

THE TALK TO THE DEAD NETWORK
Treatment
April 22, 1997 **(Revised May 27, 2026)**
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ACT I

We meet Patrick just as he is being fired from his job as a middle manager in a local corporation. He goes home and ponders his fate. He hated the job anyway, so that's the good news; the bad news is his debts are mountainous. He begins drinking. His girlfriend arrives and learning of his situation announces that she has recently begun seeing another man—a rich landlord. Patrick's drinking intensifies. Past midnight he turns on the TV and sees a Dionne Warwick infomercial for the Psychic Friends Network. He recalls a *60 Minutes* broadcast that reported PFN was grossing \$28 million a month, and Dionne Warwick has already earned more than \$100 million from her participation. And then, like a bolt from the blue, he has the great idea that will change his life and make him the man he always wanted to be: *The Talk To The Dead Network*.

ACT II

Seeking a financial partner, Patrick visits a friend from his high school days who now owns a multi-location automobile dealership and lays out the concept behind the *Talk To The Dead Network*.

He will put together a half-hour infomercial for a service that will allow consumers to speak to their dead relatives and friends over the telephone. Calls to the *Talk To The Dead Network* will be beamed into space using an omnidirectional microwave transmitter. If the target of a caller happens to be in her or his religion's good place (heaven or whatever), according to Patrick,

the transmission will be received somewhere up there; if the target happens to be in a bad place (hell or whatever), the call will be picked up in the molten interior of Venus or another hot spot.

For the privilege of this unique communication, callers will be charged \$3.99 per minute. They can talk as long as they like, but the dead, who are on another plane entirely, will not be able to talk back other than telepathically. Callers are instructed to listen to what the deceased is saying *in their minds*; whatever they imagine the deceased is saying is what the deceased *is* saying because it is inspired by the deceased. Patrick's buddy loves the idea and agrees to finance a trial of the project.

To get the gravy train rolling, Patrick sets up a bank of ten telephone lines that are terminated at a microwave transmitter, hires some operators, and places an ad in the local newspaper soliciting people to dial his number to test the service at no charge. He is very pleased by the heavy response and talks with each caller at the completion of the call. Many are delighted by the service and enjoy long chats with those in the hereafter. Patrick interviews each of them personally. He chooses four who are especially happy about their communications and also photogenic and expressive. These four he agrees to pay to appear on his premiere *Talk To The Dead Network* infomercial. He also hires an attractive local celebrity to host the show.

When Patrick approaches the local television station to purchase time, the sales manager listens to the idea skeptically, but once Patrick starts writing out a large check, agrees to air the program.

The show is a huge local success. Dozens of callers soon become hundreds and then thousands. By chance, a visiting executive from the Sable Television

Network sees the program, learns about its success from the local television manager, is impressed, and ultimately asks Patrick to go national with it. This succeeds massively, too, and pretty soon *Talk To The Dead Network* infomercials are being viewed somewhere around the world at every hour of the day in scores of languages. Media super stars now serve as hosts and recount colorful tales of their conversations with the departed.

Understandably, Patrick becomes rich beyond his wildest dreams and his whole miserable life changes dramatically. Exotic women love him and he practically has his pick, politicians embrace him, he receives honorary degrees from a number of universities, and becomes the friend of religious leaders everywhere. Even televanglists use his service and proclaim it authentic.

Fabulously wealthy and famous, with condos, homes, and cottages in exotic places around the world and a fleet of flashy cars, Patrick gives control of the Network to a trusted business associate named Carter Hood and sets out to live the very good life. Some people complain to the FCC about the Network and how it is draining money from people they know and there is a series of highly critical media examinations of what is clearly a bald-faced fraud. Government authorities can do nothing because speech, even to the dead, is protected by the First Amendment. And really, how can you dissuade a true believer that the cherished conversation he or she just had with a relative long lost to the bye-and-bye was not real?

Patrick laughs all of the way to the bank despite the fact that he knows that the dead don't talk because, well, they're dead. He marvels at the foolishness of people, but, hey, he played the chump for years and where did it get him? Fired from a job he hated; begging to get another he probably would like less. He simply joined the fraternity-sorority of hucksters, from ministers to get-

rich-quick hucksters, who every day squeeze a handsome living out of the hopes, dreams, and fears of their fellow naked apes. Faced with being screwed or screwing, Patrick finally chose the latter, morality be damned.

Things are going swimmingly but then one morning he reads a newspaper story about Connie Cronleen, an attractive and intelligent woman he had known in high school. Connie ran in social circles different from Patrick's back at the home of the Fightin' Fangs, but he had loved her from afar. Connie grew up to be a world-renowned biologist. The newspaper article outlines her involvement in an uncrewed space probe that just confirmed the oceans of Europa, a satellite of Jupiter, are teeming with life. Patrick has his minions make a few inquiries and soon learns where she lives and that she is divorced.

He decides to call and finally reaches her. She is happy to hear from Patrick whom she vaguely remembers as a decent sort of guy. Patrick mentions he will be in her city on business, invites her to lunch, and she agrees. He is dazzled anew by her classy looks, charm, her impressive knowledge of science, and her wit. He decides that she is exactly what he needs to be totally happy in this cruel, cold world. Connie likes Patrick, too, and they begin dating. She is not, however, in a hurry to get into another relationship despite the fact that Patrick obviously has money and she finds him interesting company. When she asks him what he does for a living, he tells her that he produces television programs and doesn't mention the *Talk To The Dead Network*, which he views as an embarrassment with someone of Connie's stature. Over time her love grows and before long their candlelight dinners are followed by marriage talk.

Disaster strikes when Patrick and Connie are having dinner in a cozy oceanside restaurant. A colleague of Connie's happens to spot them, walks over to say

hello, and meets Patrick for the first time. Several days later the colleague mentions casually that Patrick certainly has had a profitable career with his worldwide *Talk To The Dead Network*. Connie doesn't understand what the colleague is referring to, having never heard of the *Network*, so the colleague shows her a *Time* magazine article that tells all. Patrick figures prominently in the story. She is horrified that the man she loves is, in reality, a charlatan who has exploited the gullibility and ignorance of people in a most detestable way. She knows his *Talk To The Dead Network* is nothing more than a bloodsucking scam.

ACT III

The next time they meet, Connie confronts Patrick with what she knows, throws the expensive engagement ring he gave her in his face, vows never to see him again, and rushes from the scene. Patrick is massively despondent knowing that the woman of his dreams, the crowning glory of his happiness and success, the woman he wants to spend the rest of his life with, is lost to him forever. All his money can't buy him this love.

Sitting in one of his many mansions, he is again reduced to the wretch he was when the idea for the *Talk To The Network* first dawned on him. Reflecting on his unhappy situation with Connie, he begins drinking, flips on the television, and sees a documentary that compares the vast amounts of money spent on quackery and religion with the relatively wee amounts spent on science, particularly medical research. He becomes disgusted with himself, determines to sell out his entire interest in the *Network*, and to devote his ill-gained fortune to debunking ripoffs such as the one that made him a billionaire and to funding medical research. He communicates his plan to Connie but she

rebuffs him, thinking this sudden change a ruse to win her back; you can't change shameless swindler.

Connie becomes enamored of another man and is nearly ready to walk down the aisle with him when she see a newspaper headline about the discovery of a cure for ovarian cancer. She reads the story and near the end learns that the research that produced this breakthrough was funded by Patrick's foundation. This startling evidence of the change that has come over him softens her heart and she decides to call him. They get together, find their love rekindled after a while, get married, and live happily ever after.

Meanwhile, the *Talk To The Dead Network* is acquired by the Psychic Friends Network which becomes even more fantastically wealthy.

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