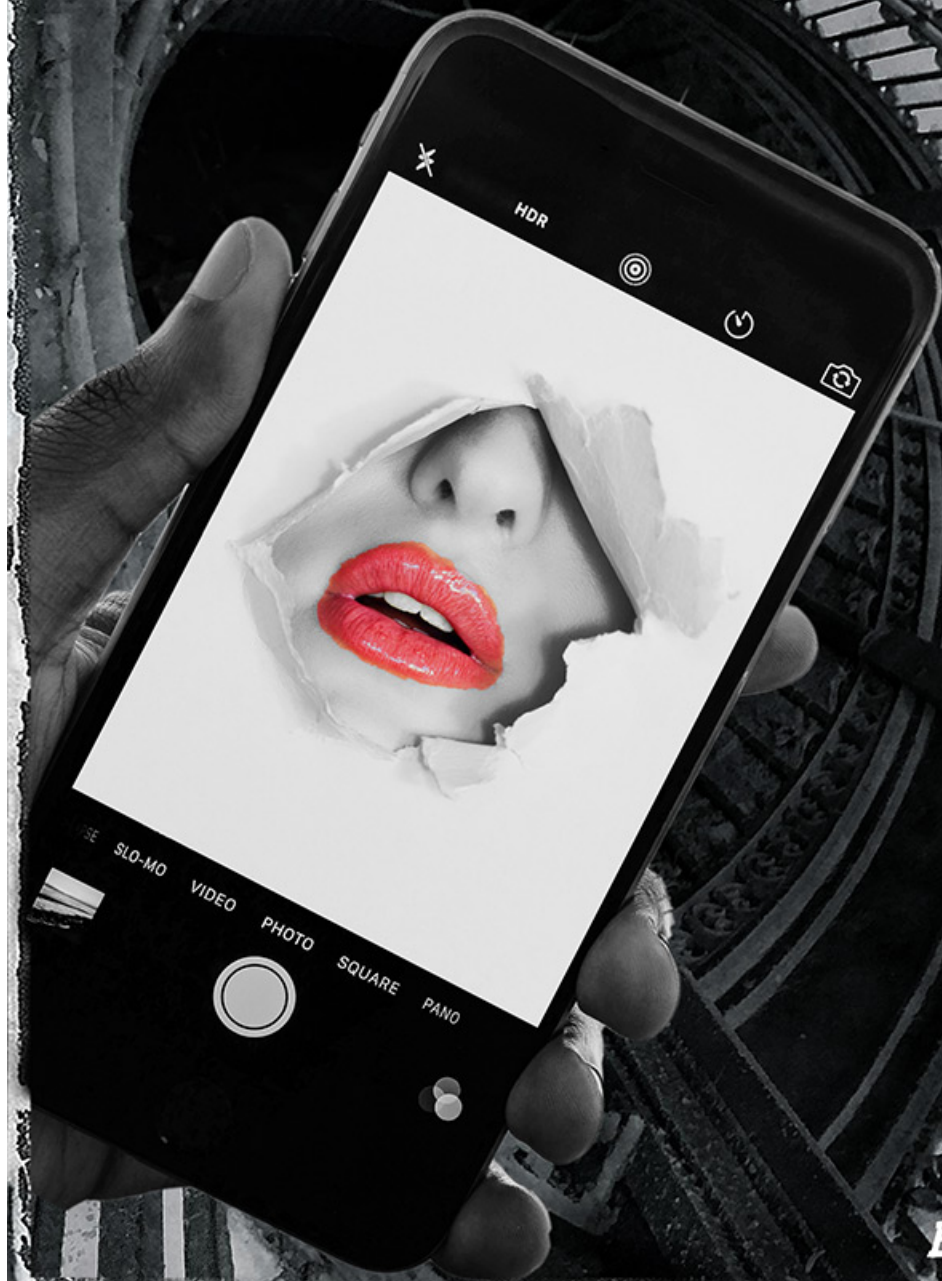




WRONG CALL

A symphony of schadenfreude



BAMBI EVERSON

WRONG CALL

One act, approx. 75 minutes.

CHARACTERS

ROGER EDWARDS (30s) - Hapless, tightly wrapped.

ANDY CRAWFORD (30s) - Roger's best friend. Loyal, problem solver.

EMILY MAYNARD (20s-30s) - Roger's ex. Volatile. Determined.

SHERYL STEINMAN (late 30s) - Strong, independent. Ice queen.

OFFICER GAIL CANNADY (late 30s - early 40s) - Veteran, dedicated, no-nonsense.

SAMMY - (30s-40s) - Prison guard. Could be doubled by ANDY or OFFICER GAIL.

MAN (40s-50s) - Customer in bar. Doubled by ANDY.

ASSORTED OFFSTAGE TV VOICES - News Announcer, Contestant, etc. Doubled by anyone.

TIME: 1997.

PLACE: New York City and a bar in New Mexico.

SYNOPSIS: An impulsive phone call by a hapless restaurant manager leads to a symphony of schadenfreude. A tale of one man's blunders, trying to cover up an embarrassing incident spiraling out of control.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Marlene should be pronounced Mar-LAY-nuh.

SCENE 1

Lights up on ROGER. He enters a hotel room He has wine and flowers. He turns on the TV while he looks for a place to put the flowers.

TV SOUND

In today's news, Congressman Harold Simons weighs in on President Bill Clinton and the Paula Jones scandal. Harold?

(Harold's voice)

President Clinton has made a mockery of the sanctity of marriage. If he forgets his vows to his wife to love, honor and cherish, how can he possibly remember his vows to our great nation?

ROGER

Sanctimonious asshole.

Roger changes the channel to MTV. The Spice Girls "Say You'll be There" comes on. Roger paces around for a moment, Takes out his flip phone, Thinks better of it, and uses the hotel phone to make an outgoing call. He turns off the TV.

ROGER

Hello... I'd like to make an... er, appointment. I got your number from my friend at... Ok sure. Right. I've never done this before. Yes! I know that's what they all say, but in this case, it happens to be true. Whatever. No, I am not a cop. I promise. I manage a restaurant. Why do you care? Oh... yes... I see... I can pay up front. The hotel, too. Already did that. So... um... How do I choose?

(Pause)

A woman obviously... well, not obvious to you, sorry. A woman... with female parts. Around my age... oh, I'm 29. No Catholic school girls in pigtails or anything. Not that there's anything wrong with that as long as they are legal. Oh right. Yes. I am aware of that. I mean... it should be legal... You know, between consenting adults... a sex therapist costs \$300 an hour for the same thing. Really? \$300? What does she do for \$300?

(Pause as he listens, getting increasingly uncomfortable)

Ew! OK... none of that is necessary... So, what have you got around the \$250 mark? No, that's fine as long as she doesn't look like my mother. Kind of a cross between Dr. Ruth and a Bassett Hound. No, I love dogs... not in that way, of course... I am at the Giraffe hotel on 28th Street. 9pm is good. I got off at 7. Got off work!! Oh my God! Can you tell I am new to this? My name? Really? You need that? Oh, right. I registered as Bond. James Bond. And she is... Haha, very funny. Oh, sorry. Yes. Cash. 1 hour, though I doubt it will take that long.

Any discount for 15 minutes? No. Of course. The whole hour even if... I get it. I mean, that's fine. I'll be waiting. Um... Thank you, Marlene. You have a nice day, too.

(Hangs up phone)

Oh, Lord!

Checks himself in the mirror. Checks his wallet. Counts out what he needs and puts everything else in a drawer. Thinks better of it and looks for a hiding place. In a paper bag, he has boxes of condoms. He opens them and puts them by the bed. ROGER is pacing about the hotel room. He checks the bed for bedbugs with a flashlight. Checks to see if sheets are clean. Remakes and straightens bed. Puts the wine on the coffee table and attempts to open it. He stops. ROGER picks up his cell phone and dials.

ROGER

(to a voicemail)

Hi, Andy. Um... its me. I just wanted to let you know I am at the Giraffe Hotel. Room 1507. If you don't hear from me by 11pm, I want you to call the police. This is not one of my pranks. I'll explain later... maybe... if I need to... just do it, Ok??? Thanks. Bye.

ROGER goes into the kitchen area and takes out two wine glasses. He puts them on the coffee table. He tries to open the wine to let it breathe. He pulls on the cork so hard that the wine spills all over his shirt.

ROGER

Shit, Shit!

He runs into the bathroom and we hear the water running. He walks out and his shirt is sopping wet, with the stain still on it. He rips off his shirt and attempts to wring it out but where? He wrings it out into the wine glass.

ROGER

Oh God!

He grabs the glass and his shirt and runs back into the bathroom. We hear the water running.. There is a knock at the door. Another knock. Louder...

ROGER

(off stage)

Door's open! Come on in!

EMILY enters. She is an attractive woman dressed like one would picture a hooker if they only saw them in movies. She examines the surroundings.

ROGER

Sorry. I'll be out in a minute. Pour yourself a glass of wine if you like. I had a little accident.

EMILY

Right. Lots of guys have premature accidents. It's Ok. I'll work with it. Got any Coke?

ROGER

No. Sorry. I never thought to bring drugs.

EMILY

No. Coke as in Coca Cola. They usually stick some in the mini fridge. Ok if I look? I know they cost like \$8.

ROGER

What? Yeah... Take whatever you want. From the fridge. Be right out.

EMILY takes a coke and a Hershey bar and goes and sits on the couch. ROGER enters shirtless with the clean wineglass in his hand.

ROGER

Sorry.

EMILY turns around. They both scream! EMILY starts throwing whatever is handy at ROGER - pillows, coke can, pens...etc.

EMILY

Goddamn it! I suppose you think this is funny! You bastard! Who ratted me out?

ROGER

(ducking the flying objects)

Oh, my God! Stop! I didn't know. How could I know? You... *You're Pussy Galore?*

EMILY

You're the one who made me watch all those goddamned James Bond movies.

EMILY has nothing else to throw, so she takes off her shoe and throws that at him.

EMILY

I'll give you shaken not stirred, you son of a bitch!

ROGER

Ow!!!

(picks up the shoe)

Where did you get these shoes? Hookers R Us?

EMILY

Screw you! You're not exactly dressed for success, yourself. Go put on a shirt. I'm having flashbacks. Looks like you got that third nipple removed. That's something.

ROGER

It's wet... the shirt... Hold on.

Rummages through his bag and pulls out a crumpled T shirt. Quickly puts it on.

ROGER

This has got to be a joke.

EMILY

Do you see me laughing? This is not remotely funny.

ROGER

Ok. Ok. Lets calm the fuck down for a second. I need to process. Can we talk?

EMILY

We're gonna have to, because if you think...

ROGER

Ew!! No. Too weird. You want some wine?

EMILY

You stole that from the restaurant, didn't you?

ROGER

No! ...Ok. I did. Ages ago.

EMILY

It was supposed to be for our anniversary! No, I don't want any. I'll stick with the Coca Cola and a nine dollar bag of M&Ms. In fact, think I'll have another.

EMILY goes and raids the mini fridge of all the candy.

EMILY

Skittles?

ROGER

I'm good. Can you explain something to me?

EMILY

Sure... whatever. It's your nickel.

ROGER

How... how did you...

EMILY

I could ask you the same thing. James Bond? So cliché. Do you want to know how many clients have used that name?

ROGER

No. I don't want to know anything about your clients.

EMILY

Well, for the future, you should pick a more fitting pseudonym... like Pee Wee Herman or Steve Urkel.

ROGER

There will be no more future endeavors. This has thrown a very wet blanket on the whole idea. When did this start? When we were together? Is that why we never had sex? Because you didn't like working from home?

EMILY

You really are an asshole, you know? You fired me, remember? I was the best waitress that place ever had. Nice call, hiring me off the books, so I couldn't collect unemployment. I don't think that's even legal either.

ROGER

That was your idea! So you could pay down those student loans. That was supposed to be helpful.

(Pause)

I didn't think it was a good idea for us to keep working together after... you know...

EMILY

You dumped me. I got angry. What did you expect?

ROGER

Not you stomping on the entire Japanese rib steak in front of the customers.

EMILY

I was tenderizing it!

ROGER

You can't do ...this!

EMILY

Why not? I've almost got enough for grad school.

ROGER

Forgive me for bringing up the obvious, but the main reason we broke up was your utter disinterest in sex.

EMILY

I didn't have much interest in being a waitress, either. That's why they call it work! I am a sex WORKER. And incidentally, it wasn't sex I was disinterested with, it was sex with you!

ROGER

Great! Just what I needed to hear. As if my soul hadn't been crushed enough today. Now I'm getting a verbal weenie roast!

EMILY

I am not going to lower myself by insulting your anatomy.

ROGER

Why not? You are lowering yourself to do everything else.

EMILY

I'm leaving.

ROGER

Yes. I think you'd better. Here, take your shoe.

ROGER tosses her shoe back at her which she catches deftly. There is a long pause as she gathers herself together.

Well?
 ROGER

It's \$250.
 EMILY

What?
 ROGER

My time. It's \$250 an hour. Even if we don't use the whole hour.
 EMILY

You are crazy. I am not paying you \$250 to fight with me! We fought for free at home!
 ROGER

Lots of men pay just to talk. It's therapy.
 EMILY

I am already paying a therapist. Last week, we talked about why my ex-girlfriend stopped sleeping with me. Next week is going to be a doozy!
 ROGER

I can't leave here without the money. 50% goes to Marlene.
 EMILY

I am not paying \$250 to NOT have sex with you.
 ROGER

Fine. You wanna...
 EMILY
(she gestures with her hands)

I've got two minutes.
 ROGER

Ewww! No! And that's not fair. Two minutes?
 EMILY

Ok, Maybe two minutes and 30 seconds. I used to play a RAMONES song in my head. You always finished before it did.
 ROGER

Which song? Never mind. I don't wanna know. I'll never be able to listen to them again.
 EMILY

That's a bit drastic, don't you think? Always the drama queen. But seriously, you gotta pay up. There are consequences for welchers. You've seen Taxi Driver, right?

ROGER

I took you to see Taxi Driver. Is that what inspired the outfit? This isn't the 70s anymore.

EMILY

You think the rules have changed? They screen people much more carefully now since AIDS you know. There is no real anonymity. No matter what fake name you give, they will find you. You don't pay, you will be hurt and there is nothing I can do about it. I owe Marlene half of what I earn and \$50 to the guy waiting in the coffee shop across the street. He protects me if I encounter any crazies. I throw a sock out the window... that's code for "come right up." However, if I come down without his cut, well, that's bad for me and worse for you. So I suggest you pay up and I'll just get out of here.

ROGER

Ok. Sure. Here.

Pulls out his wallet and gives her \$250.

EMILY

What, no tip? A tip is usually customary. You should know that.

ROGER

Oh, my God! Are you serious? I still have to pay for all that shit you ate out of the mini fridge.

EMILY

Fine. Whatever. Whatcha got? That wine is cheap.

ROGER

I have one of those new Metrocards. There's \$80 bucks on it.
(pulls out his wallet to show her)

EMILY

That'll do.

(EMILY takes it)

ROGER

I can't believe this.. Three months ago, we were in an albeit dysfunctional relationship, but I was making an effort. Dinners, Flowers, I massaged your feet after a long shift. I mean, I knew I'd have to break up with you eventually if things didn't change but there was that slim particle of hope that things would get better. Now look at us. Look at what we are both doing. Who ever thought we'd be in this position?

EMILY

Or any position.

ROGER

I'll tell you one thing, You have cured any curiosity I ever had about the sex industry. This particular experience has left a very sour taste in my mouth.

EMILY

Funny, that's what I usually say. Take care of yourself, Roger.

EMILY turns to leave.

ROGER

Em, Wait.

EMILY stops.

ROGER

I'm sorry. About firing you.

EMILY

Karma's a bitch, ain't it? See ya!

EMILY exits. ROGER stands, stunned for a moment. He goes to the fridge and takes out a pack of Skittles. He turns on the TV and sits in a stupor as the lights dim.

BLACKOUT