

Birds, Are They Real?

By

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FADE IN:

INT. EMMETT HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

DARBY (15), sits alone at a long cafeteria table. She picks at her large metal braces held together by thick rubber bands while holding a drooping sandwich. Darby sits up to look at the camera, a serious tone washing over her. The INTERVIEWER is behind the camera.

DARBY  
(straight-faced)  
Why do you think Big Bird is on  
Sesame Street? To normalize birds,  
to indoctrinate us, to keep us  
unaware of what's really going on.

Students pass behind Darby and GIGGLE, covering their mouths and pointing. One MALE STUDENT turns around as he passes and SHOUTS towards the camera crew.

MALE STUDENT  
Is it true she's part bird?

He motions his arms in a flapping movement.

MALE STUDENT  
BOCK BOCK BOCK.

The students walk away as Darby shakes her head, looking down at her hands.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)  
When did your disbelief involving  
birds begin?

Darby slowly looks at the camera and cautiously speaks.

DARBY  
I knew something was suspicious  
when my mom took me to The Lazy  
Five Ranch one time. An emu  
attacked me and when I looked into  
it's beady red eye I knew something  
was up.

Darby raises her eyebrows and glances away from the camera, vividly recalling the memory, her voice growing more animated.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

I began to see them everywhere.  
Birds on my walk to school, sitting  
on the power lines...watching me.  
They were everywhere. They knew,  
that I knew they knew.

Darby concentrates on the camera.

DARBY

Over the decades birds have been  
slowly replaced with avian robots.  
They watching all of us. The birds  
are the government and they're  
watching.

CLOSE ON - A BIRD

Past Darby's shoulder, a bird is sitting on the window sill  
outside the cafeteria staring inside.

EXT. EMMETT HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Darby exits the cafeteria as the bird swoops towards her.  
Darby SHRIEKS and ducks, the bird barely grazing past her  
head. Darby shakes, her arms covering her head as she  
squats on the ground.

The interviewer and camera crew rush to comfort her. They  
are wearing matching navy t-shirts, with "ANIMAL PLANET"  
printed across the chest.

INTERVIEWER

(mutters)  
Are you okay?

DARBY

(stutters)  
Yeah, I'm so glad y'all came after  
I sent my letter, people need to  
know. The more people that know,  
the less we can be silenced.

INT. CITY HALL - DAY

Darby is standing at the counter of the receptionist in the  
main entrance of City Hall. The RECEPTIONIST hands her a  
packet of papers and continues chatting on the phone. Darby  
shifts towards the camera crew.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

This right here is the key to raising awareness in this town. The people need to know the truth and once I raise 200 dollars, they will be forced to read it every time they drive into town.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Darby walks outside and stands on the steps of City Hall. She points towards the town center at a blank billboard.

DARBY

Soon, I will be renting that billboard and it will read "Birds Aren't Real. Wake Up."

A middle aged man in a suit walks out of the main entrance of City Hall, MAYOR FINCH, he appears in a rush. Darby notices him and quickly approaches him, waving the papers.

DARBY

Mr. Mayor! Mayor Finch! What are you going to do about birds SPYING on the citizens of Emmett in your new term?

He pauses and looks at Darby incredulously. He then GIGGLES and smiles.

MAYOR FINCH

Birds? Why you kids love practical jokes these days.

DARBY

Sir, this is a very serious matter.

MAYOR FINCH

Oh, I know. Why don't you go back inside and tell Glenda at the front desk about your concern. I'm sure she'll get a kick out of it.

The Mayor continues to walk down the steps of City Hall. Darby HUFFS and clenches her fists as she watches him walk away.

DARBY

So typical. A politician in the pocket of the government, a puppet. He's one of them.

(CONTINUED)

Darby shivers and points along the path the Mayor is walking, several pigeons peck at the ground as the he passes.

DARBY  
Surveillance.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Darby is walking down the sidewalk, passing suburban ranch style homes. She pulls a red wagon behind her that is filled with individually wrapped sugar cookies. Darby is wearing a white t-shirt and in sharpie it reads "BIRDS ARE A LIE."

CLOSE ON - POWER LINES

Dozens of birds are perched on the power lines as she passes. Some circle and land on the wire, weighing the lines down further.

Darby walks up to a door and KNOCKS three times. The door opens and a WOMAN in a robe with hot rollers in her hair appears in the door frame.

She smiles and turns her head towards the inside of the house.

WOMAN  
JARED!!! The Girl Scouts are here!

A MAN appears behind the woman and grins.

DARBY  
No, I'm not a girl scout but I am selling cookies as a part of a fundraiser.

WOMAN  
Got any thin mints? Those are just my favorite.

Darby SHAKES her head, opening her mouth to speak but the woman CUTS her off.

WOMAN  
It's fine, we'll take a dozen of what ever you've got. Jared go get my wallet.

Jared disappears and returns with a wallet. Darby is counting a dozen cookies and placing them in a brown paper bag.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

That will be five dollars ma'am.

The woman HANDS Darby a crisp five dollar bill as she grabs the bag filled with cookies. The woman and her husband wave at Darby before SHUTTING their door.

Darby places the five dollar bill in the fanny pack cinched around her waist. She turns around, pulling the wagon and heads towards the house next door.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: A few hours later.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Darby is tired and DRAGGING her feet as she walks down the sidewalk. Her fanny pouch is protruding and her wagon is nearly empty.

DARBY

After this house, we should be sold out. Not many people are willing to hear the truth, bunch of anti-truthers. But soon they will be forced to look at it and my billboard will be the talk of Emmett for years to come.

Darby turns to walk towards a small brick home. She KNOCKS on the door and waits. RUSTLING behind the door begins and CLICKS as the owner unlocks the bolted door.

The door swings open, revealing an elderly man, STANLEY (90), standing with a walker and binoculars strung around his neck.

STANLEY

Hi young lady, what can I do for you?

Stanley SQUINTS and leans forward to read the writing on Darby's shirt.

DARBY

Hi sir. I'm a student at Emmett High and I'm selling cookies to raise money to inform the citizens of Emmett birds being replaced with robots to spy on us.

(CONTINUED)

STANLEY  
(shocked)  
A truther!

Darby's eyes widen to the size of saucers.

DARBY  
YES!

STANLEY  
I knew there were more, I just  
figured they were all underground.  
Thank the Lord we have some youth  
with a real brain, not a bird  
brain.

Darby SNORTS.

DARBY  
It's nice to meet a fellow  
believer, it gets kind of lonely  
sometimes.

STANLEY  
I know, everyone thinks I'm the  
crazed man watching birds all the  
time but really those birds are the  
ones watching.

Stanley points to the birds observing from the lamp post  
across the street.

STANLEY  
(Hushed)  
Come inside, I want to show you  
something and I'll buy the rest of  
whatever you're selling.

Darby quickly throws the remaining cookies in a brown paper  
bag. She leaves the wagon on the stoop and enters Stanley's  
home.

INT. STANLEY'S HOUSE - DAY

She follows him to his living room as he motions for her to  
sit on the couch.

STANLEY  
Sit. I'll be right back.

Darby looks at the cameras enthusiastically.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

It's so nice to meet someone that knows the truth. To be honest, I've never met another truther.

Stanley reappears, pulling a board behind him. He stops. The board is covered with newspaper clippings, photos of birds, maps, and yarn. Darby stares in awe.

STANLEY

I've been working on this for years. All the evidence I have is here. This here proves that the birds work for the bourgeoisie.

DARBY

Are there others like you?

STANLEY

There were but we're all spread out now, when all the birds were killed we went underground. A few of us mail one another or meet every few years but I'm getting a bit old to travel.

DARBY

More people need to know, that's why I'm raising money. I'm going to rent out the billboard in the town square.

STANLEY

Ambitious. Be careful young lady, they're watching.

Darby turns around and looks out the window, the birds from the lamp post stare back at her.

INT. DARBY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Darby's parents sit on the pastel couch. Darby's mom nervously fixes her big frizzy blond wig while Darby's father reclines into the worn cushions.

DARBY'S MOM

Where will this be aired you said?

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Animal Planet, we're doing a segment on animal activists in the area.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY'S MOM

Oh, so exciting. Sweetie, we're going to be on TV.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

What do you think of Darby's work regarding birds?

Darby's father rolls his eyes while her mother's face falls.

DARBY'S MOM

I thought this was about our trips to the Lazy Five Ranch not about Darby's silly conspiracy theory.

DARBY'S DAD

We tried to help her. Take her to the zoo a bunch and go to a bird sanctuary. We even went bird watching in the mountains, but she wouldn't let it go.

DARBY'S MOM

Now, she thinks we work for the government too. I just don't get where it all came from.

Darby's father looks at his wife while she SNIFFLES.

DARBY'S DAD

Your mom is kind of loony, she probably got it from you.

Darby's mother pauses and looks at her husband appalled. She SMACKS him on the chest.

DARBY'S DAD

OW! Well she is! Remember that time she tried to tell us the Earth is flat at Christmas?

Darby's mother straightens her posture and grins for the camera.

DARBY'S MOM

My mother is not crazy, she is just on a lot of medication.

Darby enters the living room, startled to see her parents on the couch with the camera crew.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

Hi mom. Hi dad. I didn't know they  
were interviewing you.

Darby's mother stands QUICKLY and begins loudly whispering to Darby. The camera shifts towards the father on the couch while he smiles uncomfortably.

DARBY'S MOM (O.S.)

I thought this was about our  
family, not about your conspiracy  
theory. Your father and I looked  
like fools when they started asking  
us questions. The whole town  
already thinks we're crazy because  
of you and the whole world will  
too.

DARBY (O.S.)

Why would anyone want to know more  
about our family?

Darby's father's smile falters as looks at his upset wife. Standing up, he points towards Darby.

DARBY'S DAD

(sternly)

Go to your room, young lady.

INT. DARBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Darby enters her bedroom. The pink walls are covered in pictures torn from books of birds.

DARBY

They're not super supportive of my  
beliefs.

Darby looks solemn while picking up the fanny pack from her desk and pulling out the cash. She separates the bills and begins counting.

DARBY

I think I'm going to have to raise  
a bit more, sell some cookies at  
school this week.

INT. EMMETT HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Darby stands behind a table covered in cookies. The table has a white poster tied to the front reading "BIRDS ARE A LIE."

Darby is wearing a new shirt with "THE BIRDS WORK FOR THE BOURGEOISIE" scribbled on it. A young female holding a pen and notepad approaches Darby, CECILE (15).

CECILE

Darby right?

DARBY

Yes, would you like to buy a cookie?

CECILE

Sure, but I write for the Emmett High School newspaper and I was wondering if I could ask you some questions.

DARBY

Of course. I'm always open to spreading awareness about birds or I guess the lack of.

CECILE

What do you mean?

DARBY

Well, the government replaced all the birds with these spy like things to track us.

CECILE

(baffled)

You believe that?

DARBY

(deadpanned)

Obviously, why else would I be trying to spread the word?

CECILE

(curious)

Are there others?

DARBY

Not really, there's an old man in town but other than that it's just me. I'm going to visit him later

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DARBY (cont'd)  
today to bird watch, you can join  
if you'd like.

CECILE  
Yeah sure, I think it'd be good to  
get another perspective.

EXT. STANLEY'S BACKYARD - DAY

Stanley is seated on the chair attached to his walker as he looks through binoculars. In plastic lawn chairs next to him sit Cecile and Darby. Cecile grips her pen and notepad, ready to write.

STANLEY  
Bird watching goes both ways. I  
used to protest back in the day  
when the bird killings began, but  
there wasn't much we could do to  
stop it. Soon all the birds were  
replaced. Now we just try to spread  
awareness.

Stanley lowers the glasses. He POINTS towards the trees at a bird's nest in a pine tree. Cecile frantically writes, hanging onto each word. Darby continues looking through her binoculars.

STANLEY  
A nest. So clever. They're really  
advanced organisms, the average  
person is oblivious to what's  
happening. I do this sometimes,  
come out here to see what's going  
on. It's important for me to know  
my surroundings.

DARBY  
Stanley is the only other person  
I've met that doesn't think I'm  
crazy.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Darby and Cecile are walking down the block, away from Stanley's house.

CECILE  
Stanley seems nice, who else do you  
hang out with?

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

(quietly)

That's really it, everyone at school calls me Big Bird or does the chicken dance in front of me.

Cecile LAUGHS and slaps her hands to her mouth, SILENCING the noise. Embarrassed, she looks apologetically at Darby.

CECILE

I'm so sorry, that's not funny.

Darby pauses and stares at Cecile, emotionless. Redness develops across Cecile's face as she begins to panic.

DARBY

That really hurt.

CECILE

I'm terrible, I wasn't laughing at you. It's not okay that they call you Big Bird, but I can't help but think about kids at school doing the chicken dance.

Darby slowly cracks a smile and begins LAUGHING.

DARBY

It is pretty funny.

Relief passes over Cecile and she CHUCKLES with Darby.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: A few weeks later.

EXT. PET STORE IN THE TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Stanley struggles to push his walker as he walks past the window of a pet shop. He takes a beat, glaring into the window at a colorful parrot perched on a swing.

STANLEY

Trying to infiltrate our homes.  
I'll show them.

Stanley picks up the pace and pushes his way through the door of the pet store.

INT. PET STORE - CONTINUOUS

Stanley frantically walks to the window display, pointing at the grand bird.

STANLEY  
Just who do you think you are?!  
Spying on us civilians!

PARROT  
Polly! Polly wants a cracker!

STANLEY  
(distressed)  
FAKE! FAKE! BIRDS AREN'T REAL!

PARROT  
(squawks)  
BIRDS AREN'T REAL! BIRDS AREN'T  
REAL!

Stanley's gasps as his body clenches and he heels over, collapsing over his walker.

EXT. PET STORE IN THE TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A gurney is loaded into the back of an ambulance. The red and blue lights spin as the SIREN sounds and the doors close. The ambulance races through the town square.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Darby sits in a waiting room, anxiously biting her nails. Cecile is sitting next to Darby and looks at her worriedly before looking at the camera.

CECILE  
He had a stroke. He's doing better now, but he's convinced that Polly the parrot attacked him.

DARBY  
(mumbles)  
He'll be okay. He'll be okay.

CECILE  
When he gets out, they're advising he stays away from birds at all costs...just to be safe.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: A few weeks later.

INT- DARBY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Darby sits on the couch, smiling while staring at the camera.

DARBY

I did it. I raised the money for the billboard. Today is the unveiling and Stanley is finally doing better, so we're going to go to town and protest near it.

Darby holds up the Emmett High School newspaper. A picture of Darby is plastered on the front page. She looks down at it.

DARBY

Cecile's article came out. I know she doesn't believe me when it comes to birds but I'm learning to accept it. The article is really nice, she even quoted Stanley.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Darby stands in the town square holding a sign with a drawing of a pigeon. The pigeon has a text bubble coming from it's mouth that says "I'M A LIE." Stanley is next to her, sitting on his walker, holding a sign that says "WAKE UP."

Behind them is a giant billboard painted blue with white lettering reading "BIRDS AREN'T REAL. WAKE UP." Pigeons cover the top of the billboard.

CLOSE UP - BILLBOARD

More pigeons flock towards the billboard.

Cars whiz past Darby and Stanley, HONKING and drivers SHOUT. Many people are out shopping, stopping to stare at them and the billboard.

DARBY

(chanting)

Birds Aren't Real. Birds Aren't Real. Birds Aren't Real. Birds Aren't Real.

(CONTINUED)

Mayor Finch STOMPS towards them, his fists balled by his sides. He halts in front of Stanley and Darby, glaring down at them.

MAYOR FINCH

Just what do you think you're doing? You can't cause this ruckus in the town square!

DARBY

(startled)

We are voicing our concern, sir. The town of Emmett needs to wake up to what's happening right in front of them.

MAYOR FINCH

This is ridiculous, you two need to stop this right now.

Cecile approaches from behind Mayor Finch, with two scrawny BOYS carrying signs. Cecile is wearing a shirt with "Birds Might Be Fake" written on it.

CECILE

Mr. Mayor! Darby and Stanley are exercising their first amendment right! And we're here to join them! This is public property and you can't remove us!

Cecile and the boys position themselves next to Darby and Stanley. The Mayor HUFFS in frustration and turns to walk away.

As he is walking, his head swivels back like an owl.

CLOSE UP - MAYOR FINCH'S FACE

Scowling while continuously walking forward, his head slowly shifts back into place.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

(silently)

Did y'all see that?

Stupefied, the group stands limp, holding their signs and watching Mayor Finch walk off in the distance. The group looks at one another, petrified. Cecile and Darby make eye contact.

(CONTINUED)

DARBY

(dazed)

Yeah....like an owl.

CECILE

(stunned)

The birds work for the bourgeoisie.

The birds leave the billboard, swarming the sky and fly off  
in the direction of Mayor Finch.

FADE OUT.