

SEVERANCE PLAY

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a play

by

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## CHARACTERS

- JONATHAN** a middle aged executive, boyish charm, relates to his office staff (at least Elaine & Ginny) more like girlfriends than employees (though not lasciviously). A ladies man with a heart to be prince charming to the women in his life, once “saved” he tends to move on to the next damsel in distress; with malice to none he is unaware of his own character flaws
- GINNY** Secretary/Assistant to Jonathan, several years his junior. Jonathan’s most recent rescue. Ginny works for Jonathan as his secretary/assistant and current girlfriend. She is a textbook definition of an introvert and completely unaware of her own contribution to enabling Jonathan’s psyche, yeah...love kinda does that to you...if this was actually love, but she’s a little too soft spoken to ask.
- ELAINE** Office manager/VP of “stuff”/sales etc. Jonathan’s right hand (aka indispensable)—as many years younger than Jonathan as she is older than Ginny. Elaine is free spirited, and shoots straight from the hip. She has graduated from being Jonathan’s previous love interest and Good Friday to his “a little more than” equal. She stays with him out of a mixed sense of obligation and gratitude and if something were to happen again down the road...well, let’s just say nothing’s of the table (yet).

## 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 area prominently placed: 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 I’ve ever seen. “*

- NINA

*(The SEAGULL by Anton Chekhov)*

**A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:**

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [ ] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.  
*(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)*
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ ( ) ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.  
*(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)*
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

***A REMARK ON THE LIES THAT FOLLOW:***

*There are a good number of lies in the pages that follow. If one was to take these characters at face value of what they say half the play would be lost. The characters here lie to themselves as much as they do each other. Their lies are neither malicious nor Machiavellian in nature; they are almost always made with good intention. As an actor/director myself I so do NOT want to direct from the page nor rewrite the dialogue to support underlying intentions because this play is about the undercurrents and in order to be undercurrents they need to remain under (the dialogue). I have indicated a few of these moments simply to get the ball rolling; I invite you to make the leap and dive in. If you have questions, feel free to ask. Contact me anytime. Also: please note none of the stage directions you'll find here were set by a stage manager following the director's interpretation, they reflect unspoken dialogue from myself (the playwright), so please, consider them as you would spoken word. Thank you.*

## SCENE 1

(At rise:

WEDNESDAY AM

A business office. A glass conference room, prominently placed, sits separated out from the rest of the office and desks.<sup>1</sup>

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. As the scene/play progresses, we may (or may not) recognize that GINNY is a tad OCD and JONATHAN quite willing to overlook these qualities in her; therefore, they are indeed never discussed. Meanwhile 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...[just get back to my work. I'm here if you need...me...]

(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.

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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?)

GINNY  
(Moving now:)

Yes...Sir...

JONATHAN  
(Still preoccupied:)

Oh, don't give me that shit.

GINNY  
(Innocently honest—trying to be supportive:)  
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

(She's not:)

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—after compulsively finishing the task she’s started—vacates the conference room, the three of them taking turns to walk thru the same doorway. JONATHAN closes the door behind them.)

JONATHAN

(His demeanor slightly switching to an honest concern for Elaine’s well-being:)

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 normal for me. I was driving down the stretch of Telegraph, coming the back way ‘cuz there’s less traffic—

JONATHAN

(adjusting himself back to the business at hand:)

You coming to a point?

ELAINE

[Really? You’re going to do that: you’re going to interrupt?]....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 can still 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 is 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 exactly 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 setbacks 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

Oh, 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.  
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?

ELAINE

I / couldn't.

JONATHAN

Why not?

ELAINE

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

JONATHAN

You could have moved it.

ELAINE

I wasn't going to touch it.

JONATHAN

It was in a plastic bag.

ELAINE

OH. MY. GOD.

(Pause.)

JONATHAN

(a moment of caring intervention:)

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.

JONATHAN

Go home, Elaine.

ELAINE

Am I still fired?

JONATHAN

Whaddo you think?

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

[Et tu Brute?]

(Hands Ginny the paperwork—a sincere job offer:)

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. 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

(Doing her best to cover her own uneasiness with confrontation—trying to keep from apologizing:)

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 struggles a moment: debating 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—(well, actually with numbers for the vowels).

GINNY  
“P-Zero-K-Three-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? Take a risk.  
We’ve both slept with him.  
Oh for god[sakes] don’t pretend you’re [not]—or that you didn’t know.

GINNY  
No, I knew...

ELAINE

Or that you're not.

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?")

ELAINE

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

[Sorry, I have to...]

ELAINE

[Of course. Go ahead.]

GINNY

I'll be right back.

ELAINE

(Indicating the conference room phone:)

Phone right there.