

“PERCY”

(I'd Like To Believe In Angels)

A prize-winning one-act comedy

by

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Characters: Percya male 'budgie'.

Sparky a female 'budgie

Percy lives in a 'cage', with two 'perches', mirror, bell, plastic man that bounces back.

There is newspaper and sandpaper on the floor of the cage.

The bars of the 'cage' are implied by the shadow of a stripes gobo, (set at an angle), which is apparent as the play opens, and again at the end. The 'perches' are matt black high bar stools, to the left and right of the playing area. There is a step-ladder, centre upstage in the playing area, also painted matt black, hanging from which, with the help of a black broom handle, are a mirror and a large bell. The area of the 'cage' is indicated by sand-coloured floor covering, over which are two pieces of 'newspaper', set at an angle to criss-cross the playing area. These are white vinyl printed with representations of newsprint.

The actors are dressed informally, in jeans, no shoes. They each wear a tee-shirt, one blue, one yellow, on which two black spots can be seen in the neck area.

(Sound cue 1) Sound of budgies, followed by title song)

(Lighting fade up)

Scene 1.

(Percy is sitting on his perch. He is restless. He keeps looking nervously out at the audience. Then he gets off the perch and comes down to the edge of the stage.)

Percy - I – I know you might not be there – but you might, you might just be – sitting, standing, lying, hanging in the air, watching me – listening to me. And what's the worst thing? That you're not there, that there's no such thing as angels and I'm just talking to an empty room? That doesn't matter, it doesn't mean that I'm going - the thing is – is – well, I think I'm going – getting – or is this a sign that I'm –

(He breaks off goes back to the perch. After a moment's thought he goes to the plastic bounce-back man, angrily head butts it, it bounces back)

Take that, Always Bouncing Up Person, come on, what have you got to say for yourself?

(He rings the bell.)

Percy - Lovely – always cheers me up.

(He comes back to us.)

I should introduce myself, Angel. Percy – My name is Percy – apparently. In the pet shop where I was before, I was called Sweet Boy. Well, to be honest, all the budgies were called Sweet Boy. I don't think Arthur knew the difference between the boys and the girls any more. Lovely old man, Arthur, it was his shop. I was there quite a while, others kept leaving, but I think I was Arthur's favourite. When I was younger, anyway. He used to sit and read the newspaper to me every day. Of course it didn't mean anything to me, it all just sounded like a peculiar noise. Then one day he started giving us a new kind of food, and after a while I noticed that when I'd been eating lots of one particular seed – I could understand what he was saying. And those black squiggles on the paper, if I looked at those they made words in my head. I tried to talk back to him but our mouths are different to theirs so...I tried, but

I had a family there for a while, of course. I miss my Mum and Dad – brothers and sisters – my Mum – my Dad.

(He is obviously internally moved, but suddenly runs to the plastic man and head butts it)

Percy - And as for you, round shiny thing with picture of strangers head – I've tried talking to him but it was strangely unsatisfying.

So what does it matter if there's no-one listening? It doesn't matter if I talk to myself – counting! A bit of counting will cheer me up.
Where was I? Er – fourth row, no, fifth –one thousand six hundred and....eighty!

(Fade)

Scene 2.

(Fade up)

Percy - Three thousand seven hundred and -

(He stops, comes back to us.)

But if – I know it's a big if, but if you are there I ought to explain the counting. It's a game, you see, to finish the game I have to count every grain of sand on the sandpaper that I can see around the edges of the newspaper paper before the paper gets taken away and a clean piece is put in. Usually the new piece is of a slightly different size, and he puts it in a slightly different place each time so the count is always different. It gets a bit tricky sometimes when I haven't finished the count and I'm dying for a shit. I know that if I make the paper too messy he will clear it up, and it ruins that particular game. If that happens I have to pay a penalty, I have to ring the bell, punch Mr Bouncy, run up the ladder, climb up the side of the cage and imagine the wall is the floor and the floor is the wall, which is really scary.
But if I win I get to treat myself to one of those special seeds – (he goes a bit dreamy). They're lovely, they are.
Where was I? It would be really nice if you are there. I feel good talking to you.

Anyway, the man who lives here calls me Percy. He came into the shop one day, and without a 'by your leave' or a chance to say goodbye I was on my way.
Oh, he's all right. I saw a lot of people come and go in that shop, and although I don't understand their years, I think he's what they call middle aged. Lives on his own. I think this is what is called a flat. He keeps the food and water fresh, and he cleans out the cage. But here's the thing. He talks to me. Nothing wrong with that, Arthur talked to me. But the thing is, he asks me questions, deep philosophical questions. It started almost immediately. No sooner had I arrived, nervous and apprehensive about my new surroundings, than he hit me with one.

(Sound cue 2) - Voice Of man - So then, Percy, what do think I should do?

Percy - (To audience) About what, may I ask? One day it was –

(Sound cue 3) - Voice of Man - What do you think, Percy? Blue suit or brown suit?

Percy - I don't know, think yourself lucky you've got a choice. Then eventually The Big One. This one comes up all the time, and it's driving me crazy.

(Sound cue four) - Voice of Man - Who's a pretty boy then?

Percy - Just like that. He loomed up, big grin on his well-meaning face and –

(Sound cue 5) Voice of Man - 'Who's a pretty boy then?'

Percy - What? I didn't know, I'd only just got here. Is it a metaphorical question, is it some kind of test? Will I still get fed if I can't come up with the answer? Who is a pretty boy?

And the weird thing is, sometimes he does a funny kind of voice when he says it.

(Sound cue 6) Voice of Man, (more emphatic) - 'Who's a pretty boy then?'

Percy - That's not all. Sometimes he goes on to say

(Sound cue 7) Voice of Man - 'Yes he is'.

Percy - Well, I never said he wasn't, because I don't know who this pretty boy is. He may be a pretty boy, he may be the prettiest boy there ever was, but in my limited and limiting situation I have no way of knowing.

'Who's a pretty boy then?' 'I don't bloody know' I would shout back, but of course to him I just sound like – well, noise, I suppose.

Sometimes he'll be normal, you know, 'oh, your cage is getting a bit messy, Percy, must do something about that', or 'not much seed in there, Percy, can't have you starving can we', all nice and chatty, lovely. Then when he's finished with the seed or the paper, I think I've got away with it, and there it is again – 'who's a - ' (*sighs*) I still don't know the answer, apparently he still doesn't know or he wouldn't keep asking me.

(Goes back to the sand paper, starts to count)

three thousand two hundred and – and – (he's forgotten where he got ups to)
oh bugger.

(Returns down cage)

After a while I came up with a plan. I would somehow learn how to say it myself, and then ask one his friends. I imagined that if I asked them who exactly this pretty boy was, one of them would know, they would say- well, the name. He might hear the answer, or I could practise and say it to him when he asks me next, then he would stop doing my head in. So, I practised for weeks. It's not easy, trying to speak like them, but in the end I got it. One evening a woman I hadn't seen before came round to dinner, did the usual

(Sound cue 8) Voice of Woman - 'oh, how sweet you've got a flat-mate'

Percy - And I went for it.

(Sound cue 9) Budgie version of 'who's a pretty boy then?'

'Who's a pretty boy?' I asked, desperately, desperately hoping that all would be revealed. No luck. If anything, it made the situation worse. She squealed

(Sound cue 10) Voice of Woman - 'did you hear that? He just said who's a pretty boy!',

Percy - And now I've got two of them looming over the cage manically repeating the bloody question over and over again.

(Sound cue 11)

Voice of Man } Who's a pretty boy, then?

Voice of Woman } Who's a pretty boy, then?

Percy - Don't they know it's rude to answer a question with a question, **especially when it's the same question?**