

LAST CALL

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A Ten-Minute Play

by

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### Characters

MEG: Female. 20s. Dead. Stuck working the phones.

JUSTICE: Female. Teens. Alive. In over her head.

### Scene

Meg's receptionist office, over the train station between the world of the living and the afterlives.

### Time

Present day

SETTING: MEG's office. Economical. A single, plain desk. A single, plain chair. A push button telephone, a pen, and a large stack of papers--endless lists of telephone numbers--on the desk.

AT RISE: MEG sits at her desk. Dressed like an office worker. She's pulled one paper off of the stack. Looking at the paper, she dials a number on the phone. She waits.

A BUSY SIGNAL. MEG hangs up. Makes a mark on the paper with the pen.

MEG dials again. Waits. BUSY SIGNAL. Hangs up. Marks the paper. Mechanical. Bored.

MEG dials again. This time, the call connects. MEG sits up a little straighter.

RECEPTIONIST

Hello, Mr. Reed? Please hold while I connect you to accounting.

(MEG presses a button on the phone. Hangs up. Writes something on the paper.)

(A PASSING TRAIN. MEG pauses to listen as it gets louder and then fades into the distance.)

MEG

Godspeed, Mr. Reed.

(MEG looks to the next number on the paper. As she dials, JUSTICE enters from behind, wringing her hands. Agitated.)

JUSTICE

Excuse me--

(MEG jumps. Presses the wrong number.)

MEG

Damn it!

(hangs up. Rounds on JUSTICE, but doesn't leave her chair)

Don't you know better than to sneak up on a receptionist?!  
I can't afford to make wrong numbers!

JUSTICE

I'm sorry, I, I didn't know.

MEG

(eyeing JUSTICE's t-shirt and jeans)  
Who let you in here, anyway? You don't look like personnel.

JUSTICE

No one, I... I fell down the stairs.

MEG

...you fell down the stairs.

(JUSTICE nods)

MEG

This is the top floor.

JUSTICE

It is?

MEG

Yeah? The phones are on the top floor. Right above accounting and the train station.

JUSTICE

But... I fell down. How did I end up on the top floor?

MEG

Heck if I know, kid. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a job to do.

(MEG picks up the phone receiver again. JUSTICE comes a few steps closer.)

JUSTICE

Please, Mrs.-- I don't know where I am!

MEG

I just told you. The top floor. Right over the train station.

JUSTICE

But I wasn't in a train station! I was at school. On the stairs.

(MEG slowly registers her words)

MEG

You were at school just now.

JUSTICE

It was late. I know I wasn't supposed to be there, I should have gone home, but I--

MEG

You didn't get a phone call?

JUSTICE

I don't think so?

MEG

Are you sure? Are you sure you didn't get on a train?

JUSTICE

I think I'd remember a train--

MEG

Give me your arm.

JUSTICE

Why do you--

MEG

Give me your arm!

(gets up and grabs JUSTICE's hand, pressing two fingers to her wrist)

JUSTICE

What are you--

MEG

Shut up.

(MEG moves her fingers to JUSTICE's neck.)

MEG

You're alive!

JUSTICE

Um. Yeah?

MEG

But you're alive! How did you end up down here?

JUSTICE

I thought you said this was the top floor.

MEG

It is. But you're from the surface! You have a pulse!

JUSTICE

Of course I have a pulse! Everyone has, you have a pulse.

(MEG takes JUSTICE's hand and presses it to  
MEG's neck. JUSTICE's eyes slowly widen)

JUSTICE

What kind of a sick trick is this?

MEG

Not a trick. I don't have a pulse, nobody here does. But  
you, you got here alive!

JUSTICE

Where is "here"?

MEG

The train station. The last stop between where you came  
from, and where I should be.

JUSTICE

And you... You're dead.

(MEG nods)

JUSTICE

So this is the afterlife.

MEG

No. Well, yes, it's where you go after life, but the  
afterlives are further down the tracks.

JUSTICE

Afterlives. There's more than one?

MEG

Not everyone wants to spend eternity in the city behind the pearly gates. You get to choose... But that's assuming you have enough for a ticket.

JUSTICE

A ticket?

MEG

For the train. You get here by train. And you leave here by train.

JUSTICE

But I don't remember taking a train.

MEG

What do you remember?

JUSTICE

I was... I was at the top of the stairs. At the high school. My school. I was looking down the-- It's sort of a spiral staircase, and I was looking down the hole in the middle, over the railing. And I thought, what if I jumped? Not seriously, just, curiously. Like, would I break a leg, if I fell three stories, or an arm, or my neck, or something. I wasn't seriously considering it. And then I saw this, this really big crack in the floor, between the steps, and I thought, "I should step over that, I don't want to trip." But I guess I must have tripped, because I was going down really quickly, and then... I was at the end of the hall over there. And none of the doors were open, except for yours.

MEG

So people really do fall through the cracks in the earth. And I thought Billy was just pulling my leg!

JUSTICE

Who's Billy?

MEG

He's just this jerk in accounting-- Hang on, he might be able to help.

(MEG picks up the phone receiver)

JUSTICE

Help with what?

MEG

(dialing numbers)

The only way you're getting out of here is on a train.  
Billy can access your account and get you a ticket.

JUSTICE

My account?

MEG

(nods. Then talks to the phone)

Hey Billy. It's Meg. I need a favor... No, I'm not calling  
about my account-- Why, has there been a deposit?!

(beat)

...no. Of course not.

(recollects herself)

I'm not calling about me. I need you to look up someone  
else's account... You heard me... Because she's standing here  
in my office and needs a ticket to the surface! ...yes, the  
surface. The kid's alive, Billy, she fell through the  
cracks! ...no, I'm not joking. That's your department. ...look,  
if she gives you her info, would you just take a second and  
check how much GD she has?

(to JUSTICE, holding the receiver towards her)

Say your full name and your date of birth. Don't leave out  
any embarrassing middle names; we need those.

JUSTICE

Um. I'm Justice. Justice Elizabeth Gates. And, I was born  
on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

MEG

And your birth parents' full names, if you know them.

JUSTICE

I think, Dad's Elliot Franklin Gates, and Mom's... Barbara  
Rose Miller.

MEG

(holds the receiver to her ear again)

You got that, Billy? ...uh-huh...

(angles away from JUSTICE)

And with her life expectancy, that's...? ...yeah, thought so.  
Okay, then... Yeah, me too. Thanks anyway.

(hangs up)

JUSTICE

What did he say?

MEG

(fiddling with the pen)

Ticket prices vary with life expectancy length. It's more fair that way; somebody who died as a child had less time to earn GD than if they'd kicked it in a nursing home. And you haven't died, so that length's still wide open, and... You're a couple hundred thousand short.

JUSTICE

Two hundred thousand?

MEG

A bit more than that. If you're going to get back home, you have some serious earning to do.

JUSTICE

Well then how do I do it? How do I earn... what did you say?

MEG

GD. It's the only currency that matters after death.

JUSTICE

How do I get more of it?

MEG

I can't tell you.

JUSTICE

You don't know?

MEG

No, I know, but I can't tell you. And you shouldn't ask anyone else to tell you, not if you want to earn any more.

JUSTICE

But how can I earn it if no one will tell me how?

MEG

That's your problem. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a job to do.

JUSTICE

But I don't know what to do! Please, you have to help me!

MEG

I can't do anything else for you!

JUSTICE

Why can't you tell me how to earn GD?!

MEG

Because a selfless act isn't so selfless anymore if you know you'll get something for doing it, now is it?!

(claps both hands over her mouth)

JUSTICE

So... So it's about selfless acts, then... I just have to find people to help out?

MEG

It isn't going to work now. Damn it. Damn it!

JUSTICE

Why won't it work?

MEG

Because you know. You don't get any more GD once you know. Damn it. I keep asking Billy if there's been a deposit to my account, but we both know there's never going to be, because he's the blabbermouth that told me. Just like I just did to you.

JUSTICE

You... You want a ticket out of here, too. Back to life?

MEG

No. No, I want to move on... There was a beach. In North Carolina. We'd go there every summer, the whole family, for a whole week... Grandma and Grandpa were there, and all the cousins. All my grown-up cousins. I was always the baby. And every year we'd be there, no school, no phones, just the sand and the sea, and all of us... Mom and Dad would relax, and my sisters... We didn't have anything to worry about, at the beach. But after Grandma died, they sold the house and we stopped going... And then I went to college, and I got stupid, and mean, and short-sighted, and I thought, "Well, I'm not doing any good here, and nobody's gonna do anything good for me, so I might as well just..." I ended up on the train, way too soon, and I guess I was right about

not having done any good because when I got here they told me I didn't have enough GD to go any farther. I couldn't get to the beach. And so I stayed here. And they gave me a job, making calls. If people don't answer, they keep on living. If they pick up, I send them along. I've seen my parents' numbers go by. And my sisters. And my cousins. They all got tickets to meet my grandparents at the beach... And I'm still here.

JUSTICE

I'm sorry.

MEG

Yeah. I'm sorry, too. And I can't even tell them so.

JUSTICE

...can that phone call people on the surface?

MEG

Only if you want them dead.

JUSTICE

(suddenly defensive)

I don't! I didn't mean it, I was just angry, I...

MEG

...who did you say it to?

JUSTICE

My mom. And my dad... That's why I was still at school. I didn't want to go home... I didn't want to finish that conversation. But now... I just wish I could tell them I didn't mean it. Of course I don't wish they were dead! If I could just tell them that... If I could just tell them that I was stupid, and mean, and that... I'm sorry.

MEG

(hesitates, then grabs the phone, dialing)

Hold that thought... Billy? It's Meg again. This is the last time I'll bug you today, I promise. Could you take a look at my account? ...I know there's nothing added to it, I want to know exactly how much is in it. ...okay. I thought so. Now listen carefully. That girl I just told you about? Justice? I want you to transfer my GD to her account. All of it. Yes, all of it. That'd be enough for a ticket, right? Then do it! And book her a ticket to the surface. ...I have never been more serious in my life. Or my-- you know what I mean!

(hangs up)

JUSTICE

What's going on?

MEG

They'll have your ticket at Will Call. Now hurry and get downstairs. You don't want to miss your train.

JUSTICE

But you said "all of it"-- What about you? What about the beach?

MEG

I'm never getting to the beach, Justice. I'm never... going to be able to tell my family I'm sorry. But you... You can. Now... if you'll excuse me... I have a job to do.

(JUSTICE hesitates. Then she hugs MEG tightly before EXITING. MEG sits. Waits. Hears the TRAIN approach and fade away. Continues to sit in the silence.)

(The PHONE RINGS. Unexpected. MEG stares at it for a moment before picking it up.)

MEG

Hello? ...Billy? Why the heck are you calling me? ...I'm really not in the mood, Billy, so could you just get to the point?

(beat)

Billy. That's not funny, Billy. That's not... But I, I didn't do anything, how could there be... How much...?

(starts to cry. Hard. Slowly she collects herself, straightens in her chair, speaks:)

The beach. Book me a ticket to the beach.

END OF PLAY