

2020 MASTER OF ARTS SCREEN: PRODUCING APPLICATION TASK



Australian Government

Australian Film Television and Radio School

Television Series story bible *Secretary*, © AHIGGS

You may only use the television series story bible *Secretary*, for the AFTRS' 2020 Master of Arts Screen: Producing application

SECRETARY

Secretaries - cool Miss Moneypennys, sexbombs in stilettos, psychotic control-freaks - take your pick. That's the public perception, but what is the reality?

This series peels back the glossy exterior to follow the lives of four secretaries who work together at a smart city law firm. We go behind the fuck-off reception, over the workstation and into the drinks cupboard to find out what's really going down in secretary land.

The self-styled PA hierarchy is headed by top dog **Nadia** (27) who exerts her own brand of psychological manipulation with sweet effectiveness. Best friend but not-quite-her-equal, **Lucy** (27), is secure in the knowledge she's the office spunk but her singleton status is starting to grind. Out on his own, but very much one of the girls, **Grant** (25) is quick to criticise, correct, align but equally quick to stand up to unfairness. Entering this clique is fresh-faced **Morgan** (19), direct from a TAFE diploma in a regional town. Conscientious and determined, she's going to make every mistake in the book in her quest to fit in, get a grip and go places.

Our four secretaries devote most of their waking hours to Gallagher & Associates and its team of hotshot young lawyers. This is no nine-to-fiver; Gallagher's expects total commitment from everyone, no matter who they are. Work is their life, so they live their lives at work.

As an all-practice firm, a variety of legal issues pass through the doors of Gallagher's and inevitably across the secretaries' desks. And it's here we discover just how much, or how little, power and influence the secretary has. And none of it learnt at law school...

Competing with the demands of the job are the complexities of office life: love affairs and loyalty, petty rivalries and rumours, friendship and betrayal, lies and lust. And that's the main game.

Secretary is a behind-the-stilettos look at what really goes on in a smart office at the big end of town.

CHARACTERS

THE 'GIRLS'

NADIA, 27, Senior Secretary to Founding Partner Gary Gallagher / Office Manager A

secretary who's reached the top of the tree and has no further career ambitions. Nadia has a way of making people do what she wants with a steely sweetness rather than any overt power play. Next to fiancé Tim, her closest friend is Lucy. Nadia is very pleased that her two, five and ten-year plans are all tracking on schedule. First up is The Wedding.

LUCY, 27, Secretary to Partner, Ken Kehoe

The hottie of the office, and don't anyone dare say otherwise. Lucy is a stylish young woman who's getting a teensy bit desperate to snag a man. She's also a long way from being the brightest person in the office. To cover both these insecurities she's operates on bubbly self-confidence bordering on the arrogant.

GRANT, 25, Secretary to lawyers Justin Gallagher and Aviva Bloch

Immaculate files and an A-list partner are Grant's twin obsessions. The first he achieves every day, the second keeps him in a constant state of twitchy anticipation. Grant gets on with everyone, despite being known as the office style nazi. Although fond of a tease, he's also big on loyalty, fairness and doing the right thing.

MORGAN, 19, Junior secretary to junior lawyers Sascha Smith-Lewis & Dick McKew

Getting her first job at Gallagher's marks the start of Morgan's adult life - hello world, here I am! She has dreams of a Brilliant Career and the determination to make it happen. Morgan's a small town girl making her first steps in the big city. Boyfriend Anthony is still back home so she's on her own, except for cousin-from-hell, Sharon, who works in Accounts.

ANNABEL, 30, Receptionist

A sophisticated lady about town with many social engagements and nil interest in the law. Annabel is always 'involved in a relationship' but never reveals with whom. She's in a prime position to observe the comings and goings of the office but rarely breaks a confidence. Groomed to the highest levels possible, she's alluring and mysterious all at the same time.

THE LAWYERS

GARY GALLAGHER, 50s, Founding Partner

Gary was a brilliant lawyer who broke away from the corporates and founded the firm 25 years ago. With a fearsome reputation for getting the best for his clients, he's maintained Gallagher's as a small firm that punches above its weight. The price he's paid for that success is a broken marriage and a three-pack-a-day habit.

KEN KEHOE, 50s, Partner

As smart as Gary but with none of his flamboyance, Ken joined the firm soon after it was founded. Mates and a perfect foil for each other, Ken is the corporate backbone to Gary's front man. Slow and steady, Ken also won back his childhood sweetheart, Celia, from Gary but they've long gotten over that.

JUSTIN GALLAGHER, 35, Lawyer

Enjoys all the privileges that have come to him - wealth, Uncle Gary's legal connections, good looks. He could have turned out to be a pain in the arse but is saved by not only being very good at his job but also charming to boot.

AVIVA BLOCH, 35, Lawyer

Straight down the line Aviva gets her point across quicker than anyone but leaves a trail of offended people in her wake. Completely unsentimental and an expert time-manager, Aviva is a working mother who really hasn't got time for silly shit.

ZELKO JONES, 35, Lawyer

A somewhat mysterious past and personal life, Zelko runs with the boy pack that Justin heads. In contrast to Justin, he's had to work his own way in the world but they've ended up at the same point. Boys about town, who fancy themselves as George Clooney.

SASCHA SMITH-LEWIS, 26, Junior Lawyer

Sascha doesn't know whether to hang with the secretaries or the lawyers. Not helped by an unfortunate speech impediment, she struggles with self-confidence and a personality clash with fellow first year-er, Dick McKew.

DICK MCKEW, 26, Junior Lawyer

Dick thinks he's god's gift to law and women - currently he's neither. Arrogant, boisterous and a complete wanker, Dick suffers from too much testosterone and an overwhelming sense of his own importance.

THE ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT

Robert, 25, Accounts Receivable

On first sight, which is all he usually gets, Robert is really very uninteresting and rather repulsive. But given the chance, and away from Sharon, he reveals himself as a man of surprising potential. In more ways than one.

Sharon, 35, Accounts Payable

Any which way you look at Sharon, she's a bitch from hell who delights in thwarting any attempt to provide a service. Thank god she's only three days a week. Enjoys reporting back to the family on cousin Morgan.

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SYNOPSIS

Episode One

Morgan arrives way too early for her first day at Gallagher & Associates. Sporting a brand new Sportsgirl suit and sparkling white trainers, a security guard decides she poses little threat and agrees to let her wait in the firm's Reception.

Morgan can hardly contain her excitement. The classy Reception is awesome! She decides to take a peak around the corner into the main office area. It's amazing! And then she hears a distinct groaning sound coming from the corner office.

Morgan tiptoes across the floor towards the groaning, ending up outside an enormous corner office. She peers around the door to see a man in his 50s flat on his back. Morgan goes into automatic CPR. The man looks like he's responding, he whispers something, then collapses. Morgan does a couple of by-the-book checks to confirm that he's dead. He is. She runs to the phone on his desk to dial 000. But can't get a line out. Now she's losing her cool.

At that moment **Annabel** arrives at Reception, notices the unusual activity on switch and sets off to investigate. She enters the corner office, sees Morgan stabbing buttons on the phone then the body on the floor. Annabel lets a scream rip then takes charge.

Nadia arrives - she's in shock but flicks the switch to crisis management and expertly gives orders to the girls as to what they will and won't do. They obey without question. Nadia has that kind of authority.

Annabel has assumed her position at Reception when **Lucy** and **Grant** arrive. They can tell something's up and eventually get it out of her just as Partner **Ken Kehoe** arrives. Annabel whisks him through to Nadia, Lucy running behind concerned, followed by Grant. A controlled panic is in the air.

Later, the secretaries huddle together trying to work out what is going down in the crisis meeting attended by all the lawyers. Everyone stops and stands to attention as the ambos wheel the body through the office. The dead man is none other than Founding Partner, **Gary Gallagher**.

Morgan is summoned into the meeting. Shaking with fear, all eyes bore into Morgan as she's told the police will be arriving to interview her. Before being dismissed Ken introduces her to her new bosses - junior lawyers **Sascha Smith-Lewis** and **Dick McKew**. Her heart sinks - there seems to be no love lost between the two. She also picks up that **Justin Gallagher**, Gary's nephew, is being promoted to work alongside Ken.

Just as Morgan arrives at her workstation, Nadia despatches her off to Accounts to fill in all the necessary new employee forms. Before she departs Morgan inadvertently lets slip that Justin has been promoted. That's news to Nadia.

Down at Accounts Morgan gets her first lesson in administrative bloody mindedness from **Robert** and **Sharon**. She's saved by the police who've arrived to take her statement. In comparison dealing with them is a breeze.

With everyone under pressure on this day of upheaval, minor tasks are offloaded onto Morgan. After a mini-tour by Lucy, she's left in the kitchen to stack the dishwasher

Absorbed in the task she fails to notice Justin dropping off his dirty cup. As she swings around she bumps into him and the dregs go flying. She's mortified and offers a jumbled apology and condolences all in one. He's fine; he even manages a joke. She's smitten. He's cute. He's a Gallagher. He's way out of her league.

Meanwhile Nadia's nerves are shaken. She makes a panicking call to fiancé Tim. She might be out of a job! What about the land package? What about the white goods on lay-by? What about the wedding!!! Tim calms her down.

Morgan again tries to start work but now it's time for her to relieve on switch. Grant provides his unofficial induction to the firm as he takes her through the switch operation. Morgan's head is about to explode with information overload. As she fumbles with incoming calls, a slick businessman arrives at Reception. It's **Shane King**, a corporate entrepreneur and one of the firm's top clients. His house has just been raided by ASIC. When he finds out Morgan's a new girl, he welcomes her with a kiss on the lips as he heads through to the offices.

Realising a storm is brewing amongst the secretaries about who will be his PA, Justin calls a meeting with Nadia and Grant. They both want the job. So the fairest thing is to interview them. It might be fair but it triggers an unpleasant competitive friction between the two. Lucy definitely wants best friend Nadia to get the job. It will also, by association, bring her closer to Justin for whom she has secretly pined for several years. Lucy's number one priority though is boss Ken. She knows he's shattered by the loss of his colleague.

Morgan is relieved from switch duties only to be sent out to get sandwiches and pick up dry-cleaning. On return she has to face Accounts again to get reimbursed for the cost. It's even worse than the last encounter. Cousin Sharon gives her no favours. By now, Morgan is half starved, stressed out and exhausted. She retreats to the toilets for a quiet sob.

Nadia and Grant are undergoing their interviews when all hell breaks loose. It seems the media have got wind of Shane King's ASIC raid and are gathering in the lobby

demanding to come up. It's decided Shane has to be secreted out of the building while the media are given a holding statement. Morgan is selected to accompany Shane and distribute the statement purely on the basis that she knows nothing about the case and therefore cannot possibly reveal anything of value to the media.

Morgan is a study in concentration as she descends in the lift with Shane. He, on the other hand, is loving the cloak and dagger of it all and can't understand why his little bodyguard is so tense. He offers a quick shoulder massage. Morgan's day is rapidly turning into a nightmare. She briskly escorts Shane out. It looks so tempting to do a runner herself.

Instead she fronts the media to distribute the statement. And then gets hoodwinked into reading it. Then commenting on Gary's death. Morgan rises to the occasion. Justin, worried by the responsibility he's given Morgan, catches the tail end of her impressive handling of the situation. In the lift on the way up Morgan squirms with pride and embarrassment as Justin congratulates her. Ok, she's going to stay.

It's near the end of the day - Morgan finally gets the chance to kick off her trainers and start tackling the work on her desk. Nadia learns she's got the job. Grant throws a hissy and threatens to leave but changes his mind when **Zelko** arrives to take up a temporary position as lawyer. Ok, he'll stay.

As people leave for the day, Morgan ploughs ahead with a mountain of dictaphone courtesy Dick McKew. As Justin passes by he pauses to observe this young girl in the cheap suit and daggy shoes and can't help but admire her dogged persistence in sticking out the day from hell.