

PHONE CALL

Mark Garbett

315 West 74th St. Apt. B
New York, NY 10023
(212) 712-2889
garbettmark@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE -- NIGHT

A large office with about eight desks sitting in it. Various people sit at the desks, speaking softly on the phone.

WOMAN

(into phone)

What's one of your favorite things?
Sunsets? I love sunsets, I think
they're beautiful.

MAN

(into phone)

Of course I remember Dr. Quinn,
Medicine Woman. The one with Meryll
Streep, right?

(grimaces)

Oh. I'm sorry it's cancelled. Wait,
aren't there repeats on Lifetime or
something? Oh, you don't have cable.

ROB enters. Late 20's, he walks with a slight slouch. The kind of guy who stares at the floor when he walks past you. Rob takes off his jacket and hangs it up.

SUSAN, 20's, pretty, approaches him.

SUSAN

Hi, Rob.

Rob smiles weakly.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I thought we agreed not to work the
same shifts.

ROB

That's right.

SUSAN

Then why are you here?

ROB

I've got nothing else to do.

SUSAN

Look, Rob, I'm sorry it didn't work
out. I think you're a great guy.
Really. You're going to make some
lucky girl really happy.

ROB

(stricken)

Just not you.

Susan looks at him with compassion.

SUSAN

Do me a favor, please. Get out of here before Thomas sees you.

ROB

I'm not afraid of him.

SUSAN

That's not the point.

ROB

He's a jerk. You're dating a jerk.

SUSAN

Rob, please...

Rob looks at her. He loves her.

ROB

Sure.

Susan touches his arm, smiles and walks away. Rob stares after her, then turns to get his jacket.

A HAND is placed on the desk in front of Rob's face. The hand belongs to THOMAS. Rob turns and, startled at Thomas's sudden appearance, sits down.

Thomas smiles down at Rob. Thomas is the world's biggest asshole.

THOMAS

Rob. How are you?

ROB

Fine.

THOMAS

Sorry about Susan. As they say, may the better man win.

ROB

Lay off, Thomas.

Rob begins to get up. Thomas places his hand on Rob's shoulder and PUSHES him back down.

He lowers his head next to Rob's. He speaks low but sharp.

THOMAS

No, you lay off, bookworm. I don't want to see you looking at her, talking to her, thinking about her. She's moved on to greener pastures. Go volunteer somewhere else.

ROB

You can't keep me from coming here.

THOMAS

(reflecting)

When I saw you two together, I had to laugh. I mean there's no way someone like Susan would ever stay with a chump like you. And I was right.

ROB

One of these days she'll see what you're really like.

THOMAS

Wanna know what I'm like? I'm better looking than you, I make more money, I dress nicer, I'm fun to be around. I'm the guy who gets the girl. Guess what that makes you.

Thomas claps Rob on the back and walks to the other side of the room, slips his arm around Susan's waist. He's smiling at Rob. The prick.

The PHONE RINGS. Again. Rob looks at it and picks up.

ROB

(into phone)

Hotline.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. ANGIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

ANGIE, small and haunted, sits in a tiny studio apartment.

ANGIE

Hello?

ROB

(into phone)

Hi.

ANGIE

So how does this work? Am I supposed to be on the ledge of my apartment or in the bathtub with a boom box in my hand, threatening to drop it?

ROB

No, I'm just here to listen and help.

ANGIE

So what do I say?

ROB

Anything you want. What's your name?

ANGIE

Angie.

ROB

Hi Angie. I'm Rob. Whatever you want to talk about.

ANGIE

What if I don't want to talk to you.

ROB

Wouldn't surprise me at all. No one else seems to want to either.

ANGIE

Boy, that just lifted my spirits. Think I'll go join "Up With People" and spread the joy.

At the other end of the room, Thomas and Susan joke with each other.

ROB

Sorry. I'm having a day.

ANGIE

YOU'RE having a day? Did I call the right number?

ROB

Absolutely. I'm terribly sorry. I'm not usually like this at all. Let's start over. Angie, what would you like to talk about?

ANGIE

Well Rob, I guess I'm calling because I don't feel so good anymore.

ROB

Why not?

ANGIE

Every day I wake up and I think about my life and there's just nothing going on. My family is all gone.

ROB

So is mine.

ANGIE

I don't really have any friends. My boyfriend just broke up with me for this horrible person.

Rob stares at Thomas and Susan. Thomas massages Susan's neck. She tilts her head to allow him a better angle. Thomas leers at Rob as he caresses her.

ROB
 (into phone)
 That's my life in a nutshell.

ANGIE
 My apartment is a high-priced box...

ROB
 Infested with cockroaches...

ANGIE
 ...And mice!

Rob laughs. Angie GIGGLES.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
 I guess I'm an idiot.

ROB
 You sound like a great person, Angie.

ANGIE
 So do you, Rob.

From across the room, Thomas grins at Rob, shoots him with his finger. While kissing Susan.

ANGIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Is this your job? Talking to morons like me all day.

ROB
 I'm a volunteer.

ANGIE (O.S.)
 Oh, Rob, you're going to make some girl so happy.

ROB
 That's what they keep telling me.

ANGIE (O.S.)
 Thanks. Thanks for making me feel better. I guess everybody needs a friend to vent to sometimes.

ROB
 I'm glad I could help.

ANGIE (O.S.)
 If I call back again can I ask for you? I'm fine and everything, but I just feel comfortable.

ROB
 I'll be around.

ANGIE (O.S.)
Well, goodbye.

ROB
Bye, Angie.

She hangs up. Rob stares at the phone. Then over at Susan. At Thomas with his arm around her. She seems happy.

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Rob stands in the middle of a drab, minuscule apartment. He stares at the faded white walls, at the dull furniture. A COCKROACH crawls lazily along the wall.

He looks at the only picture in the room, of Rob and Susan. He checks his answering machine: it reads one message. He hits play.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hi, I'm calling to tell you about a
new cleaning product that will greatly
reduce your -

Rob hits erase. Buries his face in his hands. Picks up the phone. Dials.

THOMAS (O.S.)
Hello.

ROB
Thomas, is that you?

INTERCUT TO:

INT. SUSAN'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

This place is a step up from Rob's, with a women's touch. Thomas is on the phone, Susan blow dries her hair in the bathroom.

THOMAS
(into phone)
Who is this, Rob?

ROB
Yes. Can you put Susan on for me?

THOMAS
I told you not to talk to her anymore.

ROB
Thomas, please, it's important. I
won't bug her anymore after this.

THOMAS
No.

Rob fights back his tears.

ROB
Please. Just one minute...

THOMAS
What's the matter, Rob, depressed?
Feeling like one of those losers
that calls up everyday, begging
someone to tell them they're worth
something?

Thomas glances at Susan drying her hair. She's oblivious.

ROB
Thomas -

THOMAS
Do it.

ROB
What?

THOMAS
Do it. No one will miss you. No
one will even know you're gone. Do
us all a favor and put yourself out
of your misery.

Susan turns the hair dryer off. Thomas hangs up the phone.

SUSAN
Who was that?

THOMAS
Just a telemarketing call.

SUSAN
Remind me to call Rob before we leave.

THOMAS
Rob? What do you want to call him for?

SUSAN
I want to make sure he's all right.
He looked really depressed when he
left.

THOMAS
Look, Susan, you've got to let this
go. How do you think it makes me
feel that you want to call that loser
ex-boyfriend of yours?

Susan stares at Thomas.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
What?

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Rob holds a screwdriver. He's unscrewing the screen door of his window. He's Driven. Methodical.

He finishes and takes the screen door off. From below, we hear DISTANT STREET SOUNDS.

He sticks his head out the window, looks down at the sidewalk far below.

Rob turns around and stares at his apartment. A second cockroach has joined it's brother on the wall.

He climbs onto the ledge.

JUMPS.

From below, the SCREAMS of several pedestrians. The phone rings.

ROB'S ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi, I'm not here right now, so leave me a message, and have a great day.

BEEP.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Hi Rob, it's Susan. Listen, I think you might have been right about Thomas. Call me and we'll talk about it. Oh, and I forgot to tell you - after you left, some girl named Angie called for you. She was really disappointed you weren't there. I told her you'd be in tomorrow, so she'll call you then. I think she likes you. Call me!

The phone clicks off.

FADE OUT

Or...

INT. ROB'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Rob is holding a screwdriver. He's unscrewing the screen door of his window. He finishes and takes the screen door off.

He sticks his head out the window, looks down at the sidewalk far below. He climbs onto the ledge. The phone rings.

ROB'S ANSWERING MACHINE

Hi, I'm not here right now, so leave me a message, and have a great day.

BEEP.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Hi Rob, it's Susan. Listen, I think you might have been right about Thomas. Call me and we'll talk about it. Oh, and I forgot to tell you - after you left, some girl named Angie called for you. She was really disappointed you weren't there. I told her you'd be in tomorrow, so she'll call you then. I think she likes you. Call me!

BEEP.

Beat. Beat. Beat.

Rob pokes his head back through the window. Stares at the answering machine. Crawls back inside.

He picks up the screen door and begins screwing it back in place.

FADE OUT