

# Hello?

by

Ronnie Larsen

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#### Character Breakdown

Ages are somewhat flexible as long as it makes sense.

Donna Robertson, casting director 40's

Ellen Brown, assistant to Donna Robertson 20's

Sarah Hoke, an actress 20's

Michelle Taylor, actress 30's

Karen Keylock, actress 40's

The play takes place in a Hollywood casting director's office and the waiting room for that office. They are casting a typical female victim in a typical horror victim.

#### SCENE: CASTING OFFICE

The theatre is pitch black.

Suddenly we see the face of a woman illuminated by the light of her smart phone. Beat. Another woman's face is illuminated. Beat. Another. Beat. And another. After the 4th face is illuminated the stage lights come up to reveal an office and a waiting room.

Lights up to reveal Donna Robertson sitting behind a table with various papers. She is on her smart phone. In the waiting room three women sit and wait. They read sides to themselves, check their smartphones, read their sides, etc.

An assistant enters with a coffee cup walking thru the waiting room. All the actresses look up and smile briefly. The assistant enters the casting office and gives the coffee to her boss, Donna Robertson.

DONNA  
(to the coffee)  
Hello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN  
Be careful, it's hot.

Donna drinks.

DONNA  
Perfect.

ELLEN  
All three are here.

DONNA  
Great.

ELLEN  
All on their phones, of course. Not  
reading their sides.

DONNA  
Because they're idiots. Okay, who's  
first.

Waiting room.

SARAH  
(to Karen)  
So supposedly we're the final three.

KAREN  
Who told you that?

SARAH  
My agent.

KAREN  
I wasn't told that.  
(to Michelle)  
Were you told that?

MICHELLE  
(on her phone)  
One second.

Ellen enters.

ELLEN  
Karen Keylock?

KAREN  
That's me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLEN

You're up.

Karen quickly gathers her things.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Welcome back.

KAREN

Thanks for having me back.

ELLEN

I'm Ellen, by the way.

KAREN

Nice to meet you, "Ellen by the way".

They both laugh.

They enter the office together.

DONNA

Karen, welcome back!

KAREN

Thanks, Donna!

DONNA

You look great. Have you met Ellen? She wasn't here last week.

KAREN

We just met.

DONNA

Ellen makes the best coffee.

ELLEN

I do.

DONNA

So we have a new side actually. It's basically the same but there's an extra hello? It's no biggie but look it over.

Waiting room. Michelle is still looking at her smart phone.

SARAH

(to Michelle)

Hey.

Michelle looks up briefly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SARAH (CONT'D)

It's between you and I, trust me.

MICHELLE

(looking up, amused)

How do you know?

SARAH

I did a Shakespeare play with her last summer out in Glendale. Not good. Really stiff. Very "actressy", you know what I mean. I can't imagine that would work on film.

MICHELLE

(back to her phone)

One second.

Beat.

SARAH

Hey, do you have a charger for an Android. I'm on 2%. I think my phone's about to die.

MICHELLE

I don't. I'm sorry.

SARAH

Oh, crap. 1%.

Michelle shoots her a look.

Casting office.

DONNA

Whenever you're ready. Remember, the electricity has been cut and the house is pitch black and you're all alone.

KAREN

Got it. Thank you for that.

Karen gets into character. Begins. Looks around, very frightened. She is obviously reading a scene from a typical horror script featuring a scared woman alone in a scary house. She is very still and barely moves. Very tense and dramatic, but real, but not silly...it should feel just like a real horror movie and not a parody of one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

KAREN (CONT'D)  
(in character, terrified)  
Hello?  
(more terrified, huge pause)  
Hello?  
(more fear, more pausing)  
Hello?  
(scared, to herself)  
Don't die, don't die, don't die.

Donna slams her hand on the table suddenly. The actress reacts. Terrified. The audience should jump too if Donna does it right.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
(shaking)  
This isn't funny.

DONNA  
Great! So good. So scary.  
(to Ellen)  
Excellent, right?

ELLEN  
Excellent. I got chills.

DONNA  
Karen, thank you so much.

KAREN  
Thank YOU!

DONNA  
And I heard you were great in Glendale this summer.

KAREN  
Oh, thank you.

DONNA  
I'm sorry I missed it.

KAREN  
Me, too. It was really fun.

DONNA  
More Shakespeare on the horizon?

KAREN  
Hopefully. I love it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

DONNA

It's so great how you just keep working whether it pays or not. So many actresses just sit around waiting for paid work. Good for you on the work ethic.

KAREN

Gotta keep growing, right?

DONNA

Absolutely. Okay, well thank you. Don't tell them but I'm rooting for you.

KAREN

Oh, thanks Donna.

DONNA

Okay, Karen, hopefully you'll be hearing from us.

KAREN

Fingers crossed.

DONNA

See ya later, Shakespeare.

They both laugh and Karen exits. Donna and Ellen are now alone. Karen exits thru the waiting room and all the actresses smile warmly at each other.

DONNA (CONT'D)

So guess how much she gets for doing 3 plays all summer outside in the heat at The Glendale Shakespeare Festival.

ELLEN

I have no idea.

DONNA

Zero. Zip. Nada. They do it for the art. Seriously.

ELLEN

Pathetic.

DONNA

When I first came out here 12 years ago I did a season there and I met Karen and it was fun for a few weeks but by the end I couldn't wait for it to end.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

DONNA (CONT'D)

I can't believe Karen's still out there plugging away 12 years later. Sad, right?

ELLEN

I didn't know you were an actress.

DONNA

Oh Ellen, there's a lot you don't know. Okay, who's next?

They shuffle thru papers.

Waiting room. Sarah is still trying to talk to Michelle but Michelle is lost in her smart phone.

SARAH

(to Michelle)

Oh, I'm getting the butterflies.

Michelle ignores her.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Are you getting the butterflies?

Michelle still ignores her.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I need to break my losing streak. I haven't booked a job in 14 months.

(beat)

I think I need to go to the bathroom. Do you think I have time to go the bathroom?

MICHELLE

(glancing up)

One second.

SARAH

Feels good to get called back though, right?

Ellen bursts into the waiting room.

ELLEN

Okay, Sarah Hoke, you're up.

SARAH

(to Michelle)

I'm up. Wish me luck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Michelle still ignores her. Still lost in her phone. Sarah gathers up her things.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(oblivious)  
Nice talking to you.

Ellen and Sarah enter.

DONNA  
Sarah Hoke, great to see you again.

SARAH  
Thanks for calling me back. My first call back in a while so it feels great!

DONNA  
Okay, let's read. Here's the side. There's an extra "hello" but you'll be fine.

SARAH  
Oh it's different that what I have? Do you mind if I just take a minute to look it over?

DONNA  
It's nothing, it's just an extra "hello".

SARAH  
Just like 5 minutes. Please. I want to be perfect for you.

DONNA  
Uhhhh. Sure. No problem. Step outside. Take your time.

SARAH  
You sure?

DONNA  
Absolutely. Absolutely. No problem.

Sarah goes back to the waiting room and paces and reads to herself under her breath. Donna and Ellen are alone again. Donna drinks more coffee.

DONNA (CONT'D)  
Total nutcase. I would never send her on. Could you imagine dealing with that energy on a set.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

DONNA (CONT'D)

You can smell the crazy. That's why we have callbacks to find out who's crazy.

ELLEN

(reading her resume)

She has a huge resume.

DONNA

So does Gary Busey, so what?

Back in the waiting room. Michelle is still on her phone and ignoring Sarah.

SARAH

Excuse me, I'm just gonna run to the bathroom real quick, can you tell 'em that for me if they call me.

Michelle ignores her and Sarah heads off stage to the bathroom.

Back in the office, Donna finishes her coffee while Ellen does paperwork.

DONNA

You know what, I really wanna get going. Let's just bring in Michelle so we can get out of here.

Ellen goes to the waiting room.

ELLEN

Michelle Taylor?

MICHELLE

That's me.

ELLEN

Come on in.

They enter the casting room.

DONNA

Hey, Michelle, great to see you again. You look wonderful as always.

MICHELLE

Awww, thanks Donna, so do you.

DONNA

Oh no, I look like awful. That's why I stay behind the camera these days.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

DONNA (CONT'D)

But thank you. Are you still taking classes with George?

MICHELLE

Every Tuesday.

DONNA

Tell him I said hi and tell him his students are always the most professional.

(to Ellen)

That's the Film Teacher, George Harris, I was telling you about. I gave you his number did you ever call?

ELLEN

Not yet.

MICHELLE

Oh, are you an actress.

DONNA

She wants to be but she won't sign up for a class. Ellen's a little lazy.

Ellen laughs uncomfortably.

DONNA (CONT'D)

But she makes amazing coffee.

MICHELLE

What more do you need?

DONNA

Okay, let's read this thing. Here's the new side. And really important, there's an added "hello".

MICHELLE

I'm actually off book soooo...just add another "hello"?

DONNA

Exactly. Perfect. Whenever you're ready.

MICHELLE

Okay.

Michelle is quickly in character. Begins. Looks around, very frightened. It should feel exactly the same as the first actress. Exactly the same. And, again, not cartoony.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

Keep it real. Like a real horror film. A good horror film.  
Slow and tense.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
(in character, terrified)  
Hello?  
(more terrified, huge pause)  
Hello?  
(more fear, more pausing)  
Hello?  
(scared, to herself)  
Don't die, don't die, don't die.

Suddenly, Donna slams her hand down hard and loud on the table. The actress reacts. Terrified.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
(terrified, shaking)  
This isn't funny.

DONNA  
Perfect!

ELLEN  
Really?

DONNA  
Perfect! That's it. You're done. Thank you so much for coming in. Tell George I said hi.

MICHELLE  
I will. And thanks again. Take care.

Ellen and Donna are now alone.

DONNA  
Not great, right?

ELLEN  
Sort of bland.

DONNA  
I've seen her do better work. She doesn't challenge herself.

ELLEN  
Every time I went out there she was on her phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

DONNA

They aren't hungry enough. That's the problem. They think, "Oh it's just 4 lines in a horror movie". They don't respect the work. Get the other one in and let's go home. I got errands to run.

Ellen goes into the waiting room. Looks around. No one is there.

ELLEN

Hello?

(no answer, big pause)

Hello?

(still no answer, big pause)

Hello?

Suddenly, Donna slams her hand down hard and loud on the table. Ellen reacts crazily but funny. They both laugh.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

This isn't funny. My heart is pounding. Feel it. You want to give me a heart attack?

Donna can't stop laughing. Finally...

DONNA

I'm sorry, that was REALLY funny.

(composing herself)

Ok, what are we doing?

ELLEN

She's gone.

DONNA

What?

ELLEN

She's gone.

DONNA

No way. Are you serious? I guess she couldn't handle the extra "hello".

Donna goes to the waiting room.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Hello?

(beat)

I told you I could smell the crazy.

Fine, we're done, let's go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

Ellen quickly starts packing up.

DONNA (CONT'D)  
Can you get hit the lights and lock up?

ELLEN  
Yep. So who are we casting?

Donna gathers her things.

DONNA  
I don't know yet. I need to think about it but I got to get to the bank by 6. So we'll deal with it tomorrow. Ciao. And don't forget to check your e-mails.

Donna leaves. Ellen is finished packing up. Ellen goes and hits the lights. The stage goes almost black except for a tiny shaft of light. Silence. Then we hear a toilet flush in the distance. More silence. Then slow footsteps, high heels.

Sarah slowly enters. Nervous. She grows scared in the darkness.

SARAH  
Hello?  
(no answer, big pause)  
Hello?  
(still no answer, more scared)

She takes out her smart phone and her face lights up. She uses the light as flashlight to illuminate the room.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
Hello?

She turns her phone back to her so it illuminates her face and she begins to make a call but as she begins to type she sees her phone is about to die...

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(to the phone)  
Don't die, don't die, don't die.

The phone dies.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
And there it goes. Oh crap.

Once again, just a tiny sliver of light illuminates the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(really scared now)  
Hello? Hello? Hello?

Blackout.

The End.