

SIMON SAYS

A play in two acts

by Bruce Hoogendoorn

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CAST

HARRY: Late forties

CAROLINE: Eighteen

MARLENE: Late thirties

SANDRA: Forty

CHRIS: Forty

PAUL: Twenty

SHARON: Twenty

ACT 1

SCENE 1

A living room and a bedroom in an old farmhouse. They are connected by a door with a sliding bolt on the living room side.

In the living room is a table, chairs and a bar fridge. On the bar fridge are cups, coffee, sugar, and a Bible. There is a door leading outside, a window, and another door leading to an unseen kitchen.

In the bedroom is a single bed, a small table with a chair, and a thick, wire-reinforced window. It is day and light streams in. A broom leans against the wall. There is a door to an unseen, but often used, bathroom.

We hear a car approach and skid to a halt. Car doors open and then slam shut. There is the sound of a struggle.

CAROLINE: *(off)* Let me go! Let me go!

There is frantic knocking on the living room door.

HARRY: *(off)* Marlene! Open the door.

MARLENE comes out of the bathroom, wearing rubber gloves, holding a cloth and a spray and wipe bottle.

CAROLINE: Help! Help!

HARRY: Marlene! Marlene!

MARLENE races into the living room.

CAROLINE: Help me!

HARRY: *(off)* Open the door, Marlene!

She puts the cloth and bottle on the table, then hurriedly opens the door. HARRY, a seriously overweight man, and PAUL, moderately fit, enter. They drag in a struggling young woman, CAROLINE, who is very fit, wearing a tracksuit and joggers. SANDRA follows them carrying a shopping bag.

CAROLINE: Help! I've been kidnapped!

MARLENE: It's all right. Everything's going to be all right.

HARRY & PAUL take her into the bedroom. SANDRA and MARLENE follow.

CAROLINE: Let me go!

HARRY: Let her go.

She hurries to the other side of the bedroom.

CAROLINE: Keep away from me!

HARRY: Caroline, I know you're upset and scared, but I guarantee you you're completely safe.

CAROLINE: Yeah right!

SANDRA: You are, sweetheart. If only you'd agreed to see me none of this would be necessary.

CAROLINE: This isn't necessary. So let me go!

HARRY: Caroline, my name is Harry Barker. All I'm going to do is talk to you about the organisation you work for.

CAROLINE: What for?

HARRY: To make sure you understand how they work.

CAROLINE: What are you talking about?

SANDRA: For God's sake, Caroline, it's a cult!

HARRY: Sandra.

SANDRA: Sorry.

CAROLINE: A cult?

HARRY: *(pause)* Yes.

CAROLINE: It's a weight loss centre! There's nothing religious about it.

HARRY: Not all cults are religious.

CAROLINE: I know you! You came to the Centre for a weekend. Kept asking me questions.

HARRY: I was finding out how the Centre operates and if you were all right.

CAROLINE: What are you? - Some sort of detective?

HARRY: No, I'm a counsellor.

CAROLINE: A counsellor? Since when do counsellors kidnap people?

HARRY: Only when I think it's in a person's best interests.

CAROLINE: It's disgusting that you think you have the right to do it!

HARRY: Not as disgusting as seeing someone have years of their life stolen from them.

CAROLINE: What are you talking about?

HARRY: I've counselled dozens of people who at your age devoted their lives to their groups. Only to realise years later they'd been deceived and exploited.

CAROLINE: But I'm not in a -

HARRY: I know you don't think you're in a cult. Because you're not educated about them.

CAROLINE: This is crazy!

CAROLINE points at PAUL and MARLENE.

CAROLINE: Who are they? - Torturers?

HARRY: This is Paul. He looks after security.

PAUL: Hi, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Security! Prison guard, more like it.

HARRY: And this is Marlene. She does the cooking and will make sure you're comfortable over the next few days.

MARLENE: Hi, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Next few days! How long are you going to keep me here?

HARRY: Between two to five days.

CAROLINE: Five days! But I have to go to the river tomorrow.

HARRY: The river? What do you mean?

CAROLINE: I want you to let me go right now or I'll get the police and press charges.

HARRY: Sorry, Caroline. I can't do that.

CAROLINE looks around frantically, sees the broom, picks it up and raises it over her head.

CAROLINE: Let me out of here!

They all back off.

HARRY: All right, let's calm down.

CAROLINE hesitates then slams the end of the broom handle into the window. No break. She tries a few more times, then throws it away in disgust.

CAROLINE: What is this? - Guantanamo Bay?

HARRY: Caroline -

She looks out the window desperately.

CAROLINE: Where's the Centre from here? It can't be far. *(pause)* I can't tell where I am.

She starts to cry. SANDRA moves towards her instinctively.

SANDRA: Oh, sweetheart.

CAROLINE: You keep the fuck away from me.

SANDRA: Caroline!

HARRY: If you want to freshen up, the bathroom's in there. There are some clean clothes if you feel like changing.

CAROLINE hurries into the bathroom and slams the door.

MARLENE: Sorry about the broom, Harry. I was about to put it away when you -

HARRY: Marlene, it doesn't matter. Can you take it out, please?

MARLENE: Of course.

MARLENE picks up the broom, opens the door and puts it in the living room.

HARRY: Are you all right, Sandra?

SANDRA: She's never spoken to me like that before.

HARRY: They get a bit wild at first. Just remember, that's her cult personality. The real her is buried deep beneath it, but we'll get it back.

SANDRA: It's like she's a stranger. She's lost so much weight. I can barely recognise her.

HARRY: When I went into the Centre it took me hours to work out which one was her. She's nothing like her photos.

SANDRA: No, she's...beautiful.

There is banging in the bathroom.

SANDRA: What's she doing?

HARRY: Trying to smash the window.

PAUL: Should I go in?

HARRY: She can't break it. Let her blow off some steam.

SANDRA: I know how to cheer her up.

SANDRA picks up her bag.

HARRY: What's that?

SANDRA: A small present I've brought her.

HARRY: Yes, but what is it?

SANDRA: It's her favourite -

The bathroom door bangs opens revealing CAROLINE.

CAROLINE: You've caged me like an animal. Do you realise how worried they'll be at the Centre?

HARRY: I'm sorry, that can't be helped.

CAROLINE: They'll have called the Police, you know. You'll be in so much trouble.

SANDRA: Caroline, look what I've brought you.

SANDRA takes a small cake box out of the bag.

CAROLINE: Get that away from me!

SANDRA: But it's your favourite. The mud cake from the restaurant.

CAROLINE: I know what you're trying to do to me. Chris said this would happen.

SANDRA puts the cake on the table.

HARRY: Said what would happen?

CAROLINE: Leave me alone! I have to do my workout.

CAROLINE strips off her tracksuit. She wears a crop top and hot pants. She has a great figure.

PAUL: Jesus.

SANDRA looks at him.

SANDRA: That outfit's a bit revealing, don't you think, Caroline?

CAROLINE: For God's sake!

CAROLINE starts to do an aerobics routine, smiling and chanting at the same time. The others watch.

CAROLINE: (*chanting*) Body strong, body light, positive energy - all right! We hate sugar, we hate fat, they're out of our lives, and that is that! (*repeat*)

CAROLINE becomes increasingly intense. The light tightens on her until it becomes a spot. The bathroom door bursts open & a hotter light blazes out. CHRIS, the cult leader, bounces into the room accompanied by rock music suited to aerobics. He is forty and physically impressive: tall, muscly, solarium-tanned with bleached blonde hair. He wears flashy aerobics gear. He leads the routine and raises its intensity. Note: unless stated otherwise, Chris is always invisible to everyone except Caroline.

CHRIS: Excellent, Caroline, keep it going...that's the way...and kick...kick high...higher, Caroline! Well done! Take a break.

CHRIS & CAROLINE stop, as does the music. He applauds her & gives her a hug.

CHRIS: You look fantastic.

CAROLINE: Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS: You're getting very close to becoming a Mentor. In fact, let's see how close.

From the back of his shorts, CHRIS pulls out a pair of spreading callipers. He playfully snaps it open and shut a few times.

CAROLINE: Oh God.

CHRIS: It won't hurt a bit.

He clamps on the spreading callipers just above her hip bone on the right side of her body. CAROLINE grimaces. He repeats the procedure three times: on the upper pectoral, abdomen and then thigh.

CHRIS: To become a Mentor you have to average under fourteen millimetres. You averaged...thirteen. *(beat)* This Saturday you can come to the river.

CAROLINE: Are you serious?

CHRIS: Yes.

CAROLINE *squeals with delight and hugs him.*

CAROLINE: Thank you, Chris. I won't let you down. I'll do another workout.

CHRIS: No, Caroline. Give your body time to recover. Exercise according to the program and the results will come.

HARRY: *(from darkness)* Caroline?

CHRIS: Time for my run.

CHRIS *starts his stopwatch and runs back into the bathroom. The door slams shut. Normal light returns. CAROLINE stares at HARRY.*

CAROLINE: I have to go to the river.

She charges at HARRY and launches a karate kick that gets him in the stomach. He collapses. SANDRA and MARLENE scream and back off. She turns and faces PAUL who stands in front of the door. He assumes a martial arts position.

PAUL: Caroline, calm down. Don't be silly.

CAROLINE *hesitates for a moment, then runs at him, launches a kick, but pulls out with her leg halfway up and screams. She clutches her hamstring and hops around the room, trying to come to a stop.*

CAROLINE: My leg! My leg!

HARRY: Paul, help her to the bed.

He does.

HARRY: Marlene, get some ice.

MARLENE: Are you all right?

HARRY: Yeah, just winded.

MARLENE *enters the living room and digs out a tray of ice from the bar fridge.*

CAROLINE: I've torn my hamstring. I'll get fat again. I'll never get to the river.

HARRY: What do you do at the river?

CAROLINE *cries out in pain.*

SANDRA: It's all right, some ice is on the way.

CAROLINE: I don't want any ice. I want Chris. He'll know how to treat it.

HARRY: Ice brings down the swelling.

CAROLINE: How would you know? You're not an expert like Chris.

MARLENE *re-enters with a tray of ice.*

MARLENE: Here's the ice.

HARRY: Marlene, we'll need a t-towel to wrap it in.

MARLENE: Of course. Sorry.

MARLENE *exits & goes out the kitchen door.*

CAROLINE: Don't bother! I won't use it.

HARRY: It's either that or you lie there in agony.

CAROLINE: At least let me call Chris to ask what to do.

HARRY: I can't let you do that.

CAROLINE: Why not?

HARRY: You need a break from his influence so you can re-evaluate the Centre objectively.

CAROLINE: Chris was so right about all of you.

PAUL: Caroline, I play soccer and when anyone tears a hamstring you always put ice on it. You have to do it straight away or it takes much longer to heal.

CAROLINE: *(pause)* How long do you have to have it on?

PAUL: Usually ten minutes an hour for the first three days.

CAROLINE: Three days!

PAUL: Yes.

CAROLINE: Then I can start working out again?

PAUL: I doubt it. They can take up to six weeks to heal.

CAROLINE: Are you serious?

PAUL: Yes.

CAROLINE: *(to Sandra)* See what you've done to me? - You've ruined my life!

SANDRA: Caroline -

CAROLINE: I want to call Dad. He doesn't even know this is happening, does he?

SANDRA: How can I contact him when he's always in the Caribbean.

CAROLINE: You could have called Aunty June. She always knows where he is.

SANDRA: He's barely seen you since you were five. Do you really think - ?

CAROLINE: He would never have let this go ahead!

SANDRA: No. And it would have had nothing to do with your welfare. He would have stopped it to spite me.

HARRY: Caroline, considering the acrimony between your parents, I felt it best not to involve your father in the counselling.

CAROLINE: Considering the *acrimony* between my mother and me, I feel it's best not to be involved either. So let me go!

MARLENE *enters with the ice in a t-towel.*

MARLENE: Here, Harry. Sorry about that.

HARRY: That's okay.

HARRY *gives the ice pack to CAROLINE.*

HARRY: Put it under your leg.

PAUL: Actually, it's better if you wrap it firmly around your leg and tie the ends of the tea-towel together.

CAROLINE *tries and groans in pain.*

CAROLINE: Could you do it for me? It hurts when I move.

PAUL: Just lift your leg a little.

CAROLINE: I can't. Can you lift it for me?

PAUL *does so and puts the ice under it. She gasps.*

CAROLINE: It's freezing.

PAUL: You'll get used to it.

PAUL *ties the ends of the t-towel together.*

PAUL: I have to elevate your leg.

PAUL *puts two pillows under her leg.*

PAUL: Comfortable?

CAROLINE: It's all right.

HARRY: There's no point starting our discussion while you're in so much pain. We'll leave it until tonight.

CAROLINE: I'm not discussing anything!

HARRY: That's your prerogative. Can we get you anything to eat or drink?

CAROLINE: I'm not eating anything you give me.

MARLENE: We can do a salad. It's not just mud cake on offer.

CAROLINE: I don't want anything!

HARRY: *(pause)* Marlene will bring you some more ice later on.

CAROLINE: I don't want any from her. Only Paul.

HARRY: Fine.

PAUL: I'll bring ice once an hour. Take that pack off in ten minutes. And don't get up unless you have to.

SANDRA: Caroline, I've brought some things for you.

CAROLINE: Will you stop talking to me!

SANDRA *takes a teddy bear & book out of the bag.*

SANDRA: Look. It's Andy and a Jane Austen.

She puts them on the bed. CAROLINE grabs the teddy bear.

CAROLINE: A Teddy Bear! Do you think I'm five years old?

She throws the bear at SANDRA.

HARRY: Let's give her a break.

SANDRA: But, Caroline -

HARRY: Come on, leave it 'til later.

They go into the living room. CAROLINE throws the book at them as the door is closed. Lights down on the bedroom.

HARRY: Sandra, for this to work, you have to stick to the plan. Offering her fattening food was the worst thing you could have done. It just reaffirms the Centre's teaching.

SANDRA suddenly bursts into tears.

MARLENE: Oh! You poor thing.

MARLENE gives her a hug.

SANDRA: She threw Andy at me!

MARLENE: It's okay, Sandra. I was the same with my parents. And I refused to talk to Harry. But he was so kind and patient, eventually I listened to him. He saved me. And he'll save Caroline, too.

SANDRA: You were in a cult?

MARLENE: Oh yes. So now I help Harry get people out. It's the best thing I've ever done.

HARRY: You've been a great help, Marlene.

MARLENE: Except for forgetting the broom. I was about to get it when -

HARRY: Marlene, it wasn't a problem.

MARLENE: But -

HARRY: Forget it. Why don't you get lunch ready?

MARLENE: Oh, okay.

MARLENE grabs the cloth, bottle, gloves and exits.

SANDRA: She's been through what Caroline's about to go through?

HARRY: Yes.

SANDRA *goes quiet, worried.*

HARRY: Sandra, Caroline won't turn out like Marlene. She was in a cult for ten years and endured a lot of abuse. Caroline's only been in for six months and has been treated fairly well.

SANDRA: Ten years? That must have been horrible.

HARRY: She was pretty much the slave of the cult leader. Hardly made a decision in all that time. That's why she has trouble making them now.

SANDRA: I'm sorry that happened, but is it a good idea to have her around Caroline?

HARRY: I know her behaviour is disconcerting, but she's very helpful. You'll get used to her. Now why don't you go for a walk. Think about what you're going to say to Caroline tonight.

SANDRA *nods and exits.*

HARRY: Paul, I want to talk to you. I heard your reaction when Caroline took off her tracksuit.

PAUL: What do you mean?

HARRY: You said "Jesus".

PAUL: I would never use the Lord's name in vain.

HARRY: Paul, it's all right. Most men would have reacted the same way. Just be careful. She might try to use her looks to get you to help her.

PAUL: I wouldn't fall for that.

HARRY: I know. But she didn't randomly choose you to change her ice. Notice the way she gasped when you helped her with it?

PAUL: It was cold.

HARRY: Not that cold. So when you go in to change it, do it quickly, and keep the conversation to a minimum. Right?

PAUL *nods.*

HARRY: Good.

HARRY *exits.* PAUL *looks at Caroline's bedroom door for a moment then picks up the Bible and starts reading. Blackout.*

SCENE 2

Late afternoon. Dim lights up on the bedroom. CAROLINE is asleep on the bed. The ice is off her leg. SANDRA's recorded voice calls to her. She sounds seductive, tempting.

SANDRA'S VOICE: *(recorded)* Caroline...

CAROLINE sits up, holding the teddy bear.

SANDRA'S VOICE: *(recorded)* Caroline...

A spotlight illuminates the cake Sandra left her. CAROLINE stares, salivating, then snaps out of it and starts doing stomach crunches.

CAROLINE: Body strong, body light, positive energy - all right! We hate sugar, we hate fat, they're out of our lives -

SANDRA'S VOICE: *(recorded)* Caroline...

CAROLINE: Shut-up!

She throws the teddy at the cake, misses, and resumes stomach crunches.

CAROLINE: Body strong, body light, positive energy - all right! We hate sugar, we hate fat, they're out of our lives -

SANDRA'S VOICE: *(recorded. Most seductive voice yet)* Caroline...

CAROLINE stops exercising and stares at the cake box. Finally she limps towards it. She pauses, then takes out a piece of cake. She is about to take a bite, when the bathroom door crashes open, revealing CHRIS.

CHRIS: What the fuck do you think you're doing?

She screams and drops the cake in the box.

CAROLINE: Nothing.

CHRIS: You were eating the mud cake!

CAROLINE: No I wasn't.

CHRIS: Stop lying! Look at your fingers.

He grabs her hand and holds it up to her face.

CAROLINE: But there are no bites in the cake.

CHRIS: You were on to your second piece. Maybe your third.

CAROLINE: I didn't eat any, I swear.

CHRIS flings aside her hand. CAROLINE hurriedly wipes the chocolate off on her clothing.

CHRIS: Then let's see, shall we?

CHRIS pulls out the spreading callipers. He jams them onto her like he's stabbing her. CAROLINE cries out. CHRIS takes three more readings.

CHRIS: Sixteen millimetres!

CAROLINE: But I never ate the cake!

CHRIS: Then how did all that extra fat get there?

CAROLINE: The reading can't be right.

CHRIS: I'll check again.

CHRIS squeezes the callipers on. CAROLINE fights back tears. He takes the four readings.

CHRIS: You were right.

CAROLINE: I knew it!

CHRIS: It was seventeen.

CAROLINE: But -

CHRIS: No, Caroline! Take responsibility for what you've done. Until you can, you'll never become a Mentor. Now, did you eat the cake?

CAROLINE: *(pause)* Yes. I'm sorry, Chris.

CHRIS: *(pause)* Stick your fingers down your throat.

CAROLINE: What?

CHRIS: Just do it!

CAROLINE tries half-heartedly, but doesn't vomit.

CHRIS: That's pathetic. You're not ready to be a Mentor.

CAROLINE: But, Chris -

CHRIS: Do you want to go back to this?

CHRIS *pulls a photo out the back of his shorts and thrusts it in her face. The picture is projected onto the back stage wall.*

CHRIS: A fat, depressed girl who spent every night alone, gorging herself on chocolate, cakes and lollies. Being laughed at and shunned by everyone.

CAROLINE *looks away.*

CHRIS: Look at it! Look at those rolls of fat!

CAROLINE *slowly looks at it.*

CHRIS: Do you want to return to this?

CAROLINE: No.

CHRIS: Well, that's what happens when you eat sugar. That's what happened to Sharon. And just like her you'll have to go back and live with your mother.

CAROLINE: No!

CHRIS: Do you want to leave behind all your friends? The people who encourage you and love you?

CAROLINE: No! No! No!

CHRIS: Then why did you eat the cake? Why would you let us all down like that?

CAROLINE: I...I don't know.

CHRIS: I do. You stopped being positive. You started to think about your past and it brought back all the pain it caused you. And before you knew it, you were seeking comfort from sugar. Just like you used to. Isn't that right?

She nods.

CHRIS: Get in position. You're going to have the workout from Hell.

CAROLINE: But, Chris -

CHRIS: No buts. You have to burn off the sugar before it's too late.

CAROLINE: I tore my hamstring.

CHRIS: What?

CAROLINE: I was doing a high kick when -

CHRIS: You did another workout after I told you not to?

CAROLINE: No. I was trying to escape -

CHRIS: I don't want to hear any more excuses! *(beat)* It's time for you to leave the Centre.

CAROLINE: No, Chris! Please don't make me go. I'll get better. I'll do what you say. Please! Please!

CAROLINE collapses onto the bed and starts to sob. CHRIS leaves her for a moment, then sits next to her and comforts her.

CHRIS: Caroline, calm down. You don't have to leave.

CAROLINE: Thank you, Chris. Thank you.

CHRIS: Now can you see what happens when you do things your own way instead of mine?

CAROLINE nods.

CHRIS: Caroline, there are a lot of sugar addicts out there who need our help. I need you to take a leading role in that.

CAROLINE: Really?

CHRIS: From the moment I saw you, I knew you'd save others from the fate I saved you. But you can only do that by being the beautiful person you're meant to be. You must be strong for them, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I will be, Chris. I promise.

CHRIS: Good. Now I'd better get this out of your sight before it's too late.

CHRIS picks up the piece of cake and begins to eat it.

CHRIS: Mm!

CAROLINE: Chris, what are you doing?

CHRIS: Don't worry. I have total control over my brain chemistry. I can eat anything I want. One day you'll have that power too, but you have years of work ahead of you first.

CAROLINE: But you said we're sugar addicts for life and can never eat things like Mud cake again.

CHRIS: Can you see what the sugar's done to you? It's already warped your thinking.

CAROLINE: But -

CHRIS: Enough! You have to fight it. I want you to do two hundred stomach crunches. A torn hamstring won't stop you doing that.

CAROLINE *hesitates*.

CHRIS: Now!

She starts exercising. CHRIS eats.

CHRIS: I can't hear the chant, Caroline!

CAROLINE: Body strong, body light, positive energy - all right! We hate sugar, we hate fat, they're out of our lives – and that is that! *(repeat)*

CHRIS: I can't see a smile, Caroline. I want to see a smile!

CAROLINE *puts on a big fake smile*.

CHRIS: Come on, put in. Harder! Faster! Don't be so soft. Mm!!

There is knock on the bedroom door.

CHRIS: Time for my colonic irrigation.

CHRIS runs into the bathroom scoffing the cake. The door closes. PAUL enters with fresh ice.

PAUL: Caroline?

She stops exercising.

CAROLINE: Oh, hi.

PAUL: I'm not sure it's a good idea doing stomach crunches. It might put too much strain on your hamstring.

CAROLINE: But I'm not using my legs.

PAUL: When you get tired you tense the hamstrings. How's it feeling?

CAROLINE: Sore. I wish I could have a proper workout.

PAUL: You're keen. Whenever I hurt myself or get sick I just enjoy lying in bed. Reading books or watching TV.

CAROLINE: And eating chocolate, I bet.

PAUL: I might have the odd piece.

CAROLINE: One piece leads to a whole block. I could never stop myself. I was a disgusting pig.

PAUL *looks inside the cake box.*

PAUL: Then you're doing well to resist the mud cake.

CAROLINE: Mud cake?

PAUL: You haven't touched it.

CAROLINE *sees a piece still sitting there, untouched.*

CAROLINE: But Chris ate a piece. He...

PAUL: Chris?

CAROLINE *looks confused.*

PAUL: Are you sure I can't get you anything to eat? It's not good for you -

CAROLINE: No!

PAUL: *(pause)* I have your ice.

CAROLINE: Could you put it on for me, please? You did such a good job last time.

PAUL: I think it was a fluke. I might hurt you.

CAROLINE: Please. I can't lift my leg.

Pause. Finally PAUL gently lifts her leg, and slips the ice under it. She gasps. PAUL freezes.

CAROLINE: Paul?

PAUL: Yes?

CAROLINE: Could you move it a little further up, please?

PAUL *hesitates, then does it. She gasps again.*

CAROLINE: That's almost right, just a bit...

PAUL *suddenly stands back.*

CAROLINE: What's wrong?

PAUL: Nothing.

CAROLINE: Are you going to tie it up?

PAUL *hesitates then does it quickly.*

PAUL: I'll bring some more ice in an hour.

He grabs the used ice and starts to leave. CAROLINE stands and follows him.

CAROLINE: Can't you stay for a bit longer?

PAUL: Sorry.

CAROLINE: Paul, please, I only want to - ow!

She clutches her hamstring. PAUL hurries back and helps her back to bed.

PAUL: You shouldn't stand up unless it's absolutely necessary.

CAROLINE: It's not a cult, you know.

PAUL: I wouldn't know.

CAROLINE: Then why are you helping them keep me here against my will?

PAUL: Because Harry says you need help.

CAROLINE: And you believe him even though you don't know anything about the Centre?

PAUL: Harry has helped many people, including my sister, and he never takes a case unless he's certain it's a cult.

CAROLINE: Your sister was in a cult?

PAUL: Yes.

CAROLINE: Is she all right?

PAUL: Yes, thanks to Harry. She's very grateful to him. Our whole family is.

CAROLINE: Is that how you met him?

PAUL: Yes. And like you, Karen was convinced it wasn't a cult. But Harry calmly showed her how she'd been deceived. He was amazing. I had to work with him after that. So whenever there's a uni break, I help out.

CAROLINE: But I haven't been deceived. We don't sacrifice chickens or drink blood, or whatever it is cults do. It's a weight loss centre. People exercise and get dietary advice. It's like a normal fitness centre.

PAUL: Except people don't live at normal fitness centres.

CAROLINE: Only the staff live there. The clients come and go as they please.

PAUL: Why do the staff live there?

CAROLINE: We're sugar addicts. We have to keep away from sugar.

PAUL: But you don't have to live at the Centre to do that.

CAROLINE: We do. We can't resist temptations like chocolate. And once we're back on sugar we need it as badly as a heroin addict needs heroin.

PAUL: Oh, come on.

CAROLINE: I used to wake up at three in the morning and catch a cab to the service station to get chocolate. If you read Chris's book you'll understand.

PAUL: I think Chris is reinforcing your fear so he can use you.

CAROLINE: He's not using me! He saved me! The last six months have been the happiest of my life.

PAUL: Okay, okay, I'm sorry.

CAROLINE: Honestly, you should read his book. You could use his diet and exercise plan. I guarantee it will get you into shape.

PAUL: I am in shape. I play soccer and do karate.

CAROLINE: I suppose that's a start.

PAUL: I'm in the best shape of my life.

CAROLINE: As long as you're satisfied, that's the main thing.

PAUL: I've got better things to do with my time than constantly worry about my weight. We live in a world with enormous problems. Wars, terrorism, climate change, but people like you don't notice because you're too busy looking in the mirror.

CAROLINE: I used to smash mirrors.

PAUL: Why?

CAROLINE: You should have seen my thighs.

PAUL: How can you do this to yourself? Constantly keeping your body under surveillance. You're torturing yourself. You'll never be perfect.

CAROLINE: You wouldn't say that if you met Chris. I have so much work to do to catch up with him.

PAUL: Where else can you lose weight?

CAROLINE: Where do I begin? The back of my knees, my stomach, my big bum. Look?

CAROLINE rolls on her side revealing her buttocks to PAUL. She pokes the back of her knees.

CAROLINE: Yuk.

PAUL looks away quickly.

PAUL: This is exactly what we were discussing the other day at my Bible study group. This modern obsession with looks and -

CAROLINE: Bible study group?

PAUL: Yes. We meet once a week to discuss the Bible and how Christianity can help solve world's problems.

CAROLINE: Oh.

PAUL: We're not a bunch of nerds sitting around singing Kum ba yah, if that's what you're thinking. We meet in the uni bar and the discussion really fires up after a few drinks.

CAROLINE: Alcohol puts on so much weight.

PAUL: There you go again! Always back to weight. Jesus never worried about how he looked. He wasn't fat, but I'm sure he looked filthy at times. Especially after he lectured for three days straight. He was too busy giving meaning to people's lives.

CAROLINE: Maybe he would have converted more people if he'd looked a little cleaner.

PAUL: That is such a shallow thing to say.

CAROLINE: I was only joking -

PAUL: But I shouldn't be surprised, coming from someone who turned her back on her own mother.

PAUL picks up the cake box.

PAUL: I don't want you getting any more fat on the back of your knees.

PAUL *heads to the door.*

CAROLINE: Paul, I've read the gospels.

He stops.

CAROLINE: I remember Jesus was preaching one day, when his family came to see him. But he refused to see them. He said he couldn't be involved with people who wanted to stop him from being himself.

PAUL: That wasn't the reason. He said 'Whoever does what my father in heaven wants him to do is my brother, my sister, and my mother'.

CAROLINE: Exactly. People with the same beliefs. I share the same beliefs as Chris and the rest of the staff. They've helped me become the person I'm meant to be. We're alleviating people's suffering, just like Jesus did.

PAUL: Don't you dare compare your group to -

CAROLINE: Imagine if your family tried to stop you being a Christian.

PAUL: *(Pause)* Harry will get you through this, Caroline. I promise.

He heads to the door.

CAROLINE: Paul! If you could just call my aunty. She'll know where my father is and he'll...

PAUL *exits.*

CAROLINE: Paul!

Blackout.

SCENE 3

Lights up on both rooms. PAUL sits at the living room table reading the Bible. CAROLINE sits on the bed poking her stomach, looking for fat. She finds some.

CAROLINE: Where did that come from? God!

She starts doing stomach crunches. SANDRA enters the living room, quietly opens the bedroom door and enters.

SANDRA: Caroline? Caroline?

CAROLINE *stops exercising.*

CAROLINE: Get out of my room!

SANDRA: I just want to talk.

CAROLINE: When are you going to get it through your head that I don't want to talk to you.

SANDRA: Caroline, please. I only did this because I love you.

CAROLINE *resumes exercising.*

CAROLINE: Body strong, body light, positive energy - all right! We hate sugar, we hate -

SANDRA: Will you shut up!

CAROLINE *stops, shocked.*

SANDRA: How can you say something so inane? You're an intelligent girl.

CAROLINE: You have no idea.

SANDRA: How could I? You refused to see me for the last six months. When I went to see you, they dragged me out kicking and screaming. How could you let them do that to me?

CAROLINE: You were trying to force me into your car. You had me in a headlock.

SANDRA: What did you expect? You suddenly announce you're quitting school and leaving home to move into this weight loss centre. With the ridiculous explanation that you're a sugar addict. What sane parent would have behaved any differently?

CAROLINE: It is not ridiculous. If you read Chris's book you'll understand.

SANDRA: I have read it. It sounded like a bunch of mumbo jumbo to me.

CAROLINE: You're so close-minded.

SANDRA: I even showed it to your science teacher. She said she'd seen theories like it, but there was no scientific proof to back it [up] -

CAROLINE: Look at me! I'm proof that what Chris has discovered is true.

SANDRA: All you're proof of is if you eat less and exercise you lose weight. For God's sake, Caroline, your year twelve exams were only three months away!

CAROLINE: That's all you care about, isn't it? - my HSC score.

SANDRA: That's not true. But it has an enormous bearing on your future. And I thought you were doing so well. But your teachers told me you were failing everything except English. I assume you wrote the A-pluses on your essays?

CAROLINE: Well, my teachers weren't going to.

SANDRA: How could you have been so immature? You're eighteen years old.

CAROLINE: Seventeen at the time.

SANDRA: Don't be such a smartarse! What exactly were you doing every night when I was at the restaurant?

CAROLINE: Eating.

SANDRA: That was obvious. But why did you stop studying?

CAROLINE: You don't know what sugar addiction's like. How it takes hold of you. If you had the intelligence to understand Chris's book you'd realise -

SANDRA: Do you believe everything he tells you? All he's done is help you lose weight and you've turned yourself into his disciple.

CAROLINE: It's not just about being thin. It's a whole philosophy, a lifestyle.

SANDRA: And what an exciting lifestyle it is. Exercising all day.

CAROLINE: We don't exercise all day -

SANDRA: And living with a bunch of young girls and an older man. It's unnatural.

CAROLINE: Men live there too.

SANDRA: Only a handful. *(pause)* Has he touched you?

CAROLINE: Oh God!

SANDRA: Has he?

CAROLINE: No! His wife works at the Centre. She's beautiful. He wouldn't want me.

SANDRA: Really? From what Harry's told me about these cult leaders -

CAROLINE: It's not a cult! Where did you get that stupid idea?

SANDRA: I went to a counsellor - that's how stressed I got - and she said it sounded like one. She put me in touch with these experts and eventually I found Harry. We decided he'd go in and see if it fitted the criteria, and it did.

CAROLINE: He wouldn't know. He just followed me around asking stupid questions I never answered.

SANDRA: You'll find out when you talk to him.

CAROLINE: I'm not talking to him.

SANDRA: Then you'll never get to the river.

CAROLINE: Don't talk about something you know nothing about.

SANDRA: What exactly will happen at the river? Will you have a picnic and a swim? Go fishing? Perhaps an immersion. You'll be born again!

CAROLINE: Shut-up!

SANDRA: I will not shut up. I haven't talked to you for six months and I've got a lot of pain and anger stored up. Even though I've been worried sick about you, my main urge is to slap you!

CAROLINE: I wouldn't if I were you. I've learnt self-defence.

SANDRA: I've already seen an exhibition of that. What else have you learnt? Harry says all you do are menial tasks like clean toilets, do the laundry -

CAROLINE: I do a lot more than clean toilets. I'm training to be a Mentor. I'm going to help people who've been through the same pain I've been through.

A mobile phone starts to ring.

SANDRA: Great.

CAROLINE: You're mobile's on?

SANDRA: In case of an emergency at the restaurant.

CAROLINE: You kidnap me and you still can't put your work aside?

SANDRA: I'm sorry, Caroline, I have to answer it.

SANDRA answers the phone.

SANDRA: Angus, this had better be an emergency.

CAROLINE: You're a stupid bitch and I fucking hate you!

SANDRA covers the phone.

SANDRA: Don't you dare speak to me like that! *(pause)* Angus, just hang...yes, it is.
(pause) Yes, all right.

She covers the phone.

SANDRA: I'll be back in a moment. Angus says hi.

SANDRA heads for the door.

CAROLINE: Angus, call the police! I've been kidnapped! I'm in a farmhouse near Tharwa.

SANDRA enters the living room & closes the door. Lights up revealing PAUL. He looks up at her, startled.

SANDRA: Okay, what's the problem? *(pause)* How can half the staff be sick?
(pause) Well, tell them to pump themselves full of drugs.

HARRY enters the living room.

CAROLINE: *(yells)* I hope the restaurant has burned down!

HARRY is startled.

SANDRA: Of course you can't cover everything. I don't expect you to.

CAROLINE: *(yells)* I hope the seafood poisons everyone and they all sue you!

SANDRA: Angus, calm down. I'll get some people to you. All right?

CAROLINE: *(yells)* I hope the lobsters jump out of their tank and decapitate the customers!

SANDRA: I'll speak to you soon.

She hangs up.

SANDRA: Disaster. The restaurant's booked out and half the staff are sick. I'll have to ask some friends for a favour.

HARRY: (*pause*) Paul, can you give us a minute, please?

PAUL *exits*.

HARRY: You left your mobile on while you were talking to Caroline?

SANDRA: Harry, I own a restaurant. If there's an emergency I have to handle it.

HARRY: I understand, but Caroline's in a very delicate state. When your mobile rings it sends the message that you're not entirely focused on her.

SANDRA: There's nothing else I can do.

HARRY: It didn't sound like it went down too well.

SANDRA: She has just spoken to me in the most disgusting way. If she speaks to me like that again -

HARRY: Sandra, I know you feel a lot of anger towards her, but venting it will only push her deeper into her shell. You have to give her love and kindness no matter what she throws at you.

SANDRA: Yes yes, I know.

HARRY: Good. I'll start the counselling. You go and sort out your staff problem. You can talk to Caroline tomorrow.

SANDRA: Fine.

She exits. HARRY knocks and enters.

CAROLINE: What happened to the restaurant? Did it burn down?

HARRY: Half the staff are sick.

CAROLINE: No wonder. Working for her would make anyone sick.

HARRY: Why do you say that?

CAROLINE: Because... Don't try to be my pal. I won't fall for it.

HARRY: You caught me. I can see we're going to have a lively discussion.

CAROLINE: I'm not discussing anything.

HARRY: In that case, I'll tell you a little about my background.

CAROLINE: Oh God.

HARRY: I understand your enthusiasm. I was once in your position.

CAROLINE: *(pause)* You were kidnapped?

HARRY: Yes. And thank God I was. Otherwise I'd still be in a cult.

CAROLINE: And I'd still be at the Centre enjoying my day.

HARRY *smiles*.

HARRY: When I got involved in my cult I was at a low point in my life. I was a low-ranking public servant and my personal life was a disaster -

CAROLINE: I don't care what happened to you! You're a low-life kidnapper. That's all I need to know.

HARRY: *(pause)* I'm sorry I've put you through all this stress, but -

CAROLINE: I'm not interested in anything you have to say.

HARRY: I'm going to say it anyway. And since you're not interested in my story, I'll tell you about someone with a story similar to yours. Then if you feel like it, we can discuss it.

CAROLINE *groans and throws herself back on the bed*. HARRY *speaks directly to the audience*.

HARRY: This is about Michelle. She was eighteen and very intelligent. Yet she only thought about one thing - her weight. She tried dozens of diets, but would always give in and binge. Finally she took drastic action - she went to Jenny Craig.

She was about to enter Jenny Craig's when a woman with an incredible figure 'accidentally' bumped into her. Kelly. She asked Michelle if she was doing the program. Kelly said she did it, but put on more weight, and only lost it when she went to the centre for seriously overweight people.

Michelle went there the next weekend. Kelly took her on a tour. It was a beautiful old homestead near Canberra, with a gym, pool, sauna, the works. Kelly told Michelle about her battles with chocolate. How she spent all her money on it and then had to shoplift it. Then Michelle opened up about how her father teased her, and at dinner would say, 'Michelle's here, everyone. Guard your food.'

Kelly took her to meet the staff. Michelle had never seen so many beautiful people. Everyone raced over and introduced themselves. She received more hugs and kisses than she had in years. She was soon chatting and laughing with them and forgot all about her weight. Then a man of around forty arrived. He was tall, fit and tanned. Then he gave a lecture.

The bathroom door bursts open and CHRIS bounces out wearing white gym gear. Following him are the cast members playing Sandra, Paul, Marlene and Sharon. They are now dressed in tracksuits, as The Centre's STAFF members. They stand in a line behind Harry.

HARRY looks around at the audience and smiles at them.

CHRIS: I can't believe how beautiful, healthy and happy you all look. It's a wonderful sight. Do you remember what you were like when you first came to me?

The Centre's STAFF reply as one.

STAFF: Depressed, suicidal and overweight!

CHRIS: That's right. But do you have to sound so enthusiastic about it?

The STAFF laugh as one and sound like canned laughter.

CHRIS: Depressed, suicidal and overweight. What else?

GROUP: Addicted!

CHRIS: Addicted? To what?

STAFF 1: Cheesecake!

STAFF 2: Donuts!

STAFF 3: Ice cream!

STAFF 4: Chocolate!

STAFF 1: Lettuce!

The STAFF laugh as one.

CHRIS: Lettuce? *(laughs)* Tom, you'd only get addicted to lettuce if it was chocolate-coated.

The STAFF laugh as one.

CHRIS: What were you really addicted to?

GROUP: Sugar!

CHRIS: What? Sugar?

GROUP: Yes!

CHRIS: How on earth could anyone be addicted to sugar?

ALL: Because our brain chemicals -

CHRIS: Sorry, I'll stop you there. I want to show off by answering it myself.

The STAFF laugh as one.

CHRIS: Sugar lifts us up when we're feeling down. It activates a brain chemical that gives us a high called Dynorphin. So when we got depressed we ate sugar. Unfortunately we got depressed a lot, so we ate a lot. So much, our brain had to create thousands more Dynorphin receptor sites to cope. And when we get depressed they scream out for sugar. That's why we're addicts for life.

It took me years to discover this. I'd been fighting fat since I was fifteen. But even at my fittest, the cravings would hit me out-of-the-blue and the weight would pile on. I thought I lacked self-control and I'd hate myself. But finally I realised I was powerless to stop it. I had to cut sugar out of my life.

I asked my family and friends for their support. Some laughed, some looked at me like I was mad. My father just shook his head, and the next day gave me a huge box of chocolates. This was ironic considering he caused my addiction. He was an alcoholic who liked to end a drinking session by giving me or Mum a belting. I ate sugar to comfort myself. And when I put on weight, he'd say, 'Hey, Tubby, the driveway's uneven. Go roll on it for me.' You know what those endless comments do to you.

It was clear I wouldn't get any support. So I opened this Centre. A place where people with the same problem could live and work and support each other. A place where the only highs we needed were those that came naturally through exercise. A place... When I...when I think of the pain you all went through, it...it breaks my heart.

CHRIS breaks down. The STAFF members all hug him. They remain in this tableaux.

HARRY: By the end of the week, Michelle was exhausted, but exhilarated. She believed her battle with her weight would finally be won. But she soon fell into her old eating habits. She went to the Centre three times a week, but her weight wouldn't come down. After three months, she tearfully confessed to Kelly. Kelly took her for a talk with the owner.

CHRIS sits on the bed next to CAROLINE and takes her hand. The STAFF members crowd around her.

CHRIS: Michelle, you're a sugar addict. That's why I'm offering you the chance to live and work here with us. But I'll be honest with you - your first three weeks off sugar will be Hell. Your body will scream for it, and you'll do some crazy things to try and get your fix. But we'll get you through it. And once the initial pain is over you'll start to become the beautiful person you're meant to be. Tell me about your family. Do you think they'll be supportive?

CAROLINE *breaks down and CHRIS and his STAFF hug her.*

CHRIS: It's all right. We're here for you. You're not alone any more.

CHRIS *bounces off into the bathroom, followed by his STAFF.*

HARRY: Weren't the owner and Kelly kind to Michelle? Listening to her problems, making her feel accepted. Yet they weren't anywhere near as friendly to the other clients. Why was that? She was depressed and never said boo. Not the sort of person people are attracted to. So why -

CAROLINE: They saw she needed help!

HARRY: *(pause)* Maybe. Or is it possible they saw she could be easily recruited?

CAROLINE: Recruited? For what?

HARRY: To work at the Centre for free.

CAROLINE: It's not for free. We get board and clothing.

HARRY: You don't get much for your work. You share a room with another woman.

CAROLINE: It's more than enough. The Centre needs as much money as possible so we can continue to help people.

HARRY: How do you know the money is going to the Centre? Have you seen the accounts?

CAROLINE: Well, I don't see Chris driving a BMW or living in a mansion.

HARRY: *(pause)* Chris gave an example of his father being cruel to him. Don't you find it interesting that Michelle's father was cruel to her, too?

CAROLINE: No. That sort of thing happens to overweight people again and again. You should know that.

HARRY: *(pause)* Kelly told Chris about Michelle in advance. So when he spoke, Michelle would feel he understood what she was going through.

CAROLINE: That never happened to me. And I didn't go to Jenny Craig.

HARRY: How did you find out about the Centre?

CAROLINE: I was walking home from school one - it's none of your business!

HARRY: Then I'll have a guess. As you were walking, an attractive woman appeared out of nowhere and asked if she could join you. She was friendly, chatty and

asked you all about yourself. Finally, she casually worked the Centre into the conversation and told you how it changed her life.

CAROLINE: You make it sound so calculated.

HARRY: It is calculated. Chris knows a lot of overweight people are out tramping the footpaths. Until you become a Mentor you don't learn the techniques. *(pause)* The story I told was true. I just changed the person's name. It wasn't Michelle, it was Sharon.

CAROLINE: Sharon?

HARRY: Sharon James. Who used to room with you at the Centre.

CAROLINE: She was weak. She gave in to her addiction.

HARRY: No, she saw the truth. She got sick of being used.

CAROLINE: Now she's fatter than she was before she came to the Centre.

HARRY: How do you know that?

CAROLINE: Chris showed us a photo of her. She's enormous.

HARRY: Chris doctored the photo to reinforce your fear of leaving the Centre.

CAROLINE: He would never do that.

HARRY: I saw Sharon a month ago and she looked great.

CAROLINE: You're lying, you're - did you kidnap her too? Is that why she left?

HARRY: I found her crying at the Centre and we talked. Now she's having a wonderful life. Working, socialising, going to the gym. Best of all, she has no trouble controlling herself around sugar.

CAROLINE: She can't control herself. She's an addict.

HARRY: How much research have you done into Chris's sugar addiction theory?

CAROLINE: Look at me! I'm thin! I'm healthy! I'm happy! For the first time in my life. And you want to take it away from me.

HARRY: I want you to think about what it's cost you.

CAROLINE: It hasn't cost me anything.

HARRY: Don't you miss your friends?

CAROLINE: I didn't have any friends. I was too busy eating.

HARRY: What about going out, like to the movies?

CAROLINE: I didn't go anywhere. I was afraid there'd be someone out there waiting to laugh at me. No-one laughs at me now. I have friends who love and encourage me.

HARRY: Do they really love you, Caroline?

CAROLINE: You saw for yourself.

HARRY: It's part of the technique.

CAROLINE: God you're so negative.

HARRY: It's called love-bombing. They give you love so you'll behave the way they want. If you do or say anything they disapprove of, that love will be withdrawn -

CAROLINE: I won't go back to being fat!

HARRY: *(pause)* Chris has deliberately given you a phobia so you won't leave. But he doesn't have a phobia.

He hands her a photo. Projected onto the back wall is a picture of Chris wolfing down some donuts.

HARRY: I took it two weeks ago when he came to Canberra on a recruitment drive. I've never seen a dozen donuts disappear so fast.

CAROLINE: He has total control over his brain chemistry. He can eat anything he likes.

HARRY: Oh come on, Caroline.

CAROLINE: I'll have the same control one day.

HARRY: How? How will you get this control? Did he explain it to -

The bathroom door bursts open and CHRIS enters. HARRY talks on silently.

CHRIS: *(to Caroline)* Poor man. He's sick. Obviously a sugar addict. Tell him you understand how he feels.

CAROLINE: I understand how you feel.

HARRY: Sorry?

CHRIS: Tell him he needs our help.

CAROLINE: You're a sugar addict. You need our help.

HARRY: I see. It's turn the tables time. Go on then. I'm interested in your technique.

CHRIS/CAROLINE: It's not a technique.

HARRY: You target a person's weakness, seemingly to help them, but the real aim is -

CHRIS/CAROLINE: I understand your pain.

CAROLINE is now silent. She simply stares ahead, zombie-like. CHRIS now speaks for her.

CHRIS: I know what it's like to be treated like an outcast, like a joke. We can change that. Help you become the person you're meant to be.

HARRY: It always amazes me this stuff actually works.

CHRIS: I found it hard to accept my problem at first, too. But once I accepted it, I was able to take action.

HARRY: You didn't take action. They took action against you, and now they control you.

CHRIS: Don't you want people in your life who can help you? You can't do it by yourself. You can't do it living alone.

HARRY: How did you know I live alone?

CHRIS: Who on earth would have you?

This has stung HARRY.

HARRY: God you people are so -

CHRIS: Happy! You could be happy too.

HARRY: It's ridiculous that you think a person can't be happy because they're overweight. Can't you see how silly that - ?

CHRIS/CAROLINE: Ow!

CAROLINE grabs her hamstring and rubs it sensuously, staring at Harry. HARRY stares back then hurries into the bathroom. He returns with a grey, baggy tracksuit. He dumps it in her lap.

HARRY: Put this on. You'll be more comfortable.

CHRIS: I'm perfectly comfortable.

HARRY: Well, I'm not. Your clothes are starting to smell.

CHRIS: They smell fine to me.

HARRY: You were jogging in them. Go into the bathroom and change.

CHRIS: No.

HARRY: Have a shower and change your clothes!

They stare at each other. Stalemate. PAUL enters the living room with ice and knocks on the door.

HARRY: What is it?

PAUL: I've got the ice.

PAUL enters.

HARRY: It's time for a break anyway.

HARRY hurries into the living room and closes the door. He sees the cake, grabs a piece, is about to take a bite when he realises what he's doing. He dumps it back in the box. He exits through the kitchen door.

PAUL: Sorry, but you'll have to put it on yourself this time.

PAUL puts it on the bed. He turns to leave. CHRIS suddenly starts to sob. He sits on the bed next to Caroline. PAUL stops and looks back.

PAUL: Are you all right?

CHRIS: No. He keeps on saying things that aren't true.

PAUL: It can take a while to become clear.

CHRIS: He yelled at me. I think he's going to hurt me.

PAUL: Harry would never hurt anyone.

CHRIS: Paul, I've never been happier in my whole life. Please don't let him take it away from me.

PAUL: *(pause)* Let's get this ice on your leg.

PAUL puts the ice under Chris's leg and secures it.

PAUL: I know you're in pain at the moment, but I guarantee it will be worth it. My sister went through the same thing. Now she's having a great life. In fact, I'll introduce you to her once this is over. You'll have a lot to talk about.

CHRIS: Thanks for being so kind to me, Paul.

PAUL: That's all right.

CHRIS *gives him a hug.*

PAUL: Honestly, there's no need for that.

CHRIS: Yes there is.

CHRIS *kisses him. PAUL tries to pull away, but CHRIS holds him tight. PAUL gives in. In their passion they fall against CAROLINE and she tumbles off the bed, retaining her zombie-like expression. She stays on the floor, out of sight. PAUL breaks the embrace and steps away from the bed. HARRY suddenly hurries back into the living room and storms into the bedroom.*

HARRY: What's taking so long?

PAUL: Um...just finished.

HARRY: Come out then.

HARRY *exits. PAUL follows. Lights down on bedroom.*

HARRY: What did she say to you?

PAUL: Well...she's frightened you're going to hurt her.

HARRY: See? She's working on you. What did you say?

PAUL: That you would never do that.

HARRY: Good. Did she say anything else?

PAUL: No.

HARRY: Just remember, everything she says is an attempt to get you to help her.

PAUL: I would never do that.

HARRY: You don't know that! Men do the stupidest things for beautiful women.
How do you think I got into a cult?

PAUL: *(pause)* A woman got you into a cult?

HARRY: *(pause)* It was a bad time in my life. She paid me attention. Made me feel special. Then once I was in, off she went to recruit someone else. *(pause)* You can have a break from giving Caroline her ice. Marlene can do it.

PAUL: But Caroline said she only wanted me –

HARRY: She's a big girl, she'll cope.

MARLENE *enters with a tray of food.*

MARLENE: Lunch time. Paul, yours is in the kitchen.

PAUL: Thanks.

PAUL *exits.*

MARLENE: Hope you're hungry, because I have your favourite. A hamburger with the lot followed by chocolate mousse.

HARRY: *(pause)* Is it possible to get a salad instead?

MARLENE: A salad?

HARRY: Yes.

MARLENE: You've never asked for salad before.

HARRY: I feel like a change.

MARLENE: You're not...

HARRY: What?

MARLENE: Worried about your weight, are you?

HARRY: No! No, of course not.

MARLENE: Good, because you have no need to worry. You're perfect as you are.

HARRY: I am?

MARLENE: Yes, you're a big cuddly teddy bear.

She hugs him. He does not reciprocate.

HARRY: Big?

MARLENE: In a lovely way.

HARRY *breaks out of the hug.*

MARLENE: Harry, what's wrong?

HARRY: I'm fine. It's just...

MARLENE: What?

HARRY: That Chris makes me sick! The way he takes overweight girls and makes them thin and beautiful, so he can take advantage of them.

MARLENE: How do you know that?

HARRY: I saw the way he flirted with them, touched them. It's sex that motivates him. Not money, not anything else.

MARLENE: What does Caroline think of that?

HARRY: I haven't mentioned it to her. I'm sure it's only after they become Mentors that he moves on them. When they're in the shape he likes. It would be a lot easier to get her out if he'd already tried something.

MARLENE: *(pause)* Harry, I'm worried that you're not your cheerful self.

HARRY: I'm tired, that's all.

MARLENE: How about I make you a special lunch tomorrow? It'll give us a chance to talk. We haven't had a good talk for a long time.

HARRY: Marlene -

MARLENE: When was the last time you had a nice dinner with anyone? I hate the thought of you at home alone eating takeaway meals.

HARRY: I don't do that much any more. I got a Jamie Oliver book.

MARLENE: Please, Harry. Let me cook you something special.

HARRY: *(pause)* Okay, fine.

She hugs him. He is uncomfortable and gently breaks off.

HARRY: How's Sandra?

MARLENE: She's been calling waiters, telling them to pick up their beds and walk.

HARRY: I'm starting to understand why Caroline joined a cult. I think they have a lot to resolve.

MARLENE: Do you want me to get her?

HARRY: No. I'm going to have another talk with Caroline first.

MARLENE: Once you're through, there'll be a salad waiting for you. But the Hamburger will be on stand-by, just in case.

MARLENE *exits with the tray.* HARRY *opens the bedroom door.* CHRIS *is standing in the doorway. He is smiling, friendly. The ice is off his leg.*

CHRIS: Mr Barker?

HARRY: Yes?

CHRIS: I'm Chris Blair. Owner of the Centre. Nice to meet you.

He steps out and offers his hand. HARRY *shakes it reluctantly.*

CHRIS: How are you enjoying your weekend so far?

HARRY: Fine, thanks.

CHRIS: Excellent. If you totally commit to the program it will do wonders for you.

HARRY: That's great news.

CHRIS: Problem is, we won't know exactly what exercise and diet plan is right for you unless you participate in all the activities.

HARRY: Ah.

CHRIS: We don't like to be pushy, but we're only thinking of you.

HARRY: Of course.

CHRIS: And while I hate to discourage clients talking with the staff, Caroline is our newest staff member and I'm afraid any distraction may reduce the quality of her work. Consequently, reducing our service to you.

HARRY: I see.

CHRIS: Terrific. I knew you'd understand.

CHRIS is about to go back into the bedroom when...

HARRY: She's a great kid. So competent and friendly.

CHRIS: I'll pass that on to her. She'll be thrilled to hear it.

HARRY: And she loves you. Always raving on about how you turned her life around.

CHRIS: That's nice of you to say so, but I'm sure you're exaggerating.

HARRY: Oh no. I was beginning to picture you as some sort of God.

CHRIS: As you can see, that's not the case.

HARRY: No.

CHRIS: Anyway -

HARRY: Must be difficult for you to resist.

CHRIS: I beg your pardon?

HARRY: A man your age being looked up to by such an attractive young woman.
Must be hard not to...

CHRIS: Not to what?

HARRY: Come on. We're men. No need to be shy with me. Any man in your
situation would find the temptation -

CHRIS: Mr Barker, I believe a bushwalk is about to begin. I think some fresh air will
do you good.

CHRIS begins to close the bedroom door when...

HARRY: I know what you're doing. You make me sick.

*CHRIS slowly closes the door. HARRY stands angry for a moment, then is
about to storm into the bedroom when he stops himself.*

HARRY: No! No! No!

*He walks around the room, calming himself down. He stops, takes a deep
breath and calmly enters the bedroom. Lights up on bedroom. CAROLINE is
back on the bed doing stomach crunches. CHRIS is standing over her, urging
her on. Harry can no longer see him.*

CHRIS: Come on, crunch those muscles. Burn that fat!

HARRY: Caroline, the reason you live at the Centre is to avoid dealing with the
problems you have with your mother.

CHRIS: Don't think about her. You've moved beyond her.

HARRY: If you don't deal with it, it will eat away at you until it makes you sick.

CHRIS: She's trying to sabotage your recovery.

HARRY: Why are you so angry with her?

CHRIS: She wants to take control of you again.

HARRY: One of the first things cults do is target any negative feelings recruits have about their families. Saying ‘they hurt you, they held you back, they never loved you’ over and over until you believe you have no-one else to turn to. Did Chris ever do that to you?

CAROLINE *stops exercising & stares at CHRIS.*

CHRIS: Are you going to listen to him? He’s sick. Now keep going.

CAROLINE *resumes the stomach crunches.*

HARRY: Is that why you refused to see her, or answer her letters?

CHRIS: I wouldn’t see her because -

CAROLINE: What letters?

CAROLINE *stops and looks at Harry. CHRIS is worried.*

HARRY: You didn’t get them?

CAROLINE *is about to answer, but CHRIS manages to beat her to the punch, as he tries to do for the rest of the scene.*

CHRIS: I would have thrown them out anyway.

HARRY: Shouldn’t you have been allowed to decide that for yourself?

CHRIS: No, because -

HARRY: They stop you communicating with outsiders, so you can’t consider different ideas.

CHRIS: I didn’t want to read the -

CAROLINE: I should have got the letters!

HARRY: Of course you should have. And they stop you communicating with yourself. When do you have time alone to think?

CHRIS: Every day.

HARRY: I watched you work. There’s always someone with you.

CHRIS: It’s a safety measure. Addicts are ingenious at getting their fix.

HARRY: And when you weren’t working, you did group activities like touch football. You were never allowed to do your own thing.

CHRIS: We were. But we loved being together.

HARRY: Then when you were too tired to move, you listened to Chris's lectures. Constant stimulation draining you of any urge to question.

CHRIS: That's not -

HARRY: When was the last time you read any Jane Austen?

CHRIS: Who?

HARRY: Your mother said she's your favourite author.

CHRIS: I have more important things to do than read trivial books.

HARRY: In *Persuasion*, which one of the Musgrave sisters went into a coma?

CHRIS: How the Hell would I know?

HARRY: Come on, Caroline, you know this.

CHRIS: No I [don't] - .

CAROLINE: Louisa!

HARRY: That's right. And who did Louisa end up marrying?

CHRIS: I have no [idea] -

CAROLINE: Captain Benwick!

HARRY: Exactly! And who convinced Anne Elliot not to marry Captain Wentworth due to his lack of fortune?

CAROLINE: Lady Russell! She almost destroyed their lives.

HARRY: Don't you miss reading?

CAROLINE: Yes. I miss it very much.

HARRY: This is what Chris does. He cuts you off from anything that connects you to your old life.

CHRIS: That's rubbish.

HARRY: Don't you want to get control of your life again, Caroline?

CHRIS: I am in control of my life. I chose to live at the Centre.

HARRY: No. You were manipulated into living there.

CHRIS: That's not true.

HARRY: Don't you want to be free to make your own decisions?

CAROLINE *jams her hands over her ears.*

CAROLINE: Shut-up! Just shut-up! Please! I need...I need to think.

Blackout.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Caroline's bedroom is empty. PAUL is on the living room floor doing stomach crunches. He wears a tracksuit. He stops and feels his stomach. He looks discouraged. He resumes stomach crunches. MARLENE enters with a tray carrying a glass of juice, glass of water, a bowl of bran, fruit and a covered dish.

MARLENE: Breakfast time.

PAUL leaps up, embarrassed.

PAUL: Thanks, Marlene.

She puts down the tray. She puts the juice and the covered dish on the table.

MARLENE: Doing some exercise?

PAUL: Yeah.

MARLENE: Hope it helped you work up an appetite.

Paul takes the lid off the dish.

PAUL: Bacon and eggs.

MARLENE: As ordered.

PAUL: *(pause)* I hate to be a nuisance, but could I have the bran instead?

MARLENE: Sorry, that's for Caroline. I'm going to try my luck with her.

PAUL: Oh.

MARLENE: Why would you want it anyway? It's awful stuff. I'm only offering it to her because it's the only sugar-free cereal we have.

PAUL: Actually, I'm trying to lose some weight.

MARLENE: But there's not an ounce of fat on you.

She playfully grabs his stomach. He jumps back.

PAUL: I hide it well.

MARLENE: What's going on around here? Harry's eating salad and now you've gone high fibre. I might have to conduct an inquiry.

PAUL: Sorry to be fussy, Marlene. I should've said something earlier.

MARLENE: That's all right. I'll bring you some bran after I finish with Caroline.

MARLENE takes the tray and knocks on the door. PAUL gets his Bible and reads.

MARLENE: Caroline, it's Marlene.

She enters, but no-one is in there.

MARLENE: Caroline? Caroline!

MARLENE puts the tray on the table. CAROLINE limps out of the bathroom dressed in the grey, baggy tracksuit. It hides her physical attractiveness.

MARLENE: You've changed.

CAROLINE: Yes.

MARLENE: And you've showered.

CAROLINE: I was feeling a bit sticky.

MARLENE: You look much more comfortable. How do you feel?

CAROLINE: Much better thanks.

MARLENE: Wonderful. Now I hope you don't get cross, but I thought I'd try my luck and bring you some breakfast. Bran, fruit and water. No processed sugar to be found. But if you don't want to eat it, I'll take it away.

CAROLINE: No, no, I'll eat it.

CAROLINE sits at the table. She picks up a spoon. MARLENE smiles encouragingly. CAROLINE starts eating her bran.

MARLENE: Tasty?

CAROLINE: Not really.

MARLENE: *(laughs)* Still, it's wonderful to see you eating. You need your strength during these sessions. There's so many things to think about. But don't be too

hard on yourself if you don't understand everything straight away. Harry will get you there. He's so kind and patient. Suddenly you'll find yourself looking up into his eyes and... You really do have a lovely figure.

CAROLINE: Thanks.

MARLENE: It must be nice to be beautiful.

CAROLINE: I wouldn't say I'm -

MARLENE: Oh, you are. I bet men always stare at you.

CAROLINE: The men who come to the Centre do.

MARLENE: Do you like that?

CAROLINE: I did at first. When people looked at me before it was with disgust. Suddenly I was admired. I couldn't get enough. But after a while it got irritating to feel eyes on me all the time.

MARLENE: Of course it must.

CAROLINE: Your figure's not too bad.

MARLENE: You're just being nice.

CAROLINE: I'm not. And if you came to the Centre -

MARLENE: Naughty, Caroline. You were trying to recruit me, weren't you?

She gives her a playful slap on the wrist.

CAROLINE: Sorry, I...

MARLENE: I know. It takes a long time to get out of the habit, but you will.

CAROLINE resumes eating.

MARLENE: Will you see your Mum this morning?

CAROLINE: I might leave it for a while.

MARLENE: It's probably best not to put it off.

CAROLINE: I thought I might read first. I haven't read for a such a long time.

MARLENE: Whatever you think is best. I was terrified when I had to face my parents. We'd been separated for so long. We had so much to say to each other. So much pain. I didn't think I could do it. But I did. And it was awful and wonderful at the same time. We screamed at each other, hugged and cried

and got it all out of our systems. The only advice I'll give you is not to hold anything back. If you feel angry, be angry, if you want to scream at her, then scream at her. Don't worry, you'll get through it. *(beat)* If you want anything else to eat, just give me a yell.

MARLENE *heads for the door.*

CAROLINE: Marlene...

MARLENE: Yes, Caroline?

CAROLINE: Chris...he...I think he deceived me.

CAROLINE *bursts into tears.*

MARLENE: Oh dear. It's all right, Caroline. Everything's going to be all right.

MARLENE *hugs her & pats her back comfortingly.*

MARLENE: Now you eat your breakfast. You'll feel better for it.

MARLENE *enters the living rooms. Lights down on the bedroom. Just as she enters the living room, HARRY bursts in through the back door, wearing shorts, t-shirt and joggers. He's breathing heavily and sweating profusely. PAUL stands, alarmed.*

PAUL: Harry, are you okay?

HARRY *puts up his hand, indicating he can't speak.*

MARLENE: Harry, what's wrong? You're purple.

HARRY: War...war...

MARLENE: You're too warm?

HARRY *vigorously shakes his head.*

HARRY: War...water!

MARLENE: Oh.

She opens the fridge and gets a bottle of water. HARRY collapses into a chair. MARLENE gives him the water. HARRY gulps it down.

HARRY: Thanks.

MARLENE: What happened?

HARRY: I...I...went for a...run.

MARLENE: A run? Why?

HARRY: I...I want to get...fit.

MARLENE: What brought this on?

HARRY: I've...I've been planning to...for a while. I thought it was time to...start.

MARLENE: That's great. Eating salads and now running. Even Paul has turned away his bacon and eggs and ordered bran.

PAUL: I'm trying to lose a few pounds.

He pats his stomach.

HARRY: How's...Caroline?

MARLENE: Wonderful! She thinks Chris deceived her.

PAUL: Really?

MARLENE: Yes. She's even showered and changed. And she's eating! *(pause)*
Harry, did you hear me?

HARRY *nods, emotionless.*

MARLENE: Aren't you excited? You've made a breakthrough.

HARRY: I'm not up to getting excited at the moment. How's her state of mind?

MARLENE: A little confused I think, but nothing serious.

HARRY: A few more sessions and she'll be fine. I'll give Sandra the good news.

HARRY *staggers out.*

MARLENE: Salad and now jogging?

She picks up a piece of mud cake and starts eating. Blackout.

SCENE 2

Lights up on the bedroom. CAROLINE is on her bed reading 'Persuasion'. She puts it down, frustrated, unable to concentrate. She picks it up again, starts to read for a moment, then puts it down again and starts to do some stomach crunches.

CAROLINE: Body strong, body light, positive energy - get out of my head!

She picks up the book again. She shakes her head vigorously, trying to clear it. She starts to read again. The bathroom door swings open revealing CHRIS standing there in a blaze of light.

CHRIS: What the fuck do you think you're -

CAROLINE: Piss off!

CHRIS stands shocked for a moment, then sheepishly closes the door. CAROLINE stares at it for a moment and is about to resume reading, when the door reopens slightly. CHRIS peeps out, and says...

CHRIS: *(quietly)* Body strong, body light, positive energy -

CAROLINE: *(loud)* 'Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage...'

CHRIS quietly closes the door.

CAROLINE: '...there he found occupation for an idle...'

CAROLINE looks up, for a moment, then starts again.

CAROLINE: 'There he found occupation for' - body strong, body light, positive energy -

She throws the book down in disgust and begins to sob. Blackout.

SCENE 3

Lights up on the living room and the bedroom. CAROLINE is asleep on the bed. PAUL is in the living room eating bran. He is pulling faces, clearly not enjoying it. He pours on a number of spoonfuls of sugar. He eats again. Now he likes it better. There is a knock at the back door.

SHARON: *(off)* Hello? Hello?

PAUL cautiously opens the door, revealing a seriously overweight young woman.

PAUL: Can I help you?

SHARON: Hi. You must be Paul. I'm Sharon.

She shakes his hand and enters.

PAUL: Sharon?

SHARON: Harry asked me to talk to Caroline. To help with the counselling.

PAUL: You're Sharon?

SHARON: Yes.

PAUL: Who used to live at the Centre?

SHARON: That's right.

PAUL: Are you sure?

SHARON: What do you mean?

PAUL: It's just that you're...

SHARON: What?

PAUL: *(pause)* Early.

SHARON: Oh, I thought I might have trouble finding the place, so I left early.
Where's Caroline?

PAUL: In there.

SHARON: Oh good. I'll say hi.

PAUL: No, don't do that. Harry will need to talk to you first.

SHARON: Oh, please, I'm dying to see her. We were so close at the Centre.

PAUL: I'm sorry, but he'll have to talk to you about what you should and shouldn't say to her.

SHARON: Oh.

PAUL: So, um...take a seat and I'll get Harry.

PAUL hurries out the kitchen door. SHARON looks around the room. She sees the cake.

SHARON: Yum!

She takes a piece and starts to eat.

SHARON: Mm!

She looks at the bedroom door. She heads to it and knocks.

SHARON: Caroline?

CAROLINE sits up.

CAROLINE: Yes?

SHARON comes in holding the cake.

SHARON: Caroline!

She rushes over and hugs her.

SHARON: It's so good to see you.

CAROLINE struggles out of the hug, gets off the bed and hobbles away.

CAROLINE: Who are you?

SHARON: It's me. Sharon.

CAROLINE: Sharon who?

SHARON: Sharon James. From the Centre. Remember?

CAROLINE: You're not Sharon.

SHARON: Don't you recognise me?

CAROLINE stares at her, then screams.

SHARON: What's wrong?

CAROLINE: It's true! It's all true!

SHARON: What's true?

CAROLINE: If we leave the Centre we get -

SHARON: I'm not fat!

CAROLINE: Look at you. Look at what you're eating. Your addiction's out of control.

SHARON: I'm not addicted! It was a lie Chris told to control us.

CAROLINE: You have to come back to the Centre. We'll save you.

SHARON: I'm already saved! I'm out of Chris's grip. You're the one who needs to be saved, you brainwashed zombie.

CAROLINE: Sharon, please, you have to come with me or you'll die.

SHARON: I will not die! You're just jealous because I'm in charge of my life. Eating what I want, when I want. Look...

She takes a bite.

SHARON: Mm, it's delicious. I bet you'd love some, wouldn't you?

SHARON approaches her with it. CAROLINE hobbles away from her.

CAROLINE: Get it away from me.

SHARON: Eat it!

SHARON grabs her by the hair and tries to ram it down her throat, rubbing the cake all over her face. CAROLINE screams, clawing the cake off her face.

CAROLINE: Get away from me! Help! Help!

She breaks away. SHARON starts ravenously eating the cake left in her hand. HARRY, now dressed normally, hurries in, followed by PAUL.

HARRY: What the Hell is going on?

CAROLINE: She rubbed cake all over my face!

SHARON: She tried to escape. I had to stop her.

HARRY: You're Sharon?

SHARON: Yes, Harry, I'm Sharon. Why can't anyone recognise me today?

CAROLINE: Get it off me! Get it off!

HARRY: Paul, give her a hand.

PAUL: Come on, Caroline.

PAUL leads her into the bathroom.

HARRY: Why did you do that? You know she has a sugar phobia.

SHARON: I was trying to help her get over it.

HARRY looks unconvinced.

SHARON: She called me fat and said I have to go back to the Centre or I'll die.

HARRY: Even so, there was no need to behave like that.

SHARON: Do you like being called fat?

HARRY: *(pause)* Well, what happened to you?

SHARON: What do you mean?

HARRY: When I saw you a month ago you were...different.

SHARON: Dangerously thin, you mean?

HARRY: Well...yes.

SHARON: I've been eating more healthily since then.

HARRY: Oh. Good for you.

SHARON: *(pause)* All right, I've been on a binge! I hadn't eaten chocolate in two years. But I've got it out of my system now. Tomorrow I'm going to start dieting and exercising again.

HARRY: That's great, but it leaves me with a problem. I wanted you to show Caroline it was possible to leave the cult and not become...overweight again.

SHARON: I'm not that bad.

HARRY: No, you're not that bad. But enough to reinforce her phobia.

SHARON: Just because I've put on a little weight?

HARRY: And you did rub the cake all over her face.

SHARON: Well, she's seen me now. Won't the damage be done?

HARRY: Probably, but I don't want to make it worse.

SHARON: But I have some important things to tell her about the Centre. Things she doesn't know.

HARRY: Do you know what happens at the river?

SHARON: *(pause)* Yes, and if she's already been there -

HARRY: She hasn't. She was supposed to go today.

SHARON: Thank God.

HARRY: Why didn't you tell me about the river before?

SHARON: It's hard for me to talk about.

HARRY: Did Chris...touch you?

SHARON *looks away.*

HARRY: Are you be willing to tell Caroline about what happens at the river?

She nods. HARRY knocks on the bathroom.

HARRY: Is everything all right in there?

CAROLINE, *her face now clean, storms out of the bathroom followed by PAUL.*

CAROLINE: You lied to me!

HARRY: What are you talking about?

CAROLINE: You said she was thin.

HARRY: She was a month ago.

CAROLINE: *(to Sharon)* You put on that much weight in a month?

SHARON: I'm not that bad.

CAROLINE: *(To Harry)* Can't you see now? - Chris was telling the truth!

HARRY: Caroline -

CAROLINE: You have to let me go. You can see what will happen to me if you don't.

SHARON: I'm not that bad.

CAROLINE: For God's sake, look in the mirror.

SHARON: *(pause)* All right! And it's all Chris's fault.

CAROLINE: Chris's fault?

SHARON: Yes. And if you go to the river the same thing will happen to you.

HARRY: What happens at the river, Sharon?

CAROLINE: I don't want to hear it! I don't want the surprise ruined for me.

HARRY: You're going to hear it whether you like it or not! *(beat)* Sharon, what happens?

SHARON: *(pause)* Well...after I'd been at the Centre for six months, I qualified to become a Mentor. I was taken to the river on the centre's boundary. All the mentors were standing in a line on the bank smiling at me. Chris and his wife stood at the head of the line. Next to them was a massage table. I didn't understand what was going on. I was very nervous. Then Chris made a speech.

CHRIS bounds out of the bathroom holding a plastic bag. He puts an arm around SHARON in an avuncular manner. He speaks directly to the audience.

CHRIS: When Sharon first came to us she weighed eighty kilos, and her skinfold measurement was forty millimetres. But due to her hard work over the last six months, she has dropped to fifty kilos and her skinfold measurement is now only twelve. She deserves a huge round of applause.

Canned applause.

Sharon, I know it's been hard for you. You've had to cope with the pain of being denied sugar, a new diet and a tough exercise regime. Many have failed to get through it. But you've done it. You're a worthy addition to our team of Mentors. You will save many others from the pain you've been saved from. I know you will wear your uniform with pride.

He takes a flashy gym top out of the bag and gives it to her. They shake hands. She struggles to put it on, as it is way too small for her, but finally manages it.

CHRIS: Mentors, please welcome our newest member.

Canned applause.

CHRIS: Sharon, you've worked so hard. You deserve to be rewarded.

CHRIS disappears into the bathroom.

SHARON: He and the other men left. Then the women undressed me. I was shocked. I thought I was in for some weird sex orgy. But it was nothing like that. They led me into the water. Scrubbed my back, washed my hair. I felt like a baby in their arms. Then they took me back to the bank and dried me. They lay me down on the massage table and placed a towel over my bottom and then left. I was all alone. Then Chris came back. He poured warm oil on my back and massaged me. It was wonderful. He told me how much he admired what I'd done. And he kept saying how beautiful my body was. Then...then he "accidentally" knocked the towel off. And...

SHARON is unable to continue.

HARRY: Sharon, there's no need to go on. We know what he did next. What does that tell you about him, Caroline? That he's a selfless man out to help others from the goodness of his heart? No, just a man out to use under-confident people for his own pleasure. He doesn't care about any of you. He moulds you into a shape he likes so he can -

SHARON: No, no, no! I can't, I can't.

HARRY: What's wrong?

SHARON: He didn't do anything.

HARRY: Of course he did.

SHARON: I was the one who knocked the towel off! *(pause)* I wanted him. I loved him. But he pushed me away. Told me I wasn't ready to be a Mentor. Said I had to go back to the beginning, doing jobs like cleaning toilets and showers. Then he took my uniform and left. After that he acted like I didn't exist. I couldn't handle it. That's why I left.

She starts to cry. Pause.

HARRY: Tell Caroline how good your life is now.

SHARON: Well...I'm working and I'm going back to study, and - it's no good! I'm miserable. All I do is eat. I miss Chris. I want to go back.

HARRY: But a month ago you said -

SHARON: I was trying to convince myself. Look at me! - I'm as fat as a house!

CAROLINE hugs her.

CAROLINE: Sharon, we'll go back together. Chris will help you.

SHARON: He won't take me back.

CAROLINE: He will. He'll forgive you.

HARRY: Paul, get her out of here.

CAROLINE: You'll be beautiful again!

HARRY & PAUL *drag SHARON out. HARRY slams the door & bolts it.*
CAROLINE *bangs on it.*

CAROLINE: Let me out! You can't let that happen to me.

Lights down on the bedroom.

HARRY: What is wrong with you?

SHARON: I want to be thin again. I want to be loved again.

HARRY: I wish you'd told me how you were feeling before you came here.

SHARON: I thought I was over it. But seeing Caroline brought it all back. I'm sorry.

SHARON *walks towards the back door.*

HARRY: Where are you going?

SHARON: Home.

HARRY: No, no. You're staying here.

SHARON: What?

HARRY: I'm not confident that you won't go straight to Chris and tell him where
Caroline is.

SHARON: I would never do that.

PAUL: Harry, we can't keep her here against her will.

HARRY: Sharon, give me your car keys.

SHARON: No.

HARRY: Give them to me.

PAUL: Harry, maybe we should think for a minute.

HARRY: Maybe *you* should have thought before you left her alone. Caroline's worse
than she was when she first arrived, thanks to you.

PAUL: I'm sorry, Harry, but -

HARRY: I can't risk letting her go. If she goes to Chris the police could be here in half an hour. We'd get done for kidnapping.

Suddenly SHARON runs out the back door.

HARRY: Sharon!

They chase her.

SHARON: *(off)* Let me go!

They bring her back in struggling.

SHARON: You bastard!

HARRY: You'll only have to stay for a day or so. Give me your keys.

She gives the keys to him.

HARRY: Paul, take her to Marlene and ask her to give her some lunch. And don't let her out of your sight.

SHARON: What's for lunch?

HARRY: I don't know, but here's dessert.

HARRY hands her the cake.

HARRY: And tell Sandra to come over.

PAUL leads SHARON out.

HARRY: Fuck!

Blackout.

SCENE 4

HARRY and SANDRA in the living room.

SANDRA: This is out of control. Kidnapping my own daughter was bad enough, but now holding that girl...

HARRY: It's for our own protection as well as Caroline's.

SANDRA: You guaranteed me there wouldn't be any problems.

HARRY: Sharon took me by surprise. I had no idea she could put on that much weight in a month.

SANDRA: I'm not. Not the way she was tucking into the mud cake. She was like a little Pac man. *(beat)* Has all the progress you made with Caroline been undone because of her?

HARRY: Yes.

SANDRA: Little shit. What are we going to do now?

HARRY: It's time you and Caroline discussed the problems you have with each other.

SANDRA: What problems?

HARRY: I don't know. But there must be something. She has a lot of anger towards you.

SANDRA: That's because of that Chris putting ideas into her head.

HARRY: Well, yes, but there must be something [else] -

SANDRA: Are you implying that I've been a bad mother?

HARRY: No, not at [all] -

SANDRA: Anytime a child in this society has a problem, a judgemental stare is always turned on the mother. I've felt enough guilt in my life over not being able to do more for her, but I won't be made to feel guilty any more. Caroline joining a cult is not my fault. I brought her up the best I could. I admit she spent a lot of time with babysitters, but on Sundays we did lots of fun things together. Picnics, coast trips, all sorts of things. She was a very happy child.

HARRY: I'm not suggesting otherwise.

SANDRA: If you want to point the finger, point it at her father. He ran off with a bimbo when she was five. I was left to bring her up on a waitress's wage.

HARRY: I'm just looking for reasons for Caroline's anger at you, whether they're real or not.

SANDRA: Other than the usual mother/teenage daughter problems, I can't think of anything.

HARRY: *(pause)* Did you ever put pressure on her to lose weight?

SANDRA: No! The last thing I wanted to do was make her anorexic. The only thing I did was occasionally suggest she go for a walk. But she hardly ever went. When she did she always ended up at the shops.

HARRY: What about - ?

SANDRA: I've done nothing wrong!

HARRY: For God's sake, your mobile phone went off while you were talking to her.

SANDRA: I've explained that.

HARRY: It was the about the most insensitive thing that could have happened.

SANDRA: Don't you dare lecture me about -

HARRY: The time for politeness is over. Go in there and have it out with Caroline. Because I'm certain your relationship is at the core of her cult involvement.

SANDRA: Harry -

HARRY: If you don't, we could find ourselves in gaol.

SANDRA: *(pause)* Are you serious?

HARRY: You bet I am.

SANDRA: *(pause)* Well...how should I do it? Should I be kind and loving?

HARRY: No, no, just be yourself.

SANDRA: I beg your [pardon] -

HARRY: Sorry, I didn't mean in like that. I meant, do whatever comes naturally: scream at her, accuse her, cry, whatever. Just get an emotional reaction and get her talking. All right?

SANDRA nods then heads to the bedroom door.

HARRY: Wait.

SANDRA: What?

HARRY: Mobile.

SANDRA: Oh.

HARRY: Good luck.

She takes the mobile phone out of her pocket and gives it to him. HARRY puts it in his pocket and sits at the table. Lights down on the living room and up on the bedroom.

SANDRA strides into the room. CAROLINE is standing, trying to stretch her hamstring.

SANDRA: Why are you so angry with me?

CAROLINE: Oh God, not again. Haven't you got any business problems to deal with?

SANDRA: They're all solved. Well? *(pause)* Is it because you think I didn't spend enough time with you when you were a child? I did a lot more than many other parents. Remember all those coast trips? They were great fun. You loved them. We both did. *(pause)* I know you had to go without things when you were little. Like the pretty clothes your friends had, but I couldn't afford them. I explained that to you again and again. Surely you can't hold that against me? *(pause)* I don't know what I did wrong. This Chris has somehow got you to hate me over some imaginary thing that I -

CAROLINE: You turned me into a sugar addict!

SANDRA: *(pause)* Is that what he told you?

CAROLINE: It's the truth.

SANDRA: And how was I supposed to have done this?

CAROLINE: *(pause)* By putting pressure on me to study all the time.

SANDRA: Are you serious?

CAROLINE: You always demanded to see what marks I got for essays or exams. You'd always lecture me about the dire consequences of not getting a high enough score to get into law or medicine.

SANDRA: I never lectured you.

CAROLINE: You stressed me out. That's why I started eating. I ate for comfort.

SANDRA: Oh, Caroline. Can't you see what this Chris has done to you?

CAROLINE: And you were the one who gave me all the sugar! You always brought home cakes from the restaurant for me. You can't deny that.

SANDRA: You asked me to.

CAROLINE: You could have said no. Anyone could see I had a serious weight problem, but you didn't do anything to help.

SANDRA: I didn't want to turn you into one of those women who spend their whole lives worrying about their weight.

CAROLINE: Well, I was worried. And when I decided to do something about it by going to the Centre, you wouldn't let me.

SANDRA: I did let you.

CAROLINE: Only once a week. I needed to go at least three times.

SANDRA: You couldn't afford to go three times a week. Exams were coming up -

CAROLINE: See! Constant pressure. Even at the expense of my health.

SANDRA: *(pause)* I did it out of love.

CAROLINE: Yeah right.

SANDRA: I did. I didn't want you to be like me. Uneducated, working as a waitress, bringing up a child alone. I wanted you to have a life where you'd never have to rely on some stupid man.

CAROLINE: Don't you talk that way about Dad.

SANDRA: I'll talk about him any way I want after what he did to me.

CAROLINE: What you did to him, more like it.

SANDRA: He left me because I was overweight!

CAROLINE: That's not -

SANDRA: After I had you I put on weight. He started making jokes about it. Called me his little Oompaloompa. Then he made me go to the gym. But no matter how much better I began to look, he always found an imperfection. This went on for years. Finally I realised I could never please him so I gave up. Then he left me for that skinny little -

CAROLINE: He said the reason you split up -

SANDRA: I don't care what he said! Look at his life. His girlfriends get younger and younger. He leads tour groups to the Caribbean filled with pretty young things he can prey on. Are you blind? *(pause)* You're lucky I stopped him putting the same pressure on you that he put on me.

CAROLINE: He never would have done that.

SANDRA: On the rare occasions he saw you, he'd always ring me afterwards and criticise me for letting you become overweight.

CAROLINE: He never said anything about my weight.

SANDRA: That's because I told him I'd kill him if he did.

CAROLINE: *(pause)* I don't think you know Dad at all.

SANDRA: Oh, for God's sake.

CAROLINE: We always have a great time together. I can really open up to him. We've had some really good talks lately.

SANDRA: You've seen him?

CAROLINE: He phones me once a month. We talk for ages. He thinks it's great what I'm doing. He's really supportive, unlike you. He's even coming to stay at the Centre next month.

SANDRA: He's staying at the Centre?

CAROLINE: For a week. He's really excited about seeing the new me.

SANDRA: *(pause)* You refused to see me, but you're going to see him? *(silence)* I brought you up alone. You've hardly seen him since you were five, yet you invited him to stay? The man who nearly destroyed both our lives? *(silence)* Go back.

CAROLINE: What?

SANDRA: Go back to your cult.

CAROLINE: I can leave?

SANDRA: Yes. Get out of my sight.

SANDRA starts to leave then stops.

SANDRA: You know what really makes me sick. You've turned into exactly the sort of dolly bird your father likes. Exactly the sort of woman he left me for. I'm sure he'll be very proud of you.

SANDRA *exits into the living room.* CAROLINE *goes into the bathroom.*
HARRY *stands.*

HARRY: How did it go?

SANDRA: I told her to go back to her cult.

HARRY: What?

SANDRA: I don't want anything more to do with her.

HARRY: Why?

SANDRA: That's none of your business.

HARRY: You can't let her leave.

SANDRA: It's finished.

HARRY: It is not finished while there's a danger that she'll press charges against us.

SANDRA: I don't care anymore.

HARRY: Well I do. I'm not going to gaol. I know that I can turn her around if I have more time with her.

SANDRA: I'm not paying another cent for this counselling.

SANDRA *exits.*

HARRY: (*yells*) If you leave now you'll be estranged from her for good.

HARRY *stands shocked for a moment. He then goes into the bedroom.*

HARRY: Caroline?

CAROLINE *comes out of the bathroom wearing her crop top and hot pants again.*

CAROLINE: I'm leaving now.

HARRY: We need to have a bit more of a talk first.

CAROLINE: My mother said I can go.

HARRY: After we've had a talk.

CAROLINE: I'm not talking to you for a second longer.

HARRY: Caroline -

CAROLINE: I won't go to the Police, if that's what you're worried about.

HARRY: Sorry, Caroline, but we're starting again.

CAROLINE: I'm not talking to you! So go have a doughnut, go have a pie, just leave me alone!

HARRY: Caroline, please calm down.

CAROLINE: Don't tell me to calm down, you fat prick. Just get out of my way.

CAROLINE tries to step around him. HARRY grabs her arm. CAROLINE lashes out wildly.

CAROLINE: Get your fat fingers off me, you disgusting pig!

HARRY slaps her. CAROLINE staggers back.

CAROLINE: Oh shit.

HARRY: Don't you speak to me like that!

CAROLINE: I'm sorry. Please don't hurt me.

HARRY: You're the one who's disgusting. Using your beauty to recruit people.

CAROLINE: I haven't recruited anyone.

HARRY: You will. You'll prey on lonely men minding their own business. Then when they're hooked, you'll forget all about them. You fucking little...

CAROLINE starts to cry.

HARRY: Oh shit. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

HARRY touches her comfortingly. CAROLINE pulls away.

CAROLINE: Please don't.

HARRY stops.

HARRY: *(pause)* I'm sorry, it's just....you're so beautiful. If you...I mean, we can all go if you... I've never been with someone beautiful. Never.

CAROLINE: Please stop.

HARRY: Try to remember how it felt when you were like me. Please. It would mean so much.

HARRY *leans in to kiss her. CAROLINE screams, pushes him away, and hurries as far away from him as possible.*

HARRY: You'd do it for Chris, wouldn't you?

CAROLINE: Help! Help!

HARRY: Anything for Chris!

HARRY *grabs her just when MARLENE, dressed up as attractively as she can manage, enters the living room with a dinner tray.*

CAROLINE: Help! Help me!

MARLENE: Caroline?

HARRY *releases her and hurries away. MARLENE puts the tray on the table, then hurries into the bedroom.*

MARLENE: Is everything all right?

CAROLINE: He tried to rape me!

HARRY: That's bullshit!

CAROLINE: It's true. Look at me.

HARRY: Marlene, you know they sometimes make up stories to try and discredit me.

SANDRA *and PAUL run in.*

SANDRA: What's all the yelling about?

HARRY: Nothing, everything's fine.

CAROLINE: He tried to rape me!

HARRY: It's not true! Sometimes in these sessions people cry rape. It's an attempt to discredit me.

CAROLINE: Mum, you have to get me out of here. Please, Mum. Please!

CAROLINE *starts to cry. SANDRA hesitates then hurries to her and hugs her.*

SANDRA: Oh, you poor girl. My poor darling girl.

HARRY: For God's sake, it isn't true.

MARLENE: Harry, would never do that. He's a beautiful person. You tell the truth!

MARLENE *goes to hit her*. CAROLINE *screams*. HARRY *pulls her back*.

SANDRA: Get her away from us.

HARRY: Marlene, calm down.

MARLENE: She's ruined our dinner!

HARRY: What?

MARLENE: I cooked steamed fish and vegetables for you. It's fat-free.

HARRY: Marlene, be quiet.

MARLENE: But, Harry, I dressed up specially. Look.

HARRY: Shut-up! Just shut-up!

MARLENE: But, Harry -

HARRY: Marlene, once and for all, nothing is ever going to happen between us!
(*pause*) Now let's all calm down. We need to talk.

SANDRA: The talk is over. We're going home.

HARRY: She'll go straight back to Chris. You'll never see her again.

CAROLINE: Paul, please help me.

HARRY: Paul, keep your cool. Where's Sharon?

PAUL: Still eating her lunch.

HARRY: Go back and keep an eye on her.

CAROLINE: Paul, don't leave me with him.

HARRY: Just go. I'll handle this.

CAROLINE: Please help me.

HARRY: Paul, move.

PAUL: (*pause*) Harry, I'm sorry, but I think we'd better stop now.

HARRY: What?

PAUL: Come on, Caroline.

PAUL *goes to* CAROLINE.

HARRY: What are you doing?

HARRY *bars the way.*

HARRY: Have you forgotten what I did for your sister?

PAUL: Harry, please.

HARRY: You fucking idiot! You're thinking with your cock.

PAUL: Harry -

HARRY: She'll go to the Police and we'll both go to gaol.

CAROLINE: I won't, Paul. I won't.

HARRY: Come on, Paul, are you going to believe that?

PAUL: Harry, please.

HARRY suddenly rushes at PAUL and attacks him, swinging wildly, but missing. The women scream. PAUL does not fight back. He tries to restrain him.

PAUL: Harry, calm down. Please clam down.

He eventually secures him in a Full Nelson. HARRY thrashes around.

HARRY: He'll use her! Can't you see that? Chris...he'll...he'll...

Suddenly HARRY goes limp in PAUL's arms and slumps to the floor.

PAUL: Harry? Harry?

MARLENE: Harry, what's wrong?

SANDRA *checks his breath and pulse.*

SANDRA: He's not breathing.

PAUL: Shit.

SANDRA: And there's no pulse.

MARLENE: What?

SANDRA: We have to do CPR.

SANDRA *clears HARRY's mouth.*

SANDRA: Paul, push down thirty ten times in a row then I'll do mouth-to-mouth.

PAUL *starts heart massage.*

MARLENE: Oh my God! Oh my God!

SANDRA: Marlene, calm down.

SANDRA *takes the phone out of Harry's pocket and hands it to CAROLINE.*

SANDRA: Call an ambulance.

CAROLINE *stands frozen for a moment.*

SANDRA: Caroline, dial triple 0!

CAROLINE: What's the address?

SANDRA: Shit, what is it again?

PAUL: 1600 Smiths Road, Tharwa.

CAROLINE *dials.*

MARLENE: Is he breathing?

SANDRA: Not yet.

MARLENE: Come on, Harry. Everything will be all right. I'll look after you. I'll make you salads. I'll lose weight. I promise.

CAROLINE: Chris, it's Caroline! I'm being held prisoner.

SANDRA: Caroline!

CAROLINE: I'm at 1600 Smiths Road, Tharwa.

SANDRA: Marlene, get the phone.

CAROLINE: Come and get me!

MARLENE *grabs for the phone. They struggle & it falls to the ground and breaks.*

MARLENE: It's broken! What'll we do? What'll we do?

PAUL: Use the phone in the kitchen. Hurry.

MARLENE *hurries out.*

SANDRA: How could you do that, Caroline? There's a man's life at stake.

CAROLINE *is indifferent.* SHARON *enters eating a huge piece of mud cake.*

SHARON: What's going on?

SANDRA: Stay back.

CAROLINE *hobbles towards* SHARON.

CAROLINE: Sharon, we have to go.

SANDRA: Caroline, don't go. Please.

SHARON: What happened to him?

CAROLINE: He's had a heart attack.

SHARON: Oh my God!

CAROLINE: And the same thing will happen to you if you keep eating that.

SHARON: *(pause, stops eating)* I'll just have one more bite.

She resumes eating.

CAROLINE: Sharon, we have to go. Chris is coming to save us.

SANDRA: Caroline, don't go yet. Wait until we've had a talk.

CAROLINE: Sharon, come on.

SHARON: *(still eating)* You go ahead, I'll catch up.

CAROLINE: Sharon!

She grabs her arm and tries to drag her out.

SHARON: Leave me alone!

In the struggle she drops the cake.

SHARON: Look what you've done! Look what you've done!

SHARON *drops to her knees and snatches up bits of the cake and eats them ravenously.* CAROLINE *watches for a moment, not sure whether to leave her.* CHRIS *suddenly bursts out of the bathroom in a blaze of light.*

CHRIS: Go, Caroline. It's too late for her.

CAROLINE exits.

SANDRA: Caroline, wait!

SANDRA stops working on HARRY and starts to follow her.

PAUL: Sandra, please, I need your help.

*SANDRA stops, pauses, then returns and resumes CPR on HARRY.
SHARON continues to eat. CHRIS stands over Harry, watching.*

Slow blackout.

THE END