

HEADS UP

By Joe Musso

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CHARACTERS

Three actors, any gender. Throughout the play, one actor will have his/her shirt pulled up over his/her head, giving the audience the illusion that the actor is headless. The actual gender of the headless actor should remain hidden from the audience.

SETTING

An imagined woodland setting.

TIME

The present. A spring day.

PROPS

Three pair of binoculars, a pen, and a small notebook.

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Words in brackets [] are implied but not spoken.

(A spring day. An imagined woodland setting. The two actors with heads are intently peering through their binoculars.)

ACTOR ONE: See it?

ACTOR TWO: No.

ACTOR ONE: *(pointing)* Near that group of berries.

ACTOR TWO: No.

ACTOR ONE: On that broken branch.

ACTOR TWO: No. Wait. Yeah, I see it. . . . That's not a Bohemian Waxwing.

ACTOR ONE: Yes it is.

ACTOR TWO: No way.

ACTOR ONE: Black mask, yellow tip tail —

ACTOR TWO: *(interrupting)* — and a yellow belly

ACTOR ONE: *(putting down his/her binoculars)* So?

ACTOR TWO: *(putting down his/her binoculars)* The belly of a Bohemian Waxwing is gray, not yellow. That bird is a Cedar Waxwing.

ACTOR ONE: [Are] you sure?

ACTOR TWO: Positive.

ACTOR ONE: *(looking at the Cedar Waxwing again through his/her binoculars)* What does it sound like?

ACTOR TWO: Zeee, zeee, zeee, zeee.

(ACTOR TWO takes up his/her binoculars and begins scanning for more birds. ACTOR THREE, the headless one, enters. ACTOR THREE puts its binoculars up to where its eyes would be if it had a head. ACTOR TWO scans to where ACTOR THREE is standing and is suddenly taken aback by what he/she sees. ACTOR TWO pokes ACTOR ONE to get his/her attention.)

ACTOR ONE: What? I was looking at a White-Breasted Nuthatch.

*(ACTOR TWO directs ACTOR ONE'S attention to ACTOR THREE.)
(after a short scream) Where's its . . . its head?*

(ACTOR THREE puts down its binoculars and turns to the direction of ACTOR ONE and ACTOR TWO. Awkward pause. ACTOR THREE then turns away from ACTOR ONE and ACTOR TWO and resumes its bird watching with its binoculars.)

ACTOR TWO: *(so ACTOR THREE can't hear)* Must be some sort of joke.

ACTOR ONE: *(a bit too loud)* A joke?

ACTOR TWO: Shhh. Yeah, you know, the shirt-pulled-over-the-head trick.

ACTOR ONE: [I] didn't think of that.

ACTOR TWO: You were too busy panicking.

ACTOR ONE: Sorry.

ACTOR TWO: Probably your older brother. He's always pulling goofy stunts.

ACTOR ONE: Can't be. He's at home in bed, sick to his stomach.

ACTOR TWO: Virus?

ACTOR ONE: No, he thought he was eating a common Meadow Mushroom, but it turned out to be a poisonous Green-spored Lepiota?

ACTOR TWO: Yikes!

ACTOR ONE: Actually, he ate three of them. Raw. To impress his girlfriend.

(ACTOR THREE puts down its binoculars and removes a pen and small notebook from its pocket. ACTOR ONE and ACTOR TWO notice. ACTOR THREE begins writing in its notebook.)

ACTOR TWO: *(so ACTOR THREE can't hear)* If it's not your brother, then who is it?

ACTOR ONE: Beats me.

ACTOR TWO: Frustrating.

ACTOR ONE: I have an idea. I'll sit on your shoulders and look down the hole in its shirt.

ACTOR TWO: That would be rude.

ACTOR ONE: Rude?

ACTOR TWO: Yes, looking down someone's shirt like that.

ACTOR ONE: More rude than being headless?

ACTOR TWO: True.

ACTOR ONE: I mean, I don't know about you, but I don't appreciate being the butt of a practical joke.

ACTOR TWO: Me either.

ACTOR ONE: So you're with me?

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ACTOR TWO: All the way.

ACTOR ONE: *(with forward momentum)* Then let's do it.

ACTOR TWO: *(halting ACTOR ONE's momentum)* Wait.

ACTOR ONE: Why?

ACTOR TWO: Won't it look odd?

ACTOR ONE: Odd?

ACTOR TWO: Out of the blue, you sitting on my shoulders?

ACTOR ONE: Right. . . . I know. I'll pretend I need the extra height to see a bird.

ACTOR TWO: Good idea.

ACTOR ONE: Just act natural.

(ACTOR TWO gives ACTOR ONE a "thumbs up." They act natural.)

(to ACTOR TWO, but in a volume ACTOR THREE can definitely hear.) Look, a Henslow's Sparrow.

(ACTOR THREE stops writing)

ACTOR TWO: *(disappointed in ACTOR ONE's choice of bird)* A Henslow's Sparrow?

(ACTOR THREE hurriedly returns its pen and notebook into its pocket.)

ACTOR ONE: Yes. *(pointing)* Up there.

ACTOR TWO: In a tree?

ACTOR ONE: The highest branch.

(ACTOR THREE begins scanning with its binoculars in the area where ACTOR ONE pointed.)

ACTOR TWO: *(to ACTOR ONE)* Highest branch, huh?

ACTOR ONE: *(to ACTOR TWO)* In fact, I'll need to sit on your shoulders, for a better view.

ACTOR TWO: *(to ACTOR ONE)* Be my guest.

(ACTOR ONE sits on ACTOR TWO's shoulders. ACTOR ONE begins looking through his/her binoculars. ACTOR THREE is still frantically looking through its binoculars, searching for the imaginary Henslow's Sparrow.)

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