

An inside call

Cast of Characters:

TERRY: A southern woman in her mid to late 30s. She appears beaten down and tired. Her time in her sister's house has clearly warped her perception.

HAROLD: A man in his 40s or 50s who seems very well put together and organized, smooth and relaxed, like he has everything under control.

(Setting): A census year in an unspecified future at Terry's sister's house and a post-apocalyptic event, taking place somewhere in the American south.

Trigger warning: Mentions of suicide and mass death events

(Lights Up:) TERRY, wearing a washed-out, disheveled outfit of what would have once been casual clothing, sits alone in her home, staring off into space at the audience. Her home area is at stage left with a warm light over it. Suddenly, a turquoise landline that sits next to her rings. She is startled from her dissociation and hesitantly picks up the phone with her right hand. The light on stage right turns on and HAROLD is sitting at a desk covered in papers, pencil in his hand, his phone put to his ear, wearing a full suit.

TERRY:

Hello? Who is this?

HAROLD:

Is this Teresa Stevens?

TERRY:

(She voice is stuttering and confused): Yes, I believe it is

HAROLD:

Thank you, Teresa, Harold here, speaking on behalf of the US government about the current state of affairs under the state, now, Terry, it says you live here at 1113 Crete road, is that right?

HAROLD looks down at the paper and taps it with his pencil as he speaks.

TERRY:

Uh, well, no, actually, I moved to my sister's house to visit the day before the long dawn happened.

HAROLD nods and finishes writing as TERRY speaks. TERRY looks down at the floor, suddenly deep in thought.

HAROLD:

Alright, is your sister able to come to the phone at the moment?

TERRY:

(There is a pause as TERRY is silent for a beat, wide-eyed, before shaking her head and looking at the phone.) No, she can not, when the long dawn came... wait, where have ya'll been? I haven't gotten a radio broadcast from the government for months now, much less a personal phone call.

HAROLD:

Sorry about our lack of communication as of late, Ma'am, we've been tied up in other endeavors related to the Solar Mass Death Event, but if we can focus on the questions, please.

TERRY:

Other endeavors? Folks out there were dying for months on end and from y'all we heard jack!

HAROLD:

Please ma'am, calm down, we can address your concerns in a moment, but it's the higher ups you to talk to, I can pass your complaints upward after you answer my questions, okay?

TERRY:

(She takes a couple deep breaths) Okay, we can put a pin in this, but we're not done here, ya' hear me?

HAROLD:

Of course ma'am, but back to the questions, now, at your original residence, I see that there are others marked as living there, are they still residing there?

TERRY:

No, my husband and mother came with me to visit my sister.

HAROLD makes a massive sweeping motion crossing something out on the paper.

HAROLD:

Gotcha', now, Terry, can you please tell me how long you've been in the house?

TERRY starts counting on her left hand, then when she gets to five on it, she holds the phone to her head with her shoulders as she counts to five on her right hand, then she puts her fingers down on her left hand and counts another 5 on it, she does the same with her right hand but only counts to one.

TERRY:

Sixteen, thereabouts.

HAROLD:

Months?

TERRY takes the phone back into her right hand and puts her left hand down.

TERRY:

Yeah, give or take a coupla' days, It's real hard to tell though, with the state of the sky an' all, I've been in here since I heard the first broadcast, didn't seem like a good time to go out.

HAROLD:

Well Ma'am, back then it certainly wasn't, you did the right thing staying out of the light.

TERRY:

(Her becomes tense and irritable) Yeah, I did.

HAROLD:

Another question.

TERRY:

Shoot.

HAROLD:

Well, if you've been in here for sixteen months, how have you been able to feed yourself for so long?

TERRY:

Those disgusting rations you all delivered, put through the mail slot, no less! Why, I'm surprised you don't remember, seeing as it's the only thing you ever did for us!

HAROLD:

Well, see ma'am those rations were only for the first 4 months

TERRY:

Som'n like that, 'feeds a family of four for 4 months' and whatnot, but you didn't deliver it to a family of four, didja'? Just to lil' ole' me and mama, and she couldn't even eat them without her dentures and such! We're lucky we had soft foods for her at the house.

HAROLD:

I see, my apologies for the incompetence of my predecessors, Let me assure you with full confidence that the situation is is now under control.

TERRY:

(TERRY scoffs) Yeah right, this didn't seem like the situation you just control.

HAROLD:

Well, I don't know what tell you ma'am, we've done tremendous work and we've found a solution

TERRY:

With all do respect, Harold, you sound just like the people on the radio, and they never seemed like the solvin' type.

HAROLD:

Well, Teresa, that's just the thing! The people who you know from the radio are no longer the guys in charge! They passed just like so many others of this tragedy, it looks like their advice didn't really work out anyway, did it?

TERRY:

Uh-huh, well the procedures have been working for me so far, I feel.

HAROLD:

Oh yeah, no denying that, and I'm glad they have, of course, but these times've been rough, haven't they?

TERRY:

Well, I guess they have, I broke my cellphone a couple of months back, it just stopped turning on, something to do with how it was experiencing errors syncing to the internet, I think it's because the internet went out a lil' before and it just couldn't calibrate properly or som'n the like that, couldn't tell which parts were the display and which weren't.

HAROLD:

Obviously, our predecessors were negligent in how they dealt with technology, but that can't have been your worst complaint over the past sixteen months, right?

TERRY:

Well, it's been a bit since ma' passed, but that's the fault of those nasty predecessors o' yours. Couldn't get her medicine, she just kinda... went.

HAROLD:

I'm sorry for your loss, we've all lost loved ones over the course of the S.M.B.E., and my heart aches for you, I'm sure your sister and you must have been devastated.

TERRY:

Ha! She wasn't even here to see it, when the first broadcast came that afternoon, or whatever you'd call it, she'd left that morning. Last morning I saw her... hell, last morning I ever saw.

HAROLD makes a mark on a paper.

HAROLD:

I... I'm so sorry, I didn't understand.

TERRY:

It's fine, we weren't close, I spared as many tears for her as I could manage, it's not like they'd be enough to do anything.

HAROLD:

And as for your husband, is he here with you, or...?

There is a long pause before TERRY speaks again, she starts staring downward.

TERRY:

Well, I've spared him enough tears to do someth'n, that's for sure, prolly enough to snuff out that damned sun, I'll tell you that.

HAROLD:

I see, do you know-

TERRY:

I'd rather not talk about how he died, if that's what you're askin', if I try to I'll cry too much to answer and more of your damn questions, it's not like the tears can do anything from down here on land, anyway.

Harold nods and makes a mark on the paper. There is a long pause before TERRY takes a deep shaky breath.

TERRY:

Hey, Harold...

HAROLD:

Hm?

TERRY:

...what's the point? Of all these questions, I mean... are ya' markin' down the dead? 'Cause I think that's not the greatest concern as of late, are ya markin' down the livin'? 'Cause if ya are, I don't see much point in that either, at least not in markin' me down, this ain't livin', eatin' the same ol' government rations that get stuck and unstuck from my teeth, passin' by the room I left my mother in, holdin' my breath by every window 'cause I know it only takes a light breeze to move the cloth that separates me from death? I don't know what time it ever is, what day it ever is, if the day even changes...

TERRY lays the phone down speaker up and lays down her head. She turns her head to look at the phone.

TERRY:

If this is what livin' is, then don't put me down as one, I won't be livin' soon.

HAROLD:

Well, Teresa, you're right, this is the census, remember when the last one of this area came? It says here you lived here back then, do you remember back then? It's only been ten years, I know it feels like that's a while, but honestly, ten years ago the world probably made a lot more sense than it does now. The world was right, it was normal, it felt real, didn't it? More real? Than this, at least?

TERRY sits up slightly and cradles her head in her left hand. She looks at the phone.

TERRY:

Yeah, it certainly did.

HAROLD:

Of course it did, this whole situation is so bizarre, right?

TERRY:

(She chuckles and her voice breaks as she speaks and nods) Yeah, when uh- when the first broadcast came, all those months ago, we weren't sure whether or not to laugh or call the police. But then we got a call, folks were dyin' out there, Harold, when the sunlight touched 'em.

HAROLD:

Yeah, it was crazy, wasn't it? It wasn't like before, tell me, Teresa, what did you do the day of the last census?

TERRY:

That's hard to remember... I think I went to the beach, funny huh? Or at least I think I'd gone to the beach the day before, the day of? I don't know, it's kinda silly of me to miss going to the beach now, of all things.

HAROLD:

I don't think it's silly at all, Teresa, and what if you could go the beach again?

TERRY:

Don't be cruel, Harold.

HAROLD lowers his phone slightly and starts looking stage left.

HAROLD:

Seriously, what if I told you that you could go back outside again, not a worry in your head?

TERRY sits up straight and narrows her eyes, looking straight at the phone.

TERRY:

I'd break your nose, that's an irresponsible thing to tempt people with, a dangerous idea to fill their heads.

HAROLD:

Why so?

TERRY:

Don't be difficult, you're remindin' me of your predecessors, tha' sun's out there killing folks! It took my sister, and it took my husband, and it took my... it took my life away from me, the broadcasts say it only takes a half-second to become lethal! And I've seen it too! I saw what it does to people, I saw what it did to my husband! And night never comes, so I can't exactly admire the moonlit beach either!

HAROLD stops talking into the phone and starts talking in the direction of TERRY at stage left.

HAROLD:

Terry, that was once the case, but now... now it's different! We fixed it, fixed it all! It was simple, they just needed our new eyes to see! Once we replaced the original scientists, we solved the SMBE, the long dawn'll be over, you'll see tomorrow morning yet!

TERRY:

No... it can't be...

HAROLD:

Well, it is, Teresa, imagine seeing another morning, imagine seeing the night again!

TERRY picks up the phone and holds it to her ear, she hesitantly stands up and takes a few steps toward her door. In doing so the phone line pulls tight and falls slack, swinging back toward TERRY, revealing that the cord has been detached. The light over HAROLD dims, but doesn't turn off.

TERRY:

I just don't believe it...

There is a long silence as TERRY looks at the phone before TERRY speaks again.

TERRY:

Harold?

The light over HAROLD comes back on fully. He isn't speaking into his phone at all, just looking over at stage left.

HAROLD:

(Slowly, carefully) Yes?

TERRY:

(She is stuttering and confused, barely paying attention to the call.) I said that I just don't believe it...

HAROLD:

Why not? What's not to believe, why would I lie? If I was, you would know it, you're smart, aren't you? You'd figure me out if I was lying.

TERRY takes another step toward the door, still holding the phone to her ear.

TERRY:

Uh-huh, that's right.

HAROLD:

And yes, I know it's shame that we were too late for all the others.

TERRY:

Wait, yeah, who's to say the same won't happen to me?

HAROLD:

I say it, tell me, Teresa, I'm the only voice you've heard in a long, long time, isn't that right?

TERRY:

Yeah, that's right, call me Terry?

HAROLD:

Of course, now, Terry, are you ready to take the same steps as all the others before you? You'll join the world again!

TERRY:

Well...

HAROLD:

It's what Tracy and your mother would want, right?

TERRY takes a step toward the door.

TERRY:

Yeah...

HAROLD:

...and Beau, he always hated being cooped up, he'd want this for you.

TERRY takes several steps toward the door.

TERRY:

You're right...

HAROLD:

I'm sorry that we failed you the first time, but I promise with everything that I am, Terry, that we will not fail you again.

TERRY walks the rest of the way to the door and puts her hand on the doorknob, but hesitates.

HAROLD:

You open that door and it'll be just like it was before, your life can go back to normal, you can heal, you will never have to worry about the long dawn ever again.

TERRY takes a deep breath, steeling herself.

HAROLD:

But from here, there's no reason to keep talking, I have to go now to inform the next person, okay? Goodbye, Terry.

TERRY nods and absent-mindedly does the motion as if she's hanging her phone up, but drops the phone, as there is nothing to catch it. The light on stage right goes out.

TERRY:

Goodbye...

TERRY walks through her door into the "outside". The light on stage left goes out.

-END-