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It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

—Mr. Rogers

Cast of Characters

The people. All in their early to mid-twenties:

STUART
LINDSAY
TODD
GARY
PENNY
LEN

Place

The place.

The telefundraising (euphemism for “telemarketing”) department of the fictional small town public broadcasting station, TPPT (Twin Ports Public Television).

TPPT is located in a fictional town, kind of a college town, an Iowa City/Ann Arbor/Madison sort of place.

The room is a little funky, very earnest and very public tv-ish. Low budget in a non-profit way. Maybe some posters for the station. Maybe...

A poster for Reading Rainbow...

For Sesame Street...

For Antiques Road Show...

A local gardening or cooking show...

Maybe information about local co-op groceries. Maybe something about riding your bike instead of driving... Recycling... You get the picture.

The stuff laying around.

The typical gifts for donors. Coffee cups, tote bags, T-shirts and aprons, the DVD box set of “The Civil War,” some Suze Orman things, etc... You can make these things specific to your town’s favorite PBS programming.

There are 5 phone stations and a separate desk for the Supervisor.

The phone stations may be at a long table, or at five small desks.

The supervisor's desk also has a phone.

1 huge pile of paper.

Each sheet of paper contains the phone numbers of potential donors.

The Supervisor will organize this huge pile into 8 less huge piles, each placed under its respective sign, visible to the audience. The signs read...

- Call ASAP
- Call Backs
- Current Members
- Past Members
- Do Not Call
- Lonely
- Mean
- Deaf

On the back wall.

A big chalk board on which the night's financial progress is charted, person by person, and separated into hours. So it would list the telefundraisers' names down the left side, and across the top... 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00.

Also.

A small television

A coffee pot

Old pizza

A mini fridge

Office stuff

Other detritus

Time

The present. On the last night of TPPT's Pledge Week.

A Note About Style

These people like one another and they're good at giving each other a hard time. They have a great rapport with each other—and great timing. Be sure to keep up the pace of the dialogue. This thing needs to move. Very casual, very quick, very familiar. Until it shifts, of course.

All the stage business with the phones (the calling, the ringing, the hanging up, etc.) needs to be choreographed for rhythm and precision. Feel free to go to town with this. Just remember: It can never be random or sloppy. Then it will suck. Please don't let it suck.

Author's Note

This play is inspired by a few things. My summer working as a telefundraiser for an arts organization, the social and political concerns of the students I worked with to develop this project, and the attacks on the freedom and integrity of public television. I should've written to the White House. Instead I wrote this play.

Acknowledgments

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This Play was originally commissioned by the Guthrie Theater, Joe Dowling, Artistic Director.

CALLING ALL

by Melanie Marnich

1. On Any Night Before This Night.

(Darkness.)

(From the dark, the sound of a telephone being dialed.)

(Then, one after another, voices.

The voices of the telefundraisers, as filtered through the phone. Varying degrees of desperate, nervous, bored and earnest.)

LEN. Yeah, hi, hi, Miss— Ms.—Mrs. Cermaski. Yeah. Hi. This is Len calling from TPPT, your Twin Ports Public Television station. I'm sure you know our slogan here is "Keep TPPT Commercial-Free." So we're wondering if you could—

(Click. Dial tone. MRS. CERMASKI hung up.)

LEN. Shit.

GARY. Hello, Mr. Davenport? This is Gary. Gary calling. From Twin Ports Public Television? TPPT? As a viewer and loyal supporter of TPPT, you—

(Click. Dial tone. DAVENPORT hung up.)

GARY. Shit.

LINDSAY. Hi, Miss— Oh. Ooo. Sorry. *Mister* Lopato. Wow. You just really sound like a wo— Sorry. Um. I'm Lindsay. Calling from TPPT. As you know, our quality programming relies on your support for—

(Click. Dial tone.)

LINDSAY. Aw, shit.

STUART. Miss Gupta? This is Stuart, from—

(Click. Dial tone.)

STUART. Shit.

TODD. *(In one fast run-on sentence hoping to get it all in before the inevitable hang-up:)* Randy? Mr. Randy Pugman? Hi this is Todd calling on behalf of TPPT and we're reaching out to all our viewers—

(Click. Dial tone.)

TODD. Shit. Shitshitshitshit.

(He hangs up the phone.)

(Darkness until...)

2. This Night.

(Lights up.

Switched on by...

PENNY, *the supervisor, who has just walked in.*

She's young and hip in a slightly granola sort of way.

She looks around, assessing her domain.)

PENNY. Well. Happy Telefundraising Thursday.

(During the lines below, she pours a cup of cold coffee, puts it in the microwave and sets the timer. While the coffee's being nuked...)

PENNY. *(Reciting her mantra of can-do affirmations:)*

I am powerful.

I am strong.

I am centered.

I am successful in all I attempt.

People like me.

I am a valuable person.

Success flows to me in a steady stream.

I am a leader.

My body is healthy, inside and out.

I have confidence.

I inspire confidence in others.

I make a difference in this world.

I make a difference to those around me.

I live according to my values.

My values are valued by others.

I—

(Ding! Goes the microwave. She goes for the coffee like a junkie.)

PENNY. *(Affirming:)*
Caffeine is my friend.
Caffeine is my friend.

(She smells some milk that's been left in the mini-fridge. Ew. She pours it in her coffee anyway.)

PENNY. *(Affirming:)*
This will not make me puke.
This will not make me—

(Her phone rings.)

PENNY. *(Answering as she gulps her coffee:)* TPPT Telefundraising. Penny speak— Oh, hello, Mr. Patterson. Yes, sir. Great. Fine. Yes. Of course I know our numbers are down. I— I don't know *exactly* why, but I guess my feeling is that donations are being downsized because so many of our donors are being downsized.

Uh-huh.

Uh-huh.

Uh-huh.

No, that wasn't a glib excuse, sir. Yes, I'd love to keep my job. Yes, I know that desperate times call for desperate measures. It's— What new script?

(Searching...)

Ummmmmm...

(She finds an envelope on her desk and opens it.)

PENNY. Found it. It's—

(She looks it over. It's not good.)

Wow. Um. Gosh. This is... Wow. I mean, they hang up on us *now*, when we ask for two hundred. This is— Okay. Okay. Absolutely. Got it. Will do. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Goodbye, Mr. Patterson. Sir.

(She hangs up.)

PENNY. *(As she looks over the script:)*
This does not mean disaster.
This does not mean disaster.

This—

(On this last line, LEN, LINDSAY and GARY enter.)

LEN, LINDSAY, GARY. *(Singing:)*

Hi ho, hi ho

It's off to work we go.

Hi ho hi ho hi ho hi ho hi ho.

LEN. Hey, Snow White.

PENNY. Hey, Goofy.

LINDSAY. Did we interrupt your affirmations again?

PENNY. That's okay. I'm affirmed out for the day.

LEN. Affirmations, Penny...

GARY. ...Will not make it so.

LINDSAY. They're great. Shut up, you guys. Ignore them, Penny.

LEN. They don't work, I'm tellin' ya.

LINDSAY. I affirmed my way into an amazing suede jacket once.

GARY. I'm sure you did, Lindsay.

(PENNY starts to organize the huge stack of call sheets into smaller piles.)

LEN. Okay. Watch.

Steven Spielberg loves my work.

Steven Spielberg wants me in his next movie.

Steven Spielberg is calling me now.

(He stares at his phone not ringing.)

GARY. He's too commercial anyway.

LEN. Right.

Fellini. Fellini is calling me now.

GARY. Fellini's dead.

LEN. Forgot.

Louis Malle. I love Louis Malle. French guy.

GARY. Dead.

LEN. Disney?

GARY. Dead. Yet undead.

LINDSAY. Stop being morons, you guys. They're morons, Penny.

PENNY. I know. I hired them.

GARY. My affirmations?

I hate my job.

This job is my idea of hell.

I hate my job.

PENNY. I'm giving you all the worst calls, Gary.

GARY. And the difference from other nights would be...?

PENNY. (*Affirming:*)

I will not dream of firing Gary.

I will not dream of firing Gary.

LINDSAY. What *do* you have to do to get fired around here?

(*TODD enters wearing pajamas, singing the theme song to the Mr. Rogers' show.*)

TODD. (*Singing:*) It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor. Won't you be mine?

LEN. Hi ho, Todd.

TODD. Hello, my friends. Beautiful day, isn't it?

GARY. What's your neighborhood *on*?

LINDSAY. You're not supposed to do this job, you know, *impaired*.

TODD. My neighborhood isn't *on* anything. I am not *impaired*. I just feel good *naturally*.

LINDSAY. (*Skeptically:*) Right.

TODD. You should try it.

LINDSAY. Not gonna happen.

GARY. Um. Todd?

TODD. (*Digging up a slice of old, cold pizza:*) Yeah?

GARY. Feel free to correct me here, but it looks like you're wearing your pajamas.

TODD. I am indeed.

LEN. Cool.

LINDSAY. Don't encourage him, Len.

TODD. One-hundred percent flannel. One-hundred percent comfy. One-hundred percent Toddy.

LINDSAY. (*Catching a whiff of something:*) Uch. What smells?

(*GARY & LEN sniff around.*)

GARY. Smells like something...died in here.

LINDSAY. Kind of a festering...stench.

LEN. (*Smelling near the fridge—and TODD:*) Maybe something went bad in the fridge.

LINDSAY. Sort of a moldy...

(*LEN sniffs sniffs sniffs.*)

LEN. No. It's... It's...

(*His nose leads him to TODD.*)

LEN. (*Recoiling:*) Agh. You're...pungent, dude.

TODD. Sorry. I just finished working out.

GARY. In your *pajamas*?

TODD. Yeah. I've been reading these books on simplifying your life, conserving stuff, going easier on the planet and all that. I'm simplifying by not spending needless time on changing clothes, or by using detergent and deodorant that are leaching into the water table and causing frogs to grow nipples. And I've stopped worrying about acquiring things with ephemeral style. Check it out. Low-Impact-Living-Dot-Com. It's a sacrifice, but someday the planet will thank me.

LEN. Todd, I love you like a brother, but this is bad.

TODD. Your children will thank me. Your children's children will thank me.

LINDSAY. What children? Who can ovulate with that smell in the room?

TODD. People resisted hybrid cars when they first came out, too.

GARY. But not because they reeked.

TODD. I'm onto something. Something big. You'll come around.

LINDSAY. Come *on*, Todd. It's so not about "simplifying."

TODD. What then?

LINDSAY. All due respect, you just took lazy to a new level.

TODD. Think about it. That in itself is pretty ambitious.

PENNY. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to write you up again, Todd.

TODD. For what?

PENNY. For...pajamas.

LINDSAY. What about the smell?

PENNY. And for the smell.

TODD. How many more times can you write me up before I get fired?

PENNY. If I were actually going to fire you, I'd've done it two months ago, when you got caught with the intern from "Matching Gifts."

TODD. And you're keeping me on because...?

PENNY. Because I don't have time to train in someone else. And because people who do what we do aren't exactly a dime a dozen.

(At that, STUART strides in wearing a Krispy Kreme uniform and carrying a box of donuts.)

PENNY. Speaking of which...

STUART. *(Presenting box:)* Who's your daddy?

EVERYONE. *(Spying the box:)* Ooooooooooooo!

STUART. Hot off the conveyor belt, you guys. Dig in.

(They all descend on the box.)

LEN. Aw, man, thanks. This is my favorite food group.

LINDSAY. *(Picking up a donut then stopping just before she bites in.)* Oh. Wait. They're completely fried in animal fat. I can't eat them.

GARY. Why not?

LINDSAY. I'm a vegan.

TODD. Since when? I saw you eating a Quarter Pounder With Cheese twenty-four hours ago.

LINDSAY. I know. This is new.

LEN. Very PC, Lindsay.

LINDSAY. If PC stands for "preventing cellulite."

GARY. That's not very veganistic of you.

LINDSAY. So I'll join PETA and call it even.

STUART. *(Finally noticing:)* Wow, what stinks?

GARY, LINDSAY, LEN, PENNY. Todd.

STUART. Show some mercy, pal. Fumigate yourself.

TODD. Someday you, too, will thank me.

STUART. *(Eating a donut:)* Hey. You guys read about that weird thing that happened in that country, you know the one with the other weird thing happening? I couldn't believe it. Really couldn't. Un-freakin'-believable.

GARY. *(Eating:)* Where'd you read about it?

STUART. On the bus.

TODD. Never admit you ride the bus, Stuey. No guy who hopes to get laid should ever admit he rides the bus.

LEN. Says the guy in the pajamas.

GARY. I meant what *paper*?

STUART. Oh. The Daily Telegraph Times.

LINDSAY. I thought you only read The Onion.

STUART. I started cheating on The Onion with the Daily.

LEN. (*Eating:*) I read about it, too. It's all just...weird. Beyond weird.

STUART. Seriously weird. Some sort of endemic pandemic epidemic.

LINDSAY. I'm giving up news. Cold turkey. Because it's all bad. And it's affecting me on a cellular level, I think. My DNA is...morphing. You just can't *ingest* it all and not be...warped.

LEN. Actually caring about what's going on out there can really kick your ass. Not worth it.

STUART. But doesn't it make you want to shrug off our generational *ennui* and *do* something?

(*They all think.*)

GARY, LINDSAY, PENNY, LEN. (*Ad libbing:*) Not really. No. Not so much.

TODD. (*Not knowing what ennui is:*) On *what*?

LEN. (*Eating:*) It doesn't make me want to do something. It makes me long for the good old days, you know?

GARY. You're twenty-three. What good old days?

LEN. Come on. Think back. To when you were, like seven. Things were easier then. No job pressures. No money pressures. No romantic pressures. No Social-Security-is-gonna-disappear pressures. No unstable-democracy-somewhere-in-the-world pressures. No holes-in-the-ozone pressures. No any-time-minutes-versus-calling-outside-of-my-plan-versus-roaming pressures, no—

STUART. We got it.

LEN. None of that crap. Just toys and stuff. Life was good. Now, every day is an act of denial. Every day, we wake up and have to actually *choose* to not care. If we're going to stay sane. It's exhausting if you think about it.

LINDSAY. I'd like to be clear about something, though. It's not that we never cared.

LEN. And Lindsay takes the floor.

LINDSAY. We *used* to care. About all that stuff. We did. Didn't we?

LEN, STUART, GARY, TODD, PENNY. (*Ad libbing:*) Yeah. We did. Sure. (*Etc...*)

LINDSAY. But then I think we just figured out that caring didn't make a difference. The guys we didn't vote for still got elected, the jobs we wanted don't exist, the money we raise is never enough...

LEN. Will someone please take the floor from Lindsay?

LINDSAY. So we just cut our loses, saved some time, and stopped caring. That's not *bad*. Sad, maybe. But not bad. It's just...pragmatic.

GARY. Speaking of pragmatic, how's the new job going, Stuart?

STUART. Great. I mean, if I add up the hourly wage I make there, with the hourly wage I make here, I make almost half of what it takes to live. And if I figure out how to not sleep, I can get a third job, which means I could pay off my student loans by the time I'm fifty-seven. So things are looking up from last week.

LINDSAY. That's what you get for graduating with a double major in physics and comparative lit.

STUART. Magna cum laude.

LINDSAY. Yeah. You'd've done better majoring in home ec. and ping pong.

TODD. I'm a second-year senior majoring in I-Could-Care-Less, and I'm probably the most employable of all of us.

LEN. No, I think I can really take my degree in Who-Gives-A-Shit to the bank.

GARY. My major in These-Four-Years-Will-Get-Me-Nowhere will look better on paper.

LINDSAY. Yeah. But the fact that I've made the Dean's List every semester for getting straight A's in What's-The-Pointism makes me infinitely recruit-able

STUART. Like I said, state of the world.

LEN. Are they hiring at the Kreme?

STUART. Always. It's a rough job, you guys. It's like a slaughterhouse for dough. Trust me. There is no such thing as a free-range pastry. But if you want me to put in a word for you...

LEN. That'd be awesome.

TODD. Me, too, Stuey.

STUART. No jammies, though, Todd. Sorry.

TODD. Last I checked, that's called discrimination.

STUART. Check again. It's called hygiene. Besides, they're kind of loose and might get caught in the fryer. If that's a deterrent for you.

TODD. (*Helping himself to another donut:*) Not really.

LEN. That's the great thing about this job. No real possibility of injury.

LINDSAY. True. When it's not completely awful, it's completely easy.

STUART. Yeah. And sort of worthwhile. We're bringing Masterpiece Theatre to the masses. And that's a good cause. That's why we're doing it, right? Half-heartedly. But that's why. Isn't it?

TODD. That implies motivation.

LEN. Don't forget, we're the generation voted Most Likely To Die Of Apathy in a recent Rolling Stone poll.

LINDSAY. Sometimes, I think I'm doing it for Bill Moyers. I think he's hot.

GARY. *What?*

LINDSAY. He's got the smart thing going on. Those glasses... A great vocabulary, integrity...

PENNY. *(Agreeing with LINDSAY:)* That quiet but intense voice...

LINDSAY. That probing intellect...

TODD. *(Queasy at the thought of Bill Moyers doing anything with his lips and probing:)* You mind? I'm trying to keep these donuts down. I can't think of Bill Moyers probing anything.

PENNY. Sorry.

LINDSAY. He's just so—

TODD. *(Cutting her off:)* No more Moyers. Anything but Moyers. Please.

GARY. *(Coming to Todd's aid:)* You read in the staff newsletter that the Birkenstock Store's offering discounts to TPPT employees? If you bring in a friend, you get an extra ten-percent off. Stuart, you in?

STUART. Hell no.

GARY. Todd?

TODD. "Simplifying," remember?

GARY. Len, I know you don't care. Lindsay? You love shoes.

LINDSAY. Sorry. I can't pay ninety-eight bucks for a cork shoe with a couple of leather straps. Jesus had prettier sandals.

(PENNY is finally done setting up the piles of call sheets under their appropriate signs.)

PENNY. Okay, ladies, if you're done socializing... Here are tonight's call sheets. Organized, as usual, in order of hope and importance.

(Indicating each stack.)

"Call ASAP"

"Call Backs"

"Current Members"

"Past Members"

“Do Not Call”

“Lonely”

“Mean”

“Deaf”

Okay. You know the drill. Grab a chunk from each pile...

(They form a line, and grab sheets from each pile, like an assembly line.)

LINDSAY. Hey, Penny, Todd didn't take any Lonelies.

TODD. Lind-say!

LINDSAY. To-odd.

TODD. The Lonelies *scare* me. They just want to talk. And talk and talk. And you always hear an equally lonely cat in the background.

LINDSAY. Suck it up, pajama man.

TODD. *(Grabbing a bunch of Lonelies:)* Alright... alright...

STUART. Yeah, and uh, let me point out... *Someone* just skipped the Mean pile.

LINDSAY. Stu-art!

STUART. Lind-say.

LINDSAY. That guy made me cry last night!

STUART. So. Some guy made me cry last night, too, and you don't see me skipping the Means.

LINDSAY. *(Grabbing a handful of Means:)* Paybacks are hell, Stuart.

(GARY holds out some call sheets to STUART.)

GARY. Here ya go, Stuey.

STUART. What's that?

GARY. The Deafs you skipped.

STUART. *(Taking the sheets:)* An oversight.

LINDSAY. Bus-ted.

LEN. Hey, Gary.

GARY. What.

LEN. Here's the Do Not Calls you managed to avoid.

GARY. Fine. I'll swap you ten Do Not Calls for fifteen Means.

LEN. Done.

(And they swap call sheets.)

(Suddenly, Lindsay's phone starts to ring.)

(This is confusing as it's almost impossible for someone to call one of these phones directly. They all look in the direction of the phone but no one answers it.)

TODD. Maybe it's Moyers calling.

STUART. You're not supposed to give out your number, Lindsay.

LINDSAY. *(A little weirded out:)* I...didn't.

GARY. I thought you can't actually call *into* these phones.

PENNY. You can't.

(LINDSAY picks it up just as it stops ringing.)

LINDSAY. *(Hanging up the phone:)* Weird.

PENNY. *(Snapping into her best motivational mode:)* Whatever. Focus, team, focus. This is the last night of Pledge Week and we gotta make it happen. We have, what?, six of us, one hundred twenty thousand of them and four more hours to do our best for free speech, free thinking and commercial-free viewing even if we're more than happy to take all those things for granted. But a job's a job, and we really have our backs to the wall. I know we're down to a part-time pledge schedule and a part-time pledge team. But we have to put in a full-time effort, right?

(Silence.)

PENNY. *(Ignoring the silence:)* Okay. So here's the deal. Mr. Patterson called a few minutes ago from HQ.

TODD. HQ?

PENNY. Headquarters.

STUART. You mean from his cubicle downstairs?

PENNY. Yeah. And he pointed out that our numbers are down. Way down.

GARY. Like, how way down?

PENNY. Something like twenty-two percent below our nineteen eighty-six numbers, calculated in nineteen ninety-three dollars.

(The group groans in unison.)

PENNY. Exactly. So he's asking us to be flexible and to take a new approach to the intro, body and close of each call. We need to set up a higher expectation with a greater sense of investment, pride and reward, then distill it into an essence of—

LINDSAY. Cut to the chase, Penn.

PENNY. We have a new script.

(General grumbling.)

PENNY. I know, I know...

LEN. Can't be worse than the one we have.

STUART. Hey, anything's better than asking "would you like to make that two dozen?" seven hours a day.

PENNY. Well...

LINDSAY. How bad is it?

PENNY. *(Handing them each a new script:)* It's just based on a little more gutsy...optimism. That's all.

TODD. And that's a euphemism for...

PENNY. *(As she hands out the script:)* Let's just read through it, okay?

(General throat clearing, then...)

PENNY. Ready?

EVERYONE. *(Flatly:)* Hello, Mr/Miss/Mrs/Ms Blank. I'm insert-real-first-name-here. And I'm calling for TPPT, Twin Ports Public

Television. How are you tonight great me too. I know you know how much we depend on your support.

STUART. This is sort of the same.

PENNY. Keep going.

EVERYONE. With recent government cutbacks, the threat of more cutbacks, and an increase in programming costs on the horizon—

LINDSAY. That's all new.

PENNY. Keep going...

EVERYONE. —we need to ask our supporters for even more help. Mr. Rogers and Reading Rainbow are on the chopping block, and the future of public TV is in your hands. How would you feel about a donation of twelve hundred dol—

(Everyone drops their scripts.)

STUART. Holy shit.

TODD. That's a typo, right? Say it's a typo.

PENNY. Um. No.

LINDSAY. This is *illegal*.

LEN. I'd rather give myself a root canal than open with an ask of twelve hundred.

GARY. It's a joke. Tell me it's a joke.

PENNY. It's not a joke, you guys.

TODD. Suddenly my jammies aren't the stinkiest thing in here.

LINDSAY. This is horseshit, Penny. Total and complete horseshit.

STUART. For twelve hundred bucks, they're gonna want more than a mug.

PENNY. Don't shoot the messenger, you guys. This comes from Patterson.

LEN. Oooo. Patterson. Oooooo. I've never even *seen* Patterson. I don't know if Patterson actually *exists*. But if he does, I'd like to watch him make this fly.

GARY. There's no way, Penn. Noooooo way.

PENNY. That attitude isn't going to get you anywhere, Gary.

STUART. Seriously, Penny, is Patterson insane? Seriously. Seriously insane. Seriously.

PENNY. The less people give the more we need them to give even though they're giving less which means we have to ask for more because there's less and it's all costing more. Or something. Is how he explained it.

LEN. Lindsay's right. Horseshit.

TODD. I'm going on strike.

GARY. Asking us to do this has to violate some child labor law or something. It's abuse. I'm calling...OSHA. Or the Teamsters. Or Amy, from Judging Amy.

LINDSAY. (*Working up a head of steam:*) There's no way. Absolutely no way. This is *toxic*. It's dangerous to our *health*. I refuse. I just refuse. I'll sue Patterson for...something. I'm not doing it. I'll— I'll *resist*. Just... Screw it! Screw Patterson! And screw you, Penny! I'm gonna fight this thing! It's just *wrong!* It's just—

(PENNY *starts to cry.*)

TODD. (*To LINDSAY:*) Way to go, Erin Brockovich.

LINDSAY. Oh! Oh no. I didn't mean it. No no no. I'm sorry.

PENNY. (*Squeaking indecipherably through her tears:*) Ijustdont-knoweeenerrrreeeeifandIcantseeeeeeeweeeee...

GARY. Penn? Penny, don't cry! We're sorry. Aren't we? We're sorry.

TODD, GARY, LEN, STUART. (*Ad libbing apologies:*) Yeah. Come on, don't cry. We're sorry...

LINDSAY. Are you...okay?

PENNY. No! I'm not okay! I'm trying to do my job. I'm trying to help you do your job. I'm trying to help all of us *keep* our jobs even if we hate them. I'm trying to help us help people have viewing options other than watching stupid, pretty sluts in bikinis live on an island and eat bugs! I'm trying to fight the trend that will result in there being a CSI for every city in the country! Because that's where we're headed! You really want a CSI *Duluth*?!

TODD. That'd be cool.

LINDSAY. Shut up, Todd.

(PENNY blows her nose, takes a breath and collects herself.)

PENNY. *(Wiping away tears, pulling herself together:)* Phew! Yeah. I just— I lost it for a second. I feel, you know, *pressure*. There's pressure on us, you guys. To basically save the station. But— I mean— I *know* the script's stupid and impossible and ridiculous. I *know*.

LINDSAY. I'm sorry, Penny. I really am. I didn't mean to say it was horseshit.

LEN. Me, either.

TODD. We were just being...

STUART. Jackasses.

TODD. Yeah.

LINDSAY. And I take back the whole "screw you" thing.

PENNY. It's just— Patterson said we *have* to use this new script. And we *have* to use it starting tonight. Period. I know it sucks. I know it's horseshit. I know. I know we'll get laughed off the phones. But asking for two hundred isn't getting us anywhere, is it?

(No answer.)

PENNY. *Is it?*

EVERYONE. *(Not very enthusiastically:)* No.

PENNY. No. So look at it this way. If we got five two-hundreds, that's still not as much as one twelve-hundred. So maybe the odds actually *increase* in our favor? In a weird way. Maybe.

(Lindsay's phone rings again.)

TODD. A jilted admirer?

LINDSAY. *(Answering the phone:)* Hello? Hello? Who—

(But they're gone. She hangs up the phone slowly, more than a little creeped out.)

LINDSAY. There was...something. Static. Or something. Then it went dead.

STUART. Weird.

LINDSAY. Yeah.

PENNY. Focus, you guys. Think of the Lehrer News Hour. Let's think of Washington Week. Think of Between the Lions. Think of Ken Burns and those freaky twin brothers from Antiques Road Show.

(They shudder at the mention of those guys.)

PENNY. Tonight's it, telefundraisers. We've got less than four hours left to Pledge Week and we still have to raise, um... *(Flipping through a file...)* two hundred thirty-seven thousand, four hundred twelve dollars. And... ninety-three cents. Or else.

GARY. Or else...

PENNY. Everything goes down the crapper. Programming, our jobs, the station, everything.

LEN. *(Doing the math in his head:)* Uh... that's... fifty-nine thousand...three hundred fifty-three dollars and...twenty-three cents. An hour.

TODD. Holy crap.

LEN. Nine thousand, eight hundred ninety-two dollars and twenty cents. Every ten minutes.

LINDSAY. Maybe we can make a dent in it. That would be better than...no dent.

PENNY. Alright. You know what I think we should do?

STUART. If you're thinking of saying what I think you're going to say, don't say it.

PENNY. Come on.

LEN. In the name of God, no.

GARY. Don't Penny.

PENNY. I think it's time for—

TODD. Penny...

PENNY. The Telefundraiser's Pledge Week Pledge!

(Everyone groans.)

PENNY. It's cheered us up before.

STUART. Yeah, but that was back when we could drink on the job.

PENNY. The clock's ticking, team.

(She holds out a phone—like a bible to be pledged upon. No one moves.)

PENNY. You guys? Please?

(Everyone reluctantly gathers around, each placing a hand on the phone.)

PENNY. Ready? Go!

EVERYONE. *(With no oomph whatsoever:)* I pledge to my city, state and country, that I will do my telefundraiser's best to raise cash and raise consciousness in the spirit and service of public broadcasting.

I will do my telefundraiser's best to instill feelings of kindness and generosity in the anonymous and often annoying calls I make in order to spread good will, good cheer and good intentions toward TPPT, my Twin Ports Public Television station.

And I pledge do so with enthusiasm and a smile.

And so begins our telefundraiser's day.

ONE-TWO-THREE-LET'S-GO!

(And they all shuffle to their phones while PENNY claps like a coach.)

PENNY. Lookin' good, you guys. Lookin' good.

(General grumbling.)

PENNY. Okay, then. I have to run to accounting for a sec. Just, you know, remember to put your numbers on the board as they come in.

EVERYONE. Right. Fine. Yeah. *(Etc...)*

PENNY. Great. I'll be back in a few.

(PENNY exits.)

(They all sit at their stations, procrastinating with whatever and however they can. They play with paperclips, futz with call sheets, clean their phones...)

*(GARY finally takes a deep breath and picks up his phone...
And chickens out.)*

*(TODD picks up his phone...
Thinks better of it...
And hangs up.)*

*(LINDSAY picks up her phone...
Actually dials a few digits...
Then hangs up.)*

*(LEN reaches for his phone with his right hand...
His hand freezes in mid-air...
His left hand tries to force his right hand to pick up the phone...
They struggle...
The right wins.)*

*(STUART works up a head of steam...
Slaps himself hard in the face...
Picks up the phone and...
Puts it back, defeated.)*

(Silence.)

LINDSAY. Somebody do *something*.

GARY. Fine.

(He dials with purpose.)

LINDSAY. Wow. My hero.

GARY. *(Into the phone:)* Yeah. Hi. Great, thanks. You? Great. That's great, yeah...

(The group is amazed that he has a live one.)

GARY. Hey, how much is a large with extra pepperoni and—

(STUART reaches over and hangs up Gary's phone.)

STUART. Doesn't count, dude.

TODD. Okay okay okay. I got one for you guys. Ready?

LINDSAY. *(Flatly:)* Yeah.

TODD. What did the zero say to the eight?

LINDSAY. I don't know, Todd. What *did* the zero say to the eight?

TODD. Nice belt.

(No one laughs.)

GARY. That is so fucking lame.

LEN. Why can't I do this? I've always been able to do this.

TODD. It just went from difficult to impossible?

GARY. And from humbling to humiliating?

LINDSAY. Donut, Stuart, Donut.

(STUART tosses her a donut, which she promptly eats.)

LEN. You know what I wish someone could tell me? What I really, really wish someone could tell me?

(No one bothers to respond.)

LEN. Do you?

TODD. No, Len, we do not know what you really really wish someone could tell you.

LEN. I wish someone could tell me when I went from being a guy who wanted to be a famous actor on television, to being a guy who was happy to watch other actors on television. No, no. Worse. When I went from dreaming of adventures, to keeping adventure shows on the air. Wait. Even worse. When I went from thinking—

TODD. We got it, we got it.

LEN. Because something changed. In a big way. And I don't know how or when it happened, but it did. And, like, here I am. How the hell did that happen?

LINDSAY. It's not *that* bad.

GARY. Yeah, it is. Name one good day around here.

LINDSAY. What about the day the newspaper printed our ad with the typo in it. Remember? "Support Pubic Television?" That was a good day.

TODD. That was a great day.

STUART. You know, I used to want to be a dot com millionaire. I used to watch all those guys in their Porsches and beemers, zipping around Pacific Heights, the Marina... I'd be sitting on the bus—

TODD. What'd I say about the bus?

STUART. ...sitting on the bus and I'd watch them and think "yeah, I could do that." You know?

GARY. I wanted to be a neurologist.

LINDSAY. Get out! A brain guy?

GARY. A brain guy.

TODD. Waaaaaay too much responsibility.

GARY. Yeah, but I thought then, *then* I could really, you know, fix things. That were wrong. With people. Things that were broken. Or bent. Or just not...right. And I'd get things running again. Like a... Like a brain plumber. Or electrician. I'd go in there and sort things out, get them back on track or whatever.

LINDSAY. Nice.

STUART. What about you, Toddster?

TODD. Um. Nothin,' really. Nothin'.

STUART. Come on...

TODD. No, really, nothing.

LEN. No one wants to be “nothing.”

TODD. It's stupid.

LINDSAY. All the more reason to tell us.

GARY. I fessed up on the neurology thing.

STUART. And now you know I've been riding the bus for my entire life.

TODD. You'll think it's funny.

GARY. We won't. Promise.

LINDSAY. Scout's honor.

TODD. I— I used to want to be a — a running back. An all-star running back. That's what I wanted to be. Heisman Trophy-winning, Nike-Adidas-Gatorade-endorsed running back. With twenty-two inch biceps and a neck that was wider than my forehead.

STUART. That's not funny. It's really cool.

LINDSAY. Completely cool.

TODD. Then I thought...maybe a priest. A white collar, black outfit, a father-son-and-the-holy-ghost sacrament-upholding dude.

(Silence.)

LEN. *(To TODD:)* Who are you and what did you do with our friend Todd?

TODD. Told you.

LINDSAY. We're not laughing. We're so not laughing. We're...

STUART. Weirded out, maybe.

GARY. But not laughing.

LINDSAY. I wanted to be an architect.

STUART. Okay. That's funny.

LINDSAY. Why? Because I'm a *girl*?

STUART. Because I've seen you build sand castles.

LINDSAY. And?

STUART. And you never make it past the moat.

LINDSAY. I would sketch these houses. These, these luminous...domains. They didn't work, but they were kind of...amazing. Windows on all four sides, but you could see the sunrise out of every one. So no matter what room you were in, it was always morning. And these windows had sort of super hero powers. Like x-ray vision, so you could see through other people's houses, through their cupboards, closets, clothes. But no one could see you.

LEN. Wow. That's really...

GARY. Beautiful?

LEN. Perverted, I was going to say. Like a reverse peeping Tom thing.

TODD. A neurologist, a millionaire, an actor-adventure guy, a pervy architect, a priest... You think TPPT knows what raw potential once existed in this room?

STUART. I don't think they got that memo.

GARY. We could quit. We could all just walk outta here. Get things back on track, ambition-wise. Let someone else do the dirty work. We get paid seven twenty-five an hour. Who needs a job like this?

LEN. It's not that I need *this* job. I need *a* job. And this job was the only one I could find.

GARY. Okay. So maybe we take comfort in the fact that we're all equally desperate. There's a certain *esprit de corps* in that, isn't there?

STUART. (*Trying to be inspiring, working up to a crescendo:*) It's not about *desperation*. Desperation would flip burgers. Desperation would be frapping frappuccinos in a strip mall. Desperation would hit the casinos. I think we're a cut above desperate. We aren't just cogs in some...coggy machine. Whether we admit it or not, we have certain political, social and intellectual ideals and are willing to do our bit to make the world a finer place. Maybe— Maybe I work here not because I'm desperate, but because I believe that if everyone in society gave just one lousy buck to support the cause of their choice, this would be a more sane union. Maybe I'm willing to put my mouth where the money is and try to make a difference. Maybe that makes me proud to be a telefundraiser and a human being.

(A spattering of applause.)

GARY. Two things. One, you're full of shit. You hate this job as much as we do. And two, I hear what you're saying, but save your "I have a dream" speech for when you're not wearing a polyester uniform.

STUART. I'm just trying to point out that our work does have some redeeming qualities and therefore *we by association* have redeeming qualities. Be honest with yourselves, guys. Honestly. Be honest.

LEN. You want honest? I work here because I wanted a job that I could do in my sleep with half my brain tied behind my back.

TODD. Honestly? I work here because I need to pay off an off-track betting thing and I've sold all the plasma my body could produce.

GARY. I work here because I'm committed to making sure plurality and diversity and complexity are available to all citizens, free of charge, free of commercials.

STUART. See? That's great.

GARY. Kidding. Because I blew my entire student loan on a trip to Tampa for Spring Break.

(Then, Len's phone starts to ring, weirdly enough.)

TODD. Who'd be calling you?

LEN. Hell if I know.

(The phone keeps ringing.)

LINDSAY. Well?

LEN. *(Answering the phone:)* Hel—

(A second. Then they hang up.)

LEN. —lo.

(He slowly puts the phone down.)

GARY. What?

LEN. That was kind of...spooky.

LINDSAY. They say anything?

LEN. No. Not... I don't think so. There was a sound, though. Sort of.

STUART. There's gotta be a full moon or something.

(PENNY enters carrying a big scrapbook.)

(She notices the blank blackboard and stops.)

PENNY. Okay.

Okay.

Okay.

I'm looking at that board. I'm looking at it really really hard. And I don't see anything on it. You guys suck.

GARY. We're just...warming up.

PENNY. No. You really, really suck. There's not one dollar up there. You suck so much.

LEN. It's hard, Penn. Because this whole thing really does...suck.

PENNY. Just tell me you each made ten calls while I've been gone.

(Guilty silence and shuffling.)

PENNY. Five calls each. Five.

(Nothing.)

PENNY. Three.

(Nope.)

PENNY. Two? Just gimme two.

(TODD raises his hand.)

PENNY. Great! Todd?

TODD. Can I go to the bathroom?

STUART. Shut *up*, Todd.

PENNY. Then could someone at least tell me that you've done more than just sit around talking to each other? Could you tell me that?

EVERYONE. *(Ad libbing...)* No. Nope. Not really. *(Etc...)*

PENNY. Great. That's just great.

(PENNY tosses the scrapbook down on her desk. It's a very dusty, tattered tome.)

LINDSAY. What's that?

PENNY. It's an album of all the best callers in the history of TPPT. Kind of a Telefundraiser's Hall of Fame yearbook. I dug it out of storage. I thought it would cheer you guys up. Inspire you or something.

(They gather around the scrapbook. PENNY opens it—it's practically falling apart.)

PENNY. *(Sort of in awe:)* Page after page of TPPT superstars...

STUART. *(Flipping through the book:)* Oh, yeah, this guy. I've heard of him.

LINDSAY. *(Squinting to read the name:)* Phil...Stammer?

PENNY. "Stammer the Hammer" they called him.

LEN. You've got to be kidding.

PENNY. He's a legend.

TODD. His ear's the size of a potato.

PENNY. From the phone. He was a relentless caller. But that's what it takes.

(They flip another page...)

GARY. This is sort of...terrifying.

TODD. Look at these... shells of human beings.

LINDSAY. They all look sort of embalmed.

PENNY. They were full-timers. They really sacrificed.

LINDSAY. Yeah, their pigment.

LEN. How could you think this was *inspiring*? I mean, *look* at these people.

PENNY. *(Shutting the book:)* Fine. But they proved it could be done. That you could bring in thousands a night. *Thousands.*

GARY. But that was back when people out there actually had jobs with potential and possessed sense of social responsibility.

TODD. And workers like us took pride in being workers like us.

LEN. I think that only happened for about one week in '77.

(Stuart's phone rings.)

PENNY. *(Disapprovingly:)* Stuart.

TODD. *(Sing-songy:)* Stuart's in trouble.

STUART. *(answering the phone:)* Hello? Hello?

(Nothing. They've hung up.)

STUART. Whoa.

GARY. What?

STUART. *(Looking into the receiver:)* I don't know. It's like there's some sort of crazy phone-line-electrical-storm thing going on.

LEN. Did they say anything?

STUART. I couldn't really tell.

LINDSAY. I don't know about you guys, but it's creeping me out.

(Gary's phone rings. He answers it.)

GARY. Hello? Hello? Hel—

(They've hung up.)

GARY. Damn.

(He puts the phone down.)

GARY. There was something that sounded sort of like... "listen." Sort of. I couldn't tell.

LINDSAY. Cree. Ping. Me. Out.

TODD. Yeah, it's...

STUART. Weird.

LEN. Yeah.

PENNY. Okay. Shake it off, you guys. Time to man and woman your phones.

LINDSAY. *(Challenging her:)* You first.

PENNY. What?

LINDSAY. You first. I want to see you pick up the phone and do what you think we should do. Because I don't think doing it is really very doable.

(The group turns on PENNY.)

LEN. Yeah. If you think this is so easy, let's see you try it.

STUART. Come on, Penny.

LEN. You don't do it, we don't do it.

LINDSAY. I dial if you dial, Penn.

PENNY. Don't you turn on me, Lindsay. We women have to stick together, right?

LINDSAY. The hell we do.

PENNY. Fine. You want me to go first? I'll go first.

(She cracks her knuckles, neck, back, whatever she cracks best.)

PENNY. I didn't get to be supervisor because I was afraid of the phone.

(She boldly grabs a call sheet from the “Call ASAP” pile.)

LINDSAY. No way.

(LINDSAY picks a sheet out of the “Mean” pile.)

PENNY. Damn.

LINDSAY. Uh-huh.

(PENNY marches over to her desk, and makes the call.)

PENNY. Uh, yes, Miss Hansel. This is Penny calling from TPPT, your Twin Ports Public Television Station. Yes, how are you tonight? Uh-huh... Uh-huh...

LINDSAY. *(To the others:)* Figures she'd get a live one.

PENNY. Well, you must know by now that the government is poised to make *major* cutbacks in their funding to public television. And this puts some of our finest programming in jeopardy. Pardon?

LEN. *(To others:)* That's not the script! She's winging it. That's not fair!

PENNY. Uh huh. But maybe you'd consider a donation of twelve hundred dollars.

PENNY. Uh huh. Uh huh. I see. Of course I understand. Of course. Times *are* tough. I'm so sorry. But I totally understand if you can't.

(The group high fives each other.)

PENNY. But, hey, you know what we say around here. “If you can only do eleven hundred, you can only do eleven hundred.”

(They all gasp in shock.)

PENNY. Alright then. Will that be check or credit card?

(Writing down Miss Hansel's information:)

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

TODD. Luck of the draw.

PENNY. Got it. Thank you so much. And “The Best of NOVA” will be in the mail to you tomorrow. No, no. Thank *you*.

(She hangs up and swaggers to the blackboard to write down the donation.)

(The team is in befuddled awe.)

PENNY. *(At the blackboard:)* Eleven hundred clams on American Express from one Miss Amy Hansel...

(While PENNY is at the blackboard, GARY goes to her phone and hits “redial.”)

(He listens for a second, then hangs up.)

GARY. Um, Penny?

PENNY. Yeah?

GARY. I just hit redial.

PENNY. Oh.

GARY. Yeah.

(GARY puts her phone on “speaker phone” and hits redial again.)

(From the speaker, we hear the message from Penny’s home answering machine click on.)

PENNY’S MESSAGE ON SPEAKER PHONE. *(Really perky:)* Hi, it’s Penny. I can’t come to the phone right now. But leave a message and your number, and I’ll call ya back! Thanks! And make it a great day!

(PENNY is mortified—as is everyone else.)

STUART. You called *yourself*?

TODD. You— you *charlatan*.

PENNY. Okayokayokay. I did. I admit it. But I thought it would help, you know, get the ball rolling. Lift your spirits.

STUART. I used to *admire* you, Penny.

LINDSAY. That was loooooow, Penn. Really low.

LEN. You know what you and Patterson can do with the call sheets.

LINDSAY. Even the Deafs.

STUART. Especially the Deafs.

(Suddenly, Todd's and Gary's phones start to ring. Disturbingly.)

TODD. What the fu—

(TODD and GARY look at each other.

GARY answers first.

Listens.)

(TODD picks up his phone.

Listens.)

(They both hang up slowly, weirded out.)

TODD. Did yours say anything?

GARY. I...think so. Yours?

TODD. I guess. It sounded like...

GARY. Like “help?”

TODD. Like “help.” I think.

GARY. And then it went dead?

TODD. Yeah. Like, static or something.

STUART. I think we got ourselves some freaky pissed off former donors who got sick of being called after being put in the “do not call” pile. That’s what I think.

LEN. Or it’s Patterson messing with us. I mean, I don’t even *know* Patterson, but it seems like something he would do.

PENNY. Patterson would not do this. He’d do a lot of things, but not this.

TODD. What did Patterson ever do to become Patterson is what I want to know. Was he like the big winning phone jockey? Did he start out calling like this, and work his way up? Or was he just born Patterson.

PENNY. Honestly, I don’t think the guy’s picked up one of these phones in his life.

GARY. Figures.

PENNY. Just...call, you guys. Call.

(LINDSAY tosses a stack of call sheets at Penny's feet.)

PENNY. What.

LINDSAY. Your call sheets. Get crackin'.

PENNY. Damn.

TODD. Yeah. Doesn't feel so good, does it, Lady Supervisor?

PENNY. Fine. I call. You call. We all call. And that's an order. We start dialing and don't stop till we get something from somebody somewhere. I don't care if we have to telepathically leave our bodies to stomach it, we're gonna do it.

LINDSAY. Promise you'll call real people and not just yourself?

PENNY. Promise.

LINDSAY. Fine, then.

STUART. Fine.

GARY. Fine.

TODD. Fine.

LEN. Aw, what the hell.

*(LEN goes to his phone.
Everyone else follows suit.)*

*(They all start calling with very very very little enthusiasm—and being hung up on in rapid succession.
This can all overlap.
Make up as many names and calls as necessary to orchestrate this section. Keep it tight. Keep it moving. Have fun.)*

LINDSAY. Yeah, hi, Mrs. Clauson. I'm Lindsay, with TPP—

(They've hung up. She calls the next person...)

GARY. Hello, Ms. Haller. This is Gary calling, from—

(They've hung up. He keeps working...)

STUART. Mr. Lasky? This is—

(They've hung up. He moves on...)

LEN. Mr.—

(They've hung up. He keeps going.)

PENNY. Hi, Mrs. Berger. I'm Penny, calling from T—

(They've hung up. She tries again.)

TODD. *(As he starts a call:)* Hi, Mrs. Wexler? This is— This is—

(TODD leaves his body. It's what he has to do to tolerate the phone calls. The same goes for the other callers. The lighting may change, or they may leave their stations as they deliver their sanity-preserving, internal monologues...)

TODD. This is not me. This is not me. I am— I— used to be a boy who's become a man who prays when no one's looking. I believe in miracles. I believe faith is the finest art. Before this? I was an atheist, an athlete, a star. I could catch a football with my eyes closed. I thought talent was man-made, an agreement between my ego and my DNA. But then one day, a real bad day, I took a hit from the side. And for a minute, I was dead.

(Now to GARY.)

GARY. Hi, is this Trish? Trish Pappas? This is Gary and— and—

(He leaves his body...)

GARY. There's a sleepwalker in my house day and night. I feed her, I clean her, I wash her clothes and her hair. I wipe her face when she drools. I wipe her cuts when she falls. I take her places. I take her punches. This sleepwalker, also known as Different, also known as Special, also known as Stupid, also known as my little sister, really named Angel. This little sister of mine. I wish I could fix her, but I can't. So I carry her like a load, like a feather. Like the living carry the dead when they don't really mind.

(And over to STUART.)

STUART. Glad I caught you, Mrs. Damen. This is Stuart calling, from TPPT. And I—

(He leaves his body...)

STUART. I read coins like other people read stars, palms, tea leaves. For signs, for good fortune. I go home at night, empty my pockets, spread all my change across my bed and look at the faces, the scratches and dirt and tell myself I can see my future. Sometimes it's dark. Sometimes it's bright and shining. One nickel, face to the wall? Good luck tomorrow. Three dimes and two pennies? One wish will come true. Two quarters, tails up? Beware. I read this money for hope, for amnesia.

(Over to LINDSAY.)

LINDSAY. Hey, hi, hello, Mrs. Lapinski. Hi. This is Lindsay calling from TPPT, and I just wanted to say that I—

(She leaves her body...)

LINDSAY. I live in an old building next to a big house on a block filled with old buildings and big houses. There's a man who lives next door. He leaves early in the morning, wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase. He kisses his wife goodbye. He works long days. He brings his work home. On some nights, he wants a cigarette, just to relax. But his wife won't let him smoke in the house so he goes outside and stands by the back door and smokes. One after another. He leans against his house that he's paying for and stares. He stares at the light coming from my room. And there I am.

(Over to LEN.)

LEN. Hi. Am I speaking to Mrs. Orlando? Great. This is Len calling from TPPT, and I'm calling because—

(He leaves his body...)

LEN. Because my secret shame is that I watch reality TV. My other secret shame is that I want to *be* on reality TV. My other other secret *secret* shame? I can do a Rubik's cube in under ninety seconds. I can fly through it. See? *(He produces a Rubik's cube.)* Time me, time me. Okay... go! *(He does the cube brilliantly.)* And this? This is a shame because when you have a mind that can arrange pieces like this, you have a mind that can arrange pieces of anything, anywhere, anytime. Where other people see love and chaos, I see reason and pattern. And this is not...living.

(Over to PENNY.)

PENNY. Hi, Ms. Riggs? This is Penny calling for TPPT. And I'm wondering if you know that—

(She leaves her body...)

PENNY. That my grandma died two weeks ago. She was from Germany. She was beautiful. Tiny and strong, with the bones of a bird, but I watched her break the necks of chickens. She would sing to me at night. It was so beautiful I would cry. I'd say "Grandma, that's not a lullaby." And she would say *(In a German accent:)* "We sang it through nights of war. We sang it through nights of fire. And we woke up in the morning, alive. What lullaby could be better?"

TODD. *(Still out of his body:)* I'm on my back on the field. I watch my life flash before my eyes. And it was...nothing. Nothing *worthy*. And in that dead space, I made a deal. That if I lived, I'd have to find something to believe in. Long story short, when I came to, walked off that field and went straight into a church and said "If you're there, God, give me a sign. Because I think I might have missed a thing or two along the way. Give me a sign, and I'll do better."

GARY. *(Still out of his body:)* I tell myself she's my privilege. She's my honor. She's the way I get to show what a good person I am. "Look how good he is to that girl." "Look how sweet, how kind." But there are days when all I can think of is how much I want to drive her out into the middle of nowhere and leave her there. I want to put her on the side of the road with a halo made from a coat hanger, and hang a sign around her neck that says "Angel. Belongs to no one."

STUART. *(Still out of his body:)* I stare at the faces, the numbers, the grooves to forget that when I was little I had one pair of pants and two shirts. One pair of shoes and no belt. When I was six, I knew there were monsters under the bed. By seven, I knew there were devils behind the door. By nine, I knew by his smell if a man could help me or hurt me. Money equals mercy, so I can go to bed and dream without memory.

LINDSAY. *(Still out of her body:)* There. Standing in the frame of my window in my robe. Clean and...shining. He sees me. He sees me. He thinks I'm beautiful. I think he's beautiful. We stand like this, staring at each other, him in the dark, me in the light, his tie undone, my robe undone, tossing thoughts between us like a ball. Faster and faster and harder, harder, harder until— until—

LEN. *(Still out of his body:)* The shame is that a mind like mine doesn't see the point in... music, for example. In beauty. In passion. In the...insensible realm of the senses. I see the world as tiny squares to be manipulated in the name of order. But what I want is to be an explorer of random occurrences. I want one plus one to not equal anything. I want the alphabet to fall out of line. A-Q-N-T-X. I want to be completely wrong about everything.

PENNY. *(Still out of her body:)* She sang for me.

(She sings softly the chorus of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." If you can get the lyrics in German, that would be preferable.)

Joy, beautiful spark of the gods,
Daughter of Elysium,
We enter fire imbibed,
Heavenly, thy sanctuary.

TODD. *(Still out of his body:)* Then I swear a candle on the altar was lit by an unseen hand. By a holy spark. And now? Now I'm a believer but I can't tell a soul, I don't know why. This God is a private thing.

GARY. *(Still out of his body:)* Somedays I read the book that says people who have what she has don't live very long. And I think "good." Because she'll be the death of me.

STUART. *(Still out of his body:)* But I'm still afraid of the dark. I go to bed with the TV on. The radio on. The water on. My clothes on. With everything I own around me. On. And then, I can sleep.

LINDSAY. *(Still out of her body:)* He sighs. I sigh. He finishes his last cigarette, tosses it in the can by the back door. I touch my hair. He takes off his tie. I close my curtain. He shuts his door. It's not love. It's not. It's just how we say hello and goodnight in this world.

LEN. *(Still out of his body:)* I don't want to see the design of the universe. I want the mess of a random world to bring me to my knees. And that, that would be...sublime.

PENNY. *(Singing, still out of her body:)*
Be embraced, Millions!
This kiss for all the world!
Brothers!, above the starry canopy
A loving father must dwell...

TODD. And this...

(Returning to the phone—and to reality:)

This is Todd, calling from TPPT...

GARY. *(Back to the phone and reality:)* And I'm glad I caught you at home...

STUART. *(Back to normal:)* Because now, more than ever, we need your help.

LEN. *(Back to normal:)* Proposed cuts to our funding would mean fewer choices and would be the end of— hello?

PENNY. *(Back to normal:)* Miss Riggs? Miss Riggs?

(But Miss Riggs has hung up.)

PENNY. Shit!

(She slams the phone down.)

(Then, one after another, they slam their phones down.)

STUART. Shit!

LINDSAY. Shit!

GARY. Shit!

TODD. Shit!

LEN. *(Sputtering and flipping off the phone with both hands:)*
Shhhppptt!

LINDSAY. This is a nightmare.

LEN. I have never in my life met with such—

STUART. Resistance? Rejection? Hostility?

LINDSAY. I had one guy ask *me* for money.

GARY. Affirmations, Penny, affirmations.

PENNY. This night is not tanking.

This night can still turn around.

Money is coming to us now.

We can all get jobs somewhere else.

Even if it's in New Delhi answering phones for AOL.

STUART. Maybe it's just like some horrifically bad air or bad karma or something blowing through. It'll pass.

LINDSAY. Who decided you get to be Polly-fucking-Anna around here?

STUART. Back off, Lindsay.

PENNY. Okay. Did anyone get *anything*?

(They flip through their call sheets.)

GARY. *(Handing a sheet to PENNY:)* I got one donation for seventeen dollars. From an anesthesiologist. He said that's all he has left after paying his malpractice insurance.

(PENNY adds that to the total on the board.)

(TODD shifts in his chair.)

LEN. Todd, don't move. The smell, man, the smell.

TODD. Sorry.

(Handing three call sheets to PENNY:)

I got twenty-five from an orthodontist, thirteen from a professor, and three hundred from a trucker from the Teamsters.

LEN. Go Teamsters.

PENNY. *(Scribbling the numbers on the board.)* Okaaaayyyy...

LINDSAY. *(Handing a call sheet to PENNY:)* I had a soybean farmer pony up one hundred bucks.

PENNY. (*Scribbling...*) Grrrrreeaatt...

STUART. (*Handing in his sheets:*) This guy said he's good for some sperm and a few office supplies

(This stops PENNY in mid-scribble. She tosses the chalk on the floor.)

PENNY. They hate us, don't they? They absolutely hate us.

LEN. It's the new script, Penn. It's killing us. We can't make it work.

(LINDSAY picks up Penny's phone and holds it out to her.)

PENNY. What?

LINDSAY. Call Patterson. Call him and tell him we need a rewrite.

PENNY. I can't.

LINDSAY. Why not?

PENNY. Because he's...Patterson.

LINDSAY. Call him now, tell him we need a rewrite pronto, or this phone will go where no phone has gone before.

PENNY. (*Frantically dialing Mr. Patterson:*) Okay okay okay okay... Hi! Yeah, Mr. Patterson? Yeah. It's me. Penny? Yes. No. It's not- No. It's not going well. No. No. No. So given the response we're getting, we think a more appropriate amount would be, like...

(She looks to everyone as they each frantically mime some low amount.)

PENNY. Like thirty-five, forty- Fifty. Fifty dollars. It's not pretty out there, Mr. Patterson. And fifty seems to be a fair— Hello? Mr. Patterson?

(But he's hung up.)

PENNY. Asshole.

(She hangs up.)

TODD. I say it's jungle rules. Every man for himself.

(Then, Lindsay's phone starts to ring. She lets it ring a few times, then pounces on it.)

LINDSAY. Hel— Hello— I— I can't— I can't understand—

(But they've hung up.)

(She slams down the phone.)

(Just as she does this, Gary's phone starts to ring. He grabs it.)

GARY. *(Into the phone:)* Hello? What— What are you saying? Who are—

(They're gone.)

STUART. You hear anything?

GARY. Just— noise and— and something I—

(TODD'S phone rings.)

LINDSAY. Holy—

TODD. *(Picking up the phone:)* Hello? Hello?! What? I— SAY SOMETHING OR LEAVE US THE HELL ALONE YOU MOTHERFU—

(He hears something.)

TODD. *(Listening intently:)* Oh, God. What? I can't— Hello? Hello?! Hel—

(But the connection is lost.)

TODD. God. It sounded like...

GARY. A message?

TODD. Yeah.

LINDSAY. Oh God.

LEN. Okay. Now I'm officially freaked out.

STUART. Don't they know that *we're* supposed to be the pests?

TODD. It wasn't very pesty. It was more—

GARY. Panicky.

LEN. Maybe it's some sort of cosmic, karmic payback for all our whining and apathy and passivity and lack of drive and—

LINDSAY. (*Losing it:*) Okay! Okay! That's it! I've got better things to do than sit here and be terrorized by a some— some— *something*, for less than I'd make at an I-Hop! I'm outta here!

(And with that she tries to open the door—but it's been locked from the outside.)

(She tries again. Jiggles it. It doesn't budge.)

LINDSAY. Oh, God.

(She tries again. It still doesn't open.)

LINDSAY. Funny ha ha, Penny.

PENNY. I didn't—

LINDSAY. UNLOCK THE DAMN DOOR!!!

PENNY. I didn't lock it!!

(PENNY goes to the door and tries to open it. Again, it doesn't open.)

TODD. Are we being forced to telefundraise against our will?

STUART. This is twisted.

(PENNY runs to her phone and calls Patterson.)

PENNY. Listen, Patterson, you freak! Unlock the—! What? What? No— I— I— In the top drawer?

(She goes to her desk drawer and opens it.)

PENNY. Uh-huh...

(She slowly pulls out a box.)

PENNY. Uh-huh...

(She slowly opens the box.)

PENNY. Uh-huh...

(She slowly pulls a piece of paper out of the box.)

PENNY. Uh-huh.

(She slowly pulls a gun out of the box.)

PENNY. Uh-huh.

Yes, sir. I'll tell them.

(She slowly hangs up the phone.)

*(She holds the paper in one hand, the gun in the other.
Then raises the gun, pointing it at the gang.)*

LINDSAY. Oh my God.

STUART. Penny. Don't.

TODD. Penny...

LINDSAY. Penn?

PENNY. *(Reading from the piece of paper:)* Alright! Dial, motherfuckers, dial!

GARY. Put the gun—

PENNY. I SAID DIAL!

LEN. *(Using a phone as a shield:)* What the hell do you think this is?! A post office?!

PENNY. *(Turning the gun on LEN:)* Shut it, Len!

TODD. Puuuuuut the guuuuuunnn dooowwwwnnn...

PENNY. *(Turning the gun on him:)* Don't make me shoot you!!

TODD. *(Using LEN as a shield:)* I'm not! I'm not!

PENNY. THEN START DIALING!

LINDSAY. WHAT THE FUCKINGFUCK ARE YOU DOING, PENNY????!!!!

PENNY. I DON'T FUCKINGFUCK KNOW!!!! I'VE HAD IT WITH YOUR COMPLAINING AND THIS JOB AND WITH EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING I'M JUST TRYING TO DO MY BEST AND I'VE FUCKING HAD IT!!!!

(They freeze—not knowing what she's going to do with the gun.)

PENNY. Oh my God.

(Affirming:)

I am not centered.

I am not strong.

I am not a leader.

I don't make a difference.

We don't make a difference.

We don't make a difference.

(PENNY puts the gun to her head.)

LINDSAY. Oh, shit.

STUART. Don't. Penny?

*(PENNY closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, about to shoot—
Everyone holds their breath and freezes—
Then—)*

*(Lindsay's phone starts to ring.
What the—?
Her phone keeps ringing.)*

*(Then Stuart's starts to ring.
Then Len's.
Then Todd's.
Then Gary's.
Then Penny's.)*

(They all stare, terrified, at the phones that ring crazily.)

(Finally, LEN picks up his phone.)

LEN. *(Scared:)* Hello?

(LINDSAY does the same. They're all equally scared.)

LINDSAY. Hello?

STUART. Hello?

TODD. Hello?

GARY. Hello?

PENNY. *(Lowering the gun:)* Hello?

*(They all listen for a while in complete silence.
Then they all hang up. Shocked.)*

LINDSAY. I heard...

LEN. They said...

GARY. They said “don’t stop.”

STUART. They said “we need you.”
There’s work to do.

LEN. They said “you’re the hope.”

PENNY. They said keep trying.

LINDSAY. They said fear is at war with reason.
Power is at war with grace.

TODD. They said rage is at war with love.
Death is at war with grief.

GARY. War is at war with peace.

STUART. They said the waters are rising but the tide will turn.

LEN. The winter’s almost over.

LINDSAY. Our time is coming.

TODD. They said to wake up.

GARY. To keep calling.
Good will come of this.

STUART. You are the revolution that will save your life

LEN. Wake up.

PENNY. Wake up.

LINDSAY. Help is on its way.

(Shock. Silence.)

STUART. Holy shit.

GARY. I don’t know whether to laugh or cry or run for my life.

LINDSAY. Who were they?

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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