching speeds of forty miles an hour, can cause a tremendous amount of damage to a ...

NAT. (*Stirs restlessly.*) Sarah? (*Diane switches off the radio.*) Sarah! No! Don't! (*Diane goes to him, taking a cloth from a bowl of water to soothe his forehead.*) No! Stay away from me!

DIANE. Shh ... (*Nat suddenly springs up towards the door.*)

NAT. I have to get out! (*Diane puts her hands on his shoulders.*)

DIANE. No, don't do that. (*Nat grabs her roughly, forcing her back across the room.*)

NAT. I'll fucking kill you! I mean it ...

DIANE. You're just having a dream. It's okay, it's me, it's Diane.
(Nat looks at her, his eyes are wild.)

NAT. It's so cold.

DIANE. Why don't you lie down? Here, come on ... *(She goes and holds the blanket for him to get back into his bed. He looks around the room.)*

NAT. The baby was here.

DIANE. No. It's okay ...

NAT. She was over there. She came in the door. She ... *(He goes towards the stairs.)*

DIANE. No, come over here and lie down. *(He obediently goes to her and goes to lie down, suddenly springing up.)*

NAT. I hope she didn't go back out!

DIANE. *(Gently.)* No, no, it's alright. Shh ... Just try and rest. Try and stay warm. I'm here. *(Nat quietens down and we hear birds shuffling around outside, enlivened by the voices.)*

Scene 2

Dusk. Diane is at the stove putting some fuel in. We can hear some wings flapping outside and scratching or pecking here and there. Nat is awake, watching Diane.

NAT. What time is it?

DIANE. Oh, hi. Are you hungry?

NAT. I'd love a drink of water.

DIANE. Yeah. *(She pours him a cup of water from a plastic bottle. He gulps it down.)* More? *(He nods and she pours him another cup.)*

NAT. Thanks. How long was I asleep?

DIANE. Two days.

NAT. What?

DIANE. Your temperature broke yesterday. It must have been at least a hundred and three.

NAT. Oh ... I'm sorry; did you say your name was Diana?

DIANE. Diane.

NAT. Oh yes, Diane. No sign of the owners, of this place?
DIANE. No.
NAT. Is everything...?
DIANE. Everything's ... the same.
NAT. No news or...?
DIANE. Nothing for the last twenty-four hours.
NAT. Right. God ... But nothing like, from the government or...?
I mean how can all the phones all just be out?!

DIANE. I don't know. They think it's the tides.
NAT. What is?
DIANE. The birds go out with the tides. And they come back at high tide. Every six hours.
NAT. Oh.
DIANE. I mean, they don't know why.
NAT. God ... I thought maybe it was all a dream.
DIANE. I know. It's high tide now. *(Pause. They listen to the birds scabbling around outside.)*
NAT. Do you think they know we're in here?
DIANE. Yeah. I do. *(Pause.)*
NAT. Did you say you had a daughter?
DIANE. Yes. But, you know, grown up. Moved away. Etcetera. I was on my way to see her. It was her birthday and I was ... going to ... *(Pause.)*
NAT. What about your husband?
DIANE. We're separated.
NAT. Right.
DIANE. He lives abroad.
NAT. Is this happening everywhere?
DIANE. It seems to be. *(Pause.)*
NAT. What does he do?
DIANE. Who?
NAT. Your husband.
DIANE. He's a writer. We're both writers.
NAT. Really?
DIANE. Yeah, really.
NAT. What do you write?
DIANE. Books ... you know. I haven't written one for a while but ...
NAT. Well I'd say it's tough enough to ... to write a book, I mean ...
DIANE. Do you have any children?
NAT. Well I ... no, they're my ... the children of my ex.

DIANE. Ex-wife?

NAT. ... My ... ex-girlfriend — or partner, I suppose. Not wife. We were living together. But not ... not recently.

DIANE. Right. *(Short pause.)* Well, you were a family.

NAT. Yeah. *(A loud smash somewhere makes them spring up. Nat grabs a hammer and wields it like a weapon.)*

DIANE. How old are they?

NAT. Six and eight. But I haven't seen them in about ... ten months, a year.

DIANE. Right. Well that's hard.

NAT. Yeah. And the break-up was ... you know ...

DIANE. Mmm ...

NAT. It was ... *(He looks at the shutters where some wings are heard flapping. Birds bang against the glass.)* difficult, so ...

DIANE. Yeah. Well that's ...

NAT. Yeah. *(Pause.)*

DIANE. Was this Sarah? *(Pause.)*

NAT. Yeah, how do you know?

DIANE. Because you were talking to her.

NAT. What do you mean?

DIANE. You were talking to someone called Sarah. You pushed me right across the room.

NAT. Are you serious? *(Diane just gives a little wry smile and raises her eyebrows.)* Oh I'm sorry. Did I hurt you?

DIANE. No. *(Beat.)* Just my finger.

NAT. Oh, no. I'm sorry. Is it bad?

DIANE. No it just got bent right back, you know when that happens.

NAT. Oh God ... Listen, I'd never do anything like that. I mean ...

DIANE. I know.

NAT. I'm sorry.

DIANE. No, it's okay. *(Pause. A concerted effort by a bird to fly repeatedly through a window makes them fall silent. The noise passes.)*

NAT. I can't believe I did that. She's absolutely crazy. I mean she had me locked up, you know? *(Diane looks at him standing there with a hammer in his hand.)*

DIANE. Who?

NAT. Sarah.

DIANE. In your dream?

NAT. No, like really. In real life. She's crazy.

DIANE. What do you mean locked up?

THE BIRDS

by Conor McPherson
from a story by Daphne du Maurier

2M, 2W

Daphne du Maurier's short story, also the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's classic film, is boldly adapted by Conor McPherson — a gripping, unsettling, and moving look at human relationships in the face of societal collapse. In an isolated house, strangers Nat and Diane take shelter from relentless masses of attacking birds. They find relative sanctuary but not comfort or peace; there's no electricity, little food, and a nearby neighbor may still be alive and watching them. Another refugee, the young and attractive Julia, arrives with some news of the outside world, but her presence also brings discord. Their survival becomes even more doubtful when paranoia takes hold of the makeshift fortress — an internal threat to match that of the birds outside.

"Deliciously chilling ... spring-loaded with tension ... claustrophobic, questioning, frightening; and with a twist." —**Irish Independent**

"Never has [McPherson] been more in control ... he keeps us on the edge of our seat." —**The Irish Times**

"[THE BIRDS] is a powerful piece of theatre and a reminder to me of just how important that story has become. ... truly frightening ... a night in the theatre that should not be missed." —**Tippi Hedren,**
star of the Alfred Hitchcock film *The Birds*

Also by Conor McPherson
THE DANCE OF DEATH
PORT AUTHORITY
SHINING CITY
and others

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