

UNSILENT PARTNER

An original screenplay
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ACT ONE

UNSILENT PARTNER

FADE IN.

CORPORATE JET - NIGHT.

ROYCE DONOVAN (60s) is confident as he opens a humidor and reaches for two cigars. He approaches MICHAEL RIDGEWAY (60s) who twiddles a pen as he contemplates a standing offer regarding a partnership deal for his accounting business.

ROYCE.

I only smoke a cigar when I
close a deal.

Michael declines Royce's offer to light his cigar.

MICHAEL.

I'm still undecided.

ROYCE.

Take as much time as you need.

Michael stares at a stack of papers. On the top page is a contract with a sticker pointing to a signature line.

MICHAEL.

I've built my accounting
business from scratch and never
needed a partner.

ROYCE.

Michael, it's a million
dollars: half for the business;
half for yourself.

MICHAEL.

The contract says you'll be a
silent partner.

ROYCE.

I'm only interested in money.

MICHAEL.

Pardon my asking, Royce, but
will you be involved in any of
the actual operations?

ROYCE.

I only visit my companies when
there's an emergency. But if it
means turning a profit on an
investment, I'd even become a
secretary.

Michael chuckles and stops twiddling his pen, for Royce,
unknowingly, just helped him make a major decision.

MICHAEL.

Secretary? Trust me. I've had a
hundred of 'em. You wouldn't
last. . . . It's a deal.

They shake hands.

ROYCE.

That'a boy.

MICHAEL.

But with one condition.

ROYCE.

No, no, no. No conditions.

Michael makes a handwritten mark on the contract, crossing
out the fifty percent by both names, and changing it to
fifty-one and forty-nine. Perturbed, Royce cuts his cigar
with a guillotine.

MICHAEL.

I need to own fifty-one percent, not fifty. Then it's a deal.

Michael signs the contract and initials the changes. Then Royce signs the deal and lights his cigar.

ROYCE.

Sure. Give me a day or so to fax you the changes, which is only a formality now. I don't like handwritten marks on contracts, but ethically I'll make the transfer by Monday because we both signed it. And, Michael -

MICHAEL.

Yes.

ROYCE.

Enjoy your vacation next week.

MICHAEL.

Thanks, Royce.

KITCHEN STATION - DAY.

On Friday, in darkness aside from back-up lights, KAELIN (20s and nerdy) and FORBES (30s, Black, and dressed in 80s Retro) slide a water cooler into a kitchen, which doubles as a work station. Both wear baseball caps with lit visors.

KAELIN.

We really need to move into a new office.

FORBES.

I think that's what Michael's working on right now.

When they reach the kitchen station, Forbes removes a flashlight from his pocket, illuminating a fern.

Forbes moves the fern from a well-worn place on the rug and jimmies the water cooler behind it. After a short wait, Kaelin plugs the cooler into the outlet.

KAELIN.

Look at all we have to do just
for this stupid job.

FORBES.

For you, this is a job. But for
me, this is a career.

SECRETARY CUBE – MOMENTS LATER.

Michael opens the door and sees an emergency light shining.

MICHAEL.

Agh!

Holding a lit flashlight, GIDEON (40s and preppy)
approaches him.

GIDEON.

Good to see you're back,
Michael. Don't mind the lights.
Kaelin said they'll be back on
in a few minutes. I have other
bad news, though.

MICHAEL.

What now, Gideon?

GIDEON.

Hannah quit.

MICHAEL.

(sarcastically)
What a surprise.

GIDEON.

(lying)
She told me she wasn't making
enough money.

Michael speaks as if he has said this often before.

MICHAEL.

(dryly)

Change the passwords. Change the locks. Modify the security processes. Then order coffee, heavy cream, and sugar. Pure cane sugar.

GIDEON.

Okay. I'll tell Kaelin to get on it right away.

Michael rolls his eyes. Gideon then reaches for his rolodex wheel.

MICHAEL.

That system has never worked before. Let's try something different this time.

Gideon shines his flashlight on a plaque on the wall:

Insert:

Be consistent.

GIDEON.

Why change anything now? The way we hire secretaries has always worked for me.

MICHAEL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS.

Michael enters and immediately lights a candle. Then, Kaelin and Forbes enter, both still wearing lit baseball caps as an emergency light is seen in the background.

KAELIN.

Oh, hi, Michael. Sorry about the lights. The new plant people moved the water cooler to the secretary cube because it was blocking the fern. Then they plugged it into the bad outlet, so when the hot water heater clicked on, poof!

FORBES.

The thermostat overloaded the twelve-hundred volt circuit, which blew a fuse.

KAELIN.

Right. . . . I called Ackerman Brothers and they said Harry should have it fixed any minute now.

MICHAEL.

Didn't it take him two days last time?

KAELIN.

Don't worry. They promised me he'd get right on it. Here. Try this on.

Kaelin hands Michael a cap.

MICHAEL.

Where did you get these?

FORBES.

Oh, that's right. You haven't seen them yet.

Michael puts the cap on his head.

MICHAEL.

How much did they cost?

Kaelin removes his cap and reveals a calculator on the bottom of the visor. He pushes some buttons.

FORBES.

Gideon negotiated them down to forty-five dollars each, wholesale. Retail, they run seventy bucks.

MICHAEL.

How many did you buy?

FORBES.

Twenty.

KAELIN.

(v.o.)

Twenty. That's why they gave us
the great deal.

MICHAEL.

There's only six people who
work here. That means you
overpaid, ah, almost five
hundred dollars.

FORBES.

We thought about that, which is
why they threw in all these
gadgets. Look. It has the
light, a calculator, a compass,
and an adjustable Velcro band.

MICHAEL.

I'm going on a two-week
business trip, starting Monday.

ROYCE'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT.

Royce wears a smoking jacket inside an elegant home office
in Palm Beach, Florida.

A DOG ceaselessly BARKS in the background, annoying him.

Repeatedly, the fax machine prints a delivery report with a
similar display message whenever a fax attempt fails.

Insert:

RECEIVING ERROR. ATTEMPT 280.

LATER.

Royce ardently pushes buttons on a tape calculator, growing
more frustrated with each calculation.

ROYCE.

(to himself)

Epson ink cartridge. Forty-five dollars. Shipping and handling. Another six dollars. Two-hundred eighty sheets, costing two cents per sheet. No, minus one legitimate fax equals one-hundred-seventy-nine sheets times two cents per sheet. . . . Fifty-six dollars and fifty-eight cents wasted. . . . And counting.

KITCHEN STATION & CUBICLES - LATER.

In the late morning, the lights are on as VICKY (30s and Black) PANS a fully stocked and organized cabinet,

with coffee from all over the world,

in addition to condiments, and stacks of batteries.

Jittering, she slams the cabinet door shut, then hits her briefcase against a badly tattered counter,

chipping off a chunk of it.

CUBICLES - MOMENTS LATER.

Vicky is perturbed as she enters Kaelin's cubical.

VICKY.

We're out of Brazilian Roast Latte, medium blend. You know I drink that on Fridays.

KAELIN.

We have plenty of other blends. However, I ordered the Brazilian priority mail, just to be sure it gets here today. UPS must be slower than usual.

VICKY.

Michael's not going to be happy
about this.

Gideon emerges with a towering stack of letters.

GIDEON.

(whiny)

Has Michael hired a secretary
yet?

FORBES.

(through the partition)

Nope.

GIDEON.

Well then, ah, who's going to
put postage on these?

KAELIN.

You're the man!

GIDEON.

We need a new secretary by
Monday, when Michael leaves for
his trip.

Gideon exits into the kitchen and puts the envelopes on the
counter then returns.

FORBES.

Kind of a long business trip,
don't you think?

VICKY.

Uh huh. He said he's not had a
day off in like twenty years.
Since, well, you know.

They glance at Marla's photo on Michael's office wall.
Michael enters.

MICHAEL.

A good accountant cannot stay
in the home base, because it's
harder to bill form here. Now
get out and do your jobs.

VICKY.

Michael, I'm tired of Gideon
hiring bimbo secretaries.
That's how we got Hannah, and
all the rest of them.

KAELIN.

Hannah was not a bimbo.

VICKY.

Yes, she was.

KAELIN.

No, she wasn't!

Michael rolls his eyes. He has heard this before.

VICKY.

I have to go. I have lunch
meetings all week . . . with
clients.

Vicky grabs a cup of coffee and spills some as she exits.

KAELIN.

My mother in Ohio needs a job.

MICHAEL.

I don't have time for this,
Kaelin. No mothers are allowed
to work here.

Gideon reenters then pretends to walk like an old man as he
exits, mocking Michael.

GIDEON.

Yeah, who needs a mother
around, when we already have a
father?