

Touchy Feely

by
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CHARACTERS

ALICE, early twenties

GUY, early twenties

KELLY, early twenties

JULIET, early twenties

LOCATION

Various locations around a provincial university.

SCENE ONE

A student flat.

ALICE and GUY face each other on upright chairs. There is a Labrador at GUY's feet.

ALICE

The telephone's ringing.

GUY

Okay.

ALICE

We should really be sitting back-to-back. To make it more like being on the phone.

GUY

Doesn't make any difference to me.

ALICE

Yeah, I gathered that. How long have you been blind?

GUY

Since I was sixteen.

ALICE

What caused it?

GUY

Wanking. It's not a myth.

ALICE

I only asked.

GUY

Sorry. Joke. Detached retinas.

ALICE

Oh.

GUY

Would it help to turn round?

ALICE

Sorry?

GUY

Sit back-to-back?

ALICE

Um... Yeah, it's in the manual.

GUY
Well, if it's in the manual...

ALICE
You'll disturb your dog.

GUY
He'll get over it.

They stand and ALICE repositions the chairs.

ALICE
What's his name?

GUY
Keith.

ALICE
Funny name for a dog.

GUY
I like it.

ALICE moves GUY to his chair. They sit back-to-back.

GUY
That better?

ALICE
Yes.

GUY
Okay.

ALICE
Right - the telephone's ringing.

GUY mimes answering a phone.

GUY
Hi.

ALICE
Oh, you're not going to say 'hi', are you?

GUY
It's what I say when I answer a phone.

ALICE
Well, don't. It sounds too casual.

GUY
'Casual'?

ALICE
Yes. Try 'hello'.

GUY
Okay.

ALICE
All right. The telephone's ringing.

GUY mimes answering.

GUY
(Institutional automaton.)
Hello. Thank you for calling Night Line - we're here to listen. Guy speaking. How may I help you?

ALICE
You're taking the piss.

GUY
You started it. 'Hello'. 'Hi'. What's the difference?

ALICE
It's obvious.

GUY
Not to me.

ALICE
Look - at Night Line we take a lot of calls from vulnerable people. Maybe even suicides. So it has to sound like we give a shit.

GUY
Oh, I see - so, 'hello' sounds like we give a shit, but 'hi' doesn't?

ALICE
That's right.

GUY
You said I was s'posed to be friendly and informal.

ALICE
You are.

GUY
(Practising 'friendly and informal'.)
Hello. Hel-lo. Hello. Hi.

ALICE
Can we get on?

GUY
All right.

ALICE
The telephone's ringing.

GUY mimes answering.

GUY
Hello.

ALICE
Um... Hello. Is... Is that Night Line?

GUY
Yes. How can I help you?

ALICE
It... It's my essays. I've got three to do by the end of the week and I'm just not coping.

GUY
Do they usually start in straight away? About their problems?

ALICE
Not usually. But this is role play. We can make it up.

GUY
Okay. Okay - essays.

ALICE
Three essays.

GUY
So why haven't you done your essays?

ALICE
Why don't you try being a bit more blunt?

GUY
Okay.

ALICE
That was sarcasm. You're s'posed to be supportive.

GUY
All right. So why..? Why aren't you coping?

ALICE
I don't know. I'm just not.

GUY

Why not?

ALICE

That's a bloody stupid question.

GUY

Why is it a bloody stupid question?

ALICE

No. Stop. Look - you're supposed to be responding sensitively to what I'm saying.

GUY

I thought I was.

ALICE

You weren't. You were just going 'Why's that? Why's that?'

GUY

You said I was meant to, um... ask open questions. Draw callers out. Not put words into their mouths.

ALICE

Yes, but that's not just going 'Why's that?'

GUY

(Beat.)

Why's that?

ALICE stands up.

ALICE

You're not taking this seriously.

GUY

Another joke. Couldn't resist. Sorry.

ALICE

I haven't got time for jokes.

GUY

You're telling me.

ALICE

What's that s'posed to mean?

GUY

You haven't cracked a smile since we got here.

ALICE

Oh, and how would you know?

GUY

You give off poker-faced vibes.

ALICE

Right - I think I'll be walking you and your dog back now.

GUY

No. Come on. I want to learn.

ALICE

Are you sure you're cut out for this sort of work?

GUY

I dunno. I only just started.

ALICE

Why *did* you decide to sign-up for Night Line?

GUY

I don't sleep nights, so I thought talking on the phone would be a good way to pass the time. And I thought Night Line was somewhere I'd meet... people.

ALICE

Can be.

GUY

I've only met you so far.

(Beat.)

It's been charming.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO

A seminar room.

GUY is sitting on an upright chair facing ALICE, JULIET and KELLY.

GUY

It's okay to be quiet.

Silence.

GUY

Maybe you're not talking because I'm a man? I can easily arrange for you to speak to a female Night Liner if that's any help?

Silence.

GUY

This is a completely confidential service. Nothing you say will go any further.

Silence.

GUY

You don't have to say anything. I'll be here when you're ready to talk.

Silence.

KELLY

Okay. Not bad. So that's how we deal with silent callers. Happy?

JULIET

How..? How would you know someone's still there?

ALICE

Hear them breathing.

KELLY

No, I... I think you'd get a sense... You'd know.

GUY

Feminine intuition?

KELLY

Something like that.

GUY

I'll try and get some.

KELLY

Do that. Okay, so let's work in pairs. Role-play on reluctant callers. I'll work with you, Juliet. And, Guy, you're with Alice. Okay?

ALICE

You've been on the sun bed again.

KELLY

Yeah, a healthy tan's part of the job, Alice.

ALICE

'Healthy'? 'Job'?

KELLY

Oh, shut up. Maybe you should try it. You'd make a great dominatrix.

ALICE

Oh, dream on. I wouldn't demean myself. Or other women.

JULIET

Well, I think Kelly's got guts. I couldn't do it.

ALICE

You've got more sense.

GUY

Um... Did I miss an episode?

JULIET

(Blurts it out.)

Kelly dances on the computer.

ALICE

She strips on the internet.

GUY

Does she?

KELLY

And..?

ALICE

You're perpetuating the phallist myth.

KELLY

Oh - good. Let's go.

JULIET

See you, Guy.

KELLY and JULIET leave. ALICE pulls up a chair opposite GUY.

GUY

Alone at last.

ALICE

Don't start.

GUY

We must stop meeting like this.

ALICE

You're not funny.

GUY

No, I *mean* it. How come we always have to work together?

ALICE

I'm your mentor. Not that happy about it myself.

GUY

Rather be out with your girlfriends, eh?

ALICE

What?

GUY

Bitching about blokes.

ALICE

What's that s'posed to mean? Are you trying to imply that I'm gay or something?

GUY

You said the other day it was a mistake to assume heterosexuality.

ALICE

Yeah, but I didn't mean you should automatically assume homosexuality. You shouldn't assume anything.

GUY

Sorry.

ALICE

I don't believe this!

GUY

Don't shout. You'll upset the dog.

ALICE

I'm gonna walk you and him back.

GUY

We're meant to be role playing.

ALICE

You don't even know me.

GUY

You're always spouting that feminist stuff. Slagging men off.

ALICE

That doesn't mean I'm gay! Anyway, maybe I've got reason not to like blokes very much.

GUY

Have you?

ALICE

I don't have to justify myself to you.

GUY

No. But you might want to prove a point.

Silence.

GUY

Have it your way.

ALICE

I will.

ALICE gets ready to go.

GUY

What about all that stuff from your precious manual, then? About Night Liners being there for each other? Trusting each other?

ALICE

Don't give me that.

GUY

Why not? You always do. We're meant to be role-playing reluctant callers here. We won't find anyone more reluctant than you, will we?

ALICE

All right.

She sits down.

ALICE

Well, last year there was this bloke. Gary. We joined Night Line at the same time. Anyway, I liked him. But I thought he'd be more interested in Kelly. She's the sort of woman blokes are interested in.

GUY

Is she?

ALICE

Yeah, she's... Well - she's the sort of woman blokes are interested in.

GUY

Example?

ALICE

She's... Look, are we talking about Kelly, or am I telling you about Gary?

GUY

You're telling me about Gary, sorry.

ALICE

Good. Anyway, he... he seemed interested in me. Asked me questions. Said 'hello'. Agreed with things I said. You know when you get the impression..?

GUY

Yeah.

ALICE

So we... we started to see each other. You know, usual stuff. And I thought this was really going somewhere. But I didn't want to... It might be uncool. I mean, by the age of fifteen you're supposed to have slept with fifteen people, so by the age of twenty it's just like having a cup of tea. I mean, I got the first time out of the way. At a party. Ages ago. But I didn't want to go too far with Gary too soon. Just being friends was enough.

GUY

Not for him?

ALICE

No. He kept pestering me. I told him to back off. Spelt it out. And so he... Then he...

GUY

(Gently.)

What?

ALICE

He... Backed off.

GUY

Backed off?

ALICE

Yeah.

GUY

Is that it?

ALICE

Thanks very much.

GUY

I thought you were gonna say that he... Correct me if I'm missing something here - you told this bloke to back off. Sent him packing with his tail between his legs...

ALICE

Yes.

GUY

So you got what you wanted. He did what he was told.

ALICE

But where did that leave me? It made me wonder - was he right? Maybe I *should* have slept with him. I mean, it's pretty difficult for girls today. Actually, it's always been difficult for girls.

GUY

So 'no' means no. Except when it means definitely maybe.

ALICE

No. 'No' means no.

GUY

No wonder the poor bloke backed off. He probably wondered whether he was coming or what.

ALICE

I was the one who was confused. Then I realised that was what he wanted. To him sex was just about power. Conquest. Domination.

GUY

So, what else is it about?

ALICE

Sharing. I dunno... Going for a bike ride together. Going for a coffee together.

GUY

Oh, come on... I don't think so. I think it's a game for two or more players. Age sixteen and above.

ALICE

Often younger. Where the hell have you been?

GUY

Yeah. Well, I... I was a late starter. While my mates were getting their first fumbles in the back row of the multiplex, I was having surgery.

ALICE

I don't wanna know.

GUY

Come on. It's my turn. 'Trust and support each other', remember? It says in the manual...

ALICE

If you have to...

GUY

It... It started at college. There were a few mature students on the course. I went for a drink with one of them one night after class. She was thirty. Just split with her husband. Still pretty cut up about it. She told me there was something about me and we went back to her gaff for coffee and a chat about Chaucer. One minute we were discussing irony. The next her tongue was firmly in my cheek.

ALICE

You've told this story before. You don't come out with a line like that off the top of your head.

GUY

Did I promise you an exclusive?

ALICE

No. But I thought you were trying to prove that sex wasn't about conquest. I mean, obviously if you go round boasting about it I'm not gonna be convinced.

GUY

I've told a few close friends, that's all.

ALICE

It's usually them you most want to impress.

GUY

This isn't very impressive. Believe me.

ALICE

Go on, then.

GUY

Okay. Well, it... It was a sympathy shag on both sides to be honest. She felt sorry for me 'cause of my lack of sight. I felt sorry for her 'cause of her lack of husband. It... It made us sort of equal. Big mistake. Sex between equals is no fun at all.

ALICE

Only if you see it as a power trip.

GUY

I haven't finished yet. She... She tried to help with the... She was more experienced than me. But there... There were all these thoughts running round my head. 'What are you doing, man?' Trying to find the right gap.

ALICE

Oh, leave something to my imagination.

GUY

It... It was all a bit frantic and undignified. Keith got really confused.

ALICE

The dog was watching?

GUY

Well, we weren't gonna ask him to join in.

ALICE

I... I couldn't do it with a dog in the room.

GUY

Didn't really think about him. Even when he started barking. I had other things on my mind. It... It was all over in seconds of course - I'm not boasting, see? So full-on sex in the middle of a chat about *The Wife of Bath* was too much for me to take. Total sensory overload. I threw up over her shoulder. Onto the carpet. I lost my cherry, then my lunch.

ALICE

So what does that prove?

GUY

Well, it... It shows that sex isn't just a joyride. I'm more sensitive about it.

ALICE

Oh, and you show your sensitivity by being sick on her carpet? I mean, most women like a fag and a cuddle after sex - not getting busy with a mop and disinfectant.

GUY

Keith helped a bit. That dog'll eat anything.

ALICE

Too much information!

GUY

I wanted you to share the full horror of the experience. Sex is a big deal for us. Blokes have hang-ups too.

ALICE
Well, I'm better off on my own. Stronger.

GUY
Lonelier.

ALICE
I've got friends.

GUY
Is... Is Kelly one of your friends?

ALICE
Kelly? We don't see each other much outside Night Line, but she's a mate - yeah.

GUY
You were bickering a bit just now.

ALICE
That's just about her job. It's healthy.

GUY
Has she... Has she got a boyfriend?

ALICE
Search me. Why? Are you hoping to be sick on her carpet?

GUY
Yeah - I might even skip the sex.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

Night Line HQ.

GUY and KELLY sit near a telephone.
Keith is at GUY's feet.

KELLY is reading a sociology textbook.
GUY is tense.

GUY
What if two people call at once?

KELLY
Not very likely.

GUY
Yeah - but it's a possibility. I was just thinking - if someone was gonna top themselves, it'd be a bit of a bummer if we were engaged.

KELLY

We've got 'caller waiting' on this phone. If someone else calls while you're talking, you get a message on the line.

GUY

Oh, right.

KELLY

I mean, check whoever you're talking to already is cool about it first...

GUY

Oh, yeah. Course. Wouldn't want two suicides on your hands, would you?

KELLY

No, you wouldn't. Not many callers are suicidal, though. I've never had one. Most people just want information. Bus and train times. Doctors' surgeries. That sort of thing. Alice must've told you.

GUY

Probably. She told me a lot.

KELLY

There is a lot to remember. You'll get used to it, though. I did.

She reads her book.

GUY

Have you been... um... working?

KELLY

At Shimmer?

GUY

The internet thing?

KELLY

Yeah.

GUY

Have you?

KELLY

Just finished a week. I do a week on, week off. It means I can catch up on my coursework.

GUY

What hours is it? You don't mind me asking? I'm sorry if I...

KELLY

I don't have to answer. All times. There's always someone logging-on. Sometimes I'm there in the early hours. Sometimes in the afternoon. I try and swap with the other girls to fit in with lectures and stuff. There's a few students work there.

GUY

Is it well paid?

KELLY

Better than working in Sainsbury's.

GUY

And what sort of...

KELLY

Go on.

GUY

You'll think I'm a pervert.

KELLY

Most people are curious. Not only perverts.

GUY

I just wondered what you *do*? I mean - if you want to go into detail... I'm very broad-minded.

KELLY

Not anything too strange. I only do solo. No girl-on-boy. No girl-on-girl. No girl-on-goat. Just me. It's basically stripping. The punters can send messages to me through the computer. Tell me to do stuff. They can see me over the web-cam, but I can't see them. I can... type dirty back to them. Do what they want me to. Or not.

GUY

Where do you draw the line?

KELLY

Well, it basically comes down to stripping. Few variations. But that's it in the end. That's what I do. But there are rules. Limits. I dress up in all the gear. You know - the French maid. Nurse. Leather and studs. That sort of thing. And I take it all off again. But I don't do close-ups. And I don't open my legs any more than thirty degrees.

GUY

Oh, so there's geometry to your pornography.

KELLY

Oh, very good. Thirty degrees is enough to let them see... what they want to see without getting undignified. 'Unladylike' my mother would say.

GUY

What does your mother think about it?

KELLY

She thinks I work in Sainsbury's.

GUY

Aren't you worried someone will recognise you?

KELLY

Well, I can't really imagine my mother surfing the 'net for porn. And it's not likely that anyone else I know will pick me out. They're not gonna be looking at my *face* for a start. Plus I wear loads of make-up. And a wig. And if I'm dressed I'm in one of their ridiculous outfits. Not the sort of thing I wear in the street. And if anybody else did recognise me, it's not exactly the sort of thing they're gonna admit to, is it?

GUY

No. I wouldn't. I mean, not that I'd... There wouldn't be any *point*, would there? Me logging-on, I mean. I couldn't make anything out. Even if you went over thirty degrees.

KELLY

Something I've been meaning to ask you...

GUY

Carry on.

KELLY

It's a bit embarrassing...

GUY

Can't be any more embarrassing than me asking you about stripping.

KELLY

Oh, that's nothing. It's just a job. I don't mind telling you about it.

GUY

What do you want to know?

KELLY

I just wondered how you saw me? How... how you pictured me, I mean. In your mind's eye?

GUY

Oh, everybody asks that.

KELLY

Sorry.

GUY

It's okay. I don't mind.

KELLY

I... I guess it must be like hearing somebody on the radio. A DJ or something. You picture them in your head, then you see them - on the telly or somewhere - and they look nothing like the way they *sound*. Know what I mean?

GUY

I... I think so.

KELLY

Oh - sorry. Course you don't. Obviously. Idiot!

GUY

No. No you're not. I haven't always been blind. I know what people look like.

KELLY

Oh, good. I... I thought I'd really... So how... how do you picture me?

GUY

Well, that... It's difficult.

KELLY

I won't be offended.

GUY

Well, it... It's not like you with the radio. The DJs. I don't just go by the sound of the voice. I pick things up about people. From what they say. I mean, like, Alice... I thought she... No - forget that. Bad example. But you... You've been telling me about the stripping and stuff...

KELLY

So, I... I'm sitting here naked, am I?

GUY

Not *naked*.

KELLY

That's a relief. What, then?

GUY

French maid outfit. Pink feather duster.

KELLY
Please!

GUY
Sorry.

KELLY
You'd hear me crackle.

GUY
Eh?

KELLY
It's acrylic. Very cheap. Very uncomfortable. Everything they make me wear is really uncomfortable. I wouldn't wear any of it in my own time. I'm in jeans and T-shirt - sorry.

GUY
It's okay. I... I mean I didn't really think you were... dressed like that. It... It was just a... a sort of a...

KELLY
I know.

GUY
So give me a better picture. Tell me what you're really like.

KELLY
Describe myself?

GUY
Please.

KELLY
Um... Well, I'm average height - five-six. And I...
(Considers.)
I've got black hair. Jet black. I'm dark skinned. And very dark eyes. Like anthracite, my granddad used to say.

GUY
You sound really... exotic.

KELLY
Well, I... I sometimes wish I was just blonde, you know?

KELLY *is* blonde.

GUY
I... I don't think you should want to look any different from the way you do.

KELLY

S'pose it doesn't matter much to you.

GUY

It does.

KELLY

Shall I go on, then?

GUY

Please.

KELLY

Um... My mouth... I think my mouth's a bit too big for my face. My mother always said I had a big mouth. My nose... Well - it's a nose. Right size and everything. What can I say? Is... Is this helping? Are you getting a picture?

GUY

Yep - with you so far.

KELLY

Um... Let's see... I... I have to be careful about my weight. Because of the job. So I swim a lot. Do steps. My figure's okay. I think my bum looks big in some things. I have to be careful when I'm shopping for clothes. Always get the rear view. My legs are good. I've got two... I can get away with miniskirts, but don't. They, um... They make me feel... uncomfortable.

GUY

You feel uncomfortable in a miniskirt, but you get your kit off on the internet?

KELLY

That's different. At work I'm the one in charge. I control what they see. So that's it. That's me. Got a picture?

GUY

Um... Let's see... Average height. Nice eyes. Nose. Slightly oversized mouth. Slim. Fit. Nice legs. No miniskirts.

KELLY

I could be anyone.

GUY

With jet black hair...

KELLY

Would... would it help to touch my face?

GUY
Touch..? Touch you?

KELLY
Isn't that..? So you can feel how... how I look, you know?

GUY
Oh, right.

KELLY
Would it help?

GUY
It might...

KELLY
All right, then.

She moves her chair closer to GUY's, and he turns to face her. She takes him by the wrists and places his hands on her face. He traces her features gently - eyes, nose, lips, the outline of her jaw. His touch turns from sensory to sensual.

KELLY
Is this... helping?

GUY
(Reverie.)

Mmm...

(Snaps out of it.)
I... I mean, I still wouldn't recognise you in the street...

KELLY
Well, no, but... Do... Do your eyes look funny?

GUY
Hilarious.

KELLY
I... I just wondered what you're hiding behind those glasses?

GUY
Take them off if you like.

KELLY
Are you sure?

GUY
Uh-huh.

With GUY still feeling her face, KELLY removes his dark glasses, then peers at his eyes.

KELLY

There... There's nothing wrong with them. You're just looking at the ceiling.

GUY

'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.'

KELLY

Mm?

GUY

Oscar Wilde.

KELLY

Oh.

GUY

Actually, I'm looking at you.

KELLY

Eh?

GUY

There are still some shreds of retina in my left eye.

KELLY

You... You mean you can see me?

GUY

Just about.

She pulls away from him and stands up.

GUY

What?

KELLY

You were touching me.

GUY

You told me to.

KELLY

I thought you couldn't see.

GUY

I can't. Very well.

KELLY

But you could see me.

GUY

When you were right next to me. I've got a bit of vision. I see glimpses. Sort of out of the corner of my eye. There aren't many blind people who are totally blind. Most of us see something.

KELLY

But you touched me. You felt my face.

GUY

What's the problem?

KELLY

I... I could've just moved close to you and you could've seen me.

GUY

You said you didn't do close-ups.

KELLY

I didn't mean... You took advantage of me.

GUY

Can I have my glasses back, please?

KELLY

Here.

She holds them out in front of him, he gropes the air for them. She puts them into his hand, he puts them back on.

GUY

Thanks.

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

GUY's study bedroom.

GUY is sitting on a swivel chair. A cafetiere is brewing at his feet, its plunger unplunged. There is also a carton of milk and a couple of mugs. Keith is nearby.

JULIET is lying on her belly on the bed reading aloud from Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*.

JULIET

'At this point one must expect to meet with an objection. "Well, then, if even obdurate sceptics admit that the assertions of religion cannot be refuted by reason, why should I not believe in them, since they have so much on their side - tradition, the agreement of mankind, and all the consolations they offer?"' That's right, that is. Can't argue with that.

GUY

(Sighs.)

I think he's about to.

JULIET

I'm sure he is. Um... 'Why not, indeed? Just as no-one can be forced to believe, so no-one can be forced to disbelieve. But do not let us be satisfied with deceiving ourselves that arguments like these take us along the road of correct thinking. If ever there was a case of lame excuse we have it here. Ignorance is ignorance...'

GUY

This isn't working.

JULIET

What?

GUY

Listen, Juliet, it's good of you to offer to read for me, it really is...

JULIET

I don't mind.

GUY

But when I ask for Freud, I need Freud. And you... You've commented on, criticised, and even edited everything you've read so far.

JULIET

I didn't. I didn't edit. I read what's in the book.

GUY

You went 'blah, blah, blah' a couple of times.

JULIET

Oh, that. That was just footnotes. Cf this. Viz that. Ibid the other. It wasn't relevant.

GUY

That's for me to decide.

JULIET

I read the rest word for word. Even though I don't agree with any of it. And neither does Keith.

She tosses the book aside and fusses over the Labrador.

JULIET

No you don't, do you, boy? No you don't.

GUY

He doesn't have an opinion. He's a dog.

JULIET

He's lovely, though, isn't he?

GUY

He's all right - for a dog.

JULIET

Don't you like dogs?

GUY

Not much.

JULIET

Why not?

GUY

They love unconditionally.

JULIET

What's wrong with that?

GUY

It's not realistic.

JULIET

I... The coffee's probably ready now.

GUY

Okay.

He reaches for the cafetiere.

JULIET

I'll do it.

GUY

I can manage.

JULIET

You don't have to. I'm here.

She moves the cafetiere away from him
and opens a carton of milk.

JULIET

Milk?

GUY

No thanks.

JULIET pours milk into her own mug.

JULIET

How... How was it the other night? At Night Line?

GUY

The phone only rang once. Wrong number. Kelly answered.

JULIET

I couldn't find any sugar.

GUY

I don't take it.

JULIET

I'll do without, then. I'm sweet enough. Nice, isn't she? -
Kelly.

GUY

Great.

JULIET admires the cafetiere.

JULIET

Nice coffeepot. Wouldn't instant be easier, though?

GUY

Probably.

JULIET

I'll get you a jar.

GUY

I prefer ground.

JULIET

I admire you. I really do.

GUY

Why? Because I don't drink Gold Blend?

JULIET

No. I mean the way you... make coffee. And everything.

GUY

Don't you make coffee?

JULIET

All the time. But I'm not...

GUY

Blind?

JULIET

It *is* okay to say 'blind'?

GUY

Say 'visually challenged' and Keith's gonna bite you.

JULIET

I... I'm never sure when you're joking.

GUY

You really think that sappy mutt ever bit anyone? But I hate all that PC bollocks. 'Blind' is a perfectly good word. Use it.

JULIET

Okay. Did Kelly walk you back, then? The other night?

GUY

She did.

JULIET

Did she... stop for coffee?

GUY

No.

JULIET

She's got a boyfriend, you know.

GUY

And he's got something against coffee?

JULIET

No - I mean...

GUY

She been going out with him long, then?

JULIET

Um... Since last year. I think. I love the next bit.

GUY

What?

JULIET

Pushing the thing down. On the coffeepot.

She pushes the plunger slowly into the
cafetiere.

JULIET

I really love that. It's sort of...

GUY

Sexy...

JULIET

Um...

She pours the coffee.

GUY

Possessive type, is he?

JULIET

Um... Dunno really. I've never met him. He's not in Night
Line. Is the reading helping with your essay?

GUY

Uh... Yeah. I'll have to go over it again, though. When
they send the tape. What does he think about Kelly being a
cyber-stripper? Her boyfriend?

JULIET

I don't know. I've never met him.

GUY

I thought she might have said.

JULIET

She hasn't. I don't mind doing more reading for you. If it
helps.

GUY

A tape's better. I can rewind as much as I like. Is he on
her course?

JULIET

No. I think he's... I think he's in the rugby team. I'll
go back over anything you want to hear again.

GUY

You can't be here all the time. Big bloke, is he?

JULIET

I expect so. He's in the rugby team. I won't make comments
next time.

GUY

It isn't fair to make you read this stuff. I can't picture her with a rugby player. She doesn't seem the type.

JULIET

She obviously goes in for the sporty type. Not my cup of tea, but...

GUY

Have you poured yet?

JULIET

Yes. Do you want me to..? Put it in your hand?

GUY

Leave it on the floor. I'll find it.

JULIET

Okay. Right in front of you, then.

She settles back on the bed with her coffee.

JULIET

So why isn't it fair to make me read it?

GUY

'Cause you don't agree with it.

JULIET

Just because I don't agree with it, doesn't mean I mind reading it.

GUY

Yes, you do. It was really pissing you off.

JULIET

Not that much. I've got a strong faith. I don't care what some old... *buffer* thinks.

GUY

Old *buffer*? Freud?

JULIET

Well, he is. Don't you think?

GUY

I agree with him. About religion. It's not for me.

JULIET

Have you tried it?

GUY

You won't convert me.

JULIET

I... I wasn't... I think everybody has got to make up their own mind. I'm not a Bible-basher, you know. You don't know anything about me, you can't go around... You probably think it's all tambourines and guitars, anyway.

GUY

Fuck me - isn't it?

JULIET

No! Just because I go to church doesn't mean to say I'm... boring. Just because I go to church doesn't mean to say that I... don't have any friends. Or I don't go out, you know? Just because I go to church doesn't mean to say I think I'm perfect and I'm better than everybody else and I don't need any help. Just because I go to church doesn't mean to say that I don't occasionally have bad thoughts or I don't want to swear my head off at people, or lash out at them. You shouldn't judge me, anyway. You should come with me and find out for yourself.

GUY

Sorry. When... When you've got a disability, religious people kind of think they... own you. It's either, 'Jesus gave sight to the blind. Made the lame walk...'

JULIET

He did.

GUY

Well, I can't prove he didn't - but He's not gonna do that for me, is He?

JULIET

Maybe not literally.

GUY

Literally is what I need. And the other thing you get is the divine retribution bit. It's all about disabled people being punished for something terrible they did in a previous life...

JULIET

I don't believe that.

GUY

I... I mean, what is there? Some sort of tariff? Blindness for theft? Deafness for adultery? Paraplegia for murder? I mean, it... It does kind of appeal to me that there's a deaf, dumb, blind, tetraplegic out there who used to be Adolf Hitler. But it doesn't work like that. There isn't that kind of natural justice. Disability's like shit. It happens.

JULIET

Well, I...

GUY

Sorry. I didn't mean to...

JULIET

It's okay.

GUY

It's just... You have to find your own way of coping. Something to get you by. With you it's God. Jesus. All that. With me it's... Well, I do my own thing.

JULIET

I just thought you might... I was just trying to help you. I mean I... really admire you...

GUY whips off his dark glasses.

GUY

Look me in the eye and say that.

Blackout.

SCENE SIX

Night Line HQ.

GUY and ALICE sit on upright chairs. Keith is at GUY's feet. ALICE is folding A4 leaflets in half.

GUY

How does a blind man know when he's coming to the end of a parachute jump, then?

ALICE

Dunno.

GUY

His guide dog's lead goes slack.

Silence.

GUY
Well, that's it. That's the punch line.

ALICE
Not funny.

GUY
I thought it was pretty good.

ALICE
I don't laugh at jokes about disabled people.

GUY
Why not? Aren't we funny?

ALICE
It's just... bad taste.

GUY
Politically incorrect?

ALICE
If you like.

GUY
So... Tell me a joke that doesn't have a butt. That doesn't laugh at somebody's expense.

ALICE
I can't remember any.

GUY
That's my point. There's no such thing as a PC joke.

ALICE
Look - make yourself useful. Fold these. You can do that.

She gives him a pile of leaflets.

ALICE
The outside is on top.

GUY
What are they?

ALICE
Night Line leaflets. For the library and wherever. I just photocopied a whole load. We were running out.

GUY folds a leaflet in half.

GUY
Like this?

ALICE
That's right.

They both fold leaflets in silence for a moment.

GUY
So when did you have the operation?

ALICE
What operation?

GUY
The sense of humour bypass.

ALICE
Look - if you can't think of anything worth saying, don't say anything at all. Fold leaflets.

GUY
I'm folding. You really need to lighten up, though. A good laugh would do you good.

ALICE
There isn't much to laugh about.

GUY
Yes, there is. Everything's fair game. Humour's how we deal with stuff we're scared of.

ALICE
So what are you scared of?

GUY
The dark.

ALICE
The dark?

GUY
That's right.

ALICE
Is this another joke?

GUY
I wish it was. You remember I said I had trouble sleeping?

ALICE
Insomniac - yeah.

GUY

Well, it goes back to when I went blind. I was sixteen. Just coming up to my GCSEs. My right eye's always been useless. No retina. But the left was okay. Until the retina slipped off when I was asleep. Bad things happen at night.

ALICE

It must've been... difficult.

GUY

Difficult? Well, it isn't a treasured memory.

ALICE

I didn't mean...

GUY

It was scariest thing that ever happened to me. I mean, you don't know what's meant by 'cold sweat' until you wake up every night in a damp T-shirt. Turn on the light, and the light's still out. Except you can feel the heat from the bulb. So I started listening to late-night phone-ins. On a good night you get a suicide calling. The DJ has to try and talk them out of it between double glazing ads. I thought Night Line would be like that. Without the ads.

ALICE

We don't get many suicides.

GUY

We don't get many *calls*. The only time the phone's rung while I've been here, it was a wrong number.

ALICE

There'll be calls. How long was it before you got used to it? The blindness?

GUY

You don't get used to it. I mean I'm not as bad as I was. I was really depressed. Started popping pills. Antidepressants. I developed a taste for euphoria. I wasn't allowed repeat prescriptions. Had to learn to cope without a chemical crutch.

ALICE

You can't rely on pills to get you by.

GUY

I'd've given it a go. But then I got angry. Really fucking pissed off. And you know what the fucker of it all is? There's no bastard to blame. Whose fault is it? The doctors'? They can only do so much. My parents'? They can't help belonging to the gene pool that gave me weak retinas. God's? I don't think so.

ALICE

Well, it isn't my fault, either.

GUY

Sorry. I didn't mean to... It's the anger. That's what stays with you. The anger.

ALICE

Don't you think you might be shutting people out? By being angry? Making a joke of everything?

GUY flings the leaflets at her.

GUY

So what do you think I should do? Confront my emotions? Get in touch with my inner child? I really hate all that touchy feely bollocks. Everybody's got their way of coping. Getting by. I run on rage. It helps me pick myself off the pavement.

ALICE

All right. Don't jump down my throat.

GUY

Well...

A moment.

ALICE

Look - for what it's worth I...

She touches GUY's arm.

ALICE

I think you're doing really well. I really do.

GUY

Thanks.

ALICE

I mean it.

GUY

Good. I suppose a shag's out of the question?

A shocked second or two, then ALICE snatches her hand away.

ALICE
I... I can't believe you said that.

GUY
Neither can I. You're not my type.

ALICE
Where do you get off talking to me like that?

GUY
Where do you get off patronising me?

ALICE
I wasn't.

GUY
No? You always treat me like I farted at a funeral, then suddenly it's 'You're doing really well.' Patting my hand.

ALICE
Obviously I made a mistake.

GUY
Obviously.

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN

The tutorial room.

GUY, JULIET and ALICE are sitting facing KELLY who is standing next to a flip-pad on an easel. On the pad are a number of drug-related terms - crack, smack, horse, hash, dope, grass, whizz, E etc.

KELLY
Any problems? Questions?

GUY
Yeah - where can I score some blow?

ALICE
Chuh!

KELLY
Well, that information isn't on file, but ask around the nearest junior school. You'll soon find out.

JULIET

I know somebody.

GUY

You do?

JULIET

Yes. From my church. He suffers from MS, actually. The hash helps. We often share a spliff together.

KELLY

Well, thanks for that, Juliet. Any other questions?

Silence.

KELLY

Let's call it a night, then. Our next session's on personal relationships. Alice is doing it. That'll be interesting. Two weeks.

She closes the flip-pad and recaps the coloured pens on the easel. GUY, ALICE and JULIET stand up. ALICE puts the chairs away.

JULIET

You want to be walked back, Guy?

GUY

It's okay. Keith knows the way now.

JULIET

I don't mind.

GUY

I'm okay. I want to talk to Kelly for a while, anyway.

KELLY

I have to get back. Essays.

GUY

It won't take long.

JULIET

I don't mind. I can wait outside.

GUY

No need.

KELLY

Why don't you go back with Juliet, Guy? We'll talk another time, yeah?

GUY
Five minutes. That's all.

JULIET
I'll wait outside for you, Guy. All right?

GUY
You really don't have to.

JULIET
I want to. I will.

She goes.

ALICE
Sad cow. I'm off, then. Maybe you could spare me a few minutes next week. See you, Kelly.

KELLY
Yeah - 'bye, Alice.

ALICE goes. KELLY takes the flip-pad off the easel and folds the easel away.

GUY
Good session.

KELLY
Thanks.

GUY
I learned a lot.

KELLY
Good.

GUY
What you said about -

KELLY
Look, Guy - I really *do* have to get back. And Juliet's waiting for you.

GUY
That's her choice.

KELLY
She's a nice person.

GUY
She's all right. But I really wanted to...

What?
KELLY

It's... about the other night.
GUY

Forget it.
KELLY

I... I just wanted to apologise...
GUY

There's no need.
KELLY

I didn't mean to... take advantage.
GUY

Well, maybe I overreacted. I was a bit... bit fazed, y'know?
KELLY

Yeah.
GUY

Finding out you could see...
KELLY

Only a bit.
GUY

It... it's like you're a... a different person, yeah?
KELLY

The... the truth is... This is difficult.
GUY

You don't have to...
KELLY

No. I want to explain.
GUY

There's really no need.
KELLY

Please.
GUY

I haven't got long.
KELLY

GUY

My life's a... a leap in the dark. Things come at me in concrete and steel. Cold and hard. I take the knocks 'cause that's how it is. That's my life. That's the score. Concrete and steel. Hard reality. But when... when you let me... Christ - this even sounds creepy to me.

KELLY

All right.

GUY

Well, it... it proved there's something else out there. Reality's not just cold and hard. It's soft and warm as well. Or it can be. I think maybe I'd... forgotten.

Silence.

GUY

I've... I've said too much. Said the wrong thing again. Sorry. I'll go. Juliet's waiting.

KELLY

No, it's okay. I... I think I understand. It... it must be difficult.

GUY

Good. I'm glad you understand. I hoped you would.

KELLY

I'm not saying... Just as long as you realise that... You mustn't...

GUY

I was hoping that maybe...

KELLY

Please don't.

GUY

Couldn't... Couldn't we meet for coffee or a drink or something?

KELLY

Sorry.

GUY

'Cause of your boyfriend?

KELLY

Boyfriend?

GUY

From the rugby team.

KELLY

What?

GUY

Juliet told me.

KELLY

Juliet told you I've got a boyfriend in the rugby team?

GUY

Yeah.

KELLY

I haven't. I'm not even in the market for a boyfriend.

GUY

On for a coffee, then?

KELLY

No. It's not a good idea.

GUY

Why not? What's wrong with me?

KELLY

Nothing's wrong with you. But we're both part of Night Line. I don't think we should... socialise. It's not professional.

GUY

I thought we were meant to form a... a mutually supportive network. Trust each other.

KELLY

We are.

GUY

So why can't we go for coffee?

KELLY

Because I wouldn't feel comfortable. It wouldn't be right.

GUY

What about if I leave Night Line? I don't think I'm really cut out for this sort of work. Ask Alice.

KELLY

You're doing all right.

GUY

But then coffee would be comfortable.

KELLY

You're not making this easy, are you?

GUY

I don't want to be let down gently.

KELLY

You'd rather do it the hard way?

GUY

I can take the knocks.

KELLY

I... Juliet's waiting for you.

GUY

So what is she? Consolation prize?

KELLY

Don't be horrible. She's lovely.

GUY

She's not my type.

KELLY

And you're not exactly mine -

GUY

Don't say it.

KELLY

Thought you could take the knocks.

GUY

I was wrong.

KELLY

Well, sorry. But it's how I feel. I mean. I... I'm flattered. But... I'm not worth it. Really I'm not.

GUY

Have you got low self-esteem or something?

KELLY

No. But I'm not worth -

GUY

Crap. That's just crap.

KELLY

Well, what... what can I say?

GUY

Nothing. There's nothing else to say. I'll just go home and kick the dog.

KELLY

Don't do that. He hasn't done anything.

GUY

I have to take it out on someone.

He goes.

Blackout.

SCENE EIGHT

Night Line HQ.

GUY and JULIET are sitting by the phone. Keith is at GUY's feet.

GUY is listening to a personal stereo. JULIET is making notes on an A4 pad distractedly.

JULIET

You're quiet tonight.

GUY takes out one of his stereo earphones.

GUY

Sorry?

JULIET

I said, 'You're quiet tonight.'

GUY

Sorry.

JULIET

It's okay. I don't mind. We don't have to talk.

GUY

Good.

He puts the earphone back in.

JULIET

What are you listening to?

GUY takes the earphone out.

GUY

Talking book. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

JULIET

Oh. What's that about?

GUY

Sex and death mostly.

JULIET

Not a love story, then?

GUY

No. It's not a love story.

JULIET

Joke. Freud again, right? I've heard of it.

GUY

Well done, you.

He screws the earphone back in. JULIET
makes a note.

JULIET

What does he think, then? Freud?

GUY yanks the earphone out.

GUY

It's complicated.

JULIET

We've got all night.

GUY takes the other earphone out.

GUY

Do you really want to know? Not exactly a Freud fan, are you?

JULIET

Well, I might not agree with him. But I'm interested.

GUY

Well, he... He says that organisms... That's us. Live in a state of permanent tension. 'Cause we're always after food and sex. And we're always trying to relieve that tension. But what we really want is to sort it all permanently. Get back to a state of inertia.

JULIET

Go straight back to bed, you mean? I've had days like that.

GUY

A lot more basic. He says we're made out of stuff that's stable in nature. Carbon. Water. Minerals. And that's what we want to get back to. The basics. It's the only way of really relieving the tension of being alive. So in the end the whole point of life is death.

He takes a bottle of pills from his pocket and opens it.

JULIET

I'll have to remember to get it out of the library next time I need cheering up.

GUY

I find it strangely comforting.

He shakes out a pill.

JULIET

You were quiet the other night as well. After you spoke to Kelly.

GUY

Yeah. I needed to be alone. Things to think about.

He puts the pill into his mouth.

JULIET

Did..? Did you get back okay? To halls?

GUY

No. Keith walked me under a bus.

JULIET

I only asked.

GUY

Well... Would you mind fetching me some water?

JULIET

Course not. Got a bottle in my bag actually.

She takes out a plastic bottle of mineral water.

JULIET

Spring is much nicer than tap. I'll open it for you. Here.

GUY

Thanks.

He drinks and swallows the pill.

JULIET

Have you got a headache?

GUY

No.

JULIET

What..?

GUY

Doesn't that bloody phone ever ring?

JULIET

Sometimes.

GUY

I've been coming here weeks now, and not a peep. Apart from that wrong number.

JULIET

Well, that... That's good really, isn't it? It means nobody needs our help.

GUY

It means there's no point in us being here.

He shakes out another pill and swallows it with a swig of mineral water.

JULIET

Yes there is. In case. It... It's like the fire brigade. They have to stand by in case there's a fire. But that doesn't mean they want there to be a fire, does it?

GUY

Well, I want someone to call us. I don't want all my training to go to waste.

JULIET

It won't.

He takes another pill.

JULIET

What are those?

GUY

Valium. I used to be on antidepressants. These are spares.

JULIET

Are..? Aren't they dangerous?

GUY

(Shrugs.)

Only if you take too many.

He takes another.

JULIET

How many is 'too many'?

GUY

One or two is the usual dosage.

JULIET

What are you doing?

GUY

Role play. Refresher course.

He rattles the pills.

GUY

Live ammo. I'm gonna sit here and swallow them one by one. You have to draw me out. Outline my options. Talk me out of it.

He swallows another pill.

JULIET

Stop. Why are you doing this?

GUY

I don't want to waste another night.

JULIET

We... We weren't wasting it. I don't understand.

GUY

It's very simple. Ask open questions. Be friendly and informal. You know the form.

JULIET

But why are you doing this?

GUY

I got the idea from Freud. I reckon he's right about the death instinct thing. Life's a drag - why drag it out?

JULIET

You... You don't mean that.

GUY

Don't I?

He swallows another pill.

JULIET

Don't!

GUY

You won't persuade me like that. Looks like it's curtains.

JULIET

Why are you doing this to me?

GUY

You obviously need the practice.

JULIET

But I haven't done anything to you. Only tried to help.

GUY

It's nothing personal.

JULIET

You're not being fair.

GUY

Life isn't fair. It's just a lot of random shit. You deal with it or you don't. This is something you have to deal with.

JULIET

And if I don't?

GUY

Your decision.

He takes another pill.

JULIET

Okay. Okay. We'll talk.

GUY

I'm already feeling very relaxed. Euphoric.

JULIET

What... What's brought this on?

GUY

The Valium, probably.

JULIET

No. I... I mean what... What made you decide that now's the time to do this? You don't just suddenly decide to... to... There must be a reason.

GUY

There is - Kelly.

JULIET

What's she done?

GUY

She didn't fancy me back.

JULIET

You're taking an overdose 'cause Kelly doesn't fancy you?

GUY

That's right.

JULIET

That's a bit... *extreme*, isn't it? I... I mean, y... there's someone who doesn't fancy me back, but I'm not gonna start swallowing pills.

GUY

I reckon I'm due a bit of luck. Kelly was it. My bit of luck. Except she wasn't.

He takes another pill.

GUY

You're not doing a very good job of persuading me.

JULIET

You're not giving me a chance.

GUY

I am. I'm listening.

JULIET

Aren't you being a bit blinkered?

GUY

I'm more than blinkered. I'm blind.

JULIET

I'm talking... metaphorically.

GUY

Great. I'm topping myself and you're talking metaphorically.

JULIET

Listen! Why does it have to be Kelly? Why her?

GUY

I dunno. I don't choose who I fancy. It just happens.

JULIET

It doesn't have to be her, though. You could be happy with someone else.

GUY

Who?

JULIET

Well, I...

GUY

You what?

JULIET

I...

GUY

You fancy me? Is that it?

JULIET

Mm.

GUY

Loosen your clothes and get over that table, then.

JULIET

Wh... What did you say?

GUY

You heard.

JULIET

Is... Is that what it all comes down to? Sex?

GUY

Pretty much. I'm a strict Freudian.

JULIET

What about love?

GUY

I'm gonna pop another pill in a minute.

JULIET

If... If I had sex with you, would you put the pills away?

GUY

Um... No. 'Cause it would be a sympathy shag. I don't do sympathy shags. Tried it once. Didn't like it.

JULIET

(Relieved.)

And it would be blackmail. I... I have feelings for you.
But I'm not ready to... to...

GUY

Shag me?

JULIET

Yes. No - I mean.

GUY

I don't think you really like me.

He eats a pill absent-mindedly.

JULIET

Please stop swallowing those things.

GUY

Sorry. I was forgetting myself.

JULIET

Don't.

GUY

You don't really like me. If I wasn't blind you'd think I
was nasty, sarcastic and self-centred. And you'd be right..

JULIET

You don't know how I feel.

GUY

I think I do. You like the idea of me being blind. Needing
you. It makes you feel needed.

JULIET

Doesn't everybody need to be needed?

GUY

Maybe. But it's not much fun being the one everybody needs
to need. That's what I mean. I wanna be me. Not just
some... object of sympathy.

JULIET

So I... I like you 'cause I feel sorry for you? Not for you
yourself?

GUY

That's right.

JULIET

No it's not.

GUY

So what do you think? That we're... soul mates or something?

JULIET

What about you and Kelly, then? Do you think that you and her are soul mates?

GUY

I... I thought we had something going.

JULIET

I bet you didn't. I bet you worked out that she's really good-looking. And you... you liked the idea that she takes her clothes off on the computer. And that... that turned you on.

GUY

Well...

JULIET

I'm right, aren't I?

GUY

All right, I admit she turns me on. What's wrong with that?

JULIET

It... It shows that you... you're not really interested in her. You're interested in your fantasy of her. That's almost the same as what you said about me.

GUY

H'm...

JULIET

I think you should give me the pills.

GUY

Why?

JULIET

'Cause if you're gonna kill yourself, you'd better have a really good reason. Give me the pills.

GUY

You haven't persuaded me.

He shakes out another pill.

JULIET

Give them to me.

No. GUY

JULIET lunges at GUY and tries to snatch the medicine bottle from him. It ends up in a clinch.

GUY
There was nothing in the training about this.

JULIET
Give me the pills.

GUY
No.

JULIET breaks away from him and grabs the phone.

JULIET
I'm calling an ambulance.

GUY
You can't.

JULIET
Yes I can. What's the number?

GUY
Nine nine nine.

JULIET
I knew that.

She dials.

GUY
Don't. You'll be wasting their time.

JULIET
Get you to hospital. Pump your stomach. They'll probably be able to save you.

GUY
They would. Definitely. You can't OD on Skittles.

JULIET
What?

GUY
The pills aren't Valium, they're Skittles. Here. Try one.

JULIET hangs up and takes the bottle.
She shakes out a pill, bites it.

Skittles? JULIET

Yeah. GUY

JULIET
You've been sitting here swallowing Skittles?

That's right. GUY

Why? JULIET

I was bored. GUY

You. Are. A. Shit. JULIET

Told you you didn't really like me. GUY

Bastard! JULIET

She slaps him.

Ouch! GUY

I've never met such a total... total... JULIET

Bastard? GUY

Bastard - yeah. JULIET

This is more like it. Now you're seeing me for me. GUY

I hate you. JULIET

GUY

That's good. Hate's an honest emotion. Better than compassion. Sympathy. Any of that other touchy feely bollocks. Hate's real. It has corners. Edges.

JULIET

No I don't. I don't hate you.

GUY

Don't go back on yourself. You were making progress.

JULIET

I don't understand.

GUY

I just want a bit of emotional honesty. And if it's hatred... At least it's honest.

JULIET

You haven't been very honest with me.

GUY

But if you really knew me, you'd know that I'd never top myself. I thought about it. Yeah. How to do it. Details. I'd go with pills and alcohol. Just drift away. But then I'd get angry. Suicide's a cop out. It's for losers. You know what I think when I hear someone's topped themselves? 'A loser died - good!'

JULIET

Why did you join Night Line, then?

GUY

I... I thought it would be a good way to meet girls. And, Christ, I met some.

JULIET

Don't... Don't you believe in what we do? Want to help people?

GUY

Maybe I don't believe in anything anymore.

JULIET

I... I'm going.

GUY

What?

JULIET

I don't want to be with you anymore.

She leaves quietly.

A long silence.

GUY

It's okay to be quiet. Maybe you're not talking to me because I'm a man? I can easily arrange for you to speak to a female Night Liner if that's any help? This is a completely confidential service. Nothing you say will ever be repeated. You don't have to say anything. I'll be here when you're ready to talk.

Lights fade.