

ARGENTINA

A Play in One Act
by
Arjay Nine

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Employees of an administrative section of a large corporation.

John	Managing Director [late 40's or 50's, not fat, but not thin]
David	Vice President [late 20's or 30's, standard build]
Peter	Vice President [late 20's or 30's, shorter, wiry, slightly nervous]
Tom	Associate [younger, slightly, than the VP's, more cautious]
Ivy	Secretary
Barnaby	Managing Director [by phone from the Austin office]

SCENE

David, Peter and Tom

Executive office with a window in a high-rise building. [Same as any in midtown Manhattan, but this is not necessarily Manhattan. Not overly elegant, but nice; a step above the average office.] It's the office of a nondescript upper level manager who has gotten to his level by being the standard, serious, predictable, mainstream American executive. He's not stupid or mean, though not particularly imaginative or fun. He's calm and dignified, more sage and circumspect than the others. He's clearly in charge and secure in his authority, not having to manifest it.

On John's desk is a modern telephone, a polished brass *in* tray and matching *out* tray, a pen stand, a blotter, a small paper clip dispenser and maybe a desk lamp. There are a few pieces of paper, and a note pad, but the desk is not particularly cluttered with either papers or equipment. There's an office chair at the desk and three other chairs around the office.

Three of John's direct subordinates, David, Peter and Tom are standing around discussing last night's game. They're wearing business shirts, ties and navy slacks. [No jackets.] John's navy jacket is on a hook on the door or on a coat rack in the corner.

[Note to the director: The characters do not act incompetent in any way, only the dialog reveals them as such. Of course they are incompetent, but not in any way different from the general blinkered mainstream mentality of standard corporate culture. These four are right from the middle of America's best executives. They're not stupid, just complacent in their faith in corporate power culture.]

Lights up

David

Can you believe that shot Sprewell hit last night.

Peter

Ha ha --. Right at the buzzer, right? Out of the corner.

David

Yeah yeah. Unbelievable.

Peter

Unbelievable luck.

David

Oh, come on.

Peter

It was off the glass.

David

So the fuck what?

Peter

It was slop.

David

Mourning was in his face.

Tom

There's a fuck-up, Mourning.

Peter
He's been struggling.

Tom
[is interrupted early in this line by John's entry]
Struggling? Hell, for the kind of money they're wasting on Mourning's sorry ass they could recruit a viable team in a couple of years instead of a fuckin' cheering section for Alonzo the Clown. Reilly knows what he's doing with his players, if anyone can keep Mourning under control he can, but. . .

[The door to the office opens and John enters. The conversation immediately, smoothly and abruptly, without the slightest hitch, switches to a business subject as though they'd been on that topic the whole time.]

Tom
--but the Fed isn't going to just sit back and watch the CPI rise like that. We're gonna see a bump in rates.

Peter
It doesn't matter, Playtex has 200 million in short-term debt coming due June 15 and their asset backed issue isn't even half sold.

David
[Agreeing with Peter] They're lost on this one. The internal audit couldn't even make sense of the numbers.

John
[Walks around to his desk and sits down as they talk.]
Sorry to keep you guys waiting.

David
What's up, John?

John
You guys wanted to know how many weeks we have left...well, I still don't know. I spent over half an hour getting screamed at by Louise in her office last night over all this, and...it looks bad. I put in a pitch for all of you, but I want to warn you, I think it's fifty-fifty whether any of us will still be here a month from now.

[Long pause. All three men still standing look almost absolutely blank.]

John

But,...I have a fax here from Texas.

It's about contracting an operation in Argentina and then hooking it all in with accounting later.

David

[Hesitating.]

O. K.

[Pause. About 5-10 sec. David, Peter and Tom are unsure what to make of it.]

John

Yeah. I uh. I wonder what they mean by that.

Tom

Did you say Argentina?

John

That's what the fax says.

[another pause, about 20 seconds]

Peter

Do you think they mean that as a place?

Tom

It says, "in" Argentina, right?

David

Gotta be a place.

Tom

Fuckin' Barnaby doesn't have more than one state of mind.

John

I don't know. We want to be careful here and not go running off in the wrong direction. I think we better do a little groundwork on this.

Tom

Argentina. [saying it very carefully]

Fine.

David

We could see what's on the Internet.

John

True. But let's wait a little on that.

I'm not really ready to go with the Net for something like this.

Our ass is on the line here.

Peter

It's probably one of those cyber-companies.

John

You're assuming Argentina is a company.

Peter

What are you thinking, John?

John

I don't know. I just don't know.

[Goes out the door with the fax.]

[The other three immediately resume their sports conversation so smoothly it's as though they never left it.]

David

The whole Miami team has the maturity of a kindergartener with a crack habit.

Peter

I don't know. Maybe it's not just Mourning.

Tom

Mourning would have called, "glass."

David

What's with you guys and this calling, "glass" shit?

Peter

It's a matter of honor.

David

[will be interrupted during this line by John's entry; anywhere is o.k.]

How about points? Is it a matter of fucking points? It's a made-for-TV game.

Everything is for the camera. But the camera doesn't hear . . .

John

[Returns without fax, walks around to his side of the desk and sits down.]

David

[switching topics smoothly, as before]

. . . Barker's puts them at A double-A plus and that's conservative. Don't try to make them out to be some sort of powerhouse.

John

O.K., let's work this through now.

We have to be willing to think outside the box here.

Tom

This is going to be a piece of fucking cake, it'll just take us a while.

David

Yes.

[short pause]

Peter

I'm willing to bet that if we actually called someone at Argentina, they'd have no clue what this is about.

John

I'm sure about that.

Tom

Or IN Argentina.

David

Or ON Argentina.

Peter

"On"?

David

If it's a boat.

Peter

It's not a boat. The fax said, "In" didn't it?

Tom
It could have been a typo.

Peter
Where's the fax?

David
Ivy's making copies of it, right John?

John
Let's ignore the fax, guys. I think we really need to push the envelope here.

Ivy
[Enters with a big stack of stapled copies, about six inches tall. Sets them down on the desk. They ignore her.]

John
[continuing without interruption]
The Argentina issue really is just at the bottom of the iceberg. Once we figure out what the hell they mean here, we can do an end run on Argentina, whatever or wherever it is.

Ivy
You have a problem with Argentina?

Peter
[Looking at Ivy with slight surprise, as though he hadn't noticed her before. Then, saying absent-mindedly, but directly to Ivy:]
Yeah yeah. Argentina.

[David and Peter chuckle lightly to themselves, in a subtly superior way.]

Ivy
The country in South America?

John
[Dismissive, but not impolite. Not meaning what he says, looking down at the papers, not looking at her.]
Yes. Thank you Ivy.

Ivy
[exits]

[all eventually sit during the next four lines]

Peter
We should give Barnaby a call.

Tom
He's not going to know anything.

Peter
What do you mean? He's the one who sent the damn fax!

Tom
Barnaby doesn't have clearance.

Peter
So the fuck what?

David
He might know who does know, though.

John
Get Barnaby on the phone.

[They sit around and look at each other.]

David
John, what if Argentina is some sort of pastry, like a cruller?

John
That doesn't make sense.

Peter
It might not be a pastry, it might be a soup or a warm dish.

John
[calmly]
No no. It's not a food. Not a food at all.

Tom
I think we should go in the direction of consumer durables.

Peter
If we do, then we should use Chicago.

[Phone rings.]

John

[Picks it up.]

Yeah. Yeah. I've got David, Peter and Tom here.

[Silently mouths "Barnaby" to the others.]

Let me put you on speaker.

[Hits the speaker button.]

David

Well, if the old goat doesn't come calling.

Barnaby

[Calmly, coolly, pleasant, professional and adult. Not playing their frat-boy game. Through the whole conversation he deals with them on this level, not reacting to their absurdity, a bit like a vendor who can handle a valuable but obnoxious client professionally, cordially, not condescending.]
How's everything, guys?

Peter

Barnaby, you old banger.

Tom

How do you like the weather down there in Austin?

Barnaby

I can't complain. I'm used to it now.

Peter

I'll bet the pigeons are loving it.

Barnaby

The pigeons?

David

When are you going to come up to New York and let us scrape you down and drag you through the streets?

Barnaby

[Laughs.]

Tom

It'll be a cold day before you pull that deliverables bullshit on us again.

Barnaby
Yeah. Yeah. I suppose so.

John
Listen, we've got the Tinscher memo here. We were talking about it when you called.

Barnaby
The Tinscher memo?

Peter
Hey Barnaby, you sick snood, my name is Peter Covington. C-o-v-i-n-g-t-o-n. You've written "Arthur Baldwin" here.

John
Yeah, he's on the sixth floor.

David
Barnaby, you slut. At least you can get one of my names. Who the hell does your typing?

Barnaby
So, are you guys going to take it over from Baldwin then?

Tom
You have laser tag in Austin, Barnaby?

Peter
He knows if they did, we'd come down there and whip his pathetic ass again.

Barnaby
It won't be a problem getting me a full proposal by Thursday, will it?

John
Thursday works for us, Barnaby. What are you talkin' there, spiral bound?

Barnaby
Hell, just send it by e-mail, guys.

John

[Scoffing.] E-mail. Right.

[Pause]

[Quieter, more subdued, slightly timid.]

Listen, Barnaby, we weren't ready for Argentina.

Barnaby

Sure, I understand. Is that going to be a problem?

David

Barnaby. If that's a problem, then we might as well be scrubbing the rings out of urinals at Shea.

Barnaby

Uh.

Peter

[Loudly, taunting.]

Hey, Barnaby.

BITE ME.

[a pause]

John

So, . . . , what were you thinking?

Barnaby

What? You mean Argentina?

John

Argentina, sure Argentina. What do you want us to do with that?

Barnaby

I'm not sure what you mean, John.

David

You tell us, big guy.

Are we just towing the log here, or, you know. . .

Peter

Argentina, Argentina. I think it's getting dark!

David
Man the winches!

Tom
Like it's some sort of South American country.

[All three look at Tom with apprehension.]

John
[after a pause]
Barnaby, you can trust us with this, just sit on those cloven hooves of yours for a little while.

David and Peter
[Still staring at Tom in disappointed disbelief, look away from Tom toward the speaker phone.]
You're gonna pay for this, Barnaby.

Barnaby
I'm leaving this in your hands, guys. Call me if you need anything.

John, David, Peter, Tom
[All say their good byes, some in unison, others not.]
Later.
Bye, Barnaby.
See ya.

[When the call is over, they look to Tom. There is not a sound, they just stare at him.]

David
A South American country.

Tom
[Shrugs in a way to deflect blame, to make light of the issue, as though it was no big deal.]

[They look at him as though he has just been discovered to be a spy from another company. He starts to crack.]

Tom
What?

[The others just stare. One of them shrugs, makes a gesture that says there's nothing that can be done about it.]

[Tom opens the door, leaves as though nothing is up and he is leaving to go and get some air.]

[The others seem relieved. Shake their heads, not that it's a shame he's gone, but that they're wonderin where they themselves went wrong.]

John

[Calls Ivy on the speaker phone.]

Ivy

Yes?

John

Ivy, Tom's just left. Would you please call HR and let them know and then call building services and have them come clean out his desk.

[He pushes the button that hangs up the phone.]

Ivy

[after a pause] O.K.

John, David, Peter

[Sit, reflecting, for about twenty seconds, looking off in different directions, one at the ceiling, one at the floor, one at the desk.]

[lights fade]

Kurt Opprecht, 2000

