

# IF A TELEMARKETER

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*AFTER STEPHEN DUNN*

If a telemarketer calls you crying  
at 7 pm on a Tuesday, and her voice is young  
and thin and quivering like half-  
dead spider legs and she is so clearly midwestern  
and so blatantly under-experienced, stumbling over  
a clunky script about childhood cancer, would  
you hang up after the mention of her affiliation? Would you  
hear the radio static of smoker's  
coughs in the background and say  
"Take me off your list"? Or would you politely listen  
to her teary pitch before saying "I'm not interested,"  
or "Not right now" or "This is a bad time to talk"?  
But then, when she chokes out  
her rehearsed rebuttal, would you sigh and hang  
up? Or would you understand  
the covenant between caller and called, that  
she is paid to be rejected and hates this as much as  
you do. Would you then donate  
fifteen reluctant dollars, feeling  
sorry for the children with cancer or the girl  
or yourself? Or ask skeptically how much  
of this donation goes to these sick children? And when  
the guilty truth slips out of "less  
than 10%" would you scold her for  
exploiting suffering for a living? For  
profiting off pity? Calling you,  
crying? Or would you recognize

her voice, an anxious child forced  
to order for herself at a restaurant?  
Would you hear in the connection how the phone  
she holds is ancient and suspiciously  
sticky, the fluorescent lights above her buzz.  
Would you hear how the man at the next desk  
eyes her thighs and how the woman on her left takes  
loud swigs from a 2 liter of diet Mountain Dew  
every five minutes and Frank Delano had threatened  
suicide twice that night, how she keeps  
this job because it's a decent walk and her shoes  
have begun to separate from their soles and she's  
struggling to pay for a school that will distance  
her from the thigh-eyeing men and the  
Mountain Dew-guzzling women while  
slowly learning she's no different from them? If  
you were that telemarketer, that girl, would you cry?  
Choke out a "thank you for your time"? An apology?  
What would your relationship with pity be?  
With empathy become? How long would it take until  
you quit, or become a Frank Delano?