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 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? It's 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 then actual thoughts from seagulls.

SAMMI

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.