

# CONFIRMED SIGHTING

## By Patrick Gabridge

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**CHARACTERS**

(2f)

FIONA FLECKSTEIN: 20s-40s, an ornithologist, not from these parts.

KELLY LAWTON: 20-40s, local to the area.

*(The ages can vary, but it's better for KELLY to either be the same age, or slightly older than FIONA.)*

**TIME**

Spring 2004.

**PLACE**

A swamp in Arkansas.

**SETTING**

A trail in the woods/swamp.

**AWARD HISTORY**

Confirmed Sighting won the University of Maryland Baltimore In10 International Playwriting Competition in 2009.

**PROPS**

Backpacks (2)

Digital camera

Gun

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**AT RISE:** *The sound of a woodpecker making a loud double knock on a tree. TWO WOMEN with binoculars enter from opposite sides of the stage and almost bump into each other, because THEY're excitedly looking offstage, at something up in the trees. FIONA is muddy, with sticks and leaves stuck to her, wearing tall boots, camouflage shirt, and a fancy backpack. KELLY wears jeans and T-shirt and boots, but with a sports vest with lots of pockets, and maybe a small pack.*

FIONA: Watch out.

KELLY: Sorry. Wow. Did you see that?

FIONA: Shhh. Quiet. Where is he?

KELLY: Off through there. Oh, there he goes, through those trees.

FIONA: Come back! Come back!

KELLY: Oh. There he goes again. Gone.

FIONA: Excuse me.

*(FIONA starts to move away from KELLY, off the path, into the woods.)*

KELLY: I'd watch out down there. There's a whole nest of water moccasins in that part of the creek.

FIONA: Really?

KELLY: My brother was out here last weekend and shot three of 'em. I don't mind most snakes, but moccasins just have that temper. They want to bite something. And I sure wouldn't want it to be me.

FIONA: I can't just let him go. He's out there somewhere.

KELLY: Seemed pretty skittish.

FIONA: Very. Full of water moccasins, huh?

KELLY: Maybe if you keep your eye out. And if you're a good shot. What are you carrying?

FIONA: Carrying?

KELLY: Your gun.

FIONA: I don't... didn't bring one.

KELLY: Might want to think twice. You out here all alone?

FIONA: The rest of the team gave up yesterday. I just... Maybe if I go upstream a little this way, there will be a place I can cross. He's out there. If can just get a--

KELLY: He was a beauty. When I first saw him, the size of him, I thought hawk or owl, but then he landed on that tree, and: woodpecker, with a capital W.

FIONA: You got a good look at him, too?

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KELLY: Oh, yeah. Couldn't have been more than fifty feet away. Bigger than the last pileated I saw, and then some.

FIONA: That wasn't a pileated. That... That was an ivory-billed woodpecker.

KELLY: Naw. You think so?

FIONA: The light-colored bill, white stripe on the back, leading to a large white patch above the rump, bright red crest with the black stripe. The call. The double-knocks. Did you see the big stripe of white on the trailing edge of the wings?

KELLY: That was him all right. A regular woody woodpecker.

FIONA: So that's definitely what you saw?

KELLY: Heck, yeah. He was really something.

*(FIONA rifles through her backpack.)*

FIONA: *(to herself)* Okay. Okay. Breathe, breathe. *(to KELLY)* Would you be willing to give me your name and contact information? Just let me find my notebook and a pen. Ah, here we go. *(SHE produces a notebook and pen.)*

KELLY: I suppose so. Though we ain't really met or nothing.

FIONA: Right. I'm sorry. The excitement. Fiona Fleckstein.

KELLY: Fiona. I like that. Very fancy sounding. I'm Kelly. Kelly Lawton. Nice to meet you.

FIONA: Yes. Would you? They'll want a corroborating witness.

KELLY: Who's that?

FIONA: Everyone. The Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, Fish & Wildlife. The Department of the Interior. The entire birding world.

National Geographic. ABC, NBC, CBS. Steve Richter, my department head. And don't let him throw you--he'll say, "are you sure you got a look at the bill? Maybe it was just the light, could have been a leaf." They'll all be like that, but he'll be the worst, because he's a jerk, and there's no way a woman got this sighting.

KELLY: They can be just like that. My ex, he was always like that. You'd say you saw something, and he'd be like, "Kelly, that's not what you saw. You were drunk, you were high on meth, you were this, you were that."

FIONA: But you aren't. You weren't. I mean, you did see him.

KELLY: Clear as day. I'm sober now, seven months. Twelve steps. You in AA?

FIONA: No.

KELLY: Miracle, really. Saved my life. That and getting rid of peckerhead. That's how mad I still am--can't even speak his name.

FIONA: So this bird, the ivory-billed woodpecker is very rare. Very, very, very, very rare. Most people think it's been extinct for sixty years. But there have been rumors, and we've been searching. But now, if we both saw it, there's a chance this could be real. I definitely saw him. I got a good look through the binoculars.

KELLY: Sounds like people are going to be real excited.

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FIONA: Excited doesn't even begin to... But they'll be doubtful, so you need to be prepared. They'll ask you the same questions over and over and over again. Some of these people, I'm one of them, we've been looking our whole adult lives.

KELLY: For this bird. Ain't that something. I can see why they'd be real skeptical. Did you get a picture?

FIONA: I had the binoculars up and when I went for my camera, he was already on the wing.

KELLY: 'Cause I got a good twenty seconds on mine.

FIONA: What?

*(KELLY pulls out a small digital camera out of her vest pocket.)*

KELLY: Mine takes videos, too. Last year, I caught one of an elk rubbing the velvet off his antlers. Hoo, was he big. I was nervous, because I didn't think a .22 would make a difference if he decided he didn't like me there. I put it up on YouTube, and must have been a thousand people took a look at it in about two weeks. But elk in Arkansas is a big deal. There's only about a couple hundred in the state.

FIONA: You have video of the ivory-billed woodpecker?

KELLY: Sure thing. Here, take a look.

*(SHE plays the footage for FIONA.)*

FIONA: I wasn't seeing things. That's him. Clear as day. The bill, the black and white pattern. That's real. He's definitely real.

KELLY: So they can ask me all the questions they want, I'll just say, take a look at this.

FIONA: You have a video. You have a video. A video.

KELLY: Here, let me get a picture of you. To record the big day. Re-discovery of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Fiona Fleckstein. Take a step back. There you go. Don't need to tell you to smile, do I?

*(KELLY takes a photo of FIONA, then puts the camera away. FIONA watches KELLY for a moment.)*

FIONA: I want to buy your camera.

KELLY: Excuse me.

FIONA: Whatever you want for it. Name your price. Within reason, I'm just an assistant professor, after all. But seriously. I want your camera.

KELLY: Well. I mean. You can just go to the store.

FIONA: How about two hundred? I probably have a hundred on me now. And when we get back into town, I'm sure there's an ATM. I could get another hundred right then. Or an extra hundred and fifty. Two fifty total, cash. How much was it new?

KELLY: Maybe two hundred, but--

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FIONA: Okay, three hundred. Because it's a pain to find a new one, I know.  
And you can upgrade.

KELLY: Fiona. Calm down there, Hon.

FIONA: I'll send you a disk with all your photos. E-mail them. Prints.  
Whatever you want. But I really need your camera.

KELLY: Don't worry. I'll show folks the pictures of the woodpecker. I would  
never keep something like that to myself.

FIONA: Right. It's just that... if the video comes from me, I'm an  
ornithologist, after all. It'll have... credence. Maybe more credence. It'd  
be taken seriously.

KELLY: Oh, I see. Look, the image is real clear. I know it's just a cheapo  
camera, but you can see that bill clear as day. Folks'll believe their own  
eyes.

FIONA: The image is great. But if it, if it just came from me, then... if it  
comes from you then, well, I will just sort of fade into the... This could be  
a big step for me. In my career. So if I produce the video, then, see,  
they'll...

KELLY: You want to be the one on TV.

FIONA: It's not so much the television as--

KELLY: You're not the only one who might get something from this, Fiona.  
In America, we all have something to gain from being in the public eye.  
Especially if it's for something good and clean and scientific, like this.  
You know, not Jerry Springer stuff. I don't want to be remembered for  
trash like that. Not that I don't have a story for a show like that, but that's  
not me. That's private. This, though, this is something good. I'll call up  
my mama and say, "look, you said I'd never amount to nothing, but you  
just turn on channel five tonight and see what's up."

FIONA: Four hundred dollars.

KELLY: Of course, if you have the video, you get a promotion. You're set  
for life. But you need me to lie for you.

FIONA: It's not a lie. You just give me the camera.

KELLY: But it's part of a lie. You say you shot it, I say, oh, I was just walking  
along and there it was.

FIONA: Yes, but it's not a lie. We don't need to get into that sort of detail. I  
have the camera, in my hand. I don't have to say, "this is my camera  
and I took this picture with my own little fingers."

KELLY: They just induce that for themselves.

FIONA: Right. Please. I... I'll beg, if that's what it takes. Seriously. This is  
like coming across a dinosaur in the Amazon. It matters, especially to all  
the people who have been looking for so long.

KELLY: I've heard about those dinosaurs. Do you think they really found  
one?

FIONA: No. There are no dinosaurs.

KELLY: No ivory-billed woodpeckers either. But there is. Got it right here  
on my camera. Oh, the fuss of it all.

FIONA: Five hundred.

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