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Calling

A comedy in one act

Colin and Mary Crowther

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



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CHARACTERS

Kat, truculent, caring

Ann, too eager to please

Caro, restless, rootless

Robyn, ambitious, impatient

Patricia, friendly, sensible

Stephanie, mature, withdrawn

The action takes place in and around an old boarding school
one summer weekend

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(See also page ii)

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The characters in this play are probably all in their 20's but could be between 17 and 35, making it equally ideal for older teenagers or for a mixed-age cast. Very full stage directions and character descriptions are given to help less experienced groups. But please feel free to do it your own way. All the characters were asked to dress comfortably. None of them has met before so they weren't able to confer. Some thought the instruction was a trick and have dressed formally. So Robyn looks stunning in a top of the range suit, made up to the nines, her hair worn up, as becomes a flight attendant; Caro looks equally formal, but on a tight budget, in the dark suit she probably wears in her work as a hotel receptionist. She also wears make-up and has paid some attention, not very successfully, to her hair. Ann never knows what to wear and looks so old-fashioned her father must have chosen that dull dress and white cardigan for her. Her hair is curly, reinforcing the impression that she is younger than her real age. No make-up, her father wouldn't approve. Kat, cherishing her role as rebel, is a Goth – not caring how out of date, or out of place, it might look. But she is clearly not comfortable with that image in this place and each time she leaves the stage, she returns with one less extreme decoration, one more attempt at toning it all down, especially the make-up. Patricia and Stephanie are the only ones who look really comfortable, Patricia in a favourite top, warm cardigan and skirt, Stephanie smarter in new clothes: a plain white T-shirt, pastel tracksuit and white trainers, all chosen, one suspects, to make her look younger and not stand out. She and Kat are the only ones to wear a crucifix, though it's difficult to tell if Kat's isn't part of her Goth image.

Enjoy!

Colin and Mary Crowther

CHARACTERISATION NOTES

Kat is bristling. Whenever she meets new people, her low self-esteem means that her hackles go up and her claws come out: scarred by life, her first defence is attack. A pity. She is intelligent, amusing, dedicated, caring, perceptive and painfully honest, but always being hurt because she comes across as aggressive and takes the huff at the slightest provocation

Ann is nervous, younger than her years and desperate to please, to belong. But what she says is certainly not what she rehearsed with her father. We soon begin to wonder if this is really the too-dutiful daughter or the ultimate, if unconscious, act of self-defence... In which case, is she stupid, or very clever or very, very sly? Whatever the truth, we feel we want to protect her

As **Caro** herself recognizes, there is something lacking in her and this insecurity results in her constantly seeking approbation. Perhaps this can be traced back to her childhood: both her parents were in the army and she rarely saw them. She was sent to a boarding school and in the holidays to the care of her doting grandmother. If she could only find a friend who would value her and raise her self-confidence, then perhaps the little girl would finally blossom and mature. It's what she seeks in this job, but it will come at a price she is not yet able or willing to pay

Robyn is impatient for change and for the chance to lead that change. The youngest child - by far - of a family of high-fliers, she has always struggled to be noticed; to be taken seriously. The trouble is - or perhaps it is her saving grace - that she is so transparently ambitious and ruthless in pursuit of that ambition. She's a hard nut to crack, but remember that hardness is just her shell

Patricia is remarkably relaxed for someone facing so important a weekend. This is because she is certain of her calling, but it does help

to reveal what a friendly and sensible person she is. She's certainly the sort of person we all want as our best friend, because she listens all the time. Consequently, she can sum people up quickly. Miraculously, even then, she seems prepared to accept everyone as they are. But underneath her confidence lurks a very real fear

Stephanie at first seems aloof, guarded, occasionally impatient and irritable, but as she changes and grows, these clouds lift and she is revealed in her final interview with the panel as a mature woman, at peace with herself

Other plays by Colin and Mary Crowther, published by
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Footprints in the Sand (Colin Crowther)

Just Passing

Noah's Ark (for children)

Reflections

Till We Meet Again

Tryst (Colin Crowther)

An Untimely Frost (formerly The Lost Garden)

*With our gratejul thanks to Joyce
Kirkman LGSM, an inspiring teacher
and dear friend, for her invaluable
help and support*

CALLING

The setting is very simple: eight identical chairs in a wide semi-circle, right across the centre of the stage, each facing DC. There is a small table ULC. On the table are notebooks, pens and four A4 buff envelopes, each one containing a typed sheet of instructions and a fifth one for their solutions. Offstage right is a long, strong, old plank

The action alternates between interview sections and group sessions. For the interview sections, everyone sits alertly focusing on the interview panel, who are assumed to be DC. They usually sit in the same order for the interview sections. From SR: Kat, space, Ann, Caro, Robyn, space, Patricia, Stephanie. In the group sessions, they visibly relax and revert to their real selves

Lights snap on to reveal a band of cold, bright light across C: this is the interview lighting

Kat I don't. It's the last job on earth I want. But it's got my name on it. Like nursing did. E.M.I... What? ...Oh, Elderly Mentally Infirm... What I'm doing now. People with dementia. No one else wants to... Fine. I'll do it. And I love it. Love them. Good job I do. No one else will. And now this.

Ann Couldn't get plainer than that.

Caro Ooh, that's a hard one. I'll have to think about that.

Robyn You see what I mean? Sweet people. But frankly, misfits and losers. You see a lot of that in my profession.

Ann Nursery Nurse.

Caro Hotel Receptionist... Well, I was. Before that, Home Carer. Old people. Not very nice old people...

Robyn Flight attendant. Senior Flight Attendant.

Patricia Teacher... Secondary... Science...

Stephanie You know what I do. What I want to know is why I'm here.

Caro Before that, sales assistant... Supermarket... Stacking shelves. Boring.

Robyn London, New York, Paris, Rome. Like the perfume. *(She laughs)*

Caro Before that, hairdresser... Well, brushing up after the hairdresser. Really boring.

Robyn Management, really.

Caro I don't think I've got any strengths, not as such, but tell me what to do, stick me at the back, you'd hardly know I'm here.

Stephanie I still don't know why I'm here.

Patricia Because this is where I'm meant to be.

Ann It would make Father so proud.

Kat *(rising)* Oh, let's stop wasting each other's time. I know you'll reject me. Came expecting it... *(Moving behind her chair, as if to exit, then turning back)* When you do?

Patricia Turn me down? I hadn't thought...

Kat I'll find someone else who feels rejected... Look after them. Because I know how they feel. *(She turns to face upstage and freezes)*

Ann *(rising)* So proud. *(Moving behind her chair, as if to exit)* What do I think? Don't you see? This isn't about me. *(She turns upstage and freezes)*

Robyn *(rising and moving behind her chair)* Who knows? In ten years, I could be sitting there. Interviewing you! *(She laughs nervously, turns upstage and freezes)*

Caro Oh, yes, I have got a strength. Knew I must have, somewhere. *(Rising and moving behind her chair)* I can start tomorrow. *(She turns to face upstage and freezes)*

Patricia *(rising slowly)* If you turn me down, I'll go away.

Go back to my classroom, to my teaching. (*Appearing to give up she moves behind her chair, then looks up and smiles*) Next year, I'll come back. And I'll keep coming back. Till what's calling me is calling you. (*She turns upstage and freezes*)

Stephanie (*remaining stubbornly seated*) Will someone please tell me what this is all about!

Quick cross fade to general lighting over the whole stage

Stephanie crosses her legs but otherwise remains sitting, nursing her thoughts. Patricia crosses to the table and looks at what is on it. Caro and Robyn stand to one side near the back of the room, talking quietly to each other. Ann wants to belong, but doesn't know where

Kat (*flopping down in her chair*) Weird.

The others look at her, then look away

Patricia It's all here. Paper, pens, the dreaded envelopes.

Ann Oh, good. Isn't it?

Robyn Frankly? I'm less than impressed.

Caro I must admit, I was disappointed — when they told us to come here, to a boarding school. I thought we'd be going to — oh, what did they tell us to call it? — HQ.

Kat Weird.

Robyn And last night? When we arrived?

Ann That was odd — no one to greet us — school holidays, of course, but there must have been someone here because —

Robyn A scribbled note and a bag of groceries — not what I call hospitality.

Ann I was surprised we had to cook our own meals.

Caro Make our own beds!

Kat Weird.

Robyn And those rules — about what we could and could not

say — the words we could use.

Ann “Job”.

Caro “HQ”.

Ann “Shiftwork”.

Robyn And today it gets worse. They give us four tasks — all weekend to complete them — then don’t stick round to see how we get on.

Patricia Still, better get started.

Robyn I think we should start by introducing ourselves. Last night’s a bit hazy...

Kat and Stephanie groan audibly, then smile at each other, recognizing rebel kinship

Everyone comes and sits down in interview sequence, except Patricia, who remains standing by the table, the first envelope in her hand. They look in front of them, addressing the panel

Quick cross fade to interview lighting

Kat Kat. Not Katherine, Katrina, Katya, Katy, Kate or Kay. Kat.

Ann Ann. Just plain Ann. Can’t get plainer than that.

Caro Caro. Short for Caroline. In Italian, it means Beloved. Not that anyone’s ever called me that in Italian. Or even English.

Robyn Robyn. With a Y.

Patricia Patricia. Pat... Whatever.

Stephanie Stephanie. Sounds strange, after all these...

Kat Why don’t they just get on with it!

Quick cross fade to general lighting

Call us in, one by one, ask us all they want, and then... let us go. Instead —

Robyn Instead they call us in, one at a time, ask one silly

question, then call us back and ask another.

Patricia I'm sure they have their reasons.

Stephanie I'm beginning to doubt it.

Robyn It's so unsophisticated. When I had my interview at B.A. —

Kat groans, as if in real pain

They had this whole battery of tests, designed to weed out the — shall we say? — unstable.

Kat Did it work?

Patricia (*stepping forward quickly; opening the envelope and reading aloud*) Task One: "You are out walking on your own when suddenly you come across a man who has fallen into quicksand. Already it is up to his shoulders. Soon he will drown. What would you do?"

Caro I thought they'd start with something easy.

Stephanie I think they did.

Ann I know! I'd step back. In case I fell in. Are they all going to be this easy?

Caro That's a good idea.

Stephanie Do we have to agree? On our answer?

Robyn Maybe we're like a jury. We need a foreman, to count the vote, summarize the pros and cons, persuade the dithering. I don't mind volunteering... (*She rises, not expecting any opposition*)

Patricia It says, "you are on your own". So no, I don't think we need a foreman.

Kat Pity.

Robyn sits, miffed. Inspiration strikes Ann, not that anyone notices

Ann Oh! I've seen this somewhere.

Robyn I'll go first, shall I?

Stephanie I think Ann already has.

Robyn I'd call air-sea rescue.

Caro That is a good idea!

Stephanie But you're on your own.

Robyn I never go anywhere without my mobile.

Ann It was in a film. About a nun.

Patricia Caro, what would you do?

Caro I'd run for help. Get someone responsible.

Stephanie No time. It's already up to his neck.

Ann Audrey Hepburn!

Robyn You seem to know all the answers, Stephanie. What would you do?

Stephanie (*shrugs*) I'd start by throwing him the lifebelt.

Caro He could pull you in. Then you'd both drown.

Robyn What if there isn't a lifebelt?

Stephanie There's always a lifebelt. Stands to reason. If there's quicksand, there's a warning. And a lifebelt. Help him out, if I could. If not, pour him a coffee — feed him a sandwich — keep his energy up.

Caro What for?

Stephanie So we can talk through why he decided to kill himself.

Caro But it was an accident! Wasn't it?

Ann It's a bit morbid. Couldn't they think up something nicer? With babies?

Patricia I've never seen anyone die before. Oh, I'd try to help — smile, take messages, listen, say... whatever — but I know, when it came to the end, I'd look away.

Ann (*jumping up*) Yes! That's it. You listen to his confession!

Robyn You're not a priest.

Ann And smile. So as he sinks, gurgling in his final agony, he'd have something beautiful to look at. Me. (*She sinks back into her chair, dramatically*)

Kat Audrey Hepburn. *A Nun's Story*.

Ann That's right! Trouble is, I think she got it wrong.

Robyn So we're agreed. Caroline —

Caro Caro.

Robyn Sweet. Caro came closest. To me. I'd organize air-sea rescue, ambulance, that sort of thing. Stephanie threw in a lifebelt and a sandwich. Shall we vote on it?

Kat He's about to drown — not go on a picnic!

Robyn Very well. What would you do, Kat?

Kat Simple. I'd hit him on the head. Knock him out. Then at least he wouldn't know he was drowning.

Horrificed pause, then slowly the others see the funny side

Robyn Ah, Kat and her wicked sense of humour.

But their laughter has backed Kat into a corner. And a cornered cat will do just one thing...

Kat *(rising)* Who's joking?

Robyn *(to Patricia)* What's next?

Kat *(flaring)* I'm a nurse. What do you expect me to do? I'm there to kill the pain.

Stephanie But pain can be useful.

Kat Huh! If you think that, you haven't seen pain — not real pain. Oh, for God's sake! It's what they want. Patients. Relatives. Kill the pain.

Stephanie *(carefully)* Is that what you do? When your patients are in too much pain? Kill them?

Kat Course not. You stay with them. Hold their hand. Wipe their brow. And in the deep dark bowels of the night, reach out your hand... *(Chickening out)*... and go, "There, there." *(Pause)* I need a cigarette.

Kat exits DR, pulling out her cigarettes as she goes

Ann *(rising)* I'm really hungry now.

Caro Oh, so am I!

Robyn It's only half past eleven.

Stephanie What about Task Two?

Ann Couldn't we have an early lunch? To give us energy for the next one? Something tells me we're going to need it.

Caro Good idea.

Patricia rises

Robyn Perhaps we should all stretch our legs. (*She rises and heads DR*)

Caro and Ann rise. Caro starts to follow Robyn, but Ann is not yet sure whom to follow

Patricia I'll get it, shall I? Sandwiches OK? (*She turns US, heading for UL*)

Stephanie (*jumping up and intercepting her; trying to put her off*) I'll do it.

Patricia You made dinner last night. Least I can do is make a few —

Stephanie You did the washing up. Let me — please.

Robyn We need a rota. Ensure no one gets imposed on. I'll do that. I'm good at rotas.

Ann What can I do?

Patricia (*to Ann*) The washing up?

Patricia exits UL

Stephanie (*looking defeated then realizing her behaviour is attracting attention*) I'll just... write up our answers... to Task One... Someone should... (*She turns her chair US and sits at the table and begins to write*)

Robyn But you could cheat.

Stephanie Why should I want to?

Robyn Sweet. In that case, I'm off to explore.

Caro What was that all about?

Robyn Dark horse, our Stephanie. What do we know about her?

Caro Last night, after dinner, when we were all chatting in the Common Room, where was she? And this morning, she didn't show for breakfast.

Ann (*joining them* DR) Had hers early. She said.

Robyn Where does she get to?

Ann She's taking time out.

Robyn Like a gap year?

Ann More of a sabbatical, I think.

Caro From what?

Kat enters DR. *She herds the others back to their seats*

Kat They want us back in.

Robyn Oh, really! What for this time?

They resume their seats for an interview session, all except Stephanie and Patricia

Quick cross fade to interview lighting

Kat Family? Haven't got any.

Robyn I can't wait to see their faces!

Kat When I was little, my mother used to tell me a story, how, when she knew she couldn't have any children, she went to this big, long room, with rows and rows of babies. And chose me. I loved that story. Made me feel special.

Ann Oh, they're all in favour. Not my sister. She thinks I'm a fool. But she doesn't live at home now. Nor does Mother... I haven't seen her since... So Father pinned all his hopes on me — and he has such high hopes of people. Till they let him down. And everyone does, in the end. My sister...Mother... But the Head at my old school — ever so nice, I had a chat with her, just like this — she said I had to try something else first. So I did. Nursery Nurse. And I love it. But now Father thinks the time is right. And he would be so proud...

Kat As I grew older, I'd get into mischief — nothing more —

tell a fib, break something — she told a different story. How, if I was bad, she would take me back — choose another, better, little girl. Leave me behind in that big, long room, with rows and rows of other, bad little girls...

Caro No close family. We're... a bit scattered, always have been. But friends, that's a different story... Best friend? No. Not at the moment. People come and go, don't they? But the way I see it, with you, I'd have hundreds of best friends... Twenty-three? Oh. Well, twenty-three's... nice... One would be nice.

Kat Moral to her story? Love is something you must earn. And I'd never be good enough. So I grew frantic, desperate to please. But no, try as I might, I kept doing something wrong... And every night, the shadow of that long, dark room reached out for me...

Ann What do I think? Don't you see? It isn't about me.

Kat So no. No family.

Patricia enters UL, with plate of sandwiches

Patricia They think I'm crazy. But I can tell, they're not surprised, not one bit.

Ann (*rising; shaking, clearly very distressed*) Can I go now? Please.

Quick cross fade to general lighting

Caro takes Ann's hand, leads her UC. Robyn and Kat eye each other, then ignore each other

Patricia (*thrusting the sandwiches under Stephanie's nose, preventing her from working*) Sandwich, Stephanie?

Stephanie Oh, I...

Patricia After all, you made them.

Stephanie Sorry.

Patricia Why, Stephanie?

Stephanie I didn't think anyone else would want to...

Patricia Well, think again. We're all in this together. Or supposed to be. It's share and share alike from now on. Agreed?

Stephanie nods

You did the meal last night. And breakfast. And lunch. I'll do it tonight. Someone else can do it tomorrow.

Stephanie And Robyn can write up the rota.

They laugh. Patricia takes the plate to Robyn

Robyn I don't eat lunch.

Patricia places the plate on the chair beside Robyn

Stephanie I've got a problem.

Patricia And I wish you'd talk about it.

Stephanie I've written up the ideas we had, but I can't remember who said what...

As each person's name is mentioned, they take a sandwich, except Patricia and Stephanie

Patricia Try me.

Stephanie Robyn —

Patricia With a Y.

Robyn Oh, cheese. Perhaps just one...

Stephanie She would call in the professionals.

Patricia Never be without your mobile.

Stephanie Ann —

Ann Is that lunch?

Stephanie Ann thinks she's Audrey Hepburn.

Ann My favourite. Food.

Stephanie Who's the one having second thoughts?

Patricia Interesting. You got that impression, too. Her name's Caroline.

Caro (to Ann) Oh, no. I'm sure. Well, quite sure. You can never be totally sure until you've done it, can you? Trouble is, by then, it's too late. You've gone too far... I had that trouble with a boyfriend once... (She sits beside Robyn)

Kat rises, goes over and takes the plate from them then goes back to her corner and sits, eating slowly

Patricia Kat thinks she's the Terminator.

Stephanie Then there's you.

Patricia Patricia

Stephanie The one who'd look away.

Patricia The coward.

Stephanie (shaking her head) I suspect the only honest one among us.

Patricia And you. The practical one. All there with the lifebelt. And the sandwiches. Dead giveaway, those sandwiches.

Stephanie Still... someone...

Robyn Missing.

Caro Sometimes I think there's something missing in —

Robyn They're in there, we're out here... so why do I feel they can see every move we make; hear every word we say?

Everyone stops eating and starts thinking

Ann They use spies in MFI.

Caro You mean — one of us?

Kat MFI?

Robyn A spy!

Ann Oh. Silly me. Not MFI. I meant MI5.

Robyn (to herself) That's it! The place is bugged!

Quick cross fade to interview lighting

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