

An excerpt from

BIRDSONGS

By

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Scenes 1-5

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BIRDSONGS

SCENE 1

House lights down.

Orchestration of Erdo, Erdo, Erdo.

The orchestration of it fades to a teen choir singing the folk song with the sound of birds in the background.

Lights fade up slowly on a forest. The music remains.

The lighting for this scene and all of the forest scenes should be very warmly lit. Lots of yellows and greens. Very different from the school yard scenes which should be much brighter.)

The music fades out first, then lights, then birds.

SCENE 2

In the school yard.

Opening sequence of tableaux:

1. Lights up

Barb and Scott holding Geza up by the straps of his hosentrager
Lights down

2. Lights up

Scott is holding Geza's arms behind his back while Barb is squirting Geza with toothpaste in the face.

Lights down

3. Lights up

Geza holds a worm in one hand, a sandwich in the other. He has an expression on his face that shows that he obviously just discovered the worm in his sandwich. Barb and Scott are in the background in various stages of holding back laughter.

Lights down

4. Lights up

Barb is holding Geza's book behind her back. Geza is reaching for it. Scott is cheering Barb on.

Tableau comes to life

Barb: What's the matter Gaaay-za?

Geza: I vant my buk bak.

Barb: You vant yor buk bak? Do you vant to suk my blood while you're at it?

Scott: (laughs hysterically)
Yeah, what are you doing out during daylight anyway
Gaay-za? I thought you Transylvanian types hung out in
coffins until the sun went down.

Geza: I am not from Transylvania, I am from Tatabanya, close
to the Austrian border.

Scott: Oh yeah, that makes loads of difference.

(Barb laughs)

Geza: Besides, Transylvania not been part uv Hungary since
First World Vor.

Scott: (puts his face close to Geza's) Well you know what
Gaay-za? ...We don't care!!...You know what else
Gaay-za? You're as faggy as your name! How about
learning to speak English, eh? What a good idea, huh?
Loser. Come on Boom-Boom. (he gets up to leave)

(Barb who has been laughing along with Scott until now suddenly
freezes on "Boom-Boom")

Barb: Don't call me that.

Scott: Don't call you what, Boom-Boom Barb?

Barb: Scott, stop it!

Scott: Come on, you should be proud! You've got the biggest
tits of everyone in grade 8.

(Scott puts his arm around Barb's shoulder and tries to grab Barb's
breast. Barb pulls away just in time.)

Barb: Get lost you jerk!

(Scott exits laughing)

(Barb sits down and starts to cry. Geza looks perplexed - doesn't
know what to do. Finally he sits down an arm's length away from
Barb. He looks at her...he looks away. He looks at her...he looks
away. He looks at her and puts his hand consolingly on Barb's
back)

Barb: (pulls away violently) Oh gross! Get away from me you
big geek!

(Barb runs off after Scott. Geza sits and looks forward without expression. After a few moments he picks up his book off the bench where Barb left it and walks off in opposite direction from the other two. Lights down)

SCENE 3

Sounds of birds.
Lights up on forest. Geza is sitting by himself with a notepad and paper.

Geza: (reading out loud while he writes)

Draga Marci; Canada is very beautiful. I am very happy to be here. I have many new friends. I visit them frequently at their homes. I even have a girlfriend who calls me Zizucska as her pet name for me.

(Geza stops, rips up the letter, and tries again.)

Draga Marci; I cannot lie to you. I hate living in Canada. I feel like I am in prison. I have no friends. All of my classmates (or should I say cellmates) hate me. The boys laugh at me for liking poetry (among other things). I think there is a law in Canada that boys must not say any words longer than one syllable. Even their names are one syllable: Bob, Jeff, Bill, Joe, Zack. It makes it easier for them to bark at each other. The girls either ignore me or they write nasty letters about me. One girl,

(lights up on Barb stage left in bright school yard lighting. She is drawing something)

asked me to pose for a book cover she was drawing once.

(Barb gestures seductively with her finger for Geza to come near. Geza puts his paper and pen down and dictates the rest of the letter completely orally. He combs his hair carefully then walks towards Barb.)

I was surprised because she normally never speaks to me.

(Barb positions Geza's body in a running position then continues drawing and giggling)

I stood there for half an hour before she showed me the picture.

(Barb finishes, walks over to Geza, hands him the drawing flirtatiously, then walks offstage. The lights go back to forest lighting)

It was me running alright. A boy in my clothes. Behind his back she had drawn arrows flying through the air coming towards him. Above his head was the title of the book in big letters: GAY NECK.

(He sits down)

I wish I could go back to where my language says what I want to say, what I feel.

Mintha a ver ki volna szoritva a szivembol.

(He repeats it over and over again, finding the rhythm of it. Then he whistles it. He then whistles it as loud as he can to the birds. He listens for a response.)

Geza: If I learn your language, will you learn mine?

(He slowly starts to imitate the bird calls. Lights fade down together with sound.)

SCENE 4

Lights up on Barb standing in one white special (light). The rest of the stage is dark.

Barb: So I have to stand here and talk for a whole minute? What am I supposed to talk about? Myself? (looks at her watch) Oh that should take a whole 10 seconds. Okay, go. Hi my name is Barb Sharpe. I'm thirteen years old. I live with my mom and her husband Richard. My dad lives in Winnipeg somewhere. I haven't seen him in eight years. I hate my mom. Everyone says I'm exactly like her and I don't think that's true. I hate doing the dishes. I don't get why we don't just get a dishwasher. I hate school and homework. I don't get French. It's not my fault if I'm stupid. Quit laughing Scott! You're no Einstein either! Mr. Prefontaine is always giving me a hard time. I don't know what he's got against me. Maybe I remind him of his daughter or something. My best friends are Judy, Karen, Cheryl, Linda, and Susan who lives in Winnipeg. I love shopping for clothes and jewellery. What? What do I want to be when I grow up? I don't know, rich, I guess. Can I stop now? Thank God.

SCENE 5

Lights up on Geza in the forest sitting centre stage singing with the birds. His ability to do bird calls should be 100% better than in the last scene. Geza should look very upbeat in contrast to the ending of the scene before. He interrupts his bird calls and starts singing a Hungarian folk song that he has just been reminded of:

Erdo, erdo, erdo,
Maros-szeki kerek erdo

Madar lakik benne,
Madar lakik tizen-ketto

Cukor jegyet adnek annak a madarnak,
Dalol-j-aki nevet a babamnak

Csardas kis angyalom,
erted faj a szivem nagyon. (Repeat from "Cukor")

He keeps singing until he notices that a bird is singing along with him (either by accenting the beats/off beats, harmonizing, etc.). He should notice this by "Dalol-j-aki" then slow down to the end of "angyalom" and stop and listen. (Becca would have started her accompaniment on "Cukor jegyet". She stops when Geza stops.) Geza starts to sing again - bird sings too. He stops - bird stops. Geza is delighted! He can't quite believe it. He starts the song over again but this time without words - only in bird whistles. He plays with the pace and dynamics of the song and is thrilled with how the bird plays along. Towards the end of this jam session Becca appears from behind a tree, walking stick in front of her - she is still singing along with Geza. Geza in all his exuberance almost doesn't notice Becca. He does a double take when he realizes that it is she who is singing and not in fact a magical bird. Geza stops singing and a few beats later so does Becca. There is silence. Geza looks disappointed in that Becca is not really a bird. He does not let this show in his voice. He has been raised to be very polite.

Geza: Hello.

Becca: Hello.

Geza: Dat vas you?

Becca: yup

Geza: Da whole time?

Becca: yup

(pause)

Geza: (stifling major disappointment, trying to be sincere)
You sing very well

Becca: Thank-you.

(pause)

Geza: Have you been here before?

Becca: Oh yeah. Lots of times. My house is just on the other side of these woods.

(Geza is silent suspicious that Becca has been spying on him)

Becca: I haven't been here in a few months though. I forgot how peaceful it is out here.

Geza: (relieved) Yes! It's very nice. What's your name?

Becca: Becca. It's short for Rebecca. A lot of people call me pigeon or pidge

Geza: Vy?

Becca: Because I've listened to pigeons for so long that I can imitate them perfectly.

Geza: (Suddenly very interested) Really?

Becca: Yeah

Geza: Will you show me?

Becca: mmm...

Geza: Please?!

Becca:okay. (Becca starts climbing tree)

Geza: Where are you going?

Becca: I feel closer to them up here.

Geza: Be careful.

Becca: (with an edge of anger) I do this all the time.

(Becca perches herself on a branch and does a brilliant pigeon call. 4 repetitions of 4 different calls. Geza is amazed.)

Geza: Excellent.

Becca: Thank-you.

(pause)

Geza: Can you show me how to do that?

Becca: I can try.

(Becca climbs down from the tree. Geza has her walking stick. Before he can give it to her, she reaches for it where she left it and begins to panic when it's not there.)

Geza: Here it is! I'm sorry, I had it.

Becca: Oh phew! I'm always so scared that something will happen to this stick. My mom keeps wanting me to get a regular cane 'cause this branch could break so easily, but I've had it for so long. It reminds me of being out here.

(She perches herself beside Geza in a pigeon-like position. Geza copies her. Becca does 4 repetitions of the first call. Geza copies her.)

Geza: I have not seen you at school before.

Becca: I don't go to school. My mom believes in home teaching. Just for me. My sisters go to school.
(She does 4 repetitions of the 2nd call)

Geza: You have sisters? (he copies the 2nd call)

Becca: Yeah, two, do you?
(she does 4 repetitions of the 3rd call)

Geza: That is a difficult one.
(he copies the 3rd one with difficulty)
No, I am only child.

Becca: Oh. Well you're lucky.
(she does 4 repetitions of the 4th call)

Geza: I have friends in Tatabanya who are like brothers.
(he starts to copy the 4th call but Becca interrupts
with:)

Becca: Where's Tatabanya?

Geza: It is a small town in Hungary, in Central Europe.

Becca: Wow! You're from there?

Geza: Yes. We lived in a house that belonged to my ancestors who were dukes and duchesses in the 19th Century. Well. We lived in only part of the house because the rest was taken away from my family when the soviets took over Hungary in 1945.

Becca: Holy! Why did you leave Hungary?

Geza: It is difficult to live well there now. My parents heard that they could make a lot more money in Canada.

Becca: What do your parents do for a living?

Geza: My father is agricultural engineer and my mother is English teacher. I learned to speak English from her.

Becca: Oh great! Engineers do make a lot of money here!

Geza: (Silence)

Becca: So where do you live?

Geza: In this town.

Becca: Yeah, but where?

Geza: Just over there (gestures in some vague direction)

Becca: Where?!

Geza: (realizes he made a faux pas. He pauses while he considers the safety of telling all to Becca)

I live in the trailer park.

Becca: ...oh.

Geza: They tell my father that he can't be engineer here unless he goes to university for another four years. We don't have enough money for that.

Becca: Drag.

Geza: Pardon me?

Becca: I mean, that's too bad.

Geza: He works in the grain elevator. Shovelling grain.

Becca: (hopeful)...and your mom teaches English?

Geza: (pause) No. She cleans other people's houses.

(pause)

Becca: But you still have your house in Hungary.

Geza: No. My parents sold it so that we could come here.

(pause)

(Geza starts the first pigeon call again and Becca joins in. The following exchange is done interspersed with the various pigeon calls in rhythms that correspond with the dialogue.)

Geza: Do you notice that sparrows always sound like they're asking questions?

Becca: (thinks about this) I wonder if they ever get any answers.

(Both of them pause in their calls, then continue)

Geza: But I like our house here. We have a garden right outside the door and I have my own bedroom.

Becca: Oh - good. Do you miss Hungary?

Geza: I miss my laughter.

Becca: You miss your what?

Geza: My laughter. It feels like somevun took it away from me.

Becca: (Becca stops her calls and looks full of thought.) You talk different.

Geza: Yes, I have accent.

Becca: No, not that. I mean you talk about laughter and stuff. I don't know anyone else who talks like that. My family won't talk about anything that isn't perky and perfect. I wish they would just be more real or something. I don't get why they all understand each other so well and I don't understand anything.

Geza: Like vat?

Becca: Last night for example. My mom and my two sisters were laughing about something in the kitchen. Then I walked in and everybody stopped laughing because they felt guilty for having fun.

(Geza stops his bird call.)

Becca: They think I can't tell because I can't see it, but I hear it in their voices.

Geza: (pause...unsure of himself)
Have you always been blind?

Becca: (simply) No. I lost my sight in a car accident when I was six. My dad died and I went blind. Aaah! It feels so good to tell someone. The rest of my family feels so guilty that nothing happened to them that they pretend that it never happened.

Geza: How do they do that?

Becca: Like when my sisters started swimming lessons. My mom said I couldn't because I was too young. Why couldn't she just be honest about it? she was scared that I would hurt myself. She knows how much I love the feeling of being in water and she doesn't want to get into an argument about it because then she might have to admit that she knows that I'm blind! She can't handle it. It's like she thinks it's her fault that I went blind some unknown reason. My dad was driving the car not her. And I just have to go along with this scam that the world and everything and everyone in it is wonderful so that my mother won't feel any guiltier! Meanwhile, sometimes I think I'm going crazy because I know that I am blind and that I had a dad who no one else ever mentions.

(pause)

Geza: My father says the first seventy years are difficult. Then it's easier.

Becca: (laughs) That's so funny!

Geza: (surprised that he made someone laugh) It is?

Becca: Yeah! (She continues to laugh. Geza starts to laugh too and they share a good laugh and release of tension)

I wish I could laugh like this at home. My family is so anally retentive. You know I've never ever heard my mom even burp before? (she starts speeding up and getting really excited) Sometimes when my family is all together in one room, I'll fart really loud just to piss everyone off. Then it's so funny how everyone gets so grossed out so I'll keep farting over and over again and everyone's yelling at me to stop and I just sit there laughing my head off,...and farting, and then finally everyone leaves the room!

(she laughs hysterically then realizes that Geza isn't laughing so she stops and becomes concerned - turning lady-like.)

Becca: Sorry. I hope that doesn't gross you out too much. I guess it's pretty gross, isn't it?

Geza: (trying to make her feel better even though he is a bit grossed out)
No, I like bad smells.

Becca: (laughs) You do?

Geza: When my dad fills his car up with gasoline I go with him so that I can stand in the garage and smell the exhaust. It reminds me of Hungary.

Becca: Oh how weird! (They both laugh at the irony of her finding that weird) By the way, what's your name?

Geza: Geza.

Becca: Geza. What are you wearing?

Geza: Hosenträger.

Becca: What's that?

Geza: Pants made out of strong leather.

Becca: Neat! Can I feel it?

Geza: (hesitates) Okay.
(He moves closer to Becca. Becca puts her hand out and Geza leads her hand to one of his hosenträger straps.)

Becca: Wow. It's really soft.

(Geza slowly leans forward and kisses Becca lightly. Then he stands up and gently takes her hand away. He is a little overwhelmed.)

Geza: I have to go now.

Becca: Okay.

Geza: Will you be here tomorrow?

Becca: I could be.

Geza: I will be here at the same time as today. Can you come then?

Becca: Okay.

Geza: Good-bye.

Becca: Bye.

(Geza exits. Lights down.)