

JLS

by

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Setting

Two aging female birds sit atop the railing at the Bridgeport, CT dock facing the human passengers as they prepare to enter the ship and embark on the ferry. The actors are dressed in simple white and grey cloth frocks and/or tights, with no shoes. They sit with their heads propped up and hands under arms mimicking wings and occasionally move their necks to change their gaze or consider flight.

Characters

Ellen-- cautious, content and knows her place among the flock. She believes there are distinct stages to life and now has settled into retirement as a stage for observation and not experimentation.

Sammi-- curious, willing to take risks to seek adventures and new possibilities regardless of age. Approach to life is guided strictly by a literal and spiritual reading of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

ELLEN

It's about time you returned to our observation deck.

SAMMI

I know they are almost ready to leave.

ELLEN

You must have missed that lesson.

SAMMI

Which one? Was it in JLS?

ELLEN

JLS?

SAMMI

Jonathan Livingston Seagull.

ELLEN

I read Livingston...Seagull like every other gull. And why the initials all of a sudden?

SAMMI

Its a rebranding thing for the
Kindle generation, like that Saudi
Prince-- MBS.

ELLEN

(shrugging shoulders, not
understanding)
This isn't from... Livingston
Seagull. This one comes from living
as a seagull, you know the early
bird special.

SAMMI

The featherless come here every
hour. What is the rush? Running
late is my happy time.
(BEAT)

It means I am already in a happy
place.

ELLEN

The "happy time" is the proper time
that we all agree to. We learned in
the flock to come back here to our
safe place, and not to stay too
long in our happy place.

SAMMI

Since when did we vote on our happy
place being a safe place?

ELLEN

Since you flew head first into your
own reflection in a building
window.

(BEAT)

And look what that got you--a case
of arthritis in your wing. You can
barely fly straight now!

SAMMI

Flying straight is overrated.

ELLEN

But flying is not, so you had
better watch it gull.

SAMMI

What can I say that I haven't already. Thanks for finding this place near this ferry for us to recuperate and when necessary offer refuge, but I am not exactly ready to retire.

ELLEN

Don't you like watching these different breeds of featherless birds from all over the world?

SAMMI

They are not birds. They are humans.

ELLEN

Who can't fly.

SAMMI

Doesn't stop them from ignoring us.

ELLEN

They call it "people watching". We can play their game. But we have to keep a safe distance, pretend we are not watching them so they will not alter their behavior and merely perform for us.

SAMMI

Who, the tourists? They are not "people watching" or performing for us. They are taking pictures of everything but the people-- they are more interested in statues, buildings and boats.

ELLEN

Occasionally-- us birds.

SAMMI

Usually themselves.

ELLEN

They call that selfies.

SAMMI

But they can just look in the glass walls to see their reflections... like we do with the shallow water.

ELLEN

No need they have mirrors inside the buildings, and now the phones can double as portable mirrors as well.

SAMMI

So why the selfies?

ELLEN

They don't realize that a time will come when the only one who wants to look at you is yourself.

SAMMI

And when is that time?

ELLEN

When you retire.

SAMMI

Retire from what, taking selfies?

ELLEN

No, from their work. It is time to retire when the body tells us its time to retire.

SAMMI

It is time to retire when the mind is crazy. If the body is still working, even badly I vote no retirement, but maybe more vacations, now and then.

ELLEN

Birds don't vote. We eat, we crap, we make fun of the featherless with their bird tattoos.

SAMMI

And... unlike them we are free spirited and know how to have fun our entire lives.

ELLEN

It is fun to crap on the people we are watching now and then.

SAMMI

Now that is the spirit.
How about the Bahamas again next month?

(MORE)

SAMMI (CONT'D)

There is a certain seagull I met last time. I wonder if he is still around?

ELLEN

The one with the flappy neck?

SAMMI

They all have flappy necks at this age. I am just looking for a good laugh and a few sips of rum not sitting around worrying, complaining and convalescing in a coop.

ELLEN

Oh I am not worrying or complaining... You go find your Bahamian sun tanned seagull. He is probably off with 5 other birds right now-- in his happy place.

SAMMI

On cold mornings I still feel the pain of my window accident in my whole body. But when I fly...

(BEAT)

Fly to the edge of the fiercest winds, ... This is my purpose.

(BEAT)

I can feel the wind pulling me, inviting me closer, dangerously closer and I know to think beyond my own self-imposed limits in order to not be sucked into the void.

ELLEN

The Caribbean creates many dangers for us Northern gals-- some in the form of storms-- some in the form of well tanned gulls.

SAMMI

I'll take that pain and if necessary danger over the alternative-- numbness and silence. That's a majority of two votes for our next Caribbean vacation.

ELLEN

I told you birds don't vote.

SAMMI

But they vacation.

ELLEN

Vacation, in this season?

SAMMI

I know, I know what you're thinking. But for me a storm is a place a bird like me oughta be even at our age.

ELLEN

Storm? That is what we call the "fiercest wind," what the featherless call a hurricane.

SAMMI

You expect me to just sit here on this perch watching the same scene with you because it is safe?

ELLEN

It is the not the same scene. It changes everyday, every ferry ride.

SAMMI

The people change, the scene does not.

ELLEN

If you want to fly into a hurricane with a broken wing and a prayer go ahead, but I am not acting like some crazy bird.

SAMMI

You go to Florida every year for the season, what's the difference? Its not like they don't have hurricanes too.

ELLEN

Unlike you, I go when it is not hurricane season.

SAMMI

Don't forget what JLS said...

ELLEN

And don't preach to me anymore from JLS.

SAMMI

Why not---he is simply the greatest Seagull ever.

ELLEN

He is not a Seagull. He is an invention of a human who wrote a book with more pictures of seagulls than actual thoughts from seagulls.

SAMMI

Not a book. The book.

ELLEN

Yes, yes. Jonathan Livingston Seagull. You quote it like they quote the Bible.

(pointing toward the audience)

SAMMI

Why not--It can be our Bible. It's not like they ...

(pointing to the audience)
Get it.

ELLEN

Lets see, what is the moral to...
JLS?

SAMMI

"Jonathan Seagull discovered that boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull's life is so short, and with these gone from his thought, he lived a long fine life indeed."

ELLEN

That is a quote not a moral.

SAMMI

Technicality. Plus we never really got to grammar or literature in flight school.

ELLEN

The flock would be livid if they knew you were addressing the featherless directly.

SAMMI

Why?

ELLEN

Really?

SAMMI

Really.

ELLEN

To start off. You have chosen to engage a featherless to quote a seagull whose thoughts were conjured by another featherless in order to some how teach me that the essence of life-- flight-- is about overcoming fear and boredom.

SAMMI

Precisely. What is the problem?

ELLEN

You know what they say these days: "Nothing about us, without us."

SAMMI

It's not without me.

ELLEN

The problem here is that you are getting crazier and more unhinged than I could have predicted when we started to travel together.

SAMMI

I have a bucket list, that's all.

ELLEN

Flying into a hurricane is really the best you can come up with?

SAMMI

(shrugs shoulders/wings)
Better than Vegas.

ELLEN

What is it with this bucket list thing anyway? Who needs to commit to do all the crazy things that you managed to avoid up until now?

SAMMI

Not avoid, just somehow not overcome the fear to even try.

ELLEN

How many of these crazy ideas are on your bucket list?

SAMMI

At the moment, about 17.

ELLEN

Only 17, why not 100 while you are at it?

SAMMI

Sure. I add new ones all the time. It keeps me interesting.

ELLEN

Better to be interested than interesting.

SAMMI

Don't you have anything, anything at all that you just want to try once, that is a bit out of your comfort zone?

ELLEN

Well, if you insist. I always wanted to climb inside her nose.

SAMMI

Whose nose?

ELLEN

You know, the tall one with the torch.

(pointing South toward
Ellis Island)

SAMMI

Your sole bucket list fantasy is to pick the nose of Lady Liberty?

ELLEN

You don't have to be crude about it. It is just sort of ...

SAMMI

Irreverent, selfish, reckless, wild... choose one. It's ok to think it, feel it, say it. It's not we weren't once teenagers.

ELLEN

Not in front of the passengers. It is better for them to think of us as genteel and graceful as we age. Natural like the ocean breeze.

SAMMI
Natural like the hurricane winds
too?

ELLEN
If you insist.

SAMMI
So I fly solo?

ELLEN
(pondering, for the first
time)
Unless you have time for one side
trip before you leave.

SAMMI
You mean... to the nose?

ELLEN
Yes to the nose.

SAMMI
I would be honored to accompany you
on this maiden flight.

ELLEN
What would JLS say?

SAMMI
She lived a long fine life, indeed.

End of Play.