

JINX

By James Arnold

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SYNOPSIS: A series of extremely improbable coincidences (whatever the cause) on the psychology of a small group of co-workers causes great merriment, slight paranoia and intense fun!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 3 males, 1 either)

JOHN (m) Computer programmer.
Unremarkable in appearance,
dressed in business casual.
Somewhat loud and brash. (30
lines)

SUSAN (f) Programmer. Seems trendy,
self-confident. (25 lines)

JERRY (f/m) Nerdy programmer. Wears large
black-rimmed glasses and
dresses as a computer geek.
(6 lines)

MR. WINKLER (m) Office manager. Dressed in a
cheap suit. Over-worked, bossy.
(4 lines)

RACHEL (f) Programmer. Unremarkable in
appearance and personality,
dressed in business casual.
(22 lines)

CRAIG (m) Programmer. Unremarkable in
appearance and personality,
dressed in business casual.
(17 lines)

SETTING: *A small office with five desks and chairs. Computers optional.*

AT RISE: *JOHN and SUSAN enter the office. They are already engaged in conversation as they enter. JERRY, already at work, ignores them as they walk toward their desks.*

JOHN: *(To SUSAN.)* Got your lotto ticket for tonight?

SUSAN: Yeah, you?

JOHN: *(Derisively, in passing, to JERRY.)* Jerry! Geekoid!

JERRY is engrossed in his computer. He's slightly annoyed, but he's accustomed to being teased, and pretends to ignore John's greeting.

JOHN: *(To SUSAN.)* Yeah, I picked my own numbers this time. Got 'em right out of the blue. Divine inspiration. As of tomorrow *(He says grandly.)* I'm a man of leisure.

JOHN sits down at his desk. SUSAN is taking off her jacket, and drapes it over the back of her chair. SUSAN'S desk is downstage left.

SUSAN: Hey, I picked my own numbers too! You got your ticket with you?

JOHN is busy turning on his computer and/or arranging some papers, but pulls the ticket from his pocket obligingly.

JOHN: Yeah, have a look.

SUSAN pulls her ticket from her purse, crosses to JOHN'S desk. She takes JOHN'S ticket and holds the two of them side-by-side. She looks back and forth at the two tickets, her expression changing from light and casual to stunned disbelief. JOHN has begun typing at his computer, but noticing SUSAN'S silence, he stops and looks up at her face. JOHN pauses curiously while SUSAN stands motionless, speechless.

JOHN: What's the matter?

SUSAN: *(Numbly.)* They're both the same. Your... your numbers and mine. They're the same. You picked my numbers.

JOHN: *What?!*

JOHN stands abruptly and grabs the tickets from SUSAN'S hand. He looks at the tickets, back and forth several times, and stands like SUSAN in stunned disbelief.

SUSAN: *(Slowly, incredulously.)* What're the odds of that?

MR. WINKLER bursts into the office. He strides nervously in small quick steps toward his office door. JERRY looks up from his computer, his face taking an ingratiating pose as MR. WINKLER passes.

JERRY: Good morning, Mr. Winkler.

MR. WINKLER ignores JERRY'S greeting.

MR.WINKLER: *(To JOHN and SUSAN.)* Where's Rachel?

JOHN is still staring at the tickets, his mouth slack-jawed. SUSAN is dazed, her eyes on the tickets in JOHN'S hands. She answers mechanically, without customary deference.

SUSAN: Not here yet.

MR. WINKLER crosses the stage toward his office, slightly annoyed at their inaction, and at SUSAN'S tone of voice.

MR.WINKLER: *(Autocratically, as he exits.)* I've got a meeting upstairs. Tell her I need her screen shots before noon!

MR. WINKLER exits. JOHN and SUSAN remain frozen in disbelief. JOHN and SUSAN step slowly backward to their chairs, then slowly sit down, all without taking their eyes off each other. SUSAN breaks her stare, grabs her phone and rapidly punches the numbers for a call. JOHN is troubled, shoulders slumped, motionless, staring at his screen. SUSAN begins talking excitedly on the phone about the

coincidence, as if to a close friend. RACHEL enters.

RACHEL: Hey guys!

JOHN swings his chair around to face RACHEL as she enters, but JERRY continues typing, and SUSAN remains absorbed in her phone conversation. JOHN and RACHEL don't much like each other.

JOHN: *(To RACHEL.)* You're in trouble. Winky needs the screen shots by noon. And look at this.

JOHN holds the lotto tickets out to RACHEL as she walks to the desk next to JOHN. RACHEL swerves to take the tickets from JOHN'S hand and looks at them briefly, but she's thinking about her deadline.

RACHEL: *(Matter-of-factly.)* Lotto tickets.

JOHN: Yeah. Me 'n' Susan picked the same numbers.

RACHEL looks at the tickets again, trying impatiently to comprehend, and speaks as if dealing with imbeciles.

RACHEL: Why did you wanna do that?

JOHN is annoyed. He gets up and grabs the tickets from RACHEL'S hands.

JOHN: We didn't WANT to do it. We just DID it.

RACHEL resents his attitude. She glances at the tickets, but her thoughts are inclined to her deadline.

RACHEL: Oh. *(She pauses.)* Far out.

JOHN swings his chair around, slaps the tickets on the desk and begins typing angrily on his keyboard. CRAIG enters the room from the hallway door as RACHEL sits down.

CRAIG: Mornin'.

JERRY is on good enough terms with CRAIG to respond.

JERRY: Hey.

CRAIG takes his seat upstage left as SUSAN hangs up her phone. She swings her chair around.

SUSAN: (To JOHN.) My sister thinks it's love.

JOHN: What – the reason we picked the same numbers?

JOHN scoffs and SUSAN laughs. RACHEL is already working feverishly on her deadline.

CRAIG: What are you talking about?

CRAIG is ignored.

JOHN: (To SUSAN.) Did you use birthday numbers? Lucky numbers?

SUSAN: No! They just came to me... Just like you.

JOHN and SUSAN stare at each other for several moments.

JOHN: We must've seen the same numbers somewhere yesterday.

Maybe lots of other people picked 'em too.

SUSAN: Too weird.

JOHN: Dumb luck.

SUSAN: It was psychic.

JOHN: Luck.

SUSAN: Psychic.

JOHN: Luck.

All five are quiet for a time, engrossed in their computer screens or paperwork. The only sound is their rapid tappings on their keyboards. Unexpectedly, JOHN speaks.

JOHN: Luck.

SUSAN can't believe JOHN hasn't dropped the issue. She rolls her eyes, takes a breath.

SUSAN: Psychic.

JOHN: Luck.

SUSAN refuses to continue the game. She pretends to ignore JOHN. Suddenly, SUSAN and RACHEL stop what they're doing, roll their chairs back with a sigh and speak simultaneously.

SUSAN and RACHEL: *(Simultaneously.)* I need some coffee!

Both are startled, and speak with a laugh, again simultaneously.

SUSAN and RACHEL: Jinx! Buy me a coke!

Even more startled, they laugh again, this time louder, longer, and more incredulously. After a few moments they stop laughing, then without pause, blurt out simultaneously.

SUSAN and RACHEL: We're in sync!

Now their mouths are open wide, and they laugh again. This time the laughter is more with amazement than humor. JERRY is just starting to come out of his fixation on his computer, but the two other men have already stopped what they're doing, and are staring at the women in disbelief.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)*
Unbelievable!

Now there are gasps, shrieks of amazement, uncontrolled laughter.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* I don't...
(Everyone pauses.) believe this! *(Eyes and mouths are wide-open.)*

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* What is
going... on...

Gasps.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* This...
can't... be... happening...

No more laughter. Everyone is frozen, staring at each other, unwilling to speak again. Then, as if to themselves.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: Whoa.

JERRY is afraid to say anything. He's avoided being part of it so far, and is determined to keep it that way. Unlike the others, he's a spectator to the phenomenon, and is regarding the others with suspicion, distance, unease. It's as if there's something wrong with them. It may even be somehow contagious. His mouth is open slightly, and he maintains the same disturbed, comical expression on his face throughout the scene. After a few moments, there are nervous smiles amongst SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG. But not a sound. Each begins to realize that they're having an incredible experience, that they'll all look back on it with great humor and appreciation at having been involved. What a story to tell to friends and family... Silence. Uncomfortable smiles turn to a sort of nervous "okay, this-is-a-weird-moment-we're-sharing" laughter. They pause, then each begins to form a word with their mouths, and watches helplessly at the others doing the same.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* Is it o...
ver?

It obviously isn't, and faces turn serious, ominous. How long can this continue? Silence. Heads shake. Occasional, disbelieving, humorless laughs - but not in sync. Wrinkled brows, expressing a sense of enough-is-enough, each starts to say, as if protesting against the gods.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* What....

Each voice just trails off into silence. The phone on RACHEL'S desk rings, and everyone jumps at the intrusion. Then they begin to realize that only RACHEL can answer, and only she can speak. A sense of relief, of completion, spreads through the room, and finally, after numerous rings, RACHEL grabs her phone compulsively.

RACHEL: *(Anxiously into phone.)* Programming. Rachel.

Everyone else exhales visibly. Each of them, watching the phone in RACHEL'S hand, smiles in anticipation – but not JERRY, who never loses his expression of foreboding and separation. RACHEL collects herself as she listens to the voice on the phone.

RACHEL: Hi Andrew. *(Pause.)* Yeah, I got it. *(Pause.)* Probably Friday. No later than Monday. *(Then uncharacteristically and unprofessionally, she says weakly.)* ...or not.

Apparently a reaction from ANDREW to her last comment brings her back into her business persona.

RACHEL: No, definitely, no later than Monday. *(Pause.)* Okay. B-bye.

No one has moved a muscle, except to gradually relax their expressions, as they anticipate that the spell, or whatever it was, has been broken. The outside world has intruded, and they feel they've been released. RACHEL has conducted the conversation as if in a daze. She sets the receiver down slowly, carefully. Then she looks back at the others in silence. Each begins to speak, and each realizes after the third word is spoken that they are once again in sync.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* Well at least... that's... over.

SUSAN puts her hand to her mouth. All their public faces are gone, each is feeling alone and trapped. A sense of gloom, there's some mysterious, awful process happening. JOHN manages to scoff, but he doesn't try to match his bravado with another attempt at some solo utterance. Silence. No one moves. MR. WINKLER storms in, and everyone jumps again at the intrusion.

MR. WINKLER: Craig! I'm gonna need your projected hours on the changes to the data files.

Everyone looks at CRAIG. CRAIG gulps.

CRAIG: *(Tentatively.)* Okay.

After the phone call, this singular utterance is not viewed as being especially encouraging. MR. WINKLER barely notices. He's goes back into his office just to pick up some more papers, and re-emerges in a rush.

MR. WINKLER: *(To SUSAN as he's leaving.)* Did you get my message about the screen shots?

SUSAN: *(Anxious to speak.)* Yes!

MR. WINKLER: *(To everyone, louder.)* Don't forget, we've got a meeting with the AR team tomorrow at nine! They've got some changes to... *(He begins to slow his stride and his words as he nears the exit.)* What's goin' on?

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG reply, completely self-absorbed, as if dazed or drugged.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* We're... not sure...

MR. WINKLER looks at them for a moment with authoritative disapproval.

MR. WINKLER: *(Gruffly.)* I gotta get to a meeting.

He pauses again, looking at each one of them in turn. Clearly, something strange and unproductive is going on. To JERRY, he speaks loudly and reproachfully.

MR. WINKLER: Jerry, we've got a deadline here!

JERRY doesn't move. MR. WINKLER searches for something to say, something about the project, something about how whatever is happening, it's unacceptable, but he can't find the right words to employ. Suddenly, MR. WINKLER is gone, and in an obvious boss-like state of disturbance and deferred vengeance.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously, with resignation.)* O-kay. *(The synchronicity is no longer a surprise. Each shouts angrily at the others.)* HEY!

JERRY: *(Softly.)* You guys are freakin' me out.

Everyone stares at him, as if from a sinking ship at one person drifting away in a lifeboat.

JERRY: *(He shouts plaintively.)* Don't look at me!

An idea strikes SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG. Once again, they blurt something they hope will be unique.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* My name is [Each says their name]!

The one word of difference isn't reassuring.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* Stop talking! *(Shouted frantically.)*

One at a time, each of them has gotten out of their chairs and backed up to a wall, as if holding on to keep from falling through the floor. JERRY has gotten on his desk and scooted his back to the wall, holding his folded legs protectively in front of him.

JERRY: STOP IT!

RACHEL begins sobbing. JERRY is beginning to feel slightly empathetic, and musters the courage to speak, as if to try to show the others a solitary voice is possible, but also to test his continued independence.

JERRY: My... name... is... Jerry.

JERRY is self-satisfied, but the others find this annoying in the extreme. They stare him down, then return their attention to their dilemma.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* I... don't... like... this. *(Pause.)* I HATE THIS!

Their eyes wild with increasing desperation. SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG begin to say the most improbable things that come to mind, hoping to finally break the spell, but always simultaneously.

SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG: *(Simultaneously.)* Licorice! *(Amazement.)* Sea shells... at the... *(With a sob.)* seashore! *(Astonishment.)* Duck-billed... platypus!

With that last utterly improbable, unsuccessful, and absolutely untoppable reference to an obscure marsupial, a reference none of them has used more than a few times in their lifetimes, a strange "ohhhh" sound, much like the rising pitch of an air-raid siren, wells from deep in the gut of SUSAN, RACHEL, JOHN, and CRAIG, and when it reaches a critical level of distress, each of them (except JERRY) lunges toward the exit with a piercing, primal scream of terror, as if some devouring demon would claim the last one out of the room. They slam into each other, fighting like a mob to exit. Two of them are on hands and knees before they manage to scramble from the room. Their screams fade away. JERRY sits frozen, with the same slack-jawed expression, but with increasing consternation as he reflects on what's happened. Silence. JERRY sits in shock. Looking toward the heavens, as if expecting the ceiling to fall down upon him.

JERRY: *(Repeating the others' last words in a hushed voice, as if they might be magical incantations.)* Licorice. Sea shells at the seashore. Duck-billed platypus.

The effect is comical. He becomes increasingly uneasy about his solitude, and finally gets up and runs frantically offstage as-if after the others.

THE END

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