

Hang-Ups  
by  
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# HANG-UPS

Lights come up on a couch and coffee table. A man (TED) sits on the couch, breathing into a bag. A woman (SELENA) sits next to him.

SELENA

Take deep breaths... that's right... nice and easy...

TED

*(Huffing into the bag)* Oh my god -- oh my god...

SELENA

There you go -- In. Out...

TED

*(Lowering the bag)* Who *does* that?! I mean, right there on TV -- no trigger-warning or *anything*...

SELENA

I know -- I know it was a real shock. But it's over now, Ted. Just try to relax.

TED

Yeah -- OK -- but what kind of reporter just blurts out a one point drop in the prime interest rate. You can't just spring that kind of thing on people... oh god...

SELENA pushes the bag back up to TED'S mouth.

SELENA

Ted. Breathe. *(Picking up a newspaper)* Here -- I'll fan you with the Wall Street Journal...

TED

Yeah. Yeah -- that's better. It...it feels like the Real Estate section...

SELENA

That's right -- plus the Moneywise insert. Just lie back and take deep breaths -- how does that feel?

TED

*(Dropping the bag on the coffee table and falling back on the couch)* Better. Much better. Thanks, Selena -- you're a life-saver.

SELENA

*(Putting the newspaper down on the coffee-table)* Hey, that's why I took that course in CPA CPR -- just in case I started dating an accountant.

TED

Well, I don't know about "CPR" -- except that one time -- at Disney World...

SELENA

It was a joke, Ted -- and the Tea Cup ride *does* get a little intense...

TED

All that spinning -- and twirling -- and throwing up. Goofy and Mickey just standing there judging me...

SELENA

No one was judging you. You're just a bit...high-strung.

TED

I guess so. But accounting is a very "high-strung" line-of-work, Selena.

SELENA

I know -- every day you're really pushing it -- "living on the spreadsheet's edge."

TED

Yeah -- that latest update to QuickBooks would make Chuck Norris scream like a little girl.

SELENA

So listen -- since we're on the subject of professions -- I think it's time I came completely clean about *my* job.

TED

Uh -- I thought you said you were in sales -- some sort of telemarketing.

SELENA

Well, it's *kind* of like telemarketing. Especially the whole "tele" part...

TED

Sure -- I mean, I see you on your phone all the time...

SELENA

Yeah, well, I try not to mix work with my personal life -- but sometimes you can't help taking the job home with you.

TED

Tell me about it. (*Holding up his phone*) Who else has the IRS on speed-dial?

SELENA

I know, right? So you'd understand if I was taking (*Making air-quotes*) "business" calls at home.

TED

(*Making air-quotes*) "Business" calls?

SELENA

Yeah -- from clients...

TED

Clients. What type of "clients?"

SELENA

*Male* clients...

Pause.

TED

Oh no. No-no-no-no-no...

SELENA reaches into her purse and pulls out a large stress-ball.

SELENA

(*Handing him the ball*) Ted -- everything's fine -- just concentrate on this...

TED

(*Kneading the ball and talking to himself*) Compress-the-stress. Compress-the-stress...

SELENA

That's right -- just like the therapist showed you...

TED

(*Still squeezing the ball*) Selena, the stress is *not* compressing...

SELENA

Keep squeezing -- don't work yourself into a tizzy...

TED

What am I supposed to *work* myself into when I find out *you're* working as a...for the...in the...

SELENA

In the what?

TED

*You* know what. The what where men call women...

SELENA

Yes.

TED

And the women take their credit card numbers...

SELENA

Right.

TED

And they start talking...talking about...

TED begins biting the stress-ball.

SELENA takes TED'S face in both her hands.

SELENA

It's not phone-sex.

TED

*(Collapsing back on the couch)* Oh thank god!

TED laughs nervously and sighs loudly with relief.

SELENA

It's phone-*Ex*.

TED

Well, OK then...Wait. *What?*

SELENA

I'm a phone-*Ex* operator.

TED

"Phone-*Ex*?" What the hell is a "phone-*Ex*" operator?

SELENA

Look, Ted -- it's simple. Guys pay to talk to me like I was their *ex*-wife or girlfriend.

Pause.

TED

Men *pay* to talk to you?

SELENA  
Correct.

TED  
On the phone?

SELENA  
Yep.

TED  
But not about sex.

SELENA  
Nope.

TED  
And you pretend to be their *former* wife or whatever.

SELENA  
See? You got it. That's phone-Ex.

TED  
No, Selena! I *don't* get it! I don't get it at all...

SELENA  
Listen, Ted -- it's no big deal...

TED  
No big deal? We've been seeing each other for over two months and now I find out you're... you've been...

SELENA  
"Exing."

TED  
(*Pointing at her*) Exing! Phone-Exing with other men.

SELENA  
(*Crossing her arms*) It's a job, Ted. And it pays way better than temp-work.

TED  
Oh come on -- that isn't a "job." And what kind of weird, freaky loser pays a complete stranger to talk to him like she's his ex?

SELENA

Listen -- most of my clients are just regular guys. And for your information, call-in services aren't *only* about sex. All sorts of men talk to all sorts of women about all sorts of things.

TED

Yeah -- I *bet*. And what kind of girls do these "regular guys" pay to call?

SELENA

Well, some men just want to talk to bank-tellers.

TED

Bank-tellers?

SELENA

That's Phone-Checks.

TED

You can't be serious...

SELENA

Of course, they're guys who only pay to talk to witches -- that's Phone-Hex.

TED

Phone-*Hex*?

SELENA

And then you've got the lines for green-skinned alien-girls...

TED

You don't mean...

SELENA

Yep -- Phone-Treks.

TED

Stop! Just stop. I'll never be able to look at Captain Kirk the same way again...

SELENA

Look, Ted -- I'm going to prove you're blowing this whole thing out of proportion. (*Pulling out two cell phones*) This is my personal phone -- and here's the one I use for work.

TED

(*Crossing his arms and sulking*) Well, I guess that makes it your *Ex*-tra phone.

SELENA

Ha. Ha. Anyway, I'm going to take a few calls and show you nothing weird or freaky's going on.

TED

What? *Now*?

SELENA

Yes -- now. (*Tapping on her phone*) I just have to log into the switchboard...

TED

Woah! Woah! Wait a second! I don't want to hear you phone "Exing" some random...

SELENA

Hold on -- I've got a call coming through. Oh -- it's Gerald -- this is perfect...

TED

What's perfect? Who's Gerald...?

SELENA

(*Holding up her hand and answering her phone*) Hello... No -- I'm not gonna guess who this is... 'cause I *know* it's you, Jerry. How many times do I have to tell you to quit calling... You *know* why. It's over. It's *been* over. It's always gonna *be* over... Stop. Listen to me -- I don't want to talk about it... No -- the hair-plugs aren't going to change anything... Look, Jerry -- I've moved on... That's right -- and *you* should move on too. OK, I really have to go so I'm hanging up now and I don't want you calling me again -- especially tonight between 9:00 and 9:30... What? No -- crying doesn't help. Bye.  
(*SELENA hangs up*)

Pause.

TED

I. Am so. Confused.

SELENA

Oh, that's one of my regulars -- Gerald from New Jersey. Don't worry he'll call back this evening and we'll hash it all out.

TED

Wait -- you and he aren't...I mean, you've never even *met* this guy?

SELENA

Of course not. I'm just his *phone*-Ex.



TED

So that was all just an act? The two of you don't even know each...

SELENA

Hold that thought. (*Answering her phone*) Brad? Nice of you to call -- *finally*... Yeah, Yeah -- like I haven't heard *that* before... OK, just skip it -- where's the check...? Yes, Einstein -- it's that time again -- the same time it is *every* month... Well, that's why they call it "child-support," Brad -- you were all about making the "child," now how about some "support" ... Yeah, *right*. So, listen, if you're not too busy banging cocktail waitresses, you might actually take a weekend off and see your son... Well, Tommy keeps asking when you're coming by... *Fine*. Know what, I'm really busy at the moment so just forget it... And don't call back between 10:00 and 10:30 tonight. (*SELENA hangs up*)

TED

(*Staring at her*) Who *are* you?

SELENA

Sorry about that -- Brad gets kind of twitchy if we don't touch base every day or two.

TED

And he's another one of those guys? He's just calling you for...

SELENA

Phone-Ex.

TED

But what about the child support -- the waitresses -- and Tommy? *None* of that was real?

SELENA

It's all just part of the job, Ted. Look, I know it sounds strange, but that's why guys like Brad keep calling back -- because I make it *seem* real. And none of it's about sex -- I'm just the girl they call when they're looking for an *ex*.

TED

(*Shaking his head*) But... but... it's so *bizarre*. I'm mean, who actually *pays* for that? It's like divorce court S&M...

SELENA

(*Sitting next to him*) Yeah -- maybe -- I don't know. But the important thing is that *you* get the truth. You know who I *really* am -- not some random girl at the end of a 1-900 number -- the *real* me. (*Taking his hand*) The one who really cares about *you*.

TED

(*Standing up*) I don't know, Selena...

SELENA

(*Standing*) Listen -- just give yourself a few days to...

TED

I mean, this is...this is a *lot* to take in...

SELENA

I know -- I know it is -- but I wanted to tell you the truth before we went any further. Don't you see, Ted -- *you're* the guy *Selena* calls -- especially when she needs something good. Something real.

Pause.

TED

Look. I...I just don't think it's going to work out. I'm sorry.

SELENA

(*Wiping her eyes*) Yeah...OK...Fine. (*Rummaging around in her purse*) So -- I guess you'll need your Xanax -- remember not to take it before you eat. This is your mother's birthday card -- don't forget to sign it. Here's your rescue inhaler. The prescription has three more refills -- make sure you go to CVS. (*SELENA piles the pills, card, inhaler and prescription on the coffee table*)

TED

Right -- thanks. I always wind up running out...

SELENA

(*Walking to the door upstage left*) Yeah -- I guess running out is easy. (*Stopping with her back to him*) You know, Ted -- everybody has hang-ups. I have them -- you've got more than your share too.

TED

I know -- believe me -- I know.

SELENA

(*Turning to face him*) OK -- so don't be so quick to judge the guys who call me. Most of them are just looking for a person to act like they actually *mattered* -- at least once. And that's all an ex really is -- somebody who *used* to be important to somebody else -- to *anybody* else. Who doesn't want that?

TED

It's not like...I never thought...I don't know.

SELENA

Good-bye, Ted. Try to take care of yourself.

TED

Look, I just...

SELENA exits upstage left.

TED looks after her a moment, then sits on the couch. He picks up the inhaler, gives himself a quick dose, and slumps back against the cushions. He picks up the Wall Street Journal, fans himself a moment, drops the paper and stares at the door a few seconds. Finally, he makes up his mind, digs out his cell phone and dials.

TED

Hi, Selena -- it's me. Listen, I was thinking about what you said and...What?...Oh...

TED pulls out a credit card.

TED

It's a Visa...Debit instead of credit...Yes -- I can hold...

TED stares blankly at the audience as lights fade to

BLACKOUT