

PROUD

by

Judd Lear Silverman

PROUD

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PROUD

PROUD was originally produced by Rising Sun Performance Company (co-presented by the 14Y Theater, NYC) in February 2023. The production was directed by Eric Parness and featuring the following cast:

TomRick Benson
DickElliot Colby
HarryDuane Chivon Ferguson
PatPaulina “pau” Tobar
Police OfficerRachael Langton
TV Reporter.....Lluvia Almanza
TV AnchorOrlando F. Rodriguez
Zoo KeeperBen Dworken
Swing for Harry/Police OfficerJonathan Wong Frye*
Swing for PatLluvia Almanza

Assistant Director: Maggie Connick (swing for TV Reporter); Production Stage Manager: Richard Urquiza; Assistant Stage Manager: Corin Greene*; Costume design by Zahra Jangbar; Scenic Coordination by Miriam Eusebio; Lighting design by Jess Clapper; Properties design & Scenic Dressing by Laine Diep; Sound design by Jorge Olivio; Associate Producers Miriam Eusebio and Sean Gordon; Technical Director: K8 August; Run Crew/Board Op: Reagan Such; Public Relations: Andrea Alton/Alton PR; Social Media by Jennifer Iris Rivera; Marketing Materials by Rachael Langton

**member, AEA*

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CAST

NOTE: Though peacocks are male, as costumed and imagined they can be played by either gender, as can the humans. In the original production, there was much switching between genders.

The Peacocks:

TOM, great, heroic leadership abilities; a scout and a scientist

DICK, an intellectual/historian who has read the great work of man and peacocks

HARRY, a showman who has the respect of all, mainly for his tail prowess

PAT, smart and eager and willing to learn, but not yet mature

The Humans*:

STATE POLICEMAN, a tired traffic cop

TV ANCHOR (JIM), vain, hoping to move to bigger markets

TV REPORTER (ANDREA), popular local television reporter/personality

ZOO OFFICIAL (male or female), Philly Zoo spokesperson, a zoologist

**could be voice overs, projected videos, or even characters on the stage, (depending on casting/size/resources), but the focus and the presence of the play should rest with the peacocks. Humans and peacocks occupy their own worlds. If an appropriate physicality has been established for the “birds” when by themselves versus how the humans see them, then humans with human physicality can effectively share the stage with them and even allow for some interesting simultaneous staging events.*

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Setting:

Though this is an “epic journey” or quest, the actual location is in and barely a mile away from the Philadelphia Zoo, mostly around Route I-76, known locally as the Schuylkill Expressway (pronounced skool-kill). The time is the present – or to be more specific, May/June of 2018. The clearings are all a mix of grass, trees, woods, and maybe a stream or a brook – with slight shifts, one clearing looks much like the other. When the peacocks are on their march, they are on the blacktop of the Expressway, I-76. The entire adventure takes place over approximately four days.

Scene 1: A dark gathering space at night, a wooded spot at the Philly Zoo.

Scene 2: The next morning, other side of the gate, equally woody and green.

Scene 3: A clearing, directly adjacent to I-76, then onto the Schuylkill.

Scene 4: That evening, different clearing, barely a mile from the Schuylkill.

Scene 5: The same clearing, the following morning.

Scene 6: The Schuylkill Expressway, same day.

Scene 7: That night, at yet another clearing.

Scene 8: The same clearing, the morning after.

Synopsis:

The play is inspired by the true story of four peacocks who escaped from the Philadelphia Zoo on May 31st, 2018. The facts are true. The perspective and the story, as presented, belong to the peacocks, telling of their great escape and their solemn mission.

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Shakespeare Quotes:

page 1

“Pat! Pat! . . . A marvelous convenient place.”

Peter Quince, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM, ACT III, sc.i

page 5

“In nature’s infinite book of secrecy/A little I can read.”

Soothsayer, ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA. ACT 1, sci.i,

page 5

“Knowing I lov’d my books, he furnish’d me/From mine own library with volumes that/I prize above my dukedom.”

Prospero, THE TEMPEST, ACT 1, sc. ii

page 5

“O, let my books be then the eloquence and dumb presages of my speaking breast.”

Shakespeare, SONNET 23

pages 10-11

“What a piece of work is man, How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, In form and moving how express and admirable, In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god, The beauty of the world, The paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?”

Hamlet, HAMLET, Act II, sc. ii

page 24

“I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:”

Oberon, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM, Act II, sc. I

page 74

“Wisely, and slow. They stumble that run fast.”

Friar Lawrence, ROMEO AND JULIET , Act II, sc.iii

page 87

“When I was at home I was in a better place”

Touchstone, AS YOU LIKE IT, Act II, sc.iv

page 88

“Now these her princes are come home again, Come the three corners of the world in arms, And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue, If England to itself do rest but true.”

Philip the Bastard, KING JOHN, Act V, sc. Vii

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SCENE ONE

A dark gathering space at night, somewhere in a wooded spot at the Philadelphia Zoo. TOM, DICK, and HARRY, all peacocks, have just arrived from various locations.

TOM. Are we all met?

DICK. (*Enjoying himself.*) “Pat, Pat.”

TOM. No, no, he’s not here yet. That’s just the problem. Did either of you have any difficulty finding the place?

DICK. “A marvelous convenient place.”*

HARRY. Maybe for you. Some of us had to drag our trains through the mud!

DICK. Oh, Harry! Now’s not the time for vanity!

HARRY. Says the bird quoting Shaken-spear.

DICK. Shakespeare!

HARRY. Whatever. You get the same self-satisfied smirk every time you quote --

DICK. You could learn to read if you wanted to!

TOM. Gentlemen! We have to focus. We have an important mission to accomplish.

DICK. Yes, Tom.

HARRY. Agreed.

TOM. Are you sure no one saw you?

HARRY. Do you mean zoo staff? Certainly not. They never notice anything!

TOM. Well, that’s good.

DICK. Unless we’re dancing, it’s hard to tell us apart.

HARRY. Speak for yourself. I am a magnificent dancer!

DICK. Yeah, but right now, you’re just any ole fowl.

HARRY. I have NEVER been any old fowl! Why, when I spread my --

DICK. Yes, yes, we know, Harry, you’re quite magnificent. No one says

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otherwise.

TOM. I just wish the kid would get here already. Do you think he's too young for this?

DICK. He's a good chick. We can train him.

TOM. He is, but that doesn't mean he's ready for such responsibility.

HARRY. We all have to spread our wings sometimes.

TOM. Well, a part of that is showing up!

DICK. Look, his lineage is impeccable. You said so yourself. And our guidance feather was handed down from the lad's grandfather.

TOM. The Feather Chronicles are the oldest, most cherished records we have of the ancestors.

HARRY. Again with the Chronicles! It's like a cult with you!

TOM. Still, everything must be in place for this to work. Precision is key!

HARRY. Let's not re-tread something we've already actually agreed to!

DICK. For once, Harry's right.

HARRY. For once?!

DICK. And he's not even that late. (*Just then, PAT scurries on, out of breath.*)

PAT. Sorry, guys! I couldn't decide what to bring!

TOM. You didn't need to bring anything!

DICK. We're travelling light.

PAT. But what if it gets cold?

HARRY. Well, we always have something resplendent to wear.

DICK. (*Nudging Harry.*) Not all of us! Not yet, at any rate.

TOM. Nonetheless, we're on a mission and we can't worry about extraneous matters. Comfort doesn't matter. Being on time does.

Remember that, Pat.

PAT. Sorry, Chief.

TOM. Very well. On to the business afoot.

DICK. Yes!

HARRY. Please, let's get on with it. (*All turn to look at Pat.*)

PAT. I'm ready .

TOM. Very good. Now you all know there are risks involved in this mission. That's why it was important that no staff member see us straying from the fold. Likewise, we can't even trust our own to keep the secret.

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(To Pat.) You didn't tell any of your buddies, did you?

PAT. Oh, no! I promised! Scout's honor!

TOM. And you're absolutely sure no one saw you?

PAT. Oh, heck no! Sir. At one point, when someone was coming, I jumped behind a tree so no one would see me! Don't worry -- I blended right in.

DICK. Camouflage skills? Good lad.

TOM. *(To Pat.)* Until your tail matures, your wing feathers will be camouflage enough.

HARRY. But how will he be able to--

TOM. He doesn't have to, Harry! We can do that!

DICK. That's our job, Harry!

PAT. Do what?

TOM. The important thing is that no one follows us.

PAT. So no one knows what we're doing?

TOM. Just us.

PAT. That IS secret!

DICK. Only those we could trust.

HARRY. Those of us with impeccable reputations. Or the requisite skills.

DICK. Yes, Harry, we all know you've got tail!

HARRY. And we all know you like to read stupid human books. Big deal.

DICK. "In nature's infinite book of secrecy/A little I can read."*

HARRY. All that garbage you consume!

DICK. "Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me from mine own library with volumes that I prize above my dukedom."*

HARRY. *(To Tom.)* Can't we shut him up?

DICK. "O, let my books be then the eloquence and dumb presages of my speaking breast."*

TOM. We all contribute something to this mission.

PAT. But what about me? What do I contribute?

HARRY. Good question!

DICK. Now, stop with the snobbery, Harry!

TOM. Gentlemen! He may not yet have the depth of plumage or the range of color, but--

HARRY. But?

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TOM. But that is to his advantage in this case.

HARRY. Why?

TOM. He has youth.

HARRY. What's youth when he's at home?

TOM. Someone from another generation must witness what we are doing. So that he can pass the story on to another generation.

HARRY. I should trumpet it from the rooftops!

TOM. No, Harry! That's precisely what mustn't be done!

HARRY. But I should do it so exquisitely!

DICK. Temperament like an Opera star!

PAT. What's an Opera?

HARRY. You know how fat old Theresa the Peahen likes to screech with everyone gathered around to listen to her?

PAT. Yeah?

HARRY. THAT'S opera. It's over when the fat lady sings.

TOM. WE can tell no one!!!!

PAT. Not ever?

TOM. Not . . . Yet. You'll know when the time is right.

PAT. But I'm confused. Just what are we doing? Why are we hiding from the others? What is the mission?

TOM. Draw near! (*They do.*) We are going over the wall.

PAT. When?

TOM. Tonight! When I give the signal, you will each fly up to one of these trees to roost. And then, at sunrise, we will swoop down, landing on the other side of the gate.

PAT. The other side?!

TOM. The Zoo Officials won't even notice till we're way down the path and away.

DICK. It will be a great adventure!

HARRY. Makes me nervous just to think about it.

PAT. We're going on an adventure?

TOM. Not just an adventure! A mission! An important mission that only we can do.

PAT. What is it?! This is so exciting!

HARRY. Hush up, small fry, and let the man speak! (*Pause.*)

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TOM. We are not like the other peacocks.

HARRY. Or peahens, for that matter.

PAT. Well, er, yeah, that much I figured out. I don't see them dance as much.

DICK. That's not their part in the scheme.

PAT. Although they do get to choose who--

TOM. Gentlemen! As I was saying, we are not like the others.

PAT. Even me?

TOM. Even you, Pat. For while you are a fowl with a proud lineage--

DICK. Your grandfather was a legend!

HARRY. I saw him dance once when I was a chick!

TOM. -- you also possess, through your parentage, some alternate skills.

PAT. I do?

TOM. We believe so. Which is why we picked you. Dick, why don't you explain the history.

DICK. Well . . . You see, Pat, peacocks are a very special species. We may be from India or the Congo or Myanmar--

PAT. Momma always told me I was Javanese!

HARRY. Oh, that's just what your Dad told her! (*As the others stare at him.*) Sorry, Professor. Do continue.

DICK. But essentially . . . all peacocks are originally from another galaxy. (*Just the mere mention of this stuns them all into silence a moment.*)

PAT. Another--

DICK. Yes. We are from another planet altogether, sent here on a mission thousands of years ago.

PAT. What for?

DICK. To study man.

PAT. Man?

TOM. Humankind.

DICK. "What a piece of work is man--"*

HARRY. I'll say he's a piece of work!

DICK. "And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?""*

HARRY. This what ?

TOM. (*Cutting them off.*) Our assignment was to observe their habits and their habitats, to learn what makes them tick--

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DICK. Their *modus operandi*--

TOM. Such that when the time was right, we could report back--

DICK. To the others.

HARRY. In the vast beyond.

TOM. To tell them what we've learned. (*The elders nod in agreement. PAT starts to nod along but doesn't quite get it.*)

PAT. But . . . What have we learned?

TOM. Here on this planet, man rules everything.

DICK. Everything.

HARRY. Even with his pathetic tail.

DICK. You're obsessed!

HARRY. With good reason!

TOM. Man is . . . a danger.

PAT. He is?

TOM. Why, look at this zoo! They pretend it's free-range, yet they keep us trapped. Imprisoned. They steal our discarded feathers for their gift shop!

DICK. Well, only after we've molted.

TOM. And then they troop in all kinds of curiosity seekers--

HARRY. Bunch of Looky Lous!

TOM. And they bunch us all together in tight quarters.

DICK. Not just with peacocks.

TOM. All kinds!

HARRY. Desirables and undesirables combined.

DICK. Mankind does have a tendency to be . . . ego-driven.

PAT. Ego . . . ?

DICK. They think about themselves a lot. You can see it in their literature.

HARRY. (*Muttering.*) Shaken-spear.

TOM. And while they think they are doing great things by studying us on these . . .

DICK. Wildlife preserves.

TOM. -- they are actually limiting our freedom. They are, in fact, killing us. (*Pause.*)

PAT. On purpose?

DICK. Mostly by mistake. They're not necessarily mean, the humans. But

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they're a bit--

HARRY. Obtuse.

TOM. They destroy everything they touch.

PAT. I had heard they put down the occasional animal, but that was only when they were injured or in pain. I thought, how kind!

TOM. Well, maybe here at the zoo, but --

DICK. That is their tendency. They often speak of beauty and kindness.

“The beauty of the world, The paragon of animals--” *

TOM. And yet frequently, they are also the cause of that pain! The things they make us do! They put us on display, like we are here strictly for their entertainment.

HARRY. And they have no real sense of showmanship!

DICK. They don't mean us harm, but--

TOM. They love a good conquest, but they usually don't know what they're conquering! Man will tromp on an anthill just when they've come to find out what ants actually do!

HARRY. Very strong creatures, ants.

DICK. Harry!

HARRY. Well, they are! They can lift an impressive amount of weight for their size. You have to give them that!

DICK. Hasn't stopped you from eating them, has it?

HARRY. Well, they also make for a very pleasant snack!

TOM. They assume that if we don't speak as they speak, we are therefore inferior.

PAT. The ants?

TOM. The humans.

DICK. We don't speak each other's language very well. I've studied theirs for years, I've picked up some words here and there, some idioms, but it's hard -- the syntactical structure is appalling.

HARRY. It's just plain ugly to the ear!

DICK. Not true!

HARRY. No poetry in it! Not like ours: “When the frost begins to bite the leafy greens--”

TOM. Oh, no, please don't recite!

DICK. As a linguist, I will admit that their occasional Shakespeares come

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few and far between --

HARRY. Well, at least we can agree on that!

DICK. -- but sometimes they approach art.

TOM. I'd hardly call them artistic!

HARRY. Not at all up to our standards. Stupid insecure creatures.

DICK. I'm afraid that part's true. They are an insecure breed. They always place themselves in charge so that they can keep what frightens them under control.

HARRY. And everything frightens them.

PAT. So they're not all knowing? *(Tom, Dick, and Harry start to guffaw!)*

HARRY. Goodness, no!

TOM. They know far less than just about any other life form on this planet! They toxify their own air, pollute their own water, and poison their own land! They've mindlessly destroyed their own habitats -- as well as ours!

HARRY. They're not to be trusted!

PAT. But surely, if they're as foolish as you say, then they are harmless.

DICK. If they were, then we wouldn't have to take the actions we're taking!

HARRY. Unexpectedly, they DO learn things!

PAT. Like what?

DICK. Inter-galactic locomotion.

PAT. Inter--

HARRY. Space travel.

DICK. Which is where we come in.

TOM. You see, being from another galaxy, we know how other past species have raped the galaxy with their clumsy plodding and ham-fisted exploration.

DICK. Mars is still all dried out after the last time.

TOM. We know all the warning signs.

DICK. It's almost inevitable the humans will do the same foolish things, poor misguided souls.

TOM. They've already made the first tentative steps towards space travel. As a scientist, I can tell you that the humans display all the tell-tale behavioral predictors of a race out of their depths. They are totally

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undisciplined creatures. To lead, you must have discipline!

PAT. But did our species get it right the first time?

TOM. Should one stop for on-the-job training or should one step in to protect the galaxy from disaster? We have to stop them before they make a tragic mistake. Even the germs they carry with them can wipe out a civilization they know nothing about.

DICK. The fear is that if they venture out into other worlds--

TOM. -- they will ultimately destroy them!

DICK. Even with the best of intents. *(Pause.)*

PAT. So what are we supposed to do about them? The humans, I mean.

DICK. Well, that's where the genius of it all comes in.

TOM. It's all outlined in the Feather Chronicles -- of which your Grandfather was a high priest and guardian!

DICK. We're here undercover, so to speak.

PAT. Undercover?

DICK. Oh, we may look like ordinary peafowl -- *Afropavo, Pavo* --

HARRY. None of us are totally ordinary!

TOM. -- but some of us are special. And the humans can't see the difference.

DICK. Well, we've kind of made sure they can't see the difference.

TOM. Natural adaptation. Camouflage of a most inventive kind.

DICK. We're peacocks, but we're hiding in plain sight!

HARRY. With some of the most resplendent plumage in the galaxy.

PAT. I don't--

HARRY. Cheer up, kid. You're young. It takes a few years before you get the gift!

PAT. I mean I still don't understand. What is our mission? *(Tom, Dick, and Harry look to each other to see who will spill the beans and explain.)*

TOM. To report our findings.

PAT. Where?

TOM. Home. We will make a report and send it home for the elders to adjudicate. They will in turn speak with the Interplanetary Council and then--

PAT. And then?

DICK. And then they'll take appropriate action.

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PAT. Will they respond quickly?

DICK. Hard to say. This is our first full report.

TOM. Which is why we need some responsible young one to observe the process.

DICK. Which means you.

PAT. But how do we make our report?

HARRY. *(Suddenly beaming proudly.)* We broadcast it!

PAT. We what?

TOM. We send it digitally through the universe to a great receiving antenna, which in turn sends the signal on to our elders.

PAT. With those contraptions like the zoo staff carry?

HARRY. *(Scoffs.)* Pfff! Child's toys!

PAT. Then how do we send them a message?

TOM. Through us. *(Pause.)*

PAT. I don't get it.

TOM. What have we got in abundance?

PAT. Uh, brains . . .

HARRY. Not all of us.

DICK. Clearly not.

PAT. Determination?

DICK. So does everyone else -- even the humans.

PAT. So what do we have?

TOM. Built-in equipment! *(At which point, Tom, Dick, and Harry release their tails into enormous, breath-taking displays of peacock plumage at its most magnificent, Harry perhaps having the best of the lot,)*

PAT. Wow. Awesome.

HARRY. False modesty does not become me, so yes, I am magnificent.

PAT. But . . . How do our tails help?

TOM. They aren't just tails, my boy. They are broadcasting antennae. Satellite dishes, but even better. Portable!

PAT. But I thought we spread our tails and danced strictly to attract a mate?

DICK. That may be true for the others. But that's why they thought this would be a great assignment for us. Our equipment is a natural part of our physiognomy.

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TOM. We're not only peacocks --we're living satellites as well!

PAT. So . . . then we don't really use them for mating? For attracting the females? (*The others look at each other. They close up their tails.*)

DICK. Well, we've been known on occasion --

TOM. We need to keep them in shape, so we air them out and do the ritual stuff in the meantime.

DICK. To while away the hours.

HARRY. For entertainment. And gratification. In Technicolor.

DICK. We're still peacocks. After all. (*Pause.*)

PAT. I didn't know.

HARRY. Well, you are young. Maybe by next year--

TOM. We're getting off the topic. Our mission is to escape this zoo, go to the nearest mountaintop, where we'll get good reception, and broadcast our report!

PAT. But how do we get to the mountain?

TOM. It's all in the Chronicles! The ancients tell of a huge passageway.

DICK. We've never seen it yet ourselves. That's why we have to go on the mission.

TOM. And that's why you must come along -- to learn the path so that you can pass the word along to others. Tell them of our journey and how we saved the galaxy. You will create the record of our legacy.

HARRY. And you'll report how magnificent we looked on the mountain!

PAT. Wow. I'm honored.

HARRY. As well you should be.

TOM. But enough. It is time to take our places. For now, up to the trees for some shut-eye and spiritual preparation. At sunrise, we'll fly over the zoo gates and meet on the other side.

PAT. We're flying?

DICK. Just short distances. You've probably noticed, we don't do well with long distances.

PAT. Gee, I thought there was something wrong with me. Every year, I find it harder to fly a long way.

DICK. Well, that's because you're growing up.

TOM. As birds go, we're not especially aerodynamic.

HARRY. What we lack in stamina, we make up for in magnificence!

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TOM. We are strong, so we're good for short flights, especially upwards at great bursts of speed.

DICK. We've avoided our predators that way for centuries.

TOM. But we'll walk most of the way. That's why you need to rest up.

PAT. This is really happening?

DICK. It's really happening. Tomorrow.

TOM. Tomorrow.

HARRY. Tomorrow.

DICK. And you will live on to tell our grandchildren about it.

TOM. Okay. Stop talking. Everyone pick a tree. There's work to do.

HARRY. Glory to find!

DICK. A purpose in life.

PAT. A mission.

TOM. And it's just outside this zoo. (*BLACKOUT*)

SCENE TWO

Early the next morning, the sun barely up. The other side of the gate, equally woody and green. Tom has his hand up, holding up a long peacock feather -- a navigation feather he reveres with the way one would approach a Stradivarius. He is listening intently, at first seeming to find which way the wind is blowing, then pointing the feather at it like a divining rod. There is an odd static-like sound -- like an old radio trying to connect with a frequency. Tom tries each frequency, looking for the perfect connection. Dick is kneeling down by a body of water, splashing it on his face to wake himself up. He rises slightly and looks over at Tom.

DICK. Any prog--

TOM. SHHHH!!!

DICK. Sorry.

TOM. It's just . . . getting the signal is harder than it sounds. If the signal isn't right, then we haven't found the path. (*Tom resumes his concentration and Dick wanders over to check on Pat, who is energized, looking around at an area of wood he's never seen before -- like the rest,*

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he's never been beyond the gate. He hops up on a rock trying to get a better view, but to no avail. He shades his eyes from the sun.)

PAT. I thought it'd be different somehow.

DICK. What?

PAT. The other side of the gate. It sounds and smells just the same! And I still can't see very far -- all these grasses block my view!

DICK. "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, with sweet musk-roses and with eglantine."*

PAT. Huh?

DICK. I'm told they built a wall of nature to make sure we didn't wander off. It's just the area surrounding the zoo.

PAT. But they give us free run of the place!

DICK. Only because it amuses the visitors.

PAT. Sometimes you can get up real close to them! I saw Harry out on the patio just the other day, preening in front of the tourists.

DICK. Well, you know Harry. He just loves to be admired. That would be enough for him. Just to be admired.

PAT. Doesn't everyone want that?

DICK. Sure. I guess. I just want to know that at the end of the day I made some kind of a difference.

PAT. You mean, this day?

DICK. Every day. There's so much out there, waiting to be fathomed . . . language . . .

PAT. Peacock language?

DICK. All language. Even human. Language captures all our greatest thoughts and makes them . . . relatable.

PAT. So you've read heaps.

DICK. Well, the modern peacock standards, of course. But ancient Peacockian I haven't cracked yet. It's in feather and you need to pick up on such little nuances. It's harder than you'd think, much harder than human.

PAT. So you've read lots of human language?

DICK. Some. Mostly what I can get my hands on. Someone once left an old book in the woods and I took to it like a duck to . . . Well, anyway, I

PROUD

make out what I can. But I envy Tom.

PAT. Tom? Can he read human?

DICK. Better -- he can read feather! It's very difficult to do. You've got to have the knack, to understand what it's telling you. I'd love to read the Feather Chronicles in the original Peacockian. From what Tom tells me, it's beautiful. But you need the ear for it. Your grandfather was quite the scholar, you know. It was he who passed that feather on.

PAT. Mom and Dad don't talk of him much.

DICK. I'm afraid that's because your grandfather gave the feather to Tom and not your father. Your father wasn't his son, so . . .

PAT. Then he should have given it to my Mother, shouldn't he?

DICK. Doesn't work like that -- at least not according to the old ways.

PAT. They want me to adapt to the new ways. The "zoo" ways.

DICK. I can't say they're wrong. I can't say they're right. It's moments like this mission that test us. Reading our past may be the key to our future.

PAT. Maybe I can learn how to read feather!

DICK. (*Pointing to Tom.*) Well, luckily you're watching a scholar at work, firsthand!

PAT. (*Crossing to watch Tom.*) How does it work?

TOM. It picks up signals. The earth's gravitational forces. It's sort of like a compass.

PAT. What's a compass?

TOM. It helps you locate where you are. And then it tells you what direction to go. It's all based on knowing true north.

PAT. (*Memorizing.*) "True north." And we can do that with our feathers?

TOM. There's no end to what we can do with our feathers. They are sensitive instruments, calibrated to the electromagnetic currents all around us.

PAT. All around us?

DICK. (*Admiringly.*) He really is a brain, isn't he?

TOM. Even homing pigeons feel the earth's magnetic signals pinging off the landscape. Another branch of the family, of course, but it's important you always know how to find your way home.

PAT. That's awesome! How do you know all this?

PROUD

TOM. (*Secretly proud.*) The ancients recorded it all in the Feather Chronicles. This is just the beginning of your training, Kid. There's lots to see, lots to explore, lots to learn.

PAT. Wow.

DICK. Both of you come splash your face in the water, eat some fresh leaves and ants. You'll need all your strength for the trip. (*Harry comes staggering in, groaning.*)

HARRY. That was the worst roost I've ever had! I couldn't sleep a wink and that tree branch put my back out. I can barely move my legs! And I'm so hungry I could eat a whole snake!

DICK. Don't fill up! You'll spoil the trip! Come find a small worm or something to nibble on. It'll perk you right up.

HARRY. (*To Pat.*) The only thing that would perk me up would be a cute little peahen who--

DICK. Not in front of the lad!

HARRY. Well, surely he's observed!

PAT. (*Sheepish.*) Actually, I have watched some of the dancing.

DICK. You have?

PAT. Yeah, some of the other chicks and I peek through the bushes on occasion.

DICK. And you saw?

PAT. Well, it's a weird dance, twisty and strutting. (*And he tries to recreate what he saw, totally clueless. Dick, delighted, starts to join in, although once he starts, his feathers open up like an umbrella.*)

DICK. Come join us, Harry!

HARRY. I don't open my train unless we mean serious business! I'm a professional, not some rank amateur!

DICK. Oh, you're rank, all right! Tom, what about you?

TOM. Someone's got to do some work around here. (*Dick lowers his fan of feathers. He puts his arm around Pat's shoulders.*)

DICK. Not to worry, Kid! Before you know it, you will have a fan like no one else's and your dance will be amazing.

PAT. I just feel awkward.

DICK. We all go through that phase. Part of growing up. That's why it's a good idea to eat a little bit of everything. Plants, spiders, slugs--

PROUD

TOM. (*Still working.*) Protein! Good lean protein!

HARRY. I still love a good snake sandwich every once in a while. Why, I remember that one summer--

DICK. Oh, you'd eat anything and claim it made your tail grow.

HARRY. Well, I do have that tail, don't I?

PAT. It's true. He does!

HARRY. (*Pleased.*) You've noticed?!

PAT. That night when me and the fellas were peeking through the bushes--
-

HARRY. Yes?

PAT. We saw you dance. You were incredible.

HARRY. Well, when you have the right equipment --

TOM. Is that all you guys can talk about?!

HARRY. "Is that all you guys . . . ?" Honestly, Tom, just because you don't have such an amazing one--

DICK. Harry, come on, just have some of this brook water, it's delicious!

TOM. Yeah, go soak your head.

DICK. Now fellas, you're not setting a good example for our trainee. Truce?

TOM. Truce.

HARRY. Oh, very well. Truce.

PAT. (*To Tom.*) Maybe you can teach me to navigate with feathers, like you do.

HARRY. Suck up.

DICK. Do you know how, Harry?

HARRY. No. Do you?

DICK. No. Your gift is in your tail. Mine's in my scholarship. And Tom's is in gizmos and gadgets. If he didn't understand the technology, I doubt we could do this at all.

HARRY. You can hardly expect me to remember things my great-grandfather taught me years ago!

DICK. That's why Tom is our leader. It's been his job to keep up on all the skills we'd need for when the day finally arrived.

HARRY. And has it?

TOM. You bet it has! You know all those rumbling noises we keep

PROUD

hearing?

HARRY. It's just a little something I ate.

TOM. I mean, when it sounds like the earth is moving under us?

PAT. I've heard those sounds!

TOM. Well, it is! Plates are shifting. Earthquakes. Small ones for now, but soon tsunamis, tidal waves, volcanoes--

HARRY. You're a one-man horror show, you are!

TOM. The Earth is angry! All of the drilling and digging and pounding is setting off a chain reaction!

PAT. Chain --

TOM. Like ripples in the water! They don't stop spreading out! The energy goes on and on, being absorbed into this tree, that rock--

HARRY. Rocks don't absorb anything. They're just . . . rocks.

TOM. Maybe it's true: when you get a big tail, you get a smaller brain. Pea-sized.

HARRY. Well, I don't hear any travelling signals yet, do you?!

DICK. Now boys, come on, we've got a long journey ahead of us!

TOM. Anyway, the balance has been upset, which is why the earth is furious!

HARRY. *(Suddenly distracted.)* Oh, look, there's a tasty morsel! *(HARRY lunges for a bug he sees. He eats joyously.)*

DICK. Better?

HARRY. Well, I must say they do get some variety on this side of the gate! If the grub keeps up like this, I'll need a girdle to fly!

TOM. Do you want to go home, Harry? Just say the word. You can fly your fat ass back up over the gate, dance your tail off, and get all the fawning praise your needy heart desires!

DICK. *(Warning.)* Tom . . .

TOM. Or you can do what you were born to do and use the great gifts you were given. Which is it gonna be? *(Pause.)*

HARRY. So you do acknowledge I have great gifts? *(Tom just lets out a defeated groan. Dick looks up.)*

DICK. It's getting lighter. Don't you think it's time?

TOM. Well, we've certainly spent enough time listening to this!

PAT. But which way do we go? How do we end up not going right back

PROUD

into the zoo? *(Tom holds up his feather again. Suddenly, there is a tone, resonant and clear, not high-pitched or squeaky but steady, sturdy-sounding -- something you can zero in on.)*

TOM. Do you hear that?! It works! It works! I knew it! It's telling us to go . . . that way! *(Feather aloft and shaking with excitement, Tom follows the sound's direction off into the grass.)*

DICK. *(To Pat.)* Shall we?

PAT. I'm not gonna miss this! *(But Harry is still digging hungrily for grubs.)*

DICK. Harry?

HARRY. There's got to be more of these beetles here. *(Looking up.)*
What? A man's gotta eat!

DICK. C'mon, Pat. He'll come when he's ready. *(The two of them start off in the direction Tom just vanished. Harry realizes he's all by himself.)*

HARRY. Crap. *(Taking one long look.)* Good-bye, creepy crawlies. Catch you on the way back. *(Groaning as he gets up.)* I'm getting too old for this. *(But he straightens his back, looks around, and then fearful of being left behind, he dashes off to follow them.)*

SCENE THREE

Farther into -- or out of -- the woods. The muster of four step into a clearing and into -- the light! Immediately we hear the sounds of cars and traffic, as one would on I-76, the Schuylkill Expressway. The four are stunned by what they see.

PAT. WOW! That's --

TOM. Impressive.

HARRY. I have to admit . . . *(The four just stop and stare for a moment.)*

PAT. Is that wide thing they're on --

TOM. It must be the path!

DICK. I guess this is the "High Way." Somehow I thought it would be golden, not --

PAT. Black.

PROUD

HARRY. Humans seem to prefer dreary colors.

DICK. So this is the road to El Dorado. It's different than it is in books.

(For better or worse, they are lost in admiration.)

PAT. And look at all those boxes rolling along on it!

DICK. Oh, those are called "cars."

PAT. How do you know?

DICK. There's a sign at the zoo, with an arrow pointing to them. Haven't you ever seen it?

HARRY. Well, you're the only one who can read their signs, big shot!

DICK. Surely you've seen them resting in that pen. They keep a big fence around them, so those cars must be valuable. They belong to the Par King, I think.

HARRY. Who's that?

DICK. Never seen him.

PAT. I always thought they were just other animals.

HARRY. I just assumed they were either resting or dead.

TOM. Some strange sort of conveyances. Quite a feat of engineering for a species so primitive. I had no idea . . .

HARRY. Smelly and noisy, if you ask me.

PAT. Do they have to stay in lines like that? Like they're lined up for the water hole?

DICK. They have those colored lines in their pen at the zoo, too.

TOM. No doubt to keep order. See? Even they fear they'll get out of control!

HARRY. Docile till you cross one perhaps. Then I bet they're not too friendly. *(They look off for a moment.)*

PAT. I think they're amazing. So many, all moving at once.

DICK. Is this the path we're looking for?

TOM. I'm not sure. The ancients left a clue in the Feather Chronicles, but their meaning was unclear -- something about a "school kill."

DICK. A what?

TOM. A school kill. I didn't quite understand it.

DICK. Well, maybe it's like a school of fish. They all travel together for safety.

TOM. Which means we better stick close to each other, men.

PROUD

HARRY. I don't like that "kill" part. You didn't say anything about any killing, Tom!

TOM. You know, Harry, you really are a thorn in my side!

HARRY. I could be back at the zoo, safely foraging right now.

PAT. Well, I wouldn't have missed this for anything!

DICK. That's more like it!

HARRY. The exuberance of youth.

DICK. How far away is the mountain?

TOM. The Chronicles don't specify. I just know we're looking for a point high above the rest of the land. The highest point is where we'll send the message from.

DICK. The highest point of the "highway."

PAT. (*Suddenly, in high spirits.*) First one on the path is a rotten egg!

TOM. STOP! (*Pat freezes in his tracks.*) Let me make something very clear. I am your Commander. You have to trust me to make the decisions, for safety's sake. Now we must stick together. See how those --

DICK. Cars.

TOM. -- how they're travelling in an orderly fashion. A group, properly spaced.

HARRY. Well, they're bigger than we are.

TOM. Just so. We'll stick close together, in formation.

HARRY. But how do we know you've got it right?

TOM. Do you know how to read the feathers?!

HARRY. I have tons of my own, thank you.

TOM. And do they talk to you?

HARRY. Well, they tell me what looks good on me.

DICK. He means--

TOM. He knows what I mean! As long as I have the navigation feather, I am in charge! Got that?

PAT. Yes, sir!

TOM. Got that?

DICK. Of course.

TOM. Well? (*Pause.*)

HARRY. If you say so.

TOM. Now let's see if we can make our way onto the path. (*Gingerly, he*

PROUD

ventures a few steps forward, puts his foot on the highway. For the first time, he seems unsure.) Well, it's not the most comfortable, but -- I guess we'll get acclimated to it shortly. *(Tom now gingerly puts both feet on the road, and walks around a little bit, trying to get used to the feel.)*

DICK. It's like taking a bath. We just have to get used to the temperature, that's all. *(Taking Pat's hand.)* C'mon, Pat. One-two-

DICK & PAT. Three! *(They join Tom on the roadway. It is not very comfortable, but they're trying to be tough.)*

DICK. Well, we can get used to it. We're tough old birds, right? Quit your dawdling, Harry! Or are you a chicken?

HARRY. Oh, all right! Never let it be said I allowed fear to stop me! *(And Harry steps onto the highway. He immediately starts hopping around in pain.)*

HARRY. Aaaaah! Hot, hot, hot, hot . . .

TOM. Oh, stop being such a baby! Now that I'm getting used to it, it's not so bad.

HARRY. But it's only going to get hotter as the day progresses!

DICK. *(Looking to Tom.)* He's right about that.

TOM. Well, we can't fly all the way. Let's just walk and when we need a break, we'll fly.

PAT. If the elders wanted us to do this, why didn't they give us better wings for distances?

HARRY. Or at least heat-resistant feet?!

TOM. It's a trade-off. We got the tails for the broadcast, right?

DICK. Right! That suits you, doesn't it, Harry? Makes you a specialist!

HARRY. *(Brightening.)* Well . . . true. I mean, would you seriously give up . . . THIS? *(He ostentatiously opens up his train, displaying his remarkable plumage. It's true -- he is stunning.)*

TOM. Really?! Here?! When we're on a mission?!

DICK. Put it away, show-off!!! *(Chastened, Harry closes his tail.)*

TOM. C'mon, men. Fall in. Company . . . MARCH! *(And the rag-tag group begins their slow and awkward march. Staring ahead and determined, the four begin to move -- or strut as peacocks will do -- in slow motion. They stare proudly, determinedly, occasionally sneaking sideway s glances to take in their surroundings. (A strobe lighting effect*

PROUD

might enhance the sense of this slow, picture-perfect moment.) As they progress, we first hear music, but it quickly dissolves into a symphony of car horns as their march stops traffic on I-76. NOTE: Humans and peacocks occupy their own distinct worlds. The humans could be voice overs or projected videos or possibly characters onstage, but the focus and the presence of the play should rest with the peacocks. Soon, we hear the sound of police sirens, far away but getting rapidly closer. Red and white lights begin to flash as we hear a bull-horn amplified voice, followed by other voices, underscoring the peacocks' march.)

STATE POLICE. To the left, please! We have a right-lane emergency ! Over to the left! Left! Left!

T.V. ANCHOR. And apparently, there's a wild cause of some traffic on I-76 -- am I right, Andrea?

T.V. REPORTER. That's right, Jim! I'm here on the scene and four peacocks -- I guess you'd call them a party of peacocks -- seem to have commandeered a lane of the Schuylkill Expressway. Traffic is backed up throughout the Valley Forge area as the birds, suspected escapees from the Philadelphia Zoo, are marching to an unknown destination. Zoo Officials are meeting up with State Police to help recover the birds.

STATE POLICE. To the left! Keep your vehicles to the left! *(The lights restore back on our feathered band, who are now not necessarily moving in slow motion -- but due to heat and fatigue they are not moving all that quickly either.)*

HARRY. My feet are killing me! Can't we just fly?

TOM. I don't see any reasonable roosting spots yet, do you?

HARRY. You'd think they'd build some rest areas along the path. *(Again, some cars horns sound.)*

PAT. What's all that honking about?

TOM. Oh, Harry can't keep his big yap shut!

PAT. No, I meant from the "boxes." Them!

DICK. *(Forever the "Professor.")* You mean the cars. It does seem like they're crying out, doesn't it?

TOM. Isn't that just like humans?! Like we're slowing them down! Are they on a mission?!

DICK. Well . . . they could be. We don't really know.

PROUD

HARRY. And we don't care!!!

PAT. How do we know they're not? It could be something important to them!

HARRY. If they really want to get there faster, the humans should climb out of their domesticated beasts and walk! (*Cars honking, Harry shouts to the cars.*) I'm walking here! (*Back to the slow-motion strut and lighting for the four, as voice-overs continue.*)

T.V. REPORTER. Westbound traffic has been snarled for miles by the invasion of the peacocks. These magnificent creatures are strolling down the shoulder of the road with what seems like a police escort. Zoo representatives have confirmed that they are escapees from the zoo, where they are usually allowed to roam freely within the gates. Here's one official we spoke to:

ZOO OFFICIAL. These male birds are fairly domesticated. Even when they've escaped on the rare occasion, they've always returned home to their roosts on the grounds. They're homebodies.

T.V. REPORTER. How are you going to recapture them?

ZOO OFFICIAL. They're unfamiliar with this terrain, so we don't want to startle them with any sudden actions. These birds are extremely good at sudden high, fast bursts of flight. Most nights they head for the trees or a rooftop when it gets dark to avoid predators. Any sudden action could set them into flight. We're just trying to contain them on their walk so that we can group them up with nets. Eventually they have to get tired. (*Back to the guys.*)

HARRY. I don't know how much more of this I can take.

DICK. Well, no one has ever called you stoic, Harry.

HARRY. Oh, eat my tail feathers, Dick!

TOM. Can't you just behave with some pride?

PAT. It seems like they're just following us. Like a royal escort!

DICK. Good observation, Pat.

HARRY. My feet weren't built for this hot black stuff! How do the humans do it?

PAT. Well, they're in their boxes.

DICK. Cars! And they wear something on their feet at the zoo, so it probably protects them.

PROUD

HARRY. Feet protectors! I thought you said the humans were impractical!

TOM. They may be more advanced than we thought. Feet protectors.

Hmm.

HARRY. And speaking of gadgets, what does your stupid feather say?

How much farther do we have to go?

TOM. What? You think I'm free to stop and consult the feather right now?! We're just moving ahead!

DICK. (Conceding.) This has been going on for a while. You okay, Pat?

PAT. I'm fine. A little hungry maybe.

HARRY. Hear that? The kid's hungry!

TOM. Oh, so now it's the kid you're worried about?!

HARRY. Can't we pull over a moment to rest?

TOM. We do that and they'll capture us for sure.

DICK. Maybe they're hoping we'll get worn out and have to stop.

TOM. (*Surprised.*) I hadn't really thought of that. All right. Here's what we'll do: When I give the signal – (*Back to slow-mo.*)

T.V. REPORTER. A police cruiser is now pulling into the lane ahead of the birds while a zoo vehicle is pulling alongside to corner them off. Looks like they're trying to coax them into the van and . . . (*A sudden blackout on the fellas, followed by the sound of a loud peacock call!*) Wow! Did you hear that? Those birds sure have some vocal cords! (*The sound of many giant wings flapping. We might get the effect of numerous shadows, giant birdlike shadows crisscrossing in every direction. After a moment, we hear the commentator voices again.*) Whoa! Didn't see that coming, Jim!

T.V. ANCHOR. Boy, when they fly, Andrea, they fly!

T.V. REPORTER. Yes, Jim, they sure do! Apparently the birds headed for a clump of trees some ways away in the distance. They probably won't come down again till morning.

T.V. ANCHOR. Resisting arrest, as it were. With no doubt more traffic delays during tomorrow's rush hour. Thanks, Andrea.

T.V. REPORTER. Thank YOU, Jim!

PROUD

SCENE FOUR

Darkness. Harry is on the ground, searching around for grubs and water. Dick is distracted. Tom works to read the messages from the feather while Pat looks on fascinated.

HARRY. You told me we were going on a mission. You never said we'd be on the lam!

PAT. We're on a lamb?

DICK. He means on the run!

PAT. Are they trying to stop us?

HARRY. Well, clearly!

PAT. No, I mean, do they know about our mission or are we just a bunch of birds they wanna return to the zoo?

DICK. That's a good question. Tom?

TOM. Well . . . I don't think we should give them too much credit. Their intelligence is questionable.

DICK. They have spies?

TOM. No, I mean their brains. I doubt they've figured we're going to rat them out to the Universe. Still, they don't like anything escaping their control.

PAT. At least they're trying to capture us safely.

TOM. Oh, that's just optics! They don't really care.

PAT. But how do we know that? How do we know they don't care?

HARRY. Would we care if we were them? *(Suddenly finding a worm.)*
Oh, a juicy one! Delectable!

TOM. You have to look at their total lack of concern for nature, their history of destruction. They can't find the forest for the trees!

DICK. Still, can't we just fly up to a high branch and broadcast from there?

TOM. The Chronicles says a mountaintop. The trees simply aren't high enough. Besides, if we spread our wings while balancing on a branch, we'd no doubt catch a wind and tumble to the ground, message incomplete.

HARRY. Is it such an important message that we must risk life, limb and -

PROUD

- (*Suddenly lunging; proudly.*) Gotcha!

TOM. Those worms and beetles you keep slurping up, Harry? The little berries and seedlings? Those don't stand a chance if the planet keeps changing and then where will we be?!

PAT. But what can we do to stop them, if it's truly their nature?

TOM. It's not so much that we can stop them here. But if they're going to expand into other parts of the galaxy, surely the other planets should know!

PAT. And that's what we're reporting?

TOM. (*Smiling.*) Yes, Pat. That's what we're reporting.

DICK. I'd hate to think we did nothing to stop a tragedy. Wouldn't you, Harry?

(*But Harry is too busy hunting for more grubs to pay them any mind.*)

PAT. They will send ships right away, then.

DICK. Ships?

PAT. To rescue us and the other animals. (*Pause.*)

TOM. I . . . I don't know. I'm not sure how long it will take for our message to get to them. It may take many years for them to respond.

HARRY. Fat lot of good, then.

TOM. It's not about us personally, Harry, it's about the future!

PAT. So by the time they get our message and the humans are ready, the elders will be ready, too!

TOM. Exactly. Good thinking, Pat. You are an excellent cadet.

PAT. I'm a cadet? I thought I was just a lowly apprentice.

TOM. I hereby promote you.

DICK. You see, Pat? Keep this up and one day you'll be the leader!

HARRY. A leader in exile, if we don't figure our way out of this mess.

TOM. I need more time with the navigation feather. On the actual path. Tomorrow morning, I'll get up before the rest of you and do some reconnoitering.

PAT. Some what?

TOM. I'll check out the path in advance.

PAT. I'll come with you.

DICK. No, that's dangerous! It'll be dark.

TOM. (*To Pat.*) Sorry, Scout, I prefer to be by myself when headed into

PROUD

an unknown situation.

DICK. You can't go alone! Can't you figure it out here, at base camp?

TOM. The settings are too particular. I actually need to be on the path to get a good read.

DICK. Then I'll come with you. Wake me and I'll come with you.

TOM. No, thanks, it's easier to reconnoiter alone.

DICK. But--

TOM. The feather will guide me. I'll be there and back before you even notice I'm gone.

DICK. But it's all of us as a team--

HARRY. Oh, go ahead. I won't stop you.

TOM. (*Ignoring Harry.*) Thank you, Dick, but I really can do it faster if I'm not worrying about you every step of the way.

DICK. But --

TOM. I'm going to get some shut eye. Tomorrow's another busy day. First I want to find some water, then I'm off to roost. Good night. (*Tom exits.*)

HARRY. Well, I'm certainly not going to stay up to keep watch. I'm going to get a late-night snack and then Dreamland. Good-night, Kids! (*Harry likewise exits.*)

DICK. Maybe you should get some rest, too.

PAT. No, not if you're alone on duty.

DICK. I'm not on duty. The humans won't be looking for us anymore tonight. They don't climb trees. And they're scared of the dark.

PAT. They are?

DICK. They're scared of a lot. They flinch when they hear our calls. Trust me, they're afraid of the dark.

PAT. And you're not?

DICK. I like the dark. I like the quiet. I do my best ruminating and rummaging at night before I go to sleep.

PAT. Me, too.

DICK. There's nothing different in the dark but visibility. That's why I'm a little concerned--

PAT. About Tom tomorrow morning? I thought so.

DICK. I'm not skeptical of Tom or his skills. It's just . . . dark. And he'll

PROUD

be hard to see.

PAT. Isn't that the idea? He's reco . . . reco . . .

DICK. Reconnoitering.

PAT. Checking out the path in advance! He's our commander. That's why he gets the responsibility.

DICK. You're probably right. Still . . .

PAT. Can I ask you a question? It's a little personal.

DICK. I don't mind.

PAT. Well, you know how I told you me and the other guys have watched the dancing going on from the bushes?

DICK. Yes, you mentioned that.

PAT. Well, we've seen Harry dance and we've even seen Tom kinda dance -- he's a bit inhibited --

DICK. Yeah, he says it splits his focus. He just hasn't met the right hen yet.

PAT. -- but . . . you don't dance.

DICK. I did earlier!

PAT. We were just playing around.

DICK. Doesn't mean I can't. When I want to.

PAT. But you don't dance when the others dance. You just . . . watch Tom dance. *(Pause.)*

DICK. Oh.

PAT. I hope you don't mind my --

DICK. No, no, I guess it's natural you'd be curious. *(Pause.)*

PAT. So?

DICK. I . . . I'm just . . . None of the peahens interest me.

PAT. Oh. But Tom --

DICK. I admire Tom for his leadership abilities. That's all. I too watch him to learn.

PAT. Oh.

DICK. That's all.

PAT. Right. I'm sorry, I -- it's just that I haven't--

DICK. When the time is right, you'll understand much more about it. Not to worry -- it'll all work out. And you come from a long family of dancers. Great birds. Your Grandfather--

PROUD

PAT. The one who gave Tom the feather instead of my father --

DICK. Uh, yes. He was a great leader and a wise man. He could have just given over the leadership to his daughter's husband, your Dad, but he had an eye for talent. Wise leaders usually do.

PAT. I want to be a leader. Like Tom. I want to read feathers and head away teams and do something for the good of everyone on the planet.

DICK. Even the humans?

PAT. Even the humans. I don't think they mean to step on anthills. Do you?

DICK. I don't know. I don't want to think so. I've read so much of their poet--

PAT. The one Harry hates. Shaken-spear?

DICK. Shakespeare. Yes. I want to believe that if they can produce such creative. . . brains like that -- and there must be more than just one of them in their history -- well, I want evidence that they are a superior, intelligent life-form. I have to believe they were put in charge for a reason. If I can find proof, then . . .

PAT. Then?

DICK. Then it all makes more sense. You can't write with such beauty about beauty and not truly understand it. There has to be something finer, nobler about them. At least more than what Tom thinks.

PAT. I've seen them pet some of the animals at the zoo and talk in this low, comforting tone. They seem to really like other creatures. And today, I kinda felt they were actually trying to protect us, riding along side us in their boxes with the flashing red eyes.

DICK. Cars. Learn the names, even in their language.

PAT. When they tried to make a grab for us, before we flew up to the trees , , , they were being extra cautious. Like they didn't really want to scare us or hurt us. Like they wanted to take us back to the zoo for good reasons. I just think they don't understand us.

DICK. Isn't that a problem, then?

PAT. Well, one side or the other has to understand better, that's all. And lend a wing to help.

DICK. You're going to make a great leader someday, Pat.

PAT. I am?

PROUD

DICK. I'm sure your Grandfather wouldn't hesitate to give you the feather. You're a good lad, Pat.

PAT. Thanks. I like you, too, Dick.

DICK. Okay, let's not get all sloppy, as Tom would say. We'd better get some shuteye ourselves, or we'll be no good to anyone tomorrow. Time to find a roost. *(They start to head off as the lights fade. We hear walking around among leaves, then crickets in the dark. Then the sound of a peacock cry -- that shrill, unmistakably confident proclamation. Then silence again.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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