

# OFF HAND

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Deanna Schatz

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**OFF HAND**  
**By Deanna Schatz**

**SYNOPSIS:** A recent retiree and his wife make a startling discovery in their backyard. With false accusations, secret pasts, and a few mishaps along the way, this play is truly off hand.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2 MEN, 1 WOMAN)*

**BOB** .....Late 50s. Recently retired. Still getting used to staying at home with his wife all day.

**ELAINE** .....Mid to late 50s. Homemaker. Always trying to prove to her husband, Bob, that she can be helpful.

**OFFICER BLAINE/JOHNNY** ....Early 40s. A visitor to Bob and Elaine's home.

**SETTING/TIME**

Suburbia. In Bob and Elaine's backyard and house. It is present day in the early summer. Night has just fallen.

**NOTES:**

This play can be performed in several ways. In its simplest form, the actors may read the lines and pantomime actions in an oral interpretation. It also may be fully performed without props and perhaps a chair for the living room set. Actions may be pantomimed or props may be used. The play may also be performed with a set ranging from minimal to elaborate.

**PROPS**

BOB ..... Shovel, Tarp, Stakes, Glass

ELAINE ..... Telephone

OFFICER BLAINE... Badge, Pepper Spray, Flashlight, Notepad, Pen, Gun

**SET DESIGN**

For the yard, a dirt pile may be used with a trap door for the hole. Trees, sidewalk, flowers, or a garden path may be added. Front and back doors can be constructed for entrances from the backyard or the street or one door can be used for Bob and Elaine to come in from the backyard, as well as Officer Blaine to enter from. Also, the set may be simple enough to quickly change between scenes or have an invisible wall between the backyard and the living room. In the living room, if props are used, the only necessities are a recliner and a small table for Elaine's telephone and Bob's drink.

**SCENE ONE**

**AT RISE:**

*BOB is digging in his backyard. ELAINE comes out of the house and walks eagerly toward him while speaking.*

**ELAINE:** Don't you think you ought to come in now? It's getting late.

**BOB:** Yeah, I know. I'm almost done.

**ELAINE:** You can't still be digging for the pond. It's only supposed to be three feet deep. *(Walks closer, looks into hole.)* Did you measure this before you started?

**BOB:** *(Annoyed; holds out shovel.)* Do you want to do this?

**ELAINE:** I was just asking.

*BOB digs for a few more moments.*

**ELAINE:** Do you think you should cover it with a tarp or something? It looks like it might rain and if it gets filled up with mud—

*BOB has since stopped digging and is holding up a tarp.*

**ELAINE:** Oh . . . should I get some stakes to—

*BOB is holding stakes in the other hand.*

**ELAINE:** Oh . . .

*BOB digs for a few more moments; ELAINE examines the hole.*

**ELAINE:** *(Squints.)* Wait . . .

*BOB keeps digging; ELAINE leans over the hole and BOB flings dirt on her shoes.*

**ELAINE:** I said *wait*, Bob.

*BOB keeps digging.*

**ELAINE:** Stop digging!

**BOB:** (*Annoyed.*) Why?

**ELAINE:** (*Looking in hole.*) There's something there.

**BOB:** Where?

**ELAINE:** Right there. (*Points into the hole.*) I can see it shining.

**BOB:** That's nothing, Elaine. Probably just a bottle cap or some broken glass . . .

**ELAINE:** That is not a bottle cap. Don't dig anymore. I'll be right back.

*ELAINE scurries off; BOB puts shovel down, wipes brow, looks into hole, shakes head.*

**ELAINE:** (*Returns, shining a flashlight into the hole.*) See? I told you there was something there. It looks like . . . (*Leans over.*) a ring. Bob, what is that? (*Pause, squints.*)

*BOB and ELAINE lean over hole.*

**ELAINE:** Is that—

*BOB and ELAINE look at each other.*

**BOB:** A hand?

## SCENE TWO

*A few minutes later. In the house. BOB is sitting in a recliner. ELAINE is pacing.*

**ELAINE:** What are we going to do, Bob?

**BOB:** (*Shortly, not looking at her.*) I don't know, Elaine. Just give me a sec, all right?

**ELAINE:** All right.

*Short pause.*

**ELAINE:** Don't you think we should call the police?

**BOB:** Elaine. *(Puts his hand up to quiet her.)*

**ELAINE:** But I think that—

**BOB:** Elaine!

**ELAINE:** All right, all right.

*Pause.*

**ELAINE:** *(Very quickly.)* But we have a body in our backyard!

**BOB:** *(Sighs loudly.)* Don't you think you're being a little dramatic?

**ELAINE:** *(Resolutely.)* We dug up a hand.

**BOB:** We don't know it's really a hand.

**ELAINE:** Bob. You saw it. I saw it. *It's a hand!*

**BOB:** Well, how do you know the hand is . . . attached to a body?

**ELAINE:** Aren't all hands?

**BOB:** Not necessarily.

**ELAINE:** Well, maybe you should go out there and dig some more to see if it is.

**BOB:** Do you really think that's a good idea? If it *is* a body, which I doubt, that's a federal offense . . . tampering with evidence.

**ELAINE:** Well, what do you suggest then?

**BOB:** Like I said, I don't know.

**ELAINE:** I still think we should call the police.

**BOB:** Why? So they can accuse us?

**ELAINE:** We'll just tell them the truth.

**BOB:** Just let me think about it for a minute. I need a drink.

*BOB exits. ELAINE paces.*

**ELAINE:** How can he drink at a time like this? Sometimes I just don't understand that man. *(Pause.)* Why won't he let me call the police? *(Laughs to herself; thinks for a moment.)* Only guilty people . . . nah. *(Pause, thinks.)* I'm sure . . . Maybe I should . . . *(Nods to herself, picks up receiver and dials 9-1-1.)* Hello, sir. I'd like to report—

*BOB* reenters as *ELAINE* is talking.

**BOB:** *(Comes up behind ELAINE, puts his drink down.)* Elaine?

*ELAINE* jumps and slams down the receiver.

**BOB:** What are you doing?

**ELAINE:** Oh, nothing, just making a quick phone call.

**BOB:** To who?

**ELAINE:** Oh, uh, just . . . My sister. But wouldn't you know it, she was on the way out the door. You know how busy she is.

**BOB:** You were calling the police, weren't you?

**ELAINE:** I said I was calling my—

**BOB:** *(Long.)* Elaine.

**ELAINE:** *(Imitates.)* Bob.

*BOB* gives *ELAINE* a look.

**ELAINE:** Okay, okay. I was calling the police.

**BOB:** Elaine, why would you still call them even though I asked you not to?

**ELAINE:** I don't know, Bob. Maybe because it's the only sensible thing to do.

**BOB:** The sensible thing to do would just be to wait until I decided what to do.

**ELAINE:** Well, I hung up, so it doesn't matter. Are you happy now? I don't know why you didn't want to call them anyway. *(A beat; ELAINE becomes frustrated.)* It's like you want to make yourself sound guilty.

**BOB:** There you go with the dramatics again.

**ELAINE:** *(Angry.)* Well, what do you expect, Bob? It's like you don't want me to call the police for some strange reason. *(Shouting.)* There's a body buried in our backyard!

*BOB* is about to fire back when there is a knock at the door. Both seem surprised.

**BOB:** Oh, great, it's probably the neighbors coming over because of your yelling.

*ELAINE glares and BOB gets the door. It is a police officer.*

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Evening folks. Name's Officer Blaine. (*Flashes badge.*)

**BOB:** (*Shakes hands, invites OFFICER in.*) Is there something I can help you with?

**OFFICER BLAINE:** (*As if asking a question.*) Got a call from the 911 dispatcher that there was a hang up from this address.

**BOB:** (*Glares at ELAINE.*) Everything's fine, Officer. Just misdialed, that's all.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** You're sure everything's okay? I heard some shouting just a minute ago when I was coming up the walk.

**BOB:** Yeah, well, the wife and I—

**ELAINE:** Everything is most certainly not okay, Officer.

**BOB:** Elaine—

**ELAINE:** Officer, I have to tell you—

**BOB:** (*Grabs ELAINE'S arm in a non-threatening manner.*) Elaine, I'm sure—

**ELAINE:** (*Becomes nervous.*) Bob, let go of me.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to let go of her.

**BOB:** Listen, Officer—

*ELAINE is trying to wrench herself free.*

**OFFICER BLAINE:** (*Pulls out pepper spray; firmly.*) Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to step away.

**BOB:** (*Releases ELAINE, who moves away from him.*) All right.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Now, ma'am, what were you saying?

**ELAINE:** (*Visibly shaken, blurts out.*) My husband killed someone and buried them in the backyard! (*Clamps hands over mouth.*)

**BOB:** WHAT?!? (*Moves toward ELAINE.*)

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Sir, please step away—

**BOB:** (*Does not hear OFFICER, moves closer.*) Elaine, what the hell are you—



*OFFICER* pepper sprays *BOB*.

**BOB:** AARRGGHH!

**ELAINE:** Bob!

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Ma'am—

**BOB:** (*Rubbing eyes.*) Goddammit, Elaine! What the hell did you tell him that for?

**ELAINE:** I'm sorry, Bob! I didn't mean it! It just came out!

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Could someone please explain to me what's going on here?

**BOB:** (*Angry, wiping eyes.*) I'll tell you what's going on here. My melodramatic wife thinks we dug up a hand in our backyard and I wouldn't let her call the police because she always blows everything way out of proportion so now she thinks I buried a dead body in our backyard!

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Is this what happened, ma'am?

**ELAINE:** (*Ashamed.*) Yes, sir. I'm sorry I caused all this mess, Officer. Oh, Bob, I'm sorry.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Excuse me. Back up, sir. You say you dug up a hand in your backyard?

**BOB:** Yes, Officer. And I can assure you I had no knowledge of this until just this evening, and I had every intention of calling the police once I got my wife to calm down.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** So, there's a hand just lying in your backyard?

**BOB:** Technically, it's in a hole in our backyard.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** I see. Well, I'll need to see this alleged hand, then.

**BOB:** Right this way, Officer.

*BOB* goes out with *OFFICER BLAINE*, *ELAINE* follows behind.

### SCENE THREE

*A few minutes later. BOB, OFFICER BLAINE and ELAINE are standing around the hole.*

**BOB:** Well, here it is, Officer. See it? Right there. *(Points in hole.)*

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Uh, kind of. Just a minute. *(Gropes on belt for flashlight, turns on, scans the hole.)* Oh, yeah. *(A disgusting realization.)* Oh . . . yeah. *(Shudders.)* Well, looks like you folks have got a little problem on your hands.

*BOB and ELAINE look at each other.*

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Oh, uh, pardon the bad pun.

**BOB:** No problem, Officer.

*OFFICER'S flashlight goes out. He shakes it.*

**BOB:** Can I give you a hand with that? *(Takes the flashlight, hits it against his hand; the light goes back on.)*

*ELAINE sighs audibly.*

**BOB:** Oh, sorry.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Thanks. *(Takes flashlight back; pulls out a notepad and pen.)* Now, let me see if I can get a handle on things . . .

*ELAINE clicks her tongue.*

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Oops, sorry. *(Flips through notepad.)* Now, let me see . . . I just need to make sure. Do either of you feel compelled to confess that you had a hand in this?

**ELAINE:** *(Is "weirded-out" by the humor.)* Now this is just getting ridiculous.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** My apologies. No offense, ma'am.

**ELAINE:** None taken. Could we please just move on?

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Of course. Now, as I was saying before, do either of you feel compelled—?

**ELAINE:** We most certainly do not feel compelled to confess to something we didn't even know about.

**BOB:** (*Thinking, looking in hole.*) Excuse me, Officer, but is this the usual procedure for something like this? I mean, shouldn't you call your forensics team to come out and take a look at this or at least call for some backup?

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Sir, I'm sorry that I have to bring this to your attention, but which one of us has the badge here?

**BOB:** I understand that, Officer, and I'm not trying to disrespect you or your position, but I do have a degree in criminal justice, and I think maybe there are some more important questions to be asking before you can accuse someone.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** I did not accuse anyone. I merely asked you if you were willing to confess on your own.

**BOB:** Well, that's sort of like an accusation, isn't it? And, anyway, shouldn't someone find out if this is really even a hand? I mean, maybe it's not what we think it is. And, if it is, aren't there experts who need to be here to be photographing and trying to dig up whatever it is that's down there? Plus, someone should be analyzing that ring or whatever and taking fingerprints, if there are any to be taken. Really, Officer, are you even following standard procedure?

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Regardless of your *With a mocking tone.* "degree," sir, I'd rather not have you telling me how to do my job. Now that you mention it, though, I will be taking the alleged ring for analysis.

**ELAINE:** Whoa, hold on just a minute. We *will* be getting that ring back when you're finished, right?

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Ma'am, this is evidence in an investigation.

**ELAINE:** So? Isn't there some kind of finders' claim we have on this? We found the ring on our property. It should be ours.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** You can't be serious, ma'am.

**ELAINE:** You're darn right I'm serious. I want that ring back when you're done with it. It's mine. Bob, tell him.

**BOB:** *(As if waking up suddenly, has been staring at OFFICER BLAINE, deep in thought.)* Uhm, yes, well, Officer. Perhaps we do have some sort of a claim over this. I think I'm going to have to call a lawyer before I can let you take this.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** I'm afraid I can't let you do that, *(With emphasis, change in tone of voice.)* Robert. *(Pulls out a gun and points it at BOB and ELAINE.)* Leave it up to you to ruin all my fun. Look at the two of us. Going on like we don't know each other. Were you even fooled at all?

*ELAINE looks stunned, confused, and about to speak.*

**BOB:** Honestly, I was for a minute.

**OFFICER BLAINE:** Well, at least I had you going for a minute. How'd you know about the body?

**BOB:** Well, I didn't know about the body until I accidentally dug it up, but when I saw it, I knew right away that this hand belonged to Marion Cantonelli. *(ELAINE looks puzzled.)* The former wife of famed mob boss Victor "the Man" Cantonelli. Try to keep up, honey. *(ELAINE nods, listens intently.)* Who else would wear a rock so big that it shines in the dark? Having known that, there's only one person I could think of who would be both brave and stupid enough to kill Marion, and that would be Johnny B.

**ELAINE:** *(Gasps.)* You're Johnny B!

**JOHNNY (OFFICER BLAINE):** The one and only.

**ELAINE:** And "the Man" killed your brother!

*JOHNNY does not look amused.*

**BOB:** Elaine.

**ELAINE:** Sorry.

**BOB:** *(Shakes his head.)* You always thought you were so smart, Johnny. I spend half my FBI career chasing you across the country and then you shoot me and leave me with this bum leg so I've got to retire. And after all these years, you come back. 'Cause you made a mistake, didn't you, Johnny?

**JOHNNY** glares.

**BOB:** *(Slowly, letting it sink in.)* You were so busy trying to frame me with this body and putting that wiretap and 9-1-1 router on my phone. But, then *(A beat.)* you forgot the ring.

**JOHNNY:** The one mistake of my career. *(Pause, glances down into the hole.)* But now I'm back to fix it. *(Laughs.)* And it looks like you did all the hard work for me. Now, I'll be taking what is rightfully mine. *(Reaches down and puts the ring on his finger.)*

**BOB:** I don't think so, Johnny.

**JOHNNY:** *(Emphatically.)* Well, I do. *(Grabs ELAINE and puts gun to her back.)*

**ELAINE:** *(Terrified.)* Bob, do something!

**BOB:** *(Afraid for ELAINE.)* Just stay calm, Elaine. Now, Johnny, just let her go and everything will be fine. You know you can get out of this without anyone getting hurt. Just let her go.

**JOHNNY:** Oh yes, I know that. But if I don't do something, what's stopping you and your lovely wife here from going straight to the feds?

**BOB:** We're not going to do that if you just let her go.

**JOHNNY:** Oh yeah, I can't tell you how many times I've heard that garbage.

**BOB:** Johnny, I swear. Just let her go, and we'll forget all of this happened. You'll get out of here free and clear. No one will ever find out, and we can all just go back to the way things were. I'm not chasing you anymore, Johnny. I won't. Just *let her go*.

**JOHNNY:** You know I can't do that.

**BOB:** *(Pleading.)* Please, Johnny. I'm begging you. *(Takes a knee.)* Don't hurt my wife. Please, there must be something else you want. Anything.

**JOHNNY:** I dunno . . .

**BOB:** Take me.

**JOHNNY:** What?

**BOB:** Johnny, take me instead. Elaine doesn't know anything. She's innocent.

**JOHNNY:** Now there's a thought.

**ELAINE:** Bob, no!

**BOB:** It's the only way, Johnny. You know you don't need to kill her.  
You came here for that ring. (*A beat.*) And me.

**ELAINE:** Bob!

**BOB:** Elaine, this is between me and Johnny. You have to (*Gives ELAINE a look.*) step aside.

*ELAINE nods very slightly. BOB winks at ELAINE and at the same moment, ELAINE takes a large, jerking sidestep, wrenching herself free of JOHNNY'S grip and throwing JOHNNY off balance. JOHNNY teeters on the edge of the hole for a quick moment, mouth agape. JOHNNY gasps in horror and then falls into the hole. BOB and ELAINE peer into the hole in silence. After a beat . . .*

**ELAINE:** (*Visibly shaken.*) Is he . . . dead?

**BOB:** (*Looking into the hole.*) It certainly seems that way. Looks like he whacked his head on the way down.

*Pause.*

**ELAINE:** So . . . now what?

*ELAINE and BOB look at each other. BOB looks at the hole.*

**BOB:** (*Slowly.*) Guess there was room in there for one more.

*ELAINE looks surprised, is about to speak, thinks, raises eyebrows, smiles at BOB, and shrugs. BOB leans over and takes the ring off JOHNNY'S finger.*

**BOB:** Your hand, my dear.

*BOB puts ring on ELAINE'S finger.*

**ELAINE:** Oh, Bob . . .

**THE END**