

THE CARING SIDE by Carol Hill

Pronunciation - The a of Uranus is short as in 'apple'

SCENE 1

Small office with desk, computer, telephone + answering machine, 2 chairs, laden bookcase, filing cabinet, floor-standing cupboard, coffee machine, alarm keypad on wall, wall mounted clock showing 9.30.

Sounds: Key turns in lock; door opens; high street traffic and intruder alarm is heard.
Door closes; alarm volume increases.

Enter [left] smart, suited woman – aged early 50's.

BETTY: *(Tutting and muttering)* Ok! Ok! I'm comin'. Stop yer clacker! *(Approaches alarm keypad)* Oh what's the bloomin' code?
(Taps in 4 numbers – alarm continues & volume increases)

Come on, come on...think! What is it?
(Taps in 4 numbers – alarm continues & volume increases)

Why didn't 'e choose somethin' I can remember. *My* phone number's ok...*his* number I can remember..even *the office* phone! But - I ask you – his first car's registration number? I'll never manage that even if it's tattooed on my own pos-tier-iah [*posterior*].
(Taps in 4 numbers – alarm continues & volume increases)

Last try then I'm off 'ome.
(Taps in 4 numbers – alarm stops)

Eh... peace at last.

Exits. Light switches on offstage. Betty enters and removes jacket which she carefully hangs on back of a chair...she turns on answerphone and jacket slides to the floor. Makes a big fuss of picking it up and dusting it off whilst listening to messages.

MSG *(slowly - old & frail)* Er...hello....? It's Eva...um...Eva Spendmoor. I live at 36
ONE: Cemetary Gardens, Little Endswell and I don't know what to do. I think my carer's passed out...well, either that or she's dead. She was supposed to be making my tea and she was taking so long that I went to see what she was doing – and there she was...lying *prostate* on my kitchen floor. And now...*(begins to cry)*...I don't know what to do...should I have sandwiches or shall I open a tin of soup. Can you ring me back please.
(Telephone call disconnects. Electronic beep sounds.)

MSG *(well educated)* Good evening? This is Mrs Hill on 01635 229101. One of your carers
TWO : is supposed to be here at 8 o'clock. It's now precisely 8.30pm and nobody has arrived. Would somebody please contact her and let me know if she's coming - the name is Patience on *my* rota. Thank you very much.
(Telephone call disconnects. Electronic beep sounds.)

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MSG (young) Hi! Jenny here. I've locked myself out *again*. Duh! What am I like! (*Laughs*)

THREE: Don't worry, I'm okay..am at Nora's next door so can someone fetch my spare key please. It's now nine o'clock (*Betty checks clock*) oh er ... that's nine at night...

BETTY: Oh my lord!

MSG ...so if there's any chance you can get here before Nora goes to bed..about eleven.. - I'll be

THREE *re-ally* grateful. I've tried ringing the 'On Call' emergency phone but no-one's answering. (cont.) Speak to you soon.

(*Betty takes paper+pen out of desk and writes*)

Sound: Outer door from street bursting open.

Enter [left] large girl wearing weatherproof all-in-one suit and motor-bike helmet with visor down.

BETTY: Hey up ... it's Darth Vader!

JANE: (*Raises helmet visor*) Shut yer face! (*Removes helmet*) It's chucking it down out there an' I'm on mi scooter. The sooner I pass mi driving test, the better!

BETTY: How many times is it now?

JANE: (*Nonchalantly*) Four.

BETTY: How many?

JANE: Well ok seven then, but yer can't blame the 2 breakdowns *and* the suicide on me.

BETTY: Oh yeah? So why was it

MSG This is Mrs Hill on 01635 229101 again! Your carer is still not here and it's now 9.20pm.

TWO Will somebody PLEASE contact me straight away. I need to know what's happening.

VOICE: Thank you very much.

(*Telephone call disconnects. Electronic beep sounds.*)

BETTY: Look I'll have to ring this woman an' check Patience did actually turn up.

JANE: Well do it in a minute. Lets have a cuppa first.

(*Gets a cup of coffee from machine*)

What d' you want?

BETTY: Oh..just get me hot water. It's good for yer skin...besides, I'm dietin'.

Jane gets cup of hot water from machine and puts it on Betty's desk.

Betty gets pack of Choc. Digestives from a drawer in the desk.

JANE: (*Raising one eyebrow*) Oy! You're dietin'! Remember?

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BETTY: An' that's why I'm 'avin' water 'stead of mi usual choc'lat. Anyway I need to keep mi blood sugars up...yer know give mi some energy.

JANE: Don't Mars Bars do that.

BETTY: Yeah but I've already had two so I'm pacin' miself. I'll 'ave the next one for elevenses!

MSG This is Mrs Hill on 01635 229101 yet again! Your carer has still not arrived despite it TWO being 10.15. Where IS Patience? Please can you contact me immediately.

VOICE: *(Telephone call disconnects. Electronic beep sounds.)*

BETTY: Look I'll 'ave to ring this woman 'n' see if Patience showed. This is the third time she's done this...*this* week! And she don't drive. And she don't talk English well neither! Now then, what's 'er number?

(Betty sits at desk, switches on computer, logs on and types in instructions.)

Righto! Here she is.

(Picks up phone and enters number then speaks using her 'telephone voice')

.....Hello...hello...Oh hello Mrs Hill. It's Betty at Uranus Care. I'm just checking that Patience arrived last night.....Oh no....really....so she didn't show at all.... and you're all out of Patience (gives a hollow laugh)....yes....yes....very funny....no....no Mrs Hill, I gather you're not trying to be funny....It is not good enough, no! So did you manage to get into bed on your own?....No! So where *did* you sleep?....In your wheelchair with what round you?....*Which* curtains?....And was the conservatory door shut?....But wasn't it cold?....Yes, I imagine the curtains helped! *(Raises her eyebrows at Jane)*....Well I can only apologise and I'll certainly get hold of Patience to find out what is going on....You'll be fine tonight, yes....yes....yes, she's very nice. From the Phillipines - called Blessing....*(Gives hollow laugh)* Oh, very droll Mrs Hill....Yes, one night with Uranus Care and it's curtains for you....Yes, ha ha, I think that's very good, as well, considering you've been up all night....Ok then Mrs Hill, I better go now and check Patience is all right..... No, I don't suppose you are bothered....but I'm sending Jane to you now just to make sure you have everything you need....*(Jane grimaces, shakes head in refusal, and makes negative hand movements)*....well, ok then....yes, bye bye....yes, bye bye then....yes, yes bye....bye....bye bye Mrs Hill.

(Replaces receiver and sighs heavily)

JANE: What did you say that for?

(Puts on helmet)

BETTY: Because she's a client and you're a Carer and we, at Uranus Care, like to give service that's '*out of this world*'..

JANE: *(Leans on desk opposite Betty)* It's certainly that. Uranus Care my ars.....

BETTY: *(Firmly closing Jane's visor)*.... so you cover Mrs Hill...

Jane shakes head in resignation and [left] exits.

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BETTY: *(to herself)*...and Jim can take Jenny's spare key, then call at Eva's house an' make sure that her carer,....*(checks computer screen)*....Charlene, 's not dead! Glory...'av a quiet day 'e sez. 'S not even ten o'clock an' the hafluent's hitting the fan already!
(Telephone rings - Betty picks up the receiver)
Good Morning. Uranus Care Company. Can I help you?.....Oh hello Pete. I was wond'rin' how you were gettin' on. Is the van done?.....Well what time can Jim pick it up?.....*(getting annoyed)* It's only two words for Gawd's sake. 'aven't you anyone you can put on the job now?.....Why, what's the matter with him?.....Well *write it down* for him - anythin', I don't care but we need that van by ten thirty – ok?.....
.....No buts, Pete. We need it now. Jim'll be with you in five minutes. Make sure it's ready.....Yeah, yeah ok. That'll be great. Gotta go now – the other line's ringing.
Bye.....bye.
(to herself)...Mess with Elizabeth Khan at your peril! They didn't nickname me Sheer for nothing! *(does poor impersonation of roaring/clawing tiger)*
Right, next job...loo before that blessed phone goes again.

(Betty hurriedly [right] exits)

Sound: Outer door from street opens

Enter [left] middle-aged woman

TRISH: Hel-lo! Bet-ty! Where are you? *(Calls off-stage [right])* Betty?

BETTY: *(from off-stage)* That you, Trish? I'm upstairs – won't be a min. Get yoursel' a brew.

TRISH: Ta! You want one?

BETTY: No thanks. I'll be up 'n' down these stairs like Jane's drawers!

TRISH: I'll tell her you're maligning her character!

BETTY: You can do. She'll think I'm payin' her a compliment.

Sound: Toilet flush

Enter [right] Betty

BETTY: Morning! What time d'ya call this?

TRISH: *(Sighs heavily)* I call it "Time to go home already" – why, what d'you call it?

BETTY: Oh, ha ha. What's the matter now?

TRISH: I've just had fun scrubbing Theresa's *teeth* again for 30 minutes.

BETTY: Well at least she hasn't lost 'em this time. What's she done with 'em now?

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TRISH: The Doctor prescribed suppositories for her.

BETTY: And?

TRISH: She took them *orally* instead of anally!

BETTY: Oh Gawd! That would be a nice mess. Did you explain to 'er what to do with 'em?

TRISH: (*Sarcastically*) No, I suggested they'd go down well with a light Chianti!
'Course I did! I said "Theresa, you're supposed to put those in your back passage".
(*Grins broadly*)

BETTY: And?

TRISH: She said (*uses voice+face of a toothless old woman*) "What, next to my wheely-bin?"

Both women have a good laugh

Sound: Outer door from street opens and bangs shut

Enter [left] rough-looking woman who stomps over to floor-standing cupboard, yanks open door, rumages amongst voodoo dolls and selects one with a flourish – holding it by the waist

GLORIA: That's the 'biddy' I'm after!

BETTY: Mornin' Glo'. Bit early for 'the dolls' i'nt it?

TRISH: Oh no... not the voodoo dolls....(*Sings spooky music*)...Do-do-do-do do-do-do-do!

GLORIA: Eh?

BETTY: Shut up, Trish.
(*Speaking louder*) I SAID...ISN'T IT A BIT EARLY FOR 'THE DOLLS'?

GLORIA: Don't start Bet. I'm just about up to 'ere's (*indicates the level of her ears*) with that old trout!

BETTY: Who?

GLORIA: Mrs ruddy Farty-fart that's who!

BETTY: (*Patiently*) Mrs Farquhar?

GLORIA: Yep, that's the one!

BETTY: (*Soothingly*) But she is a client Glo'. Come on, give me the doll – let's you 'n' me go for a cuppa an' a chocy biccy. (*Puts arm round Gloria's shoulders but Gloria shrugs it off*)

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GLORIA: No way! Not this time. She's got away with 'er behaviour long enough. Question is, what shall I do with it? 'ead in the toilet job, tie it's knees together or hair spray it's arms up?

BETTY: (*Grabbing the doll by one leg*) Oh no you don't. Now's not the time.

GLORIA: Oh yes it is. (*Pulls the doll so the leg in Betty's hand lifts high out to the side*)

TRISH: Be careful, both of you. You'll pull it's leg off, besides *that's* Mr Treadwell!

GLORIA: Eh?

TRISH: I SAID IT'S LEG'LL COME OFF. BE CAREFUL!

As Gloria looks at Trish, Betty tugs the doll out of her hand

TRISH: Now you've done it!

GLORIA: Eh?

BETTY: Are yer ears defective or what? Now see what you've done. Gawd knows what's happened to him.

GLORIA: Eh?

TRISH: SHE SAID WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR EARS?

GLORIA: Oh..right. It's Mark's fault. We were doin' a bit of experimental sex an' 'is Mum come in, sudden like, 'n' made him jump 'n' ... well ... I 'aven't been able to 'ear prop'ly since!

TRISH: (*laughing*) Please don't tell me any more. I've heard enough.

GLORIA: Eh?

Sound: Outer door from street bangs opens then bangs shut

Enter [left] Jane at speed in a panic

BETTY: What are you doing back? Yer s'posed to be 'alf way to Mrs Hill's by now.

JANE: Some sod's nicked mi bike.

GLORIA: Eh?

JANE: Mi bike's bin nicked. It were outside the shop 'n' some sod's nicked it. I've looked around but all I can find is mi butties.

TRISH: (*Trying not to laugh*) Your 'butties'? Where were they?

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JANE: In a Asda bag wi' mi WD40 an' mi rubber gloves.

GLORIA: Eh? What 40?

JANE: (*Shouting*) WD40!

GLORIA: Eh?

BETTY Shut up, Glo'!

and

TRISH: Shut up, Gloria!

(*in unison*)

GLORIA: (*Looking offended*) Ok! Ok! I were only askin'. No need to shout!

BETTY: Look, none of this is gettin' us anywhere. Jane, you better ring the police 'n give them the details. 's no point them comin' 'ere cos you'll 'av to get a lift off of Jim...when 'e eventually gets the van!

JANE: I already did on mi mobile. They've got all mi details an' 'r' goin' to call at Hill's or I've to go to 't' station next week!

BETTY: Ok good. Glo' you'll 'av to

Sound: Telephone rings

BETTY: Good Morning. Uranus Ca.....(*listens intently, facial expression changes to horror*)...well that was damned stupid!.....was anybody hurt?.....you sure?..... and where are you now?.....'n' is the shop pressin' charges?.....you're lucky!.....how's Mr Treadwell?.....Well that was bloomin' lucky.....*I meant* for 'im! So where did you say you are now?.....Right. Get a taxi 'n' take Mr Treadwell 'ome then get back here as quick as you can.....yes.....quick as you can, yes! Ok?..... Ok! Bye, yeah bye. (*Replaces receiver*)

TRISH: Now what's happened?

BETTY: You'd never guess...not in a million years.

TRISH: Well go on then, tell us!

BETTY: Claire took Mr Treadwell shoppin' first thing this morning – yer know how 'e likes to get the sell-by date reductions! Well there 'e was, toddlin' up n' down on 'is zimmer, when that stuck-up dead-'ead from Hospice At Home.....

JANE: You, too, can have the care you've always dreamed of with Horse Pis.....

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BETTY:came flyin' past with one of their clients on a brand new Eurofleet zimmer frame. Well – yer know Claire! Never turn a challenge down! Off she sets at a great rate of knots after them....pushing poor Mr Treadwell on to warp speed no doubt....'til they got level with 'em at the bog rolls! Apparently, it were neck 'n' neckbrace right up the first frozen food aisle, tho' Mr Treadwell's chillblains started to give him a bit of 'gyp' but, as they rounded the top by the yoghurts, Claire managed to coax a spurt out of him.... she always *was* good at that!.....and they took the lead. Then just as they were streaking towards the checkouts.....disaster happened!

TRISH: Go on...

BETTY: For some reason, Gawd knows why, Mr Treadwell's leg suddenly flies out in a sidekick and he follows it. Poor Claire didn't stand a chance of hanging on to him. He just left her holding the zimmer while 'e disappears 'ed first into a box of over-ripe grapes just next to that big pile of plums. Some burly car mechanic lifted him out....by the plums you might say!

JANE: (*Gives a dirty snigger*) An' is he alright?

BETTY: Yeah, he's fine, Claire sez....she couldn't work out what happened. We've a good idea though Glo' haven't we?

GLORIA: Have we?

BETTY: Remember the doll. Did you notice it had a zimmer frame? No? And did you notice the frame fall off when you didn't let go? No? Now what do you think that doll's name is? Any ideas? Mr Treadwell, by any chance?

GLORIA: Oh bums!

BETTY: I tried to tell you. I did try to tell you but you wouldn't listen, would you? This could've turned out very nasty. We're just lucky that *this time* we've got off lightly but just let it be a lesson to you eh?

TRISH: Are you listening Gloria?

Sound: Outer door from street opens

Enter [left] man wearing overalls

BETTY: Mornin' Jim. I'm glad you're here. You've got a busy day today..... Jenny's locked herself out again so I need you to take the spare key to her. Then you can call at Eva's an' make sure that Charlene's not dead!

JIM: *DEAD?* You pullin' my leg or what?

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BETTY: Oh it'll only be Eva goin' over the top as usual. Charlene's probably just passed out. I think her baby's due on Friday. Put some paper towels in yer car; oh 'n' yer better fill yer flask with hot water – just in case!

JIM: You *ARE* jokin', aren't you? You can go in your car if you're serious.

BETTY: 'Course I'm not serious. (*Turns her back to Jim and crosses her fingers*)
Listen, on the way can you drop Jane at Mrs Hill's.

JIM: Why, what's the matter with your mo-ped, spud?

JANE: Some sod's nicked it

JIM: No! *Really?* They'll pinch anything these days.

JANE: What d'ya mean by that?

JIM: Well you can hardly class it as a Harley can you!

JANE: It was to *me!*

JIM: That mo-ped was knackered. Get yourself a proper bike. Now's your chance to get something really powerful under you. *I've* got a big helmet with your name all over it!

Jane blushes/looks embarrassed and turns away

BETTY: Enough with you 'n' yer helmet. You better get a move on. Mrs Hill will be *aploptic!* Have they made a good job of the van, Jim?

JIM: See for yourself. It's right outside the door.

BETTY: Let's have a look.

Exit [left] Betty

JIM: She'll not be happy.

GLORIA: Why?

JIM: I think they've got the wording wrong!

TRISH: What's it say?

JIM: Well it was s'posed to say

Sound: Outer door from street bangs opens then bangs shut

Enter [left] Betty looking furious

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BETTY: I just give up! Ten years we've been dealin' with that garidge (*garage*) an' they still don't know our ruddy name! My husband will go *bananas!*

Picks up telephone and fiercely pushes numbers

Jane, Trish & Gloria exchange questionning looks

BETTY: (*tapping fingers impatiently*) Come on! Come on! Hello? Oh hello. Is that you Pete? It's Betty again at Uranus Care. Who did you give our sign job to, just out of interest? Your son! And did 'e do well in school? 'n' did 'e learn about the planets by any chance? No, I suppose it's not important these days...unless of course you 'ave to do a sign for us...us at Uranus Care...not, I might add Your Anus Care, which is what your dead-head son's painted!.....When?.....I don't care how busy you are, it's on it's way back to you – now!

Firmly replaces telephone receiver and glares at Jane, Trish, Gloria & Jim who are all starting to laugh

BETTY: An' if just one of you so much as titters, I'll.....(*tuts*).....Your Anus Care indeed!

Telephone rings. Betty picks up the receiver

BETTY: Good Morning. Uranus Care – Discretion is our middle name!

FIN