

B4 & After

In the staff room of the local bingo hall. The girls are getting ready...

CAROL: Lippie.

TRICIA: Lippie.

CAROL: Mascara.

TRICIA: Mascara.

CAROL: Blusher.

TRICIA: Blusher.

CAROL: Stand back! (*hairspray*) Nervous?

TRICIA: I'm never going to remember all this.

CAROL: Buck up. First day's the worst. You've passed the exams. Once you've done it a few times you'll be right as rain. You've been watching it done for years...

TRICIA: But I never realized it were so complicated.

CAROL: It's not really. Half the time I make it up as I go along.

TRICIA: But what about the *procedures*.

CAROL: Well, is the equipment checked?

TRICIA: Check!

CAROL: You're scrubbed up?

TRICIA: Yeah.

CAROL: Hair's up?

TRICIA: Aye.

CAROL: Now put some make-up on. They all look so rough I find it gives you an air of authority.

TRICIA: I'm not here to look good. I want to make people's lives better.

CAROL: Don't kid yourself. Most of them are past saving.

TRICIA: I heard Mrs Pennington never even made it into the building yesterday. Had heart attack on the steps and there was nothing they could do.

CAROL: Oh she's been in and out of here for years. Each time I thought it was gonna be her last. You get used to it. Erm..too much?

TRICIA: Not entirely appropriate but I'm sure people will have more important things to worry about than your tits...hard to imagine I know.

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CAROL: Give us a shifty in the mirror.

TRICIA: Use that side.

CAROL: Jesus, I look like Marlon Brando! Now I know what blokes see through the bottom of their pint glasses as I stagger up at 2am! Right, I'm ready.

TRICIA: Time for a quick fag?

CAROL: Not in uniform!

TRICIA: Bugger off! Ok, then just let me have a quick practise.

CAROL: Here!?

TRICIA: Please? "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Premier Bingo, the Northwest's number 1 spot for making your dreams come true. Eyes Down..."

Carol addresses the audience

CAROL: Welcome to Premier bingo. When I left school, the four most exciting words I'd heard since 'get your kit off'.

When I was a girl I never imagined I'd stay here. Middlington, a little town not far from the seaside and situated slap bang in between dreary and tedious. When they tried to increase tourism they couldn't even make it look appealing in the brochure!

I didn't want to end up married to one of the lads in town. Thinking they were so cool in their cars driving up and down the prom with the tunes blaring and the beat pulsating. MC bored rigid and Jam master jaded. Over excited because Middlington has just got its first drive through let alone a drive by!

Ever since I was a kid I'd had very different dreams. I had a globe by my bed. I'd got it from a car boot sale for 15p. It was supposed to be a lamp but the light didn't work and there was a crack through South America. I knew everything. I knew that Dakar was the capital of Senegal, that the largest lake was Superior and

the Volga was in Europe. I knew the American states and the Canadian provinces... and I could even spell saskachtuen.

But, I didn't know me periodic table or any of that algebraic formulae crap so, I left school at 16. I enrolled at the university of life and achieved a degree in drudgery and a masters in fucked up relationships.

Wasn't really college material. More interested in hanging out at the motorway services than the library. Not that passing your exams promised that much – all I ever heard was “Just think luv, if you get your exams you could be a supervisor, get one of those nice semis up by the bowling green”

I didn't want to work at the factory like everyone else – I wanted to travel. Then I realized I wasn't going to get that far on me wages from Saturday mornings at the Pier Chippy and the odd fiver from me Nan. I was on me way to sign up for some shifts when I passed this place. Someone had obviously vandalised the flashing sign very recently coz what caught my eye was huge neon lettering that read 'Peeing'.

Mr Stanophili took me on straight away – said I had other assets that would work better for me than a Maths GCSE. I suspected that his intentions weren't entirely in the direction of Bingo, but I didn't really mind. I thought he was gorgeous, really exotic, like a cross between Richard Gere and Saddam Hussain. After he'd thoroughly inspected my attributes he offered to buy me a drink to “Celebrate my new position”. There were so many strings attached to the offer I could have abseiled to the Coach and Horses and got it myself but I thought I wouldn't mind being tied up with him for a while. We began our affair that night, agreeing to keep all inappropriate activity outside of the workplace...we decided that didn't include the store cupboard!

TRICIA: Oh my god!

CAROL: How did't go?

TRICIA: I hope we're going to the pub tonight, I feel like a blithering idiot who's capable for nothing.

CAROL: I'd rather have a pint and a packet of pork scratchings.

TRICIA: It were terrifying. I feel lucky to get out alive.

CAROL: Well it's a serious business. It's no secret that Nora King is up to her bifocals in debt and is desperate to win the weekly national before her husband finds out.

TRICIA: I had no idea that bingo could get like that.

CAROL: Well she's in here morning, noon and night at 15 quid a session. *And* she started on competitions. Newspapers, magazines, food packaging. They reckon she's spent close to three grand and all as she's won so far is a bird table. Complete this sentence in less than 12 words; 'I ended up destitute because...' She ran out of savings and lent some money off of that shady fella that made our Alan's life such a misery.

TRICIA: Them money lenders are bastards. Worse than the banks. Don't care about nothing except their pound of flesh.

CAROL: Well...she could afford that!

TRICIA: Yeah!...Cheaper than weight-watchers...

CAROL: Oh it's not all serious. You need to lighten it up a little every so often, tell some jokes. There won't be a dry seat left in the house.
You get to know them too. Annie Parker is in for every game. Says she's 42 but I'd put her closer to 60. The roots constantly showing through her L'Oreal's 'Burnt Amber'...coz she's past it! Next to her is Barbara Wallis. Brings with her

no less than 30 good luck charms with her from her grandkids and brings her Alfie with her.

TRICIA: Oh yeah. Just sits in the corner gurgling and dribbling and trying to grab your tits whenever you walk past.

CAROL: Well they get that way when they turn 80 don't they?
Mary Flagherty is always good for a giggle. Used to be a gypsy but started to suffer from travel sickness.
Freda Jenkins is the best for keeping you up to date with all the gossip. She knows what everybody's doing with everybody else.

TRICIA: Oh I know her. She works at the hairdressers on the high street where I used to go in. She was always on at me about our Daniel having red hair when me mam and dad are both dark. I jokingly said 'well we can't tell if he's the milkman's coz he's bald' and she said she'd always thought the milkman had a ginger look about him. I was going to say 'no way' coz you know how me mam feels about 'fraternizing with the workers' but then I realized she did always spend a bloody long time placing the milk order!

CAROL: I used to go into her as well but I stopped after I asked for me hair to be cut chin length and she asked me which one!
Beryl in the back comes in here trying to get out of debt. She ran up a huge phone bill calling those tarot phone lines. Apparently nobody could see that coming at £2.95 a minute!

TRICIA: I almost got a job on one of those things once. Our Joanne started on them and asked me if I fancied it. I asked her if you had to be able to read the future but she said that was often more of a hindrance than a help so I went down to the offices. Didn't even see a pack of tarot cards and certainly no crystal balls. Although the

spotty lad in the cubicle opposite did scratch his quite a lot. And the amount of force he used meant they definitely weren't crystal.

CAROL: Night times in here are the best, you'll usually have a few hen do's in and you have to slow the calling down coz they're all pissed up on Pernod and black. The old dears usually get grumpy with them and then join them for a few halves of mild.

TRICIA: Speaking of getting shit-faced, what are you doing for the bank holiday?

CAROL: I got in a selection of beers from around the world.

TRICIA: You havin' a party?

CAROL: Yep, me, them and whoever's on Parky Friday night. I hate bank holidays. Too many bloody people trying to get to the beach.. By the time they've found a parking space they've forgotten what they're doing there in the first place. You?

TRICIA: Oh I love long weekends – Our Sandra's having a barbi in their backyard. Darren's said he'll forgo a lads night to come with me. So we're gonna start the holiday weekend with a bang.

CAROL: Then you can go to the party!

TRICIA: Not that I've got anything to wear. And Shirley's going to be there in her little designer number looking all blond and perfect.

CAROL: Bollocks. You scrub up just as well as her. Wear that little pink skirt you got from Top Shop last Saturday and tell her it's Gucci only the label fell off.

TRICIA: It's our anniversary. Five years since Darren and I first made love. Well, five years since he got his leg over in the back of his fiesta.

CAROL: Five year going out anniversary...isn't that Prozac?

TRICIA: Yeah, I know he's a dickhead sometimes-

CAROL: -most of the time

TRICIA: -but it's nice having a bloke around for some things. You've got to admit, eating alone isn't a patch on a meal for two...if you catch me drift.

CAROL: Er, yes, nice visual by the way.

TRICIA: You could come out with us on Saturday night if you fancied.

CAROL: Wish I could. In a very weak moment I agreed to have dinner with Roy – bloody mobile phones storing numbers of people you should never phone when drunk. Drinking and dialling is like a computer virus...within minutes it's affected everyone in your address book. But, he's promised to wear his front teeth and not hit anyone whilst I'm in the same room...Tell you what, we'll have dinner and then I'll blow him off. That'll take 10 minutes then I'll get rid of him and meet you in the pub.

I'll be a millionaire by then anyway...I've got my lottery ticket. Middlington will soon be a distant memory and I'll be sending you postcards from all over the place.

My ideal future is only a few numbers away.

TRICIA: I wish I had your optimism – I can't help feeling I'm always going to be one number out.

CAROL: You've got to think more positively. Anyway, I might be going away but you're gonna stay here and have a family and that's fantastic-

TRICIA: I'm not having a family-

CAROL: But I thought that's what you wanted...there's nothing wrong with that-

TRICIA: It is. But Darren doesn't...want to have a baby.

Pause

CAROL: I don't –

TRICIA: I thought I was pregnant. I was really chuffed. I was two weeks late and I was just about to tell Darren when I got my period.

CAROL: You poor thing. I'm so sorry babe. What did Darren say?

TRICIA: That he were relieved.

CAROL: What?!

TRICIA: Well, at least he were honest. Says it's not right time to be having a baby what with the economy, and the factory laying so many of them off...He's right, kids are expensive.

CAROL: He should know. The local gift shop wouldn't sell nearly as much of that 'world's best dad' shite if it wasn't for his contribution to the community. And don't kid yourself it's because they think he's a good dad. He only gets those because you can't fit 'world's best tosser able to still get it up after 16 pints at the Red Lion

and take advantage of whomever's staying at next door's B&B" on a thimble.
Bastard.

You know, you don't have to stay with him.

TRICIA: I'm parched, is it time for a cup of tea?

CAROL: Bugger that, it's gone 11, pub's open. I'll just grab me fags.

The ladies address the audience in the following monologues

TRICIA: I was devastated. But then Darren made me realize it wasn't what I wanted. Oh I want a baby. Someday. I don't think that feeling will ever go away. But, obviously it's not going to be with him. I know I've got to leave him, but I really love him, even if he is a bastard sometimes. And he's been a part of my life for so long. He was my first ever crush, I was 14 and he was 23. He was seeing this girl in my class, her and a few others, and I was well jealous. I used to hang out at the bowling- green opposite the factory for hours every day just to get a glimpse of him. But he never even noticed me.

Then, after school was done I got a job in the supermarket and he used to come in for his fags everyday. Every day "20 B&H, a packet of polo mints and a scratchie". He used to scratch it there and then. He'd win a couple of quid now and again but more often than not it was "Bastards. Story of my life luv, always one number out. One bastard number out". One day he won a fiver and out of the blue said he wanted to buy me a drink to celebrate. I was so shocked I don't think I actually replied but sure enough, he was waiting for me when I finished my shift and he took me to The Anchor for a lager and lime. I wouldn't say it was the start of a beautiful love affair but I was in love. And I think he was too...some of the time. He had ambition. An ambition to win loads of money and never have to work at 'that bastard factory' again. He was always at casinos with his mates and he was even known to put an entire pay packet in the fruit machines at the Coach

and Horses on a Thursday night. We lived off my pay from the supermarket and very soon that was owed to someone before it was ever earned.

CAROL: I remember my first pregnancy scare – I was thirteen. Our history teacher went off sick and Matt was the student teacher that replaced her. He was in his final year at teachers college and he was a right laugh in class. He was dead nice and really made you feel clever, you know. He said I had potential and asked me if I'd like to come to his flat for extra lessons. It happened pretty gradually I guess. A hug at the end of the session, then a kiss. He said he'd never felt like this before, said he didn't think of me as a pupil but a friend, said I was mature for my age. After a few weeks we slept together...it hurt so much that I had to pretend I wasn't there but I knew I was special, you know, coz he'd chosen me. After it was over he got really angry. 'Look what you've done now you little prick tease', said I shouldn't have made him do that and did I realize how much trouble I had gotten him into. Of course he didn't get into trouble. Not for me or Lindsay, or Rosie, or Helen, or Jenny or any of us that had been so special. He just left and became one history lesson that none of us would forget.

I spent the next month in agony wondering how I was going to tell me mam I was having a baby. I thought it was inevitable. She'd been on at me for years. "There's a name for couples who smoke up, drink and shag at the end of the pier...parents! Don't let that happen to you – be careful or you'll ruin your life...I should know..." And me Nan was always off to church to pray for the 'youth of today'. Luckily before I told anyone I might be I found out I wasn't...that was one of the better periods of my life!

TRICIA: I was going to go to college last year as a mature student – I had my place and everything – but Darren didn't want me leaving for Chester. It's a 60 minute drive down the motorway. Said that if I loved him I wouldn't want to go away either and did I really expect him to stay faithful. Of course I didn't but that has no bearing on whether or not I'm around.

His mum got me a job here instead.

CAROL: Religion terrified me when I was younger but the church youth club was the best hangout in town. Scouts and guides learning things you didn't get a badge for. A breeding ground for sinning! Or a sinning ground for breeding in Julie's case!

TRICIA: I think that was when I realized perhaps he wasn't the one for me after all.. I was having last minute jitters and we weren't even engaged! I tried to make our lives more exciting. One night I cooked this fancy meal out of a magazine, 'seared tuna steaks with a coriander pesto and sweet potato rosti' "Tuna?" he says, "Tuna? I'm not a bloody dolphin!" . And I rented a foreign movie with subtitles and all that. He seemed quite happy about that...until he realized it wasn't porn!

CAROL: I'd always wanted to save myself for someone special. I remember my school mates falling for the first bloke who'd ask them to dance *and* buy them chips which basically meant anyone with balls and a paper round
Even at that age I realized I wanted to watch the sun setting from a different viewpoint - And I don't mean going on top for a change on a Saturday night at the end of the pier!
I guess I still am. Looking for someone special. Someone who I don't know. With dark skin. On a beach somewhere hot.

TRICIA: I realized maybe spicing up the sex was the way to go. I mean we never even did it on the couch... or the floor... or the kitchen table. God forbid. Always the bloody bed. I suggested options. I thought maybe his problem was because of the picture on the wall of the Blackpool tower making him feel inadequate.

CAROL: There was Jamir. He worked in the Balti King down the high street and didn't speak much English – which turned out to be a blessing! He was well cheesy – black silk sheets, scarves on the headboard, 'sensual' massage oil by the bed and a mirror on the ceiling. V. disappointing – turns out his object in the mirror wasn't larger than it appeared.

TRICIA: I had a rash moment once after watching one of them women's chat shows and greeted his arrival home from work by lying naked on the kitchen floor covered in chocolate sauce and whipped cream. He looked at me with a bemused look and said "If you want to 'do it' luv, best wash all that sticky shite off else you'll get sheets all mucky".

I don't think I'd ever been that humiliated in my life, not even by my mother. I've not been able to look at an ice cream Sundae since!

CAROL: Then I was with Terry for just under a year. We used to have a right laugh but I think he saw me as one of the lads. I mean our sex life became no more than him grabbing my arse and saying 'fancy a quickie' – as if there was an alternative. He taught me to dismantle the engine on a Ford Cosworth but he was hopeless when it came to genital mechanics. "G-Spot! G-Spot! I've only just located the 'effin clitoris!" I'm pretty sure that was only by accident coz we'd had a heavy night in the pub the night before and he had the shakes!

TRICIA: I suggested we should go on a holiday, get away from everything here. I was gob-smacked when he came home and said it was all booked. I should have realized. I knew he hadn't asked me where I wanted to go, whether I would prefer the landscape of Australia or the culture of Italy, the heat of Morocco or the tranquillity of the Caribbean.

CAROL: That ended when I realized we hadn't been out by ourselves for months. It was always a few pints with the lads then onto the kebab shop, or the curry house if we was feeling flush, then back to my flat for a nightcap and a shag. I told him he didn't have a romantic bone in his body and after a brief discussion I established that no, I didn't think the one he was prodding me in the back with *was* all that romantic. He's poking someone else now...and I'm happy for him.

TRICIA: He booked us in for a fortnight in Blackpool. A popular tourist destination, with miles of beach admittedly, but at a push about a twenty minute drive from here. We'd driven further to find the right go faster stripes for his Ford XR3I. But it meant he could pop back to see his beloved rovers play an FA cup match.

CAROL: Everyone in this town is a waste of space. There's always some excuse to stay put. Money usually. Yet there's plenty spent here in the pubs of a weekend and there's always a queue for the lottery machine on a Saturday afternoon. It's all reality telly and the soaps. There's a buzz around town coz Richards about to do away with Emily in Corrie. Excitement is something they watch not something they live.

TRICIA: The future isn't exactly something I relish when I think about it with him. He's always got someone to blame for why his life is shit. It's never his fault, he's just hard done by. By the 'management', or the government or the 'bloody foreigners'. But I can't imagine the future without him either. Haven't got a clue what I'd do...

CAROL: That was always one of our holiday traditions as kids. Trying to drag dad away from his religious shrine which was the armchair in front of the telly, next to the bald patch in the carpet and the Rovers Return coaster. Where, come hell or high-water, homage was paid to Rita and Vera, Jack and Mike, the Weatherfield gods and their numerous disciples. As if somehow the Sunday episode confirmed Corrie as a religious experience. People here don't want to go abroad coz they'll miss the telly. And the bingo of course...

During the following dialogue the audience participate in an actual game of bingo

TRICIA: "Ladies and Gentleman, welcome to Premier Bingo. The Northwest's number one spot for making your dreams come true."

As you entered the building today you received a Premier Bingo card. You should have those in front of you now and if everyone's ready we will begin. What we're looking for today is a line in any direction ...up, down, across or diagonal. Eyes Down. And the first number out is...

CAROL: I really thought I'd be helping people achieve their dreams working here. But there's just too much desperation. The highs are few and far between and after the anticipation the disappointment is overwhelming.

TRICIA: And the next number out is...

CAROL: There's been a drive in the last few years to make bingo more glamorous and appeal to a younger age group. As the market grew so the stakes got higher and now they have these national games...played at the same time against people from all over the country.

TRICIA: (number) Remember this is a prize game lads and lasses.

CAROL: A few weeks ago they had the biggest yet. Everyone was talking about it. The prize was a cruise on the Pride of the Pacific.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I dreamt about it for weeks – this was my chance. I really felt that I was going to win...I deserved it. It was my dream. Travel.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I knew I couldn't play here so on the night of the game I got a bus up to Lancaster. It were packed. I found myself a spot and laid out my cards.

TRICIA: (number), (number)

CAROL: I don't think I'd ever been so nervous.

TRICIA: (number) Just one row ladies and gentlemen, any direction.

CAROL: The calling started and the whole room went quiet. The events of the day were forgotten, gossip put on hold and even the smokers stopped their coughing.

TRICIA: (number) we're playing today for a prize and the opportunity to win a lot of money.

CAROL: All you could hear was the soft thuds of ink onto paper as numbers were steadily being crossed off cards.

TRICIA: (number), (number)

CAROL: It was a full card game and the calling was fast, but nobody missed a beat. For the first time in weeks my thoughts weren't on the cruise itself but on the numbers that were going to get me there.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: Six numbers left. Then five. As each number came out there was an inaudible air of relief at the silence that followed. I was still in the game.

TRICIA: (number) (number)

CAROL: Out of the next seven numbers I had four of them.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I only needed one number. Just one number and my life would change.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: My heart was beating out of me chest. I always thought that was just a metawotsit but it's true. I could see it. My jumper was moving, faint like, but it were moving...

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I was ready. One more number and I were ready to shout Bingo! At the top of my lungs. The ball came out, the number was called and I heard it, loud and clear. Bingo! But it wasn't my voice. It wasn't my number. Bingo! Over here dear...Bingo!

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: It's like time went into slow motion. Voices rose. Everyone turning to look at the TV screen the shout had come from. The Pier Bingo, Aberystwyth. Another voice said 'That's a good bingo' and then there were papers being ripped up and conversations resumed from where they'd left off. But I just sat there in silence.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I couldn't move. Couldn't speak. It hadn't even occurred to me that I wouldn't win. I hadn't really thought about this...

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: And as I sat there I realized that I didn't want to stop playing. As I looked at everyone else I wondered why they'd given up. It wasn't over. I didn't want to just wait for the next game, and the next...I wanted to finish this one.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I hadn't won the cruise...but that didn't mean that I'd lost everything I'd wanted. It just meant that it had to be done in a different way. I realized then and there that I was still going away, from here...somehow.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I realized that just because you lost at bingo didn't mean you couldn't win at life – but you have to play that game...you can't just stand and watch, waiting for the right number. You have to participate. Just like winning at bingo means paying your fiver, getting your jumbo marker and starting to tick off your numbers.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: Turns out that the lady who'd won didn't even take the cruise. There was an alternative prize of a fitted kitchen and the stupid cow took that instead.

TRICIA: (number)

CAROL: I'm going to go away. I just have to figure out when and where to. I could get a job overseas. Even if it's crappy and long hours it'll feel like I'm on holiday compared to this place. And everybody needs a holiday.

TRICIA: (*end bingo – prize is a scratchcard.*) There you go luv – go and scratch that in private – as I say to my Darren on a regular basis.
Thank you for playing everyone.