Channel 9 Late Edition: The Loufi Halloween Special

“Do Not Stay Up” ft. Burt Maddock

A fictional mock newscast. All characters, places and the station are invented.

Cold Open

Static. A lamp flickers on a dark desk. A refrigerator hums in a key that doesn’t exist.

ANCHOR DELOLAH LOBEER: Good evening from **Wimbertucky**. It’s late. If it’s late, you should be asleep. Tonight, the legend of **The Pounder**.

BURT MADDOCK (resident expert): It’s not a monster, Delolah. It’s a collections agency for sleep.

The studio clock reads 3:17 and stops.

DELOLAH: Our field reporter, **Wankell Jombosprice**, is at the scene.

WANKELL (porch, whispering): Delolah, I’m outside the home of **36never**, so named because he has “never” slept in 36 days. He says he’s fine. He’s holding his eyelids open with a clothespin collection.

Pound. Pound. Pound. The floorboards breathe.

WANKELL: Neighbors are gathering. **Jack McStack**, tell us what you saw.

JACK McSTACK (holding a plate of pancakes at 3 a.m.): I was making a stack, and the stack looked back at me. Then the syrup ran uphill.

Segment Two: The Witnesses

DEVIEN JAYGOJAY (jogging in place, terrified): I go, I go, I go. And then I stopped going. Then I went to bed. I recommend it.

BLACK FOIL (hat made entirely of tinfoil): It’s not The Pounder, it’s The Government. Or a very large pillow. Same thing.

JARREN GREENROD (Sheriff): Folks, please. We’ve had one rule in Wimbertucky since 1987: lights out at 11. You don’t have to like it. You just have to do it.

MIKEY McPINKY (age 9): It said “nighty-night” in my dad’s voice. My dad was downstairs. Then he wasn’t.

Mikey blinks. His pajamas are now a different color.

Segment Three: The Weather

MILAH VOREHEES-SPEEZEBLUE (meteorologist): Tonight's forecast: dark with a high chance of drowsiness. Pressure is dropping, eyelids are dropping, and a cold front of yawns is moving in from the east. Expect heavy pounding by 3:17 a.m.

DELOLAH: That's every night, Milah.

MILAH: And every night, it's right.

Segment Four: The Arrival

The studio goes dark. Only Delolah's lamp stays on. Her shadow moves a half-second late.

BURT: It's not in the building. The building is in it.

JORIA JORALOLONGGREY (elderly woman, rocking in a chair that isn't in the studio): I've watched it take them for sixty years. First it takes the lamp. Then the hush. Then the one who said, "I'm not tired."

The front door of 36never's house grows twelve feet tall. It smiles in a door-like way.

36NEVER (through the door, slurring): I'm good. I just need one more episode.

BURT: They always say that.

A shadow the size of a minivan fills the doorway. The porch light turns a color Channel 9 is not licensed to broadcast.

WANKELL: Delolah, it's… it's very polite. It's wearing a sock. A single enormous sock.

REDROCK "THE SOCK" JD (a sock puppet on The Pounder's arm, narrating in a smooth voice): Good evening. I'm Redrock. I handle the paperwork. Tonight's intake: one **Vietnamkong**, party of one, or possibly several, depending on how you count a man who left no forwarding address.

Pound. Pound. Pound. The sound is now coming from inside the teleprompter.

VIETNAMKONG (a voice, or several, from inside the dark): We didn't mean to stay up. We got invested in a documentary.

REDROCK THE SOCK: Everyone does. Sign here. Initial here. Yawn here.

A single, long yawn rolls across the studio. Every camera dims. A man, or men, vanish from the porch with the soft sound of a coat being hung on a hook.

Segment Five: The Count

The broadcast does not cut to a commercial. It cuts to a different studio. It looks exactly like this one, except every chair is turned to face the wall.

DELOLAH: We seem to have lost our signal. Stand by.

BURT: We haven't lost it, Delolah. It's been rerouted.

DELOLAH: Rerouted where?

BURT: To the part of the night nobody ever tells you about. The part between 3:17 and 3:18.

The studio clock still reads 3:17. A second hand ticks. It does not advance. It ticks in place, like a heartbeat in a room with no body.

BURT (quietly): There is a minute inside the minute. People who stay awake past the warning fall into it. The Pounder keeps the books there.

WANKELL (over a failing feed): Delolah, I can't feel the porch anymore. I think I'm standing on the idea of a porch.

The feed drops to a hiss. When it returns, Wankell is facing the wrong way. His mouth moves a half-second before his words arrive.

WANKELL: There's a list on the door. It's written in something that isn't ink. It has names on it. It has tonight's names.

DELOLAH: Whose names, Wankell?

A long silence. The hiss rises and falls like breathing.

WANKELL: I can read the top one. It says 36never. It says Vietnamkong. It says… it says there are still seats open.

DELOLAH (very still): How many seats?

WANKELL: It doesn't say, Delolah. It just says "Awake." And then it says "For now."

Pound. Pound. Pound. Each one lands a little closer to the camera. The lens fogs from the inside.

REDROCK "THE SOCK" JD (a smooth whisper, from the dark): Intake is open all night, friends. No appointment necessary. Everyone is already on the list. The only question is whether you sign it awake or asleep.

BURT: Asleep is easier.

REDROCK: Asleep is kinder.

The studio lights drop one stop at a time, as if something is slowly turning down a dial. Delolah's reading lamp is the last to go. It does not go out. It *leans away.*

Segment Six: The Search

Handheld camera. A flashlight beam swings through a hallway that is slightly longer than any hallway has a right to be.

SHERIFF JARREN GREENROD (whispering): Nobody touches anything. Nobody says the words "I'm not tired." Devien, you take the stairs.

DEVIEN JAYGOJAY: I go, I go, I go… I'm not going, Sheriff.

GREENROD: That's the first sensible thing you've said all night.

The group enters the kitchen. A single plate of pancakes sits on the counter. It is stacked in a perfect tower. Steam is still rising. Nobody has cooked in this house for days.

JACK McSTACK (hoarse): That's mine. I made that stack. I left it at my place.

GREENROD: Jack. You're looking at it. It's in 36never's kitchen.

JACK: I know. That's what's wrong with it.

The top pancake slowly rotates. Not the plate. The pancake. Something small and dark opens in the middle, like an eye, and then closes again, politely.

BLACK FOIL (adjusting his hat, voice cracking): I told you. It's the pillow. It's been the pillow the whole time. It's soft so you'll trust it.

MIKEY McPINKY (clutching a flashlight bigger than his arm): Daddy said to stay in the van.

GREENROD: Mikey, your dad's not here.

MIKEY: I know. But he's *right behind me.*

Everyone turns. Behind Mikey is an empty hallway. In the dark at the end of it, a tall shape that is almost, but not quite, a man stands holding a coat out in front of itself, the way you would hold a coat for a child.

MIKEY (a tiny voice): He wants me to put it on.

GREENROD (low, steady): Mikey. Look at me. Don't look at him. Walk to me. One step at a time.

Mikey takes one step. The shape takes one step. The floor makes a sound that is not a creak. It is a

swallow.

DEVIEN (from the stairs, barely audible): Sheriff. The basement door is open. It wasn't open before.

The group descends. The basement is far too large. The ceiling is lost in black. In the center stands a bed, perfectly made, with a single indentation in the pillow, as if someone was just lifted out of it.

VIETNAMKONG (a voice, or several, from every corner): We were so close to finishing the documentary.

GREENROD: Where are you?

VIETNAMKONG: We're comfortable. That's the worst part. We're so comfortable.

From the bed, soft and rhythmic, comes the sound of someone sleeping very, very deeply. It goes on a beat too long. Then it syncs with the sound of everyone else's breathing in the room.

DEVIEN (whispering): I'm tired, Sheriff. I wasn't tired five minutes ago.

GREENROD: It's the room. Everyone, out. Now. Count off.

"One." "Two." "Three." "Four." The count stops. Everyone looks around. There are six of them in the basement. Only five counted.

Segment Seven: The Forgetting

Back in the studio, which now has no walls. Only a desk, a lamp, and a darkness with a texture.

DELOLAH: Welcome back. I'm Delolah Lobeer, and this is… this is…

She looks at the lower-third graphic. It is blank.

DELOLAH: I'm sorry. What station is this?

BURT: Channel 9.

DELOLAH: Right. Channel 9. And our field reporter is… He was just here. He's tall? He says "Delolah" like he's apologizing.

BURT (setting his pen down): Wankell Jombosprice.

DELOLAH: Wankell. Yes. Of course. Thank you.

A moment later, she looks at the empty chair beside the desk.

DELOLAH: Who is that chair for?

BURT (a very small, very tired smile): You see how it works.

Burt opens his ledger. The pages are filled with columns of names. As the camera pushes in, the ink begins to lift off the paper, one letter at a time, and drift upward like ash.

BURT: This is the part that frightens me, Delolah. Not the pounding. Not the swallowing. The pounding is honest. It's loud, it's coming, you can brace for it.

BURT: It's the forgetting. When someone is taken, it doesn't stop at the person. It takes the memory of them. The birthday photo. The favorite chair. The sound of the way they said your name.

DELOLAH: That's not possible.

BURT: Tell me what 36never's laugh sounded like.

Delolah opens her mouth. Nothing comes. She tries again. Nothing. Her hand drifts to her throat.

DELOLAH (barely audible): I don't remember a 36never. Is that a person?

BURT: Exactly. That's how it keeps the books balanced.

On the monitor behind them, the credits for tonight's broadcast roll. Name by name, they dissolve before they can be read. The graphic operator's name is gone. The audio engineer's name is gone. The last name on the list flickers, then fades. It was Burt's.

BURT (watching it go, calm): Well. That's about right.

MILAH VOREHEES-SPEEZEBLUE (weather desk, voice hollow): Tonight's forecast… I had one. I had a whole forecast. It had a high and a low and a… what comes after tonight?

JORIA JORALOLONGGREY (from a chair in the dark, rocking, rocking): There's no after, honey. It takes the tomorrow last. It always saves the tomorrow for the end, like dessert.

The studio clock finally moves. 3:17 becomes 3:18. The second hand sweeps. For the first time all night, it looks relieved.

REDROCK "THE SOCK" JD: Beautiful. Look at that. Time heals everything. Especially when it's been asked nicely.

Somewhere in the dark, a name is spoken aloud. Everyone in the studio looks up, certain it was theirs. Not one of them can say what it was.

Segment Eight: After Hours

The pounding stops. Not fades. Stops. The silence that follows is so complete that the studio microphones start picking up the sound of the building's own pulse.

GREENROD (on a handheld, out of breath, walking out of the house into dawn-colored light): Folks, it's… it's over. The Pounder is gone. We've got the count. We lost… we lost…

He stops. He looks at the five survivors beside him. He looks at his own hand. A thin line of tape marks where a name tag used to be.

GREENROD: We lost some people. I can't remember who. But I know it was somebody.

JACK McSTACK (soft, staring at his pancakes, which are now just pancakes): Somebody we liked.

MIKEY McPINKY: My dad found me. He's in the van. He's asleep. He's *so* asleep.

DEVIEN JAYGOJAY (laughing, a high strained laugh, the kind that comes right before crying): We're alive. We're alive! We should… we should celebrate!

BLACK FOIL: Yes. Yes! The pillow was never real. Let's have a party.

A beat. The sky is the exact color of an unlit television. Birds, somewhere, begin a song, then stop mid-note.

MILAH VOREHEES-SPEEZEBLUE (arriving from nowhere, in the same dress she wore for the forecast): After-party at the weather desk! I'll bring the pressure systems!

JORIA JORALOLONGGREY (from her chair, now on the lawn, rocking): You do whatever you want to do, children.

Streamers appear. Nobody saw anyone bring them. A cooler of drinks sits on the porch. Someone has put on a song, but it is playing at half speed, so slow it sounds like a long exhale.

DELOLAH LOBEER (on camera, forcing her professional smile): And that's the story from Wimbertucky, folks. A happy ending. The survivors are gathering for what appears to be an after-party.

BURT MADDOCK: I'll say one thing about the party. I'm not sure whose party it is.

Everyone starts toward the porch. The music slows even further. A paper hat is placed on Jack's head by a hand nobody can see.

REDROCK "THE SOCK" JD (from a pile of gift-wrap, a soft, delighted voice): Oh, you're all so *good* at this. I do love a party. I do love a guest list.

DEVIEN (stopping, the smile sliding off): Why is the guest list… why does it have our names on it?

The porch light flickers from white to a color without a name. The streamers all slowly turn to face the group. Above the house, the sky begins, very gently, to lower.

GREENROD: Everybody. Back away from the porch.

REDROCK: Oh, no, no, no. No party tonight.

The music stops. All the lights go out. A single drawn-out voice, from everywhere, the walls, the floor, the dawn itself, says one word.

THE POUNDER (a vast, gentle, tired voice): *No.*

Pound.

The Sign-Off

Delolah's papers are completely blank. Burt adjusts a tie that is now a bedtime story.

DELOLAH: A reminder from all of us at Channel 9: if you hear heavy pounding from inside your home, don't check the clocks.

BURT: Don't tell it you're not tired.

REDROCK THE SOCK (from somewhere in the dark): Sleep tight.

The lamp clicks off. One last sound in the black: pound… pound… and then, very softly, a yawn.

END OF BROADCAST