

BOXED IN

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Ben Kingsland

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SYNOPSIS: It's a tough economy and Delaney is sure her boss is planning to give her a pink slip. But her boss can't fire her if she can't find her! When Delaney decides to hide in a cardboard box in the break room until the crisis passes, it's up to her long-suffering co-worker, Jill, to pretend nothing is going on, which would be a lot easier if the box would stay quiet.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(ONE MAN, THREE WOMEN)

NATHAN (m).....Office worker. *(10 lines)*
JILL (f).....Office worker. Workgroup partners with Delaney.
(56 lines)
DELANEY (f).....Office worker. Workgroup partners with Jill. *(26 lines)*
PENDERGAST (f).....Older. The boss. *(22 lines)*

SETTING

An office break room

TIME

The present

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Laurel Mill Playhouse One-Act Festival 2009 - Directed by Mark Allen.

The break room at an office. A table and several chairs. There's a refrigerator-sized cardboard box by the wall. A mostly-empty tray of cookies is on the table.

JILL is sitting at the table, reading.

NATHAN enters, urgently.

NATHAN: Hey. Are there still cookies?

JILL: Go for it.

NATHAN: *(Grabbing a cookie.)* Hello lunch! If it wasn't for catered meetings I'd have starved to death by now.

Do we have anything else left?

JILL: All the lettuce that was under the luncheon meats; we stashed that in the fridge.

NATHAN: That's good eating.

JILL: *(Agreeing.)* Mmm-hmm! I love when the meat juice pools up in the lettuce leaves.

NATHAN: I call that a 'violent vinaigrette.' Ha! Any cheese cubes?

JILL: I didn't see any. I also haven't seen Delaney all day.

NATHAN: Huh! Maybe she's sick.

JILL: She better be dying. Our project's almost due, and I can only pick up so much slack . . .

NATHAN: *(Shrugs.)* Give her a call.

He takes a handful of cookies and sighs.

NATHAN: Someday, I'll be able to afford groceries again.

JILL: At least we're working, right?

They both knock wood. NATHAN exits. JILL pulls out her phone.

JILL: *(As she dials.)* "Hey, Delaney, it's Jill. I was just wondering; since you seem to think I'm supposed to do both our jobs, how would you feel if I got both our salaries? Doesn't that seem - "

A muffled phone starts to ring from inside the cardboard BOX. JILL stops.

The BOX begins to shift around.

BOX: *(Fearful whisper.)* No! Shhh! No! No! No! Stop, please!

The phone ringing stops.

BOX: Phew . . . !

The BOX stops moving. JILL is still.

JILL: Hello?

The BOX jumps, then is still.

JILL slowly walks over to the BOX. She lifts up a corner. DELANEY is crouched inside.

DELANEY shrieks and pulls the box back down.

JILL: Delaney?

DELANEY: *(Inside the box.)* Shhhshhhshhhh!

JILL: What are you doing in there?

The box scoots towards JILL. JILL does a little dodging.

DELANEY: Quiet, quiet! You never saw me!

The box scoots back to its original place.

JILL: You're a little hard to miss.

The box turns to face her.

DELANEY: Well, of course, if you're talking to me. When nobody's talking to me, I do just fine.

JILL: But I *need* to talk to you. Our deadline is -

DELANEY: Please, Jill, not now! Not today.

JILL: Look, what are you doing?

DELANEY scoots right up to JILL, bumping her.

DELANEY: *(Oblivious.)* Jill, if you value our friendship, please, I need you to do this for me.

JILL: Delaney, I feel like something's come between us. Do you mind taking this off?

DELANEY: No, I can't.

JILL: Okay, then. Can I come in? I'll take off my shoes . . .

DELANEY: I'm sorry, I can't let you in. There's only food for one.

JILL: What do you mean, 'food for one'? How long are you gonna be in there?

Beat. DELANEY begins to sob, softly. JILL listens.

JILL: Are you cry - ?

DELANEY gives a loud wail. JILL winces at the volume.

JILL: Yeah, I thought so.

JILL takes a deep breath. She begins patting the box reassuringly.

JILL: There, there.

DELANEY: *(Through tears.)* I can't come out.

JILL: Ooookay. If you're stuck, I'll call the janitor.

DELANEY: No, I'm not *stuck*. But if I come out, I'm gonna lose my job.

There's more layoffs due this month. I overheard Pendergast talking about a "list" yesterday with H-R, and she said my name. If she finds me, I'm getting a pink slip for sure!

JILL: So you're hiding.

Beat.

DELANEY: Oh! I just nodded. Sorry.

JILL: You know, if you didn't want to be seen, why didn't you just call in sick?

DELANEY: *(Self-righteous.)* You mean *lie*? Wow, Jill. I guess you and I approach problems a little differently.

JILL: I guess we do. How long are you going to keep this up?

DELANEY: Well, I've got my Blackberry. And I've got my Vitamin Water. And I took some cheese cubes from the fridge earlier -

JILL: *(Accusing.)* You took all the cheese cubes?

DELANEY: Hey! I have needs, okay? I'm going through a tough time!

JILL: Times are tough, Delaney! You think you're the only person on Pendergast's list? I don't see anyone else playing hide-and-go-seek.

DELANEY: I didn't know what else to do.

DELANEY starts crying again.

JILL: Okay. Look, there's got to be a better solution. We've just gotta think outside the box.

Why don't we -

PENDERGAST enters. She carries a clipboard.

PENDERGAST: Hello, Jill.

JILL: (*Whirling around.*) Morning, Mrs. Pendergast.

DELANEY gasps and the box jumps.

JILL pretends to gasp and steady herself against the box, giving it another shake.

PENDERGAST: Are you all right?

JILL: I'm fine. Whew! Just got a little - whew! - short of breath.

PENDERGAST: I understand. I remember what I was like in your condition.

You are expecting, aren't you?

JILL smoothes out her clothes a bit.

JILL: No, ma'am.

PENDERGAST: Oh. My mistake.

PENDERGAST examines the cookie tray.

PENDERGAST: Wouldn't you know it? The jackals already ate all the chocolate chip. Do you know what I think about some of these people, Jill?

JILL: We should get raises?

PENDERGAST: Ha, ha! No.

I think some people just aren't very considerate. That has an effect on a workplace, you know. They may think it goes unnoticed, but trust me, I don't miss anything.

The box begins to inch back towards the wall.

PENDERGAST: If you saw who took these cookies, Jill, you bring it to my attention.

JILL grabs the box and holds it still.

JILL: Yes sir, ma'am!

PENDERGAST: Is that the box for the new refrigerator?

JILL: What - oh, this box? I didn't even notice it here.

PENDERGAST: Who would have left it in the middle of the room like this? Push it back to the wall, will you?

JILL: Okay -

The box scurries back to the wall. JILL hurriedly follows it, pretending to push.

JILL: (To PENDERGAST.) Done!

PENDERGAST: I'll call a custodian to come break it down.

JILL: Oh, no need. They already know.

PENDERGAST: Why haven't they taken it away yet? It's an eyesore.

JILL: They're waiting for a charity group to come pick it up.

PENDERGAST: What charity?

JILL: Boxes for Love.

PENDERGAST: Boxes for Love.

DELANEY's cell phone rings.

DELANEY: No no, oh God, oh no!

JILL pulls out her own phone and fiddles with the buttons as the ring goes on and on.

JILL: No, oh no, I could have sworn I changed my ringtone! This one brings back bad childhood memories -

The ring cuts off abruptly. JILL raises her phone to her ear as if answering a call.

JILL: (On the phone.) Hello? Yes. Sure, just come on up when you're ready. Sixth floor.

She hangs up.

JILL: That was Boxes for Love. They're here for the box. So they can love it.

PENDERGAST: Well, if we get a tax write-off, they can love as many boxes as they want. Did you organize this charitable relationship, Jill?

JILL: Yeah, I made it up.

PENDERGAST smiles. She holds up her clipboard and begins writing something.

JILL: What's on that clipboard, Mrs. Pendergast?

PENDERGAST: Oh, I've got a little list.

DELANEY thrusts a hand out from under the box and grabs JILL by the ankle in terror.

DELANEY: Eeeeeee!

JILL kicks the box. The hand retreats.

PENDERGAST looks at JILL.

JILL: Eeeeeee! I just love lists.

PENDERGAST: I'm rather fond of this one myself.

JILL: What kind of list is it? Does it have numbers . . . bullet points . . . clip art - ?

PENDERGAST: You're full of questions today, Jill. I don't think I've ever seen you show interest in anything other than padding your timesheet.

JILL narrows her eyes.

JILL: Maybe it's all these children I'm having. Broadening my hips and my horizons.

PENDERGAST laughs.

PENDERGAST: Spunk! Spunky Jill. I can't believe I never knew the real you before, Spunky J.

JILL: That's me. Spunky J!

PENDERGAST: *(Friendly, looking at her clipboard.)* I was going to have you laid off, you know?

DELANEY gasps. The box dashes forward to JILL. JILL smacks it. It retreats.

PENDERGAST: *(Continuing.)* You had such an attitude, and your team-mates can only pick up so much slack . . .

But now I see you're not a bad apple, just a little firecracker! And if this Boxes for Love initiative pans out, we might have a new partnership on our hands.

PENDERGAST holds up the clipboard.

PENDERGAST: So congratulations, Spunky J. You just made my nice list on one condition: you start pulling your weight so poor, sweet Delaney doesn't have to cover you anymore. What an incredible worker she is! I tell you, Jill, nobody on this list is more special than her.

JILL: Absolutely.

PENDERGAST: Carry on, Jill.

PENDERGAST starts to leave.

NATHAN enters. He is chewing.

NATHAN: Hey Jill, were there any more chocolate chip - ?

He sees PENDERGAST. She gives him an icy stare.

NATHAN: Oh! Good morning, Mrs. Pendergast.

PENDERGAST clicks her pen open. She flips to a new page on the clipboard and begins crossing something off. She starts humming "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," low and menacing.

PENDERGAST exits.

NATHAN: *(As she leaves.)* Mrs. Pendergast? Mrs. Pendergast?

He follows her out, distressed. JILL watches them go.

DELANEY thrusts a hand out and grabs JILL by the ankle.

DELANEY: Is she gone?

JILL: For the love of - ! Yes, she's gone.

DELANEY: I can't believe it! The whole time, I was on the *nice* list! I didn't have to hide in a cardboard box at all! Jillie, I'm so excited!

The box scoots towards JILL and bumps her.

DELANEY: Oh, sorry. That was a hug.

JILL: Will you come out of there?

DELANEY tips the box over. She stands up and stretches

DELANEY: Stretchy-stretch! Phew! Thank you so much, Jill.

JILL: According to Pendergast, I oughta be thanking you.

DELANEY: Oh, forget that! You and I both know you're the one who does all the work. You're the best workgroup partner a girl could have!

She goes for a hug again. JILL evades her.

JILL: Yeah, still not feeling it. Delaney, our deadline's coming up. How's your half of the project?

DELANEY: Oh, I'm so on it! Let me just -

Hold on. It's 12:30?! I'm on lunch break!

JILL: Lunch break?

DELANEY: Well, yeah! All I've eaten today is cheese cubes. I'm starving. I think I'd better take an hour fifteen and get some gelato on the way back. De-stress, you know? Can you cover for me?

JILL: Delaney -

DELANEY: Oh, thanks! You are amazing! See you at two!

JILL: That's an hour thirty . . .

DELANEY exits.

JILL: I'm losing my mind.

DELANEY re-enters, holding her phone.

DELANEY: (*Indicating the box.*) Oh, one more thing. The Boxes for Love guy says you can bring that down to the loading dock?

She blows JILL a noisy kiss.

DELANEY: (*Into her phone.*) Uh-huh! She's on her way!

DELANEY exits. JILL looks over at the box, bewildered.

JILL: I quit.

BLACKOUT.

THE END

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