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
“What-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.

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)*

TED
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