

SQUAWK!

A one act comedy (That's for the birds)

by Troy Banyan

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'SQUAWK' - A ONE ACT PLAY (35 minutes in length)

Cast (F3 – M3)

Patience Warriner – a fifty-something writer of anger management books who has anger issues

The below characters are doubled/tripled up

Albert Ross/Intern 4 – PA who is half Patience's age and who has become her live-in lover in last 18 months/One of the interns who comes in at the end

Judge C Bird/Doctor George C Gull – Only the booming voice of the fifty-something avian judge is heard/When the actor is Dr Gull his voice is instantly recognisable during his unorthodox housecall and he also leads the interns into the room off the ward at the end

Clerk/Paige/Intern 1 – The feathered and robed woman who administers court proceedings/The daughter of Patience who disowned her mum when she left her dad for a bohemian lifestyle and Albert/One of the interns who comes in at the end

Fiona Fledgling/Jess/Intern 3 – A confident, young avian woman prosecutor in court/A strong woman who has been having an affair with Albert, ironically through being a fan of Patience's writing/One of the interns who comes in at the end

Chris Chick/Sean/Intern 2 – An unconfident defence lawyer who crumbles in court/The stiff, but very loving and understanding fiancé of Paige who is paraded for the first time to Patience because of the rift/One of the interns who comes in at the end

Synopsis

Patience Warriner is trapped in a recurring dream that she cannot escape. What is real? She doesn't know anymore, but the one constant is her hatred of the seagulls who continually inhabit her area and whose squawking, excreting presence regularly sets off her car alarm, wakes her up and drives her to the brink of insanity, or perhaps even beyond it? The play is set on a night where she is awoken, yet again, by squawking seagulls, while her younger partner Albert sleeps like a baby. As the car alarm goes off she is so angry she storms outside and, from noises heard, it is obvious that she has thrown a stone at them and a gull has dropped from the sky, landing on her car, setting her alarm back off. Patience comes back in, sheepishly climbs back into bed and in no time the bedroom is an Avian Court of Law, and she is on trial for the unlawful killing of Sidney the Seagull.

Whilst she is assigned a rookie defence lawyer (Chick), the prosecuting counsel (Fledgling) is a hotshot lawyer specialising in avian law. With Albert turning out to be a hostile witness, things go bad for her and the heard - but not seen - judge finds her guilty. The following morning Albert is entertaining Jess in the bedroom when Patience comes home feeling unwell, so Jess has to hide in the wardrobe as, firstly, her daughter Paige and new fiancé Sean turn up to tell of their upcoming nuptials, then Dr Gull arrives, and his soothing manner/mature sensuality soon has Patience feeling better and almost swooning in his presence. In no time Jess is found out and she, together with Albert, are given their marching orders: her from the house, him from house, relationship and job.

With everything looking rosy for Patience she gets out of bed and goes to the bathroom to freshen up to join the other three. When she returns to the bedroom, however, Albert is back in bed, it's night-time and she realises it's all been a dream. As she gets amorous with Albert he exits to prepare for love and the Judge's voice booms out passing sentence on her for lack of scruples. When Albert doesn't return she realises it is a dream again and sleeps, waking the following morning only to find it's yet another dream, or is it? The only constant is the squawking of the seagulls, driving her mad.

THE SCENE – BEDROOM OF PATIENCE’S BUNGALOW – EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING

The set is a simple one. It is a bedroom with a double bed – preferably with metal head and foot boards – running from centre back to mid centre stage. Downstage left is the door that leads into the rest of the bungalow. Upstage left is a door that leads into ALBERT’S walk-in wardrobe. In between this door and the left side of the bed is his bedside table. Downstage right is a door that leads into the en suite bathroom. Upstage right is a door that leads into PATIENCE’S walk-in wardrobe. In between this door and the right side of the bed is her table, with mirror at its back. In the wall behind this table is the curtained window.

(The sound of squawking seagulls is very audible outside. PATIENCE is lying on the right side of the bed, tossing and turning: ALBERT is on the left side, wearing an eye mask and ear muffs, and is fast asleep. As the squawking intensifies the sound of a car alarm going off outside is heard, and its flashing light is also visible. PATIENCE bolts up in bed)

PATIENCE: Right, that’s it, they’ve gone too far this time.

(PATIENCE gets out of bed and angrily puts on her dressing-gown and slippers, looking disdainfully at the still sleeping ALBERT)

PATIENCE: Did you hear me ?

(There is no response from ALBERT except for an accentuated snore)

PATIENCE: No, you just sleep on. You sleep through it all..

(PATIENCE walks towards the downstage left door, still looking disdainfully at ALBERT, sighing loudly)

PATIENCE: That’s right..you just lie there. Don’t worry about me at all..I’m only the breadwinner.

(PATIENCE exits the downstage left door and as soon as she does ALBERT opens his eyes and shakes his head. The front door is then heard opening followed by a car alarm going off and a flashing light going on and off outside the curtained window)

PATIENCE: *(Shouting out: off)* You dirty swines. Right, that’s it, I’ve had just about enough of this.

(The sound of the concerted effort of a throw is heard off and this is followed by a distressed squawk. Seconds later a thud on car metal followed by the car alarm and flashing light going off again is heard. A car door opening is then heard following by the sound of the alarm going off and the flashing light stopping. All the squawking eerily stops. The car door is then heard closing, followed seconds later by the front door closing, followed seconds later by a sheepish looking PATIENCE coming back in the room. She almost tiptoes back towards the bed and stealthily climbs back into it. As she does ALBERT stirs)

ALBERT: Huh..*(pushing up ear muffs)*..what’s happened ? *(lifting blindfold)*

PATIENCE: *(No longer angry)* Um..nothing, just go back to sleep.

(PATIENCE lies back in the bed. The light darkens then turns into an eerie, limbo glow. Distant seagull squawking is heard, getting closer and it is very much orchestrated in an ominous sounding ‘group squawk’ rather than ad hoc single squawks. This then tails off)

CLERK: *(Off: solemnly)* Call the defendant..Patience Warriner.

(PATIENCE sits up in bed, bemused. The right wardrobe door then opens and she nudges the still unaware ALBERT. As she does this the CLERK - her face covered in feathers - walks through the door and points at PATIENCE)

CLERK: You must not interfere with the witness Ms Warriner. *(To Albert)* Mr Ross, can you remove yourself from the defendant's stand and go to the witness box ?

(ALBERT almost robotically sits up, removes his blindfold and ear muffs then swivels his legs out the side of the bed. He is wearing silk pyjamas. PATIENCE kneels up on the bed towards the end of it)

PATIENCE: Wait a minute, why does the word 'defendant' keep cropping up ?

(Out of the right and left wardrobe doors then walk, respectively, CHICK and FLEDGLING, and stand at the back unseen by PATIENCE. The former looks a bit tatty with only sporadic feathers over his face, wearing a grubby gown, and shambles his way to the right of the bed, while FLEDGLING is more pristine, with fine plumage, a plush, ornate gown and she strides purposefully to the left side of the bed. CLERK then walks forward, parallel to where PATIENCE is kneeling)

CLERK: All rise for Justice C. Bird.

(CHICK and FLEDGLING face the audience, where the JUDGE is situated, but never seen. CLERK leans across and prods PATIENCE to stand up on the bed, which she duly does, although she doesn't know what to expect or from where)

CLERK: Patience Warriner, it is hereby alleged that you did wilfully and unlawfully cause the death of a *larus canus*...

PATIENCE: A *what* ?

CLERK: It is the Latin name for 'common seagull'.

(There is a disgruntled chorus of squawking seagulls on hearing this description)

PATIENCE: Albert, what's happening ?

CLERK: Silence. You must not talk to the witness.

PATIENCE: Witness ? Defendant ? What's going on here ? And in my bedroom ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: Patience Warriner. How do you plead ?

PATIENCE: What ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: To the charge of the wilful killing of a *larus canus*, or common seagull ?

(Again there is a disgruntled chorus of squawking seagulls on hearing this description)

PATIENCE: Well, if you're trying to say I set out to kill a seagull I dispute that, I merely meant to scare them off because...

JUDGE'S VOICE: There will be plenty of time to air your views on what happened, but for the purposes of the plea..did your actions directly result in the death of the larus canus..Sidney ?

PATIENCE: It..it had a name ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: Yes, of course **he** did, and did your actions directly lead to his death ?

PATIENCE: Well, I..I guess..yes.

JUDGE'S VOICE: So, to the charge of unlawfully killing Sidney the Seagull..what is your plea ?

PATIENCE: I..I..guilty Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Thank you..*(aside)*..please enter the defendant's plea of guilty.

CLERK: Yes m'lud.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Now, would the prosecuting counsel please...

PATIENCE: Wait..um..wait Your Honour. What about swearing an oath, and where's the jury ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: There is no jury. I am judge **and** jury.

PATIENCE: And executioner ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: Well deduced.

PATIENCE: Huh, this is nothing short of a kangaroo court..but with seagulls instead of kangaroos.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Silence, or I shall hold you in contempt of court before we've even commenced proceedings. You have a defence counsel ..and his name is. Mr Chick.

(CLERK backs away and CHICK walks up into her place, being seen for the first time by PATIENCE, who is taken aback by his tatty appearance)

PATIENCE: Who, or what, are you ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: This is Mr Chick. He looks like this because he is still earning his feathers. Avian Law is very complex and takes many bird years to perfect. Fear not though..he will represent you well.

(CHICK nods at PATIENCE and she nods back)

JUDGE'S VOICE: While we are on introductions..here is the prosecuting counsel.

(Out of the left wardrobe door almost struts FLEDGLING, oozing confidence, with beautiful facial plumage, the exact opposite to her shabby opponent. PATIENCE is taken aback)

JUDGE'S VOICE: His opponent, on the other claw, **specialises** in Avian Law and has been practicing it for dodo's years now.

PATIENCE: Oh, this is ridiculous. Why not just hang me now and be done with it ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner. This is your final warning..or you really will be in contempt of court.

PATIENCE: Sorry Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Okay. Now, Ms Fledgling, will you please present the case for the prosecution ?

FLEDGLING: Yes m'lud. I aim to prove that the defendant did wilfully, and with malice aforethought, launch a projectile into the air at a flock of *larus canus*, fatally wounding one which, on dropping from its flight, landed on the roof of the defendant's vehicle, thus extinguishing any life that might have been left in it. I hereby submit Exhibit A as evidence...

(CLERK holds up a dead seagull, which has a cord going from wing to wing. The unseen audience of gulls grows restless on hearing this)

JUDGE'S VOICE: Silence in the gullery.

(The gull noises diminish. CLERK hangs the bird over the bed end right in front of PATIENCE)

FLEDGLING: And also Exhibit B.

(CLERK produces from her pocket a small rock, which she also places on the in front of PATIENCE)

FLEDGLING: I now call my first, and indeed only, witness..Mr Albert Ross.

PATIENCE: Albert ? But...

(ALBERT readies himself at the left side of the bed)

CLERK: Please state your full name.

ALBERT: Albert Ironside Ross.

PATIENCE: You said it was Ian.

FLEDGLING: Mr Ross, can you please explain your relationship to Ms Warriner ?

ALBERT: For the past three years I have been her administrator, P.A, secretary and general dogsbody, the last half of which I have also been her live-in lover.

FLEDGLING: Could you give a bit more detail about your role ?

ALBERT: *(Taken aback)* Well, it's a bit personal but here goes...

FLEDGLING: I mean your employment role Mr Ross.

ALBERT: Oh, I see. Well, I guess I'm her jack of all trades.

PATIENCE: And master of none.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner..this is your final warning.

ALBERT: Yes, with all the various strands of work she's involved with she needed someone to organise her business, her appointments and..yes, basically organise her life..and, well, one thing led to another..as it so often can.

JUDGE'S VOICE: *(Surprised)* **Can** it ?

ALBERT: Well, I'm only speaking from experience of my own circle of friends Your Honour, all our working relationships with our 'bosses' have developed, or evolved, further over time.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Have they now ? Did you hear that clerk ?

(CLERK looks embarrassed)

ALBERT: Yes, well..anyway, I guess the main part of my professional role is as a PA and administrator, checking and updating her diary, booking arrangements, liaising with agents, publishers and venues..that sort of thing

FLEDGLING: Thank you. So, now moving back onto your personal relationship with the accused, can you fill us in on that..in particular how her hatred for *larus canus* impacts on it ?

PATIENCE: Heh, I never said I hated seagulls.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner..this is your final warning. Please continue Mr Ross.

ALBERT: Well, our 'us' time is pretty much dictated by how Pat, um..Ms Warriner, is affected by the seagulls, mainly their incessant noise and, of course, their..you know.

FLEDGLING: Guano.

ALBERT: Huh ?

FLEDGLING: Their droppings.

ALBERT: Um..yes, their droppings, especially as it only ever seems to land on her car.

PATIENCE: There's no 'seems' about it, it **does** always land on my car.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner..this is your final warning. Please continue Mr Ross.

ALBERT: She says..*(in a feminine voice)*.."it must be the colour..of the car that attracts them. They must think it's the sea".

PATIENCE: I don't sound anything like that.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner..this is your final warning. Please continue Mr Ross.

ALBERT: Well, the gulls rule our..well..**her** life. She won't wear earmuffs as she thinks it's **them** that are encroaching on **her** life, not vica versa. She can't concentrate when we're discussing engagements etcetera. Then, when we go to bed, she..well..you know..can't relax, then..when it's time to sleep..she either can't drop off or wakes up as soon as they start their chorus.

PATIENCE: *(Tutting)* Chorus. A chorus is a beautiful, melodic combination of angelic voices, not a..

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner, I'm stopping you there. This isn't another final warning..merely my interjection following your very astute, quite moving description of what a chorus is.

PATIENCE: *(Perplexed)* Thanks, Your Honour ?

FLEDGLING: Yes, well be that as it may..Mr Ross..please can you give your account of the events that happened in the early hours of the morning in question ?

ALBERT: Well, for a change I came up to bed early, to check over the diary for the next day..then when she came up soon after I thought maybe she..um..needed me for extra-curricular activities shall we say, but when she left me in no doubt that my services weren't required I put down the diary, put on my blindfold and ear muffs..and quickly went to sleep.

PATIENCE: Huh, tired – no doubt – from another busy day of doing not much at all.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner..you can probably guess where I'm going with this – after my brief respite – and that is “this is your final warning”.

FLEDGLING: And can I ask you, Mr Ross, why it is you wear these ear muffs ?

ALBERT: Because I know the noise of the gulls will start up, it always does. Let's face it..you can't stop them being in the area so you only have two options: you either block them out so they can't affect you..or, well, you do as Ms Warriner does..and that's let them rule your life to the point of distraction.

FLEDGLING: Or..murder ?

ALBERT: Well, on this occasion..yes.

FLEDGLING: I rest my case Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Thank you Fiona..um Miss Fledgling. Does the Counsel for the Defence have any questions ?

CHICK: Yes Your Honour. Mr Ross, how long have you and Ms Warriner been living at Humbelow Bungalow ?

ALBERT: About ten months.

CHICK: And who was it who chose this property ?

ALBERT: Well, obviously Ms Warriner purchased the house but..well I guess I was the one who sourced it out because it was in such an excellent location for commuting and socialising, whilst also being a stone's throw – pardon the pun - from the coast for fresh sea air and meditation purposes.

CHICK: And, I believe, notorious for heavy seagull migration and population.

ALBERT: Obviously that *wasn't* a deciding factor.

CHICK: Mmm, so are you saying you didn't know of Ms Warriner's aversion to seagulls ?

ALBERT: Well..no, but she also doesn't like hospitals, or shadows, or the number five. Are you trying to suggest I advised her to buy a house where I *knew* there'd be a lot of seagulls ?

CHICK: (*Nervously*) Um..um..bear with me, um..I don't know.

PATIENCE: Oh..objection Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: *What ?*

PATIENCE: Look, no offence, I'm sure he'll be a fine lawyer - or whatever the hell birdlike barristers are termed as - when he's earned his feathers but I would very much like to dispense with his services and defend myself..(to CHICK)..sorry, and I'd also like to say that I have no further questions for this witness and would like to put myself on the witness stand right now.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Well, this is highly irregular..but it is allowable..(to CHICK)..I'm sorry Mr Chick but your services are no longer required..and..(to ALBERT)..you may stand down Mr Ross.

(CHICK turns sadly and pathetically trudges off out of the right wardrobe door)

PATIENCE: Right, I am ready to be questioned.

FLEDGLING: Okay, but are you sure you don't wish to cross-examine the witness now ?

PATIENCE: No..(pointedly)..I've heard quite enough from him.

FLEDGLING: Fine. So, Ms Warriner, you pleaded guilty to the charge of unlawfully killing a larus carnus...

(The disgruntled seagull gallery squawks again)

PATIENCE: Yes, I did. I aimlessly threw a stone up into the black, black night..into a mass of noise.. nothing else..but instead of scaring them away the stone hit one of the circling squawkers and it fell, somewhat ironically, onto the top of my car which had – seconds earlier – been the recipient vehicle of an almost nightly deposit of guano, setting off – once again – my admittedly over-sensitive car-alarm. There, I've said my piece, there is nothing else to add.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Really ? Just say what's on your mind then.

PATIENCE: Well, as Mr Ross alluded to..I can't lie..I **do** loathe seagulls.

(The disgruntled seagull gallery squawks again)

JUDGE'S VOICE: Quiet in the gullery. Continue Ms Warriner.

PATIENCE: Well, they just perch there, on top of lampposts and buildings, looking down their beaks at everyone and everything..surveying, assessing, sizing up who or what their next target or prey will be. Will they swoop down to make a withdrawal of food from an innocent bystander, or will they make a deposit of guano, again on an innocent bystander ? Life's just a game to them.

FLEDGLING: Huh, you sound jealous Ms Warriner. Surely life **is** just a game..of give and take..which is what they do.

PATIENCE: Yes, but no-one, or nothing, benefits but them. They're just laughing at us all the time.. and that's exactly what their squawking sounds like to me.

(The disgruntled seagull gallery squawks again)

PATIENCE: Yes, that's it, just carry on squawking. You win. I give up. I rest my case.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Mmm, that's not much of a defence Ms Warriner. Do you have anything to say in mitigation at least ?

PATIENCE: I don't see any point Your Honour, this whole thing has been a joke so perhaps I should carry on the comedy theme, you know..I've never been up before the beak at all.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner, now..I've given you several final warnings already...

PATIENCE: Then give me another..I don't care..*(pointing to ALBERT)*..as for you..I can see now how gull-ible I've been..while all the time you've been feathering your nest...

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner. Whilst these are quite amusing asides..I think you know what's coming...

PATIENCE: Oooh, I don't know, let me guess, a final warning perhaps ?

JUDGE'S VOICE: Ms Warriner, before I pass sentence on you..can you tell me what it is you do for a living ?

PATIENCE: *(Tersely)* I'm a writer.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Of what, may I ask ?

PATIENCE: *(Sheepishly)* Um..mainly self-help books, Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Focussing on any particular area ?

PATIENCE: Um..'anger management' Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: And ?

PATIENCE: 'Self-control' Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: And ?

PATIENCE: 'Making a good impression and influencing people' Your Honour.

JUDGE'S VOICE: Mmm. Well, to keep the glib tone of a minute ago going a bit longer..you seem to have scored an 'own gull' Ms Warriner. Please take her away.

PATIENCE: But..what about the verdict ?

(The CLERK starts ushering PATIENCE away towards the down R door into the wardrobe)

JUDGE'S VOICE: You are clearly guilty Ms Warriner. I will now retire to consider your sentence.

(The CLERK hangs the seagull around PATIENCE'S neck then ushers her out through the right wardrobe door, carrying the stone herself. FLEDGLING turns and exits through the left wardrobe door, leaving only ALBERT on stage. Night then turns quickly to day and ALBERT potters happily around the stage, still in his silk pyjamas. He walks over to the window and pulls back the curtains to let in even more daylight. He looks out expectantly then splashes cologne on his face, under his armpits then sprinkles a bit down inside the front of his pyjamas, all the time humming an inane but happy tune)

(There is a coded knock on the front door. ALBERT puts down the cologne then runs out of the downstage left door. The front door opening, followed by greeting noises are heard off. This is quickly followed by ALBERT re-entering, leading JESS in by the hand. Once in the bedroom they kiss passionately)

JESS: Oh Albie, how long have we got ?

ALBERT: She's giving a talk at a W.I luncheon..so will be ages yet.

JESS: You do know I feel uneasy about all this, especially as I'm such a big fan of hers ? In fact..it's her books that helped me climb the ladder at my firm...

ALBERT: Yes yes, but as we both know that there is no room for sentiment in business..I suggest that we...

(A car door is heard slamming outside. ALBERT runs to the window and looks out of it)

ALBERT: Oh God..it's her.

JESS: What shall I do ?

ALBERT: She must've just forgotten something. She'll just get it and go.

JESS: What if what she's forgotten is in this room ?

ALBERT: Good point.

(The front door is heard opening. ALBERT opens the L wardrobe door)

ALBERT: *(Whispering loudly)* Wait in my wardrobe..she won't need anything from in there.

(ALBERT shoves JESS into the left wardrobe, closes the door then lies pensively on the bed. As he does, the flustered PATIENCE enters downstage left. She looks disdainfully at the prostrate ALBERT)

PATIENCE: Hard at it I see.

ALBERT: I've literally just led back down..thinking about things.

PATIENCE: Well, sorry to shatter your thoughtful tranquility but I'm not feeling well..*(lying on the right side of the bed)*..and a doctor will be calling around soon.

ALBERT: Oh,um..won't it be better if you're lying on the lounge sofa for when he arrives ?

PATIENCE: Why ?

ALBERT: Um..I don't know..*(quickly)*..who's going to let him in then ?

PATIENCE: *(Flabberghasted)* Well, **you** of course. I'd like it if you did it in the role of a loving partner.. but if I need to refer you to the 'any other duties' section of your Job Description I will...

ALBERT: Okay okay..I get the picture. **I'll** let him in. You know..I **thought** there was something wrong with you this morning.

PATIENCE: Yes, I had a very disturbed night's sleep.