

## FEARLESS SECRETS: OUTER SELF / INNER VOICE

### DETAILED SCENE BREAKDOWN

*A Contemporary Play by Richard Ehrlich*

**Running Time:** 85 minutes continuous (no intermission)

**Cast:** 16 performers (8 characters × 2 roles each)

**Setting:** Community center meeting room, single evening, real time

### STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW

FEARLESS SECRETS unfolds in six continuous sections spanning 85 minutes of real time. The play operates like theatrical chamber music—intimate, precise, building tension through accumulation rather than explosive moments.

The structure follows a classical dramatic arc compressed into single-evening urgency:

- Sections 1-2: Establishment and escalation (28 minutes)
- Section 3: Crisis/Turning point - The Alarm (15 minutes)
- Sections 4-6: Consequence and resolution (42 minutes)

A fire alarm malfunction at the 28-minute mark becomes the play's central pressure point, trapping all sixteen performers inside for the remaining hour. What begins as practiced social performance gradually dissolves into something more dangerous and more real.

## SECTION 1: ARRIVAL

**Running Time:** 0:00 - 12:00 (12 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Establishment of dual reality and social performance

### THE SETUP

The meeting room is set: folding chairs arranged in a welcoming circle, refreshment table with careful presentation, donation jar prominently placed. AVA (Outer Self) makes final adjustments while AVA (Inner Voice) catalogs everything that could go wrong. The visual is immediately striking—two performers, same character, one managing the room while the other spirals with anxiety.

As guests arrive, the dual casting creates theatrical density. Each entrance is actually two entrances: the performed greeting (Outer Self) and the internal commentary (Inner Voice). The Inner Voices don't whisper—they speak full voice, interrupt, and address the audience directly.

### THE ARRIVALS

JASMINE and MARCUS arrive first, the safety of arriving together. JASMINE (Outer Self) offers confident professional warmth; JASMINE (Inner Voice) is already calculating exit strategies. MARCUS (Outer Self) performs casual ease; MARCUS (Inner Voice) obsesses over whether he said hello correctly.

ELENA enters alone, late, apologizing. Her Inner Voice won't stop reminding her that everyone noticed. LEO and SOPHIE arrive as a couple, their Inner Voices revealing the fight they're pretending didn't happen. DAVID enters projecting authority; his Inner Voice questions whether anyone actually respects him.

Finally, MARK. His Outer Self is pleasant enough, but his Inner Voice speaks with unusual clarity and volume—making it immediately obvious that something is different about this character. MARK's Inner Voice doesn't just criticize Mark; it observes everyone else with brutal honesty.

### THEATRICAL NOTES

*This section requires precise calibration. The dual casting could tip into comedy, but it must land as painfully recognizable. Directors must find the rhythm where Inner Voices interrupt naturally without becoming predictable. The audience needs to understand the rules before the play can break them.*

## SECTION 2: THE INTRODUCTIONS

**Running Time:** 12:00 - 28:00 (16 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Escalation through ritualized vulnerability

### THE SOCIAL RITUAL

Round-robin introductions are social theater at its most performative. Each person must present a curated self while pretending spontaneity. In FEARLESS SECRETS, we see both the performance and the performer simultaneously struggling.

JASMINE goes first—professional, accomplished, self-deprecating in that practiced way that signals confidence. Her Inner Voice dismantles every word as it leaves her mouth: "Too much. They think you're showing off. You sound rehearsed. Because you are."

MARCUS follows, trying for casual humor. His Inner Voice provides running commentary on his own joke delivery, analyzing whether anyone really laughed. ELENA over-apologizes for being late, while her Inner Voice screams that she should stop apologizing, which makes her apologize more.

### THE DISRUPTION

MARK's introduction breaks the pattern. His Outer Self offers the expected social pleasantries, but his Inner Voice speaks with unusual directness—not to MARK, but to the room: "Why is everyone performing?" The other Inner Voices react. This isn't how Inner Voices work. They're supposed to be critical, anxious, self-focused. MARK's Inner Voice is observant, questioning, challenging.

MARK (Inner Voice) continues: "AVA doesn't believe this fundraiser will work. JASMINE is exhausted from pretending. Why are we all pretending?" The room freezes. The other characters can't hear Mark's Inner Voice—the rules of the play prevent that—but they feel the shift. The performance has been named.

AVA tries to redirect, suggesting they move into the planned activity. But MARK (Outer Self) speaks up: "What if we tried something different? What if we just... didn't perform?"

### THEATRICAL NOTES

*Section 2 demands ensemble precision. The introductions could feel repetitive; instead, they should build as variations on a theme. Each character's gap between Outer and Inner must feel specific, recognizable. Mark's disruption must land as invitation, not judgment. The fire alarm at the end should feel like terrible timing rather than dramatic convenience—until we realize it's perfect timing.*

## SECTION 3: THE ALARM

**Running Time:** 28:00 - 43:00 (15 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Crisis/Inciting incident + Act I climax

### THE MALFUNCTION

The fire alarm sounds. Standard procedure: everyone heads toward the exit. The door won't open. Electronic locks, fire safety protocol, malfunction. The door is sealed. AVA (Outer Self) maintains calm, explains it's probably temporary, calls building management. No answer. She tries the back exit. Also locked. Her Inner Voice: panic.

The play's central conceit lands with full force: sixteen performers are now trapped in a room together for the duration of the malfunction. The building manager finally answers—the system has failed, emergency crews are coming, estimated time forty-five minutes. Forty-five minutes of real time remaining in the play. The clock is now visible.

### THE INNER VOICES TAKE CENTER STAGE

Something shifts in the staging. Until now, the Inner Voices have been present but somewhat peripheral—commenting from the edges. As the reality of being trapped sinks in, the Inner Voices physically move to center stage. They're no longer just observing; they're taking over.

The section becomes a choreographed cascade of anxiety—Inner Voices interrupting each other, feeding off collective panic, amplifying rather than soothing.

### SOUND DESIGN NOTE: THE FIRE ALARM

**The fire alarm should be treated as atmospheric pressure rather than continuous sound.** While fully audible at select moments (initial trigger at end of Section 2, opening of Section 3, brief return mid-way through the trapped sequence, and just before release), it should primarily exist as felt presence between those moments.

This atmospheric pressure can be created through:

- Emergency lighting rhythms (soft cycling, not strobing)
- Low-frequency rumble or sub-bass pulse (felt more than heard)
- Occasional system chirps or relay clicks
- Visible countdown clock
- Actor vocal adjustments (slightly raised volume, clipped pacing)

*Critical consideration: The Inner Voices serve as the play's primary sonic landscape. A continuous literal alarm would compete with this innovative dual-casting concept and overwhelm dialogue. The alarm's presence should maintain urgency without dominating the soundscape.*

*The moment when the alarm cuts out (just before doors unlock) becomes dramatically powerful precisely because the audience has felt its pressure without being aurally punished. Silence becomes the shock.*

### THE ACT BREAK

In a traditional play, this would be intermission. Instead, the stage goes to half-light. The alarm continues. Forty-three minutes remain. When lights restore, something has fundamentally changed: the social performance everyone maintained for the first act is no longer sustainable.

## FEARLESS SECRETS: Detailed Scene Breakdown

### THEATRICAL NOTES

*Section 3 is the play's most technically demanding sequence. The shift of Inner Voices to center stage must feel organic, not arbitrary. The lighting change at section's end should signal internal shift rather than technical transition. The audience should feel trapped with the characters.*

## SECTION 4: THE BREAKDOWN

**Running Time:** 43:00 - 58:00 (15 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Dissolution of social performance

### THE NEW REALITY

When lights restore, the room has reorganized. The careful circle of chairs from the beginning is now scattered, informal. Characters sit on the floor, lean against walls. The fundraiser architecture has collapsed. Thirty-five minutes remain.

AVA (Outer Self) has stopped trying to facilitate. She sits apart, visibly done with the performance. Her Inner Voice, surprisingly, has quieted—as if giving up the attempt to manage everything has created unexpected relief.

### THE DOMINO EFFECT

DAVID (Outer Self), watching this vulnerability, makes his own admission: he doesn't know what he's doing. The community board position he holds? He accepted because he thought it would look good. He doesn't actually know how to help.

His Inner Voice, instead of attacking him for this admission, simply adds: "And you're terrified someone will realize." DAVID (Outer Self) nods. "Yes. That."

The moment is small but seismic. An Outer Self just acknowledged an Inner Voice. Not consciously—the play's rules prevent that—but functionally. The distance between what he thinks and what he says has decreased.

### THEATRICAL NOTES

*Section 4 requires the most delicate direction. The breakdown of social performance must feel organic, not resolved. Characters should struggle toward honesty, not arrive there. The shift should be incremental—small truths leading to slightly larger ones. The ensemble must find the rhythm where vulnerability feels earned rather than therapeutic. This isn't group therapy; it's what happens when performance becomes unsustainable.*

## SECTION 5: THE RECOGNITION

**Running Time:** 58:00 - 70:00 (12 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Climactic intimacy and painful honesty

### THE FEARLESS SECRETS

ELENA goes first. Her Outer Self speaks while her Inner Voice adds details: "I spend so much time managing my anxiety that I've forgotten what I actually feel about anything. I don't think I have opinions anymore. Just coping strategies."

MARCUS: "I pretend to be easygoing because I'm terrified of conflict. I've convinced everyone I'm laid-back. I've convinced myself. I don't know if there's anything underneath."

JASMINE: "I perform confidence because I'm afraid if I don't, everyone will see I'm barely holding on. But performing confidence is exhausting, and I'm barely holding on from that too. I'm trapped in both directions."

The admissions pile on each other, not confessional but matter-of-fact. These aren't revelations looking for absolution—they're observations about the mechanics of performance.

### THE SHIFT

Something has changed in the room. The Inner Voices are still present, still commenting, but they're no longer attacking. They've become almost companionable—less relentless critics, more honest witnesses.

AVA (Inner Voice): "This is the most honest I've been in months."

AVA (Outer Self): "This is the most honest I've been in months."

Simultaneous. Not call-and-response, but unison. The gap between performance and reality hasn't closed—it can't, that's not how humans work—but it's narrowed.

### THEATRICAL NOTES

*Section 5 is the play's emotional peak. It risks sentiment; it must find catharsis without resolution. The admissions should feel specific to each character while recognizing universal patterns. Directors must calibrate: too much emotion becomes indulgent, too little becomes cold. The Inner Voices quieting should feel like relief, not abandonment.*

## SECTION 6: THE AFTER

**Running Time:** 70:00 - 85:00 (15 minutes)

**Dramatic Function:** Resolution without resolution

### THE COUNTDOWN

Ten minutes remaining on the clock. The alarm continues. Emergency crews are on the way. Soon the doors will open and everyone will return to the world outside this room. The question becomes: What do they take with them?

The characters sit in relative quiet. Not uncomfortable silence—something else. Companionable awareness. They've seen each other now. Not completely—that's impossible—but more than they did before.

### THE DOORS OPEN

Five minutes remaining. The fire alarm cuts out. The sudden silence is startling. Voices from outside—emergency crews arriving, building manager apologizing. The electronic locks click open. The door is accessible.

No one moves immediately.

MARK (Outer Self): "I guess we can leave now."

AVA (Outer Self): "I guess so."

### THE EMPTY ROOM

The stage holds on the empty room for a long moment. The chairs scattered from where people sat. The donation jar. The lights that never quite matched the warmth AVA wanted. Evidence of presence but no people.

Then, barely audible, just before blackout: the sound of eight Inner Voices, speaking in unison from offstage: "Tomorrow we try again."

Blackout.

*End of play.*



## **RUNTIME SUMMARY**

Section 1: Arrival (12 min)

Section 2: The Introductions (16 min)

Section 3: The Alarm (15 min)

Section 4: The Breakdown (15 min)

Section 5: The Recognition (12 min)

Section 6: The After (15 min)

**Total: 85 minutes continuous**

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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