“DON’T HANG UP”

A SHORT PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 10 MINUTES

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SUMMARY

On the eve of being committed to an eating disorder facility, a young girl calls a product hotline.

CHARACTERS

BIG T, female, African-American, mid 40s, call center specialist

LITTLE Y, female, white, 15

TIME

The present.

SETTING

On one side of the stage, LITTLE Y sits cross-legged on a floor, holding a cell phone and drain bottle product. A plunger is nearby. LITTLE Y wears high school cheer garb, a jersey.

On the other side of the stage, BIG T sits on a swivel chair inside a call center cubicle. A large, comfortable headset wraps around her head. In front of BIG T is an inbound phone console with lots of blinking lights.

BIG T and LITTLE Y don’t see each other.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Don’t Hang Up won Best In Show at the City Theatre of Independence Playwrights Festival 2012, July 2012, as directed by Keely Siefers.
THE PLAY

The phone rings. BIG T punches a button.

BIG T
Thank you for calling Drain Rite. This is Customer Service Agent 14c. Can I get your name?

LITTLE Y
Is this a real person?

BIG T
This is Agent 14c and I’m ready to unplug your questions. Can I please have your name?

LITTLE Y
I shouldn’t give you my name. To protect you.

BIG T
Okay. How can I help you?

LITTLE Y
I’m in the process of using your product for a life and death situation. Actually, it’s more a death situation.

BIG T
Thank you for calling.

LITTLE Y
Wait, don’t hang up.

BIG T
I’m only allowed to discuss questions relating to Drain Rite, [reads] now in its award-winning forty seventh year leading the nation’s war against the toughest of stopped drains.

LITTLE Y
I’m wondering how much Drain Rite I need to drink to kill myself.

Beat.

BIG T
Honey, you need to call somebody else.
LITTLE Y
Wait, please, don’t hang up.

BIG T
[Emphatic] You need to call somebody else.

LITTLE Y
I’ve talked to a million elses. Besides, all the other elses won’t know how much of this stuff I need to drink.

BIG T
You need to call a hotline.

LITTLE Y
The minimum amount.

BIG T
I’ll get a number for you.

LITTLE Y
Where are you?

BIG T
[Sighs, reads] I’m in Louisville, KY, the home of Mohammed Ali and Abbey Road on the River, the largest annual Beatles Festival in the world.

LITTLE Y
You sound like you’re reading that.

BIG T
We got pre-scripted lines should people ask certain questions. Awful smell, discoloration, bunch of things.

LITTLE Y
This stuff does reek wicked.

BIG T
I’ve never got a call for your situation.

LITTLE Y
And is this, like, really recorded for quality control purposes?
BIG T
I’m the only one answering calls and ain’t no one foolish enough to come down and try and quality control me. Now, I really need to get back to helping other callers—

LITTLE Y
If you hang up then I’m going to drink this whole bottle and it’s going to be your fault.

BIG T
You wanted to kill yourself, you’d already done so. You want to play games, that’s fine. But I’m not playing games. I’m playing life. You want to play games you call the next person.

LITTLE Y
I’m really scared.

Beat.

BIG T
Fine, you want me to talk, you stop crying. I can’t hear your voice when you cry.

LITTLE Y
They’re shipping me away tomorrow. My parents. To some lock-up, psycho joint in Minnesota.

BIG T
Listen, what’s your name?

LITTLE Y
What’s your name?

BIG T
Not supposed to give out my name. Rules. My call center name is 14c, but you go ahead and call me Big T. It’s my stage name.

LITTLE Y
What do you mean stage name?

BIG T
I sing in a band.
LITTLE Y
Like a ska reggae metal rage band?

BIG T
A blues band.

LITTLE Y
Wow, I didn’t know people still did blues.

BIG T
At my Momma’s funeral this man came to sing and he sang the blues something wonderful. I was sitting there while they laid my Momma to rest thinking I want to be forever singing the blues. And I went down to the club first chance I got and went up to the bandleader, who was this young and handsome boy. I’ve been singing ever since at that same club.

LITTLE Y
With that bandleader?

BIG T
He’s my husband now.

LITTLE Y
Wow. You sing blues with your husband every weekend.

BIG T
Hardly. They don’t let me out of here on weekends. Weekends is when most people call. Stuck here, by myself, headset and chair, can’t miss any call. I can’t even get up to go to the bathroom. Where are you calling from?

LITTLE Y
Um. Bathroom.

BIG T
At your house?

LITTLE Y
Kind of house. Maybe you could call me Little Y. I have two X Chromosomes and I wish I had a Y because then I would be a guy and wouldn’t have this problem.

BIG T
I don’t know about that whatasome.
LITTLE Y

It’s what we learned in science last week. Mr. Hanstodder, he’s my science teacher, he was talking about the natural development of humans and how the sex-determining chromosomes impact our traits. Females are double X but males have an X and Y. I like to think there’s a little Y in me somewhere. I’m an auditory learner.

BIG T

All that science sounds confusing. You mess with too much science and you can get hurt, that’s what my Momma always used to tell me.

LITTLE Y

I bet your Mom was nice to you. I bet she listened to you.

BIG T

Momma cared about her family, the Lord’s Holy Testament and Kentucky basketball. Only time I saw Momma mix God with anything else is whenever somebody was shooting free throws.

LITTLE Y

I go to my high school basketball games on Friday nights.

BIG T

That must be fun.

LITTLE Y

Yeah, fun. All the girls dressed up to impress boys. Courtside babes. Kind of a rite of passage. But it’s totally an illusion. Ludwig Borne wrote that losing an illusion makes you wiser than finding a truth. That’s high school basketball games. Have you ever wanted to kill yourself?

BIG T

How old are you, fifteen?

LITTLE Y

Fifteen, yeah.

BIG T

Well, Little Y, I was younger than you when my Momma killed herself. My brother and I were playing inside an awful ruckus and Momma told us to shoo outside and when we came back she had hanged herself.
LITTLE Y
That’s terrible.

BIG T
Yeah, but she made us something to eat before she did it. Fresh cookies in the oven. That’s how my Momma was. She was always making food, serving up a glorious feast. She never ate a thing, though, always worried there wouldn’t be enough for us.

LITTLE Y
Why do you think she did it?

BIG T
I don’t know. I sure wish I knew. What I do know is that there’s a bigger mess you leave behind when you take your life. My Momma’s funeral was a big mess. And dealing with it afterwards was a big mess. Your Daddy and Momma work hard, they want you to have a good life, and they’re doing whatever they’re doing sending you away to help you.

LITTLE Y
My parents are having me institutionalized at some psycho joint because I don’t eat. I panic about calories going to my waist. I have to stand near air ducts so I get cold and burn more calories. I get up in the middle of the night to run stairs. All the experts say I have to go to a place for headcases like me. But I’m not bullied or teased. I’m not depressed. I just live with mirrors. All the mirrors. There I am, fat and ugly. In real jail they give you baggy jail clothes and no mirrors. Real jail would be great. Because otherwise I’m trapped in mirrors.

BIG T
You know, I’m stuck in a way, too, listening to people all day long.

LITTLE Y
Probably annoying hearing about everybody’s problems.

BIG T
That’s my life, honey. Not even enough time to go to the bathroom.

LITTLE Y
It’s like you deal with all these people trying to make you feel ugly.
BIG T
My company makes this nice product but the only people who call are those with problems. I’m in the problem business. Maybe I learned something from my Momma all those years ago, how to heal people who can’t see their own beauty. I like listening to the sound of people talking. I close my eyes and hear their soul. The sound of a soul can be strong, it can be crushing. It can be fearful, it can be beautiful. But above all the human voice is a glorious sound. You kids don’t talk anymore, all you do is type away, texting words. That word looks just the same as anybody else who types it. You put on a fancy dress to go to that basketball game, it’s the same dress that some million elses wear. There’s not much in the world that is uniquely yours. Except your voice. Little Y, those mirrors can’t stop the way you talk, and you sound beautiful to me.

LITTLE Y
Thank you.

BIG T
I said no crying.

LITTLE Y
I’m sorry.

BIG T
You don’t need to be sorry for anything. This isn’t your fault. Things of this nature aren’t anybody’s fault.

LITTLE Y
Maybe like your Momma.

BIG T
Maybe like my Momma. Maybe this is where I’m supposed to be for whatever reason. Maybe we’re all where we’re supposed to be for whatever reason.

LITTLE Y
Maybe I’m supposed to be sent away.

BIG T
Maybe one day I’ll be sitting here, and the phone will ring, and I’ll be able to close my eyes and hear her voice.

LITTLE Y
Can I make a confession?
BIG T
Go ahead, honey.

LITTLE Y
I’m not really in my bathroom. I stole my Mom’s car and drove away until I ran out of gas and locked myself in a Waffle House bathroom. I don’t want to die in a Waffle House bathroom.

BIG T
Then surely don’t order from the grill.

LITTLE Y
I locked myself and found this bottle of Drain Rite and this plunger.

BIG T
Good thing you didn’t call the plunger help line. Is there a mirror over the sink.

LITTLE Y
Big T, do you think I can call you again? From Minnesota?

BIG T
I’m not supposed to—

LITTLE Y
You’re the only person that’s made sense.

BIG T
They give you phones at this place?

LITTLE Y
I’ll figure a way.

BIG T
Alright. Well, call your Momma and tell her where you are.

LITTLE Y
I don’t know.
BIG T
You listen to me. You call your Momma and tell her where you are. Then you go out to the counter and order some hot soup and sit there and eat it until she shows up. Take the Drain Rite bottle with you and you call that number when you get to where you’re going. But first thing, before any of that, tell me if there’s a mirror above the bathroom sink.

LITTLE Y
There is.

BIG T
Look at it. Go on, put yourself in front of it, and look at it.

LITTLE Y
I’m looking.

BIG T
[Reading] Thank you for calling the Drain Rite product support hotline. Have I answered all your questions to your satisfaction?

LITTLE Y
Yes.

BIG T
Then you be safe.

LITTLE Y
I’ll call you, Big T. And thank you.

LITTLE Y punches her cell phone, hanging up. She hugs the bottle.

BIG T moves on to the next call, punching her headset.

BIG T
Drain Rite support, this is Agent 14c and I’m ready to unclog your questions…sir, can you hold one second?

BIG T takes the headset off. She closes her eyes. She smiles.

Then she puts the headset back on.
BIG T
Thank you for holding. You were saying something about discoloration?

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY.