

Linnaean Centennial Dinner 1978

Scene 2: In the Ramble

First: Well, here we are in New Jersey... I think

Lin: We just passed a sign that says; Central Park Ramble.

(Lin looks off stage)

Lin: My, the people seem friendly, here.

First: I saw two in a bush who were more than friendly.

Lin: Look! There's a group of colonists. They seem to be wearing some kind of strange necklace. They keep putting them up to their faces.

First: Perhaps it's a religious group.

Lin: Perhaps. But they don't seem to drink from the necklace. Let's get closer and hear what are saying.

Jean: What's that over there in the bush?

May: I'm not sure but I thought I saw...

Jean: I think it has a yellow...

Mary: I don't know about that but the upper parts were...

Jean: Dark. Definitely dark.

Mary: There's something around the eye.

Mary: In the book.

(Mary consults book)

Jean: My God, My God, It's a Yellow-breasted Chat

Mary: Yellow.....throat

Mary: A Yellow-breasted Chat? I didn't see that.

(Dick comes up behind them peers through glasses)

Dick: Ladies, I don't know what you think you've seen but I have a *Turdus migratorius*.

Mary: I'll have to look that up.

Jean: What's that?

Lin: A migratory thrush... (Said with great enthusiasm to First)

Dick: The American Robin, of course.

(Dick looks briefly at Jean when she asks question. Puts up glasses and looks.)

Jean: Well we just saw a Yellowthroat

Mary: Yes we saw a Chat. (Mary and Jean stare at each other)

Mary: A yellow Chat-throat?

(Dick pays no attention to them puts down his glasses)

Dick: Over there is a *Columbia livia*.

Lin: {stares where Dick points}

That is a dove all right, but it is not blue. I call that *Columbia domesticus*.

Mary: Jean, he's pointing to a pigeon. (Delivers last word as if it were excrement.

(Dick moves away from them looking lofty. Moves up stage, turns back to audience and seems to scan high and low trees.)

Berry: See that bird over there?

Sarah: Where?

Berry: In the tall tree. About 2 o'clock.

Sarah: I don't see any bird at 2 o'clock.

Berry: 3 o'clock?

(They look at opposite sides of tree)

Sarah: No.

Berry: Yes, there's a bird there.

Sarah: I still don't see it.

(Berry puts glasses down.)

Berry: Say Sarah, What are you doing at 5:30?

(Sarah looks at spot on tree.)

Sarah: Nothing there, either.

(Berry notices side of the tree she is on)

Berry: Wait a minute. Did I say 3 o'clock?

Sarah: Yes.

Berry: Well, I meant 9 o'clock.

(They cross views)

Berry: Now do you see it?

Sarah: Oh yes, I do. Do you know what that is?

Both: A Chestnut-sided warbler!

(Dick has turned and walked over to them)

Dick: No, ladies. I'm afraid you're wrong. That bird is a *Quiscalis quiscula*.

Sarah: Who?

Dick: What a common birder might call a grackle.

Berry: Some of us are better at identification than others.

Sarah: That's a good bird—for the dead of winter.

(Richard Z has entered)

Richard Z: What are you looking at?

(All answer in a babble of voices. Richard stands in front of Berry and Sarah.)

Richard Z: Where? Where? I don't see.

(Sarah comes up behind him and points: He steps back on her toe.)

Sarah: Ooh, ow!

(Rich Z never notices.)

Mary: Jean, what's the difference between the call of the Nashville and the Tennessee?

Jean: I'm not certain.

(Rich Z goes over to them)

Rich Z: Oh! I can tell you that. The Tennessee song is in -three parts. It goes: ten-ten-ten; chip-chip-chip; zuh-ze, zuh-zee, zuh-zee. And the call is not as loud as the Tennessee

(After a silence)

Jean: Thank you.

(First comes over to Rich Z and says coyly)

First: Tweet, tweet, tweet, I'm so sweet.

Mary: Oh! There's a Black-throat blue!

Jean: Lovely!

(Rich Z steps in front of them)

Rich Z: Where? Where? I don't see.

(They move backstage. First who is still next to Rich Z pinches his back ide.)

Rich Z: Ow! Who did that?

(Rich Z looks at other birders suspiciously)

First: You'll never guess.

(First chuckles and turn to Lin)

Berry: Sarah, look in that bush over there.

Sarah: Where?

Berry: The smallest one. Look at midnight.

Sarah: Is it a robin?

Berry; No. It's a female Orchard Oriole.

Sarah: Oh Berry, come now... how do you know?

Berry: How do I know?

Sarah: Yes, how do you know?

Berry: Because it has the gestalt of an Orchard Oriole

Sarah: Ah. Gestalt birding.

Dick's looking through glasses)

Dick: Ah! *Sturnus Vulgarus*

(Rich Z comes to his side, looks)

Rich Z: No. *Passar domesticus*.

(Dick lowers his glasses, looks at Rich Z and says with some heat)

Dick: *Passar domesticus*.

(Rich Z even louder)

Rich Z: *Passar domesticus*.

Dick: Young man, don't you know a starling when you see it?

Rich Z: Certainly, but we are looking at a house sparrow.

Dick: You are obviously a very short-sighted person. Just step over here and I will give you a splendid view of the bird.

(They move down stage and in pantomime view and disagree. Lin stands at their side listening for the Latin and watching what they point to.)

(Jan upstage center)

Jan: Are you going to the meeting on Tuesday?

Mary: Yes, I think so.

Sarah: Are you talking about the Linnaean meeting?

(Lin, turns and gestures his delight to First)

Jan: Yes.

Lin: They have a society named for me! Just imagine.

Berry: I say Lin ā un.

Sarah: Ever look it up?

Berry: In what?

Sarah: A dictionary. It says Li **nee** un.

Jean: I know better but I forget.

Sarah: There's a way to remember.

(Lin and First come over to the group. Dick and Rich now bird back to back in a rage.)

Sarah: What is that?

(Sarah points to her hip)

All: The hip

Sarah: And what is that?

(Sarah points to her ankle)

All: The ankle

Sarah: And half way between?

(Sarah points to her knee)

Ail: The knee

(Lin, who has been doing the exercise with them, laughs.)

Lin: Very funny, the English language.

Berry: Who's speaking at the Linyan meeting?

Mary: Gee, I don't know.

Jean: I think it's a talk on bats.

First: Oh, grand!

Berry; No, we had that one already.

Mary: Do you remember the one on butterflies? There was this marvelous man from Princeton. He delivered his talk in sneakers and kind of grungy clothes. But he was terrific... Once he began speaking he became a butterfly. He showed you how they fly. Some go this way and some go that way.

Sarah: I'm sorry I missed it.

Jean: I liked the one on fishes.

(Jean and Sarah begin to move off together)

Berry: Gee, I wonder when they're going to have one on birds.

(Dick and Rich Z exit in on opposite directions like men pacing off for a duel. They turn and with glasses drawn, hurl Latin names at each other, then exit.)

Lin to First: Oh this sounds exciting. I should like to go to this meeting.

First: Fine. You stay here and enjoy yourself. I must get back to the witches. It's time for spell practice. I'll come back for you on Tuesday.

Lin: Oh thank you. That will be wonderful.