A SOCIALLY DISTANCED FARCE IN ONE ACT

A 15-minute comedy

By Jenna Jane

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Summary

This farce holds up a mirror – or, well, web cam – to the work-from-home struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's April 2020 and this Zoom meeting could be the difference between a company going under or adapting to the changing consumer needs of the pandemic. Can these employees at an office-wear fashion company convince people to wear pants with buttons again? Was adopting a puppy a mistake? Why are the kids watching *Frozen* instead of doing virtual school? These coworkers will have to learn to handle family drama on-camera, bridge generational gaps with each other and, for the love of all that is holy, learn when to mute. This 15-minute comedy can be produced virtually or onstage.

Cast of characters

A note from the playwright on gender references, below: These are only suggestions. Gender is just a performative social construct, anyway. Do whatever feels right to you.

Onstage:

ELAINE: A woman in her 40s. Regional manager at WorkIt. Mom of 7-year-old LULU. Exhausted, but trying to stay positive and keep the team on-task.

MEG: A woman in her 20s. WorkIt's social media manager. Savvy and direct, but diplomatic.

GARY: A man in his 50s. Clothing designer at WorkIt. Old school. Genuinely trying to keep up with technology, but he's a fish out of water. Single father to TIM.

Voiceovers (Can be pre-recorded):

LAURA: A woman in her 40s. WorkIt's head of market research. Disingenuous. Thinks she's the smartest person in any room.

TIM: A teenage boy. Lovesick, impatient, impulsive. GARY's son. Could be double-cast as WAITER.

LULU: A 7-year-old girl. Attention-seeking and prone to outbursts. ELAINE's daughter.

COLLEEN: A woman in her 50s. CEO of WorkIt. Strategic. Overbearingly friendly in the least authentic way possible.

WAITER: Any gender expression, any age. Polite, efficient. Could be double-cast as TIM.

Setting

A Zoom meeting in April 2020.

SETTING: Four simple frames are propped upright on desks in front of four chairs. These are MEG, ELAINE, GARY, AND LAURA'S work-from-home setups. At the bottom of each frame is their name and job title. The bottom of each frame should be just below chest level. In the lower left corner are images of red microphones fastened to the frame with Velcro or a magnet. Actors remove and replace the red mic images to signify unmuting and muting. MEG, ELAINE, and GARY's frames are empty. LAURA's frame contains a professional headshot of LAURA. MEG's frame is on stage right. GARY's frame is on stage left. ELAINE and LAURA's frames are in the middle. Behind MEG, there are several thriving potted plants and a poster of Audrey Hepburn. She has a ring light nearby. Behind ELAINE, family photos. GARY's background is a white wall, mugshot style. GARY is poorly lit.

AT RISE: We hear a cellphone alarm going off. MEG ambles onstage, rubbing her eyes behind her hipster glasses with one hand and holding her phone in the other. She turns off the alarm. She's wearing a *Tiger King* tank top and leggings. She approaches her frame, stops herself, then walks back offstage. ELAINE enters and takes a seat behind her frame. Her hair and makeup are flawless. She wears a tailored blazer, blouse, and pajama pants. She removes the red microphone from her frame (referenced hereafter as unmuting). GARY enters, wearing a crisp, fitted button-down shirt, tie, and boxers. He takes a seat.

ELAINE

Good morning, Gary!

(GARY mouths a few sentences, silently.)

Oh, Gary, you're on mute.

(GARY stops mouthing, looks around at the bottom of his screen, pokes something. He silently mouths, 'How about now?')

Still muted.

(MEG enters, pulling on a nice cardigan. She turns on her ring light, takes a seat, unmutes herself.)

Hi, Meg! Glad you could join us for this Zoom brainstorming session.

(GARY unmutes.)

MEG

Of course! I've got a few ideas I think you're going to --

GARY

(Loudly.)

How about now? Can you hear me?

(MEG mutes herself and gives a thumbs up.)

ELAINE

Yes, loud and clear. I think we're just waiting on Laura now. So, as soon as she joins, we'll --

LAURA (Voiceover)

(Traffic noise can be heard in the background, like LAURA is calling from the inside of a car on a highway.)

I'm here!

ELAINE

Laura, I'm not sure if you saw in the Zoom meeting invitation, but I requested that everyone join with their video turned on. While we work from home, I think it's so important that we stay connected face-to-face. Could you turn your video on, please?

LAURA (Voiceover)

(Overlapping with traffic noise)

Yeah, sorry, my web cam stopped working yesterday. And web cams are out of stock pretty much everywhere right now. I found one on Amazon, but it's not going to get here for a couple weeks.

(We hear her navigation app say: "In half a mile, exit right.")

ELAINE

Laura, where are you? We're hearing a lot of background noise.

LAURA (Voiceover)

Oh, really? That's so weird. I'm in my living room.

(A car horn honks.)

ELAINE

That sounds like traffic.

LAURA (Voiceover)

You know what? I just saw the UPS truck go by. Maybe that's what you heard. These delivery trucks drive by all the time these days, am I right? I'll just go ahead and mute myself.

ELAINE

(Slow blink, then a confident smile.)

OK, let’s just jump right in. As I mentioned in the Zoom invite, this is a brainstorming session to rethink our products, to adapt to the changing needs of our customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For decades, WorkIt has been known for our high-quality professional attire. But now that most office workers are hashtag working from home, we need to rework this season’s office-wear line into a home office-wear line.

MEG

(Unmutes.)

Like, pajamas?

ELAINE & GARY

No.

MEG

Like, leggings?

ELAINE & GARY

No.

MEG

(Pauses.)

OK.

(We hear a dog barking throughout ELAINE’S next line.)

ELAINE

I’m going to level with all of you: I’m being considered for a promotion to Head of Sales. If that happens, I can bump all of you up the ladder. But, let me be clear. There’s a lot riding on this brainstorming session. Profits have been in the hole since the pandemic began. If WorkIt doesn’t adapt, we may have to shut down. The ideas we come up with in this Zoom meeting could be the difference between – I’m sorry, is that a dog? Whose dog is that?

MEG

Mine, I’m sorry. I adopted a puppy over the weekend!

GARY

(Genuinely excited.)

Oh, that’s great!

(GARY tries to move his head around in his frame, hoping to get a view of the puppy.)

MEG

Yeah, I figure I’m finally home enough that I can actually take care of a puppy, right?

(The puppy is barking incessantly. MEG talks to her puppy, just offstage right.)

Mr. Pickles, I’ll take you out for a walk right after this meeting, OK? Be quiet for Mommy. Good boy.

(He is not a good boy. Barking continues.)

ELAINE

Could you put yourself on mute, Meg?

(MEG mutes. The barking stops. MEG silently shushes her puppy.)

Ok, I want to hear your ideas for how WorkIt can respond to our customers' needs by transitioning seamlessly from professional wear to work-from-home fashion.

GARY

Eh…

(Silence, as GARY silently mouths a few words.)

Pants…

(More silent mouthing.)

Necktie fabric…

ELAINE

Gary, you're breaking up.

GARY

(Unaware and unenthusiastic.)

Loungewear for the modern worker…

(Silent mouthing.)

Elastic waistband…

(GARY freezes, his face contorted unattractively.)

ELAINE

Gary, I think your connection might be bad. You're freezing up.

(Awkward pause. GARY remains frozen.)

We'll come back to Gary. Laura, I know you've only been head of market research for three months, but why don't you break down what your data tells us about demand for pants with buttons?

LAURA (Voiceover)

(While LAURA talks, we hear ocean waves crashing and seagulls screeching.)

Absolutely, Elaine. I'll just go ahead and share my screen here. Give me a thumbs up if you can see this chart.

(ELAINE shakes her head. MEG gives a thumbs down. GARY is still frozen.)

Great, so you can see from this line graph that demand for pants with buttons has been slowly decreasing over the past decade. But the industry has really seen a sharp drop-off since the beginning of this pandemic. In the meantime, demand for terry joggers and yoga pants –

MEG

(Unmutes.)

I can't see the graph. Can anyone else see it?

(Barking. MEG mutes.)

ELAINE

Laura, your screen isn't sharing.

LAURA(Voiceover)

(More ocean waves. Perhaps a ukulele plays.)

Really? How about now?

(MEG gives a thumbs down. GARY unfreezes.)

ELAINE & GARY

No.

LAURA (Voiceover)

(We hear ice cream truck music.)

That's so weird, you guys. This has never happened to me before.

ELAINE

Laura, are you at the beach?

LAURA (Voiceover)

What? No, that’s – there’s an ice cream truck that comes through my neighborhood, lately.

TIM (Voiceover)

Dad, I can’t take it anymore. I have to see Lisa.

GARY

(GARY turns toward offstage left.)

I’m in a meeting.

ELAINE

You’re not on mute, Gary.

TIM (Voiceover)

It’s been six weeks since the last time I saw her. What if someone hotter slides into her DM’s?

GARY

We’ve been over this, Tim. You can’t put your health at risk to see your girlfriend. Now, please, I’m working.

TIM (Voiceover)

You and mom were never in love! You don’t understand what it’s like to –

ELAINE & MEG

Mute!

(GARY mutes, arguing silently toward offstage left.)

ELAINE

Alright, thanks for hanging in there, Meg. As our social media manager, what's your recommended strategy for socially marketing this transition?

MEG

Of course, we should target some ads on Instagram. That's standard stuff, at this point.

(Barking.)

But I was thinking, what if we collaborate with an influencer for a few videos on TikTok? I've made a list of TikTok –

(Incessant barking.)

Sorry, I think Mr. Pickles really needs to go out for a walk. He's pacing around by the door.

LULU (Voiceover)

Mom, can I watch *Frozen?*

ELAINE

Honey, aren't you supposed to be in class? Mommy gave you her iPad so you could go to school virtually.

MEG

Mr. Pickles, no! Not on the rug!

LULU (Voiceover)

But I want to watch *Frozen!*

(MEG mutes and the barking stops. MEG runs offstage right.)

ELAINE

You can watch *Frozen* after school. School first. Then *Frozen.*

(LULU shrieks and cries. ELAINE looks out at the audience through the frame, then offstage toward LULU, then back at the frame. MEG is gone. GARY is still arguing silently. Who knows where the hell LAURA is? A crew member slides another frame out onstage. The title at the bottom says 'iPhone.')

Lulu, where is Daddy?

(ELAINE yells offstage as LULU bawls.)

Bill, where are you? I'm in a meeting!

LULU (Voiceover)

(Tearfully.)

He's making sourdough again. I hate sourdough! I hate it, I hate it, I hate it!

(ELAINE mutes and talks silently to LULU, off camera. MEG enters stage right without her cardigan and sits. She realizes she's not wearing her cardigan, gets back up and EXITS off right.)

GARY

(Unmutes. Nonchalantly.)

Hey gang, sorry about that. You know how teenagers are. Hormones with legs.