SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE

Logline: During a regular night shift, a train station worker receives a desperate phone call from a scared child, lost in the darkness.

1 INT. TRAIN STATION TICKET DESK — NIGHT — 1983 1

A cramped and dusty ticket office.

PETER DOLAN (50s, rough beard) sits behind a glass partition, scribbling in a logbook. An electric heater sits in the corner, basking the room in a warm glow.

The clock on the wall shows 2am.

PETER gives the heater a gentle nudge in his direction with his foot, just enough to turn it a couple of inches, before returning to his logbook.

RING RING.

PETER startles slightly. The rotary phone lets out another harsh ring.

He stares at it, then at the clock on the wall, then back at the phone.

It rings twice more.

He hesitantly lifts the receiver.

PETER
Malton Station, erm-you're through to...this is the ticket office... how may I help you?

There is a pause of crackling silence.

PETER (cont'd)
Hello?

Another brief pause before...

GIRL (O.S.)
I can't get out.

It's the voice of a child, a young girl, faint and shaking.

PETER doesn't speak.

GIRL (O.S.) (cont'd)
The door's locked. I can't get out and I'm scared.

PETER glances out at the platform. It's empty.

PETER
Right, we don't need to panic, I'm sure we can sort it. Where are you?

GIRL (O.S.)
I-I don't know. I was getting on a train with my mummy but she's gone now.

PETER
(Looking out, scanning the platform)
That's okay, we'll find her. What's your name?

There is a buzzing silence.

PETER (cont'd)
Hello?

GIRL (O.S.)
I came to get a train with my mummy but she left me on my own and I can't get out.

PETER
(softly)
I know, I know. There's no rush, just tell me what you can see and then someone to come and get you, alright?

Pause.

GIRL (O.S)
It's a big room, with lots of chairs.

PETER begins to make notes in a notebook: BIG ROOM, CHAIRS.

PETER
Okay, it sounds like you're in the waiting room, so that's fine, we can find you there. Is there anyone else in there with you at the moment?

GIRL (O.S.)
No, they all left when the smoke came in.

PETER
(Beat)
What smoke?

GIRL (O.S.)
It came under the door and then everyone ran away.

PETER stands up suddenly, takes his coat from the hook and puts it on, shaking. He grabs his flashlight, all while keeping the phone to his ear.

PETER
Okay, stay there, I can come and get you.

GIRL (O.S.)
It's outside the window. I can't open the door.

PETER
Don't try and open the door, just stay where you are.

GIRL (O.S.)
The door handle is hot.

PETER
Yeah, don't try and open it, alright? I'm going to come and find you.

GIRL (O.S.)
Please don't leave me.

PETER
I'm not leaving, I'll be right there in just two seconds. Stay on the phone, okay?

Silence.

PETER (cont'd)
Hello?

Pause.

PETER (cont'd)
(Urgent)
Can you hear me?

GIRL (O.S.)
The lights have gone off.

PETER
They haven't, don't worry. The lights are all-

BLACKOUT. The entire station goes dark except for the glow of the heater.

PETER (cont'd)
(Panicked)
No-no, that can’t-

He slams his flashlight on. It doesn't do much but it's enough. The telephone line goes dead: a hollow silence.

PETER (cont'd)
(Into phone)
Are you still there?

Complete silence.

PETER’s breathing echoes in the darkness. He clicks the receiver; no dial tone.

PETER (cont'd)
Shit.

2 EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM — CONTINUOUS 2

The ticket office door creaks open and the flashlight beam shines through.

PETER sticks his head out slowly and looks up and down the platform. There's no one around. Nothing moves.

PETER
(Almost shouting)
Hello?

Nothing.

PETER (cont'd)
Hello?

He steps out and closes the door behind him.

PETER (cont'd)
(To self, whispered)
Come on Peter...straight there, straight back...

He takes a deep breath and begins to move down the platform, shining the light into every corner.

3 INT. STATION BUILDING — NIGHT 3

PETER turns down a corridor, reaching a door above which is a sign: WAITING ROOM. He looks up and down the hall. No sign of fire, or smoke, or people.

He reaches his hand out and slowly turns the door handle.

4 INT. WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 4

PETER cautiously pushes the door open and steps in.

PETER
Hello?

Silence.

PETER (cont'd)
I'm from the ticket office...I-I think we spoke just now...on the phone?

Nothing.

PETER (cont'd)
It's alright, I've opened the door for you.
(Beat)
There's no fire, I've checked. You can come out...if you want?

He steps further in, and hesitantly begins searching behind each bench and under each table. He stands up and lets out a sigh. He is just about to turn back towards the door when -

ECHOED FOOTSTEPS, rapid, sprinting down the far side of the room.

PETER freezes.

He shines the light toward the sound but sees nothing.

PETER (cont'd)
(whisper)
Hello?

Behind him, the footsteps run again, this time closer.

Peter’s breath stops. He swivels, shining the light into the darkness but again sees nothing.

PETER (cont'd)
(shaking)
Please just-just come out where I can see you.

The door creaks, he turns towards it and just catches it slowly swinging, almost unnoticeably.

PETER walks towards it, reaching out to pull it open and as he does he sees a doll sitting on the ground.

It's burned around the edges, slightly melted below its eyes.

He bends down and picks it up, his fingers trembling.

A sudden echoed crying, desperate, and far away, ripples down the hall.

PETER (cont'd)
(quickly, voice cracking)
Stop this. Stop it now.

No response.

He turns and rushes back down the corridor.

5 INT. TRAIN STATION TICKET DESK – NIGHT 5

He enters the ticket office and slams the door behind him, throwing the doll to the ground.

PETER runs over to the phone and begins dialing. He holds the receiver to his ear but there is no dial tone, just silence.

He dials again, constantly looking around, ensuring he is alone.

Still nothing.

He slams the phone back on the hook and his eye catches his notebook. The words he had written before were now scribbled out.

Below them is a child's crude drawing of a stick-figure man, with a beard, holding a flashlight. He has sad eyes, an upturned mouth and a tear rolling down his cheek. Beside him, in scrawled handwriting, are written the words: Please find me.

The phone rings again.

RING RING...RING RING...RING RING

PETER looks at the phone reluctantly.

He slowly reaches out and lifts the receiver with a CLICK.

PETER
(Slowly, softly)
Hello?

There is an empty buzz and crackle, then

GIRL (O.S.)
I can't get out.

PETER
Who is this? If this is a joke then it's not very funny. I'm calling the police.

GIRL (O.S.)
The fire's nearly here. It's getting warmer.

PETER
Whoever you are, you-you need to call someone else, not me. I'm not helping you anymore.

There is another long pause. Only the hum of the phone and PETER's breath can be heard.

GIRL (O.S.)
Why won't you find me, Peter?

PETER
(Pause)
How...how do you know my name?

GIRL (O.S.)
I'm so scared and alone. Why won't you find me?

PETER
I came to find you, there's no one here. There's no fire.

GIRL (O.S.)
It's so dark.

PETER
I don't know who this is, but-but if it's someone playing some silly game...or something...it's got to stop now, alright?

GIRL (O.S.)
My mummy left me in the fire.

PETER
Please, there's no fire. Please stop saying there's a fire.

Silence.

GIRL (O.S.)
Where are you, Peter? What can you see?

PETER
Stop.

GIRL (O.S.)
Can you see *me*?

PETER's breath stops. He looks out from the partition but there is only darkness, and his pale face staring back from the reflection.

GIRL (O.S.) (cont'd)
Stay there Peter, I'll come and find you.

The phone cuts out.

PETER is frozen with fear. The receiver falls from his ear and swings on its wire.

PETER stumbles back then grabs his bag from a coat hook, dropping his flashlight in the panic. He scrambles around fumbling for it, his hands shaking. He grabs it, throws the door open and hurries out into the darkness, his flashlight flailing as he runs.

The door knocks over a broom, which in turn, knocks the electric heater forward. Smoke begins to rise as the glow intensifies on the carpet, developing into a small flame. Then a larger flame.

The doll lies on its side with the flames reflected in its glassy eyes.

A child's arm reaches down and curls around the doll.

CUT TO BLACK