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Crisis Hotline

A 10-Minute Play by

Dan Borengasser

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CHARACTERS

2F

TRISH; *a late twenty-something contemplating suicide*

SARAH; *a thirty-something who volunteers for the Crisis Hotline*

SETTING

The stage is split into two areas:

Stage Right – The office of the Crisis Hotline

Stage Left – A small apartment

Crisis Hotline

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AT RISE: *SARAH sits at her desk in the Crisis Hotline office stage right doodling on a sheet of paper. Although lights remain down stage left, TRISH FOSTER is visible in her apartment holding her cell phone. SFX: PHONE RINGS in the Crisis Hotline office. SARAH hits the speaker button and the LIGHTS RISE on TRISH who is obviously distraught, on the brink of tears.*

SARAH
Hotline. *(No response)* Crisis Hotline.

TRISH
Hell ... hello

SARAH
My name's Sarah. What's going on?

TRISH
I ... I have to talk to someone.

SARAH
Shoot.

There's an uncomfortable silence. TRISH awkwardly lifts a pistol from her lap and looks at it indecisively.

TRISH
Did you say shoot?

SARAH
Sorry. Old Hotline joke. Go ahead.

TRISH
I ... I ... *(Sniffs)* I don't know whether—

SARAH
You're not gonna keep sniveling, are you?

TRISH
What?

SARAH
You sniveled.

TRISH
I ... I didn't snivel.

SARAH
Listen, I've heard every possible snivel, and, believe me, you sniveled.

TRISH
Oh, God, I shouldn't have called.

SARAH
Too late. What's the problem?

TRISH
It's ... it's just that I'm feeling ... you know ... depressed and ... Am I on a speaker phone?

SARAH
Yeah.

TRISH
Ah ... do you mind taking it off speaker? This is kind of private.

SARAH
How private can it be? You're talking about it with a perfect stranger. Well, not exactly perfect.

TRISH
(Becoming increasingly rattled)
Have I got the right number? You did say this is the ... ah ... Crisis Hotline?

SARAH
Yeah, yeah. Calm down.

SARAH puts on a headset and disengages the speaker phone.

SARAH
There. You're off speaker phone. Okay?

TRISH doesn't respond.

SARAH, *Continued*
Let's try this again. You called the Crisis Hotline. Most people call the Crisis Hotline because they're having a crisis. Take it from there.

TRISH
My ... my husband and I are having problems.

SARAH
All couples have problems.

TRISH
And ... and I think he's having an affair.

SARAH
Every woman thinks that at one time or another. What's he say?

TRISH
I haven't brought it up.

SARAH
Why not?

TRISH
I'm ... I'm scared.

SARAH
Yeah, well, who isn't?

TRISH
I ... ah ... I don't mean to be critical, but shouldn't you be ... like ... more ... you know ... more ...

SARAH
Understanding?

TRISH
I suppose.

SARAH
Concerned?

TRISH
Yeah.

SARAH
Empathetic?

TRISH
Yes!

SARAH
Yeah, maybe. But you ever think maybe you're not the only one to have a bad day? Just asking.

TRISH
This is more than a bad day.

SARAH

I'm sure. What else?

TRISH

I can't eat or sleep. It's driving me crazy. One moment, I'm furious. The next, I think it's my fault. I mean, if I could have been more supportive or sexier or a better lover, maybe he wouldn't have felt like he had to run around.

SARAH

Oh, please. *(Beat)* What's your name?

TRISH

I ... I don't wanna say.

SARAH

I need to call you something. How about Basket Case? Or Wuss Wife? Or ...

TRISH

Becky. Call me Becky.

SARAH

That's better.

SARAH reads from a hotline instructional sheet.

SARAH, *Continued*

So, Becky, what was the precipitating event?

TRISH

The precipitating event?

SARAH

Yeah, you know, the reason you called. As opposed to yesterday. Or the day before that.

TRISH

He didn't come home last night.

SARAH

Okay. What is your state of mind, Becky?

TRISH

Not too good. I'm depressed most of the time. I feel helpless. Lonely. *(Beat)* Are you reading these questions?

SARAH

Yeah. So what?

TRISH

I don't know. Seems a little impersonal.

SARAH

Impersonal? Not much point in my developing a relationship with someone planning to off themselves, is there?

TRISH

Off myself?

SARAH

Yeah, you know, suicide. A date with the old grim reaper?

TRISH

I ... I didn't say anything about suicide.

SARAH

You didn't have to. You've got all the signs. *(Reading again)* What is your plan of action?

TRISH

Have you had any training for this job?

SARAH

(Becoming agitated)

First of all, it's not a job. I'm a volunteer. I listen to all this depressing crap for free. You don't even want to get me started on that. And, second, yeah, I've been trained. Extensively. Hours and hours and hours. Okay? Satisfied? So what is your damn plan of action?

TRISH

You don't have to get so upset.

SARAH

Upset? Don't talk to me about upset. Becky. Or whatever your name really is. Who's the freaking counselor here anyway, huh? You or me?

TRISH

Ah ... you.

SARAH

Damn straight! Now, I'm going to ask you one more time. What the hell is your plan of action?

TRISH

Ah ... no plan really. Probably have a glass of wine, watch a movie, go to bed.

SARAH

Don't give me that garbage! You were suicidal. You're still suicidal.

TRISH

No, no, I feel better now.

SARAH

Liar. What about your husband, the adulterous no-show?

TRISH

Jeez, what's your problem?

SARAH

Hey, I don't have a problem. You're the one with the problem. Remember.

TRISH

Well, something must have happened to make you so hostile.

SARAH

Am I confused here? Aren't you the one who called the Crisis Hotline?

TRISH

What was it?

SARAH

What was what?

TRISH

You know. The ... ah ... precipitating event?

SARAH

Don't try that crap on me.

TRISH

If you're too embarrassed to say, that's all right.

SARAH

(Laughing derisively)

Oldest trick in the book.

TRISH

What?

SARAH

Misdirection. Changing the subject. Acting like I'm the one with the problem.

TRISH

But, I'm not—

SARAH

Think you're dealing with a rookie here? Huh?

TRISH

I'm actually a good listener.

SARAH

Bully for you. Then, listen to this— Your situation isn't even that bad. Compared to some of the pathetic losers I've had to deal with, you're like a little ray of sunshine.

TRISH

Is that supposed to be comforting?

SARAH

In fact, for seriousness and potential for self-inflicted harm, I'm giving your case a low rating. Feel better?

TRISH

You rate us?

SARAH

What do you expect? Have to evaluate you somehow. You're getting a four out of ten.

TRISH

A four! My situation was at least a seven!

SARAH

Hah! Did you hear what you just said? "Was." You're already using the past tense. Now tell me I don't know what I'm doing.

TRISH considers the situation for a moment.

TRISH

Okay, if mine is a four, what's yours? How do you rate your condition? (*Goads, after no response*) Bet mine is worse than yours. You're probably a two.

The quiet is almost palpable.

SARAH

Okay, hot shot. I lost my job today.

TRISH

Like that's the end of the world. You can always get another job.

SARAH

You don't know what the hell you're talking about.

TRISH

So tell me. What's ... ah ... your state of mind? (*Sullen silence*) Isn't that the point of the Crisis Hotline? To listen to someone's crisis? (*Still no response*)

TRISH, *Continued*

What difference does it make if it's your crisis or mine? Nothing. Besides, you've already heard mine. It's your turn.

SARAH

Cute. Very cute. *(Beat)* Okay. I was an executive assistant at an advertising agency. I worked seventy hours a week. My life was my job.

TRISH

That doesn't sound so bad. Maybe a three.

SARAH

I was also having an affair with the owner of the agency, who said he was leaving his wife for me. Like a dumb ass, I fell for it. His wife finds out and here I am. 32 years old, no job, no friends, no future.

TRISH

Wow. Sorry. A seven, at least. *(Beat)* Maybe an eight.

SARAH

Now I don't even have a hamster to talk to. And the few times I get out of my apartment, what do I do? Come down here and listen to some nut case whine about her supposed problems. *(Beat)* Present company excepted.

TRISH

Is ... is there anything I can do?

SARAH

Oh, please, give me a break. What the hell could you do?

TRISH

I don't know. Buy you a hamster?

There is no response ... till SARAH snorts in amusement.

SARAH

That's pretty good ... ah ... say, what is your real name, anyway?

TRISH

Trish. Trish Foster.

SARAH

Hi, Trish. I'm Sarah Collinsworth. *(Awkward pause)* Well, this has all been very interesting, but my shift's winding down, and I've got a lot of paperwork to do first. You still suicidal?

TRISH

No. You?

SARAH

No. Not that I ever was, of course. But I do feel a little better, so I guess I owe you that. (*Beat*)
Well, don't do anything I wouldn't do. See you.

SARAH starts to hang up.

TRISH

Wait.

SARAH

What?

TRISH

You're about to get off?

SARAH

Yeah.

TRISH

You ... ah ... you want to meet? Like for a drink?

SARAH

Sorry. Against the rules.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes