

The Flock

Episode Six

SCENE ONE

[FX: Hubbub of unintelligible human chatter, culminating in warm applause]

[FX: Clucking of chickens]

GOLD BANTAM What was that?

SILVER BANTAM Sebright Bantam category wasn't it?

GOLD BANTAM That's us.

SILVER BANTAM Time to show our stuff.

[FX: More clucking]

[FX: Parting of a curtain]

[FX: More applause]

GOLD BANTAM Strut, strut, strut.

SILVER BANTAM And- ELEGANT POSE.

GOLD BANTAM Hold it.

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SILVER BANTAM H-old it.

GOLD BANTAM You heard about this fanciful notion some parrot has come up with?

SILVER BANTAM Cloud Cuckoo Land?

GOLD BANTAM Sounds ludicrous, doesn't it.

SILVER BANTAM But seems to appeal to the masses.

GOLD BANTAM Soon every bird and their beak are going to be trying to get in on that.

[FX: Louder applause]

SILVER BANTAM Right, next spot.

GOLD BANTAM Strut, strut, strut.

SILVER BANTAM And- CONFIDENT POSE.

GOLD BANTAM Hold it.

SILVER BANTAM H-old it.

GOLD BANTAM Perhaps we should offer our capable services.

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SILVER BANTAM Whole endeavour could use some pedigree I wager.

GOLD BANTAM Got the right sort of wattle for the job.

SILVER BANTAM Know how to rise to the top.

GOLD BANTAM Bred for it, aren't we?

SILVER BANTAM Aristocratic heritage.

[FX: More loud applause]

GOLD BANTAM Last one.

SILVER BANTAM Strut, strut, strut.

GOLD BANTAM And- MAGNANIMOUS POSE.

SILVER BANTAM Hold it.

GOLD BANTAM H-old it.

SILVER BANTAM We can keep the riffraff in check while we're at it.

GOLD BANTAM Make sure the spoils go to the right places.

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SILVER BANTAM Don't want the status quo getting too wobbly.

GOLD BANTAM What would the staff think?

SILVER BANTAM They so depend on a bit of order.

GOLD BANTAM Structure.

SILVER BANTAM The comforts of the familiar.

GOLD BANTAM Bless them.

[FX: More loud applause]

SILVER BANTAM Thank you, thank you, thank you.

GOLD BANTAM Flourish to the crowd.

SILVER BANTAM And we are done.

[FX: Curtains closing]

GOLD BANTAM Now let's hunt down those oiks who think they're running the thing.

SILVER BANTAM And get the right birds at the top of the pecking order.

[THE FLOCK intro theme]

SCENE TWO

[FX: Gentle breeze]

JONNY SWIFT The Diary of Jonny Swift.
In-flight log 245.
Word has spread of the plan,
To build a Cloud Cuckoo Land in the sky.
Hearts have been set aflutter.
The great forces of bird-dom have been galvanised.
For better or worse?
There's certainly a lot of movement going on.
A vast array of characters,
From far and wide,
Homing in on our friends Parrot, Budgie and Magpie.
Ready to offer their knowledge, expertise,
And opinions.
Maybe I should be thinking about where I fit,
Into all of this.
Up in the sky,
In this new utopia-
Do you reckon they'll need a narrator?

SCENE THREE

[FX: Distant wingbeats]

MAGPIE I think we've got visitors.

PARROT News- news gets around fast.

BUDGIE It's because it's such a great idea.
Hope-
Is-
Infectious.

MAGPIE So is disease.

PARROT Oh- oh great.

MAGPIE Just an observation.
Perhaps we should set up some kind of system-
To contend with the coming deluge.

BUDGIE Look, don't worry about it.
I'll handle this.

PARROT Are you- are you sure?

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BUDGIE You- don't think I'm the right bird for the job?

PARROT No, no, it's just-

BUDGIE You've inspired me, OK?
I want to help!

MAGPIE What does 'handling it' involve exactly?

BUDGIE I'll talk to this lot, see what they're about.
Sort the wheat from the chaff.
The nuts from the shell.
The seeds from the not quite so tasty other seeds.
Present only the best of the best ideas to you two.
Free you up to focus on the big picture.

PARROT That's very-
Noble of you.

BUDGIE What can I say?
You've really brought out the best in me.

PARROT Well go for it, then. By- by all means.

BUDGIE Thank you, mate.
Magpie?

MAGPIE Enjoy yourself. Have fun with it.

BUDGIE I'll be back before you know it.
See ya!

[FX: Budgie flying off]

PARROT And we focus on the big picture.

MAGPIE We focus on the big picture.

PARROT Easy, right?

MAGPIE Turn the dream into reality.

PARROT The hypothetical into the- into the actual.

MAGPIE The ineffable into the- effable.

PARROT Maybe- maybe we should have a drink first?

MAGPIE Freshen up the grey matter?

Excellent idea.

I spotted this great little pond side spot on the way over here.

WEAVER BIRD Right you are, then.

(Slight pause)

Ready when you are.

BUDGIE Um-

Let's see-

Please state your name, any relevant qualifications, and what you believe you can bring to this enterprise.

WEAVER BIRD Gotcha.

Weaver Bird, and my specialism is- weaving.

See the first thing I thought when I heard about this whole plan was-

You want to build a great big nest way up in the sky?

Well, you're going to need some ballast.

Some solid foundations.

Some real tightly wound leaf fibres, grass, maybe twigs even.

And that, my friend, is where I come in.

Clue is in the name.

Weaver-

Bird.

And my weaving capabilities are mind-expanding.

You'll be questioning your pre- and post-weaver bird reality, once I get started.

'Was I so blind to the true beauty of weaving!?', you'll be saying.

Yes. Yes you were.

Check this out.

I'm weaving now and I'm not even thinking about it.

[FX: Weaving sounds]

Weaving with my foot.

Weaving with my beak.

Weaving with my wing.

Weaving in mid-air

Weaving upside down.

Weaving with my eyes closed.

Effortless.

And I ain't even gone full weaver.

Not yet.

But I will.

Oh, I will.

Thank you for your time.

BUDGIE

OK, let me just note that down-

Weaver bird-

Weaving.

Thank you.

If you could just go and wait over there, we will inform you of our decision- shortly.

OK.

Um.

BUDGIE (CONT'D) Next, please!

BOWER BIRD Bower bird, and my specialism is- contemporary architecture.

Now, don't be fooled by other birds that claim, oh, we'll build you a great nest.

'We might even weave it for you.'

But is it great?

Is it really?

Or is it actually totally boring and dull?

Because with me, you don't need to worry about that.

Oh no.

I am renowned, legendary even, for the beauty, the innovation, the daring of my courtship structures.

Imposing walls, grand avenues, fine objects sumptuously displayed.

There is contrast, there is illusion, there is drama.

It's kind of my whole deal.

The power of the bower.

And let me tell you, I will bring that pioneering approach directly to the construction of Cloud Cuckoo Land.

It will be embedded in the very essence of the place.

I will not let that place look trash.

I won't allow it.

If there's even a chance the place you're building could look rubbish and terrible?

Get a bower bird involved.

You will not regret it.

BUDGIE Will not regret it-

I see.

Bower bird- got it.

Thank you.

Yes, over there, please.

Let me just-

Who's next?

PEACOCK

Peacock, and my specialism is- pure shimmering loveliness.

Yes I have heard what others have to say with regard to aesthetic design, but I must add-

When you seek out a place for beauty in your work, why opt for the inert, the lumpen, the rooted, when instead you can invest in the very embodiment of extravagance; a living, breathing example of splendour right in front of you, ready to illuminate proceedings whenever you should need it.

Look on my feathered display of gleaming eyes, canopied behind me, and catch a glimpse of the all-seeing eternal.

Stare into infinity, and let it stare back into you.

Become one with creation.

[FX: Hypnotic sounds]

You would be a fool to let such an opportunity pass you by.

Let a peacock strut across your celestial stage, and the whole endeavour will be elevated, to the very heavens themselves.

What more is there to add?

BUDGIE

Very- impressive.

[FX: Cry of a peacock]

I will certainly- add your proposal to the list.

Peacock.

Thank you.

If you'd just wait with the others-

Let me just have a look down the length of the-

Woah.

That is-

Rather a long queue.

This could take a while.

Well, I'm sure Parrot and Magpie are using this time productively.

SCENE FIVE

[FX: Downing of drinks]

MAGPIE (*slurring*) The thing is, though, the thing is, the thing is-
Big picture it's-

PARROT (*also slurring*) Quite- quite a lot of pressure!
You know?

MAGPIE Exactly!

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PARROT Ex-exactly!

MAGPIE Where do you even start?

PARROT Got to get that thing that's just been in- in your head-

MAGPIE In your head the whole time, safe and sound.

PARROT And turn it- turn it into something-
That other people can *see*.
And let you know if they *like* it.

MAGPIE Or don't.

PARROT Well- well, quite!

MAGPIE It's scary.

PARROT It *is* scary.

MAGPIE And then – whoosh!
The joy of it goes out the window.

PARROT And oh look, here comes the stress.

(Parrot and Magpie sigh)

MAGPIE I wonder how Budgie's getting on

PARROT Been a while-?

SCENE SIX

[FX: Bird chatter]

BUDGIE Next, please!

LOVEBIRD Lovebird, and my specialism is- relationship advice.
Want an insight into what it takes to maintain a fulfilling, long-lasting, mutually supportive relationship?
That may or may not include snuggles?
Yes?
In that case you are going to need some lovebirds around.
Something to aim for.
Something to inspire.
Something that makes everyone go 'awwwwww, how cute' that bit more often.
And decide, you know what, let's give love a shot.
Let's just give it a shot!
All you need is-
Lovebirds.
It'll help with morale, I promise you.

BUDGIE Yeah I guess so?

 Hmm.

 Lovebirds.

 It's on the list.

 Next!

NIGHTINGALE Nightingale, and my specialism is- lyric, dramatic and epic poetry.

 Now some birds may accuse me of zealotry in my service to the
 muses, brandish me a whimsical sender forth of song, an indulger of
 airy sentiments, and honey-tongued words.

 I'm sorry but-

 Guilty as charged.

 And in advance of this interview, I have taken the liberty of writing
 several lovely odes, a fistful of sonnets, a stray villanelle, I have even
 studied haiku.

 If I may:

 Way up in the sky/

 In our new Cloud Cuckoo Land/

 A bit cold, perhaps?

(Slight pause)

 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables.

 If you'd forgotten.

 It's a haiku.

 That's what a haiku is.

BUDGIE Um, great, really great stuff.

 But could we move it along please?

Got a lot to get through-

PALM COCKATOO Palm cockatoo, and my specialism is- the power of rhythm.

Did you know I'm a really good drummer?

Like, really good.

Give me a stick or a seed pod, and a dead tree, and you are getting thunderous rhythm that can be heard up to 100 metres away.

Guaranteed.

And who doesn't need an impromptu drum circle every now and then?

I did actually bring some bongos just in case of emergency-

[FX: Bongo playing]

BUDGIE No I didn't know that, but could you- not do that?

There are still a lot more of you to get through-

[FX: Bongo playing fades into the distance]

LYREBIRD Lyrebird, and my specialism is- superb mimicry.

Curious to hear the sounds of human development without the drawbacks?

I can do that for you!

[FX: A strange mix of car alarm, dial-up modem, fax machine or equivalent]

Curious to hear the sounds of potential musical genres as yet unexplored by bird kind?

I can do that too!

[FX: Avant garde beatboxing]

Oh, and not to be rude, but that palm cockatoo is a little basic, if you know what I mean?

You need a pro for this sort of thing.

BUDGIE How do you even- do that?

Who's-

RED-BACKED SHRIKE Red-backed shrike.

AKA

Butcher bird.

AKA

The Butcher

AKA

Butch

AKA

Butch Catch A Bee and the Spike Storage Kid.

Look, you're going to need some food up there, and you're going to need some food storage.

I got you covered on both counts, my friend.

Do you know how many things you can do with a skewer?

R-B SHRIKE (CONT'D) I'm thinking of putting out my own recipes.

I mean, look-

[FX: Something being impaled]

BUDGIE Oh, that is disgusting-

TURKEY VULTURE Turkey vulture, and my specialism is- clean-up and sanitation.

Death.

We can't get away from it.

You're going to have some bodies up there at some point, and you're going to need some way to get rid of them.

And voila, here I am, ready to get my beak dirty.

Did you know my hygienic bald head means all that blood and gore; it just doesn't stick to me.

Worried about contamination?

Did you know my guts are so acidic they can destroy anthrax, cholera, and all manner of other agents of disease?

Did you know, as an added bonus I've got a great sense of smell?

If something's died, even in a real awkward place, and no one can figure out where that horrendous stench is coming from, no problem. I'll sniff it out and have it sorted in no time

Clean, efficient, effective.

And my rates are very reasonable.

BUDGIE You do conjure up a very vivid picture-

SEAGULL Seagull, and my specialism is- homo sapiens deterrence.

SEAGULL (CONT'D) Have you thought about defence?

Have you thought about how those humans are going to react?

Because they're not going to take kindly to this old project, believe you me. I mean, they seem to get very worked up if you even highlight a few weak spots in their food processing systems, but I digress-

My suggestion?

We poo on them.

Yep.

Unleash great torrents of guano from on high.

That'll really throw them off. They hate the stuff.

Stop them in their tracks- with poo.

Oh, and if we can get some chips lined up after that initial barrage, I'd be very grateful.

Restock the supply lines if you know what I mean.

BUDGIE

Defence?

You're right-

I hadn't really thought about that-

PELICAN

(with a mouthful of water) Pelican, and my specialism is- waterworks.

Sorry.

[FX: Gush of water]

Pelican, and my specialism is- waterworks.

I hate to say it, but those pesky humans may well continue their advances even after they have been covered in our excrement.

And what do we do then?

Pour water over them.

Gushes of it, straight out of my throat pouch for the most part.

Sounds simple, but do you have any idea of the amount of water I can jockey around in this thing?

They'll be slipping and sliding around, streaked with droppings, and questioning their very purpose in life.

But they're tenacious that lot.

They'll be coming up with all sorts of contraptions and contrivances to bolster their assault.

We may still need to do more.

BUDGIE More?

OSTRICH Ostrich, and my specialism is- extreme violence.

Look.

I can kick humans in the face.

I can definitely do that.

I've done it before.

I'm a bad-tempered, vicious individual, and I hold a massive grudge.

I will kick them in the face, and then I will kick them again.

And a third time, just to make sure.

But what the pelican says is true.

Will that even be enough?

How many kicks is it going to take?

Will they ever stop coming for us?

BUDGIE This is all a bit- worrying.

Not helped by all that racket-

From the waiting area.

[FX: Arguing birds]

What are they arguing about?

Next in the queue will have to wait-

GOLD BANTAM Hello there, young- Budgie is it?

SILVER BANTAM We're a couple of pedigree bantams, happened to be in the area, and we thought-

BUDGIE Sorry. Applications are temporarily closed.

Because I need to go and sort-

That lot out.

[FX: Arguing birds getting louder still]

This is ridiculous.

All that stuff about defence, and we're just wasting time.

Need to whip this lot into shape.

Parrot? Magpie?

A little help?

(No response.)

BUDGIE (CONT'D) No?

Down to me then.

Budgie.

You are confident.

You are accomplished.

You are taking charge.

(Beat)

(to the Gathered Birds) Excuse me?

[FX: Arguing birds continue, oblivious]

EXCUSE ME?

[FX: Arguing birds still do not respond]

This clearly isn't working.

Maybe If I step out of sight for a moment-

Now have I picked up enough human to-

[FX: Budgie mimicking human speech, which comes across as reversed or distorted, barely intelligible – WHAT ARE ALL THOSE BIRDS DOING]

[FX: Birds hush, arguing stops]

BUDGIE *(back to normal voice)* Look you lot, we need to get started.

Before the whole thing gets messed up.

Got it?

[FX: Awkward mumbling from the birds]

GOT IT?

GATHERED BIRDS GOT IT.

BUDGIE Good.

GATHERED BIRDS GOOD.

BUDGIE Now here's how we're going to do this-

[FX: Rush of activity]

[THE FLOCK outro theme]

[CREDITS]

[END]