

Getting on Top

By Sam DeLeo

Getting on Top

Structure and Running Time:

A one act play in two scenes, approximately 25 minutes.

Characters:

Dan Helix	software engineer, late thirties.
Kamalon Kumar	American-educated, Indian-born software engineer; mid to late twenties.
Kelsey Powers	CEO of Alpha Technology, a software/consulting firm, mid thirties.

Set:

For the brief first scene, a water cooler to the extreme side of the stage will do as the common area of a business office. The rest of the play takes place inside Kelsey Powers' office, which should reflect a modern CEO's office as much as possible. There should be a large desk, a huge leather sofa in the sitting area, and a smaller desk attached perpendicularly with the larger one, so as to permit two people to work together within arm's distance of each other and still face the audience.

*poem abridged excerpt of Bal Natu's Ghazal poem "Now It Does Not Matter," copyright 1991, Sheriar Foundation.

Act I.

scene 1. (at the water cooler).

Dan: Kamalon. Long Friday, you making it?

Kamalon: (speaks with a very slight Indian accent throughout, which becomes more pronounced when he gets excited). I guess. How goes it with you, Dan?

Dan: I'm about ready to give up after I finish my e-mails. Whattya say we get outta here and go get some beers, eh?

Kamalon: I'd love to do that, but I have to work.

Dan: What? How many weekends in a row have you've worked overtime now? What the hell is up? We've got plenty of time on this next project. Come on, relax, live a little.

Kamalon: I do, you just don't see it very often lately.

Dan: You've got a hot date, that's it, isn't it?

Kamalon: No, I'm just working.

Dan: Okay, so you're going out to find some hot young thing and you don't want me in the way.

Kamalon: No Dan.

Dan: I know, it's alright, don't mind me, you wouldn't want Steam Engine here, Grecian Formula Gus, you wouldn't want Wrinkles here slowing you up.

Kamalon: I've never called you Wrinkles. Wrinkles, huh. I like the sound of that. No, I really am working.

Dan: With who?

Kamalon: Uhhhh. (beat. under his breath) Kelsey.

Dan: CEO Kelsey?! That Kelsey?

Kamalon: One and the same.

Dan: (crosses his index fingers together in front of Kamalon). Get away from me. You're cursed.

Kamalon: It's not that bad.

Dan: Yeah, and neither is oral surgery.

Kamalon: This could be my chance to move up. If I'm ever going to be able to afford to go back to India and get started, I'm going to need more than I'm making now. And, strange as it sounds, I think I've actually taken a liking to Kelsey. (quickly and adamantly) Swear not to tell anyone I said that.

Dan: Ha! Don't sweat it, no one would believe me. What are you working on?

Kamalon: Uh, the AT & T project.

Dan: That's the company's biggest contract. Why do they have **you** working on that? Sorry, I didn't mean it like that, I just-

Kamalon: I know you didn't. Because you know my potential and are very much afraid you will some day be working for me in the capacity of my personal manicurist.

Dan: Alright, but you should know I don't do toenails.

Kamalon: You'll learn to relish them.

Dan: I detest relish. Alright hot shot, suit yourself, but I'm outta' here. Don't worry, if I don't hear from you by Sunday I'll call the Indian embassy. I'm gonna go have some fun, something which seems beyond the realm of comprehension anymore for some people I know.

Kamalon: Gimme a break, what choice do I have. Have one for me.

Dan: Will do, bro'. (casually saluting him goodbye). Well, can't keep the wine, women and good times awaitin'. (he exits).

Kamalon: See you. (under his breath). I'm sure it will be a real Mardi Gras wherever you go. (He quickly grabs his folder, and begins wandering around the empty office space). Anybody here? Anyone still working? Anyone? (when he's satisfied no one else is in the building, he straightens his tie and hair and prepares to enter Kelsey's office, which is dark. the only stage light should be on the entrance where he stands. he knocks. he knocks again. when there is no answer, he tentatively begins to open the door. the second he turns on the lights, Powers, outfitted in a leather corselet, fishnet stockings, spike heels and a short cattail whip {or something a bit more 'post-modern-dominatrix,' if available}, pounces on him from a desktop)

Kamalon: Ahhhhhhh!

Kelsey: What's the matter, cat got your tongue?

Kamalon: Are you trying to kill me!?

Kelsey: Not yet. I just thought we'd change the order tonight. You look good.

Kamalon: (collecting himself). Thanks.

Kelsey: New suit?

Kamalon: Yes.

Kelsey: Nice. Take it off. I've written up a few things. Here. (hands him a couple of pages).

Kamalon: (takes them from her while continuing to take off clothes until he is down to his socks, boxers and tank T-shirt). Don't you think this ruins the spontaneity? Let me try saying a few things on my own tonight, come on.

Kelsey: No Kamalon. You'll just ruin it for me.

Kamalon: Come on, just let me try. If you don't like it, I will go back to the pages.

Kelsey: Alright. But don't blow it. It's hard to believe some of the things you say come out of a body like yours. (she tears off his T-shirt).

Kamalon: (impressed). You are really hot tonight.

Kelsey: This damn project has-

Kamalon: Say no more. We'll get rid of some stress. Have at me.

Kelsey: You're damn right I'll have at you,

Kamalon: Come on, how do you say it here, "Tear me a new one."

Kelsey: Up on the sofa, Haji.

Kamalon: (with enthusiasm) Alllright. (gets on the sofa on all fours, places papers in front of him. she climbs up and sits on his lower back with the cattails in her hand, straddling over him like she is riding him. this is why a large couch is necessary. she punctuates her words by hitting his ass with the cattails, first playfully but progressively with more force).

Kelsey: Mommie's gonna ride you like you're a rented mule tonight.

Kamalon: (from pages). Ride me hard, ride me into the ground.

Kelsey: Giddyup. (he begins to gyrate his hips and move them up and down).

Kamalon: Use me, break me.

Kelsey: Why?

Kamalon: Because I deserve it.

Kelsey: That's right you fucking deserve it. Why else?

Kamalon: Because I exist through you. You define me, you-

Kelsey: The pages, damn you.

Kamalon: Sorry.

Kelsey; Why else?

Kamalon: (looking at pages). Because I've been very bad about getting my work done.

Kelsey: And?

Kamalon: I need to be punished for it.

Kelsey: How?

Kamalon: I need to be put through the wringer for it?

Kelsey: Again?

Kamalon: I need to be put through your wringer for it.

Kelsey: Yes, yes. And how?

Kamalon: Hard, very hard.

Kelsey: Now get your ass on the floor. (preferably, the back of the sofa should face the audience, but it should not be so tall so as to obscure her completely when she gets on top of him and they simulate having intercourse. after he moves to the floor in front of the sofa, with the pages, she pulls out some handcuffs and pretends to cuff his ankles to the end and middle legs of the sofa. for the actors' comfort, only the ankle on the sofa's end leg, which will probably be visible to the audience, should appear fastened. she stands over his prone body with her back to the audience and legs straddling either side of him). Time to come to mama. (lowers herself onto him. they both gradually begin moaning).

Kamalon: (from the pages). Faster please.

Kelsey: No.

Kamalon: Faster please. Pleeeeease.

Kelsey: What do you say?

Kamalon: Faster master, I am yours completely.

Kelsey: No damnit, on the page!

Kamalon: Faster, bust me like a war horse.

Kelsey: (quickening her pace). Ooooookay, mama's goin' to the rodeo! (lights fade to their moaning. lights are down long enough for them to gather their clothes and put them back on. when the lights come back up, he is sitting at the smaller desk working on a laptop. she is digging through some files in and about her desk).

scene 2. (at desks).

Kelsey: Where are those memo notes? I can never find anything. I Wish I was as organized as you, Kama. How's it coming?

Kamalon: Just about there.

Kelsey; Good. I want you to help with this staff memo for the project next. (Sits back, sighs and waits for him to finish). That was nice tonight, Kama. You were very good tonight.

Kamalon: Thanks Ms. Powers.

Kelsey: What?! Ms. Powers! I told you not to call me that. How can you- what the-after what we just did?!

Kamalon: I'm sorry, Ms.-I mean Kelsey. I-I was busy concentrating on this last part. There, it's done. Kelsey.

Kelsey: Let me see. Okay, you're aligning the sales tool with the customer service software. Good. I don't see how they can't bid on this. Good work, Kama. I can see another bonus in this for you. I don't know why we had you programming this long. You belong on the sales arm.

Kamalon: Just helping out where I'm needed.

Kelsey: When this sells, I'll make sure you get a commission, too. I'm not one to bask in the glory. One thing you'll find out is that I'm fair about giving credit where it's due.

Kamalon: I know you are.

Kelsey: And you deserve credit for this. Now go get us something to drink from the break room. Then we'll get started on the memo.

Kamalon: Alright. (turning around and smiling before exiting). Be right back.

Kelsey: Good, we don't want to be here all night. (he exits). What a sweetie. Who is this guy? And why didn't I find him earlier. (begins humming while she gets purse, finds compact and reapplies some make-up.) He's got an intriguing inner fortitude. And so sexy. (puts away make-up. he comes back with drinks and sets them on desks). Kamalon?

Kamalon: Yes.

Kelsey: Nevermind. I just had a stupid thought. Okay, you ready. We're just gonna have to make it a short e-mail and set up some meetings, I can't find my damn notes. (he sits down at the laptop again ready to type. as she dictates the memo to him, she paces around the room toying with the cattail whip in her hand. in this part of the scene it should be very apparent that she is trying to get him to notice her and tease him sexually. she does this, for example, by touching his shoulders while walking by him, leaning over the desk so he can see her cleavage, sitting on the desk with her legs apart, etc.). "To, AT&T project staff. As you know, the project deadline is approaching rapidly. Our deliverable is due to the client by the end of this coming week." Just let me know if I'm going too fast, sweetie.

Kamalon: Your pace is perfect.

Kelsey: (laughs). You make me laugh sometimes.

Kamalon: Did I say something funny?

Kelsey: Nevermind. "On Tuesday and Wednesday, I want senior managers Bill Quinn and Janet Billups to be in New York meeting with the client. I want your final budget analysis when you return on Thursday. Be in my office for a meeting at 2 p.m. on Monday to go over this. Your flight schedules have been arranged, please see your secretaries about them." So far so good, hot pants?

Kamalon: Perfect.

Kelsey: "All engineers working on the project should meet-" (with her back to the audience, sitting on his desk with her knees up and her arms hanging over them so he can look straight up her skirt). Am I distracting you?

Kamalon: No.

Kelsey: (teasingly) We can take a break if you're tired. But not too tired.

Kamalon: I'm not really tired. Unless you want me to take a break then-

Kelsey: (miffed). Let's finish. "-should meet with project manager Julie Chen as a group the first thing Monday morning. And Jenny, come see me after this meeting." Okay, that's it, group e-mail it.

Kamalon: Done.

Kelsey: Good. (beat). You know Kama, you've definitely got potential. If you're patient, things'll go your way. The question you should always keep in your head is, "What separates me from the next guy."

Kamalon: You're the CEO.

Kelsey: No dummy, I meant you.

Kamalon: Well. You know how hard I'm willing to work.

Kelsey: (cooly) Yes, I certainly do. So it's just a matter of desire.

Kamalon: And I'm full of desire.

Kelsey: You are? (seductively). How encouraging. (obviously not having the same conversation he is).

Kamalon: Well, aren't we all filled with it?

Kelsey: You know I am, Kama.

Kamalon: It's what we're all made of, the struggle to be that we're all bound to lose.

Kelsey: Here you go again. I was talking about-

Kamalon: Because, it's always one step ahead of us.

Kelsey: Don't you ever feel something more when we're together.

Kamalon: They say desire is the presence of an absence: To realize it is to realize nothing. It's the face in the mirror that can never quite become familiar, the question that changes with each answer.

Kelsey: (seductively) But think of all the sweet fruit that falls from its tree.

Kamalon: The fruit is only sweet as long as its out of reach. What we want always bleeds just beyond our hearts, both as near and as far from us as tomorrow.

Kelsey: (annoyed, mimicking him). "Oh, "The woman Thou gavest me for a companion, she gave me (fruit) from the tree and I ate." You're the only frickin' fruit around here. (beat). This office is a mess. Why don't you clean it up a little. Get the broom and dust pan. (he fetches them from just off the corner of the stage. she begins shuffling papers. he comes back and begins sweeping, whistling or humming occasionally while he does. she stops what she's doing to watch him, almost in amazement. after a beat or two, she pounces on him and grabs the broom from him). Gimme that!

Kamalon: What's wrong?

Kelsey: Quit it! Just stop! (beat). What is it with you?

Kamalon: What do you mean? I- If you don't want me sweeping, why did you tell-

Kelsey: If you weren't good at what you do, I think I would despise you. Maybe I do despise you.

Kamalon: But I thought we'd been getting along.

Kelsey: Yes, we have, but can't you- don't you... just forget it. (beat). It's not your fault, I guess. It's the same with every challenge for me. I have to see how far I can go, even when I know I shouldn't. Especially when I know I shouldn't. That's what separates us.

Kamalon: You have your challenges, and I have mine.

Kelsey: I suppose. You're just one of those unfaultable employees, and those are the people you're comfortable being around. You don't know anything else. Someday you will.

Kamalon: I have a long way to go, but I've learned a lot from you, Kelsey. I'm very thankful for the opportunity you've given me.

Kelsey: (uninterestedly). Yeah, well don't you sweat it. (almost to herself) I must be burnt out from this project, I'm usually more in control of myself. (puts some papers in a drawer and picks up one of the family photos on her desk). Good old mom. I've never even told you who the people are in these photos, have I?

Kamalon: Uh. No.

Kelsey: Well come here, don't you want to see them?

Kamalon: I guess.

Kelsey: This is my mother. This is my sister Katie. Here's me and my dad after a day fishing on the lake when I was young. That's my fish, he was skunked that day, even though he's holding it up. Here's me and my brother with my first car, a '76 Chevelle. It had a 354 in it, sweet, eh? My nephew Joey, Katie's son, isn't he precious? (annoyed at his lack of response). Look, I don't want to bore you.

Kamalon: No, not at all, if you feel it's necessary-

Kelsey: Necessary?! (curtly). There's no sense in keeping you any longer tonight, Kamalon. I'm sure a good-looking guy like you has plenty of plans on a Friday night.

Kamalon: I've no plans.

Kelsey: Right.

Kamalon: I've left the whole weekend open. You had said you wanted to work the whole weekend.

Kelsey: (sarcastically) How thoughtful of you. Well, I did have a dinner date which I was considering cancelling anyway. I suppose we **should** get started on the implementation proposal, even late as it is. (seductively, showing her legs as she sits down next to him). But, of course, we don't have to right this minute. (almost squirming out of her skirt). What would you **like** to do?

Kamalon: Whatever you need me-

Kelsey: Kamalon I'm asking **you**..

Kamalon: I'm very open-mind-

Kelsey: (yelling) I want to know what you want!

Kamalon: (walks a short distance away from her, stammering). Wwww-well, I don't know, what do I want? I came here chiefly to go to school.

Kelsey: That's not what I meant and you know it. (beat).

Kamalon: (finding his train of thought). But it was really to be freer, to make lots of money, to enjoy that kind of freedom. (more animatedly) . And then, then I found that it was the right to give up that freedom, to sell it in a manner of speaking, that makes one feel most free. So you see, it doesn't seem to me so important anymore what I want.

Kelsey: Look at me. (he does not look). Kama. Look at me. (he finally looks). Do you want me?

Kamalon: (lowly. then slowly beginning to exit). Kelsey, maybe I'd better be, I should be go-

Kelsey: (she runs in front of the door). No, you're not fucking going anywhere until you answer me. (beat). I know I can be difficult. I've been hard on you. But you have to understand that doesn't mean I don't like you. It's all part of the business, this crazy business we're in. It really cannot be helped sometimes. (softly). Kama, don't you want me? Even a little? (he still is not returning her glance). Look at me. Speak! (nothing). At least say something, damn you! Speak up! Say some- (she attacks him, first smacking him in the back of the head, then hitting him forcefully everywhere, stopping intermittently to yell at him to say 'speak.' after he has sunk to the floor to protect himself, she picks up a paperweight.) Speak, you bastard, or so help me I will hurt you. (he still does not reply. unable to deliver a blow to him with the paperweight, she smashes it into the desk and begins crying. it's only then that he speaks).

Kamalon: Damn it. Damn it. (beat). Yes, I want you.

Kelsey: What?

Kamalon: Yes. I've been afraid of it, but I've always wanted you.

Kelsey: Afraid of what? Me? Why would you be afraid of me?

Kamalon: (begins laughing).

Kelsey: (suddenly realizing what she's done). Oh I'm sorry. I'm so sorry baby. I didn't mean-

Kamalon: It's okay, I'm alright. (beat). I meant I was afraid of ruining things. This is my fear.

Kelsey: Kama no. No, it'll be alright. We make our own choices here.

Kamalon: You make the choices.

Kelsey: We'll change that.

Kamalon: No.

Kelsey: No? Why not? We'll progress, move forward. Just say it once more to me, that you want me, and I promise to change everything.

Kamalon: You want things to be even, but they can never be even. And neither of us would want them even. Can't you see I don't resent this. I embrace it.

Kelsey: No Kama, I've taken advantage of you. You can't appreciate yet what you haven't felt. But that will change. Say it once more.

Kamalon: (barely audible). I want you.

Kelsey: That's all I need from you. (she comes closer to him and caresses him. he kisses her passionately). Let's get out of here. Let's go right now, Kama. We'll forget about the office when we're not here, and be partners, lovers.

Kamalon: Partners? We cannot be partners.

Kelsey: (laughing) Don't worry. We can take things slowly. There's no rush. Come on, lover. There's an Italian place where we can still get dinner if we hurry. (going for her things and handing him his jacket).

Kamalon: No.

Kelsey: (hurt). No? What do you mean, "no?"

Kamalon: (with difficulty). No, I cannot be the person you are asking me to be. I cannot leave with you.

Kelsey: But you want me, you just said it.

Kamalon: Can't you see others crave what we have — war, or, the threat of war. How else is peace meaningful?

Kelsey: War? Don't avoid me with your ideas. (beat). Kama, don't do this.

Kamalon: I'm sorry. I cannot. (beat).

Kelsey: You better be goddamn sure about this. (he nods). Then you're the one who's giving everything up, Kamalon. Not me.

Kamalon: I know. That's what you wanted.

Kelsey: Then that was my mistake. (they get up and adjust themselves uncomfortably. she feigns disinterest). But no more. Maybe you're right. After all, we're here to work, not date. What the hell has gotten into me, I'm acting like a damn fool. (showing her annoyance). Get started on the budget proposal. I'll get some food delivered in a while.

Kamalon: (lowly). Alright.

Kelsey: (he takes his seat at the desk again. she stands behind him for a while looking out a window, before sitting down herself). I'll take a look at the implementation proposal. (they both get busy for a minute or two. but it becomes increasingly obvious that she is having difficulty working. speaking as if to herself). This is terrible. (beat) They haven't completed any of the preliminaries I've asked them to; someone's going to have to answer for this. (seeing this, he begins to feign discomfort, too). What's wrong?

Kamalon: Nothing, just a little cramp.

Kelsey: I've got to speak to the engineering group about this. (he is now massaging his lower back area). Is it that bad? Well maybe get up and stretch. We're not going anywhere for a while.

Kamalon: Good idea. (he stretches for a while in the area in front of the desks. he lets out a few moans while doing so).

Kelsey: (she walks over to where he's at). I can't believe this, right when you know we have to get this work done. (he is now on his knees, butt resting on heels while stretching arms palms down on the floor). Hey, don't pass out or anything. You alright? (getting up to go over and look at him).

Kamalon: Yes. It's just a back spasm. (now on all fours trying to stretch lower back). Sometimes if I sing or recite poetry it seems to help to divert my mind until I can get rid of the discomfort. (he begins reciting Ghazal poem. she has gone back to the desk by the time he starts, but stops what she's doing at hearing the poem).

"Whether I am recklessly rushing toward you,
Or you are hurriedly coming closer to me,
I do not know, but now, it does not matter.

Whether you are inviting me with open arms,
Or I am hesitating to enter your embrace,
I do not know, but now, it does not matter.

Whether it is I who am on the brink of diving in,
Or it is you who are intent on pulling me in,
I do not know, but now, it does not matter.

Whether this is all your meaningful game with me
Or my foolish play with you,
I do not know, but now, it does not matter.

I do not know, and it is good that I do not know,
For all that matters is that you know.
But why even think about this?
I do not know, but now, really, it does not matter.

Kelsey: (beat). I liked that, Kama. What is it?

Kamalon: A holy poem I learned when I was young. But I believe it more to be a love song by a slave to his master.

Kelsey: Really? (coming closer to him). They say walking on someone's back helps sometimes.

Kamalon: Really?

Kelsey: But I've never tried it in heels. How about it?

Kamalon: Very funny.

Kelsey: A couple of smacks with a paperweight might loosen things up?

Kamalon: Why don't we save that treatment for a last resort. (beat) I was born in Madras. My father worked the railways. My mother had seven children, including me. We were very poor, but not as poor as others. I studied math textbooks, it was the only way out. I had no-

Kelsey: That's not necessary.

Kamalon: I know. But I thought I would offer

Kelsey: (playfully kicking him). They say kicking is good for cramps, too.

Kamalon: Really.

Kelsey: Yeah, does that seem to help?

Kamalon: In stopping the flow of oxygen. Maybe if you just put your weight on it. (she sits on him).

Kelsey: (both beginning to laugh now. she flips off her shoes). You do make me laugh. And feel light. Somehow. You flea-bitten, cheap-ass donkey show! (both laugh again).

Kamalon; Giddyup?

Kelsey: You're damn right, giddyup. Now!!! (he gets to his feet with her on his back and begins circling the desks).

Kamalon: Oh, donkey boy has been a bad donkey today.

Kelsey: (laughing). You're goddamn right he has, pick it up lard ass.

Kamalon: Faster?

Kelsey: You know it. Until your legs buckle underneath you. (their voices begin to fade as lights begin to go down).

Kamalon: Faster again?

Kelsey: Yep, until your shoes fall off.

Kamalon: Well break me down then.

Kelsey: That's right. Until there's nothing left of you but dust. (Lights out).

— END —