

# *Outbound*

By  
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*Working Draft*

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## CHARACTERS

- 1.) Iris – 22
- 2.) Shelly – late 20s to early 30s
- 3.) Bridget – late 20s to early 30s
- 4.) Ruth – 60s to 70s
- 5.) Luke – 20s
- 6.) Peter/Doctor One – 60s to 70s
- 7.) Marnie/Doctor Two – 30s

## SPACES

- 1.) An Outbound Calling Center
- 2.) An El train
- 3.) Iris's Studio Apartment
- 4.) Shelly's Kitchen and Living room (Connected)
- 5.) Ruth's Living room
- 6.) The River
- 7.) Carol's Crafts
- 8.) Kroger
- 9.) A hospital waiting room
- 10.) Two different doctor's offices, simultaneously
- 11.) Isolated exterior spaces
- 12.) Nondescript space where the characters can coexist and share their internal thoughts with the audience

## NOTES

Shelly's kitchen/living room and Ruth's living room should ideally be more realistically fleshed out. The other locations can be smaller and more abstract, implied with lighting, sound, minor pieces, or possibly ensemble members. They should be able to flow in and out quickly.

Rhythm is important. Feel free to overlap the start and end of lines where natural, particularly in the first call center scene. Also, do not fear silence.

## PROLOGUE

To begin, You cast on	RUTH
You cast off	PETER
Pre-heat the oven	BRIDGET
Wash your face thoroughly	MARNIE
To begin	RUTH
To begin	PETER
To begin	BRIDGET
To begin	MARNIE
And again	RUTH
And again	PETER
And again	BRIDGET
And again.	MARNIE
Rinse and repeat: Moisturizer, toner, primer, foundation <i>(Repeat as the other lines add on)</i>	

Knit one pearl two (*Repeat*)

RUTH

Two cups, one pinch (*Repeat*)

BRIDGET

Let the line fly (*Repeat*)

PETER

*The collective lines come to a climax, then –*

To begin

ALL

You cast off.

PETER

*Beat*

And then you wait.  
You wait for that moment you might just feel a tug at the end of the line.

PETER

**ONE**

*An outbound calling center.  
Luke and Iris sit next to each other at computers, wearing headsets.  
After each call, they click to the next contact on their screens and dial a new number.*

How was your weekend?

LUKE

Uneventful. Except, I did have a crazy thing happen on the el. This lady –  
Hi, my name is Iris, calling on behalf of Mountain Machines. I was hoping to speak with  
whoever is in charge of your heavy equipment?

IRIS

Hi, this is Luke on behalf of Ferris Fertilizers, lookin' to talk with whoever purchases your  
fertilizer?

LUKE

IRIS

Oh, you know, anything like backhoes, dozers, excavators?

LUKE

Fertilizer? Like for plants?

IRIS

I'm so sorry about that, I'll be sure to take you off the list.

LUKE

Oookay, have a good one.

*They both hang up, then to one another -*

IRIS

Pre-school.

LUKE

Law office.

IRIS

Nice.

LUKE

I was all about my dump truck in pre-school. I'm surprised they didn't jump at your offer.

IRIS

I know right? For a pre-school teacher she sounded really –  
Hi there! This is Iris calling on behalf of... oh sure hang right up.

*She selects a call result on her screen.*

IRIS

You just earned yourself a "Call Back."

LUKE

Wait, so what happened to you on the el –  
Hello, can I speak with whoever purchases your fertilizers? Sure, I can hold.

IRIS

- I'm sorry, I think I must have the wrong number.

*She hangs up, laughing.*

LUKE

What?

IRIS

That woman just answered, “Tempress talk-line, what’s your fantasy?”

LUKE

No. way.

IRIS

I swear to god. My ears feel dirty.

LUKE

(sexy voice) “Tempress talk-line, what’s your fantasy?”  
Oh! Sorry sir, I’m not –

*He hangs up in a panic.*

IRIS

You are so fired!

LUKE

Fingers crossed.

*The sound of ringing through a dialing phone.  
Iris changes her angle or posture to initiate each shift.*

IRIS

...Well no, I don’t technically work *for* Mountain Machines, I’m calling from a third-party calling center they’ve hired to call on their behalf... No one’s trying to deceive you, sir, I -

*- and he has hung up.*

*Phone ring, shift*

IRIS

Yes, I did go to college.

No, I wouldn’t say this is my dream job but it helps me pay off those student loans while I pursue other – Uh huh. Well, thank you for that advice.

*Phone ring, shift*

IRIS

That’s nice of you to say. No, I’ve never done any sort of voice over work, I’m not really – Uh nope, I don’t do that sort of thing either.

*Phone ring, shift*

IRIS

Wonderful, I will send a flyer right away and make sure all the specs on that tractor you're looking for get passed along to the right rep. Uh, no, I unfortunately am not able to make any direct sales myself – haha, the middleman, that's me.

*Phone ring, shift*

IRIS

I did some math.

LUKE

Ew. Why?

IRIS

280 to 420.

LUKE

What?

IRIS

We're supposed to average around 40 to 60 calls per hour, 8-hour work day, subtract out lunch, we talk to roughly 280 to 420 people a day. Multiply that by 5, that's 1,400 to 2,100 people per week.

LUKE

God, that's depressing.

But we don't actually talk to someone on every call, there's the no-answers, the voicemails -

IRIS

Okay, sure, the equation was incomplete. My point is –

*She starts packing up her bag and takes off her headset*

IRIS

- our job is literally just to talk to people all day long, hundreds of people, but when you think about it, we actually have zero impact on anyone. Or anything. Also, my soul is about one call away from shriveling up entirely.

*With her nose now in her cell phone -*

IRIS

Have a good night.

LUKE

Goodnight.

**TWO**

*Iris gets onto a tightly packed el train.  
She is engulfed by bodies and noise.  
She puts in her headphones and stares down at her phone while around her -*

WOMAN ON CELL PHONE

Happy Birthday, mom!

EVANGELIST

The reckoning is nigh.

MAN ON CELL PHONE

Fuck you, Jim.

WOMAN ON CELL PHONE

Of course I had to call.

EVANGELICAL

We will each be called to judgment.

MAN

No really. Fuck. You.

EVANGELIST

Do you know which way your soul is headed?

*Iris gets off the train, and now she is in her studio apartment,  
eating a Lean Cuisine and holding a remote.  
From the TV we hear:*

TV

“One woman, alone in the desert. Can she find water? And just maybe, true love?”

*She changes the channel*

TV

“...bogged down by an uncertain future? Call now and let Clandestiny reveal all that you are yearning - ”

*She changes the channel*



TV

“For just \$99.99 we’ll outline your entire ancestral lineage - ”

*She changes the channel*

TV

“Meanwhile on the Galapagos islands, Lonesome George is the very last remaining Pinta Island Tortoise. When he dies...”

*She changes the channel*

TV

“More civilian lives were lost today in the northeast region of - ”

*Iris turns off the TV.*

*She sits in silence.*

*She stares at the ceiling.*

*She stares at her phone.*

*She tries taking a breath.*

*She lays face down.*

### **THREE**

*The next day. Lights up on Shelly, about 200 miles away in her no-frills kitchen,  
and then on Iris re-entering the call center.*

*Shelly, ratty sweatpants, messy hair, walks to a small kitchen table/counter overspread with  
tupperware, pans covered in tinfoil, and flowers.  
Searching amongst the offerings, she locates a half-empty bag of bread and a mostly-eaten jar of  
peanut butter.*

*Simultaneously, Iris wills herself into her desk chair.  
She puts on a headset, logs into her computer and readies herself to begin.*

*Shelly takes a breath, opens the bag and takes out two slices.  
She starts to spread the peanut butter.*

*Iris dials a number.  
A moment later, the landline in Shelly’s kitchen rings.*

*Shelly freezes, deciding whether or not to answer it.  
She walks over and picks up the phone.*

SHELLY

Hello?

IRIS

Hi, may I please speak with Johnathan Lane?

*Short beat*

SHELLY

... Who is this?

IRIS

My name is Iris, calling on behalf of Mountain Machines. I was just calling to let Johnathan know about some specials they've got running and to see if it would be alright to send a quick flyer along.

SHELLY

...

IRIS

Ma'am? Are you still there?

SHELLY

My husband... there was an accident... please don't call here again.

IRIS

I'm so sorry I'll be sure to remove this number –

*Shelly hangs up.*

*Maybe she starts to cry.*

*Iris sits, unsettled.*

*After a few moments, Iris clicks to the next contact on her computer and dials.*

*As she begins her spiel, the lights start to fade on her and tighten on Shelly.*

IRIS

Hi, is Bill available please? Oh hi there, Bill. This is Iris calling on behalf of Mountain Machines. Just wanted to let you know they've got some specials running, and I was wondering if I could send a flyer along. Great. What's the best e-mail for you? No problem, we can send it in the mail. Are you still at PO Box 15...

*Harsh headlights on Shelly, the sound of screeching tires.*

*Blackout*

**FOUR**

*The next morning – Shelly's kitchen.*

*The phone is no longer plugged into the wall and is out of sight.*

*There is a knock at the door.*

*Another knock.*

*From outside the door:*

BRIDGET

Shells? You home?

*Shelly enters the kitchen in the same sweatpants, a sweatshirt or blanket added.*

SHELLY

Nope.

*Bridget tries the door - it's unlocked.  
She lets herself in, half-obscured by the large bag she is carrying.*

BRIDGET

Hey lady.

SHELLY

No. More. Baked goods. What are you trying to do to me?

BRIDGET

I can't help myself and you know it.

*Bridget notices the empty wall jack.*

BRIDGET

What happened to your phone?

SHELLY

I did away with it.

BRIDGET

You what?

SHELLY

I couldn't take it anymore. Too many condolences from people like Marnie Finkle. And fucking telemarketers. You know you can actually die and they still won't leave you alone?

BRIDGET

Well, I got worried when the robot lady kept saying your number was disconnected and you weren't answering your cell. What if there's like an emergency or -

SHELLY

- you clearly just let yourself in whenever you feel like it, and it turns out if there really is an emergency the police do this whole door-to-door service thing - it's very convenient.

*She selects a cookie and takes a bite.*

*Bridget takes a cookie as well.  
They both chew in silence for a moment.*

BRIDGET

So, how ya doin'?

SHELLY

Great.

BRIDGET

I'm sorry. Obviously, I don't expect you to be -

SHELLY

Bridge. It's okay. You of all people don't have to ... You're a good friend.

*They chew.  
Shelly slides the box of cookies at Bridget.*

SHELLY

But seriously, stop trying to fatten me up. I swear, sometimes I think you're plotting to eat me.

*Lights fade on Bridget and Shelly, (who remain onstage) and a sound cue brings us back to the  
call center, that same morning...*

## **FIVE**

*A Cacophony: Three shrill tones and then: "The number you have dialed has been changed,  
disconnected or is no longer in service," harsh sounds of a fax machine, a busy tone, "This mail  
box is full," "To reach the parts department, please press one" etc...*

*Lights up on Iris, head in hands.  
She hangs up the phone and clicks to the next contact on her computer;  
She dials a new number.  
A recorded voice:*

*"Please enjoy this Verizon ring-back tone while your party is reached."*

*It's a particularly grating country song.  
Iris makes a face and hangs up right away.*

*She looks at the clock. Lunch break.*

*She lets out a sigh of relief (or celebratory muttering, or a short, original lunchtime song.)*

*She takes off her headset, pulls out a sandwich, and starts eating it at her computer.*

*She hears:*

SHELLY VOICE OVER

My husband... there was an accident... please don't call here again.

*Luke slides himself in his rolling desk chair up next to Iris.  
He is eating chips.*

LUKE

Hey, Iris. How's it going? ... Iris?

IRIS

Sorry. Totally spacing out there.

LUKE

Clearly. Dreaming of life outside these prison walls?

IRIS

Always. No, I just had this weird call yesterday I haven't been able to shake.

LUKE

I had one of those first thing this morning. Some dude told me to get a real job.  
And do unspeakable things to myself.

IRIS

Yikes. Definitely had my share of those, but this wasn't that.  
It was, um, this woman, - the contact was her husband I guess - and it turns out he'd died.

LUKE

Oh man.

IRIS

Or at least that's what it seemed like - she said there was an accident.  
It felt like maybe it was a recent thing and she sounded like, young.

LUKE

That's rough.  
But I mean, you shouldn't feel guilty, you were just doing your job. It's not like there's any way  
you could have known -

IRIS

No, I know.  
Also, totally random - the guy's listed address was in the same town my mom grew up in, which  
is crazy. No one is from there.

LUKE

Seriously? Weird.

*Beat, Iris still in her own thoughts*

LUKE

Hey, so I'm sure you have better things to do, but my band is playing tonight over at –

IRIS

I think I'm gonna take a quick walk around the block before my break is up. I'll see ya in a few.

*She gets up and exits.*

LUKE

Ok, cool. Happy walking!

*Luke continues eating during the next scene.*

**SIX**

*Back to Shelly and Bridget, mugs in hand, cookies now on the coffee table, each having assumed their usual sides of the couch. Bridget's mouth is moving but Shelly hears:*

IRIS VOICE OVER

Hi, may I please speak with Johnathon Lane?

*Shelly focuses on Bridget.*

BRIDGET

So I'm waiting there in line, all I need to buy is the eggs and the vanilla when Mrs. Becker wheels up with her cart filled to the brim and says, "You won't mind if I go ahead will you, dear? I can't stand for very long." And I say of course not, even though I saw her powerwalking just the other day.

SHELLY

Yeah, you got played.

BRIDGET

And she has got, like, the "Mary Poppins-bag" of carts. So I offer to help unload, just to speed things up. I reach in, and what do I grab from on top of the denture cleaner? A megabox of condoms!

SHELLY

No.

BRIDGET

Ribbed for her pleasure.

SHELLY

No!

*Suddenly, the mail slot on the door pops up, and a stack of envelopes hits the floor.*

*The sound makes Shelly jump slightly.*

*Both women look at the pile for a moment.*

*Bridget goes to pick it up and then subtly turns from Shelly, who glances away.*

*Bridget does a fast sorting.*

*She slips a fishing magazine and a spam letter into her purse by the door.*

*She sets the rest of the pile on the counter.*

*She rejoins Shelly on the couch, picking her mug back up with one hand, giving Shelly's arm a quick squeeze with the other.*

*They sip their coffee.*

*They remain onstage as the focus shifts to -*

## **SEVEN**

*The call center.*

*Luke has logged back in and is now working on a crossword puzzle.*

LUKE

Okay, sir, that's fine, I won't send you anything you don't want. But do you at least know a four-letter word for -

*and the man has hung up -*

asshole?

*He dials the next number.*

*Iris re-enters as he begins his introduction.*

LUKE

Good afternoon. My name is Luke, calling on behalf of Ferris Fertilizers. I was just -

*He notices Iris has returned and hangs up.*

LUKE

Welcome back. How was the walk?

IRIS

Oh you know, life-changing.

LUKE

Not as life changing as what's been going on in here, I assure you.

IRIS

Yeah?

LUKE

Oh yeah. For one thing, I talked to an old lady who thought I was her son and she started yelling at me for never coming by for dinner until -

*Iris notices their manager nearby.  
She quickly sits and puts on her headset, giving Luke a warning gesture.  
He resumes making calls.*

LUKE

Dialing, dialing...

*Iris logs back into the computer.  
She dials.  
They both focus on their screens, hanging up when there's no answer, dialing again. They glance  
back towards the manager.  
Glance at each other.  
Luke makes a face. Iris laughs quietly.  
More dialing.*

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