

The Blackbird

A Short Play

Setting: A World War 2 Airfield.

Time: May 1942.

Set: Simple, Low light. Some attempt at small fires on the stage to signify the landing lights of the runway.

Cast: Leading Aircraftman Plumridge (40's)

Wing Commander Boden. (50's)

Scene 1.

(Leading Aircraftman Plumridge stands alone center stage looking into the distance, quietly whistling a sombre tune. Shortly after Wing Commander Boden walks on and stands by his side. Plumridge doesn't notice him there, the Wing Commander follows his gaze.)

Boden: Name and rank Airman?

Plumridge: *(jumps slightly. Pauses.)* James sir, Plumridge. Rank? *(thinks)* Painter, decorator, husband and father. Although currently it seems I'm a Leading Aircraftsman. Not sure how that happened sir?

Boden: *(scowles, about to scold him then thinks better of it.)*

Plumridge: Oh to be a bat, now that night is here. *(they both notice a bat flitting about.)*

Boden: Lucky little bugger, life must be so free and easy to be him, not a care in the world. No war for him, just a nightly quest to catch some flies or moths.

Plumridge: Her sir.

Boden: Pardon me?

Plumridge: It's a female sir, you can tell how she swoops, much lower sir, to catch the crane flies around the grass.

Boden: Really?

Plumridge: Yes sir, virtually deaf, the beat of the crane flies, daddy long legs to us sir, tiny wings break the air and she homes in, quite incredible really. *(He takes tired deep breath.)* And she can eat three thousand gnats in one night.

Boden: Well Plumridge, I am impressed!

Plumridge: And she hunts while her husband hangs around, literally.

(for 30 seconds or so they watch the bat, in unison.)

Plumridge: That's twelve sir.

Boden: I know.

(another long pause, the flames dim slightly.)

Plumridge: Whose stupid idea was it to send out thirteen Sir? Is no one here superstitious? *(He looks to Boden.)* Forgive me sir, I do not mean to speak out of line.

Boden: Nonsense Plumridge, James you said?

Plumridge: Yes sir, but most call me Jim.

Boden: Well Plumridge, it doesn't take an expert to realise we've sent up everything we have available. Orders from above you understand. It's the children of Cologne I worry for, it's not their war.

Plumridge: No sir.

Boden: Do you have children Plumridge?

Plumridge: Yes sir. Two girls and a boy. Another on the way.

Boden: Congratulations. *(he reaches into his jacket pocket for his watch.)* Damn it! *(he shouts, making Plumridge jump.)* Over an hour since Haskel's lot came in and still no sign of Forster's bird! No word either, last seen by Haskel's gunner over Luxembourg, but no sign since. Where the blazzers are they? *(He takes his cigarette case and with a shaking hand he lights one for himself.)*

Plumridge: Are you alright sir?

Boden: Of course I am, just cold. *(He takes a deep drag.)* Have one.

Plumridge: Thank you Sir, but no. My good lady stopped the smokes once we had our first.

Boden: Damn you Forster! *(making Plumridge jump again.)* I had faith in you!
(He turns and heads back to the control tower at a march.)

Plumridge: Sir!

Boden: Go home Plumridge, go home to your wife and kids.

Plumridge: No Sir! Listen sir.

Boden: *(returns to his side.)* I can't hear a bloody thing, what are you on about?

Plumridge: I can hear it sir.

Boden: What damn it?

Plumridge: *(pauses and points.)* Look sir, just to the west of the woods over there.

Boden: My God Plumridge, your eyesight must be as good as your hearing, I still can't hear or see a damn thing! Are you a bat?

(sound affect of a WW2 bomber aircraft gradually becoming louder.)

Plumridge: There sir, see?

Boden: My God, he's made it, Forsters made it! *(he takes off his cap.)* Come on Forster, bring her in! *(they both follow it in unison.)* Where's he gone?

Plumridge: Below the hedgerow sir, probably low on fuel sir. I expect I will be pulling branches out of the undercarriage sir.

Boden: Yes of course. There he is! Come on Forster, you can do it! He's gone again damn it! Ah, bring her in now, nice and steady does it! *(he watches excitedly, Plumridge remains calm.)*

(aircraft sound effect louder, additional sound affect of a heavy landing. The two 'watch' the aircraft pass, bouncing.)

Plumridge: Cuh! Would you believe it sir?

Boden: Of course! Never doubted him! Night Plumridge! *(patting him on the back slightly too hard, making him jump again.)*

Plumridge: Good night sir.

Scene 2.

(simple set, soft light. In the center a tall toolbox stands with a tin mug and a flask on top. An 'anglepoise' type lamp. Parts of aircraft can be on the stage, or any items to signify a hanger interior. Off set is the Aircraft, out of site. Branches will be passed to Plumridge as he collects them.)

(Plumridge is stood SR, he walks of and wrestles back a large branch, shoving it on the floor. He takes of his cap and wipes his brow with his sleeve.)

Plumridge: Time for a cup of tea I reckon.

(he pours a cup from the flask, finds a box or chair to sit on and takes a deep breath. He takes a small tin box from his bag by the chair. He opens it to find some nice sandwiches/pastie.)

Plumridge: Ah, you're a fine woman Amy! *(He tucks into his food. He sips at his tea looking towards the aircraft in the SR wings. He looks around him sheepishly, pulls out a cigarette, lights it and starts to smoke. After a period of time he suddenly stops eating, he has noticed something in the undercarrage of the aircraft in the wings.)* Is that what I think it is? *(he walks off SR, sound effect of branches breaking, he returns with a small nest, complete with a small blue/brown egg, in his hands which he places carefully on the toolbox. He looks into the nest.)* Cuh! Well I never! *(he very carefully lifts up the egg.)* Still warm! *(he places the egg back in the nest, finds some cotton wool from his tool box and gently places it around the egg in the nest. He brings the lamp, turns it on and positions the bulb over the nest. He writes a note on a piece of card which reads: 'Please do not disturb'.)*

(Boden enters)

Boden: Why the devil are you still here Plumridge? And what's that you've got there? *(this makes Plumridge jump.)*

Plumridge: Sir, I will be leaving soon sir. Found a Blackbirds nest in the branches of Forster's Blenheim sir. Complete with egg.

Boden: How do you know it belongs to a Blackbird?

Plumridge: See how tightly it's woven sir, she insulates it with moss too. I added the cotton wool obviously. The egg is still warm Sir.

Boden: My God! Does that mean.....

Plumridge: Yes sir, it's still alive. *(pause)* Either that or it's been cooked in the engine fire, in which case I'll make some toast to go with it.

Boden: What are it's chances, Plumridge?

Plumridge: About the same as a chocolate fireguard sir.

(fade to black-out)

Scene 3.

Several Days Later.

(Set: same as scene 2.) (Plumridge walks onto the stage from SL and waks up to the toolbox, moves the lamp to one side and looks into the nest.)

Plumridge: Cuh, well bugger me! It lives! Hello little fella, welcome to Bassingbourne and welcome to life!

(sound effect of subtle chirping)

(Boden appears silently beside Plumridge)

Boden: What is it Plumridge? *(making him jump once more.)*

Plumridge: Sir, Please! *(holds his heart.)*

Boden: Well?

Plumridge: Have a look sir, it's a Blackbird sir!

Boden: My God! Just as you said. It survived! *(he looks to Plumridge.)* But how do you know it's a Blackbird, Plumridge?

Plumridge: Well, firstly by the egg size and colour, confirmed by its tiny pink body and yellow beak. You see how big the eyes are Sir? They'll be covered by the lids for a few days Sir.

Boden: Will it survive?

Plumridge: Hopefully longer than a chocolate fireguard sir.

Boden: Well it seems the squadron has a new mascot Plumridge.

Plumridge: Yes, Sir.

Boden: Well back to work, there is a war on you know!

Plumridge: Of course, Sir.

(Boden starts to leave but returns.)

Boden: One last thing?

Plumridge: Sir?

Boden: It will need a name. What are you going to call it?

Plumridge: Robin. Sir.

(Boden leaves, slow fade out to the sound effect of the bird chirping.)