

MICHAEL STEWART, MR. JOLLY (2016)

THE PHONE CALL

Hi, Mum.

Hello, love, I was just thinking about you.

Were you really? What were you thinking about?

I can't remember now, love.

Sorry about yesterday, Mum. It's very high pressured at work at the moment. Happy birthday, Mum.

Thanks, love.

Did you have a nice day?

Oh yes, it was lovely. I was invited to Elma's for tea.

That's nice.

It was, yes.

What did you get then?

Well, Elma got me perfume, and Anne got me some chocolates, and Cath got me a voucher for Marks and Spencers.

Did you get lots of cards?

Oh yes, lots.

Good.

There was an awkward pause.

And you?

What about me?

Are you okay?

I'm fine, Mum. I'm doing really well. I've got a girlfriend, you know.

Have you really, Son, that's nice, what's she called?

Caroline.

That's a nice name. Is she a Catholic?

I don't think so, Mum.

Oh well, Caroline is a nice name. What's she like?

She's really nice, Mum. You'd like her.

I'm sure I would, love. I best get off. I don't want to waste any of your phone bill.

Don't worry about that, Mum. I'm loaded now, you know.

That's nice. I best get off.

Mum.

Yes.

Do you remember when I was young?

Yes, of course.

Do you remember how we used to read to each other?

Yes, how could I forget.

Mum...

Yes love, what is it?

I...

Yes Son, what's on your mind?

I was just going to say...

Go on, what is it?

Happy Mother's Day for tomorrow.

Thank you love, that's nice.

I won't be able to phone you tomorrow.

Never mind.

Or the next day.

That's okay, love.

I've got an important contract at work and I need to go into the office.

You work so hard.

Everybody does.

I'll let you get off.

Mum, don't go.

Oh, I nearly forgot, I got a phone call the other day.

For me?

Yes, for you.

And?

It was from Jamie.

What did he say?

He said he had some important news for you.

What was it?

He wouldn't say.

Why not?

He said he wanted to speak to you himself.

What did you tell him?

Well, I gave him your telephone number and your address.

Did I do the right thing?

Yes, Mum. That's fine, but...

You're not in trouble, are you?

Of course not. What makes you say that?

It's just that he sounded, well, a bit urgent.

His phone's at the top of the stairs. He was probably just out of breath, Mum.

Oh, I see. I expect you're right.

Look after yourself, Mum.

And you. You're all right, aren't you?

Of course I am.

Are you eating enough?

Loads. I'm always taking clients out for meals. You wouldn't believe the amount I go through. But it all comes off the tax. That's why companies have these expensive lunches. It's all tax-deductible.

As long as you're having three square meals.

Absolutely, Mum. I never leave home without breakfast. I don't know when I'll get chance to ring you now. I'm so busy at the moment. I think about you all the time. I'm sorry I've not been in touch.

As long as you're okay, love. That's all that matters.

I'm fine, Mum. I'm doing great. Everything is... Well, it couldn't be better at the moment. Everything is great.

Are you sure? You sound a bit strange.

There was another awkward pause.

Mum?

Yes love.

I... I love you.

I know you do, dear.

Bye.

He switched off his phone. He let the phone drop. It pirouetted through the air. There was some snow – fine flakes – falling now. The weather forecast had been right for a change. The phone hardly made any sound at all when it hit the water below. It had disappeared.