

On the Front Lines

A Ten Minute Play
by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

- TED** Late thirties and has worked at the Youth in Crisis Hotline for four years. He has been through a lot in his life and really cares about the people who call.
- MOLLY** A total nut case in her thirties or forties. Her entire life is spent calling hotlines and harassing the people who answer.
- JOSEPH** A sad young man. He can only fulfill himself sexually by calling hotlines. He is definitely not shy about what he does.
- KRISTEN** A girl of about 15. Her life is a living hell. Inside her home she has had to put up with every imaginable kind of abuse since she was 7.
- FATHER** Kristen's father. A man about 45 years old.
- GIRL** A girl about 16 years old.

Scene

The hotline room at the Youth in Crisis Hotline.

Time

The present.

SETTING:

The set consists of a large table center stage with eight telephones. Around the table are old office chairs, some of which are torn and tattered. Along the outside walls are bookcases filled with books, a table with a coffee maker. A clock is on the upstage wall.

AT RISE:

There is only one person that appears on stage: Ted a liner at the Youth in Crisis Hotline. We hear the voices of the other characters through a speaker, and the sound should envelop the theatre. The set is in total darkness.

GIRL

God, I can't believe you found me a place to stay.
Thanks, thanks a lot. You've really helped. 'bye.

(Lights up. TED hangs up
the phone and begins to
dance around in jubilation.)

TED

Yes! All right, all right. What a job you did, Teddy.
Yes. Give me the high five. This calls for a little
coffee celebration.

(TED crosses to the coffee
maker, starts to fix a cup
of coffee, and begins to
sing "I've Got You Under My
Skin." The phone rings.)

TED

I'm coming, I'm coming. Hang on.
(He picks up the phone.)
Youth in Crisis Hotline. Can I help you?

KRISTEN

I don't think so. Sorry.

(TED hangs up the phone and
goes back to the coffee
maker and his song. The
phone rings and he crosses
back to it.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline. Can I help... (pause) I hope
it's not going to be a hang-up night tonight.

(TED hangs up the phone and
picks up a magazine.)

TED

Wow! Cindy baby, what a body. Look at those...

(The phone rings once again
and he answers it.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline. How can I help you?

(TED waits patiently for an
answer.)

TED

Is there some way I can help you?

KRISTEN

(frightened)

I don't know. (pause) I'm sorry, I shouldn't have
called here.

TED

It's okay.

KRISTEN

Thank you. Thank you anyway.

(KRISTEN hangs up the
phone.)

TED

Maybe next time.

(TED hangs up the phone. He
picks up the magazine and
starts to dance around the
room looking at the picture
of Cindy and singing "It's
Quarter to Three." The
phone rings and he answers
it.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline.

MOLLY (PLEADING)

I really need some help. Can you help me?

TED

Don't call here, please.

MOLLY

But, I really need some help.

TED

Molly, I know its you.

MOLLY (STRONG)

Fuck you cock-sucker. If I had a chance, I'd stick a knife in your mother-fucking heart, you son-of-a-bitch. Go...

TED

Molly, don't call here anymore. We've told you a million times, you're keeping us from answering important calls.

(TED hangs up.)

TED

Oh, shit. Not tonight.

(The phone rings again and
TED stares at the phone.)

TED

Oh, no.

(He slowly moves to answer
the phone.)

Youth in...

MOLLY

Don't ever hang up on me, you faggot mother-fucker.
I'll...

(TED hangs up and glares at
the phone.)

TED

Molly, with a mouth like that, I'm surprised you haven't been thrown out a window.

(TED starts singing "I'm Gonna Wash that Gal Right Out-A My Hair." The phone rings again.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline. How can I help you?

JOSEPH

Hi. My name is Joseph, and I was wondering if there was someone I could talk to?

TED

You can talk to me, Joseph.

JOSEPH

There isn't a woman I can talk to, is there?

TED

Sorry, but I'm the only one here tonight.

(TED opens a three-ring notebook and starts looking through the papers contained inside.)

JOSEPH

Well, I have this problem, you see, and it's kind of embarrassing.

TED

Joseph, can I ask how old you are? The reason I'm asking is that we're not a hotline for adults. We're here to help kids with problems.

JOSEPH

I'm sixteen.

TED

You sound a lot older than that. Come on Joseph, tell the truth.

JOSEPH

I am telling the truth. I can't help it if I sound older. That's not my problem, it's yours.

TED

Okay. So how can I help you?

JOSEPH

I have this sex problem and I need to talk about it.

TED (SARCASTICALLY)

I'm sure you do.

JOSEPH

You don't believe me?

TED

I believe you. What's your problem, Joseph?

JOSEPH

It's about my mother.

TED

Your mother?

JOSEPH

Yes. She likes to do things to me, and I'm not sure it's right.

TED

You mean sexual things, Joseph?

JOSEPH

Yes. Should I tell you what she does to me?

TED

Do you want to tell me what she does?

JOSEPH

Oh, yes. I think it would be good to get it off my chest. What do you think?

TED

I think you've called here before.

JOSEPH

No, you're wrong, I've never called here.

TED

You're voice sounds familiar and so does your story.

JOSEPH

You must have me mixed up with someone else.

TED

Nope. In fact you called here three hours ago. It's right here in our book. You're Joe the wacker.

JOSEPH

You're wrong.

TED

I don't think so, Joe. I've talked to you, other people here have talked to you, and you're not a very nice person.

JOSEPH

I won't masturbate, I promise. I really need to talk this time.

TED

Bye, Joe. Don't call back.

JOSEPH

Asshole.

(As TED hangs up, he looks toward the ceiling.)

TED

God, I am trying to be a good person here.

(The phone rings and TED
picks up the phone.)

TED

Hello...

MOLLY

You prick. How many times do I have to...

TED

Molly, stop it.

(He hangs up and picks up
the magazine.)

TED

This started out to be such a good night.

(The phone rings again.)

TED

Molly, if that's you, I'm putting the phones on hold for
thirty minutes.

(He answers it.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline. How can I help you?

(We hear soft crying from
the other end.)

TED

Hello? (pause) Are you okay?

KRISTEN

I just wanted to call and say I'm sorry.

TED

Sorry? For what?

KRISTEN

I had called earlier and hung up. I know how busy you must be, so I'm sorry for wasting your time. That's all I wanted to say. So I'll hang up now. I'm sorry.

TED

Wait. You don't have to hang up. You aren't wasting my time. You called and weren't ready to talk. That's okay.

KRISTEN

No, it's not. It's not okay. I know you're probably really mad at me.

TED

Look, I'm not mad at you.

KRISTEN

You're not? Really?

TED

Yes. (pause) Can I ask why you called? Is there something you need?

KRISTEN

What do you care for?

TED

I care because you sound like you're in a lot of pain.

KRISTEN

You're probably like everyone else. Nobody gives a damn.

TED

I'm not like everyone else. And I really do care.

KRISTEN

That's bullshit. That's what you're told to say. You don't know anything about me: who I am, my name, where I live, what's going on in my life. So it's bullshit when you say you give a damn about me.

TED

Do you want to know why I'm sitting here talking to you?

KRISTEN

Because you get paid to, that's why.

TED

No. I don't get paid.

KRISTEN

You don't?

(TED finally sits down at the desk. The lights should slowly change so that only TED and the desk are illuminated.)

TED

No. I do this once a week from two in the morning to six in the morning. I've been in trouble myself. There was a time when I thought the whole world was crap and that no one cared whether I lived or died. But, people I didn't even know, reached out and helped. And so now I want to return the favor. I don't have to know your name, who you are, where you live, or what your story is, to hear that you're hurting. I'm here to help, if you want it.

KRISTEN

But what can you do to help?

TED

I don't know. This job isn't very easy. Sometimes we're able to help and sometimes not. But I do know this,

whatever your problem, we're not going to solve it all tonight on this phone call. From the pain in your voice, it sounds like you've had to put up with this for years. We're not going to solve the problem tonight, but we can start. (pause) What do you think?

KRISTEN

I don't know.

TED

How are you feeling right now?

KRISTEN

Scared.

TED

It's scary calling up someone you don't know and trying to talk about a problem that you've never talked about before. I don't know how to make this any easier for you, I wish I did. All I do know is that I'm willing to listen and try and help if I can. This is your call, not mine. I'm here for you.

KRISTEN

Thanks. Can I ask you what your name is?

TED

Ted.

KRISTEN

Mine's Kristen.

TED

Look, Kristen, one way that I know to kind of get things going, is if I ask some questions. That way you don't have to worry about how to start.

KRISTEN

No, no questions, please. I know you're trying to help, but I just don't care anymore. I want to die and then everyone will leave me alone.

TED

I don't want you to die.

KRISTEN

Well, I do. I wish God would kill me right now. Make my heart stop beating. Then everything would be fine.

TED

Everything wouldn't be fine.

KRISTEN

If I were dead, it wouldn't make any difference in your life.

TED

It would make a difference, believe me.

KRISTEN

Well, I am going to die. Then we'll see what he thinks. I'm going to take his gun, lie down on his goddamn bed, and blow my brains out. So when he comes home he'll find his wonderful daughter with her brains scattered all over his fucking bed.

TED

Where's the gun?

KRISTEN

On my lap.

TED

Is it loaded?

KRISTEN

Yes.

TED

I want you to do me a favor.

KRISTEN

What?

TED

I want you to take the gun and put it in a drawer somewhere.

KRISTEN

Why?

TED

Kristen, I really want to talk to you, but I don't feel comfortable talking to you with a loaded gun sitting on your lap. So please put the gun away.

KRISTEN

I don't see why I need to do that.

TED

You're just doing me a favor, that's all.

KRISTEN

Okay, if that's what you want. I'll be right back.

(We hear KRISTEN put the phone down. TED sits in silence waiting for her return. Through the phone we hear a door open and close and then heavy footsteps.)

FATHER

Kristen!

TED

Hello?

FATHER

(To KRISTEN from phone.)

Kristen? (pause) What the hell? Goddamn it. Who are you talking to? You goddamn...

(Into phone.)

Who is this? (pause) Hello. (pause) Answer me.

(To KRISTEN from phone.)

You're gonna get it you bitch. Get over here you...

(The line goes dead.)

TED

Hello? (pause) Hello?

(TED hangs up and sits in silence looking at the phone. It begins to ring, he stares at it for a few rings, and then slowly answers it.)

TED

Youth in Crisis Hotline. (pause) Can I help you?

(The lights fade to BLACKOUT.)

End of Play.