

**ACT ONE:****Scene One: The Dinosaur Within**

*Shadows of an enormous bird flit across the projection screen. There is the sound of gigantic wings approaching—the anticipation of something momentous appearing hangs in the air. As the sound builds and the shadows loom larger, a light rises on a boy—TOMMY. He has his back to the audience and flaps his arms, trying to fly. As the sound dies out, he sees the audience, goes to a lectern and begins to give a speech. He uses note cards and has clearly practiced, but he is nervous and makes some mistakes. TOMMY wears a Kansas City Royals baseball cap.*

TOMMY

*(reading from CARD #1)*

Hello and welcome to the mid-American annual junior paleontologists' conference. My name is Tommy Lane and it's a pleasure to welcome you and an honor for our chapter to host this year's conference.

*(He fumbles for his next card, but can't find it.)*

Card two, card two? Hmm. . . Guess, I'm a little nervous; I didn't expect so many people. Mostly these kinds of things aren't so well attended.

*(TOMMY whispers secretly to the audience.)*

Tell you a secret, there's a dinosaur inside me. Look, can you see it?

*(TOMMY opens his mouth wide and speaks with his mouth open.)*

Way down there. See?

*(TOMMY closes his mouth.)*

Maybe you can't see him yet, but he looks like this.

*(TOMMY reveals a small toy theropod.)*

A theropod. He's down there, inside me, but I don't know how to get him out. He's stuck and until he's out I'm stuck, but I'm gonna figure it out.

*(TOMMY goes back behind lectern and gets back on track. CARD #2.)*

A theropod is a type of dinosaur and it's been theorized that birds are descendants of the dinosaur line—in particular, the theropod. In this conference, we will be discussing modern birds and their possible link to the dinosaurs. If birds are decedents of dinosaurs that means that dinosaurs aren't really extinct. They're just different. They changed, you know? But lots of people feel the need to say extinct. They need a way to describe such monumental loss. And so they keep going back 65 million years ago, sifting through the fossils, and looking for an answer to what happened—*why did the dinosaurs become extinct?*

*(CARD #3)*

But I'm not sure that's the right question. They're not really extinct, not all of them. You can see for yourself, five dinosaurs here.

*(Lights rise separately on WORRU, ELI, MARIA, MISS WELLS, and JERRY. The sound of a didgeridoo stretches lethargically through the space. WORRU stands playing the didgeridoo.)*

*Then.*

*The sharp staccato sound of a jackhammer. Lights reveal ELI. He wears a hard-hat and digs with a jackhammer. All sounds continue.*

*Then.*

*The sound of someone tearing newspapers. Lights reveal MARIA. She tears sheets of newspaper and places them on the floor. All sounds continue.*

*Then.*

*The sound of a cigarette lighter striking. Lights reveal MISS WELLS sitting in a wheelchair lighting her cigarette. All sounds continue.*

*Then.*

*The sound of birds. Lights reveal JERRY looking through a pair of binoculars.*

*All sounds continue for a moment, then—one by one—each character speaks. As they speak their sound fades out leaving us with a chorus of voices.)*

A curse is upon me.                   WORRU

You afraid?                           MARIA

I'm your biggest fan.               ELI

To be young again.                 MISS WELLS

Said they'd be fossils someday.   JERRY

A curse is upon me.                   WORRU

You afraid?                           MARIA

ELI  
I'm your biggest fan.

MISS WELLS  
To be young again.

JERRY  
Said they'd be fossils someday.

*(As the characters speak again, their light fades leaving only a light up on TOMMY.)*

WORRU  
A curse is upon me.

MARIA  
You afraid?

ELI  
I'm your biggest fan.

MISS WELLS  
To be young again.

JERRY  
Said they'd be fossils someday.

TOMMY  
*(CARD #4)*

Of course, not all of these dinosaurs survived whatever terrible thing happened 65 million years ago, but some did. Now to understand why some survived and others didn't, we'll have to look at a bunch of different factors.

I know this seems like a whole lot of stuff for the mid-American junior paleontologists' annual conference to cover, but you'll get a better understanding as we dig into it, and I think we owe it to the dinosaurs inside all of us to try.

*(CARD #6)*  
Now when I say dinosaur and bird—

*(As TOMMY speaks, a shadow falls over him plunging the stage into darkness. From the darkness we hear a strange bird like call that mixes with the squeal of tires. Lights shift.)*

***Scene Two: Early Risers***

*A faint light rises on JERRY on his brick front walk. The sun has just broken the horizon. He whistles like a bird and looks through a pair of binoculars, searching the skies. A flashlight cuts through the darkness and lands on him. Holding the flashlight is JERRY'S wife, DOLLY.*

DOLLY

Jerry? Jer? What are you doing out here? It's not even light yet.

JERRY

I heard a call. A strange call. And then a giant shadow fell over the house, like the moon was swallowed. And I thought: a bird is out there. A giant bird. So I grabbed my binoculars.

DOLLY

See anything?

JERRY

Dinosaurs. Toy dinosaurs. Tommy, he was at the mid-American junior—

DOLLY

Jerry, no.

JERRY

—giving his lecture about birds and dinosaurs and extinction, but, he was getting all mixed up and then this shadow fell over him and he screamed.

DOLLY

Jerry, please.

JERRY

Remember how he used to collect those toy dinosaurs? He collected them, categorized them, a junior paleontologist. Our little genius. And then one day, right before the conference . . . he went and buried them under the front walk. Took out all those bricks. Said they'd be fossils someday. Remember?

DOLLY

Come back to bed, Jerry.

*(Pause. Sound of birds singing in distance.)*

JERRY

How can they sing? Every morning—no matter what happened the night before—they still sing.

DOLLY

They're birds, it's what they do.

*(Pause. JERRY looks through binoculars.)*

DOLLY

Jerry, you have to work in the morning, it's late, come back to bed.

*(Leading JERRY off, singing a kind of lullaby.)*

Shh. . . song sparrow, yellow warbler, hooping crane, wood thrush. . . . there we go now, back to bed. . . Northern flicker, snowy owl, California condor...

*(DOLLY flips off flashlight and leads JERRY back to bed. Lights shift.)*