

Makes No Difference

a play in one act

by Patty Ganzelli

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DRAMATIC PREMISE: What if the CEO of a software company, about to make the biggest merger in the company's history, were brought to choose between firing a young autistic man or losing the million-dollar partnership?

CENTRAL ACTION STATEMENT: JONATHAN, wanting to live up to his sister's expectations and father's legacy by merging Dunbar Engineering with Marconi Pharmaceuticals, searches for a way to appease both parties but MARLENE, wanting to maintain her company's pristine reputation, gives Jonathan an ultimatum of either firing an autistic man named Marcus who embarrassed her or losing her as a partner, resulting in Jonathan choosing to keep Marcus and lose her business.

MODE OF PRODUCTION

The play is standard realism, but the director should note the script is a precious object. Once Jonathan puts it down, whoever subsequently handles the script should give it added signification until Jonathan asks for it on page \_\_ "Marlene. The script."

CHARACTERS

JONATHAN DUNBAR, 36, CEO of Dunbar Engineering, a software company

MARCUS FOREMAN, 20, Autistic employee of Dunbar Engineering

LIZ DUNBAR, 32, Jonathan's sister and Director of Human Resources of Dunbar Engineering

RICK MANOLO, 36, CFO of Dunbar Engineering

MARLENE MARCONI, 45, President and CEO of Marconi Pharmaceuticals

FRANK LARSON, 40, Director of the Board of Marconi Pharmaceuticals

WENDY, 22, Secretary to Jonathan

REPORTERS 1, 2, 3

TIME

The present, mid-morning

PLACE

JONATHAN'S office. There is a chair behind a large desk with a computer.

SCENARIO

President of Marconi Pharmaceuticals Marlene Marconi and her assistants enter a meeting room flustered. An autistic man, Marcus, has just embarrassed them in front of an audience. Jonathan Dunbar, CEO of Dunbar Engineering, is about to make a billion dollar merger with Marconi. She gives him an ultimatum: Either fire Marcus for his antics or lose her business. Jonathan is on the fence about this issue. His sister and employees all have varying opinions, but it is not until he recognizes what Marcus must go through that he finally rejects Marlene's proposal and keeps Marcus on his team.

(Lights come up on JONATHAN, who holds a script,  
and RICK, who wears a Bluetooth)

RICK

What the hell's he know about hard work anyway? Pisses me off. It ain't fair, ya know?

JONATHAN

Is it fair people like Marcus don't make it in the world? Is it fair our stocks are dropping? Is it fair Apple is trying to buy us out? Don't get me started on fair, Rick.

RICK

I know why you're doing it, Jon, but come on. We can't be expected to give hand-outs to every charity case that walks through the door. He can't even look you in the friggin' eye and shake hands, for Christ's sake!

JONATHAN

Give him a break. If it bothers you so much, come in after he's gone home for the day.

RICK

I ain't workin' my schedule around him!

JONATHAN

Then shut the hell up about it! . . .I'm sorry, Rick. It's just. . .the press conference is in-dammit--twenty-eight minutes, I got Liz on my back about this Marcus thing, Marconi's on her way, I gotta memorize this script. . .

(To himself reads script)

"It is my sincerest pleasure to finally announce. . ."  
Goddammit. . .

(Drops script on table)

RICK

I know I know. Look, all I'm sayin' is. . .I worked my ass off to get where I am. So did you. So did your father. Rain Man needs to learn to stand in line for a minimum wage job at Wal-Mart. . .just like the rest of us.

JONATHAN

When did you ever work at Wal-Mart?

RICK

It's the principle of the thing, Jon! We worked our way from the bottom up. I don't wanna have to start all over just because some kid screwed up the merger.

JONATHAN

My father put me in charge of this company. I will not let anyone run it into the ground.

RICK

Damn right. We gotta stop this unnecessary spending.

JONATHAN

Unnecessary?

RICK

Look here--You're shelling out five thousand bucks a month for a private suite at Bayside. If he shares a room you cut that cost in half! Sacrifices gotta be made, Jon.

JONATHAN

Look, if my brother's in a home it's going to be the best damn home money can buy. Alright?

RICK

Alright, Jon, alright. . .As far as this Marcus kid, though--

JONATHAN

--Dunbar Engineering cannot afford to lose this merger. And I will not let that Steve Jobs wannabe--what's his name--

RICK

--Tim Cook--

JONATHAN

--Tim Cook! I will not let him buy out my dad's business.

RICK

Sacrifices gotta be made. For the good of the company--

JONATHAN

--I know I know. For the good of the company.

(LIZ and WENDY enter)

WENDY

Liz is here, Mr. Dunbar.

JONATHAN

Thank you, Wendy.

WENDY

Mrs. Marconi is en route. She'll be here in ten minutes.  
Shouldn't you be, like, setting up for the press  
conference?

LIZ

I got it, Wendy.

WENDY

Like herding cats. . .

(WENDY exits)

RICK

So you gonna let him go then?. . .Jon?. . .Jon!

LIZ

You're not seriously considering it, are you?

JONATHAN

Yeah. I am.

RICK

Why shouldn't he?

LIZ

Why? You want a reason?

RICK

I would love to hear one.

LIZ

Fine. Let me tell you.

JONATHAN

Lizzie. Don't--

LIZ

--Charles.

RICK

Charles. Exactly. We need to do the merger for Charles.

LIZ

For Charles.

JON

We need the money.

LIZ

As far as I'm concerned, Charles's bills are paid by an anonymous donor.

JONATHAN

Here we go again! Look. I know how long it's been--

LIZ

--Three years, Jon--

JONATHAN

--I've already heard the spiel--

LIZ

--Three years since you last saw him!

RICK

Three years since you seen your brother? We write the checks and we don't even know where they're goin'!

JONATHAN

We know where they're going!

(To LIZ)

We can talk about this later.

LIZ

We can talk about this now.

RICK

Man, I can barely go a week without seeing Danny. Three years. . .

JONATHAN

Alright I get it! Can we drop this now?

LIZ

No!

JONATHAN

Of course not.

LIZ

Call off the press conference.

JONATHAN

Four weeks of planning, Liz! Four weeks of negotiating, coordinating schedules with Fox and—are you aware how hard it is--

LIZ

--I'm well aware, Jon. I contacted CNN for God's sake! Call it off. You can do it. After all, Dad put you in charge.

JONATHAN

Dad worked his whole life to forget--

LIZ

--You have the chance he never did--

JONATHAN

--Forget how he let the doctors talk him into putting Charles away!

RICK

Never let people talk you into anything. Ya always gotta go with your gut.

JONATHAN

My gut says I can't throw away everything Dad's worked for.

LIZ

Dad hired that kid Oliver.

JONATHAN

Oliver worked in the mail room. Not on the main floor.

RICK

Why can't we do that with Marcus? Keep him out of view of the general public. . .so they don't get freaked out.

LIZ

Yeah, sure. Let's simply hide him in the basement, far from the world! It's not like we're ashamed of him!

JONATHAN

It's not about shame. It's about balancing the books and doing what it takes to provide for my family.

LIZ

Family.

RICK

Look, I didn't mean anything by it--I'm just tryin' to help, after yesterday and all. . .

LIZ

What happened yesterday will not affect our business.

JONATHAN

Our business is what's on the line.

LIZ

Why are we merging with Marconi, anyway? They don't care about anybody.

RICK

They're a pharmaceutical company. They have to care.

LIZ

They're paid to care! Every year they come out with some miracle drug for cancer or M.S. that they market and market and market until every innocent person believes it's their only option. Once they've made their profit, Marconi simply develops another new drug for the next biggest diagnosis and once again resumes the marketing cycle. I believe the fashionable disease this year is Alzheimer's?

JONATHAN

They may be heartless bastards. But they're heartless bastards who know how to present the ideal corporate image. And that's something we need.

(Just then MARCUS enters, carrying a laptop and muttering to himself)

MARCUS

". . .I have tried every way. Why, I even built a raft! A raft? A raft! That's it! We'll take the raft! And when the whale opens its mouth. . .No no no no. Now listen, son, he only opens his mouth when he's eating. . ."

JONATHAN

The ideal corporate image. . .Dammit. . .

(Clears throat)

Morning, Marcus. I thought you weren't coming in 'til two.

MARCUS

Today is Tuesday the fifth. Every Tuesday and Thursday I am to be clocked in by ten a.m., or Ante Meridiem, which is Latin for "before midday." Whereas every Monday, Wednesday and Friday I am to be in the office at 2 o'clock p.m., or Post Meridiem, which is Latin for "after midday."

RICK

Aaaand he's off again. Son of a bitch. . .

MARCUS

It is not appropriate to swear in the workplace. Might I suggest an alternative such as "cheese and crackers" or "fiddlesticks?"

LIZ

How do you think Dad would view your ideal corporate image now, Jon?

MARCUS

"Classy sophisticates like us shouldn't stain our lips with cursing."

RICK

That from Spongebob?

JONATHAN

Dad would do whatever it takes to keep the company afloat.

MARCUS

"Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?"

RICK

Kid really knows his cartoons!

LIZ

Dad would do whatever it takes to give back to the community.

MARCUS

"Community involvement and volunteerism is the driving force of our success at Dunbar Engineering."

LIZ

"Community and volunteerism. . ." Say, that's from our mission statement!

MARCUS

The mission statement that your father Patrick Dunbar wrote when the company was first created. The mission statement is emblazoned in its entirety on the red granite sculpture just outside the entrance.

LIZ

Remember when that thing was built?

JONATHAN

Yeah. . .Dad yelling at them to "make it bigger! Make it monstrous!. . .I want it immortalized!"

LIZ

". . .Immortalized as a constant reminder to always put people ahead of profit."

JONATHAN

Ahead of profit. . .

RICK

What are you working on, Marcus?

MARCUS

You're so curious, Ricky Ricardo. Don't be so curious.

RICK

I am curious, though.

MARCUS

I am debugging my hard drive. I love computers and wish to spend the rest of my life fixing them and creating new software. I am going to be the next Steve Jobs!

JONATHAN

Please, anyone but Steve Jobs. . .

LIZ

Marcus wants to live downtown, don't you, Marcus?

MARCUS

I prefer to move to the apartment downtown. I will save my income each week for to move to the apartment. This week I received eighty-four dollars and thirty-two cents!

RICK

Unnecessary spending. . .

JONATHAN

You live with your parents now, right Marcus?

MARCUS

Yes. I wish to become independent so that when I grow older I do not have to resort to "Bayside Assisted Living."

LIZ

Don't worry, Marcus. We'll help you! Isn't that right, Jon?

JONATHAN

Jesus, Liz--

RICK

--She's cuttin' your balls off, man--

JONATHAN

--We can barely string together a part-time paycheck as it is.

LIZ

"People ahead of profit."

JONATHAN

If we don't have profit, we can't help the people.

(Suddenly WENDY enters)

WENDY

--Larson and Marconi are here.

JONATHAN

Goddammit. . .Okay, Wendy.

WENDY

They wanna speak with you before the conference. Ya know. The conference that starts in, like, twenty minutes?

JONATHAN

Alright, Wendy, we get it!

WENDY

God! Forgive me for doing my job!  
(WENDY exits)

LIZ

Hey Marcus, how about you show me that antivirus thing.

MARCUS

I dislike Liz's suggestions sometimes. I prefer to foil her plans.

JONATHAN

Sometimes plans need to be foiled.

RICK

Can't blame ya there, Jon.

(MARLENE and FRANK enter)

MARLENE

Jonathan!

JONATHAN

Now before you say anything, Marlene--

MARLENE

--Jonathan--

JONATHAN

--This whole thing is easily treatable--

MARLENE

--And I've got the cure.

LIZ

I guess Alzheimer's isn't the fashionable disease this year after all.

JONATHAN

What happened yesterday was not ideal. . .

FRANK

It's on Youtube.

JONATHAN

Youtube?

FRANK

Some idiot shot the whole thing and uploaded it to the Internet!

JONATHAN

I'm sure it's not as bad as everybody makes it seem. . .

MARLENE

Oh, really? Let me show you.

(Walks over to computer and begins typing)

Look at this. "Dunbar Gives Chance to Autistic Youth! A special needs kid is enthusiastic after starting his new job at Dunbar Engineering!"

LIZ

Jon--I just wanted to introduce him to his coworkers.

MARLENE

Look at this.

(Clicks mouse. LIZ's voice is heard)

LIZ

(from computer)

Everyone! I'd like to introduce you all to the newest member of our team, Marcus Foreman.

(Applause is heard. MARCUS's voice speaks. Real MARCUS talks along with computer)

MARCUS

"Hi I'm Marcus and you're all going to be my new friends! What is your favorite Disney animation? My favorite is Pinocchio. Followed second is Aladdin, and third is--"

(LIZ stops video)

JONATHAN

Dammit. . .

MARCUS

Liz says I am inspiring!

RICK

Liz would say that.

LIZ

He is! It improves our corporate image.

JONATHAN

You should've consulted me first, Liz.

MARCUS

--The video already has over 320 thousand hits! It has gone viral.

(MARCUS continues to surf the web, muttering)

FRANK

Thank God Marconi's logo isn't in it.

MARLENE

We just narrowly avoided humiliation. And right before the announcement!

JONATHAN

We can fix this. We'll take it down--

MARLENE

Who's to say it won't happen again?

LIZ

It should happen again!

RICK

I'm not sure this is good publicity, Liz.

FRANK

We had a meeting this morning, Jon. In light of the situation, the Board feels. . .uncomfortable.

JONATHAN

Uncomfortable.

MARLENE

We have an image to uphold.

FRANK

Marconi Pharmaceuticals is committed to its patients and shareholders. We rely on innovative corporate governance and transparency. We apply global resources to improve the health and welfare of our benefactors.

MARLENE

And we can't maintain this image if all the cogs in the machine don't work properly.

FRANK

This kid--

JONATHAN

--Marcus.

FRANK

Right. This kid. Given his circumstances. . .Marconi questions whether the merger with Dunbar Engineering is in its best interest.

JONATHAN

Their best interest.

FRANK

Yes.

JONATHAN

Because they're. . .uncomfortable.

MARLENE

Everyone's uncomfortable, Jon! Not to mention, we are wasting hard-working American tax dollars on a lost cause.

LIZ

A lost cause!

RICK

Think about it, Lizzie. How many of them you see with full-time jobs? Families of their own? Answer: Zero.

MARLENE

It's a lost cause.

LIZ

You wonder why so many of them don't make it? It's because of people like you, Marconi. . .They don't get a fighting chance.

MARLENE

Look. I know this hits close to home. And you have my sympathy. You really do.

JONATHAN

Keep it professional, Marlene.

MARLENE

Fine. Professionally, we'd love to be in business with you. Your software is top-notch. Our system would greatly benefit with an update. But, professionally speaking, if you don't take care of this. . .we will walk.

JONATHAN

You have just as much to gain from this as we do.

MARLENE

And just as much to lose.

JONATHAN

It's a 50 million dollar merger!

MARCUS

--Merger?

(shuffles over to FRANK and MARLENE, who recoil slightly)

I discuss Dunbar Engineering's potential merger with Mac-a-roni Pharmaceuticals--

RICK

--Marconi, not macaroni--

MARCUS

--Mac-a-roni Pharmaceuticals in the latest update of my website www dot Marcus Foreman F-O-R-E-M-A-N dot com. Do not worry. I did not divulge any covert software secrets to the general public.

RICK

So much for the basement.

MARLENE

I should hope not.

MARCUS

"The football is secure."

RICK

. . .Football?

MARCUS

The football is the briefcase that contains the strategic defense codes the likes of which only the President of the United States can open to authorize a nuclear attack, popularized by the film *Chain of Command* released in the year 2000. "The football is secure."

MARLENE

My head is about to explode.

MARCUS

Explode like the nuclear explosion triggered by the President's football.

RICK

Exactly like that.

(WENDY enters)

WENDY

Mr. Dunbar, the press is arriving. For the press conference. That starts in fifteen minutes. They're in the outer office.

(WENDY exits)

JONATHAN

This deal has to go through. It's record-breaking for the company—the biggest merger in Dunbar's history!

MARCUS

It is even bigger than when your father partnered with Conrail back in 1983.

FRANK

How does he know that?

MARCUS

I dictated the history of the company on my website Marcus Forman F-O-R-E-M-A-N dot com starting from when his father Patrick Dunbar founded a small computer company in 1978 and

worked his way up to be one of best software distribution agencies.

RICK

That's how it's done! Ol' fashioned hard work and perseverance.

JONATHAN

. . .You haven't met Marcus yet, have you, Marlene?

MARLENE

Not formally.

MARCUS

"It is generally agreed that 'Hello' is an appropriate greeting because if you entered a room and said 'Goodbye,' it could confuse a lot of people."

RICK

That is very true.

JONATHAN

Marcus, this is Mrs. Marconi and Mr. Larson.

MARLENE

(Clears throat and offers her hand to MARCUS)

It's nice to meet you, Marcus.

(MARCUS buries his face in his laptop and walks away)

FRANK

Oooh God this is not good. . .

MARCUS

(to himself)

Last year Patrick Dunbar retired and bequeathed the presidency unto his son Mr. Jonathan Dunbar, where he continues to fulfill his father's dream of success. . .

(WENDY enters)

WENDY

They're getting really pissed off in here, Mr. Dunbar--  
(Suddenly shouting is heard and cameras flash offstage)

REPORTER #1

--They better hurry the hell up, I ain't got all day--

REPORTER #2

--Hey! Is that the Youtube Kid?!

REPORTER #3

--Is the Youtube Kid in there?!

REPORTER #2

--Hey! Kid! Say the line!

REPORTER #1

"I'm Marcus and you're all gonna be my new friends!"

MARLENE

The best of friends.

JONATHAN

Marlene--

WENDY

--I don't like being stuck out here. Please hurry up!

(WENDY exits)

MARLENE

I am not going to take this, Jon! He is gone!

JONATHAN

But Marlene--

MARLENE

--This merger will not happen if he stays. This is not how I predict the future of Marconi and Dunbar Engineering!

LIZ

I'm sorry. Should I get you a crystal ball?

MARLENE

Imagine the lawsuits!

FRANK

Millions of dollars down the drain--Productivity shot--  
Stocks plummet--Shareholders walk--Layoffs galore!

LIZ

What about diversity?

MARCUS

"Marconi Pharmaceuticals boasts a nurturing environment where diverse ideas and perspectives can flourish." WWW dot Mac-a-roni Pharmaceuticals dot com.

JONATHAN

That's all your website talks about.

MARLENE

Diversity is one of our highest priorities.

LIZ

Yeah. I've seen your website. A white guy shakes hands with a black guy who smiles at an Asian who high-fives a Latino, all in front of a gleaming silver skyscraper.

RICK

Looks like you covered all your bases, huh?

MARLENE

Marconi is seventh in the top ten global corporations for diversity and inclusion!

LIZ

Seems to me you don't quite understand the meaning of the word "diversity."

MARCUS

(types in laptop)

Diversity. From the Latin diversus meaning the state or act of being diverse. A different kind, form, or character. Having variety. WWW dot Dictionary dot com.

MARLENE

Jesus, just what we need, a human search engine!

LIZ

God knows your company donates enough to Special Olympics.

MARLENE

There's a difference between donating to the Special Olympics and hosting in your office.

MARCUS

(To himself)

". . . Prove yourself brave, truthful, and unselfish, and someday, you will be a real boy. . ."

RICK

Real boy. That's from Pinocchio, huh?

MARCUS

Pinocchio is about a wooden puppet who is brought to life by a blue fairy and goes through mischief and mayhem so he can be approved to be a real boy.

LIZ

It's his favorite.

JONATHAN

. . .Does he still sing it?

LIZ

Every day. You of all people should know, shouldn't you, Jon?

MARCUS

It is my favorite Disney animation. Everyone should love Pinocchio. Though I can understand why they would not. There are some frightening aspects to the film.

RICK

There are?

MARCUS

It is used to scare children into being good for fear of turning into a donkey and being sold to the salt mines. It has good values and is one of Disney's greatest works but some people cannot see past the scariness of Pleasure Island.

RICK

I know that part scarred me for life.

MARCUS

"A boy who won't be good might just as well be made of wood."

MARLENE

There he goes again--talking to himself. . .freakin' psychopath!

RICK

Hey Marcus. I got something for ya.

(RICK takes off Bluetooth and hands it to MARCUS)

MARCUS

A gift?

RICK

Uh, yeah. Now when people see you talking to yourself they won't get freaked out.

MARCUS

(Puts it on)

Thank you very much, Ricky Ricardo.

RICK

You're welcome, Marky Mark.

(MARCUS resumes working on the laptop)

RICK

(To JONATHAN)

Look. It ain't watcha think.

JONATHAN

How so?

RICK

I got a family to think about, Jon. I gotta take care of 'em, ya know?

JONATHAN

Yeah. I got a family too.

RICK

If this deal goes under. . .If Marconi walks. . .

(WENDY enters. Shouts and cameras flash offstage)

WENDY

The press will not wait, Mr. Dunbar--

REPORTER #1

--Mr. Dunbar! Mr. Dunbar!

REPORTER #3

Make the announcement!

WENDY

It starts in two minutes! They're demanding to come in!

REPORTER #2

--Send the Youtube kid out! Send out Marcus!

REPORTER #1

Let's go already! The network's on stand-by!

REPORTER #3

Are there other kids like Marcus working at Dunbar?

FRANK

All questions will be answered momentarily!

WENDY

Momentarily my ass. . .

(WENDY exits)

MARLENE

It's time, Jon. Will we be following the script?

MARCUS

(To himself)

". . .He's my conscience. He tells me what's right and wrong. What? You mean to tell me you take orders from a grasshopper? Grasshopper! Look here you impudent young pup! It wouldn't hurt to take orders from your conscience if you have one. . ."

MARLENE

Jon. It's time. Will. We. Be. Following. The. Script.

FRANK

Mr. Dunbar?

LIZ

Jon!

MARLENE

This is beneficial to everyone, Liz. Now we can seamlessly announce the merger and maintain the ideal corporate image.

MARCUS

(Singing to himself)

"When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. . .When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. . ." Mr. Dunbar. . .it does make a difference, doesn't it?. . .Liz. . .It does make a difference. . . doesn't it?. . .Ricardo?. . .Rick. . .

MARLENE

Jesus Christ someone get him outta here!. . .This is not how we maintain--He needs a nurturing environment!. . .It'll be better for him. . .I know you're thinking it--we're all thinking it. . .Don't look at me like that. . .This company is a machine and it needs to function properly!. . .I mean, it will be better for everyone, right?. . .It will be better for everyone if he were around people like him!. . .

JONATHAN

People like him. . .I of all people should know, shouldn't I, Liz?. . .Sitting there with him every Sunday watching Peter Pan and playing checkers. . ."I'm first, Jonathan. . .The oldest always goes first. . ." Talking about how much wheat is actually in a box of Wheaties. . .Wanting to take him home with me but knowing I never can. I of all people should know that, shouldn't I, Liz?

MARCUS

Mr. Dunbar. . .

(With difficulty, MARCUS offers his hand to JONATHAN and looks him in the eye. JONATHAN shakes his hand)

JONATHAN

Yes, Marcus. It does make a difference.

(Break handshake)

Marlene. The script.

(MARLENE hands JON the script)

MARCUS

(Begins to exit)

I prefer to move to the apartment. I have eighty-four dollars and thirty-two cents saved. I will move to the apartment.

LIZ

Marcus, are you okay? Here, let me--

MARCUS

--I am fine. You're so curious, Liz. Don't be so curious.

(MARCUS exits)

LIZ

. . .You wonder why so many of them don't make it?. . .It's because of decisions like this.

(LIZ exits)

MARLENE

You made the right decision, Jon. Your father would be proud.

RICK

Sacrifices gotta be made. . .

JONATHAN

. . .Rick. No more anonymous donations. . .I'll take the check up there myself.

RICK

. . .Tell him I say hey, alright?

(WENDY enters)

WENDY

Mr. Dunbar--

JONATHAN

--Send them in. We will now take any and all questions.

(As the lights go down, a montage of voices are heard)

REPORTER #1

Mr. Dunbar! Mr. Dunbar! About this merger, how would your father feel?. . .

FRANK

. . .The Board feels uncomfortable. . .

MARLENE

. . .The ideal corporate image. . .

MARCUS

. . .His father's dream of success. . .

REPORTER #2

. . .Do you plan on hiring more kids like Marcus?. . .

(Blackout)