

CALL US CUTE

EPISODE ONE

Save-our-slugs

BY

Paul K. Lyons

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SCENE ONE

LATE EVENING. LOUNGE

F/X: KEY IN DOOR. DOOR OPENING/CLOSING

AVRIL: (CALLING OUT) How was the pub?

GIDEON: (COMING INTO ROOM) Great. How was yoga?

AVRIL: Good. How was the pub really?

GIDEON: Boring. How was the yoga really?

AVRIL: Back-aching.

GIDEON: T'rantula in bed?

AVRIL: Don't call her that, you know I don't like it.

GIDEON: Talia in bed?

AVRIL: Long time ago. There's a letter in the kitchen from her head. Says she'd prefer if Talia didn't wear black nail polish and paint her eyes with mascara. What kids do at secondary schools is their business, but, the head says, she's determined to maintain standards in her junior school.

GIDEON: I'll read it later. Anything in the paper?

F/X: NEWSPAPER RUSTLING - OTHERWISE QUIET FOR FIVE SECONDS

AVRIL: Gideon.

GIDEON: Avril.

F/X: NEWSPAPER RUSTLING

AVRIL: I was thinking . . .

GIDEON: (INTERRUPTING) No, no, no. It wasn't boring what am I saying. The pub wasn't boring. Middlemax was there. I hadn't seen him in years . . .

AVRIL: (INTERRUPTING FIRMLY) I was thinking . . .

GIDEON: (INTERRUPTING) Middlemax, you must remember him, a year above us at school; trying to be both Boy George and Richard Branson at the same time; expelled for selling false exam papers or was it for cater-wauling at the talent show; married that gorgeous girl Licksme, she who kissed me once in the men's bog . . . Divorced long ago. Shame.

AVRIL: Lakshmi, not Licksme. Her name was Lackshmi. And you never told me she kissed you. But then I never told you about Middlemax and me.

GIDEON: Middlemax and you?

AVRIL: Middlemax and me.

GIDEON: (LOUDER) Middlemax and you?

AVRIL: I was thinking about something Lorraine - she likes to be called Rain these days - said this evening. . .

GIDEON: Hold on. What do you mean Middlemax and you?

AVRIL: Can I tell you what I was thinking about?

GIDEON: NO, tell me about you and Middlemax first.

AVRIL: In a minute. I started and you interrupted me.

GIDEON: No, I didn't.

AVRIL: You did. Now shut up.

GIDEON: Temper.

AVRIL: I was thinking I might train to become a yoga guidance counsellor. Lorraine, Rain . . .

GIDEON: The contortionist.

AVRIL: . . . earns really good money. It would only take three months . . . but it wouldn't be cheap. I might have to use a bit of your redundancy money to pay for extra lessons and training. Rain. . .

GIDEON: The manipulating contortionist.

AVRIL: . . . says I'd be a really good teacher. You know, next month, I'll have been working call centres for seven years and seven months. I've got to do something else, move on.

GIDEON: Which is why I've been trying to tell you about Middlemax. Everything's going to change. You can give in your notice tomorrow.

AVRIL: I could. I could spend three weeks in the Seychelles with Sean Connery.

GIDEON: You and I are setting up in business together.

AVRIL: What business? We don't know how to do anything. We've stumbled through to our mid-30s with nothing but a fat mortgage, a mountain of credit card debts, and one spiky daughter.

GIDEON: Yes we do? I know how to do a bit of networking, and you've got five star telephone skills.

AVRIL: Why am I getting all excited.

GIDEON: Middlemax is an agent. For freelance call centre and market research operators. When companies need operators for a short time, to cover sickness or a peak in demand, or a special circumstance, they come to him. He provides the person-power. He manages individuals, and a few small companies that specialise in short-term contract work. The contract fees are excellent. The operators earn a good living. He takes a percentage cut.

AVRIL: I can imagine.

GIDEON: He says he can get us enough work to keep us fully employed. We can work as much or little as we want. All we'll need is a couple of good computers, four telephone lines say, and some call handling equipment.

AVRIL: And what about my yoga idea?

GIDEON: You can do it at weekends, can't you? Or in the evenings. Although, actually, Middlemax says we could double our money for night and weekend work.

AVRIL: This is typical of you. Rain . . .

GIDEON: The screwed-up manipulating contortionist.

AVRIL: . . . says I should be more assertive with you. It's true. Correct me if I'm wrong, but in the months and years gone by I've only had to mention a new idea once and you've cut it to pieces, you've shredded it.

GIDEON: Here we go.

AVRIL: You . . . you . . . you've strangled my ideas.

GIDEON: Why am I reminded of window-box garden design, aromatherapy for poodles, bedtime story reading services . . .

AVRIL: They were good ideas. You strangled them to death . . . like strangling new born puppies before they've opened their eyes. You, you, you . . . murderer.

GIDEON: Calm down. So now you want to become a yoga teacher. Aren't you a bit . . . er .

AVRIL: Don't say it. Don't you dare say it? Fat. Old. Stiff. I know what you were going to say. Dumpy. Well don't. I'm losing weight. I've lost weight. Rain . . .

GIDEON: Super-elastic woman herself.

AVRIL: . . . says I look 'glorious' for my age.

GIDEON: (SERIOUSLY) You do.

AVRIL: I do? Seriously.

GIDEON: (SERIOUSLY) Yes. Of course you do my love.

F/X: NEWSPAPER RUSTLING

AVRIL: Our own company, me and you.

GIDEON: You and me.

AVRIL: We could clear out the dining room.

GIDEON: I haven't been in there for years.

AVRIL: Buy a couple of second-hand desks and swivel chairs

GIDEON: Middlemax could help us with the equipment.

AVRIL: Or someone at work might know where to buy stuff cheap.

GIDEON: It'll work, you'll see.

AVRIL: What shall we call it?

GIDEON: What?

AVRIL: What shall we call the company? How about 'The Gideon and Avril Finch Call Centre'.

GIDEON: That doesn't trip off the tongue, my love. We could shorten it to the G A F Call Centre.

AVRIL: (NOT LISTENING) Or Finch's Call Centre. Or what about 'The Answerers'. That would be classy and cool.

GIDEON: Cool? What cool like a menthol tongue twister. What's a menthol tongue twister?

(PAUSE. SUDDENLY LAUGHS) Gaff Call Centre, that would be amusing.

AVRIL: That's not funny, not funny at all.

F/X: NEWSPAPER RUSTLING

AVRIL: You could ask Middlemax - see what names his other clients use.

GIDEON: I didn't tell you about him did I. He's remarried, a tall young woman, called Lush, looks like a man, works in advertising. . . Heh, which reminds me, you never told me about Middlemax and you?

AVRIL: Oh shut up. Let's sort out this name.

GRAM: MUSIC (WITH A PHONE RINGING OR DIALTONE THEME) FOR MARKING SCENE BREAKS. TIME PASSING.

SCENE TWO

SOME WEEKS LATER. BEDROOM. GIDEON AND AVRIL IN BED

GIDEON: Big day tomorrow. Call Us Telephone Enterprises finally goes live. It's going to be great you'll see. You ready to turn out the light, Avril my love.

AVRIL: Not yet, I'm still reading these briefing notes. It's not a very well known charity is it - Save-our-slugs?

GIDEON: Don't worry about those notes. You won't need all that information. It'll be a cinch. Middlemax insisted on giving us a simple contract to start. Answer the phone, take the name, address, number and credit card details, and then say thanks, SUCKER . . . ha ha . . .

AVRIL: (GIGGLES) That's not funny. Stop tickling. This had better work. I've given up our only income, and I've said goodbye to my future as a yoga guru. Rain (WAITS) (PAUSE) . . .

GIDEON: No, I'm saying nothing against the woman, not since she taught you that trick with the thighs . . .

AVRIL: . . . thinks I'm nuts.

GIDEON: Then I must be a squirrel.

AVRIL: (GIGGLES) Stop it.

F/X: FAINT DISTANT GROANING

AVRIL: Sshhh. What's that noise.

GIDEON: I can't hear it.

AVRIL: It's Talia, she's crying out again. Go and see what's the matter.

GIDEON: You go.

AVRIL: No. I'm going into the garden.

GIDEON: What, at this time of night?

AVRIL: To look for slugs. The briefing notes say there are several types. I want to see for myself. I might also sweep up those slug pellets I put down last week. Do you know how many slugs are routinely slaughtered every day by pellets?

GIDEON: I'd rather go and see to Talia than find out.

AVRIL: And, according to this literature, it's a fate worse than . . .

GIDEON: Being pecked to pieces by birds, being squashed by a wellington boot, being drowned in beer. . . some gardeners do that.

AVRIL: This wholesale slaughter of slugs. It's got to be stopped. I can see that now. People need to start respecting slugs. They need to understand the good they do in the garden. I can't let those pellets stay out there another night. Go. See to Talia.

GIDEON: What. Before she starts sleep-biting her dolls again.

F/X: GIDEON, AVRIL GETTING OUT OF BED

AVRIL: I'll be back in a minute.

GIDEON: Drowning in beer. Actually, that doesn't sound too bad.

GRAM: MUSIC

SCENE THREE

THE NEXT MORNING. DINING ROOM/OFFICE. THERE ARE SEVERAL PHONE LINES, BUT ONLY THE MAIN ONE HAS A RING TONE. THE OTHER PHONE LINES, FOR THE CALL CENTRE BUSINESS, HAVE NO RING (USE FLASHING LIGHTS). HOWEVER, A CLICK (OR OTHER SUITABLE SOUND) INDICATES WHENEVER ONE OF THESE LINES IS TURNED ON OR OFF/MUTE.

AVRIL HAS TWO DISTINCT VOICES, A NORMAL ONE, AND A FORCED PUT-ON RECEPTIONIST'S VOICE FOR THE PHONE, INDICATED BY AVRIL-T.

GIDEON: Yes, Middlemax, I understand that you can't pay us much more than costs for this first job, but please don't mention it to Avril, I haven't told her yet - - - yes, we've received all the instructions - - - yes - - - we'll answer the phone with 'Save-our-slugs' - - - yes we'll say 'Are you sure that's all you can afford' although I'm not sure that's ithical - - - what? - - - ethical with an I - - - I don't know, how should I know what it means - - - yes, we're ready to go - - - yes, any minute now - - - yes, we'll call you if there are any problems - - - yes - - - don't worry - - - yes - - - (OUTRAGED) NO! I won't come with you to the Transvestites' Institute floodlit bowls tournament - - - where's Lush? - - - (CALMER) I see. But it was sweet of you to ask.

F/X: AVRIL ENTERS, DOOR OPENING/CLOSING (OR OTHER INDICATION)

GIDEON: Here's Avril. Yes . . . must go. Things to do. Calls to answer . . . ha ha . . . Good. And bye.

Oh, there you are. I didn't realise Middlemax had become such an old woman. It must be the cross-dressing.

AVRIL: Talia's left for school now. She couldn't remember waking in the night. Why was she moaning?

GIDEON: What's on the windowsill?

AVRIL: A vase with flowers. Chrysanthemums.

GIDEON: I can see that. What else?

AVRIL: A telephone directory. Yellow.

GIDEON: I can see that. What else?

AVRIL: Another telephone directory. Blue. But I can see where you're going. You've noticed the slug bowl. It's just so I can identify with them when I'm the phone. They're happy. I'm happy. We're all happy. Now. We've got a few minutes before the call lines get routed through to us and go live. Is there anything else I should know?

GIDEON: Yes.

AVRIL: Yes, what?

F/X: MAIN PHONE RINGS

AVRIL-T: (SAID QUICKLY) Call Us Telephone Enterprises, or call us Cute for short.

AVRIL: Oh hi Lorraine, er Rain - - - no I can't, not this week. We're on our first job - - - don't laugh - - - Save-our-slugs - - - I know - - - actually they're rather lovely creatures . . . a charity set up by Dame Tulip Worthing - - - I know - - - I bet Gideon had one of her 'Beauty and the muck' calendars in the Nineties too . . . she's advertising all this week on Hot House Radio . . . OK thanks . . . ciao.

GIDEON: Ciao! Chow! Chowee!

F/X: MAIN PHONE RINGS

AVRIL: Shut up.

AVRIL-T: Call Us Telephone Enterprises, or call us Cute for short.

AVRIL: (SLIGHT DISTASTE) Oh, Middlemax, it's you, here's Gideon.

GIDEON: What can I do you for now? - - - I don't know why Avril answers the phone like that - - - ask her - - - yes, you're our only business partner - - - yes, of course, she's going to answer the call lines with 'Save-our-slugs' - - - yes - - - yes - - - (TIREDLY) yes - - - (SUDDENLY) Hold on a tick.

(TO AVRIL) You asked about T'rantula.

AVRIL: Don't call her that.

GIDEON: In the night. She had a terrible terrible nightmare. She was growing up, getting older. That was nightmare enough. Then she discovered she had telephones on the side of her head instead of ears.

AVRIL: Poor girl. At least she's doesn't have to negotiate land-mines every night. That's what it's like for slugs.

GIDEON: (INTO PHONE) I'm back. Yes - - - Yes - - - Yes - - - Yes - - - Good. And bye.

AVRIL: What did he want?

GIDEON: No idea.

AVRIL: We all set?

GIDEON: Yes, and yes.

AVRIL: Yes, what?

GIDEON: Yes I did have something else to say?

AVRIL: Well spit it out then.

GIDEON: Oops. There go the lights. They've linked us up right on time. Two lines ringing already.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Save-our-slugs. How can I help? . . .

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs donation line . . .

GRAM: MUSIC

SCENE FOUR

TWO HOURS LATER. OFFICE

AVRIL-T: Save-our-slugs. How can I help? - - - excuse me - - - do you mind -
- - how dare you - - - you may think they're slimy loathsome things
but there's no need to be rude - - - I'm sorry about your lettuces - -
- some people think they're very beautiful creatures, full of grace and
humility - - - who? - - - well Dame Tulip Worthing for one - - - and
me for another. So, now, could I take your contribution to Save-our-
slugs . . .

AVRIL: She hung up. Gideon. (SHARPLY) Gideon, they're's three lights
flashing. Stop picking your nose. What are you doing?

GIDEON: Sorry.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs. Hold on.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs. Hold on.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs. Hold on. (TO AVRIL) There, feeling better.

AVRIL: What are you doing? Another damn competition?

GIDEON: There's only one puzzle question: how do you spell the word
holiday? H-O-L-L-Y-D-A-Y. Like Holly Wood. It was easy. No,
honestly. I used the spellcheck. . ha ha . . But it's taken me half an
hour so far to fill out the entry form. What brand of butter do we
use. Is it Kellogs?

AVRIL: Make it up. Quickly. And get back on the phones.

GIDEON: First prize is a week for two at Sunparks Villa.

AVRIL: Sunparks Villa Seychelles?

GIDEON: Sunparks Villa Glasgow.

AVRIL: Sounds a treat. Get back on the phones.

GIDEON: T'rantula would have to stay at your mothers.

AVRIL: Get back on the phones.

F/X: MAIN PHONE RINGS

AVRIL-T: Call Us Telephone Enterprises, or call us Cute for short.

AVRIL: Oh it's you Talia - - - thank you.

(TO GIDEON) Talia says 'How's it going'.

Why aren't you at school - - - oh really - - - thanks for phoning - - - see you later.

(TO GIDEON) She must have known we were talking about her.

GIDEON: Wouldn't surprise me.

How many credit cards do we have 10, 100 or 1000? Oh, don't bother, there's a box for 'Lost Count'.

Why isn't T'rantula at school?

AVRIL: She is.

GIDEON: I thought the school didn't allow phones.

AVRIL: It doesn't. But she's in her communications course. She's studying mobile phones and texting in the international world. Education's come a very long way since our day, Gideon, it's not just the three R's anymore.

GIDEON: More like the three Ms: make-up, make-out, make-off.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Save-our-slugs, how can I help? - - - No, I'm sorry we don't have any of those calendars available on this number - - - just a moment.

F/X: CLICK

F/X: KEYBOARD CLICKING

AVRIL: I can't find the information on screen. Check out the briefing manual for me - I need a number for the calendars.

GIDEON: I'm busy.

AVRIL: Well pass it over here then.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Sorry to keep you waiting.

F/X: CLICK

F/X: BOOK THROWN, LANDING

AVRIL: Ow - where did you learn to aim like that.

GIDEON: Darts. You're lucky I didn't hit double top! . . ha ha . .

F/X: PAGES TURNING

AVRIL: Where is it?

GIDEON: Try the index?

F/X: PAGES TURNING

AVRIL: Where's the index?

GIDEON: Try the back, my love, where it usually is.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Sorry to keep you waiting.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: You'd think so wouldn't you.

F/X: INCREASINGLY FRANTIC PAGES TURNING

AVRIL: You'd also hope that since we're both in our 30s, with university degrees (a good one in my case, a bad one in your case), and a few years of work experience - questionable work experience - behind us, one of us would have the confidence to know the other knows where the effing index SHOULD be!

GIDEON: Only trying to help, MY LOVE, what about the contents - try the front.

AVRIL: Here's the information.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Have you got a pen? . . . Hello. Have you got a pen.

AVRIL: Damn woman's gone.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: That's it, I'm taking a break. You do some work for a change.

F/X: AVRIL LEAVES. DOOR OPENING/CLOSING

GIDEON: (TO HIMSELF) There nearly all done. Another day, another competition. Another day, another . . . there must be a word for the absence of a prize. Not-Prize? Prizeliness? Prizeless? Another day, another priceless day. Never mind.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs. How can I help - - - (LOUDER) Yes of course - - - they need all the help they can get - - - what's that? you want to help all the lost souls. Yes - - - yes - - - fantastic - - - that's very, VERY generous of you . . . are you sure that's all you can give? - - - greedy? - - - sorry, I didn't mean to offend you - - - good and bye to you too old bat.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: (TO HIMSELF) You win some you lose some.

Now, let me think. Final question. What's the best thing about holidays? Holidays are . . . holidays are . . . holidays are great. Why? Because they're holidays. May need to work through this a bit more.

GRAMS: MUSIC

SCENE FOUR

AFTERNOON, SAME DAY. OFFICE

F/X: MAIN PHONE RINGS

GIDEON: Hello - - - yes, Middlemax - - - it's going good - - - about 50 calls this morning. A bit slower this afternoon - - - hang on a tick.

AVRIL: Coochy coochy coo.

GIDEON: Avril, what's the best thing about holidays?

AVRIL: Hard to tell. I think I'd need to go on one to find out. Coochy coochy coochy coo.

GIDEON: Middlemax. You go away a lot don't you. What's the best thing about holidays? - - - Oh, that's good. That's very good - - - better go - - - things to do. Calls to answer . . . ha ha . . . Good. And bye.

(TO AVRIL) Sunparks Villa here we come.

AVRIL: What did he say?

GIDEON: What? I'm busy.

AVRIL: Coochy coochy coo. Oh dear sluggy wuggies, the phone's ringing. Talk to you later.

GIDEON: Sluggy wuggies!

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Save-our-slugs. How can I help? - - - yes, this is Avril Finch. Who is this calling? - - - I know Finches are birds - - - yes I know birds eat slugs - - - so what? - - - no, I don't think any of the callers know my surname, why should they - - - who is this calling? - - - you think I should change my name. (FALSE VOICE DROPS)

AVRIL: - - - who is this calling? - - - well, I think you should change your telephone manner, and while you're about it, get a brain transplant - with a slug would be a good - - - although I think that might be a bit offensive to slugs to be honest - - - rude? you call that rude - - - NO, I don't know WHO you are, how could I?

AVRIL-T: Oh, Dame Tulip. Just a moment.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: (TO GIDEON. FLUSTERED) It's Dame Tulip.

GIDEON: The old slug herself.

AVRIL: Gideon! Don't, we can't afford to mess up. Not in our first week, with our first client. Besides we need the money. We'll never get to Tesco's let alone Sunparks Villa if we pin all our hopes on your competitions.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Sorry about that, Dame Tulip, I had someone holding on the other line - - - yes, it was a big donation - - - how much? er, let me see - - - er £10. Is that enough? - - - to keep you happy - - - I'm sorry for what I said before. I thought you were a prankster - - - we have had a few - - - no, it's not a problem - - - we're professionals here - - - we know how to handle every type of caller - - - just a moment.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: Give me a break. What does SHE want? The lights are flashing. Gideon! Answer the phones. For all we know, she might be ringing on several lines at the same time, just to check.

GIDEON: What's the best thing about holidays? The best thing about holidays is 'you can get away from the slugs at home'. Middlemax may have turned into a right old fusspot, but he's as sharp as . . . as . . . T'rantula's fangs . . . do tarantulas have fangs? . . .

AVRIL: What are you talking about. Don't answer that.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: (SOCIAL LAUGH) Another donation, £20 this time - - - oh, yes, he's answering the phones too, we both are, full time, all day, even through our lunch hour - - - it's lovely to talk to you, but is there some way I can help, only there are more lines ringing right now - - - (SURPRISED) you want to make a donation to your own charity? - - - well of course - - - (EVEN MORE SURPRISED) one thousand pounds - - - uh huh - - - uh huh - - - uh huh - - - just a moment.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: What do you want? Why are you waving your arms around like that?

GIDEON: Ask the old slug if she really did garden in the nude? And if so, did she get pricked in all the wrong - or right - places?

AVRIL: She's donating a thousand pounds to her own charity? Isn't that a bit weird?

GIDEON: Not as weird as prancing around with all your blossoms hanging out.

AVRIL: All the lights are blinking, Gideon, get on the phone.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs donation line. . .

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Sorry to keep you waiting, now where were we . . .

FADE OUT

SCENE FIVE

A FEW MINUTES LATER. OFFICE

AVRIL-T: Yes, Dame Tulip I've got all the details, five times in fact - - - yes, I'm very clear that the amount is one thousands pounds - - - and yes, I know there are 30 species of slugs in this country. More than any other country in the world. We're very very VERY lucky. In fact, I've got two pets on my windowsill - a grey field slug - - - oh yes, I know, they're the ones that need to learn a bit of discipline - - - and a large black. It's got a beautiful orange line down it's side - - - I know - - - I think so to - - - it's been lovely chatting, but aren't you worried that by keeping me occupied on this line, Save-our-slugs is missing out on other donations? - - - what's that? You're very grateful for our help. Thank you - - - Goodbye. Ciao.

AVRIL: She's sweet. Really loves the slugs. She likes the keeled ones best. I like Black Sluggy Wug here. He's looking a bit sleepy though. Why do you think Dame Tulip . . .

GIDEON: The old wrinkled slug herself

AVRIL: . . . said she's very grateful for our help?

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-sluggy wuggies donation line.

AVRIL: Gideon! Be more respectful. What did she mean when she said she was very grateful?

GIDEON: (IGNORING AVRIL) Of course.

AVRIL: I think we should make a donation ourselves.

GIDEON: (IGNORING AVRIL) Personally, I find slug pellets most effective - - - No they don't feel a thing - - - yes, I'm sure - - - thank you for calling.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: (ANGRILY) Gideon! This is a donation line not an advice bureau. What if that was one Dame Tulip's friends testing us out.

GIDEON: It wasn't. It was just another ordinary bloke, like me, who hates slugs. Have you noticed, we're getting more hate calls than donations.

AVRIL: I really think we should make a donation ourselves. How much of your redundancy money is left?

GIDEON: None, we spent the last of it on the computers and the desks.

AVRIL: How much is in the Going Out Fund?

GIDEON: Minus five hundred and eighty five pounds.

AVRIL: And in Talia's clothe's fund?

GIDEON: Three webs and a fly.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-Slugs donation line - - - yes, Avril Finch does work here, but I can take your donation. In fact I personally would be really grateful for any donation, as it might save my wife feeling she needs to give our every last penny to the slugs - - - oh I see, you don't want to give any money - - - you want to speak to Avril - - - who can I say is calling? - - -

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Avril. It's the local paper. Some journalist wants to speak to you personally.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Avril Finch speaking - - - yes, we're doing quite well so far. It's only our first day - - - I can't tell you that - - - I've no authority to divulge such information, and any way I don't even know - - - what? the biggest donation so far - - - no - - - I'm really sorry - - - please either make a donation or free-up the line - - -

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: He hung up.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Save-our-slugs

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs

AVRIL-T: Yes - - - yes, I know, they're lovely creatures - - -

GIDEON: Filthy? Slimy? I couldn't agree more - - - it's just a job mate - - -

AVRIL-T: They help recycle nutrients into the earth - - -

GIDEON: A farmer eh, must be tough - - -

AVRIL-T: They help decompose your dog poo - - -

GIDEON: Over 20,000 teeth, really. That's a . . . er . . . monstrous in a non-monster kind of way.

AVRIL-T: Did you really - - - I haven't tried that myself, but I will - - -

GIDEON: Like an army - - - devastating your crops - - - you have my sympathy.

AVRIL-T: Yes I know. They're good food (poor things) for all those things in the garden we love, birds, and frogs and hedgehogs - - -

GIDEON: So would you like to make a donation then? - - -

AVRIL-T: So, how much do you want to give? - - -

GIDEON: I understand mate. Good and luck.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: You were just calling for a chat - - - well call again, any time.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: (MIMICKING) Well call again, any time, for a chat.

F/X: (BOOK THROWN, LANDING)

GIDEON: Ouch!

AVRIL: Bullseye.

GIDEON: Eeeeeaaaggh. More like ballseye!

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL-T: Save-our slugs! - - - oh Dame Tulip, it's you again - - - yes, I'm sorry about that, I just didn't realise - - - yes, of course, if the journalist rings again - - - oh, he WILL ring again, I see - - - yes, I'll tell him about your donation - - - yes, one thousand pounds - - - thank you - - - YES, Dame Tulip, of course I will - - - (EVEN MORE INSISTENTLY) YES, Dame Tulip - - - good grief, I mean goodbye.

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: That woman is the effing end. She's enough to turn anyone off slugs for ever.

GIDEON: But you've only just . . .

AVRIL: (INTERRUPTING) Don't. Don't say it. I know what you're going to say, I've only just become a slug myself. I don't care what you think . . .

GIDEON: (INTERRUPTING) Calm down. I was only going to say that it was just a few hours ago that you TURNED ON to slugs, a few hours since you transformed yourself into a slug iccolyte.

AVRIL: A what?

GIDEON: An iccolyte.

AVRIL: A what?

GIDEON: An icky, as in slimy, acolyte as in, as in - what does acolyte mean?

AVRIL: You need your head examined - to see if there's any brain cells there at all. Answer the phone.

F/X: CLICK

GIDEON: Save-our-slugs . . .

F/X: CLICK

AVRIL: Save-our-slugs . . .

GRAM: MUSIC

SCENE SIX

THURSDAY NIGHT. BEDROOM. GIDEON AND AVRIL IN BED

GIDEON: You ready to turn out the light, my love. What a relief, tomorrow's our last day of parroting Save-our-slugs. Though I have to admit, I'm surprised at how many gullible people are willing to give money to such a stupid cause. I mean really, honestly, love . . .

AVRIL: I'm ignoring you. Don't turn out the light yet, I'm still looking through these credit card statements.

GIDEON: . . . don't you believe there are one or two more important charities out there. The Lottery Losers Association. Bring Back Pub Skittle. Or not forgetting the Transvestites' Institute. Middlemax was telling me they organise outings, to Rio de Janeiro and places like that.

F/X: DISTANT GROANING

GIDEON: It's Talia getting all night-vampish again.

AVRIL: You'd better go and see to her.

GIDEON: Let her chew the dolls to pieces.

AVRIL: Go.

F/X: GIDEON GETS OUT OF BED. LEAVES ROOM

AVRIL: (TO HERSELF) Now if we pay half of these five . . .

F/X: RUSTLING OF PAPERS (CONTINUOUS)

AVRIL: . . . no, these eight accounts, and a quarter of these other five, we should be able to save . . . hmmm . . . but the interest rates on these four are two times higher than on these three, so we should pay off three-quarters of these nine, and a quarter of these ones . . . oh no, but then we'll incur the extra penalty charge on this one, and this one, and this one, and this one. . .

GIDEON: (SHOUTING - FROM AFAR) Look at me. Look. Look at me.

F/X: HANDS CLAPPING IN THE DISTANCE

GIDEON: (SHOUTING - FROM AFAR) Look. Look at me. I've got two eyes, a nose, two ears, a mouth, hair - some any way, I'm nearly six foot tall. (SHOUTING QUIETENS) I'm wearing pajamas. Do slugs wear pajamas? Do slugs talk? Do slugs have a nose that they pick? . . . (FADES OUT)

AVRIL: . . . and this one, and this one, and this one. I see how to do it now. It'll definitely be better to pay these three off completely, and . . . yes . . . that it's, excellent.

F/X: GIDEON RE-ENTERS ROOM AND GETS IN BED

GIDEON: It was nothing. Another nightmare. She says we - you and me - were two giant slugs. Crawling around her room. When she woke up - in her nightmare - and saw us as slugs, she asked what we were doing in her room . . .

AVRIL: (INTERRUPTING) Wait a minute, have I got this right? She thought she woke up and saw us slugs and she talked to us, as if it were normal to find us as slugs?

GIDEON: Seems so . . . and then, she said, you answered, 'oh, we're just looking after you DARLING', and I answered 'we're just looking after you PEST'.

AVRIL: Poor girl. I suppose I have been going on a bit about the dear sluggy wuggies.

GIDEON: And they are ALL over the house.

AVRIL: Still, as you say, it'll be finished tomorrow.

GIDEON: Can I turn out the light now my sluggy wuggy?

AVRIL: (GIGGLES) Stop tickling. No, look, I want to show you this. When we get paid - next week yes? - I've worked out a way we can clear some of the credit card debits, juggle the rest and still have a bit for Save-our-slugs - just £100 that's all.

GIDEON: (FIRMLY) No.

AVRIL: I'm very determined about this Gideon.

GIDEON: Yes, I noticed - you've mentioned it ten times a day all week. But we can't afford it. No.

AVRIL: Yes, Gideon, we can. Haven't you been listening.

GIDEON: (GETTING ANGRY) NO, we can't.

AVRIL: YES, we can.

GIDEON: (VERY ANGRY) We can't. (CALMS DOWN. RELUCTANTLY) There's something I haven't told you. We're not getting paid. Not much. Just our costs and a bit more. It's a good will thing. We had to show willing. Just because we're old school chums, that's no reason for Middlemax to trust us. He's a businessman. That's it. There won't be any money to pay off the credit cards, not from this week. That's what I've been trying to tell you. So you see, we've been giving quite a lot to the slugs already. We've been busting our gut for them actually. You should be pleased. I mean, I've hated every minute. I'd be happy if I never had to say 'Save-our-slugs' ever ever again. If I never had to hear the word 'slug' again. If I never had to meet a slug again. So it's been hard for me. Harder for me than for you. You, you believe in the slugs, so it's OK for you. You've been working for a double purpose. To save slugs, and to get our business off the ground . . .

AVRIL: (INTERRUPTING CALMLY) Sorry, can I stop you. You're saying we're not getting paid for all our work this week.

GIDEON: No. Not much.

AVRIL: Not much?

GIDEON: No, not much. Avril, I hate it when you're this calm. Don't do this to me. Get angry, please.

AVRIL: Why Save-our-slugs?

GIDEON: Dame Tulip's a friend of Middlemax's wife, Lush.

AVRIL: I see.

F/X: AVRIL GETTING OUT OF BED. STORMS OUT OF ROOM. SLAMS DOOR.

GIDEON: (SHOUTING) Come back.

F/X: AVRIL STORMS BACK IN

AVRIL: Call us cute. Call me an idiot. I'll finish the contract tomorrow, but then I'm off to sign up with Rain, I don't care what it costs.

F/X: AVRIL STORMS OUT, SLAMMING DOOR

GIDEON: (SHOUTING) Come back, where are you going with the duvet?

F/X: AVRIL STORMS BACK IN

AVRIL: To sleep outside, with the slugs. If I spend another second with the dirty, grimy, slimy, spineless creep-crawly in my bed, I'll vomit.

F/X: AVRIL STORMS OUT, SLAMMING DOOR

GRAMS: MUSIC

SCENE SEVEN

FRIDAY MORNING. OFFICE

GIDEON: Yes - - - and 20 of the slime-balls here in the office - - - some of them escape at night and leave slug trails across my desk - - - yes, I finally told her last night. She moved out - - - yes - - - at one in the morning - - - into the garden - - - to sleep with the slugs - - - T'rantula found her this morning and thought she was still nightmaring - - - a bit irritable - - - (ENUNCIATED) ir-rit-orr-ible - - - never mind - - - are you sure? - - - I do appreciate that - - - it will be a bonafide job? - - - two weeks - - - top rate of pay - - - minus your commission, of course - - - you're a mate - - -

F/X: AVRIL ENTERING

AVRIL: (CROSSLY) Who's on the phone? Is it our friendly, honest, lovable agent?

GIDEON: Hold on a tick.

AVRIL: Give me the phone.

GIDEON: Avril wants a word with you.

(TO AVRIL) Calm down. We have a business relationship with Middlemax. He's our business lifeline. He's . . .

AVRIL: Give me the phone.

GIDEON: Don't upset him.

AVRIL: Shut up and give me the phone.

(INTO PHONE, LOUDLY, ANGRILY) Middlemax, I want you to know I'll finish the contract today, but not for you, and certainly not for your society friends, but for the slugs. Just a moment . . .

F/X: STRUGGLE AND SMALL CRASH

AVRIL: Gideon, will you stop trying to grab the phone, what do you want?

GIDEON: (SOMEWHAT PATHETICALLY) It wasn't Middlemax's fault, it was mine.

AVRIL: I don't care who's to blame.

F/X: STRUGGLE AND SMALL CRASH

GIDEON: Eeeeeaaggh.

AVRIL: Sorry, where was I? What you did was despicable, I've never been so . . .

GIDEON: Eeeeeaaggh.

AVRIL: (TO GIDEON) Are you all right?
... outraged in my entire life.

GIDEON: (GROANING A BIT) I'll live, please, please don't upset Middlemax.

AVRIL: (INTO PHONE) - - - do you hear - - - what do you mean what am I talking about? - - - that time in the gym store-room - - - when I showed you my - - - you know what, don't be so coy. And you promised to give me £2, and then then you never paid up;
(BITTERLY) YOU NEVER PAID THE EFFING £2.

GIDEON: (TRYING TO INTERVENE - THROUGH TO THE END OF AVRIL'S CONVERSATION WITH MIDDLEMAX) What? What did you show him?

AVRIL: You should have been expelled and sent to borstal, and had your fingers cut off one by one - - - what do you mean you don't know what I'm talking about?

GIDEON: (LOUDER) What did you show him?

AVRIL: What? It wasn't you? - - - Are you sure? - - - Really. (AMUSED) You're joking. I would never have . . . (PAUSES TO KEEP GIDEON IN SUSPENSE, EVEN THOUGH SHE'S ACTUALLY TALKING TO MIDDLEMAX).

GIDEON: (PETULANTLY) What? What?

AVRIL: . . . shown that toad my homework. How can you be so sure it was him?

GIDEON: (TRYING TO RECOVER) Let me have the phone back. I need to talk to Middlemax.

AVRIL: Just a moment.
(TO GIDEON) Oh shut up and answer the slug line.
I'll have to take your word for it, my memory isn't that - - -
(SHOCKED) WHAT! NO! Now you're taking the piss. We didn't! - - - You and I? - - - We did?

GIDEON: What?

AVRIL: Tell me more . . . No!

GIDEON: No!

AVRIL: No, really. I don't remember any of that . . . wow . . .

GIDEON: Wow?

AVRIL: Did we do that . . .

GIDEON: What?

AVRIL: (WITH A PROGRESSIVELY STEAMY TONE) And that - - -

GIDEON: (WITH A PROGRESSIVELY FRANTIC TONE) What?

AVRIL: - - - and that - - -

GIDEON: What?

AVRIL: - - - and that - - -

GIDEON: Avril, what did you do with that man?

AVRIL: Phew, some fun we had - - -

GIDEON: (ALMOST SCREAMING) No, no, no.

AVRIL: I'll pass you back to Gideon. Just a moment.

GIDEON: Middlemax. What have you been doing with my wife? What was that all about? - - - nothing! It didn't sound like nothing - - - it sounded like you were having sex, now or sometime in the past or both at the same time - - - don't tell me not to be ridiculous - - - I'll be ridiculous if I want - - - what? NO! Avril and I don't swing. I suppose that's another night out at the Transvestite's Institute - - - IT IS. No - - - but thanks for thinking of us - - - good. And bye.

(PETULANTLY) What was that all about before?

AVRIL: (CALMLY) No idea.

F/X: MAIN PHONE RINGS

AVRIL-T: (CHIRPILY) Call Us Telephone Enterprises or call us Cute for short - - - just a moment.

AVRIL: For you.

GIDEON: Hello - - - yes, this is Gideon Finch - - - fantastic - - - I've really won - - - second prize - - - not the holiday at Sunparks Villas? So what is second prize - - - I see - - - (DISAPPOINTED) I see - - - hold on a tick.

(TO AVRIL) Remember that competition I entered?

AVRIL: Which one?

GIDEON: Monday.

AVRIL: Which Monday?

GIDEON: Last Monday.

AVRIL: No.

GIDEON: I've won.

AVRIL: (GRUDGINGLY) What?

GIDEON: Second prize.

AVRIL: Which is? A holiday in the Seychelles!

GIDEON: A £50 cheque. I've won £50.

AVRIL: Not a holiday in the Seychelles then.

GIDEON: Sorry, mate, what's that you say - - - or £100 in the name of a charity of my choice.

AVRIL: (ECHOING GIDEON ON THE PHONE) A charity of my choice.

GIDEON: Oh no.

AVRIL: Oh yes.

GIDEON: Hold on a tick.

But only if you remove all slugs from the house for now and ever more . . .

AVRIL: Their charms are wearing a bit thin - I think my face became a slug highway in the night.

GIDEON: . . . and no more talk of Rain and enlightenment at least not yet. Please, give Cute one more chance. Middlemax has promised - really truly - a high-paying contract for the next couple of weeks.

AVRIL: (QUIETLY) As it happens, I'm suddenly rather fond of Middlemax.

GIDEON: Hold on a tick longer.

What did you say?

AVRIL: Nothing.

GIDEON: (RELUCTANTLY) You'd better make the £100 cheque out to Save-our-slugs. Yes, that's right, Save-our-slugs - - - yes, well spotted, it does fit in with my winning slogan - - - no I loathe the slime-bags, but I love my wife.

GRAMS: MUSIC

END