

= Cold Comfort (Inside No. 9) =

" Cold Comfort " is the fourth episode of the second series of the British dark comedy anthology television programme Inside No. 9 . The episode , which was written and directed by Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , was first broadcast on 16 April 2015 on BBC Two . Most of " Cold Comfort " is composed of a stream from a fixed camera on the desk of Andy , the protagonist , with smaller pictures on the side of the screen , in the style of a CCTV feed . " Cold Comfort " was filmed over two and a half days in Twickenham , and was , like " A Quiet Night In " from Inside No. 9 's first series , highly experimental . It was Pemberton and Shearsmith 's directorial debut .

The episode starred Pemberton , Shearsmith , Jane Horrocks , Nikki Amuka @-@ Bird and Tony Way as volunteers at Crisis Support Line , a crisis hotline . The story follows Andy (Pemberton) , who is starting at the call centre . After taking a particularly disturbing call from Chloe , a suicidal teenage girl , Andy begins to struggle , but he is offered support by his supervisor George (Shearsmith) , the gossip Liz (Horrocks) and the officious Joanne (Amuka @-@ Bird) . Andy is later joined by Michael (Way) . Vilma Hollingbery , Vicky Hall and members of the comedy group Gein 's Family Giftshop (Edward Easton , Kath Hughes and James Meehan) voiced various callers , with the Gein 's Family Giftshop comedians also appearing as on @-@ screen extras , playing unnamed call centre volunteers .

The television critics Andrew Billen and David Chater (both writing for The Times) and John Robinson (writing for The Guardian) characterised " Cold Comfort " as somewhat weaker than other episodes of the series , but other critics , including Patrick Mulkern (writing for Radio Times) , the comedy critic Bruce Dessau and writers for The Sunday Times were complimentary . Commentators praised the format , the writing and the performances , especially Horrocks 's , but offered differing views about the episode 's conclusion , plot and atmosphere .

= = Production = =

The second series of Inside No. 9 written in 2014 , and then filmed from the end of 2014 into early 2015 . The idea for " Cold Comfort " began with the call centre , with Pemberton having kept a newspaper article on the subject from 2005 as a potential inspiration . Once the writers had the idea for the setting , they allowed the story to grow out of this . The pair visited a large number of locations ? including a number of colleges ? before settling on the one used , which was in Twickenham , rejecting many because they did not look enough like offices . They had three days at the location , but completed filming in two and a half .

= = = Casting = = =

" Cold Comfort " stars Pemberton as Andy , a new volunteer , and Shearsmith as George , Andy 's supervisor . According to Shearsmith , he and Pemberton do not typically write Inside No. 9 scripts with particular actors in mind for roles , and nor do they typically write roles specifically for themselves . They were unsure , for a long time , on which characters they should take , initially considering having Shearsmith play Andy and Pemberton play George . Shearsmith said that this felt like the more " obvious " option , but the characters were switched as they " thought it would be slightly more unusual " to have it that way around .

As each episode of Inside No. 9 features new characters , the writers were able to attract actors who might have been unwilling to commit to an entire series . Jane Horrocks , Nikki Amuka @-@ Bird and Tony Way star respectively as Liz , Joanne and Michael , other volunteers at the call centre . The characters of Liz and Joanne have strongly differing approaches to their roles as volunteers , with Joanne focussing on detachment and Liz on involvement . Both approaches , for Pemberton , have advantages and disadvantages . Jane 's desk is adorned with various trinkets , including ornaments and pictures . These were Horrocks 's idea , and , for Pemberton and Shearsmith , served to make viewers suspicious of her from the start . Horrocks was chosen because she would be able to add humour while still keeping to the tight timings necessary for the episode ; many of her

lines were improvised . The character of Michael begins to work at the centre during the episode . Pemberton and Shearsmith considered having it mentioned that he had been sent by " Pauline from Wood Green " , a reference to the stage version of The League of Gentlemen 's Pauline , who had been based at Wood Green . However , this was not included in the final episode .

Edward Easton , Vilma Hollingbery , Kath Hughes , James Meehan and Vicky Hall provide the voices of various people who call in to the centre . Some of the voice actors were drawn from the comedy group Gein 's Family Giftshop , the performing members of which are Hughes , Easton and Meehan . After watching a Gein 's Family Giftshop performance , Pemberton and Shearsmith had invited the members to star in Inside No. 9 . The comedians then suggested that they also appear on @-@ screen as extras , playing unnamed call centre volunteers . Hollingbery , who voiced " Ivy " , an old woman caller , had previously starred in Pemberton and Shearsmith 's Psychoville as Mrs Wren / Mrs Ladybirdface . She was one of the few actors whom Pemberton and Shearsmith used in both series .

= = = Direction = = =

Pemberton and Shearsmith , in addition to writing and starring in " Cold Comfort " , directed the episode . This episode ? one of two in the second series that they jointly directed ? was their directorial debut . The pair did not know , while writing for the series , which episodes they would be directing , meaning that their writing was unlikely to be influenced by the knowledge . Pemberton and Shearsmith had always intended to try directing , and the second series of Inside No. 9 offered them the opportunity . David Kerr , who had directed all of the episodes in the first series , was unable to return for the second . Guillem Morales and Dan Zeff each took on directorial duties for two episodes , while Pemberton and Shearsmith decided to direct the remaining two .

Shearsmith said in an interview that the pair had considered directing episodes in which they did not appear much , but scheduling concerns left them with " Cold Comfort " and " Nana 's Party " ; episodes which feature the writers quite heavily . By contrast , Pemberton said that he and Shearsmith , knowing that they were going to be directing two episodes , deliberately chose " Cold Comfort " because the fixed cameras made filming a lot simpler , though Shearsmith said that the filming was more complex than they initially anticipated . For Horrocks , it was " lovely to be directed " by Pemberton and Shearsmith , as she " really [liked] their choices and ... [loves] their work " . Shearsmith said that he found directing the episode " exhausting " ; he found little time to rest during filming , as if he was not directly involved in filming , he was involved in making directorial decisions .

= = = Picture and sound = = =

The episode progresses mostly through footage streamed from a fixed camera in booth nine of the call centre setting . Streams from other cameras are displayed on the side of the screen , in the style of a CCTV feed . The idea was inspired by a clip of a serial killer 's interview with the CIA which Shearsmith had seen online ; this , too , had a main feed with three smaller feeds giving different views of the scene . The writers felt that the multiple screens both served a narrative function and raised the tension . For much of the episode , viewers simply watch characters taking calls . Extras are seen moving back and forth in the smaller screens , with Pemberton having initially been keen for things to be happening away from the main feed . However , he was somewhat frustrated with the result , with the same extra moving on numerous occasions throughout the episode . Shearsmith felt that a whole series filmed in the same manner " would be a bit wearing on the eye " , but that the style could be used for a single episode .

The format presented certain technical difficulties . The episode was filmed in very long takes ? some as long as five or six minutes ? without any cuts . This meant that the actors could not make any errors , but the result was " something you don 't normally see " . Pemberton said that the episode would " either be brilliantly tense or incredibly boring " . Timing during filming had to be precise , though scenes could be cut earlier or start later than was anticipated . For example , an

earlier introduction of Joanne was cut in the final episode . Other unused versions of scenes included a more violent version of George 's attack on Liz and a version of the final scene with a gunshot . The gunshot was removed on the recommendation of Jon Plowman , Inside No. 9 's executive producer , which led to some debate ; Shearsmith , for example , preferred the original version .

Alex Thompson , the episode 's sound recordist , arranged the phones so that the actors could speak to each other in real @-@ time . Pemberton and Shearsmith wanted this so that the voices would not have to be recorded in a studio later and added in ADR . The voice of " Chloe " ? the identify of whom is key to the story ? presented a particular technical challenge , as the writers wanted to ensure that her identity was not revealed the first time her voice is heard . First , the production team recorded Shearsmith playing George @-@ as @-@ Chloe , and then a number of actresses recorded their versions of Shearsmith playing George @-@ as @-@ Chloe . Of these , one ? Hall ? was chosen to lend her voice to Chloe . Shearsmith then re @-@ recorded his voice , imitating Hall 's version of George @-@ as @-@ Chloe . Hall and Shearsmith 's respective performances of George @-@ as @-@ Chloe could then be merged together for the final episode . The first time viewers hear " Chloe " , her voice is mostly Hall 's ; as the episode progresses , more of Shearsmith 's voice is audible . For Shearsmith , this did not represent the production team cheating the viewers , as viewers ' experiences are filtered through Andy 's experiences . The first time viewers hear Chloe , they ? like Andy ? experience her as a teenage girl . As most of the episode was filmed in real @-@ time , George is visible making calls as Chloe , meaning that he hides in plain sight . Footage of Shearsmith playing George @-@ as @-@ Chloe in George 's office ? used in the final episode ? was filmed separately to the rest of the episode , as a camera set @-@ up in George 's office would have been visible on one of the main cameras .

Pemberton compared " Cold Comfort " to " A Quiet Night In " , the second episode of the first series of Inside No. 9 , a sentiment echoed by some critics . Both episodes were highly experimental ? " A Quiet Night In " being mostly silent and " Cold Comfort " being filmed mostly from a fixed camera ? something which the writers felt suits anthology format . On the other hand , according to Pemberton , as " Cold Comfort " is " static and all about listening " , it is , in a sense , the " polar opposite " of " A Quiet Night In " . Though all episodes in the series were very different in tone , Pemberton felt that " Cold Comfort " was " the most extreme experiment " .

= = Plot = =

Andy starts to volunteer at the Comfort Support Line (CSL) , a crisis hotline , after the death of his sister . His supervisor George takes him through the procedure for calls , and Andy chats to the more experienced Liz . He finds his first few calls difficult , and Joanne , a volunteer who shares a mutual distaste with Liz , advises him not to get emotionally invested in the callers . Andy takes a call from Chloe , a 16 @-@ year @-@ old girl with problems at home . Chloe says that she has taken a drug overdose , and Andy sings " Shine " by Take That to her , but , when he finishes , Chloe is no longer on the line . He immediately takes a call from an elderly woman distraught that her cat has died , but responds insensitively , and hangs up .

The following day , George thinks Liz is breaking the rules by taking a personal call ; he gets angry and wrestles the handset from her . Later , Andy is upset that he listened to Chloe in her final moments , and Liz , who has made a complaint about George 's conduct , tells him that she took a call from an ex @-@ soldier , in tears because his mother committed suicide following the death of her cat . Andy realises that the man 's mother is the caller from the previous night . George advises that Andy will not face any repercussions , and asks Andy to help Michael , new to the centre , with his first call . Chloe calls in and speaks to Michael , again claiming that she has taken an overdose . Andy snatches the phone and shouts at Chloe , hanging up on her .

Following her argument with George , Liz is asked to leave CSL , and a small party is held in the workspace . During the party , Chloe calls the helpline again , asking to speak to Andy . Andy tells Chloe that her hoax call caused an old woman 's death , but Chloe says that this was Andy 's fault . She repeats what Andy had said to the old woman about her cat . Andy stays late in his cubicle and

goes to George 's office , realising that " Chloe " must be someone who works at CSL . He accuses Joanne , who has just arrived , but she says she came back for her bag . He plans to get evidence from the CCTV footage and contact the police . Looking through CCTV footage , he and Joanne discover that it is George who made the calls . Unbeknownst to them , George is approaching the office ; he hastily leaves when he sees Andy and Joanne inside .

George does not arrive for work the next day . Joanne shows in a new volunteer , Glen , who is replacing Liz . Having found out that George has made similar calls to CSL for years , Andy plans to go to the police . Andy answers the phone , and it is George . In Chloe 's voice , George says that he just wanted someone to listen to him , then warns that he has told the dead woman 's son where Andy works . In the background , Glen stands , and points a gun at Andy 's head .

= = Reception = =

Critics responded positively to " Cold Comfort " , though several characterised it as weaker than previous episodes in the series . David Chater , writing in The Times , described " Cold Comfort " as " a breather " after the " small masterpieces " of " The Trial of Elizabeth Gadge " and " The 12 Days of Christine " . He said that " Cold Comfort " offers " a promising set @-@ up , but ... doesn 't unfold with the same simple , logical elegance as others in the series " . Andrew Billen , also writing for The Times , gave the episode three out of five stars , considering it weaker than is typical for Inside No. 9 . John Robinson , who reviewed the episode for The Guardian , felt that though " the episode has the tools to ratchet up the suspense " , it " lacks both the plausibility and element of surprise that characterise the best of this series " .

Patrick Mulkern , on the other hand , who was writing for the Radio Times , described " Cold Comfort " as " warped brilliance " . He said that " any real helpline volunteers watching this episode may well wince , but it remains gripping throughout " . Reviewers in The Sunday Times called the episode " another corker " , and the freelance journalist Dan Owen called the episode " easily the funniest " since " La Couchette " , awarding it three out of four stars . He characterised it as mostly successful in its aims , and summarised it as a " memorable " and " well @-@ executed " comedy @-@ drama .

Robinson felt that the writers had " dial [ed] back the celebrity guests " for the episode , while Phoebe @-@ Jane Boyd , writing for the entertainment website Den of Geek , said that the episode " had another set of fantastic guest stars " . The comedy critic Bruce Dessau praised the performances in the episode ; Billen said that Horrocks 's performance was " particularly good " , and critics in The Sunday Times said that Horrocks was " on fine form " . Commentators also commended the episode 's writing , though Owen felt that the plot took a while to " get going " .

The television critic Julia Raeside discussed the unusual style of " Cold Comfort " , saying that " You could argue [that the writers] are at the stage in their careers where they don 't need to experiment . No one else makes television like them and yet still they push themselves . " For Clare Murphy , writing in the Daily Mirror , the episode " makes great use of CCTV split @-@ screen footage " . Dessau said that the set @-@ up gave the episode " its haunting flavour " . Viewers do not just see Andy , but also streams from other cameras , which , for Dessau , " makes the viewer both intrigued and anxious " . Boyd , too , claimed that the episode played on the " inherent creepiness " of CCTV footage . She said that the split @-@ screen set @-@ up increased the tension , and that the " gimmick is a good one " ; though it could " have worked well as a pleasing novelty on its own , [it] also makes this ' whodunit ' / ' who 's doing it ' a refreshingly inventive take on the genre " .

Critics writing for The Sunday Times said that set @-@ up " proves very effective for the denouement " , which Mulkern described as " a creepy pay @-@ off " . Chris Bennion of The Independent said that the ending was testament to the fact that the writers " know how to play their audience like a fiddle " . Billen was less impressed , saying that " the ultimate twist in the tale was crude , and the insight that those who offer help need it most just a little banal - by this series ' standards , at least " . Owen , similarly , found the motives of " Chloe " unconvincing , and considered " the surprisingly nihilistic final shot perhaps not fully earned or plausible " , but

confessed that the episode was able to " outmanoeuvre [sic] " him , as he did not foresee the ending .

= = = Cited sources = = =

Pemberton , Steve ; Shearsmith , Reece (2015) . Cold Comfort (episode commentary) . Steve & Reece IN9 (via SoundCloud) . Retrieved 20 March 2016 .