

A BIRD IN THE HAND

by

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

*We are inside Speight and Sons, a traditional local butcher shop in a Yorkshire village. It is early morning on Christmas Eve and snowing heavily outside. BOB and CHARLIE are preparing for the busy day ahead. The owner BOB is on the phone and CHARLIE his son is behind the counter cutting meat. There are 3 turkey boxes on the counter.*

BOB Yes Mrs Perryville I can assure you they are definitely organic chipolatas, no, no, not sausages. Yes and don't worry you can tell Lady Sinclair that the turkey is killed humanely. *(Pauses)* No problem at all, we will see you shortly to pick up your order. Season's greetings to you as well.

CHARLIE I don't think I would want to be a turkey. Not at Christmas anyhow. It's not really very humane to be strung upside down and then given...

BOB *(Interrupting)* People don't want to know the details son. Christmas is a magical time. We don't want to ruin anyone's lunch by *reminding* them how it got on their plate. *(Pause)* Now Charlie, are you sure you counted those turkey orders in. It's the last day of this Christmas madness and I don't want any mistakes. Besides I don't think Jenny will get that delivery van down here again. Was skidding about in the snow like anything, lucky to get out I reckon.

CHARLIE Aye, personally checked them all in this morning. We have twenty-eight today. Twenty-eight of the finest bronze feathered, free range little beauties. Waiting to be stuffed and smothered in butter and gravy.

BOB Good we don't want to disappoint anyone. Especially Mrs Perryville, she is a judge for Butcher of the Year so it's very important she is kept happy at all times.

CHARLIE *(Pauses and recounts on his pad)* Hang on. It does say twenty-nine in customer order book.

BOB I intend to win that competition this year. Did you just say twenty-nine?

CHARLIE Aye Dad, definitely twenty-nine orders in the book.

BOB Bugger. Right not to panic son, it's an important rule you must learn when running a community business. Not to panic. Everyone keep calm and collected.

CHARLIE So we are one short then?

BOB Yes Einstein, we are one bloody short! Check on the list see whose turkey is missing.

CHARLIE Ah got it. It's Mrs Perryville.

BOB What! Well there's no way we can cancel hers. That would be us out of the running for sure. *(Pause while thinks)* Let's give her someone else's turkey of

the same size and we will have to cancel another person in book. We just need to guess who is least likely to complain if we cancel their order. Right let me have a look at the order book., err who have we got. (*Looking through book*) Err, no, no, no, mmm, no. How about Mrs Howard, from Eastwood Farm?

CHARLIE Hasn't she got her family over from Australia this Christmas?

BOB Oh yes, she did mention something about that.

CHARLIE Yeah, they would be devastated. She has been going on about how it was their first family get together in five years and the turkey would be the centrepiece of their celebrations.

BOB Yes ok son I hear you. How about Mrs Emily Thornton?

CHARLIE Isn't her husband high up on the council?

BOB Oh you're right son. I'm putting in planning for that extension round back of shop so let's keep him sweet. I'll keep looking. (*Pause*) How about Mr and Mrs Eccles, they only ordered at last minute.

CHARLIE What Mr Eccles who has got colon cancer and has been given a year to live? Betty in post office was saying might be his last Christmas.

BOB Alright, alright no not Mr and Mrs Eccles either. That's the problem with living in a small community. There must be someone on here we don't know.

CHARLIE Dad. What if we just go to Tesco and buy a turkey?

BOB Buy a turkey from the supermarket. Your grandfather would turn in his grave. Supermarkets are the very reason why Speight and Sons are the only local butchers still trading in ten miles. Besides there would be nowt left by now.

CHARLIE Ok was just an idea. (*Pause*). We could get a frozen one?

BOB A frozen one! We are selling the finest bronze feathered, free range turkeys, hand bred in fresh Yorkshire air. I think they may just suspect if we hand over a vacuum-packed bird with a pack of frozen giblets up its arse.

CHARLIE Anyway it's proper baltic out there now, I will never be able to drive in snow all the way to town.

BOB Maybe someone will cancel their order. Although I can see looking here everyone has paid a deposit.

CHARLIE I've got another idea...

BOB Aye, go on then.

CHARLIE We have an extra goose, there was one more on the delivery, but I didn't send it back. We could make it look like a turkey.

BOB You mean a disguise?

CHARLIE Well, the way I see it most people don't even know what they're eating nowadays. They wouldn't know an organic turkey from a battery one, so they may not know a turkey from a goose. By the time they've doused it in gravy and had a few jars, they may not even notice we have swapped it.

BOB That is a ridiculous idea. The meats a different colour and birds a different shape.

CHARLIE We could say it's a new squarer breed of turkey.

BOB Square turkeys! *(Sighs)* Who really would be stupid enough to fall for that. You'd have to have completely lost all your senses.

CHARLIE Oh look Mrs Best has arrived early, just being helped out of a car.

BOB Of course Mrs Best that's it! Genius son.

CHARLIE But isn't she...

BOB Blind, exactly! If she can't actually see, we may be able to swap the order for a goose and get away with it.

CHARLIE You don't think she would be like one of those people who compensates with another sense. She might have really bad vision but make up for it with another superhuman sense. Like superhuman taste buds.

BOB Superhuman taste buds, have heard it all now. Go and get the goose from the back, quickly lad. And don't say a word to her, she will think it is her turkey and it will stay our little secret.

*(Enter in shop MRS BEST a visually impaired older lady with a stick and lugging a shopping trolley)*

Good morning Mrs Best, how are you on this snowy Christmas Eve?

MRS BEST Morning Bob. Very cold but all well thank you. Looking forward to picking up my turkey.

BOB *(Escorts her to the counter)* Right this way, counter is just over here. Charlie can you bring out the turkey order for Mrs Best please.

CHARLIE *(Brings out box and puts on the counter)* Here it is, would you like it in a bag madam.

MRS BEST Lovely, but if I could just have a look at it first please. Make sure I have the right one.

BOB *(Confused)* You want to look at it?

MRS BEST Well yes if that is ok?

BOB But I didn't think your eyesight was so good Mrs Best?

MRS BEST No sadly my vision is getting worse, can hardly see a thing anymore. But if I could just feel the turkey, I can check it that way. I have an incredible sense of touch you know.

BOB Really.

MRS BEST Yes almost superhuman in fact, you wouldn't guess would you.

BOB No I wouldn't guess that. Well if you just stand here and Charlie will open the box for you. (*Signals for Charlie to swap the boxes*). There if you just want to put your hands over here and...

MRS BEST (*Feels the turkey*) Oh yes that feels wonderful, very plump. Oh yes very moist. Must be about 22lbs I think.

CHARLIE Yes 22lbs exactly.

BOB Well let's not prod it about too much, don't want to ruin the meat. If you're happy we will put in bag for you. Charlie if you could please wrap that up for Mrs Best and put in her trolley there.

(*Charlie wraps up the other box with the goose in it and puts in her shopping trolley*)

CHARLIE There you go.

MRS BEST That's very kind thank you. If you could just add that to my account and will settle up with you at the end of the month like I always do.

BOB Of course Mrs Best, we will do that. (*Opens shop door for her to leave*) Have a wonderful Christmas and enjoy your turkey tomorrow.

MRS BEST I will. Thankfully I'm not cooking this year. I've have been invited for dinner and said I would bring along an extra turkey for everyone to enjoy.

BOB Oh right.

MRS BEST Yes my best friend has invited me.

BOB: Your best friend.

MRS BEST Yes. You well might know her? A Mrs Perryville.

(*Charlie gasps and drops a turkey box on the floor*)

MRS BEST Happy Christmas!

(*Mrs Best leaves the shop*)

CHARLIE Oh no...(Looks down inside box) Best make that twenty-seven turkeys.

CURTAIN