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A Cold Line: A Ten-Minute Play

Adam March

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SAMANTHA DANIEL: *A woman in her late teens.*

ANDREW CRAW: *A man in his early to mid-twenties.*

OSCAR JERVIS: *A man in his early forties.*

SCENE: *In a cramped office and equally cramped apartment.*

TIME: 11:30pm.

At Rise: Sam sits at her desk in front of a computer with a phone ringing in one hand and a pen in another. She is on stage right. There is a wall between her and Andrew. He is on stage left.

SAM

(speaking to herself)

Alright, alright. Stay relaxed and remember to engage with them.

SAM

(phone stops ringing)

Thank you for calling. My name is Sam. How—uh—are you doing today?

ANDREW

(hunched over in chair)

Hey. Um... I'm doing fine.

SAM

Good. That's good. Could you help me with some personal information, just like a formality-type thing? Could you tell me your name, age, address, and a bit about yourself?

ANDREW

Yeah, I know the spiel... It's Andrew. Uh—Andrew Craw. I'm twenty-three, currently living in Arlington, Washington at—wait, hold on, are you new there?

SAM

(she says while filling out forms with the information)
Yeah sorry, I've only had a couple clients. It might take a minute, but I could transfer you to someone else if you'd like...

ANDREW

(he interjects quickly)
No, no. That's fine. It's just that I noticed you didn't ask me if I or a family member served in the military. No to both by the way. Y' know, for your formality.

SAM

Wow, I guess I did forget. Sorry, I might be a little distracted. I'm not really used to the whole having a job thing yet. Sorry, uh, how did you know that?

ANDREW

(he says in a reserved manner)
Uh, you could say I have a bit of experience in that hellhole, but I've since stopped to preserve what sanity I have left.

SAM

(interested, but also a little nervous)
Really?
(short pause)
What pushed you away?

ANDREW

(he gets up and starts pacing around the room)
Well, originally, it was just a job that I got to help me through college. It worked well with my schedule, and I guess I figured, what the hell. I went in and made the

calls as best I could. I figured I'd keep it during my time there and later start looking for a job closer to home.

SAM

That sounds good. And uh, what changed for you?

ANDREW

In general, I wouldn't say that it was that bad. You'd deal with some pushy people here and there, but most were surprisingly nice and talkative.

(he pauses and sighs)

I had one call though, came in at two in the morning, that I could tell, just from the start, would be a pain...

Blackout. Scene transitions showing the past conversation. Andrew is moved to Sam's desk and Mr. Jervis is placed in Andrew's chair.

ANDREW

(in a more robotic, chipper tone than before)

Hi, my name is Andrew. Thank you for calling. What can I call you, and how can I help you this morning?

MR JERVIS

Um, yeah, I'm sorry for calling. I just really needed someone to talk to. My name's Oscar, wait no... Yeah, Oscar's fine.

ANDREW

Alright... I just need a bit of information from you, and we can get started. Are you okay with that?

MR JERVIS

(says while holding something back)

That's fine...

ANDREW

Ok, so, how old are you?

MR JERVIS

Forty-three...

ANDREW

Could I get your address, please? Just state and zip code are fine if you aren't comfortable with giving out the full thing.

MR JERVIS

Yeah, um...

(pause)

Just, St Helens, Oregon, zip code is... 97501.

ANDREW

Wow! No way! I'm in Portland right now for school. Ok, alright. And finally, could you tell me if you or anyone in your family has served in the military, and do you have access to a—

MR JERVIS

I'm so sorry, but I'm not sure if I can keep going anymore... I have nothing meaningful in my life. I have no connections, no hobbies, nothing! Just a senseless cycle of work and an endless pool of hate. I've put off calling for so long, but I just need another person to hear me!

ANDREW

Do you want to tell me about what's been going on? Maybe uh—Maybe I can offer some advice to help you

cope with your negative feelings.

MR JERVIS
(sarcastically)

Yeah, cope.

(slowly builds dissatisfaction through this speech)

It's honestly hard to say what's been going on. I'm not doing bad professionally, I guess I just expected more by now. Something at the end of the rainbow. I've always kept a smile on my face and worked hard to better myself, to beat my insecurities and make my life something worthwhile. But... I feel like I've never truly lived. I've probably been repressing every real emotion for years.

(defeated)

And now I'm probably too far gone to make things better...

ANDREW

I'm so sorry that you have to go through that every day. If it's an ongoing issue, we could maybe set you up with a more direct line...

MR JERVIS

No, that's alright. I really don't want to make this an ongoing thing.

ANDREW

Alright Oscar, could you tell me if you've had any thoughts of suicide and how recently?

MR JERVIS

I—I don't know, I guess not really, I just want things to change... *(angry)* I'm sick of banging my head into the

same brick wall and having no support when there's a headache!

(sighs and calms down)

I'm sorry, I guess I'm just a little high-strung right now.

ANDREW

Alright, that's ok. It's good to know that it's not an emergency. I can talk for a bit, but if you're not suicidal, I can't justify spending too much time on this call.

MR JERVIS

Really? Are you seriously saying that I'm not worth your time?! How is that fair?! How can you say that's fair?!

ANDREW

I'm really sorry, but we're not really trained to be therapists. I can listen for a bit like I said, but we need to give opportunity to others. Many other people might be on the verge of never coming back.

MR JERVIS

(holding back tears)

Okay. Yeah, that's fair. I'm grateful for your time, thank you.

ANDREW

What? Are you sure?

MR JERVIS

Yeah, I'm okay.

Blackout. Scene transitions back to Sam and Andrew.

SAM

Is that it? There has to be more to that story.

ANDREW

I only had one conversation with him. Now, based on what you heard, I want you to try and rate my performance with that client. Just, y'know, just like out of ten.

SAM

Well, it sounds like you did all you could for him. But I'm not necessarily gonna pretend that "all you could" is enough. Then again, I'm not really sure what I could have done in your situation.

ANDREW

You're really not sure, huh? Ok. So, what rating would you give me?

SAM

Maybe a seven? I really don't think I can be an accurate judge without being there.

ANDREW

I'll ask you this. Do you think Oscar went on to enjoy the rest of his days with a smile on face?! Do you think he went on to find meaning and purpose in his life?!

SAM

Well, maybe—

ANDREW

And even if, by some miracle, he managed to do all that, do you think it was our call that helped him?!

SAM

Why are you berating me? I had no part in it! And—and you probably don't even know what happened to the guy!

ANDREW

(sighs)

Look. The whole system accomplishes nothing. I didn't mean it as a personal attack towards you. I'm sorry. Although, it really doesn't help your case that you're basically brand new.

(he pauses)

And, the truth is, I do know what happened to him.

SAM

Oh no... Please don't tell me. Did he...

ANDREW

Did you expect this story to have a happy ending? I remember I stopped by my grandma's apartment. She usually has the local news playing on her TV 24-7. Apparently, the night before, some idiot was driving on the wrong side of the interstate. There was no evidence of drug use or alcohol. The man was identified as Oscar Jervis. His body was nearly mangled beyond recognition. Apparently, the dashboard of his car folded in and ripped off his legs at the waist.

SAM

(look of fear)

That's horrifying. Do you know for sure that—

ANDREW

I had only talked to him two days before. Of course, he had to choose the most selfish option! Thing about doing it that way, you're not just putting your own life at risk. The other car was carrying two other people. A mother named Brooke Adderson, who was killed in the crash and her son, Billy Adderson who was found in critical condition. I looked into it sometime later and he—he didn't make it either. I was stunned. I had just murdered three people.

SAM

But that was his choice! You said it yourself, he was selfish, and ultimately, he didn't really give you a chance to help him.

ANDREW

But that just shows that the system doesn't work! The hotline can't accomplish anything. If any people are at their breaking point and come here, they expect to find the missing ingredient, the solution to make their lives better. Truth is, we can't offer that.

SAM

But we have to try! If we can just... listen. Maybe then, making an effort is better than doing nothing.

ANDREW

That experience was truly a wake-up call for me. I was gone from that hellhole the next day. No notice, no formalities, just gone. If only I had gotten out before it cost me my sanity.

(Andrew moves over to desk and hunches over the drawers, reaching inside.)

I'm going to offer you something that can't be measured with any definition of value. A controlled dose of realism.

SAM

Wha—what the hell do you mean by that?!

ANDREW

(He pulls a gun out of his drawer and puts it to his head.)
I can't live with the pain anymore... Maybe you'll be able to.

SAM

STOP! You need to stop right now and think. How can you—uh, how—

ANDREW

I'm listening. Go ahead, give me your best coping strategies, just try to make it better.

SAM

Wait! Can you just give me your address? Maybe I can send police and they can—

The gun goes off. Andrew falls to the floor.

Sam sits for a few seconds at the dial tone and then hangs up. She sits in shock, staring into space. The phone rings. She looks at it in horror. After a long pause, Sam picks it up, unblinking.

SAM

(With a painful, manufactured tone)

H—hi! M—m—my name is Sam.

(pause)

Thank you for reaching out to 988 Suicide Hotline. How are you doing tonight?

Blackout.

Adam March is looking to find his creative outlet. He enjoys reading, running, and pushing his limits. This is his first real pursuit into the world of publishing fiction. He's enjoyed writing many short stories and poems, but now he wants to send it out in to the world to live for itself. He is very nervous and excited to see how this plays out.