

Office Hours

by

Norm Foster

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Ontario

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Norm Foster was born in Newmarket, Ontario in 1949. He attended West Hill Collegiate High School in Toronto. He studied Radio and Television Arts at Centennial College in Toronto, and at Confederation College in Thunder Bay. Norm wrote two plays for Malcolm Black, then Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick. Those two plays, *Sinners* and *The Melville Boys*, were enormously successful for Theatre New Brunswick. *The Melville Boys* has made Foster one of Canada's most produced playwrights. *The Affections of May*, *Sinners* and *The Melville Boys* have been translated into French.

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Author's note: The play can be done with as few as five or as many as seventeen actors. The author suggests that six actors would sustain the flow and separation nicely.

Running time: Approximately 2 hours with intermission.

Role Breakdown for a Cast of 5

Actor #1 WARREN, MARK, ARTIE, NEIL

Actress #1 PAM, ELLIE, SHARON

Actor #2 ONE-ARMED MAN, BOBBY, LLOYD

Actress #2 FRANCINE, RHONDA

Actor #3 GORDON, RICHARD, STAN, MAN

Office Hours premiered at Theatre New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, in October, 1996, with the following cast and crew:

WARREN/MARK/ARTIE/NEIL
PAM/ELLIE/SHARON
ONE-ARMED MAN/BOBBY/LLOYD
GORDON/RICHARD/STAN/MAN
FRANCINE/RHONDA

Frank McAnulty
Elizabeth Goodyear
David Hughes
David Nairn
Nonnie Griffin

Directed by Ted Follows.
Stage Managed by Henry Bertrand.
Set design by David Westlake.
Lighting by Tim Gorman.

OFFICE HOURS

ACT ONE

The Reporter

Time: The present.

Place: The office of television news producer Pam Gerard.

The office in each of the following pieces is quite nicely furnished, but not to excess. In the office is a desk and chair (left), for the office occupant, a couple of chairs for visitors, plus a couch, in the corner (u.r.) there is a coat rack on which hangs a trenchcoat. There is also a cabinet in which there is a bar, two or three plants round out the decor. As the scene opens, we see WARREN KIMBLE pacing in the office. WARREN wears a rumpled, well-worn suit, with a dark sweater vest underneath. He is talking to himself, rehearsing for a future conversation.

WARREN You twit. You inarticulate, BMW-driving, tofu-eating twit. (beat) No, that might be too confrontational. Uh ... All right, let's try this. You know something, Ms. Gerard? Mrs. Gerard? Pam? Can I call you Pam, Pam? No, the more I say it, the more it sounds like Spam. Pamela, I'm given to understand that you don't like my work. No, too civil. Be a little more intimidating. Give it the Robert DeNiro inflection. You got a problem with my work? Are you serious? You can't be serious. My work? Are you tellin' me you got a problem with my work? No. Okay, start off with a joke. All right. All right. Pam, don't you think it's funny that my name is Warren Kimble and yours is Pam Gerard? Huh? Kimble, Gerard? We've got kind of a "Fugitive" thing happening here. Kind of a David Janssen, Barry Morse kind of thing. No, screw the jokes. Get right to the point Pam, I get the feeling that you don't like my work. Well, right now, honey, I don't like my work either. And I'll tell you why. I'm a news reporter, Pam. I've been working my way up for twenty-three years. That's right. Some of us work our way up. We don't marry the station manager and go from television bingo hostess to news producer just like that. But, that doesn't bother me. No, that doesn't bother me one goddamned bit. What bothers me is that I was the top reporter in this city at one time, I did stories with integrity. Stories I was proud of. And now? Two weeks ago I covered a wake for a racehorse. What the hell is that?! So the horse died. Who gives a shit? It's not Black Beauty for Godssake. And last week you sent me to interview that Pentecostal group that wants to put a loin cloth on the statue of Cupid. So, there I am

interviewing the queen of the tight-asses while Cupid urinates into a fountain behind me. How in the hell am I supposed to do good work in a situation like that, you slack-jawed, addle-brained, Melrose Place-watching, harpy. I need the hard-hitting stories. And I'm not talking about doing *Death Of A Salesman* every night. Just something newsworthy. That's all I ask. I mean, hell, I'm forty-eight years old. I've got a mortgage I'm paying off and a kid I'm trying to put through university. That's a school, Pam. A big one with people your age in it — but, I'd sooner be out of work than do the crap stories you're giving me. So, that's it. That's all I have to say. And if you want to fire me, you go right the hell ahead because, quite frankly, lady, I don't give a tinker's toot. Oh, and one more thing. I don't appreciate being summoned into your office like one of your underlings and then being left here to ponder my fate while you get called away on some petty emergency. You understand what I'm saying, you scrotum-cracking, Alanis Morrisette-loving, preening little tart! Warren Kimble waits for no one!

The door opens and PAM GERARD enters. She is dressed in business clothes, and she carries a binder and a paperback book.

PAM Sorry to keep you waiting.

WARREN Oh, that's okay. I don't mind waiting. I just made myself at home. Beautiful office by the way, Pam.

PAM throws WARREN a cautioning look.

Pamela.

PAM is still staring him down.

Ms. Gerard.

PAM It'll do I suppose.

PAM moves to the chair behind her desk. She puts the binder down and arranges some papers.

WARREN Sounded like something big.

PAM What?

OFFICE HOURS

WARREN When you got called away there. It sounded big.

PAM Oh, I just had to find a crew to cover a jumper down on Kensington. No big deal.

WARREN A jumper?

PAM Yeah, some nut on a ledge.

WARREN I talked a jumper down once you know.

PAM (*not interested*) Really?

WARREN Yeah, about five years ago. This guy was on a bridge and we heard the police call S....

PAM Warren, let's get down to business shall we?

WARREN Hmm?

PAM Business? Our meeting?

WARREN Oh. Right. Right. (*noticing the paperback, he picks it up*) Oooh, Margaux Kenyon, huh? Pretty steamy stuff. I read her last one, *Spellbound In Spandex*. I'll tell you, she cooks with gas.

PAM Warren?

WARREN Oh, that's a nice week-at-a-glance. Very nice. Is that leather bound?

PAM Yes.

WARREN Very handsome. Where'd you get it?

PAM Some obnoxious salesman came in last week and I bought it just to get rid of him.

WARREN I've been looking for something like this.

PAM Warren, I don't like your work.

WARREN (*beat*) What?

PAM I don't like your work.

WARREN I'm sorry. My work?

PAM Yes, Warren, your work. That thing we pay you for.

WARREN Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well, I must say this comes as a complete surprise.

PAM It does?

WARREN Right out of left field. I had no idea.

PAM Well, I'm sorry, Warren, but I like to lay my cards on the table.

WARREN I see that. (*beat*) Have you ever noticed that your name is Gerard and mine is Kimble? You know what that's like? That's like the ... uh ... the uh...

PAM The what?

WARREN You know. The ... uh ... the running guy. You know? He killed his wife, but he didn't do it. Somebody else did it. And then there's a train crash, and now he's running. Always running.

PAM So, what do you think about what I just said, Warren?

WARREN Uh ... what you just said? Well, Pam, Ms. Gerard, I think we should talk about it. Sure. See where you think my strengths lie, where my weaknesses are. What needs to be fine-tuned. You know, do a little tweaking.

PAM No, I don't want to tweak, Warren. No tweaking. No fine-tuning. I want to fire you.

WARREN Fire me?

PAM Yes.

WARREN Well ... I, uh...

PAM Unfortunately my husband likes you.

OFFICE HOURS

WARREN He does?

PAM Yes.

WARREN Your husband the station manager?

PAM No, my husband the Zulu warrior. Yes, my husband the station manager. He thinks you lend experience to the news. A little seasoning, as he puts it.

WARREN Seasoning?

PAM Yes.

WARREN (*humbly*) Well.

PAM He particularly liked that Cupid story you did last week.

WARREN Did he? Well, you know, I was pleased with that story myself. In fact...

PAM But, I disagree with my husband. I don't think you lend experience to the news at all. I think you lend age to it. You're the oldest on-air person we have, Warren.

WARREN Oh, no, I don't think so.

PAM You are. I checked.

WARREN No, I think Daphne Hilyard is older than I am.

PAM She's forty-three.

WARREN She's what? Is that what she told you?

PAM She's forty-three, Warren. And she does a gardening show. The viewers don't mind hearing about gardens from middle-aged people. Gardening and cooking. That's where the middle-aged broadcaster is going.

WARREN I don't cook. I've got a bit of a green thumb though.

PAM I don't care about your green thumb, Warren. You can have a purple ass for all I care. You're not getting a gardening show or a cooking show.

WARREN So, what am I going to be doing?

PAM The desk.

WARREN What?

PAM I'm putting you on the desk. I want you to write up stories for the six and the eleven, but as far as on-camera work goes, I want to limit it.

WARREN Limit it?

PAM Yes.

WARREN To what?

PAM To the occasional special interest story. Like that horse wake thing you did. Stories like that.

WARREN I see. Well, you know, those kinds of stories are fine, spam. Pam! Ms. Gerard, But I was hoping for something more substantial. Something I could really sink my reporter's teeth into.

PAM I'm sorry, Warren, but I'm going for a more contemporary look on the news hour and you don't fit that look. Now, if you don't think you can handle the desk, Warren, you're certainly free to turn it down.

WARREN And what if I do ... turn it down?

PAM Well, my husband asked me to find a place for you and I did. If you turn it down and decide to move on, well, that's up to you. So, is that what you're doing?

WARREN What?

PAM Are you turning it down? Because if you are, then I've got to find someone to replace you, and I'd like to get on it right away.

WARREN Uh ... no. No, I can do the desk thing, I mean, writing has always been my strong suit anyway. So, yeah. Yeah. I can do that.

OFFICE HOURS

PAM (*picks up the phone and presses two digits*) All right. It's settled then.

WARREN When does the change take effect?

PAM Right now.

WARREN Now? Today? Boy, that's kind of fast, don't you think? I mean...

PAM (*into phone*) Dave? Pam. I'm sending Warren Kimble down to you. Give him some copy to work on for the six, would you please? ... That's right, Warren Kimble ... Dave, just do it, would you, please? Thank you. (*hangs up*) There. That's that.

WARREN Right.

PAM Oh, and there'll be a slight pay adjustment as well because of the reassignment.

WARREN Pay adjustment?

PAM Yes, the new position has a lower profile, less responsibility...

The phone on PAM's desk rings.

Excuse me. (*answering*) Pam Gerard ... Yeah? ... Oh, what the hell ... (*checks her watch*) All right, it's four fifteen now. If nothing's happened by five, come on in Right ... (*She hangs up.*) Now we've got two jumpers, out there, and what do you wanna bet they don't make a move in time for the six clock? We're done here, right?

WARREN Yeah. Yeah.

PAM Good. Well, things to do. Excuse me.

PAM exits, WARREN stands there for a moment.

WARREN The desk? Writing copy? I don't think so, Missy. No, I don't think so. And I'm gonna tell her that too. She likes cards on the table? She'll get cards on the table.

The door opens and PAM enters again. She breezes by WARREN to her desk.

PAM You're still here.

WARREN Just leaving.

PAM grabs her binder off her desk.

PAM (*moving back to the door*) Was there something else?

WARREN No. Nothing.

PAM You're sure?

WARREN Absolutely.

PAM Well, let's get back to work then.

WARREN You bet. You bet.

PAM exits. WARREN moves to the door. he closes the door softly.

(*to himself again*) Back to work, huh? You don't know the meaning of work, you spoon-fed, cell phone-worshipping, flavoured coffee-drinking miscreant. I should be the one in charge here. That's right. I was the next in line when Roberts moved on, but your husband promoted you instead. Oh that was a slap in the face. I'll tell you this much though, the first time you screw up, sweetheart, this job is mine and you know it. Well, you said it yourself. He likes my work. Of course he does. What's not to like? No. I'll just bide my time. And you keep looking over your shoulder, Pam, because every time you do, I'll be there like a festering sore. That's me, baby. A festering sore.

The door opens and a ONE-ARMED MAN enters the office. He is wearing jeans and a windbreaker.

MAN Are you the producer here?

WARREN What?

MAN The producer? Are you him?

WARREN You've only got one arm.

OFFICE HOURS

MAN What?

WARREN You're a one-armed man.

MAN I asked you if you're the producer.

WARREN Hmm? Oh, well, I should be. I've worked hard enough for it.

The MAN pulls a knife out of his jacket.

Whoa! What the hell is that?

MAN You ruined my life.

WARREN I what?

MAN You ruined my life!

WARREN No, you've got the wrong guy. You must have.

MAN Your people shot some film of me and my girlfriend at a sidewalk cafe. Do you remember that?

WARREN Sidewalk cafe? Uh...

MAN My girlfriend and I were kissing. Your station was doing a story on public displays of affection and how they're a sure sign of Spring.

WARREN Sounds like us. So?

MAN So, when you ran the story you put a graphic on the screen that identified me as that mass murderer Charles Lester.

WARREN Oh, my God. You're Charles Lester?

MAN No, you idiot! You got the graphics from two different stories mixed up. Under Lester's picture it said "All You Need Is Love".

WARREN Oops.

MAN Yeah, so now, everywhere I go, people think I'm Charles Lester. I got fired from my job, and my wife left me.

NORM FOSTER

WARREN Well you're wife must know you're not Charles Les Oh, the girlfriend.

MAN Right. So, that's why I'm here. To finish off the person responsible.

WARREN *(beat)* All right, let me take you to her. *(He starts to move.)*

MAN Stay there!

WARREN But, I'm not the producer!

MAN Not the producer, my ass. This is the producer's office, isn't it? That's what it says on the door.

WARREN Yes, it is, but....

MAN And you're the senior person here, at least from what I can see.

WARREN Actually, there's a woman who does the gardening show who I'm sure is older. She says she's forty-three but...

MAN Never mind! *(moving toward WARREN)*

WARREN Oh, now, wait a minute, wait a minute. Hurting me, what's that gonna get you?

MAN Satisfaction.

WARREN No, that won't get you satisfaction. They'll put you away. You'll lose everything.

MAN I've already lost everything.

WARREN Oh, come on, you must have something going for you. You ... you've got your health.

They both look at his missing arm.

You've got your girlfriend.

MAN She left me.

OFFICE HOURS

WARREN Oh.

MAN For your cameraman.

WARREN Well, lemme take you to him then. Which one was it? Lenny? Short guy? I hate that son of a bitch.

MAN I don't want him. I want you. The person in charge.

WARREN I'm not in charge.

MAN Go to hell.

WARREN I'm not! You obviously know nothing about the news business, do you? You see, all the producing jobs and on-air jobs are filled by women these days. It's a cosmetic business. It's not how well you inform the public anymore, it's how well you look while you misinform them. Now, the woman you're after is Pam Gerard, and she's right out here somewhere.

WARREN moves toward the door, but the MAN steps in his way and WARREN runs into the knife. WARREN grabs his stomach and steps back in disbelief.

What are you ... You ... You stabbed me.

MAN Oops.

WARREN falls to his knees. The ONE-ARMED MAN runs out of the office.

WARREN Wait ... Oh, my God ... Oh, God. *(He makes it to the couch and sits.)* Help! Anybody! God, I hope it wasn't a dirty knife. *(looks at the phone on PAM's desk)* 911. Gotta call 911. *(He moves to the desk and sits in PAM's chair.)*

PAM GERARD enters the office.

PAM Warren?

WARREN Oh, thank God.

PAM What are you doing in my chair?

NORM FOSTER

WARREN I can explain that. *(He struggles to remove himself from the chair.)*

PAM I certainly hope you can.

WARREN I'm ... I've been stabbed.

PAM What? *(sees the wound)* Oh, my God. Stabbed? What happened?

WARREN 911...

PAM What?

WARREN Call 911.

PAM Oh, 911! Right. 911. *(dialing the phone)*

WARREN A man with one arm. He thought I was you.

PAM A what? A man with one arm?

WARREN You got his graphics mixed up.

PAM *(into phone)* Yes, I need an ambulance at the CKG Television studios. A man's been stabbed ... Yes No, he's still conscious ... All right, thank you. *(She hangs up.)* They're on their way, Warren. How are you feeling? *(She punches two digits on the phone.)*

WARREN Weak. I think I'm going into shock.

PAM Well, hold on. They'll be here any minute. A one-armed man? You mean like in "The Fugitive"?

WARREN That's it!! That's it!!

PAM *(into phone)* Sally, get into my office right away. And bring a cameraman. Lenny if you can find him. *(hangs up)*

WARREN What are you doing?

PAM I'm getting Sally Fong in here.

WARREN What for?

OFFICE HOURS

PAM To cover the story.

WARREN Sally Fong?

PAM Yes. I mean, how often does something like this fall into our laps?

WARREN Sally Fong?

PAM Yes. Boy, the blood doesn't show up very well on that dark sweater, does it?

WARREN What about me? Why can't I cover the story?

PAM What? No, you can't cover the story. You're on the desk now. Can you take that sweater off?

WARREN What?

PAM The sweater. Let's take it off.

WARREN takes his jacket off, then his sweater. PAM joins in, helping him pull it over his head.

WARREN Pam, please, I want this story. This is Pulitzer Prize material.

PAM Warren, didn't we just have a little talk about this very thing? Hmm? And didn't we agree that we were going to limit your on camera appearances to a certain type of story? Well, this is not one of those stories.

WARREN But, I can do this...

PAM Warren, please, don't ask me again. I've already had enough hassles for one day, what with those bloody jumpers not being able to make up their minds. Where the hell is she? Sally?! *(She exits.)*

WARREN Wait! Wait... *(He collapses behind the desk.)* You untutored, outfit-wearing, light beer-drinking...

PAM enters the office.

PAM Did you say something?

WARREN Nothing. Nothing.

PAM exits.

... petrified piece of pig dung.

He collapses on the desk. Lights down.

End.

The Pitch

Time: The present.

Place: The office of film producer GORDON BLAINE.

As the scene opens, GORDON BLAINE and FRANCINE MAJORS are on stage. GORDON paces. FRANCINE sits on the couch.

GORDON It's three forty-five. Who does he think he is, keeping us waiting like this?

FRANCINE Now, Gordon, he's only fifteen minutes late. Are you sure he said three-thirty?

GORDON Yes, I wrote it down in my week-at-a-glance. See? (*pointing to his week-at-a-glance*)

FRANCINE Oh, that's new.

GORDON Hmm?

FRANCINE The week-at-a-glance.

GORDON Oh, yeah, I bought it the other day from some pushy salesman. Wouldn't take no for an answer.

FRANCINE Nice.

GORDON Who the hell does he think he is?

OFFICE HOURS

SHARON I believe I said if you got him in, not down.

MAN Hey, he's still off the ledge.

SHARON Sorry. Now, if you don't mind, I've got a lake to get to.

SHARON begins packing up her briefcase. ARTIE BARNES enters.

ARTIE Doctor Freeman?

SHARON Yes?

ARTIE Sorry I'm late, Doctor, but the police have got the street cordoned off and the traffic is backed up for blocks.

SHARON Late? Late for what?

ARTIE My appointment. You told me to come at four o'clock.

SHARON No, there must be some mistake. (*indicating the MAN*) This is my four o'clock. We're just finishing.

ARTIE Oh.

SHARON Are you sure I said today at four o'clock?

ARTIE Well, pretty sure, yeah.

SHARON And your name? (*She looks at her appointment book on the desk.*)

ARTIE Arthur Barnes. Artie.

MAN (*moves to ARTIE and shakes his hand*) Nice to meet you, Artie. Henry Hatcher. I just stopped by to offer the doctor here a sales opportunity, but she's decided against it. Well, what'd the fella say? Some days are diamonds, some days are stones. That's the way it goes. Have we met before, Arthur? You look very familiar.

ARTIE I don't think so.

SHARON Mr. Barnes, I'm terribly sorry. You were right and I was wrong. Could we change your appointment to Monday at four?

OFFICE HOURS

ARTIE Monday? Well, let's see. I, uh...

SHARON Quickly now, quickly!

ARTIE Sure, Monday would be fine.

SHARON Good, and please accept my sincere apologies. Now, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I have to be somewhere.

SHARON finishes gathering up her things as ARTIE and the MAN talk.

MAN Are you sure we haven't met before, Arthur?

ARTIE Yeah, I'm pretty sure.

MAN Because ordinarily, I never forget a face. Can't afford to in my business. You forget a client in the sales game and you feel like a horse's ass. But, hey, don't get me started on horses.

ARTIE and SHARON exit. The MAN stands there for a beat, and then it hits him.

Gulliver!! Hey, get the hell back here!!

The MAN exits. LLOYD enters the office, he goes to the desk and picks up the Margaux Kenyon book. He takes out a pen and writes in the book.

LLOYD *(to himself as he writes)* Doctor Freeman. Here's to escapism. Best wishes, Margaux Kenyon.

LLOYD exits. Lights down.

The End.