



# *CROSSED LINES*

A Comedy in Two Acts

*By*

*Warden Church & Bart Minshale*

## Cast

- Jamie:** *Very camp with a heart of gold and loved by everyone. Has been with the Lovers Hotline for several years.*
- Mary:** *Practical and full of common sense. Along with Jamie, she is part of the original Hotline team.*
- Tracey:** *A relatively new employee. A no-nonsense stereotyped Liverpudlian. Make-up, hair, clothes always 'just right'.*
- Tom:** *Also, a new employee. Bit of a 'Jack the lad' character and definitely 'non pc', but underneath kind and understanding.*
- Betty:** *The cleaner. Earthy and direct. She says it as she sees it! Works for the cleaning company who are tenants in the office block.*
- Veronica** *Mild, unassuming deferential housewife and client of the Lovers Hotline..*
- Lionel** *The local Conservative Party Councillor. Ambitious and keen to promote the Party line. His local Conservative Party rents an office on the upstairs floor.*
- Leonard** *One of the Counsellors of the Lovers Hotline. A quiet, fatherly figure.*
- Fred:** *Security officer for the office block.*

All the characters are of 'indeterminable age'.

The play is set in the call centre office of 'Lovers Hotline', an advisory telephone and counselling service for 'strained relationships'.

# Crossed Lines

Set – An office call centre with 4 desks

## ACT 1 Scene 1

**Jamie** Lovers hotline, we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, how may I help you?

Oh dear .... And how long had you been together ..... three years, what a shame. .... Do you have any idea what caused the split. .... He suggested what? ..... with a what? .... No wonder you split up ..... that wasn't the reason, well what was? You tried it but it broke ..... The end came off. Oh sweetheart, I am so sorry. Do you need medical care? ... Good. Look you tell me all about it and I'll just listen like the good friend you need.

**Mary** Lovers Hotline, I will not take any details or pass them to a third party. Mary speaking, how may I help you? Yes love, we are here to talk to.. to listen and even to dispense advice. Why don't you just tell me what's wrong? You've been dumped for another woman? When did this happen. .... He's still packing ..... Are you happy to let him? ..... No, I would have kicked him out ..... why can't you ..... It's his house and he's packing your stuff. Have you got a rent agreement? ..... and you have it in writing, good .....it's you who pays the rent. Well what does he do?..... He's been unemployed since you moved in. Great ..... Well go down and see the landlady and complain..... It's her he's been seeing ..... That complicates it a bit then. Is there any where else you can go for tonight, a friend, family or something? ..... There isn't..... why can't he go to hers for a few days then, while you sort yourself out. .... She's moving in with him 'cause it's a bigger flat..... Well won't her's be empty then? ..... Well ask them and

suggest you move into hers ..... OK I'll hang on while you ask him .....

*(Shouting)* Tell him you have a signed agreement and your not going to be homeless

..... Don't let him shout at you like that. You can hear him from here.

..... Right what's happening now? ..... He's gone to ask her if you can

swap ..... Right, while he's out of the way, check he's packed everything that's yours

and photograph everything that you've purchased together in the place. ....Because

you have a claim on it and if you do swap over you'll want it furnished. .... Why are

you bothered? ..... You might meet on the stairs. Well there is that, but won't they

be more embarrassed than you and just think of the dirt you can dish to the other tenants.

..... How long has it been going on? ... At least a year, well ask for a rent rebate. ....

Why not? She's been using your flat for all you know, she's certainly been using your man,

so charge her. .... I don't care if it does make him sound like a gigolo, he is one for carrying

on and how many others could there be. ....Exactly, ..... no I'll hang on while you

check everything and he comes back.

**Jamie**

So do you feel calmer now? ..... Good.....yes I find a glass of red can always put

things back in perspective. It also explains the incoherence while you've been conversing.

Just keep your wits about you for a little bit longer love. .... Oh yes, just because

you picked a loser this time, doesn't mean you won't get a prince next time round. That's

been my moto all my life. Having at least half a dozen failed relationships is almost a

necessary qualification for working here. Believe me lovey, we've all had our share of

failures. .... No of course you're not a failure. You know what they say, what doesn't kill

you makes you stronger..... Right, must go, there are others waiting, but first can

I ask you how you found out about us? ..... You've used us before? Was it me

you spoke to? ..... Jason! That is me, I changed my name to Jamie when we moved to

new premises. I thought it sounded a bit more butch. .... Oh yes, we got a fantastic

legacy from one of our regular callers when he committed

suicide shortly after phoning us and it paid for new premises and all new switchboard equipment. If you came to see one of our counsellors now you wouldn't recognise the place. Well you wouldn't anyway as it's new.....we've even changed our name to broaden our scope, we dropped the 'jilted' bit. No we don't discriminate here, you don't have to be dumped to phone us any more.....Oh we're in a big new office block on the new industrial estate..... Oh yes we share it with a security firm, Chat Line, Garden Maintenance Company, the office of the local Conservative councillor – tipped for big things apparently - and a Household Operative Firm.....cleaners to us commoners..... No , we have the biggest office on the ground floor and we've gone from just the two of us on the switchboard to four. (*Tracey enters*) Oh talk of the devil here's Tracey now. She does the busy periods and we're coming into one now.....Oh yes. Just after evening meal time is always a popular breaking up period. I don't know whether they've been plucking up the courage all day or they think that they are safer after the other half has just eaten. To full to beat them up. .... No, suicidals come later. Anyway, must go. Tom will be here next and I must look my best for him..... No.. he's an absolute gem of a man.. bit rough but we all love him. Polite, caring, sensitive, sympathetic, a true gentleman. There must still be one out there just like him for you..... That's right stay positive..... Bye love, bye, bye, bye. (*Tom enters*) Hi Tom love, everything ok?

**Tom** (*Burps, scratches and farts*) Hmph. Busy?

**Jamie** Not yet. Mary's on one though.

**Tom** Yeah..... heard that rumour before, but at least that gives me time for a slash before I get started. (*Exits*)

**Tracey** (*to Jamie*) Mary, got a jumper?

**Jamie** I don't think so. Just another problem lover.

**Tracey**            *(Holding up knitting)* No I mean is she knitting another jumper for Christmas?

**Mary**             *(indignantly)* I am here you know and can answer for meself. And the answer is Yes.

**Tracey**            Sorry love. Thought you might be on line.

**Mary**             I am but we're waiting unfaithful boyfriend's return..... 'oooo right lovey. I'm still here.  
So - what's been decided? And don't take any messing. Tell him your onto the police or your  
solicitor or something and you're going to clean him out..... good girl. That should shake  
him.....she's coming up to talk to you, good. Still the same advice though, take  
no prisoners.....

**Tracey**            *(to Jamie)* Sorry I missed this one, sounds juicy. What's it about?

**Jamie**            Don't know, I was dealing with another call so all I got was her boyfriend is jealous because  
she has been carrying on with the landlady.

**Mary**             It's her boyfriend. He's been having an affair with the landlady and now he wants her  
out of the flat, so he can move in with the other woman in. Cheeky sod!

**Tracey**            Here switch the call onto my headset, so I can cop an earful too.

**Mary**             That is against the privacy policy!

**Tracey**            Oh who cares. Pretend I've asked for some training and so you've told me to sit in on the  
call. I won't say a word. Honest!

**Tom**              *(enters zipping his flies and brushing water down trouser leg)* A scouser saying honest!  
Should be in the dock and wearing a suit!

**Tracey**            Shut your face you. *(Fixes headset)*

**Mary** Oh hello again.....what did she say? She's apologised.....she feels awful. Good, get her flat while she's down.....he's offered what? .....Both of you.....the cheeky bugger! How do you feel about that? ..... Good for you.

**Jamie** *(to Tracey)* Come on ..... share!

**Tracey** He's offered to manage her flat

**Mary** Menage a trois!

**Tracey** *(to Tom)* What's one of them?

**Tom** A threesome

**Mary** SSSSSssssssh. So what have you said.....fabulous darling

**Jamie** *(to Tracey)* What, what?

**Tracey** *(to Tom)* She told him to stick his offer where he usually put the .....

**Tom** *(to Tracey)* Put the what?

**Mary** SSSh!

**Tom** Awww.

**Mary** And what did she say. Did she know he was going to offer that?..... she's not pleased.....she's hit him where? .....oo painful!

**Tracey** Kick him out, but before you do kick him in the.....

**Mary** I'm sorry caller, we had a crossed line there for a moment, what did you say? .....  
she's gone into the bedroom and he's followed her. .... Let them sort it out  
between themselves, you stay out of it..... No, I'll hang on, I don't want to miss  
this..... I mean this opportunity to be of assistance to you. Are you ok?..... You're  
beginning to enjoy it. Well good for you..... Now what? She's done what?

**Jamie** *(to Tracey)* Fill us in.

**Tracey** The other woman assaulted the bloke and went into the bedroom. He followed, but she's  
come out with a bag of his clothes and thrown them through the flat door. It's bounced  
down the stairs and burst open. His Y fronts are scattered down the stairs. There's a lot of  
screaming, it's hard to tell what's going on now.

**Tom** *(pointing to the computer screen)* There's a call waiting.

**Jamie** Let 'em wait. I want to hear the end of this one.

**Mary** Ok caller.....where are we up to now? ..... She's thrown him  
out.....and you can keep the flat you're in. Excellent!..... So your ok  
now.....sounds like your better off without him..... Oh don't worry about  
it.....yes, go to bed and take the bottle with you. It'll all look better in the morning,  
but if he comes crawling back, you know what to do..... I can't advise you to do  
that. You'll end up in the nick, but stay firm and don't take the creep back.....Good  
girl.....Ok Bye now and remember we are always here to help should you need us  
again.....ok, bye love, bye. *(smacks hands with Tracey)*

**Tracey/ Mary** *(together)* Result!

**Tracey** That should teach the cheating rat.

**Tom** Right I'll take this next one now the excitement is over. Hello caller, your through to the Lovers Hotline. However.....before we start, I need to make you aware that before I take any details a copy of our privacy policy is available on our website. Information you provide us with will not be passed to third parties and it will not be used for marketing purposes other than by ourselves. Are you happy to proceed? (*indignantly*) They hung up!

**Mary** No wonder. What did you say all that for?

**Tom** We are legally obliged to do so since last May.

**Tracey** So what? I just say something like see our website for the privacy protection bull and I only say that if they go on to give me any info.

**Mary** And they only do that if they are making an appointment with one of our councillors.

**Tracey** By the time they get to that point, they usually forgotten whether you mentioned privacy policies, mortgage rates, Brexit, the exchange rate on the dollar or what your name is.

**Jamie** Lovers Hotline, we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, how may I help you?

**Tom** Bloody Hell, get her!

**Jamie** Oh yes, let me look up your details. .... I've got you now ..... Gosh you have been a busy girl haven't you..... you want to update us.....ok, fire away.....it was a boy.....11 pounds, ouch..... overdue by 2 weeks..... oh bless.....a full head of hair.....I'm surprised he didn't have teeth as well..... you want to name him after Mary, because she has been a pillar of strength.....Won't that cause a few problems with the other kids when he goes to school? .....Oh right, you've added a t and called him Marty. Nice .....Yes, she's here, would you like to have a word .....ok, let me put you through. Now I'm still not very propitious on this new system so if I cut you off, just call us back ..... ok here goes .....Got her (*Both thumbs up*)

**Mary** Hello, that has to be Britney.....Oh brill, tell me all about it.

**Tracey** Lovers Hotline. I'll tell you about our privacy policy when we get to it. Tracey speaking, tell me all about it. .... Oh some men are such rats.....why should you have to, why can't he take responsibility for his own actions ..... well you both played equal parts, so if you keep it make sure he pays his half of everything..... well he can't just walk away.....what did you see in him in the first place.....gosh he's huge.....Yes I can understand he gives you a lot of pleasure, but you have to ask yourself "do I still want him, is he more trouble than he's worth" .....well if you do decide to keep him, I'd have him castrated.....it would solve a lot of problems. Where does he live.....

**Tom** Bit extreme.

**Jamie** Only thing some men understand, a firm hand and decisive actions

**Tom** Very true but I think that is totally over the top. And how will he ever trust her again. I'd be afraid to fall asleep. You'd never know what you'd wake up to find missing.

**Tracey** Well it sounds like you have a bit more to discuss before you make any final decisions, but just you remember, if you want me to send somebody round to sort him out, I know some blokes who'd do it for you at a very reasonable price. Bye Love. Bye.

**Tom** What have you just offered her? You can't get involved like that

**Tracey** Why not. She'll not be able to do it by herself, he's too big.

**Tom** Size has got nothing to do with it... it's immoral, it.. it... it's illegal. It's assault.

**Tracey** Not where I come from it's not.

**Tom** Why does that not surprise me? Look you aren't there now and you can't go encouraging callers to castrate their boyfriends.

**Tracey** Oh for goodness sake. Her boyfriend and her might be splitting up but the problem is who is going to look after the Rottweiler, the dog. He's the one who may need the snip if her boyfriend leaves him with her.

**Tom** Oh!

**Tracey** I know a vet who can sort it and I'm sure giving her his details is not going to contrav...  
contrive ...contrive... break the rules.

**Jamie** Lovers Hotline, we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, how may I help you.

**Tom** This is mine. Lovers Helpline, we won't promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are speaking to Tom, how may I help you?

**Tracey** Lovers Hotline. I'll tell you about our privacy policy when we get to it. Tracey speaking, tell me all about it. .... Oh I am sorry to hear that

**Mary** So when are you going to get him christened?

**Jamie** Tomorrow morning

**Tracey** In Sainsburys Car Park

**Tom** Under a recycling bin.

**Mary** Sounds quite a venue. Will there be many there?

**Jamie** Your councillor and you'll bring your Mum and Dad with you for moral support?

**Tom** And who is going to look after her?

**Tracey** I know, last time they left her in a shopping trolley, blind drunk. You do know that until she gets help she is no good to you? And how many boyfriends has she had?

**Mary** About 60.

**Jamie** What about the father?

**Tom** You don't know which one it was. How many are there? .. 10!

**Jamie** You'll need a bus if you bring them too.

**Mary** Who will perform the ceremony

**Tom** A one eyed cat! I think you need to tell the police everything you have told me.

**Jamie** They tend to hang around by the clock, outside the public loos.

**Mary** I'd best bring a couple of bottles of vino with me then

**Tracey** The alcoholism will be their downfall. There's no point in you knocking yourself out to help when all they can do is lounge around, making silly comments and claiming benefits.

**Tom** I know the sergeant and he'll always help you fill in a form.

**Tracey** I think they all need lining up against a wall and shooting.

**Mary** Well let me know when and I'll be there.

**Jamie** I'll make sure refreshments are provided

**Tracey** It is illegal, but you can get away with it now because nobody gives a damn.

**Tom** It might mean the police station has to close for a while. But it shouldn't take long.

**Jamie** I've put it in the diary, so we're all set now.

**Tom** Do you think when it's all over, you and your partner might be able to patch things up?

**Tracey** If he doesn't come round to your way of thinking, I'd hit him with one of his empty bottles.

**Mary** We keep a supply of them here. We can always give you a couple.

**Jamie** We keep one on the computer these days so we can all dip into it when the need arises.

**Tom** It's all very civilised

**Tracey** So you think you can tie him down?

**Tom** If not you can keep him in a box for a couple of days, but he'll probably pee on your carpet

**Jamie** Have your tissues ready

**Mary** Oh let the good times role. Eh.

**Tom** Personally, I'd try neutering if you decide you want to keep him

**Tracey** That's a good idea but he might not be much use to you then

**Jamie** If it helps I can sit in on it. I can just watch or lend a hand if it proves more difficult than we expect

**Tom** Don't worry about it. We've all had training and you'd be surprised at how often we have to help. I might be called upon 6 or 8 times and that's on a quiet night.

**Mary** Right , I think we are all organised, I can't wait. It's dead exciting!

**Jamie** Ok, I'll be ready as soon as you give me the nod

**Tom** I'll leave an update for one of our councillors, then if anything goes wrong, we'll have a back-up plan in place.

**Tracey** I'll write a timetable so everything stays on track and you'll tell him couple of porkies to get him here without suspecting anything. It'll all be done before he's realised what's happened. We'll leave it there for now.

**Mary** Bye love

**Jamie** Bye sweetheart

**Tom** Chin up, it'll soon be over. Bye for now

**Tracey** Bye, bye, bye.

*(Betty enters)*

**Betty** Right! When can I get in to clean in here? I've been trying all day and if you don't shift out of my way it won't be done at all. *(Looks over Tracey's shoulder)* As it is I'll have to switch my calls through to here from upstairs when I'm here. I'm not missing a booking and everyone else has gone home, so it's that or I'm not doing you. *(peers at Tracey's screen)* By eck! This is hot stuff you've got there Tracey. Drunks, wife beating, illegitimate kids and violence.

**Tracey** You're not meant to be looking at that. It's highly conflagrational information I've just got from me last phone call.

**Tom** *(to Tracey)* I think you'll find that's 'confidential'.

**Tracey** That's what I'm telling her.

**Tom** No, you were saying they could burst into flames

**Betty** I think they could from what I'm reading

**Tom** Well stop it. You'll get us all into trouble

**Betty** Not like he's got all 3 of them, I won't. Anyway, when can I make a start?

**Mary** I'll tell you what. Make us a brew and we'll take a break, but I'll be locking my screen.

**Betty** OK I'll be back in two minutes.

**Jamie** Lovers Hotline, we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, how may I help you? Oh Hello Love, we've not heard from you in a while. Does that mean things have been going well? ..... They were but not anymore..... Oh Dear..... Yes Mary is still with us ..... *(To Mary)* It's Felix!

**Tom** I thought he was a cat. Who calls a kid Felix? *(Sits on Mary's desk)*

**Mary** Well if you look at the Peaches, Willow and Brooklyn's of this world, Felix ain't so bad.

**Jamie** Yes she's waving.... (*Mary waves*)..she's in conversation with Tom at the moment..... Tom, Oh he's a new one we've taken on.....yes there are 4 of us most of the time now.....we had a legacy, so we are all new and posh in a new office ..... No were not between waste disposal and the citizens advice anymore.....that's right it was all in the local rag about a year ago. Anyway, how are you..... what happened.....I knew it.....it's always a toy boy with you and there not good for you.....on several fronts. They're too expensive for you, leave you exhausted, usually move in and bring half a dozen mates with them and bugger off when you're bankrupt.....you are bankrupt. That's why he's packed and gone then and I bet his mates have all gone with him to bleed the next mug dry..... there's one stayed. Is he interesting? ....pug ugly. Yes, but is he interesting?.....he's made you an offer. What kind of offer? One you can't refuse? ..... to be a house boy in exchange for living in your house rent free. Hang on. (*Mary shakes her head*)....Mary say 'No' and you know she is always right. .... You need to take a step back .....You're still on the rebound ..... He's says he's rebounded more than a tennis ball at Wimbledon..... I know that's not necessarily on the cards, but you are very vulnerable at the moment ..... We would hate you to get hurt again, especially so soon after this last let down ..... I know ... I know ..... I know ..... Life is never fair .....we hear it all the time, the one you fancy doesn't give you a second look and the one who does fancy you, you can't run away from fast enough. .... I do sympathise, we all do ..... yes all of us..... Well there's Mary of course and Tracey, she's new too ..... And there's Tom..... Tom! (*Tom takes notice*) ..... well he's muscular ...you know, well built, and all the right bits in all the right places..... yes all of them ..... and some of our callers can't get enough of him ..... no, over the phone..... Oh, I don't think so..... Hang on I'll ask him, but he is

very busy ..... *(in a low voice to Tom)* ....Tom, he wants to know if I can transfer him, but he is one of our regulars, so if you don't want to, I'll tell him you're busy .....*(back to the caller)* Hang on darling

**Tom** Do you think I'll be of any help?

**Tracey** You could boost his self-confidence while he's at a low point. Go on, what harm can it do?

**Mary** Just be gentle with him and don't make any silly arrangements for him to have an appointment

**Tom** You've got to be joking! *(Goes to his desk)*

**Jamie** Ok hun, he's finishing up now with his caller. He'll take you in a sec. Ok caller I'm transferring you now.

**Tom** *(Seductively)* ...Hello this is Tom. How can I be of assistance to you in your hour of need?.....

**Mary** Oh good grief. Nothing over the top then!

**Tom** Oh I do understand. It must be very hard for you. ....Let me see your notes ..... oh goodness there are rather a lot aren't there. I could be here half the night reading this lot ..... Yes you are a regular aren't you, a very regular, regular .....

*Betty enters*

**Betty** You lot ready for a cuppa yet?

**Mary** Some of us have only just arrived. Can you give us a bit longer?

**Betty** If I must, but I can't hang around.

**Mary** You can start cleaning if you like. I could do with a toilet break so you do my desk. Just don't press any keys or turn anything off.

**Tracey** Yeah..., you can do mine too while I check my lippy. Hang on Mary, I'm coming with you.  
*(they exit together)*

**Betty** It's ok for me to switch my phones through while I'm down here isn't it?

**Jamie** Not really, but I don't suppose it'll do any harm. *(Betty reads Mary's screen.. gets engrossed and sits down)*

**Tom** OK, well you just look after yourself and don't take it too seriously ..... I always try to be sympathetic ..... No you shouldn't read anything into it ..... we are a shoulder to cry on but not in person that's all ..... No ..... dating clients is strictly forbidden so 'no' you can't ..... I'm sure Jamie would not have made such a promise.... *(Threatens to shoot Jamie)* ..... Yes you can call back any time but I would ask for Jamie personally because he is very highly qualified in that field ..... OK bye for now. *(To Jamie)* Thanks for that.

**Jamie** No problem, but what field am I well qualified in?

**Betty** *(without looking up from the screen)....* The one you are lying in at any particular point in time.

**Jamie** Cheeky mare and what are you reading?

**Betty** These notes ..... You get some right juicy stuff on here don't you?

**Tom** Yes and it's confidential so a bit more cleaning and a bit less reading if you don't mind.

**Betty** oooooo.. pardon me. *(Cleans)*

**Tom** Jamie, I'm going to have to go to the loo too. Will you be ok if I dart off for a second? Mary will be back soon.

**Jamie** No chance of that with Tracey in there with her, they'll be nattering ten to the dozen for ages, but go while we have a lull.

**Betty** Yes, I don't mop those kind of puddles. (*Tom exits*)

**Jamie** Lovers Hotline, we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, recently qualified in this field. How may I help you?..... Yes we have a list of councillors and help lines. Tell me what's happened and I'll be able to advise you on where to go with your particular problem .....

**Betty** (*Answering phone*)... Hello ..... yes this is the Lovers Helpline ..... Have you .....good grief.....good for you.....I would. (*Jamie signalling for her to stop*)

**Jamie** How awful ..... oh yes, I just need to look the number up for you ..(*To Betty*).. Stop that. You're not trained. You'll get us shot

**Betty** Shush, I'm trying to listen to this.

**Jamie** (*to Betty*)..Tell them I'll be there in a second..... Oh, no sorry. I'm not coming round to see you, it's Betty on the other line .....no I'm not talking to two people, you have my undivided attention ..... Betty is the cleaner, but she's not cleaning at the moment ..... No the cleaning is not more important than you and I have been looking for that number for you ..... Yes I've got it now. Are you ready with a pencil and paper?

**Betty** (*on the phone*)... I'd not be so patient..... I think you've been very restrained..... That's disgraceful. It's all well and good him making all these demands, but you have to put food on the table. That's a priority. Food and household bills must come first before he spends money on equipment for his own pleasure .....poor you. You can speak to a counsellor here if that helps

**Jamie** Right. It's a local line ..... 47

**Betty** We can make an appointment for one

**Jamie** 42 42

**Betty** Oh my colleague says we can make an appointment for two counsellors

**Jamie** What are you saying? ..... No it's the cleaner again

**Betty** Hang on I'll write it on a post-it and leave it on the screen for Mary

**Jamie** No love. I assure you, you are much more important than her ...

**Betty** Yes, I've got that and I've made an appointment for 2 counsellors to see you at 10 on Monday morning.

**Jamie** Give them a call and I'm sure they will be able to help. And if for any reason they can't, come back to us here and we'll sort you out with an alternative number ..... me? ...I'm Jamie. Is that so you can ask for me next time? .....Charming!

**Betty** *(to Jamie)* What?

**Jamie** She asked for my name.

**Betty** What's wrong with that?

**Jamie** She said it was so she didn't end up with me again, as I seemed more interested in what the cleaner was doing.

**Betty** Cheeky!

**Jamie** What were you doing? You shouldn't be answering our phones.

**Betty** I told you. I switched my phones down to your number. It could have been a call for me and I can't afford to pass up work.

**Jamie** Yes but it wasn't, so you should have told them to hang on until I was free.

**Betty** Oh you could have been ages. You'd run 'em up a massive phone bill. Anyway, it's done now. No big deal and I've left a note on Mary's screen to tell her that she needs to put an appointment down for 10am Monday for two counsellors to see her.

**Jamie** 2 counsellors? Why two?

**Betty** You said I should make an appointment for two. You even repeated yourself.

**Jamie** Oh I don't believe it. That was my clients phone contact number

**Betty** Well you should have made yourself clearer.

**Jamie** Mary will have to call her back.

**Betty** She can't.

**Jamie** Why not?

**Betty** I didn't take her phone number.

**Jamie** It will be on the screen. Scroll back and see what number she called from.

**Betty** Number withheld

**Jamie** Great. Mary'll go mad.

Mary (*Enters*) What will I go mad at?

**Jamie** Betty answered the phone because she thought it might be for her and instead has made an appointment for a client to see two counsellors on Monday at 10am.

**Mary** Oh hell. How do we get round that one?

**Betty** Just put it in your appointments. She did sound like a nice girl.

**Mary** You have to write your name next to the appointment to say you took it. I'm not putting my name next to that.

**Jamie** You won't be here until late on Monday morning and neither will I, thank you God.

**Betty** Stick any name you like next to it then.

**Mary** Where's Tom?

**Jamie** Gone to the loo.

**Mary** That's it then. He shouldn't have left you alone, so I'll put his name next to the appointment.  
10am you say?

**Betty** Yes. For two counsellors.

**Mary** They really will love Tom for that. (*Tom and Tracey enter*)

**Tom** Oh yes. Who's loving me for what?

**Jamie** Oh we're just saying the powers that be will love you for the way you've taken to the job and your smooth way with the clients.

**Tom** Oh thanks Jamie. Nice of you to say so.

**Tracey** Have you done Betty?

**Betty** Not quite. I haven't done Tom and Jamie yet.

**Tracey** Well you might have a problem there. Jamie is on the other bus you know?

**Jamie** Very funny, but I'll tell you what Betty. Can you do us drinks now please, I'm parched?

**Betty** Oh alright. But I'll still need to give you a quick once over before I can call it a day.

**Tom** I'd take her up on that Jamie. Could be the best offer you get today. (*Betty exits*)

**Jamie** Lovers Hotline..., we solemnly promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are in the capable hands of Jamie, how may I help you? ..... Yes you are ..... Yes we do have ladies ..... have you already started a session with one of them? We have Mary and Tracey here tonight ..... You're not sure ..... can I have your name and I'll ask if either remember you ..... Bill. Hang on. Which of you two can remember a bloke called Bill..... or would it have been one of the others?

**Tracey** How long ago are we talking?

**Jamie** Hello caller. How long is it since you last contacted us? OK hang on again. *(to the others)*  
About 2 or 3 months.

**Tracey** Can't be me then. Weren't here then. Must have been Mary if was either of us.

**Mary** Oh alright, pass him over ..... Hello Bill ..... No I can't remember you for definite but you tell me what your problem is and I'll see if it rings any bells. .... Blimey, that's a bit graphic and I can see why that causes a problem with your girlfriend. Has she dumped you because of this? ..... You haven't got a girlfriend ..... Well why are you phoning Lovers Hotline?..... Hang on, which number have you dialled? .....  
Yes, I thought as much, this happens all the time. You want the chat line on 474241 not us on 474242. .... No we don't store numbers, so you're quite safe ..... Oh you want us to pass your number on if someone suitable phones us ..... No, I'm sorry, we can't do that, data protection and all that ..... It's illegal ..... Good bye Bill, Good Bye.  
Honestly, some people. Now where's my knitting

**Tracey** It's coming on nicely. I think it's great that you are keeping alive an ancient craft.

**Mary** It's just knitting Tracey. Didn't you learn it at school?

**Tracey** I didn't learn anything at school. Well not from the teachers anyway. It must be very satisfying though to create something like that.

**Mary** Yes, it is. And I'm surprised at how other people, even strangers, take an interest.

**Tom** How do you mean?

**Mary** Well only yesterday, driving into work, I was busy knitting the right sleeve .....

**Tom** While you were driving?

**Mary** Oh it was alright. I was going dead slow through the roadworks on Dean Road. I thought, I want to get this last bit done and move onto the front, so I fished it out of my bag and steered with my knees. Next minute this police car pulls alongside with two nice young officers in the front. One winds down his window and says “pull over, pull over”. “No” I said, “It’s a cardigan”.

**Tom** What did they say next?

**Mary** I don’t know. He hit one of those cone things and it got stuck under his car. He shouldn’t have been overtaking there because that was where the two lanes become one. His own fault so I just kept going.

**Tom** Then what?

**Mary** I finished my sleeve.

**Betty** (*enters*) .....Right, Tea up. All on the same? Tea with milk but no sugar. Biscuits?

**Jamie** Oh my downfall. What I won’t do for a hobnob!

**Tom** The mind boggles! (*a call comes through on his screen*).. ..Oh blast, wouldn’t you just know it? Lovers Hotline,... we won’t promise not to take any details or pass them on to a third party, but we are experiencing a heavy load of calls at the moment. We are sorry that all our lines are busy right now but please give us five minutes and call back and we will do our best to take your call. (*hanging up*) .....Right.... where’s me tea.

**Tracey** Oh Tom, you are a shocker! I’ll have to remember that one.

**Mary** That is not what we are meant to do Tom. But seeing you’ve done it now, pass the biscuits.

**Betty** Right, now why don’t you switch to answer phone for 5 minutes while I get finished in here. Get out the way.

**Tom** Your wish is our command,..... bring the biscuits... if Jamie has left any.

**Jamie** I've hardly touched them.

**Betty** I'll start vacing. *(she turns on the vacuum cleaner and cleans around Jamie's desk).*

**Mary** *(after a few moments)*.....Right, let's get back to it.

**Jamie** I've not finished my tea yet. I can't drink it when it's hot.

**Mary** Well take it to your desk but be careful.

**Tracey** Lovers Hotline... we promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are speaking to Tracey, how may I help you? ..... Oh bless, how nice ..... He won't have anything to do with you or the baby, oh dear ..... Is he definitely the father? ..... You're pretty sure he is ..... What about a paternity check? ..... well do them both then .....

**Tom** Lovers Hotline... we won't promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are speaking to Tom, how may I help you? ..... Hang on and I'll transfer you. *(to Mary)*...Mary, this one is asking for you. She says her name is Britney.

**Mary** OK Put her through. Hello, this is Mary ..... Yes, I remember you. You had a bad break up with a weight lifter who fancied himself more than you ..... Yes, yes ..... You aren't still with him though are you ..... you've moved on. Good for you ..... not good for you ..... He's been having an affair with another woman at the golf club..... and he's only just told you ..... what a rat! ..... What do you want to do? ..... you want medical help? Has he hurt you..... for him. Why? ..... You've done what with his niblick? ..... While he was bending over his suitcase. Nasty..... Is it alright? ..... His golf club isn't..... What is the medical help for?..... Oh dear. Is he bleeding profusely? ..... I'd best get an ambulance. *(to Jamie)*....Jamie, get an ambulance .....

**Jamie** Ambulance please ..... *(to Mary)* ..address?

**Mary** Can I have your address ..... *(to Jamie)*... 22 Sycamore Crescent.

**Jamie** Oh hi Steve. How's life with you ..... Fabulous ..... Really. I'd love to see that .....  
Well I could on my day off ..... well try and get me a ticket.....

**Mary** Jamie!

**Jamie** How much? ..... well if you are in the Sawyers Arms on Friday I could let you have it then..... Great.

**Mary** Jamie! Get the ambulance.

**Jamie** Ok Sweetheart. Now Mary's getting twitchy because we need an ambulance. .... 22  
Sycamore Crescent ..... *(to Mary)* ...what's the problem?

**Mary** Profuse bleeding

**Jamie** Profuse bleeding ..... *(to Mary)* ...where from?

**Mary** Oh for goodness sake, is that important? From his *(indicates)*

**Jamie** Oh! From his nether regions ..... right thanks. It's on it's way.

**Mary** OK Ambulance on route. Where is he now? ..... No, I didn't think he'd be sitting comfortably..... The best advice I can give is to apply pressure ..... No, he can apply his own pressure there ..... I can't advise you to do that ..... I suggest he keeps well away from you. Do you think he'll bring charges against you? ..... You can't work your way through the entire contents of his golf bag!

**Tracey** Lovers Hotline.... we promise not to take any details or pass them to a third party. You are speaking to Tracey, how may I help you? .....No. We help the innocent party not the guilty ones ..... Well you aren't innocent are you? ..... not if you've caused the break up..... Well I suggest you try yellow pages again but this time under helplines try searching for lying cheating swine ..... And you!

**Jamie** Ok Lovey, See you Friday.

**Mary** You can hear it, good ..... Are you going with him? ..... Just his golf clubs..... So are you going to be alright? ..... more angry than upset .....that's good. Do you want to see one of our counsellors, they may be able to fix you up with legal advice? .....Alright, I'll leave it like that for now, but come back to us if you need any more help ..... you're welcome. Bye dear.

**Betty** Oh great, you're off the phone so I'll do you now. *(as Jamie sits back, Betty knocks coffee over, the computer sparks and explodes)*

**Tom** Eeeewwww!

**Jamie** oooh. All me bits are fizzing!

**Tom** Aren't you the lucky one!

**Mary** Well that's one computer down. Do you know how much that will cost? *(to Betty)*

**Betty** Oh give it a blow. It'll dry out and be alright. It's your own fault for delaying me.

**Tracey** I'm always dropping me mobile down the khazi but it's never the same afterwards.

**Tom** Hardly surprising. *(fire alarm sounds)* Oh bloody hell, now look what you've done!

**Betty** Is this a drill?

**Mary** There's none scheduled so we'd best evacuate anyway.

**Tom** That's good enough for me. We'll be outside way past my finishing time, so as I'm duly accounted for...I'm off! See you all on Monday. *(Exits)*

**Jamie** Right come on, everybody out .

**Mary** Tracey! What are you doing?

**Tracey** I'm not going out there before I've refreshed me lippy. *(Mary and Betty exit )*

**Jamie** Oh come on! *(Drags Tracey out).....*  
*(Alarm stops and a few moments later, Fred the security guard enters)*

**Fred** *(looking around) ....All clear in here?.... Good.. (exits and curtain falls)*

## INTERVAL

### Act 11, Scene 1

**Fred**           *(Curtain rises as Fred is talking on the phone)*.... We were lucky in terms of the fire. Only the Conservative office on the first floor was affected and that was only smoke damage. We've had time over the weekend to reorganise things. The Lovers Hotline office has given us a desk and half their space for a day while the painters are in. The Conservative Councillor, Lionel Hartley, only uses his office in the daytime and the Hotline is only really busy in the evening. Apparently he's coming in this morning to deal with a grant application for some play equipment in the local park..... Yes, so we should be alright. I'll keep you informed!  
*(Hangs up)*

**Veronica**       *(Enters)* Hello I have an appointment with two counsellors.

**Fred**           I'm sorry love. We've had a bit of a fire, there's only one person in at the moment. Take a seat, he                               should be here any second.

**Veronica**       My fault. I'm a bit early. *(Fred exits)*..... *(she wanders around the office and says to herself)*  
Oh Veronica love, do you know what you are getting yourself into? You've known he's had these funny habits right since the first wedding night. If it wasn't for the growing cost of all the equipment I could put up with it..... Oh well I'm here now. *(she sits)*.

**Lionel**           Hello, I'm your local Conservative Councillor Lionel Hartley. I am sorry, as you probably know we had a bit of a fire last week and my diary was destroyed so I'm afraid I can't quite recall your name.

**Veronica**       *(gets up and gives a slight 'bob' then sits again)*...Oh that's alright..... Just call me Veronica.

**Lionel**           Ah yes. *(pausing while he thinks)* ...I seem to remember you've come about your concerns over the rise in equipment costs.

**Veronica**       Well yes. The costs are always going up and beginning to cripple our family budget.

**Lionel** Oh no..no..no. We can't have you paying out of your own money.

**Veronica** *(surprised)*.. Can't you?

**Lionel** Certainly not. As Conservatives, we are committed to helping people just like you. Such people as yourselves provide a very valuable service to the community.

**Veronica** *(taken aback)*....Oh I thought my husband and I were quite unusual. He's always been like that and I just went along with it ever since we've been married.

**Lionel** My dear Veronica..... don't sell yourself short. As a Party that believes firmly in the value of family businesses, we want to help you to expand and funds are available.

**Veronica** Really? I had no idea.

**Lionel** Yes. All we need to do is fill in this form, get it authorised and with a bit of luck, we can have the funds available to you before the end of the week. Have you any idea of the specific type of equipment you want and the related costs?

**Veronica** Well no.... not really. I didn't expect all this. I really ought to talk to my husband about it.

**Lionel** That's probably a good idea. I suggest you do a bit of homework and have a look at what is already out there.

**Veronica** Out there!

**Lionel** Yes absolutely. I suggest you look at the stuff in the country park. There is quite a large selection down by the lake in the trees. It might give you some thoughts as to what you might need.

**Veronica** Out in the open!..... I had no idea.

**Lionel** Oh yes. All the equipment provided is good for both indoor and outdoor use, although it is generally used outdoors because the size of some of it and...*(giving her a conspiratorial nod)*  
I must say the size of the users themselves!

**Veronica** ooooooo, I think we might be getting a bit old for that. I didn't realise this was so popular.

**Lionel** Oh, I assure you Veronica..... you mustn't underestimate the demand. My wife and I have often used such facilities. I encourage you to think big.

**Veronica** Oh I'm not sure. I think I need to go away and think more about what stuff we need.

**Lionel** That's not a problem. Fill in your basic contact details on the form, and then you can decide what you would be most comfortable with - taking into account, size, durability etc.... then cost it out and come back to me.

**Veronica** *(sheepishly)*.....Alright.

**Lionel** *(his phone bleeps)*..... Oh, I'm sorry, I shall have to leave you now, but you have the form, so you fill out the basic details and leave it on my desk. I can pick it up later.

**Veronica** Well thank you for your help. *(gets up and 'bobs' again and sits.)*

**Lionel** You're welcome. *(he exits. Veronica composes herself and a few moments later Mary enters)*

**Mary** Good morning. Are you ok there? Are you being attended to?

**Veronica** Yes, thanks. I have already been seen. I just have a form to fill in and I'm done.  
*(Betty enters and gives Mary a coffee)*

**Betty** I've made you this, because you're by yourself this morning and might not get a chance to make your own.

**Mary** Thanks. *(to Betty, looking at the clock)* Our 10 o'clock is late. You made that appointment, didn't you?

**Betty** Yes. Jamie told me to make it for two counsellors.

**Veronica** *(getting up)*. That was me but I've already seen someone.

**Mary** Really?

**Veronica** I was a bit early and your security guard let me in and then I was seen by the Councillor.

**Mary** *(To Betty)* That must have been Leonard Harvey then.

**Veronica** Yes, I think that was his name. *(Betty starts vacuuming the floor, phone rings)*

**Mary** Lovers Hotline.... I will not take any details or pass them to a third party. Mary speaking, how may I help you? Yes love, we are all here for you to talk to, no we can just listen if that's all you want. Why don't you just tell me what's wrong?.....

*(Vac on and off)*

**Betty** *(Looking over Veronica's shoulder)*.. What's that word you've written there? Chaffinch?

**Veronica** No. Chaffing.

**Betty** Did you really mean to write that?

**Veronica** Yes. Why? Am I being too up front?

**Betty** None of my business dear. It's your form. *(Vac on and off)*. I don't think you should put that.

**Veronica** Why not?

**Betty** For use outside? You'll freeze in Winter.

**Veronica** The man said I was to think big. *(Vac on and off)*

**Betty** I know he told you to think big but do you really mean that?

**Veronica** "Extra large" You mean?

**Betty** Yes

**Veronica** Oh I don't know. I'm hopeless at filling in forms.

**Mary** Ok. Well if you want to chat again, you know the number so just call us. Bye for now.

**Betty** I think this lady needs your help.

**Mary** Why?

**Veronica** It's this form I've been given. I'm useless at filling things in and I don't know what to say.

**Mary** What form. Who gave it to you?

**Veronica** The Councillor ....The man the security guard sent to me.

**Mary** You mean Fred. Right leave it with me, I'll find out what's going on. Betty, if the phone goes, take the number and tell them I will phone them back. Do Not try to offer any more of your advice. (*Exits*)

**Betty** (*Pulls face and Leonard Harvey enters*) Oh Mr Harvey... can you help this lady with this form she's been given?

**Leonard** What are you doing here now Betty. Shouldn't you be doing your work in the evening?

**Betty** Oh I've been asked to give everywhere a once over after the fire and Mary has had to see Fred and she asked me to answer the phones while she's gone.

**Leonard** Well I can do that while I help this lady with her form, if I can. (*Betty exits*)... my name is Leonard Harvey, I'm one of the counsellors here. What's this form you've been given.

**Veronica** I was given this by one of your counsellor colleagues.

**Leonard** That's unusual. Let's have a look at it. Why have you got this?

**Veronica** The other counsellor gave it to me and told me to fill it in. I had an appointment to see the two of you.

**Leonard** So you are Veronica, my 10 o clock appointment.

**Veronica** Yes but I have been told to fill this form in.

**Leonard** I don't know why. Let's have a look at it. I've read your notes but.... we are an advice centre, we don't offer funding.

**Veronica** Well the other counsellor gentleman encouraged me to seek funds and to think big. He told me where there was equipment already in public use.

**Leonard** But this is very irregular. Our service is confidential.

**Veronica** Well I don't wish to speak out of turn but the other counsellor was most supportive. He said he and his wife did similar and we were performing a public service.

**Mr Harvey** Really?... What did he mean by that?

**Veronica** Well I took it mean that I was keeping my husband off the streets. (*Mary & Lionel enter*)

**Mary** (*to Lionel*) I know, we are all very busy but she needs your help to complete the form you gave her.

**Veronica** Hello again. I'm sorry to bother you but I'm having problems filling in your form.

**Leonard** I don't understand this. Why are you giving money to one of our clients? This is a highly confidential service.

**Lionel** She said she needed money to offset the rising cost of equipment. She's been spending her own money.

**Leonard** What our clients do in their private lives has nothing to do with us.

**Lionel** But she's providing a public service.

**Veronica** Excuse me!

**Leonard** It's not a public service, it's only her and her husband.

**Lionel** And we as a party are committed to expanding small businesses and encouraging them to take on additional employees.

**Veronica** Hang on. We only have a 2 up 2 down in Wilson Street - next to the abattoir.

**Mary** (*exasperated*).... Am I getting this right? The local Conservative Council is offering a grant to this lady to expand her bedroom facilities and take on staff to become a house of ill repute?

**Betty** (*Entering*) Cor....., this sounds interesting.

**Mary** Go away! (*Betty exits*)

**Leonard** And you are using Lovers Hotline as a recruitment office.

**Lionel** (*indignantly*)..... I am doing no such thing.

**Veronica** (*innocently*).....You said you and your wife used the equipment in the country park!

**Betty** (*enters*) What's this you do in the country park?

**Lionel** Get out! (*Betty exits*)

**Mary** Veronica..... who did you think you were coming to see this morning?

**Veronica** The Lovers Helpline counsellors.

**Mary** *(to Lionel)* And who did you think you were meeting this morning?

**Lionel** A lady who was proposing to install children's play equipment in the local park.

**Veronica** *(aghast)* ....Do you mean I have been confessing my bedroom activities with my local Conservative Councillor?

**Betty** *(Betty enters)*.....What a headline. *(they all turn to look at her)*... Yes.. I know. "Get Out"!

**All** No Betty. Come in!

**Mary** This is what happens when untrained staff answer calls to our switchboard.

**Betty** I was only trying to help.

**Leonard** You've blown our data protection rules out of the water.

**Lionel** If this had ever got out the scandal would have ruined my chances of being an MP.  
*(Fred enters)*

**Fred** Sorry to interrupt everyone. I have just realised I left my radio here. Anyone seen it.

**Betty** Is this it? *(takes it out of her pinafore pocket and gives it to Fred)*...I found it when I was cleaning earlier

**Fred** *(takes it from Betty and looks at it)*..... Blimey..... it's been on transmit all morning.  
*(goes to exit)*

**Lionel** *(jumps up in alarm)*....Oh my God!!.... Hang on Fred, I need a word....urgently. *(they exit together)*

**Leonard** Well perhaps now Veronica, you would like to see me in my office as previously arranged? We can start again.

**Veronica** OK - thanks. *(she goes to leave with Leonard then stops)*.... but does this mean I won't get my money? *(Veronica and Leonard exit together)*

**Mary** I hope Betty, that you have learnt from what has happened here today.

**Betty** Too right. This is a lot more exciting than cleaning. *(Exits and phone rings)*.

**Mary**

Lovers Hotline.... I will not take any details or pass them to a third party. Mary speaking, how may I help you? ..... you just tell me what's wrong?..... Someone's stuck ..... it doesn't matter, we can't get embarrassed, we've heard it all.....the hot tap? ..... was it running at the time?..... Oh. It's a mixer tap...(Fred Enters) .....how big? ..... over a foot long ..... it's the plumber's fault.....How's that.....he left it there.....you thought it would be fun..... Do you want me to get an ambulance or do you want the number for Screwfix? ..... Oh sorry Fred, .....do you want me? (*Fred indicates no and exits*) ..... Well if I were you, I'd lie down in a darkened room and see if the throbbing eases in the next half hour. If the swelling goes down you may be able to sort it yourself .....Oh any dark room will do! Well lie on your sides facing each other ..... Yes I can hang on while you try..... Try hopping in unison ..... you're there, good. Now phone back if it doesn't work and we'll get the ambulance,..... yes the fire brigade too if necessary. Oh.. we can call united utilities too. Would you like the police?..... No, I just thought why should they miss out. ....OK .....Right well I'll hang up, but please phone back if you need the extra help..... ok, bye...(Fred enters...to Fred) Yes Fred?

**Fred**

I just wanted to let you know that the painters have said they will finish upstairs mid-afternoon, so you can have your office back to normal for this evening. Will Jamie be in with you?

**Mary**

Yes .. we're all in.

*(curtain)*

**Act 2 Scene 11**

*(curtain rises)*

*(Mary is already at her desk as Jamie enters)*

**Jamie** Hi Love, had a busy day?

**Mary** Don't ask. What have you been up to?

**Jamie** Oh I have just had the most embarrassing of days. It started with it being bin day and after the men had been I wheeled ours back into our little bin store. We have one because Rob thinks it's dead common to have them outside on your front. It also stops the passers by filling them up when they chuck their chip papers in them or their dog poo bags. Well when the door was open I saw some rubbish was trapped inside the store and went in to clear it out. That's when it happened. The wind blew the door shut and I discovered you can't open the catch from the inside. I was trapped. What was I to do? If I called out to a passer-by they would know I was stuck in there and as the front door was open they could have rifled through all me treasures. Rob goes mad if people even move his bits around. He can always tell. I sat there wondering what to do when I noticed the roof was only clipped on. I decided to remove the clips to get out but when I had forced the roof open, of course I then had to climb out. That I managed but I then had to stand on the bin to jump down. It seemed so straight forward, so I stepped onto the bin lid but just as I was going to jump off it broke and I did a delicate bottom first plunge into the bin. I was stuck fast with me arse wedged in the bin and me arms and legs stuck up in the air, like I was some sort of human hermit crab. Then the worst bit. Grant came out from next door, you know the fireman with the huge ..... biceps. It was him who pulled me out. I could have died, covered in mucky bits and smelling like something the cat had dragged in. I won't be able to look him in the face again.

**Mary** From what you've said before, it's not his face you've been looking at.

**Jamie** Oh stop it, you know what I mean.

*(Tom enters)*

**Tom** Hi troops. How's things. Had a busy day? *(Mary and Jamie both shake their heads and raise their eyes upwards. Tom takes no notice).....* Well you two may have had nothing of any note, but me?.....I've just had a glimpse of paradise..... Actually, now I come to think of it, more like a preview of temptation in the garden of Eden.

**Mary** What?..... I thought Monday afternoons were your regular visit to *Hard Times?*

**Tom** *Hard Times?....* No you fool. It's *Hard Tracks ....*"the place to take your body image to a whole new level" *(he strikes a bodybuilding pose.).....*admittedly I've still got some way to go yet but I'm working on it *(he taps his stomach – pulls it in. This causes a coughing fit!)*

**Jamie** So what's this temptation bit? *(turns towards Mary)*...I wouldn't mind a bit of temptation myself. Not that I'm likely to give in.....not without putting a fight anyway. Mind you, if it was Grant I'd be a right pushover.

**Tom** Listen sugar plum. I'm trying to tell my story. *(Jamie gives a mock wince)*

**Mary** Go on Tom.....as Magnus Magnusson would say. ..."I've started so I'll finish". You were peeking in to the Garden of Eden.

**Tom** Magnus Magnusson? Have you been at the wacky baccy again?...Anyway, there was I at the gym, just taking a breather before bench pressing 80 kilos for 20 reps.....

**Mary** *(interrupting)* You?.....bench pressing 80 kilos.....with 20 repetitions?

**Tom** I didn't say I did 20 repetitions.....

**Jamie** *(interrupting)* So many did you actually do?

**Tom** What?..... approximately?

**Mary** We'll settle to the nearest one.

**Tom** Well ....very roughly .....*(he hesitates)*...if we're being strictly accurate....it was closer to 1 than 2.

**Jamie** How close to 1?

**Tom** *(hesitates again)*.....Nearly 1.

**Mary** Nearly?.....does that mean none?

**Tom** Well I suppose if you're being picky ....yes!

**Jamie** So let's get this straight. You didn't actually do any 80 kilo bench presses!

**Tom** But I would have done.....

**Mary** Would have done?

**Tom** Yes.....if some idiot before me hadn't jammed the bar bells in their rack. Even Bruce....the personal trainer struggled to remove them. Anyway, he said I'd probably expended the same amount of energy trying to get the bar bells out of the rack as bench pressing 80 kilos 20 times!

**Mary** So just for the record and the avoidance of doubt, you didn't actually do any bench presses?

**Tom** Er...no.

**Jamie** So that's it? That's the story of your temptation? Seems to me you need absolution!

**Tom** Look cup cake. That's not important... The thing is... As I'm standing there, I can see out of the corner of my eye, the most gorgeous creature, with the tightest leotard imaginable and she's looking over towards me with this big.. 'let's share a prolitic, digestive enzyme shake afterwards" type smile..... Well....I'm thinking to myself: 'Tom boy .....you're in there. Christmas really has come early' .....

**Mary** And?.....

**Tom** Well...Bruce is still standing next to me, so I turn towards him saying that this could be the start of something big.....*(to Mary and Jamie)* ...You know what I mean?.....*(pauses)*

**Jamie** *(excitedly)* Go on, go on.....what did Bruce say?

**Tom** "Hi Fiona – my last session's been cancelled this afternoon, so I should be home by 5." Turns out that they're married and she'd only called in to say she was borrowing the car!

**Jamie** Shame.....still, it probably saved you from getting a bar bell or whatever pressed in a place you'd rather it not be.

**Tom** *(ruefully)* That's true. I can't stand those arty farty fad drinks anyway....I'd much rather have a pint of Peroni.

*(Tracey enters)*

**Jamie** Hi Love, had a busy day?

**Tracey** Don't ask – it's been one thing after the other.

**Tom** Ok we won't .

**Tracey**

I'll tell you anyway. *(Tom winces and raises his eyes upwards)*. This morning... I couldn't do a thing with my hair. You know what it's like....*(Jamie nods sympathetically, Tom shakes his head.)* Whichever way I tried to style it, it wouldn't work .....it seemed to have a mind of its own. *(Jamie mouths an "argh" in sympathy....Tom motions a hands apart, "whatever" pose)*. Then the hairdryer packed up.....mind you it was only one of these cheap ones from Asda.....Talking of Asda, Sharon, my flat mate mentioned last night they had a special offer on Rimmel nail varnish....you know the new colour, Passionate Blue.....so I knew I had to call in this morning to get some..... Nice 'innit *(showing her nails.....Jamie mouths "lovely".....Tom shows "ugh" in his face)*. Then I met Alesha .....you know, me Mam's sister's girl....my cousin. *(Tom shakes his head.....Jamie politely tries to look interested)*. I didn't recognise at her first, with her new hair colour.....I mean you wouldn't would you. I thought at first it was our Kelvin's new girlfriend.....what's her name?.....oh yeah....Chantelle. She was telling me.....Alesha that is...not Chantelle.....that she'd heard that Blue Horizons.....you know.....that new shop off Lake Street where I bought that 'A' line mini *(Tom with a quizzical look at Jamie, mimes turning a steering wheel...Jamie shakes his head and makes a 'A' shape motion with his hands either side of his waist).....* the one that's slightly 'rouched' on one side..... were having a special celebrity appearance event today and you'll never guess who it was...*(pause, but nobody replies)*.....well I'll tell you. It was only, Tyrone....you know...that well fit lad on Love Island...*(Jamie makes a pouting gesture)* ...the one who's been getting it off with Leanne...*(Tom puts his finger towards his mouth as if gagging.....Mary frowns)*.....I'll tell you one thing.....he wouldn't find any resistance from me, if I had the chance with him. ....Not that there's anything wrong with my boyfriend Shane....even if he does seem to care more for United than me sometimes.....like that time when we were at the One Direction concert at the Arena and he went off to get me a hot dog 'an came back 45 minutes later with a bag of cashew nuts instead saying that he'd seen his mate Baz at the bar watching the game at Old Trafford on his I Phone and just had to

watch the penalty shoot-out! *(Tom puts his head back and his hands around his throat as if being strangled.....Jamie makes a disdainful motion with his head.....Mary looks pointedly at her watch)....Where was I?...(Jamie, Mary and Tom all shake their heads in unison) ..Oh yeah. So I thought I'd call in to Blue Horizon before I came to work.....when I got there you wouldn't believe the queue – nearly out the door and on Miles Road. 25 minutes I waited to see waited to see Tyrone.....as I got near the front and given my lippy a refresh.....just in case I got the chance for a snog.... (Tom makes out he's being sick in the waste paper basket)....and started walking towards Tyrone, the heel on my left shoe snapped and I fell arse over tip and ended up in a big heap on the floor in front of him, showing me knickers and all the rest of my charms! *(Tom now has head in hands, face down on the desk. Jamie appears to have fallen asleep.....Mary looks imploringly at the phone as if begging it to ring).* Well.....there was nothing else for it....I just got up.....dusted myself down and thought .....stuff it.....I'll give him a snog anyway *(Tom gives an audible groan).....trouble was, he'd already turned around and was snogging the girl after me! .....Bloody cheek of it.....(she goes and sits at her desk)....actually, he's pig ugly anyway.**

**Tom** *(sarcastically)* So nothing of any note then?

**Tracey** Shut yer face!

**Mary** Do you think we might actually do some work then?

*(Fred/Veronica/Betty enter)*

**Betty** Look who we've found.

**Mary** *(to Veronica)...* What are you doing back? *(to Tracey, Jamie, Tom)* This is Veronica. She was in this morning and got a bit mixed up between seeing one of our Counsellors, Leonard Harvey and the Conservative Councillor Lionel Hartley.

**Tracey** Oh dear.

**Mary** Never mind. We got it sorted out in the end....What are you doing back here Veronica?  
We're not a drop-in centre you know.

**Veronica** I know but I thought I'd better update you. When I left to come here this morning my husband said he'd have a surprise waiting for me when I got home. Turns out he'd handcuffed himself to the garden railings wearing nothing more than a pair of budgie smugglers and a diving mask and snorkel . What he didn't know was the Council had condemned the railings as unsafe a few days ago and were demolishing them today. He got crushed under the bulldozer.

**Mary** Oh ..how awful.

**Veronica** Oh.. it wasn't so bad really. When they removed the mask they noticed he had the widest of grins. He'd always fantasied about dying by being crushed with something big and heavy sat on his bare chest.

**Jamie** You poor thing *(offers her a chair)*

**Fred** *(kneeling by chair and pats her hand)* Poor thing. You must be in grief.

**Veronica** Not so much not grief as relief. Only this morning he was wondering how strong the bedroom light cord was!..... Can't think what he had in mind. Ooooo ..He was such a demanding man.

**Tom** You must be in shock. I'll go and make you a nice cup of tea. *(exits)*

**Tracey** *(Cheerfully)*....That's what I like about this job. It's never dull. I thought it would get a bit boring after a while but it just goes to show you never know what goes on behind closed doors.

**Jamie** Or in this case, out in the garden!

**Tracey** (*wistfully*) I always imagined myself with a husband who was tall and sensitive with artistic hands and a love of music.

**Jamie** Sounds like my friend Tarquin. He's got a violin, but nothing else that would be of any use to you.

**Tracey** Of course....my boyfriend's nothing like that.... You know in those costume dramas where the leading lady drops her handkerchief and the hero give's it her back?.. Well.... my Joe was under the car bonnet when I tried that, all he did was wipe his dipstick on it and give it me back!

**Mary** What does your Joe do?

**Tracey** Well...officially he's an actor..... but he's "resting" at the moment.

**Jamie** And unofficially?

**Tracey** He's a layabout.

**Mary** So has he appeared in anything recently?

**Tracey** Only the job centre....and he forgot his lines there!

**Mary** So what did he last appear in?

**Tracey** He played a servant in Downton Abbey. He liked that. He likes books and paintings and nice old buildings ....a bit of culture.

**Jamie** Sounds like he's on my bus.

**Tracey** Problem was. .he liked them a bit too much. His next performance was in the dock at Liverpool Crown Court..... Even so he's better than the one before. He was a biker and never took his crash helmet off. ....He used to sit there, cramming chips between his goggles and muffler. He looked like a waste disposal unit. So I got shot of him. At least Joe is kind, tender and reliable.

**Mary** So's washing up liquid.

**Jamie** Told you....he's a fairy.

*(Lionel enters and see Veronica)*

**Lionel** *(almost in panic)*...Oh no...not you again. I thought we'd sorted you out.

**Veronica** I just came to let these people know my husband died earlier today.

**Lionel** *(softening)*...Oh I am sorry to hear that.....At least it's eased your financial problem.

**Veronica** Mmmm...I suppose it has but I don't fancy selling the gear on Ebay. *(thinking)*. I don't imagine you and your wife would like the stuff. You did say you were interested.

**Lionel** No madam – that was play equipment.

**Veronica** Call it what you like. I can't see as I'm going to have much use for it now.

**Tracey** *(to Lionel)* Blimey....and you a Tory Councillor.....this seems more like Lib Dem antics to me.

**Fred** Or new Labour.

**Veronica** Oh no...we're strictly UCIP

**Fred** You mean the UK Independence Party?

**Veronica** Eh?....*(indignantly)* No...we're part of the Unrestrained Consenting Individuals Programme if you don't mind. The only place my late husband put his cross was.....

**Mary** *(quickly interrupting)*... er..I don't think we need to go in to that.

*(There is a pause, then Fred comes slowly over to Veronica and takes a card out of his wallet and which he shows to her without the others seeing.)*

**Veronica**      *(in amazement).....You?.....you mean..... you're one of us?.....(Fred nods)*

*(without speaking Veronica gets out of her chair and walks slowly towards Fred. They stand facing each other and without speaking, perform their ritual UCIP greeting.)*

**Veronica**      I don't ever remember seeing you at meetings.

**Fred**            I haven't been for a while. I was introduced to UCIP and went to meetings with my ex-girlfriend. We broke up so I've no-one to go with now.

**Veronica**      I guess that'll be the same for me too now. Shame, having spent all that money on gear.

**Fred**            *(after a brief pause).....* But we could go together now as we're both members.

*(Veronica and Fred link arms and exit)*

**Lionel**         So much for the grieving widow. *(he goes to leave but his way is blocked by Betty.)*

**Betty**            Oh stop pretending!.... *(Betty takes him by the shoulders and they face each other as they too perform the UCIP ritual greeting then exit together.)*

*(There is a long pause whilst Mary, Tracy and Jamie take all this in, then the telephones ring on each computer and they respond in unison.)*

**Mary/Jamie/**

**Tracey**         Lovers hotline.....we promise not to take any personal details and pass them on.....

*(Lights fade and curtain closes).*