Nothing to Wipe With

A ten minute play

By Camilo Almonacid
CAST OF CHARACTERS

PERLA, 30's, recently trained 911 operator. Any race/gender. Has a positive attitude toward the job but still learning the ropes and lacks confidence.

TERRY, 50's, supervisor at the 911 dispatcher call center. Any race/gender. Veteran dispatcher. Supportive and passionate about his line of work.

MAN-30'S and up, any race/ethnicity. Caller to the 911 center.

VOICE-Age not important but should be of an adult. Another caller.

SETTINGS

911 dispatcher call center in a small town somewhere in the U.S.

PRODUCTION NOTES
For all living room theater creators and beyond: This play should be rehearsed on an empty stomach and performed after dinner as a means to digest your food and whatever trials and tribulations the day may have brought you. I beg that you perform with improvised costumes, bed sheets, flashlights, music, and create the world of the call center using your couches, your kitchens, your bathrooms, open your windows, and get out those aluminum foil headsets. The callers voices can be either pre recorded and incorporated into the live action or you could do the voices live. Freedom to explore.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Houses on The Moon and the Play at Home Project. This play is based (loosely) on a Facebook post by an Oregon police department. So, thank you Newport Police Department for your expertise in the matter.
SCENE ONE: A 911 CALL CENTER

A room with a few cubicles. Perla sits at her desk with all of her attention placed on the 7 screens displaying maps and GPS satellite views of streets and areas in town. Several phones of various sizes are positioned around the desk. Next to Perla is Terry, he/she is tapping a pen and his/her foot, checking his/her watch.

TERRY
We had 300 calls last night.

PERLA
Oh my, that’s a lot.

TERRY
That’s why I got you on the latest shift, sorry, I know it’s not the most glamorous time of the day.

PERLA
This is better, I need to learn in a slower paced environment.

TERRY
Well, I’m sure this evaluation is gonna be a no brainer, you’re doing great so far.

PERLA
We haven’t even gotten any calls yet.

TERRY
Oh, you’ll get one.

PERLA
What if I mess up?

TERRY
We all mess up.

PERLA
Somebody’s life could be put in jeopardy.
TERRY
Perla, Perla, you’re jumping the gun darlin’-

PERLA
This is a big responsibility, I could literally give somebody the wrong information or not get them a unit sent out in time and a whole family will die, cause of me.

TERRY
You’re a lot to handle, but I like your overall disposition. I think you want to do good. I understand. I was like that too. We were all like that.

PERLA
Really?

TERRY
Yeah, pretty soon, you’ll be multi tasking these phones and screens and knowing your 10-22’s from your 10-29’s like nobody’s business.

PERLA
10-22 is “leave area if all secure” and 10-29 is “caution severe hazard and potential”.

TERRY
Good job. I trained you well.

(A call comes in)

PERLA
Shoot, I can’t do this. My nerves.

TERRY
Yes, you can kid.

PERLA
Why do you believe in me more than I do?

TERRY
Cause that’s my job, to believe in my dispatchers, now answer the call, we don’t know if somebody needs us.

Perla takes a deep breath and puts on a face of determination.
She adjusts her headset and pumps her chair up.

PERLA
(into headset)
911 do you have an emergency?

TERRY
(whispering)
You see, it’s all instincts. Trust.

PERLA
(into headset)
Hello? Hello? They hung up. Should I trace the call and have units patrol the area?

TERRY
No, no, don’t do that, we get hundreds of pocket calls everyday. I myself have pocket called 911. Imagine if we sent out units each time we got a pocket call, we wouldn’t have any patrols left.

Another incoming emergency call comes in. Perla jumps.

PERLA
911 do you have an emergency?

Static. A muffled voices appears.

MAN
Yes, I do.

PERLA
Can you verify your location?

MAN
I’m at home with my family.

PERLA
Are you safe?

MAN
I don’t believe so. My stomach.
TERRY
Sounds like he’s been shot.-

PERLA
Is your family safe?

MAN
They could be in danger as well.

TERRY
(Underneath to Perla)
You see. Follow up.

PERLA
Okay, sir, I understand, please remember to take deep inhalations and complete exhalations at all times, remain calm.

MAN
Okay, I’m breathing.

PERLA
Now, tell me...What happened?

MAN
It all started this morning, when we went to the grocery store.

PERLA
Were you assaulted or accosted.

MAN
This country is disintegrating!

PERLA
It’s okay sir, I’m here to help you but you have to tell me what happened?

Beat

MAN
There is no more toilet paper!

PERLA
Oh.
TERRY
(underneath to Perla)
Is this a prank?

MAN
Sold out. Everywhere. We even drove 20 minutes outside of
town and they didn’t have any either. Now, what are we
supposed to do???

PERLA
Sir, this line is reserved for emergencies.

MAN
This is insane! This IS an emergency!!

PERLA
I can give you the number to the non emergency line.

MAN
I got a house with five people on a full stomach, we just ate
turkey chili and bison burgers and at any moment we’re gonna
explode, and there is nothing to wipe with!

PERLA
Sir, please refrain from yelling into the phone.

MAN
Can you do something?

PERLA
What do you want me to do?

MAN
Can you have somebody bring us some.

PERLA
We don’t handle scarcity of commodities.

MAN
Do you know the mess that is going to occur if we don’t get
some toilet paper?
PERLA
Okay, I’m sorry to hear this is happening to you but I will have to terminate this call because this does not classify as an actual emergency according to the county mandate. Call is disconnecting.

MAN
No, no, no, PLEASE don’t hang up. I’m in danger!

PERLA
Sir please, I can’t help you.

MAN
It’s starting.

PERLA
What’s starting.

MAN
The pains.

PERLA
Pains?

MAN
I’ve been holding it in for 12 hours and now it’s coming.

PERLA
What’s coming?

MAN
The bison burger. The turkey chili.

We hear screaming in the background.

PERLA
Is everything okay? I heard screams.

MAN
It’s happening to my partner too. Oh my God.

More screams.
MAN
And my children!
    (to partner at home)
I’m on the line with them honey, they said they can’t send us any.

Screaming.

MAN
You have to help us.

TERRY
That’s it, let me talk to this bozo.

PERLA
No, no, Terry, I can handle it. This is what I’ve been trained for.

TERRY
All right.

Terry exhales and backs away. Perla does a quick search online, does some swift maneuvers locating some documents.

PERLA
Sir, you have multiple options.

MAN
What are they, please, hurry.

PERLA
As I understand, we are not the first creatures in history to be in such a predicament. Paper as a form of wiping was not introduced until the 14th century. By the Chinese. They used it and made over 1 million rolls a year. In fact, the department will be publishing this in our frequently asked questions on the website. But basically you need to be resourceful and you need to be patient. Ancient Romans and Seamen used to soak sponges in salt water and put it on a stick, and that solved the problem. We are a coastal town sir, so we have an abundance of salt water, and seashells (those are an option as well). Now if the measures are desperate and there is nothing reasonable then remember that the Mayans used corn cobs.
I know it seems graphic but it’s quite effective and has minimal ecological impact compared to wasteful paper. So you’ll be doing your country a favor.

    TERRY
    (underneath to Perla)
Excellent.

    She winks at Terry.

    MAN
It came out. I feel it in my pants.

    PERLA
Do you have any napkins?

    MAN
(screaming)
They sold out of those too! Oh, America! There’s another one coming. Land of the Free! Home of the... Halleluyah, it won’t stop coming out.

    PERLA
How about newspapers?

    MAN
I only read online.

    PERLA
Do you have coupons from the supermarket?

    MAN
(To Partner)
Honey do we have any coupons???

    Woman in background screams “NO!”

    PERLA
The Yellow Pages?

    MAN
(To Partner)
Do we have a yellow pages?

    Another screaming “No”
PERLA
Okay, sounds like you’re going to have to go with the ancient option.

MAN
It’s coming down my leg.

PERLA
Are you in proximity of your kitchen?

MAN
No, but I can crawl there.

PERLA
Okay crawl there and get the sponge from your sink.

MAN
Okay.

We hear screaming children, sounds of horror.

MAN
This is a war zone over here.

PERLA
Have you arrived to the kitchen?

MAN
I have the sponge.

PERLA
Now, do you have a wooden utensil, like a ladle or spoon?

MAN
Yes ma’am.

We hear Man dramatically opening drawers and searching.

PERLA
You’ll want to find a way to tie the sponge now.

MAN
Ok okay, I found some butcher string. I’m tying it! It’s madness over here.
PERLA
Stay calm, administer your own cleaning first and then help others in your family. It’s just like oxygen masks on a plane.

MAN
Understood. I’m beginning to clean. I’ve never done this, how do I...?

PERLA
Submerge the sponge in the salt water.

MAN
Salt water??? Where am I supposed to find salt water, I would have to take a 60 minute drive.

PERLA
Just put salt in a bowl sir, and add water.

MAN
Oh, okay okay.. I can do that, Oh my god I can barely move my legs.

PERLA
You’re gonna make it, I’m here on the line.

The man frantically gets the salt water but destroys his kitchen in the process.

MAN
I submerged the sponge.

PERLA
Proceed.

We hear sounds of struggle of a man in utter distress.

MAN
I think I got it.
PERLA
Ok good, now take a towel, cut it into small pieces, and give one rag to each of your family members after soaking them in a NEW and clean bowl of salt water for approximately 20 seconds.

MAN
Ok, I will do that. Thank you, you saved us.

PERLA
Don’t thank me, sir. Just be safe, take care of your family and the best thing you can do in times of quarantine is to stay home and be a good citizen. Good bye, this call is disconnecting.

Call is done

TERRY
I’m speechless.

PERLA
Was that just me?

TERRY
The way you handled that...was...

PERLA
Did I pass the evaluation?

TERRY
You handled it like a natural. A professional. I would of hung up on the guy in a second. You showed poise. Patience. Serenity. Although you knew this was not of a true emergency nature you honored his anxieties, let him know that we do not handle scarcities of household items and yet you gave him options as to how to handle his circumstance. That is advanced dispatching. You passed.

PERLA
For real??

TERRY
Yup.
Perla gets up and does a celebration dance. Terry has no choice but to join in.

PERLA
I passed! I passed! I passed!

Then another call comes in. She answers with joy.

PERLA
911 do you have an emergency?

Beat. Static.

VOICE
Yes. I still haven’t received my box from Amazon.

Perla and Terry give each other an incredulous look, then sigh. It’s going to be a long night.

LIGHTS FADE.

END OF PLAY