**Blinded by the Light**
by Dave Carley

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**Blinded by the Light**(c) 2015 and 2024 by Dave Carley

**Cast**
Collector
Man
Woman

**Play Synopsis**

The Kirtland’s Warbler was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Because of some creative work done on its very specialized habitat, it has now made a large step back from extinction. But, as with all songbirds, there are ongoing challenges.

*Blinded by the Light* tells the story of a pair of Kirtland’s, as they try to safely negotiate the long migration from the Bahamas to their breeding area in Michigan. As the play opens, they have nearly completed their journey. A last obstacle remains – one that has had devastating effects on many bird species: the brightly lit buildings of a metropolis.

In the case of this pair of Kirtland’s, those lights are Cleveland’s, but the destruction our over-lit cities pose to migrating birds decimates many, many species all over the continent.

**The Species**
Kirtland’s Warbler. The species was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Because of work done on its very specialized habitat (a small area in the Lower Peninsula Michigan with grayling sand and jack pines of a certain height) the species has begun a tentative recovery. In another very hopeful sign, Kirtland’s may now be spreading from that one location in Michigan to Wisconsin and possibly Ontario.

However, there are clouds on the horizon. Kirtland’s Warblers winter in the Turks and Caicos, and The Bahamas. Ongoing deforestation in those locations may yet prove fatal to the species, even as the size of its North American habitat grows. What is certain is that the Kirtland’s warbler will require ongoing human vigilance and involvement. Please consider donating to the Kirtland’s Warbler Alliance.

But all the habitat protection in the world will be for naught if work isn’t also done on diminishing one of the greatest threats to migrating species – brightly lit buildings. To get to northern Michigan, Kirtland’s Warblers must make their way past Cleveland and Detroit, to name just two urban obstacles.

**Staging and Costumes**
Collector needs plastic bags. There should be two chairs on the set. Man and Woman are in human dress. It would be great to have their costumes suggest the coloration of the Kirtland’s Warbler – blue jacket, yellow vest for the male, duller version for the female.

**Eponymy:**

This play is one of a series of Eponymy plays. Others include the Stendhal Syndrome, De Clérambault’s Disease, Leotards - and members of an obscure religious sect, The Muggletonians. More at <http://davecarley.com/plays-short/eponomy/>

**Production History:**

Blinded by the Light was produced in late 2015 as part of the Playwrights and Arts Festival at Know Theatre in Binghamton, New York. Blinded by the Light was presented at the Fire Station Theatre in a cross-medium event that pairs artworks with writing. It was next produced as one of the play-winners of the Save Endangered Species Festival in Los Angeles in March 2016, a fundraising event for the Jane Goodall Foundation.

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**1.**

Semi-darkness. COLLECTOR crosses stage. He has a small bag or bags with him. Two or three times he kneels and picks something up and puts it in the bag. The audience does not see what. He mutters to the birds he is picking up but the audience doesn’t make out his words. On the third dip he is clearly upset, and mutters:

**COLLECTOR:** Damn damn aw hell

*(He stands up full and turning towards the audience, looks upwards and raises his fist in the air.)*

DAMN YOU!

**2.**

Semi-darkness but, throughout this scene, stage light should grow slowly, before the rapid increase in lighting near the end. At the same time as COLLECTOR is hurling his anger, MAN and WOMAN move on to the stage, opposite to where COLLECTOR stands. WOMAN seems more determined in her movements; MAN perhaps looks around or dawdles. They never register the presence of COLLECTOR, who will slowly make his way off stage, perhaps finding one or two more pickups. MAN and WOMAN sit down periodically, MAN much more than WOMAN. She often circles the chairs, impatiently.

**MAN:**  *(A bit peevish)* What’s the hurry?

**WOMAN:** What’s the hurry!?

**MAN:**  Always, you’re hurrying.

**WOMAN:** I want to get back.

**MAN:** So do I, I just don’t think we have to get there yesterday

**WOMAN:** We started late.

**MAN:** We didn’t start late.

**WOMAN:** Almost everyone left before we did. We started late and you don’t seem to feel any urgency about it.

**MAN:**  You got to stop and smell the roses.

**WOMAN:** Only a male would say that.

**MAN:** What.

**WOMAN:** The good spots will all be gone. You know how few they are, to start with. You keep saying you don’t care but I do. It has to be just so. Why can’t you realize that!? I have to be able to see the sky. I have to see it, I have to be able to get to it, the trees, I want the trees to be just so, if we don’t hurry – God, you’d be happy just sitting about all day making noise.

**MAN:** Would not.

**WOMAN:** Uh huh?

**MAN:**  Anyway, what’s wrong with making noise?

**WOMAN:** It’s noise.

**MAN:** Making noise is how you know you’re alive. And we wouldn’t have met if I hadn’t been making noise.

**WOMAN:** Come on. Just a few more miles, cross the big lake, we’re almost there.

**MAN:**  No.

**WOMAN:** Pardon?

**MAN:**  No.

**WOMAN:** No.

**MAN:** We’re stopping here. We’ll continue tomorrow morning, first thing. I’m tired.

**WOMAN:** How could you be tired?

**MAN:**  If you were honest you’d admit you are too. Exhausted.

  *(Pause.)*

**WOMAN:** You’re not the only one you know.

**MAN:**  Say again?

**WOMAN:** You heard me.

**MAN:**  Where’d that come from?

**WOMAN:** You think there aren’t others – who find me – who think that I could – there are others who make less noise and are more industrious – I’ve had offers, a number of them – there are a lot of males out there looking for a partner, some of them have gone looking as far as Wisconsin.

**MAN:**  That’s desperate.

**WOMAN:** *They* wouldn’t think my being – particular – about where I end up, where I want to live – is such an odd thing. Yes, you make noise, you make a LOT of noise. And yes, the coat, the vest, the way you move, the way you move your – you never stop – your – yes, it’s eye-catching, it certainly caught my eye, but -

**MAN:**  But what.

**WOMAN:** There are other factors in the mix now. Other imperatives. I need that nesting space. Ground level, sandy soil I can scrape into, access to the sky. And if we don’t get there first – you know how little real estate there is/

**MAN:** You keep telling me/

**WOMAN:** You know what we’re working with, just a few acres, not a lot more, you saw everyone leaving last week, heading north. Please.

**MAN:** OK.

**WOMAN:** We are so close. Please.

**MAN:**  OK.

**WOMAN:** *(A moment of closeness)* OK?

**MAN:**  OK.

**WOMAN:** Now?

**MAN:**  Now?

  *(They stand.)*

 You weren’t really serious about finding another.

**WOMAN:** No.

**MAN:**  I didn’t think so *(pretends to he’s about to sit down again.)*

**WOMAN:** But don’t put it to the test.

**MAN:**  I worry about you being too tired

**WOMAN:** Now when we’re this close

**MAN:** Second wind?

**WOMAN:** Yes.

*(Lights should start coming up on their faces.)*

And the thought of a place in the sand

**MAN:** A bit of brush for cover

**WOMAN:** A view of the sky

**MAN:** Places to sing from

**WOMAN:** Noise.

**MAN:**  Noise?

**WOMAN:** *(Smiles.)* Song.

*(Light is quite bright and MAN and WOMAN are quickly becoming mesmerized by it. Almost as if they’re in a trance.)*

**WOMAN:** Oh this is so

**MAN:** I think we go this way

**WOMAN:** I think you’re right

**MAN:** I feel

**WOMAN:** Stronger

**MAN:**  Yes

**WOMAN:** We’ll make it

**MAN:** Home

**WOMAN:** Tonight.

**MAN:** Soon

**WOMAN:** Home

**MAN:**  Home

*(Loud banging sound – can come from COLLECTOR. Both WOMAN and MAN remain standing but heads immediately loll forward.)*

**3.**

*COLLECTOR leans down and picks up two birds. This is the first time we see what he has been collecting.*

**COLLECTOR:** This is a first for me. Kirtland’s warblers, male and female. They’re big for warblers. Big and rare. So rare that, in all the years coming here to pick up birds, every morning during migration, every dawn to collect the carnage – these are my first.

And so close to home – just a few hundred more miles, they would have made it by tomorrow night. Upstate Michigan. A day after that she would have found her perfect nesting site... they’re crazy particular. New growth jack pines, grayling sand... a protected place in the sand beneath a pine, a view of the sky. All the way from the Bahamas and they couldn’t make it past here.

*(Looks up.)* Would it kill them to turn their damn office lights down – for three weeks even? Three weeks in May, give the birds that. Let them fly by in the safety of the night, without mesmerizing them into the glass.

Just three weeks – to let them get home?

They call Kirtland’s ‘the phoenix bird’ because they rise out of a burn. Jack pines need a fire to regenerate, the burn bursts their seed pods, scatters their seeds, life starts again. New growth starts, the Kirtland’s appear.

Just never very many of them.

And now, two less.

*(COLLECTOR briefly hangs head, in line with the other two.)*

*Black.)*

**The End**