

By Daphne du Maurier
Adapted by Bryon Cahill

The BIRDS

Characters

(Main characters in boldface)

Narrators 1, 2, 3, 4
Nat Hocken, a thoughtful man
Mr. Trigg, a farmer; Hocken's neighbor
Mrs. Hocken
Jill Hocken, the Hockens' daughter
Mrs. Trigg
Jim, stableman
Radio Announcers 1, 2

Scene 1

Narrator 1: Fall is turning to winter on England's western coast. World War II is about to begin; there is restlessness in the air. Nat Hocken sits on a ledge at the cliff's edge, watching the birds.

Narrator 2: They come to the peninsula in great numbers, restless, uneasy, circling the sky.

Narrator 3: Flocks of jackdaws, starlings, and larks scatter from trees to ledges.

Narrator 4: As the slow sea meets the shore, the birds race and run on the beach.

This photo is from the film adaptation of the du Maurier story directed by Alfred Hitchcock. you might be able to infer **READERS** adaptation of the original, Hitchcock changed the story quite a bit, putting the spotlight on the mother, rather than the father.

Nat Hocken: (to himself) Perhaps a message comes to the birds in autumn, like a warning: Winter is coming. Many of them perish. They're like people who fear death before their time, driving themselves to work or folly.

Narr 1: Nat stands up and heads back to his cottage as the noisy birds soar above. On his way, he comes upon Mr. Trigg, a farmer, who is out on his tractor.

Mr. Trigg: There are more birds than usual today, and some of them are daring! One gull came so close to my head this afternoon, I thought he'd knock my cap off. I've a notion it'll be a hard winter. That's why the birds are restless.

Nat: You may be right.

Narr 2: Nat continues home across the fields and down the lane to his cottage. He watches the birds flocking over the western hills, in the last glow of the evening sun.

Scene 2

Narr 3: Just after 2 in the morning, Nat wakes to a tapping at the window. He goes to open it. As he does, a bird brushes his hand, jabbing at his knuckles and grazing the skin.

Nat: What the—

Narr 4: With a flutter of wings, the bird is gone, over the roof

and behind the cottage. Nat puts his mouth to the scratch. The bird has drawn blood.

Narr 1: Shocked and confused, Nat shuts the window and returns to bed. Before long, he hears a forceful tapping at the window. This time, his wife wakes too.

Mrs. Hocken: See to the window, Nat. It's rattling.

Nat: I've already seen to it. There's some bird there, trying to get in.

Mrs. Hocken: Send it away. I can't sleep with that noise.

Narr 2: Nat opens the window a second time. Half a dozen birds attack him, flying straight into his face.

Mrs. Hocken: Send it away. I can't sleep with that noise. **Narr 2:** Nat opens the window a second time. Half a dozen birds attack him, flying straight into his face. **Mrs. Hocken:** Send it away. I can't sleep with that noise. **Narr 3:** Nat shouts, striking out at the birds with his arms, scattering them. They fly out over the roof and disappear, just as the first bird did. Quickly, he shuts the window and latches it.

Nat: Did you see that? They tried to peck my eyes out!

Mrs. Hocken: It's all right, now.

Narr 4: Suddenly, a frightened cry is heard from across the hall, where their two children sleep.

Mrs. Hocken: It's Jill.

Narr 1: Nat lights a candle as cries of terror, this time from both children, echo through the hall. As Nat

stumbles into their room, the candle's flame goes out. Immediately, he can feel the beating of wings about him in the darkness.

Nat: It's all right. I'm here.

Narr 2: Swiftly, Nat pushes the children through the door into the hall and shuts it behind them. Alone in the bedroom with the birds, he seizes a blanket and whips it through the air, using it as a weapon.

Narr 3: Again and again, they return the assault, jabbing his hands and his head. The little stabbing beaks are as sharp as pointed forks.

Mrs. Hocken: What is it, Nat? What's happening?

Narr 4: He covers his head with the blanket and then, in the greater darkness, beats at the birds with his bare hands.

Universal/The Kobal Collection



Scene 3

Narr 3: In the morning, Nat has breakfast ready for his family when they wake up.

Jill Hocken: Did you drive away the birds, Dad?

Nat: Yes. They're all gone now.

Jill: They tried to peck at us. They went for Johnny's eyes. **Nat:** Fright made them do that. They were probably more scared of you than you were of them.

Jill: I doubt it.

Narr 4: Having finished her breakfast, Jill puts on her jacket. Nat and his wife share a glance across the table. A silent message passes between them.

Nat: I'll walk her to the bus.

Narr 1: Jill runs out the door

ahead of her father.

Nat: (to his wife) Keep all the windows and doors shut. I'll go to the farm and find out if the Triggs heard anything last night.

Narr 2: Nat runs after Jill, who is busy chasing leaves. Her face, whipped by the cold wind, is rosy under her pixie hood.

Jill: Is it going to snow, Dad?

Nat: No. This is a black winter, not a white one.

Narr 3: Nat is searching the bushes for birds when Jill sees her friends up ahead and runs to talk to them.

Jill: My dad says it won't snow. It's going to be a black winter.

Narr 4: The bus comes and takes the children away. Nat continues toward the Triggs' farmhouse.

Nat: Anyone home?

Narr 1: Mrs. Trigg appears at the door. She is beaming.

Mrs. Trigg: Why, hullo, Mr. Hocken. Can you tell me where this cold is coming from? I've never seen such a change. The radio says it has something to do with the Arctic Circle.

Nat: We didn't turn on the radio this morning. Fact is, we had some trouble in the night.

Mrs. Trigg: Kiddies OK?

Nat: Well ...

Narr 2: Nat tries to tell Mrs. Trigg his story, but the look in her eyes conveys that she does not believe him.

Mrs. Trigg: Are you sure they were real birds, with proper feathers and all?

Nat: Mrs. Trigg, there are 50 dead birds lying in the children's bedroom. They attacked me.

They tried to go for young Johnny's eyes.

Mrs. Trigg: Well, I suppose the weather brought them. Foreign birds maybe, from that Arctic Circle.

Nat: No. They were birds you see about here every day.

Mrs. Trigg: Funny thing, no explaining it, really. Well, I must be getting on.

Narr 3: She turns and heads back to her kitchen, leaving Nat dissatisfied. Walking back across the farmyard, he happens upon Jim, the stableman.

Nat: Had any trouble with birds?

Jim: Birds? What birds?

Nat: We got them at our place last night—scores of them in the children's bedroom. They were quite savage.

Jim: Oh? I never heard of birds acting savage. Birds are tame creatures.

Nat: These birds weren't tame.

Jim: No? Cold, maybe. Or hungry. You should put out some crumbs.

Narr 4: Realizing that Jim is as closed-minded as Mrs. Trigg, Nat gives up and goes home.

**'I never heard of birds acting savage.
Birds are tame creatures.'**

Scene 4

Mrs. Hocken: See anyone?

Nat: Mrs. Trigg and Jim. I don't think they believed me. Anyway, nothing's wrong up there.

Narr 1: Nat grabs a large garbage bag and goes to the bedroom to collect the dead birds. He takes the bag to the beach and opens it. The wind is colder than he can ever remember its being. He scatters the bird bodies over the sand.

Nat: (to himself) The tide will take them when it turns.

Narr 2: Nat looks out to the sea. The wind cuts him to the bone. The waves rise stiffly, curl, and break again. He tries to draw a breath and is once again sliced by the frozen air.

Narr 3: Then he sees them. Staring at the waves, Nat realizes that he is not looking at whitecaps. The line over the water that seems to go on forever is, in fact, gulls—thousands of them. Eastward, and to the west, the gulls are there. Nat turns away from the sight and anxiously

hurries home.

Scene 5

Narr 4: Nat enters his house and meets his wife in the kitchen.

Mrs. Hocken: Nat, it's on the radio. They're reading a special bulletin.

Nat: What's on the radio?

Mrs. Hocken: About the birds. It's not only here. It's everywhere—in London and all over the country.

Nat: Turn it up.

Radio Announcer 1: We urge everyone everywhere to board up their windows and take reasonable precautions for the safety of themselves and their children.

Nat: Let's hope they hear that on the farm. Down at the beach, there are thousands of them, tens of thousands! They were so thick, you couldn't put a pin between the gulls' heads. They're all out there, riding the sea, waiting.

Mrs. Hocken: What are they waiting for, Nat?

Nat: (distantly) I don't know.

Narr 1: Nat opens the drawer that holds his hammer and tools.

Mrs. Hocken: What are you going to do?

Nat: See to the windows.

Mrs. Hocken: You think they would break in, with the windows shut? Those sparrows and robins and such? How could they?

Narr 2: Nat does not answer her. He goes upstairs and boards up all the windows.

Narr 3: His wife watches as Nat works to make their house an impenetrable fortress.

Mrs. Hocken: What they ought to do is call the army out to shoot the birds.

Nat: Do you think they've enough soldiers to go around shooting birds off every roof?

Mrs. Hocken: I don't know. But something must be done.

Narr 4: Nat continues working. At 3 o'clock, he steps outside and is faced with horror in the skies. The birds are hovering, silent. They soar and circle, rise and fall.

Mrs. Hocken: (arriving outside) What's the matter? You've gone white.

Nat: I'm going for Jill. I'll wait for her at the bus stop. Keep Johnny inside. Keep the door shut, and draw the curtains.

Mrs. Hocken: Nat?

Narr 1: Nat goes to the shed

and grabs a hoe. He walks up the lane to the bus stop. Every now and then he glances over his shoulder.

Narr 2: At the top of the hill, Nat waits. He watches as the birds travel across the sky.

Narr 3: The bus appears, and several children climb out of it. Nat meets his daughter at the stop and takes her by the hand.

Jill: What's the hoe for, Dad?

Nat: I just brought it along. Come on now, let's go home. It's cold. No hanging about.

Narr 4: Nat addresses the other children.

Nat: See how fast you can run home now.

Narr 1: The children giggle and then run off across the fields.

Jill: We always play in the lane, Dad.

Nat: Not today you don't. Come on now, no dawdling.

Jill: Look, Dad, over there! Look at all the gulls!

Nat: Yes, hurry now!

Jill: Where are they all flying to?

Nat: Up-country, I think, where it's warmer.

Narr 2: Nat squeezes Jill's hand a little tighter and drags her along.

Jill: Don't go so fast! I can't keep up with you!

Nat: Do you want me to carry you, Jill?

Narr 3: Jill jumps on Nat's back, and he begins to run. She is



Universal/The Kobal Collection

a gun?

Nat: I don't want a gun. But I'd be obliged if you'd drive Jill home.

Mr. Trigg: Sure. Hop in, sweetie.

Jill: Aren't you coming, Dad?

Nat: There's no room for me. You be a good girl for Mr. Trigg.

Jill: OK.

Mr. Trigg: (to Nat) Why don't you join us for the shooting match, Nat? We'll make the feathers fly!

Narr 1: Mr. Trigg drives away, and Nat is left alone in the road. The birds are circling lower in the sky.

Scene 6

Narr 2: Nat arrives at home just as Mr. Trigg drives down the driveway and greets him.

Mr. Trigg: Well, what do you make of it? They're saying in town that the Russians have done it—that they've poisoned the birds.

Nat: How could they do that?

Mr. Trigg: Don't ask me. You know how stories get around. Will you join my shooting match?

Nat: No, thanks. Have you boarded up your windows?

Mr. Trigg: No. Lots of nonsense. They like to scare you on the radio.

Nat: I'd board them up now, if I were you.

Mr. Trigg: Well ... all right, then. See you in the morning. We'll have gull for breakfast!

Narr 3: Mr. Trigg drives away. Suddenly, a bird dives from the sky. It is followed by a dozen others. Nat drops his hoe and covers his head with his arms. He runs for the house.

Narr 4: Nat begins to feel his own fresh blood trickling down his hands, his wrists, and his neck. Flailing madly, he reaches his door and begins pounding on it as hard as he can.

Nat: Let me in! It's Nat! Let me in!

Narr 1: More birds are flying toward him. Nat can see the huge flock coming down. Just as they are about to join the pecking frenzy, the door swings open. Nat stumbles across the threshold, and his wife throws her weight against the door.

Narr 2: They hear consecutive thuds as birds crash into the house.

Scene 7

Narr 3: Nat's wife dresses his wounds. They are not deep.

Nat: Thank goodness they wait-

ed until Jill was safe inside. They're flying inland. They're making for the towns.

Mrs. Hocken: What will they do, Nat?

Nat: They'll attack. Go for everyone out in the streets.

Mrs. Hocken: Why don't the authorities do something?

Nat: There's been no time. Nobody's prepared.

Narr 4: The muffled sounds of the birds come from the windows, from the door. Wings brush the surface, sliding and scraping, as the birds seek entry. Birds crash with a thud against the house.

Nat: Good. That will kill some of them. Not nearly enough, though.

Narr 1: Night comes, and Nat decides to bring the mattresses downstairs to the kitchen. The children watch him set up the makeshift beds.

Nat: (to the children) It's more cozy down here, close to the fire, don't you think?

Narr 2: Nat turns on the radio.

Radio Announcer 2: The birds, in vast numbers, are attacking everyone in sight and have already begun an assault on buildings. People are asked to remain calm and not to panic.

Radio Announcer 1: Owing to the exceptional nature of the emergency, there will be no further transmission from any broadcasting station until 7 a.m. tomor-

*'Take us with you.
I'd rather die than stay here alone.'*

row.

Narr 3: The radio goes silent.

Jill: What's it mean, Dad?

Nat: There won't be any more programs tonight.

Jill: Is it the birds? Have the birds done it?

Nat: No. It's just that everyone's busy.

Narr 4: A low, droning hum begins to grow in the distance.

Mrs. Hocken: It's planes! They're sending out planes after the birds! Isn't that gunfire? Can't you hear gunfire? It's good—isn't it, children—to hear the planes? The planes will get them.

Narr 1: Just then they hear a crash about 2 miles off, followed by a second, and a third.

Mrs. Hocken: What was that? Are they dropping bombs on the birds?

Nat: I don't know. I don't think so.

Narr: The sound of planes dies.

Jill: Where have the planes gone, Dad?

Nat: Back to base. Come on now, time for bed.

Narr 2: The children lie down on the mattresses with their mother. Nat stays awake and paces.

Nat: (to himself) Waste of life

and effort. We can't destroy them that way. There's always gas ... mustard gas. We'll be warned first, of course, if they do that. The best brains of the country will be on it tonight.

Scene 8

Narr 3: In the morning, Nat wakes up to his wife's voice.

Mrs. Hocken: Something smells bad. Something's burning.

Narr 4: Nat jumps up and runs to the fireplace.

Nat: The birds are trying to come down the chimney, and the fire is almost out! Stand back! We've got to risk this.

Narr 1: Nat throws a jug of kerosene into the fireplace. The flames roar. A hellish screeching noise makes its way down the chimney. Scorched and blackened bird bodies fall into the fire.

Nat: I should have stoked the fire last night. I ought to be shot for this.

Narr 2: Time continues to pass slowly as Nat reinforces his barricades.

Mrs. Hocken: The birds aren't hammering as loudly anymore.

Watch the Birdies

Who is this dapper gentleman with the seagull and the crow? A film virtuoso you should know: Alfred Hitchcock



MPV.net

Hitchcock was one of the world's great directors. Yet when a reporter asked him, "What is the deepest logic of your films?" He gave a simple answer: "To put the audience through them." And through them we have gone, kicking theater seat backs in surprise and screaming in horror.

Hitchcock (1899–1980) was an absolute master of scare tactics, wielding themes of guilt, fear, and redemption for psychological effect. He came to Hollywood from England to direct *Rebecca*, an adaptation of the so-named Daphne du Maurier novel that would win an Academy Award. He stayed on to create many classics, including four major masterpieces: *Rear Window*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, and *Vertigo*. The photos used on our cover and in the play are from his adaptation of du Maurier's "The Birds." The featured actress is Tippi Hedren.

Nat: I'm filling their car up with food too. We'll take it home and return for a fresh load.

Mrs. Hocken: What about the Triggs?

Nat: They must have gone to a friend's house.

Mrs. Hocken: Shall I come in and help you?

Nat: No. There's a mess in there. Cows and sheep all over the place. Wait here in the Triggs' car with the kids.

Narr 1: They make three trips back and forth. At night, Nat looks out to sea and sees something gray and white moving.

Nat: The good old navy never let us down!

Narr 2: He waits. Straining his eyes as they tear up in the sky, he understands: It is not the navy. It is the gulls rising from the sea. The tide has turned again, and they are making their way inland.

Narr 3: Nat's face turns pale, and he closes the door slowly. He turns to face his wife, who is turning the dial on the radio. It is silent on every station.

Narr 4: A light tapping is heard. It gets louder and is joined by the sound of a hundred other beaks. The first bird makes its suicidal dive into the house. It is followed by another ... and another ... and another. Nat looks at the dying fire and then at the piles of food on the counter. He smiles weakly at his wife.

Nat: We forgot to get wood.

Nat: (listening) You're right. Their fury must have receded with the tide.

Narr 3: Nat goes to the door and opens it cautiously.

Mrs. Hocken: Wait! Where are you going?

Nat: I've only got about six hours until the tide comes in. I'll take some baskets and go up to the farm for food and supplies.

Mrs. Hocken: Take us with you. I'd rather die than stay here alone.

Nat: Come on, then.

Scene 9

Narr 4: The family walks to the edge of the Triggs' property.

Nat: OK, wait here. I'll be back in a moment.

Narr 1: In the farmyard, the birds are everywhere, dead and alive. The live ones are as quiet and as still as the dead ones. They perch on the trees and on the roof of the farmhouse. They sit on the fence and on the porch. They watch Nat.

Narr 2: Jim's body lies in the yard—at least, what is left of him.

Narr 3: Nat goes inside the house and finds Mr. Trigg's body close to the telephone. He looks up the stairs and sees bloodied legs sprawled on the floor: Mrs. Trigg's.

Nat: (to himself) Thank goodness there were no children here.

Narr 4: Nat fills his baskets with food and carries them back to his wife and children.