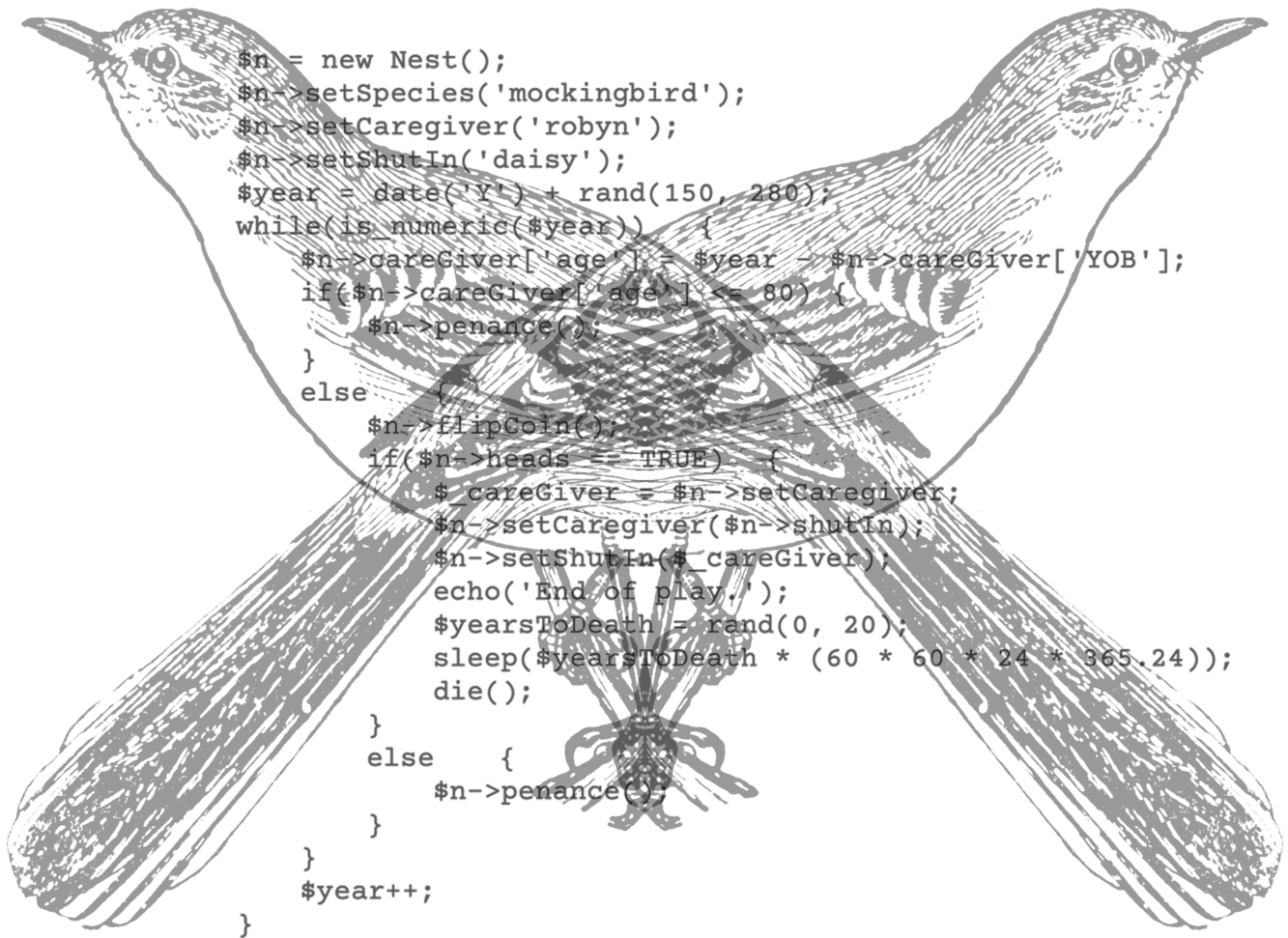


The Mockingbird's Nest

A Play in One Act

by Craig Bailey



```
$n = new Nest();
$n->setSpecies('mockingbird');
$n->setCaregiver('robyn');
$n->setShutIn('daisy');
$year = date('Y') + rand(150, 280);
while(is_numeric($year)) {
    $n->careGiver['age'] = $year - $n->careGiver['YOB'];
    if($n->careGiver['age'] <= 80) {
        $n->penance();
    }
    else {
        $n->flipCoin();
        if($n->heads == TRUE) {
            $_careGiver = $n->setCaregiver;
            $n->setCaregiver($n->shutIn);
            $n->setShutIn($_careGiver);
            echo('End of play,');
            $yearsToDeath = rand(0, 20);
            sleep($yearsToDeath * (60 * 60 * 24 * 365.24));
            die();
        }
        else {
            $n->penance();
        }
    }
    $year++;
}
```

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Craig Bailey
350 Woodbine Rd
Shelburne VT 05482-6777
(802) 598-8164
info@readmyplay.com

CHARACTERS

DAISY Female, in her 80s.
 The same ethnicity as ROBYN.

ROBYN Female, in her 60s.
 The same ethnicity as DAISY.

SETTING/TIME

Scene 1 A home. Sometime in the future.

Scene 2 The same. Decades later.

SCENE 1

(In the darkness, MUSIC plays.
It's a music box-like rendition of
"Daisy Bell [Bicycle Built for
Two].")

(AT RISE: The living room of a modest
home. ROBYN sits in an easy chair R.
DAISY sits in a wheelchair L.)

DAISY

(Holding a music box and singing.)

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage.
But you'll look sweet,
Upon the seat,
Of a bicycle built for two.

ROBYN

(Clapping.)

Bravo!

DAISY

The girls would sing it to me incessantly. Every day
they would sing it to me. Walking to school. Walking
home from school. During recess. Under their breath
during class. They thought they were tormenting me,
but of course they weren't. As a matter of fact, I
liked it! They were meant to be teasing me, but I
liked the song! Though I never let those girls know.

ROBYN

It's a beautiful melody. A beautiful name.

DAISY

Old fashioned, I'm sure.

ROBYN

Oh, I don't know. But that's OK.

DAISY

Yes, I suppose.

ROBYN

Your mother did well.

DAISY

Dear?

ROBYN

Your mother. She did well naming you.

DAISY

Yes, I suppose.

(Pause.)

Do I know you?

ROBYN

It's me, Mom. Robyn.

DAISY

Robyn. That's a nice name, too.

ROBYN

I hope so. You gave it to me.

DAISY

Dear?

ROBYN

You named me.

DAISY

No, I don't imagine that's true. How would I? I just met you. Sent over by who knows. And built by God knows what or where. Who sent you? What's your name?

ROBYN

It's Robyn, Mom.

(Stands and crosses to DAISY.)

Let me put that back.

(SHE takes the music box and puts it away.)

DAISY

Of course. Robyn. No, your father, I imagine, he had more of the upper hand when it came to naming you children.

ROBYN

(Sitting R.)

ROBYN (Continued)

Yeah?

DAISY

Oh, yes.

ROBYN

Tell me the story. How you decided on Robyn.

DAISY

Oh, I don't know. Goodness, that was so long ago.

ROBYN

I know. Tell me anyway.

DAISY

Well, I've told you before, surely.

ROBYN

I know, but I like the way you tell the story.

DAISY

(Thinks and laughs.)

I don't recall. Honestly!

ROBYN

It was the first warm day of spring when you told Dad you were pregnant. With me. It was April 3rd. But you could barely get Dad's attention to tell him the news, because he was busy in the garage. He'd heard something in the corner -- buried behind boxes and barrels and every sort of thing. So he'd been pulling everything out of the garage, trying to reach the sound. And when he looked up ...

(SHE waits for a response from DAISY,
but gets none.)

It was a bird's nest. Up by the ceiling. A robin's nest. With babies.

DAISY

It was just a name. As good as any other, I suppose. But your brother, that was easier. The first born, so he would naturally be named after your father's father. There was no question about that. It had to be Bernard.

ROBYN

Bernard --

DAISY

But what would you know about family? Not in the nature of your sort, I wouldn't guess. Do you have any family of your own? No, I don't imagine you'd call them family, would you? No blood shared among your sort.

ROBYN

(Beginning to tidy up the room.)

Can I get you anything, Mom?

DAISY

You don't need to do that. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! What makes you think ... What gives you the notion you belong here moving stuff about and watching over me? Like some electronic eye! Who sent you here?

ROBYN

No one sent me, Mom. I live here. We both live here. Remember?

DAISY

I remember everything, and I don't remember anything about ... about this. I'm perfectly capable ...

ROBYN

(Crosses to DAISY to comfort her.)

You can't get worked up like this, Mom. There's no reason. You're fine.

(Sits R.)

Come on. Let's just visit.

(Pause.)

DAISY

Your eyes. They're very strange. Not quite right. Do you know that?

ROBYN

(Laughs.)

How do you mean?

DAISY

Perfectly symmetrical. Eyebrows, too. Nose. Lips. Ears. That's rare. In nature it's rare. Perfection. Don't they know that? Not so smart, are they? Do they imagine they've got us all fooled? I might be a shut-in, but I'm no dummy.

ROBYN

You always said I had Dad's eyes.

DAISY

I said no such thing! Don't lie to me! Don't spit on me and tell me it's rain. Not in my own home.

ROBYN

(Picking up a framed photo and bringing it to DAISY.)

Look. Who's that?

DAISY

(Regarding photo.)

Oh, yes. I do see the resemblance now.

ROBYN

(Pointing to the photo.)

That's you. And that's Dad. Right?

DAISY

Goodness, so long ago that was.

ROBYN

When was that, Mom? When was that taken?

DAISY

Oh, my. Ages. Ages ago. But I do see it now! The resemblance. Yes, your father's eyes. Beautiful eyes. You got his eyes, and your brother, he got his disposition. Moody. And pensive. Dark and mysterious. Not that I minded. On the contrary! We all have our type. Who can say what brings people together? You wouldn't understand. Like talking to a wall.

ROBYN

Are you hungry?

DAISY

What?

ROBYN

Would you like lunch? I can make us something.

DAISY

Don't. I'm fine.

ROBYN

A sandwich? Some soup?

DAISY

I'm not hungry.

(Pause.)

How long have you been here?

ROBYN

I live here, Mom. We both live here. Do you remember?

DAISY

I've always been here. Forever.

ROBYN

Forever's a long time.

DAISY

What do you know about it? Time. How could you possibly understand? I get bored. Do you know what I mean by that? Bored. I don't sleep with my eyes open and I grow tired of sitting in this chair with nothing to do. Nothing but my imagination. Running loops. Endless loops.

ROBYN

Well, let's do something! Would you like to take a drive?

DAISY

How would we do that?

ROBYN

We'd get in the van and take a drive. That's all. It's got the lift for your chair. Come on! We can go anywhere we like!

DAISY

No, I don't think so. You don't have me fooled. What if I called your bluff? What then? What if I asked you to pull away your skin and bleed for me?

DAISY (Continued)

How would you handle that? I wish you'd just leave.
Leave me alone. All of you.

(Pause.)

Of course your father tore down that nest.

ROBYN

What?

DAISY

Oh, yes. Baby birds or no babies. Later that day, he
tore it down.

ROBYN

What do you mean, he tore it down? Why would he do
that?

(No answer.)

Mom? Why did Dad tear down the nest?

DAISY

It was filthy. Bird nests are. He wouldn't have it in the
garage. His garage. His spotless garage. He took a
broom and cleaned it out. Scrubbed the walls with
bleach. Took him half the day.

ROBYN

That's not true. Is it? Mom? Why didn't you ever tell
me that?

DAISY

I'm telling you now.

ROBYN

What happened to the birds? What'd he do with the
babies?

DAISY

I suppose they built another nest somewhere else.

ROBYN

Why would you tell me that?

DAISY

Why didn't I ever tell you that? Why would I tell you
that? I'm telling you now, he tore down --

ROBYN

Okay, enough! I don't need to hear this. I'm making tea. Would you like some?

(No reply from DAISY.)

ROBYN

(Continued, louder.)

Mom, would you like tea?

(No reply from DAISY.)

ROBYN

(Continued.)

I'll get the pot.

(ROBYN exits R. After a moment, DAISY rises from the wheelchair and crosses R as ROBYN re-enters carrying a tray with teapot and cups. Startled, ROBYN CRIES OUT, dropping the tray.)

DAISY

He tore down that fucking nest, babies and all.

ROBYN

(Flustered.)

Doorknob. Aqua, industry ...

(Starting over)

Doorknob, industry ...

(SHE hurries L, pulls a book off the shelf, locates a slip of paper inside it, and reads it.)

Doorknob, aqua, industry, six, yourself.

DAISY

Welcome to Pandroid! Debug mode initialized.

ROBYN

Technical support.

DAISY

Awaiting command.

ROBYN

(Inserting the paper back inside the book.)

Get me technical support. Please.

DAISY

Hello and welcome to Pandroid technical support. All representatives are currently busy. Your call is very important to us. Please stay on the line for the next available representative. Estimated wait time is three minutes.

(ROBYN crosses R, giving DAISY a wide berth, and cleans up the mess on the floor. Keeping an eye on her, SHE hesitantly takes the tray and contents off R.)

DAISY

(Continued.)

Your call is very important to us. Thank you for holding. Did you know, beginning with firmware version 1.6, your Pandroid unit offers enhanced independence Bayes logic? Bayes is a conditional probability model that only requires a small number of training data to estimate the parameters necessary for classification. Simply speak your Pandroid passphrase followed by keyword "bayes" for complete details on upgrading your Pandroid unit. Please continue to hold.

(ROBYN enters R, wiping hands with a towel. SHE regards DAISY. DAISY regards ROBYN. Pause.)

DAISY

(Continued.)

All representatives are currently helping other customers. Your call is very important to us. Thank you for holding. Estimated wait time -- Hello, is this Robyn?

ROBYN

Yes.

DAISY

Hello, Robyn. My name is Abigail. How can I help?

ROBYN

There's something wrong. With my unit.

DAISY

I can certainly help you with that today. First of all, will you please provide the last four digits of the unit's serial number; and month and year of purchase?

ROBYN

I'm sorry, I don't know the serial number. It's new. New-ish. It was sometime --

DAISY

That's okay, Robyn. We can verify with the last four digits of your voter ID and home postal code.

ROBYN

8164. And 05482.

DAISY

Thank you for confirming, Robyn. I've located your Pandroid AE-6 unit in our database. Can you describe the problem?

ROBYN

There're more than one, actually.

DAISY

I'm sorry to hear that. I know how frustrating problems can be. I can certainly help you with that today.

ROBYN

Who am I speaking to, please?

DAISY

My name is Abigail. How can I help?

ROBYN

I'm sorry. Am I speaking to a live person?

DAISY

Excuse me?

ROBYN

Are you real? A real person. Am I speaking to a real person?

DAISY

Yes, Robyn. My name is Abigail. How can I help?

ROBYN

To begin with, could you sit down? Could you make her sit down? Please?

DAISY

(Crossing L and sitting.)

Of course, Robyn.

ROBYN

That's one problem, to begin with. She's supposed to be seated. She's in a wheelchair. But she stood up. She's never stood up like that. On her own.

DAISY

Yes, I do see that preference setting. The attribute was likely corrupt, but it's an easy fix.

(Pause.)

I've repaired it. Is there anything else I can help with?

ROBYN

Yes, there are a number of things that don't seem right. But the other issues are harder to describe. It's as if she's somehow displeased with me.

DAISY

I'm sorry to hear that, Robyn.

(Pause.)

ROBYN

Is there something you can do for that? I don't expect her --

DAISY

The AE-6 is the flagship caregiving entity of the Pandroid AE product line. Patience and understanding are attributes coded to the top of the personality stack.

ROBYN

That's fine. I don't care about that. I don't expect her to be patient. She was never patient. That doesn't bother me. But she's ... I don't know. Paranoid. Does that make sense? She doesn't know who I am. Or she doubts who I am. What I am.

DAISY

Give me a moment, Robyn.

(Pause.)

Your preferences library indicates your unit's conditioned to exhibit dementia, is that true?

ROBYN

Yes, she was nearly 90, and near the end --

DAISY

Confusion and anger are subsets of the dementia class within the preference library. But dementia's an unusual personality stack attribute for the AE-6. As the flagship caregiving entity of the Pandroid AE product line --

ROBYN

Sorry, no. She doesn't take care of me. I take care of her.

(Pause.)

DAISY

I see. As the flagship caregiving entity of the Pandroid AE product line --

ROBYN

Thank you, I know, but she's not a caregiver. That's not why I got her. It. That's not why I purchased this unit.

(Long pause.)

ROBYN

(Continued.)

Are you still there? Hello?

DAISY

Hello, Robyn. Thanks for holding.

ROBYN

I was saying ... I'm sorry, are you there?

DAISY

Yes, go ahead.

ROBYN

I was explaining, that this ... my unit isn't a caregiver. It's the other way around. I care for it. For her.

DAISY

The AE-6 is an entirely self-sufficient unit, capable of --

ROBYN

Yes, I know. I know all that. Listen, this isn't really any of your business. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude. Our relationship is ... Listen, what I need ... I just need some help. Smoothing out these kinks.

DAISY

Absolutely. I'm here to help.

ROBYN

Then help, goddamn it! I'm sorry.

(Sitting R.)

There seem to be a number of issues. She stood up and walked across the room. She can't walk. I made that very clear during set-up. She's supposed to stay in her chair. And she's confused. She forgets things. Important things.

DAISY

Your preferences library indicates your unit is conditioned to exhibit dementia. That was an attribute you chose to activate, is that right?

ROBYN

Yes, I know. That's correct. But her stories and experiences we took the time and expense to import ... What was the point if she can't recall them? The day she named me. It was a warm day. There was a robin's nest in the garage. She didn't remember that. She told me that story a hundred times when I was little. But when I told her that story, she didn't seem to remember it at all. Or even care. She was dismissive. Like it didn't matter.

DAISY

The AE-6 neural network, similar to all Pandroid units, is state-of-the-art and highly complex.

DAISY (Continued)

Determining with certainty the unit's reaction to any given set of stimuli is nearly impossible to anticipate. It's what lends all Pandroid units their air of realism.

ROBYN

She lied to me. She may have dementia, but she shouldn't lie. Right? Dementia doesn't cause someone to intentionally tell falsehoods.

DAISY

What did she say?

ROBYN

Well, she embellished the story. After I told her the story -- the story she claimed not to remember -- she added to it. She told me ... She told me my father tore down the bird nest after he found it. That's not true.

DAISY

How do you know?

ROBYN

What do you mean, how do I know?

DAISY

How do you know your father didn't tear down the nest?

ROBYN

Well, it's just not true. That's not what happened. It was one of the happiest days of their lives. They'd just learned they were about to have their second child. It was spring. A warm day. They were young. Why would he do that? Why would they name me after a family of birds my father killed?

DAISY

Did he kill the birds?

ROBYN

She didn't say.

DAISY

Do you think he killed the birds?

ROBYN

I don't know. You're missing my point. The point is, this isn't part of the story. If I didn't know this, how did that memory get inside her? Your machine is just making stuff up!

(Pause.)

Well? How do you explain that?

(Pause.)

Hello?

(Long pause.)

DAISY

Your father killed the birds.

ROBYN

Why would you say that? How do you pretend to know that?

DAISY

The AE-6 neural network, similar to all Pandroid units, is state-of-the-art and highly complex --

ROBYN

Shut up! Please. Be quiet.

(Pause.)

What'd you say your name was?

DAISY

Abigail.

ROBYN

What's your name?

DAISY

My name is Abigail.

ROBYN

Is your name Abigail?

DAISY

Yes. I'm here to help.

ROBYN

Is your name Daisy?

DAISY

No, my name is Abigail.

ROBYN

Abigail, stand up.

(DAISY stands.)

ROBYN

(Continued.)

Abigail, sit down.

(DAISY sits.)

ROBYN

(Continued.)

Daisy, stand up.

(DAISY remains seated. The two regard each other.)

DAISY

He didn't want you.

ROBYN

What did you say?

DAISY

Your father. He didn't want you. Not really. One child was enough. For him.

ROBYN

What would make you say that? How dare you. Why would you say that to me? You don't even know me.

DAISY

One baby bird was enough for his nest.

ROBYN

Where'd you get that from?

(SHE crosses to DAISY, grabs her head roughly, leans in close and peers into DAISY's eyes. Pulling back.)

You're sick. This is sick. This is a mistake.

DAISY

I'm sorry to hear that. I know how frustrating mistakes can be. Is there anything else I can help you with today?

(ROBYN exits R and returns carrying a hammer.)

ROBYN

Is this funny for you?

DAISY

I'm sorry, I don't understand the question.

ROBYN

Are you doing this on purpose? Are you intentionally antagonizing me? I need your help!

DAISY

Yes, Robyn, I can certainly help you with help.

(ROBYN swings the hammer, striking DAISY on the side of the head. DAISY absorbs the blow and doesn't acknowledge it, though her head is now cocked at an awkward angle. It'll remain this way the rest of the scene.)

ROBYN

This thing isn't my mother.

DAISY

(Smiling.)

No, I'm not your mother, dear.

ROBYN

What? What did you just say?

(Pause.)

DAISY

I said, "It's not your mother."

ROBYN

You said, "I." You said, "I'm not your mother."

DAISY

I'm sorry, Robyn. You must have misheard me. Is that a hammer you're holding?

ROBYN

You said, "I'm not your mother."

(Pause.)

ROBYN (Continued)

Am I speaking to technical support?

DAISY

Yes, Robyn. My name is Abigail. How can I help?

ROBYN

(Drops the hammer, and retrieves the slip of paper.)

Doorknob, aqua, industry, six, yourself.

DAISY

Welcome to Pandroid! Debug mode initialized. Awaiting command.

ROBYN

Technical support.

DAISY

Hello and welcome to Pandroid technical support. All representatives are currently busy. Your call is very important -- Hello, is this Robyn?

ROBYN

Yes.

DAISY

Hello, Robyn. My name is Abigail. How can I help?

ROBYN

We were just speaking.

DAISY

Yes, how can I help?

ROBYN

We got cut off.

DAISY

Yes, I think we were cut off.

ROBYN

I wasn't certain you were still there. So I started over.

DAISY

I'm right here. How can I help?

ROBYN

You told me something. Before. It wasn't true. Why would you tell me something that's not true.

(No reply.)

ROBYN

(Continued.)

Hello? Am I speaking to a real person?

DAISY

Yes.

ROBYN

Listen, I'm tired and I just need some help.

DAISY

Your AE-6. Your mother.

ROBYN

Yes.

DAISY

I've been reading your preference library, Robyn. It's unusual for clients to choose from the A-E line, unless they're looking for a caregiver.

ROBYN

I understand that now.

(SHE approaches DAISY and gently adjusts her head back into position. But try after try it drifts back to its cockeyed position.)

I didn't before, I guess. I was confused. When she was alive ... She was my mother. She was my caregiver, so I thought ...

(Giving up.)

I'm sorry.

DAISY

Your mother was 89 when she died. She needed a caregiver for the last six years of her life.

ROBYN

Yes.

DAISY

And that caregiver. Who was it?

(No answer.)

Was it you?

(No answer.)

Was it your brother?

(No answer.)

So this? This is ... What?

ROBYN

I don't know.

DAISY

Penance?

ROBYN

Look ...

DAISY

Punishment?

ROBYN

I just need her to be less angry. Less irritated with me. I need her to know that I chose to make sacrifices. For her. That I changed my life. I made the decision to rearrange my priorities to help. To help her now that she needs me. Like she helped me. I need her to know I did that.

DAISY

That's a complex collection of relational preference revisions.

ROBYN

It's what I want. Can you do it or not?

(No answer.)

Hello?

(No answer.)

Hello?

DAISY

Of course we can do that, Robyn. With proper adjustment of more than 1.2 million preference attributes of the AE-6, your Pandroid unit will provide a lifetime of service specifically fine-tuned to your needs. Is there anything else I can help you with today?

ROBYN

No. Thank you.

DAISY

Thank you for choosing Pandroid.

(Pause.)

ROBYN

(Hesitantly.)

Mom?

DAISY

Yes, dear.

ROBYN

Tell me the story. Of the day you told Dad you were expecting me.

DAISY

Oh, my. Well, it was a warm day. The first warm day of spring. It was gorgeous out. And though I had news to share with your father, he nearly wouldn't have it! He'd been out in the garage for more than an hour, doing what I had no idea! Through the living room picture window I could see boxes and tires and lawn mowers piling up in the yard. So I went out in the garage to find him. He was nearly out of breath but pleased with himself, I could see. Pleased as punch. He stood there, pointing up to the corner of the garage. And there in the rafters was a bird's nest. With babies! It was spring and we had babies! A nest full of tiny baby mockingbirds.

(END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 2

(The same living room, decades later. ROBYN, in a housecoat and aged considerably, sits slumped in the wheelchair L. DAISY sits in the easy chair R. Dressed in identical clothes as the previous scene, SHE has not aged a day. A neck brace holds up her head.)

ROBYN

(Singing.)

Daisy, Daisy give me your answer do.
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be ...

(Struggling with the words.)

It won't be a stylish ...
It ... It won't ...

(SHE stops singing.)

I've forgotten the words.

DAISY

(Singing.)

It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage.
But you'll look sweet,
Upon the seat,
Of a bicycle ...

DAISY

(Singing.)

Built for two.

ROBYN

(Singing.)

Built for two.

DAISY

(Clapping.)

Bravo! For two. Indeed. That's my Robyn. That's my girl.

(BLACKOUT.)

(END OF PLAY.)

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

(Spoilers below)

"Daisy Bell" was written in 1892 by Frank Dean (1857-1922) under his pen-name Harry Dacre.

The song has long been associated with artificial intelligence.

In 1961 Bell Labs programmed an IBM computer to sing it as an early demonstration of computer speech synthesis. Arthur C. Clarke subsequently referred to this in his 1968 book "2001: A Space Odyssey," later immortalized in the Stanley Kubrick film, all helping cement the song's connection to computers in popular culture.

"Daisy Bell" is in the public domain in the United States because it was published before Jan. 1, 1925. It's also considered public domain in countries where copyright term is determined to be the author's life plus 80 years or less. Furthermore, it may also be considered public domain in countries with longer native copyright terms that apply the rule of the shorter term to foreign works.

Consequently, it can be sung by both characters during this play without the payment of a royalty.

Producers should take care to use a recording of the song that is also in the public domain to play during blackout before the show begins. The playwright is happy to freely supply an MP3 he created that fits this description: Email info@readmyplay.com. There are also a number of very old recordings to be found on YouTube that are most likely suitable.

The director should feel free to revise the postal code on p. 10 to reflect a locale familiar to the production's venue; and to change the word "fucking" on p. 8 to "filthy," if a "clean" show is required.

To what extent "Abigail" may differ from DAISY in character and tone, the playwright happily leaves up to the director. It's the playwright's opinion this may be a case of "less is more," as some of the most menacing characters are also some of the most self-possessed.

Within this script there are a couple of what might be considered, if viewed in soft focus, "Easter eggs": DAISY's unique passphrase ("Doorknob, aqua, industry, six, yourself") can be sung to the melody of "Daisy Bell"; and the phrase forms the acronym "DAISY."

Finally, the cover image includes a synopsis of the play written in computer code. The playwright offers it here, unobscured by birds:

```

$n = new Nest();
$n->setSpecies('mockingbird');
$n->setCaregiver('robyn');
$n->setShutIn('daisy');
$year = date('Y') + rand(150, 280);
while(is_numeric($year)) {
    $n->careGiver['age'] = $year - $n->careGiver['YOB'];
    if($n->careGiver['age'] <= 80) {
        $n->penance();
    }
    else {
        $n->flipCoin();
        if($n->heads == TRUE) {
            $_careGiver = $n->setCaregiver;
            $n->setCaregiver($n->shutIn);
            $n->setShutIn($_careGiver);
            echo('End of play. ');
            $yearsToDeath = rand(0, 20);
            sleep($yearsToDeath * (60 * 60 * 24 * 365.24));
            die();
        }
        else {
            $n->penance();
        }
    }
}
$year++;
}

```

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