

Intertwining Lives

MAIN CHARACTERS

ALEX – Peter and Helen’s son
GRAHAM – Tina’s friend
HELEN – Peter’s wife
JAYNE – A counsellor
JULIE – A nurse
PETER – Helen’s husband
TINA – Peter’s girlfriend

OTHER CHARACTERS

BARMAN
NURSE
WAITRESS

SCENE 1

The kitchen of a house in a quiet suburb. Helen is standing at the sink washing vegetables to prepare for dinner. She is pregnant. Her husband, Peter is sitting at the table, engrossed in his newspaper. His jacket is hanging on the back of his chair. A briefcase is resting against the table. Although both Helen and Peter are silent, you can hear sounds of a young child running around and laughing, in the next room. Helen drains the vegetables that she has washed and puts them in a bowl. She looks round at her husband, and then after a pause, starts speaking to him.

Helen. You haven’t said much about work.

Peter [looks up from paper]. Well, there’s not much to say about it. It’s still busy.
[Looks back down to his paper, and after a moment turns the page]

Helen. I’ve noticed that. You’ve hardly been at home at all. **[pause]** We’ve hardly seen anything of each other.

Peter [still reading the paper, slightly distracted] Sorry, what?

Helen [raises voice] I said, we’ve hardly seen each other.

Peter [sighs, folds his paper and gets up] I know darling, I know. There’s just so much to do at work that’s all, but once this project is finished you’ll have me all to yourself.
[puts his arms around Helen]

Helen [rests her head on Peter's chest] But when will it finish? It seems like they give you one job after another. And it's not only me you've got to think about - I want you to spend time with Alex as well – you know, he keeps asking where Daddy is, when he come back from school and I just don't know what to say. **[She raises her head and looks at Peter]** He's always in bed by the time you get home...It's so difficult and he doesn't understand, it's so hard to explain to him. What will you do when this one's born **[she pats her stomach]** and they're both asking after you?

Peter [pulls away. His tone becomes harsher] Well, I'm not sure what to say about that darling. I can't be everywhere at once – at home and at work! I'm sure Alex will understand one day that I'm working this hard to make sure that he has the best start in life – that school he goes to doesn't pay for itself you know. **[Helen looks upset. He softens his tone]** Okay, I'm sorry. **[pause]** Things are difficult for me as well you know. I tell you what, how about I spend some time with the both of you this weekend? We could go for a picnic – maybe to the park? Maybe we could even go to the zoo – Alex would love that!

Helen. [raises a smile] That would be wonderful – Alex will be really excited.

[There is a pause. A mobile phone begins to ring.]

Peter I'm sorry darling, but I'm going to have to get that. **[He pulls a phone out of his jacket pocket].** Hello? Right, I'll be there soon. Yep, no, I know I can't miss it. Yes, that's right. I'll see you then.

Helen. Work again?

Peter [puts jacket on and picks up briefcase] Yes, I'm so sorry darling. They need me to come back in – there's some work to finish off and nobody else to do it as usual. Too many deadlines! Well, maybe I'll get a promotion out of this, and at least there'll be more money coming in. **[He gives Helen a quick kiss]**

Helen. I'll probably be in bed when you get home.

Peter. I'll try not to wake you. **[He leaves]**

Helen. [Looks down at her stomach] He didn't even ask about you today. **[She picks up the bowl of vegetables and begins to chop them]**

SCENE 2

A crowded bar. Music is playing loudly in the background. There are flashes of light and there are people drinking and dancing. At the bar a young, attractive woman is sitting with a drink. She is clearly waiting. She opens her bag and takes out a pocket mirror and a lipstick, which she applies. She looks expectantly at the door.

Barman. You haven't been stood up have you?

Tina. That would never happen. Especially not to me.

[As she looks at the door again, Peter walks in, carrying his briefcase. He looks around trying to spot her and then catches her eye. He walks over]

Tina. [to the barman] Told you. **[to Peter as he comes over]** Hi baby, what took you so long? **[They kiss].** Normally you're down to meet me in a flash.

Peter. I was getting the Spanish Inquisition. But it's okay now, I made it didn't I?

Tina. Was your wife asking questions again? Did you tell her the same old 'I'm working late' story?! God that woman is so naïve...If I was her, I'd be onto you by now.

Peter. Oh really? Well I'm lucky that she's not you then, because she's got no clue. She thinks I'm working overtime to support my ever growing family. **[He runs his hands through her hair and then touches her leg].** And even if we do get caught I think you're definitely worth it. **[He pulls her in for a kiss].** So are we going back to your place?

Tina [chuckles] Baby, there isn't ever anything else on your mind is there?

Peter. What can I say? I'm an efficient man and I don't like to waste any time. That's what they tell me at work, anyway.

Tina [laughing picks up her bag] Well that's settled then – my place it is. It's not like we can go back to yours is it?!

Peter puts his arm around her and they leave the bar.

SCENE 3

A living room in a flat. Peter and Tina are on the sofa, kissing and cuddling. Peter's jacket is slung over a chair and his briefcase is on the floor next to it. Both are in a slight state of undress – Peter no longer has his shirt on, whilst Tina's blouse is slightly undone. Her bag is on the floor near the sofa.

Tina. [stops kissing Peter and then reaches over to her bag. She pulls a condom out]. So, shall we finish this in the bedroom? I think it might be more comfortable than the sofa!

Peter. Good idea. **[He notices the condom in her hand].** Hey, what's that for?

Tina. Well baby, I just thought that maybe we should start being safe. I don't want to get pregnant or anything.

Peter. But I thought you were on the pill?

Tina. Yeah, I am. But...you know...there are other things apart from pregnancy. Like infections and stuff. I just thought we should be careful.

Peter. Hang on a minute. Why do we need to worry about infections? I've only been sleeping with you, and Helen sometimes and I know that neither of you have anything. Have you been with someone else?

Tina. **[looks uncomfortable for a minute]** No! But I've had partners in the past, and so have you. Neither of us are angels! Plus, I've never had a test – have you?

Peter. No, but I know I don't need one, and you don't either. **[He kisses her and pulls the condom out of her hand].** Come on baby, we've been doing it for 2 months without condoms – I think if we had caught something we'd know about it by now, don't you? Plus it feels great with out a condom and I don't want to spoil it – don't you think it'll feel less intense if I wear one?

Tina **[reluctantly]** Yeah I guess so...and we have been doing this for months, so I guess I can't have anything if I don't feel ill...and it feels so much better without a condom...**[She trails off as Peter starts to kiss her]**

Peter **[stops kissing Tina and pulls her up by her hand. He tosses the condom onto the sofa].** Yes baby it does feel better. And I think we've wasted enough time already... **[They both head towards the bedroom]**

SCENE 4

Some months later. Tina is in her flat alone. The phone begins to ring.

Tina. Hello? **[She frowns, appearing not to recognise the voice]** Graham? Oh my god is that you? How are you? **[She nods, excited]** I haven't seen you in ages! We should definitely meet. When are you free? **[pause]** Okay, how about this afternoon? **[pause]** Graham, are you alright? You sound a bit...I don't know, down. **[pause]** Well okay, tell me about it when we meet. Shall we say coffee at Al Fresco at around 5ish? **[pause]** Yep okay, that's great, I'll see you then.

SCENE 5

Al Fresco coffee house. Graham is sitting at a table alone. He looks round nervously and then stares into his drink. As Tina walks through the door he stands up to greet her.

Tina. Hi Graham! [**She hugs him**] Oh, it's so nice to see you! How long has it been?

Graham. About three or four months. [**They sit down.**]

Tina [to a waitress] Could I get a coffee please? [**To Graham**] So what have you been up to all this time? I last saw you last Christmas - you'd come back from travelling hadn't you?

Graham [uncomfortably] Yeah. [**pause**] I went back after that you know – to Indonesia, Thailand, India...I met a lot of people travelling...I've made some really great friends too.

[**The waitress comes back with Tina's coffee**]

Tina [teasingly] Did you meet anyone special?

Graham [looks more uncomfortable] No...not particularly...why?

Tina Well, I was just thinking, you know, you couldn't have...otherwise we wouldn't have spent that Christmas Eve together...

Graham [clears his throat] Look Tina, we have to talk – about that Christmas Eve...about everything. I have some bad news.

Tina. What?

Graham Well, when I went travelling I slept with a few people...and I had a few relationships too. They were mostly other travellers and I just didn't really think about what I was doing, you know?

Tina. What's your point?

Graham. Well when I came back home, I thought I should go for an STI test to make sure that everything was okay...and it turns out that I had Chlamydia.

Tina [looks confused] Graham, why are you telling me this?

Graham [looks down into his drink] Because I could have given it to you...on that Christmas Eve we never used anything. I...I just didn't think. But it's possible that you've got it too...and anyone else you've seen since might have it. [**pause**] Are you seeing anyone?

Tina [flustered]. I saw a couple of people after you...I'm seeing two guys now, nothing serious really.

Graham I'm sorry to have to tell you this Tina, but you need to know. You should try and get a test as soon as possible. They can treat Chlamydia easily – it's just tablets. But it's really important that if you do have it, you try and tell anybody you've slept with that you've got it too.

Tina. I have to tell them?!

Graham Yeah, it's really important that you do – because if it's left untreated Chlamydia can have serious complications like infertility. If you don't want to tell them yourself, you can always get the nurse or doctor that you see in the clinic to tell them confidentially – and they never have to mention your name. **[He gets up]** Listen, I am so sorry to have been the bearer of bad news. I...I wish things could have been different. I'm sorry, I have to go.

Graham leaves. Tina is left sitting alone in the café.

SCENE 6

A GUM clinic. Tina is sitting in a waiting room looking nervous. She has a magazine on her lap, but she is not reading it. A nurse walks into the room.

Nurse Tina Barrett please!

Tina gets up and walks into the consultation room.

Julie. Hi Tina, I am Julie, one of the sexual health nurses. I am going to ask you some questions about your general and sexual health. I'd like you to answer as honestly as you can, so that we can find out which tests you need. Does this sound okay?

Tina. Yeah, I guess so.

Julie. Right. Tina, do you have a regular partner, or have you had sex with someone other than your regular partner?

Tina. Umm... well...sort of both really. I have a regular partner...but he's not just *my* partner and I have another partner as well, but we don't see each other regularly at all. **[pause]** The thing is... I slept with someone else a few months back...he wasn't one of my current partners...and he told me that he's been treated for Chlamydia recently.

Julie. And what kind of sex did you have? Oral sex? Anal sex?

Tina. Um...yeah some of those...

Julie. Did you use a condom? Do you use condoms with your regular partners?

Tina .No... I haven't. I try to...but I am on the pill so I don't think about it.

Julie. Tina, it's really important to use condoms during sex. With unprotected sex it's not just pregnancy that you have to worry about, but sexually transmitted infections as well. You don't always have symptoms with an STI either. **[pause]** Having an untreated STI increases your risk of contracting other infections such as HIV. Okay, I'm going to give you a screen for infections – so that will just be a urine sample and/or a blood test. The urine sample tests for Chlamydia and gonorrhoea whilst the blood test is for HIV and syphilis. Now Tina, are you interested in having both tests done or just one?

Tina. Does it make a difference? Wouldn't I know if I had something like HIV anyway?

Julie. Not necessarily. The virus can live in the body for many years without causing any symptoms or signs. I think having the blood test is not a decision to be taken lightly – especially because it tests for HIV, which as you will probably know, is a life long condition. There are many advantages and disadvantages of getting tested.

Tina. Like what?

Julie. The advantages are that if you do turn out to be HIV positive, you can receive early treatment, which means that you could live longer even with the virus. And they are developing new medications all the time, so you could advantage of these as well. Living a fulfilling life with HIV means that you need to make decisions to take good care of yourself and also make sure that you have a good emotional support network around you during the early stages of the disease. Also, you can make decisions about your future – for instance, if you know you are HIV positive, you can make the decision about whether you'd like to have babies or not, as they can be born with HIV. You can also inform any prospective or previous partners that you have HIV – we can also do this confidentially on your behalf - and make decisions about either abstaining from sex or use a condom during sex. But Tina, aside from all this, if you get tested and your result is negative, you'll just be really relieved and then you can take steps to protect yourself in the future. Remember, there's nothing to say that your result is going to come back positive.

Tina. Right...I see. And what are the disadvantages of being tested?

Julie. Finding out that you have HIV can be extremely distressing – it all really depends how well prepared you are to receive the news and how much support you have from your family and friends. Do you have a good support network where you live?

Tina. My mum and I are really close...and she is pretty supportive. I haven't told her much about my personal life though...I kind of keep that stuff to myself. I guess I don't want to disappoint her. I think she wishes that I had just settles down with someone now.

Julie. I think if you are tested for HIV and the result is positive, you will need to lean on your mum for support. Getting a positive result can put you on a rollercoaster of different emotions – I have seen people experience a variety of feelings from uncertainty, fear and loss to depression, grief, anxiety and even denial that they have the virus. It's important

to be aware that being HIV positive will make a big impact on your life, and you will have to make a lot of adjustments. Your partners and your family are also likely to suffer from the consequences of you getting a positive result – whether they are infected or not.

Tina. Wow, this really is a big decision. **[pause]** I am not sure what to do.

Julie. Don't worry, you don't have to rush this decision. Just carefully consider everything that we've talked about and go with whatever feels right for you. Also remember that all your medical information will be kept completely confidential, so there's no need to worry about that. **[She gets up].** Listen, I am just going to get a cup of tea, so you can think about this and tell me what you decide to do when I get back.

[Julie leaves. Tina is left alone in the room.]

Tina. [to herself] If I get tested and I am positive, I'll have to tell everyone that I've been with that I've got HIV...Peter, Graham...Tony...Well I guess I don't have to tell them myself, the nurse can do that. But what will everyone think of me? I'll have this serious life long condition for life...everyone is sure to treat me differently. I'll have to take medication everyday and I've heard that they can make you so sick. Will I be able to hold down a normal job if I'm HIV positive – or would it eventually make me too ill? And what if I wanted kids but knew I couldn't have them because of the chance they'd get HIV? How would I tell mum? She'd be so upset...she'll be so disappointed in me. No, it's better not to know...that's it, that's my decision. **[pause]** But then, what if I do have it and I pass it on to my future partners? What if I meet someone I really care about and then give him a virus just because I was too scared to get tested? If we decided to have a baby I could pass HIV on to him or her. And it's not fair to anyone I've been with already, in case I have it. **[sighs]** Peter has a wife, a family...just being with him is bad enough. And he might not have it...Hell, *I* might not have it! But I guess I should find out. **[pause]** I'll take the test.

[Julie comes back in to the room carrying a cup of tea]

Julie. Right Tina, have you managed to come to a decision about whether you want the blood test? Remember, you don't need to rush, and you can always come back another day if you want to think about it a bit more. We just do a test for Chlamydia and gonorrhoea if you are more comfortable with that.

Tina. [looks slightly nervous but decided] No, it's okay. I've really thought about it and I think that I should have a full screen. I might not have it anyway...and if I do, it's best to know.

Julie. Are you sure? **[Tina nods]** Okay, we'll do the blood test now and I'll get a urine sample from you as well. Then I'll see you in a week to discuss your results and to answer any questions you might have.

Tina. Thanks.

SCENE 7 – One week later

The GUM clinic. Tina is sat in the waiting room.

Nurse. Tina Barrett!

Tina gets up and is led into the consultation room. The nurse is joined by another lady.

Julie. Tina, this is Jayne, one of our counsellors. She is just going to sit in on our consultation if that's okay with you?

[Tina nods. They all sit down.]

Julie. Now Tina we are here today to discuss your results. **[pause]** The test showed you have a bacterial infection call Chlamydia. This can be treated with antibiotics, which we will give you at the clinic.

Tina. That's what Graham said he had...So it is treatable?

Julie. Yes it is. **[pause]** But Tina, I'm afraid to tell you that your blood test results also showed that you have contracted HIV. **[Tina looks stunned]**

Jayne. Tina I understand that this will come as a shock to you, but I want you to know that both of us will be able to give you any support that you need. We can start you on the drug therapy straight away so that you are getting the medication into your system and we'll be available to give you long term support as well. Remember, there are a lot of people out there who are living long, fulfilling lives with HIV.

Tina is silent.

Jayne. I'm going to start seeing you on a regular basis, starting from this week – and you can talk to me about anything. You can have as many or as few sessions with me as you want okay? It is just an opportunity for you to tell me whatever is on your mind and any worries or concerns that you have.

Julie. I'll also be on hand to give you any medical advice that you might need and to answer any medical questions that you have. You won't be dealing with this all alone. Tina, is there anyone that you want us to call?

Tina nods. She looks shocked. She is shaking slightly. Suddenly, she bursts into tears.

Jayne hugs her.

SCENE 8

An office. Peter is at his desk. His mobile phone starts to ring.

Peter. Hello?

Julie. Hello, could I speak to Peter Thompson please?

Peter. Speaking.

Julie. Hi Peter. This is Julie, one of the nurses from the Wakefield GUM clinic. Are you free to talk?

Peter. Um...yes I am. Sorry, what's this about?

Julie. Peter, one of your partners had an STI screen here and had some positive results. I'm just getting in contact with you to advise that you get an STI screen to make sure that you don't have any infections, or if you do, to get treated. You don't have to come and see us – you can get treated at your local GP's surgery or at any GUM clinic in the area.

Peter. Hang on – are you saying that I might have an STI? Who came in to see you? When was this?

Julie. Unfortunately Peter, we can't give any information out as to who this person is or when they visited us. All I can say is that if you have had any unprotected sex, it is vital that you get a full infection screen. You might not have anything, but a regular sexual health check will confirm this.

Peter. Right. I can't believe this. So, can I make an appointment with you? Can you at least tell me what I might have?

Julie. Yes you can make an appointment with us. Peter, you may have been a contact of Chlamydia, which is a bacterial infection that is easily treated with antibiotics. When you come to the clinic we will not only treat you but offer you a test for other infections as well. Does this sound okay? Would you like to come in this week? We have a free slot on Thursday at 10am.

Peter. Okay, yes I'll come in this week – Thursday at 10am is fine. Thanks. Bye. **[end of phone call. Peter talks out loud to himself].** Unbelievable! **[He muses]** That's just my luck - the first time I start seeing other people aside from Helen, I'm on the fast track to getting an STI! **[laughs coldly]** Some guys have five girls on the go at once and they get off scot-free! **[pause]** Maybe this is my punishment or something...and I haven't even got the faintest idea who it could have been! **[Peter frowns, thinking]** There's no way it could be Tina – she wasn't seeing anyone apart from me...**[pause]** I bet it was that Gemma – she looked a bit like she was the local bike and she never did tell me how many people she'd been with. Dirty slag.

SCENE 9

The GUM clinic. Peter is sitting in the consultation room with Julie and Jayne.

Peter. I'm sorry...I don't quite understand what you are saying.

Julie. Peter, your blood test result came back positive for HIV. It means that your body has contracted the HIV infection.

Peter. [becoming hysterical] The virus that causes AIDS? I have the virus that causes AIDS?

Jayne. We can help you get through this Peter, there are lots of different services you can use and lots of different people you can talk to. You won't be going through this alone.

Peter is not listening. He has his head in his hands.

Peter [still with his head in his hands. His voice comes through gritted teeth] I want to know who gave this to me. Who gave this to me? The least you can do is tell me that?

Julie. It's difficult to say, especially if you've had more than one partner in your lifetime, which most people have. And Peter, you can't focus on that right now. You need to focus on your future and how you are going to be able to live a healthy and fulfilling life with this virus.

Peter. [looking up] How can I not think about it? I have a wife! A son! My wife is pregnant as well! How can I not think about who is responsible for ruining all of that for me?

Jayne. I know it is difficult Peter. But your family can become your support network as well. They can help you cope with this. **[pause]** I understand that this is not easy to think about right now, but you do realise the importance of informing your wife of your result, as she will need to come in for an infection screen as well?

Peter's face becomes ashen. He clearly has not thought about this before.

Peter. Will she...will...what is the chance that she will be positive? I mean, that...will she have the infection?

Julie. She might not necessarily have the infection. But, as both of you have had regular sexual intercourse we still need to screen her just in case, especially as she is pregnant.

Peter. [He is looking down, his head in his hands again] Oh, God.

SCENE 10

The kitchen of Peter and Helen's house. Helen is sat at the kitchen table reading a book. She has one hand on her protruding stomach. Alex is running around the room with a toy aeroplane. Peter walks through the door with his briefcase. His face is ashen, and very serious.

Helen. [looking up] Hi darling, how was work? **[She sees the look on his face]** Peter? What's the matter? Darling, you don't look well!

Helen starts as though to get up but Peter motions her back in to her seat. He sits down heavily in a chair opposite her and puts his briefcase down against the table leg.

Helen. [looking worried] Peter, what is it? Has something happened at work? Have you lost your job?

Peter. It's not work. **[he pauses, struggling for words].** I...I have something to tell you Helen, and...you need to listen. I am so sorry, god, I am so sorry.

Music [Gary Jules *Mad World*] begins playing. In the rest of this scene the characters' voices cannot be heard, although we can see them speaking to each other. Peter is speaking to Helen, struggling through his tears, and shaking his head. Helen's looks stunned at what she is hearing and her hand comes up to her mouth as though to stifle a cry. She shakes her head in disbelief – saying 'No' (this is mouthed, not actually said), and she almost shrinks away from Peter, partly turning away from him in her chair. She closes her eyes, tears on her cheeks and her hand still clasped against her mouth. Alex seems to sense the tension - he stops running around, and lays his hand on Helen's arm as if to ask what is wrong. Helen looks down at him and then picks him up and puts him on her lap, cuddling him against her chest. She looks at Peter. They stare at each other without speaking.

END