

OFFICE GAMES

a play

by

Michael Perlmutter

Michael Perlmutter
1719 N. 6th St
Port Hueneme, CA 93041
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com
www.DirectingHamlet.com

CHARACTERS

JONATHAN	a middle aged executive
GINNY	Secretary/Assistant to Jonathan, several years his junior
ELAINE	Office manager/VP of “stuff”/sales etc. Jonathan’s right hand—as many years younger than Jonathan as she is older than Ginny.

THE SETTING

A business office in Southern California. Modest at best. With (at least two, if not three) desks. The usual office amenities such as phones, computers and the like; doors leading in from the street as well as other rooms, supply closet, bathroom, other offices etc. There is indeed a separate office upstage: A glass conference room, used for presentations and “private” meetings (well, as private as you can get away with where “glass”: walls are concerned.)

THE TIME

The present (not the immediate present but like yesterday or today . . . you know what I mean.)

*“I think every story should really be a love story at its heart.
At least every play Ive ever seen. “*

- NINA
(*The SEAGULL* by Anton Chekhov)

SCENE 1

(At rise
A business office. A glass conference room,
upstage, sits separated out the rest of the office and
desks.¹)

While in the downstage area of the office, JONATHAN, a middle aged executive in casual business attire is staring at the recently evacuated front door as if watching his money walking away; as GINNY, his younger but not too young secretary/assistant, waits out the uncomfortable silence. But JONATHAN lets the moment linger. GINNY eventually pours him a cup of coffee, preparing it to his taste and sets it down in front of him. She then steps back away, returning to her previous position . . . waiting. JONATHAN takes a drink of the coffee, saying nothing, then sets the coffee back down, still poised to look out the closed door, lost in thought.)

GINNY

I'll . . .

(No reply. Nor did she expect one.)

Yeah . . .

-

JONATHAN

Any messages?

GINNY

(Without moving to the phone other than to eye ball it for a
“message light”)

No.

JONATHAN

(Lets this sink in.)

You can switch the phones back on.

GINNY

(Moving now:)

Yes . . . Sir . . .

1 . In deference to “Bob” who almost always takes things too literally, and owing to the “magic” of theatre, there is no glass in the “glass” walls creating the “glass conference room”. This allows us (the audience) to actually hear what may transpire inside the conference room; while those outside the *glass* conference room (aka actors) can not--or will at least *pretend* they can not (aka “*acting*”)--for the benefit of carrying the story forward while allowing the audience (us) in on the fun . . . OK, enough of these side comments— let us continue on, shall we?)

JONATHAN

(Still preoccupied:)

Oh, don't give me that shit.

GINNY

You're upset; I'm just giving you space.

JONATHAN

Damned right I'm upset. I've got a right to be upset.

(Pause.)

JONATHAN

There are gonna be some changes around here.

GINNY

Whatever you want.

JONATHAN

We need back up. We need back up for our back up.

GINNY

You're right.

JONATHAN

I need access to all the files. To everybody's files.

GINNY

You got it.

JONATHAN

Are you writing this down?

GINNY

(As she starts to do so.)

Of course.

(GINNY finishes jotting down the notes. There is a pause. She responds by reading them back aloud:)

GINNY

You want back up. You want back up to the back up. You want access to everybody's files.

JONATHAN

I want changes.

GINNY
(Writing it down:)

Changes. Yes.

JONATHAN
And I control the passwords.

GINNY
Passwords controlled: got it.

JONATHAN
Gumby. With an “i”--

GINNY
With an “i”.

JONATHAN
--Everybody’s the same. I don’t care: I want to have access.

GINNY
Access.

JONATHAN
Don’t placate me.

GINNY
I’m not.

JONATHAN
I am not in the mood.

(ELAINE enters, her age fits somewhere between Ginny and Jonathan’s, she is also dressed for a casual business meeting but slightly undone, carrying several files and a commuter cup of coffee. She is late and she knows it. The overall lack of response to her arrival suggests:)

ELAINE
You didn’t get my message. Fuck.
(Sets down her things onto a desk—hopefully her own. To herself more than anyone else:)
Cops.

JONATHAN
You were stopped by the cops?

(As the scene continues GINNY makes herself more scarce, returning to her own desk and busying herself with paperwork.)

ELAINE

I wish. I have had one hell of a morning. You're not going to belie—How did the meeting go?

JONATHAN

How do you think the meeting went?

ELAINE

(Blurting it out in self defense:)

I found a head.

JONATHAN

How do you *think* . . . the meeting went?

ELAINE

We can reschedule.

(Opens her coffee mug and moves to refill it from the coffee pot.)

JONATHAN

No, they won't.

GINNY

Whaddo you mean you found a head?

(Senses Jonathan's disinterest:)

Sorry.

ELAINE

I mean, I found a fuckin' head.

JONATHAN

Give me one reason why I shouldn't fire you right now?

ELAINE

I found a fucking head.

JONATHAN

(To Ginny:)

You want to give us the room for a minute?

GINNY

. . . Of course.

(GINNY exits to the conference room to clean up.)

ELAINE

You wanna use the conference room?

JONATHAN

Fine. Ginny?

(GINNY changes gears and vacates the conference room, the three of them taking turns to walk thru the same doorway. JONATHAN closes the door behind them.)

JONATHAN

Have you been drinking?

ELAINE

One drink. I found a fucking head.

JONATHAN

You've already said that.

ELAINE

Hear me out on this: this is not a normal thing for me. I was driving down the stretch of Telegraph, coming the back way 'cuz there's less traffic—

JONATHAN

You coming to a point?

ELAINE

. . . I don't want to start over.

JONATHAN

You are so fucking fired.

ELAINE

On the turn right before Gull Canyon, at the foot of this hill I had to swerve the car cuz there was something in the road. I don't run over things like other people do. It was a plastic bag like you'd get to put lettuce in at the grocery store AND it was looking at me. So I stopped the car to see what fuck it was and it was . . . a head.

JONATHAN

A human head?

ELAINE

Yes.

JONATHAN

Male or female?

ELAINE

I don't know. There was all this blood—so I don't know whether there was lipstick or . . . there was no facial hair but—I . . .

(Gathers her composure together as best she can—
continuing where he would want to hear:)

I couldn't get any reception on my fucking phone out in the middle of nowhere but there was one of those Callbox things the highway patrol put out before we had cell phones and I called . . . it in and I had to wait for cops to show up and I asked them to call you and explain what was going on but obviously they didn't. So, I'm a bit of a mess right now and yes, I had a drink, wouldn't you?

(A beat.)

JONATHAN

You are so fucking fired.

ELAINE

You don't believe me?

JONATHAN

Would you?

(Pause.)

JONATHAN

That account cost me six figures.

ELAINE

This was not a normal morning.

(Pause.)

ELAINE

I'm going to let you—I'm going to let you calm down . . . before you decide anything rash here. Because I can back this up. There's a police report with my name on it somewhere. Because this is not shit you just make up like my alarm didn't go off or I had a flat or something.

JONATHAN

Good to know.

ELAINE

Oh, fuck you.

JONATHAN
That's not the way you beg for your job back.

ELAINE
You're serious?

JONATHAN
Do I look like I'm joking?

ELAINE
What a fucking prick.

JONATHAN
Go home.

ELAINE
Bullshit.

(The phone rings. GINNY moves to get to it but not before it rings again:)

JONATHAN
Ginny.

GINNY
On it.

(Into the phone:)
Matterson's Chemicals; this is Ginny speaking, how may I help you? - Just a moment, I'll see if he's / available—

JONATHAN
I'm / not.

ELAINE
We're / in a meeting.

GINNY
--He's in a meeting. Is there anything I can help you with? - They're both in a meeting.

ELAINE
Who / is it?

JONATHAN
She / doesn't work here.

GINNY

Can I put you into his voicemail? - Certainly.

JONATHAN

(Opening the door to get a clear answer:)

Who is it?

GINNY

Dave Piero / from Dow.

JONATHAN

Put him to my voicemail.

GINNY

Yes . . . sir.

JONATHAN

I swear, if you keep that up, you're next.

(Enough said. GINNY returns to her silent work while JONATHAN returns to the conference room, closing the door behind himself. There is a brief silence.)

ELAINE

So what happened with Lobero Labs?

JONATHAN

They left.

ELAINE

They'll understand.

JONATHAN

They're not an understanding group of people.

ELAINE

You want me to talk to them?

JONATHAN

They won't believe you. / Hell, I don't believe you.

ELAINE

I can back it up.

JONATHAN

With pictures? 'Cuz you better have pictures with a time stamp. Because these people chose us because we promised to overcome set backs not create them. I didn't have anything. I didn't have files or handouts, power point: nothing. I looked like a fool.

ELAINE

You're not / a f—

JONATHAN

I know that—Oh, yes I am. For relying on you: that makes me a fool.

ELAINE

I'll get them back. Jesus—

JONATHAN

Yeah, 'cause he's about the only one who could pull off a miracle like this. Why didn't you call?

ELAINE

I didn't have any / reception.

JONATHAN

You called the / police.

ELAINE

On a CallBox. God, I just told you that. And I asked them to call you and they said they would but obviously they didn't. They dropped / the ball.

JONATHAN

You dropped it—it's just like you to blame this on some--You could have left after you called it in.

ELAINE

They asked me not to.

(No reply.)

I was in shock.

JONATHAN

You could have left long enough to get reception and make a phone call.

ELAINE

I couldn't / leave.

JONATHAN

Why not?

I / couldn't.

ELAINE

Why not?

JONATHAN

Because it was in the middle of the road. Someone would've run it over.

ELAINE

You could have moved it.

JONATHAN

I wasn't going to touch it.

ELAINE

It was in a plastic bag.

JONATHAN

OH MY GOD.

ELAINE

(Pause.)

JONATHAN

You know what I think? I think you were running late. I think you had too much to drink last night and you followed it with a hair of the dog this morning. You heard about this on the radio and you're just using it to save your fucking job.

ELAINE

I was the one who called it in. They have a report with my name on it.

Go home, Elaine.

JONATHAN

Am I still fired?

ELAINE

Whaddo you think?

JONATHAN

ELAINE

I think I'm not leaving here until I know.

JONATHAN

Have it your way.

(He exits the conference room. Starts looking through desk drawers. To Ginny:)

She doesn't leave that room. She doesn't have access to her desk. You got that?

GINNY

Maybe after things calm down.

JONATHAN

(Writing quickly on forms and signing them.)

She had the chance. She didn't leave. She pushed it.

GINNY

If she really found a head . . .

JONATHAN

(Looking at her "Et tu Brute?" Hands Ginny the paperwork:)

You want the promotion?

GINNY

Excuse me?

JONATHAN

Serve these. Have her sign them. Get her passwords.

GINNY

. . . Are you sure about this?

JONATHAN

This has been a long time coming.

GINNY

You two have . . . history.

JONATHAN

So do you and I. I can hire another her or I can hire another you. It's your call. You want the promotion—consider it a test.

(No reply.)

Or I can hire another both of you.

(Pause. JONATHAN drops the paperwork on the desk between them. He then gets his car keys out of his coat, picks up the files brought in by Elaine and heads for the front door:)

GINNY
Where are / you going?

JONATHAN
To save an account.

GINNY
How?

(But he's gone. Pause.)

ELAINE
Can I come out now?

(GINNY just stares down at the papers on the desk. Pause.
ELAINE quietly opens the conference room door and steps
just outside of it.)

ELAINE
Is he gone?

GINNY
You're not supposed to leave the conference / room.

ELAINE
Oh, for godsakes, give it a break. I trained you, remember?

GINNY
He could come back at any moment.

ELAINE
He's not coming back.

GINNY
He could have left something behind.

ELAINE
Only his dignity.

GINNY
Either way.

ELAINE
Really? OK. We'll play it your way.
(She steps back into the conference room.)

(GINNY follows her in. She debates whether to close the door or not behind herself.)

ELAINE

(Seated at the center of the table.)

Leave it open. I like the fresh air.

(As GINNY sits down:)

Funny, isn't it? A room made of glass and there are no real windows.

GINNY

(Not looking at her:)

I'm going to need your passwords to your computer.

ELAINE

(Reaching for the paperwork.)

We're doing this, are we?

GINNY

(Pulling the paperwork back.)

And your phone.

ELAINE

It's *my* phone.

GINNY

(Clarifying:)

The password for your phone—for your voicemail.

ELAINE

Pokey.

GINNY

With an "i"?

ELAINE

Whaddo you mean with an "i"?--Of course not with an "i". E-Y. But with a Zero for the "o".

GINNY

"P-Zero-K-E-Y"?

ELAINE

Yeah.

GINNY

(Writing it down:)

Thank you. And that's the password for . . . ?

ELAINE

Guess.

GINNY

Both, I imagine.

ELAINE

You don't have to do this, you know.

GINNY

. . . It's not because I want to.

ELAINE

Then don't.

GINNY

If I don't: he'll fire me too.

ELAINE

Nobody's getting fired. We've got him by the balls, don't you know that?

(No reply.)

We've both slept with him.

(No reply.)

Oh for godsakes don't pretend you're not—or that you didn't know.

GINNY

No, I knew . . .

ELAINE

Or that you're not.

(No reply.)

Look, if you want, I can tie you up and make it look like I overpowered you, if you like. We've got zip ties. I'll be gentle.

(GINNY just looks at her as if to ask, "What would that accomplish?")

It's a joke.

(A pause.)

GINNY

Did you really find a head?

ELAINE
 . . . Yeah.

GINNY
 I would've thrown up.

ELAINE
 I'm not saying I didn't.

GINNY
 Oh my God.

ELAINE
 He'll find out. He'll know the truth then this'll all be behind us.

(The phone rings. GINNY looks at Elaine as if to say,
 "Sorry, I have to . . .")

ELAINE
 Of course. Go ahead.

GINNY
 I'll be right back.

ELAINE
 (Indicating the conference room phone:)
 Phone right there.

GINNY
 I may have to look up something.

ELAINE
 Do what you gotta do.

(GINNY exits the conference room to answer the phone.
 ELAINE remains in the conference room for a moment or
 two then allows herself access out to the rest of the office.
 She retrieves her coffee.)

GINNY
 Hello, Matterson's Chemical; Ginny speaking, how can I-- Excuse me? Excuse
 me—No. No hablo espan . . . ol.

(To a dial tone:)

Asshole.

ELAINE
Welcome to America.

GINNY
You're / not—

ELAINE
Lighten up.
(Takes another drink of her coffee as she gathers things
from her own desk:)
So, how're we gonna do this?

GINNY
You know I have to fire you.

ELAINE
Why?

GINNY
Because . . .

ELAINE
Because you want my job? You have to fire me so you can take my job. Damn
girl, aren't you the shit?

GINNY
. . . He offered me / the job.

ELAINE
Of course he did.

GINNY
If I don't / fire you--

ELAINE
Then how will you get my job? Right? But what happens when I come back? I
take my job back then you just slide back to yours; so: what's the point?

GINNY
Maybe he'll keep me in your job AND he takes you back and then he'll have to
just hire another secretary.

ELAINE
An assistant.

GINNY

Whatever.

ELAINE

There isn't enough business.

GINNY

But like you said, we have him by the balls. He gives me the promotion: I keep the promotion.

ELAINE

. . . I'm starting to like you.

GINNY

So, you see why I have to fire you?

ELAINE

Be my guest. Where do I sign?

GINNY

(Showing her:)

Here. Here. And here.

ELAINE

(Lengthening it out:)

And what if I don't sign? Am I still fired? If I don't sign.

GINNY

. . . I would imagine.

ELAINE

You don't know? I've had a real fucked morning. Getting fired is hardly the cherry on the top of it all. You ever seen a dead person? Up close? Part of a dead person?

GINNY

I imagine it was horrible for you.

ELAINE

(Topping off her coffee, eyeing things about the office as the scene continues:)

It's not something you take sober, I'll tell you that. So whaddo I get out of it?

GINNY

What?

ELAINE
If I sign? Whaddo I get it?

GINNY
I . . . What's coming to you I imagine.

ELAINE
When?

GINNY
I don't know these things.

ELAINE
You should, you're firing me.

GINNY
Do you know these things?

ELAINE
(Shrugs:)
I've never had to fire me.

GINNY
You know what I mean.

ELAINE
No, I don't think I'm going to sign.

GINNY
Oh, come on. You said it yourself, it's just a formality.

ELAINE
Why?

GINNY
Because we've got him by the balls.

ELAINE
Oh . . . Dammit.

GINNY
What?

ELAINE

We were so close. We were so close to having a scene about two women discussing something other than a man.

GINNY

What the hell are you talking about?

ELAINE

You know, that test? Some women's lib group came up with it for the movies. If two women can have a scene without discussing a man.

GINNY

You're batshit, you know that?

ELAINE

Maybe.

GINNY

What're you looking for?

ELAINE

Evidence. Evidence that I was here. That I meant something. That I made a difference. That I was not some head on a platter for you to come along when you just happen to be driving by.

(Stops, pointing at her:)

You would have run it over.

GINNY

What?

ELAINE

I stopped. I stayed there so no one . . . but you, you're the type: you would've run right over it, wouldn't you? Why? To hear it crack or . . . smooosh?

GINNY

Now you're just being sick.

ELAINE

You want my job? You earn it. You gotta get me to sign.

(The challenge:)

Get me to sign.

(No reply.)

See? Now we have a scene. Now we have a scene (not about a man).

GINNY

This isn't a movie.

ELAINE

It could be though—it could be. Didn't you ever want to be in the movies—when you were a kid? Growing up? Didn't you? I know I did. And this . . . this is just surreal enough . . .

GINNY

I know what you're trying to do?

ELAINE

Do you?

GINNY

You're trying to make me bond with you. It's a sales game. Trying to make me think we're friends.

ELAINE

Aren't we?

(No reply.)

That hurts.

GINNY

I'm just trying to do my job. I can't afford to lose my job. You can afford to lose yours, but I can't afford to lose mine.

ELAINE

Next time try to pull out some tears.

(A slight beat.)

GINNY

Sign the fucking papers.

ELAINE

I don't think so. I'm not feeling it.

(The phone rings. The two women look at each other.
ELAINE nods: "Go ahead". GINNY does so:)

GINNY

Matterson's Chemical, Ginny speaking, how may I help you? - No, she's still here. - Almost done.

ELAINE

Let me talk to him.

(GINNY pushes the paper in front of Elaine. Mouthing “Sign *one*”. ELAINE in return brushes her fingers against her thumb on one hand {indicating cash} “when do I get paid?”)

GINNY

She’s a little upset. - Wouldn’t you be? - I can’t.

ELAINE

Put him on speaker.

(GINNY points to the papers. ELAINE reaches for the phone—GINNY tries to pull it away.)

GINNY

I can’t.

(After a short struggle ELAINE presses “speaker”.)

JONATHAN (On speaker)

--If I TELL you to let me talk to her, you LET me talk to her. IS SHE THERE OR NOT?

(The women look at each other. Neither answer.)

GINNY

She’s still / here.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Then you—Has she signed?

GINNY

(Looking ELAINE squarely in the eyes.)

Yes.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

. . . Dammit.

GINNY

What?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Nothing. No. Good, good—I know that had to be hard for you. Let her cry, I’ll talk to her later.

(ELAINE is now going through desk drawers.)

GINNY

Was that head thing for real?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

That's what I wanted to talk to her about but YES, Yes, the damned thing's for real. They're talking about it on the radio.

GINNY

What nationality?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Who knows. They're not even saying whether it's a male or female yet just that they're still looking for other body parts—Am I on speaker?

GINNY

Why? What makes / you say—

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Why am I on speaker--She IS there, / isn't she?

GINNY

Jonathan.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Put her on. Put the bitch on.

ELAINE

Watch who you're calling / a bitch.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

I've got a plan.

ELAINE

I was fired, remember?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Forget about that.

ELAINE

I want my money.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

You'll get your money.

ELAINE

When?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

When? Whaddo you mean when?

ELAINE

And severance, because you fired me.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

For cause.

ELAINE

The law states I get paid immediately. Severance, vacation time, holiday and / Bonuses.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

You quit.

ELAINE

How do / you figure?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

I'm not going thru this with you right now—BECAUSE I told you to go home. I told you and you didn't. I gave you an order: you refused: it's called involuntary resignation--that's the same as quitting.

ELAINE

I signed your fucking papers and they say you fired me.

(GINNY slides her the papers. She signs.)

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Ginny?

GINNY

Yes sir?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Did she sign the papers?

GINNY

I have them right here in front of me.

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Fuck. When do I have to pay her?

ELAINE

(Quoting:)

“Immediately upon termination.”

JONATHAN (On speaker)

Ginny?

GINNY

(Already on the computer looking it up on the internet:)

I'm looking it up.

ELAINE

Why did you call?

JONATHAN (On speaker)

You don't work here anymore. I'll figure it out without you.

GINNY

(Picking up the phone—switching off speaker to handset:)

Jonathan? - She's right. - I didn't write the law, I just read it. - How was I supposed to stop yo-- - Yes. - Yes. - Yes. - I'll tell her. - I will. - I WILL. - Good luck.

(She hangs up.)

ELAINE

Wha'd he say?

GINNY

He said he doesn't need luck.

(Slight pause.)

GINNY

Be back at the end of the day. Your check will be waiting for you.

(ELAINE just stares at her.)

ELAINE

Fine.

(She starts for the door.)

GINNY

Wha'd you take?

ELAINE

Nothing that wasn't mine.

(And she exits.)

(Slight pause. The phone rings. GINNY answers it.)

GINNY

Matterson's Chemicals. Ginny speaking. How may I help you? - No, he isn't in right now, is there something I can help you with?

(Lights fade.)