

Beryl and the Casting Couch

By Dante Harker

For an automated email, this third 'your advert breaches our terms and conditions' message felt particularly pointed. Not just that, it almost seemed smug as it declared that Jamie's advert wasn't good enough for their site.

What was so wrong in advertising for potential porn stars, Jamie thought as he looked around his small, yet perfectly formed studio apartment, or at least that's how the agent had sold it to him the previous summer.

Right now, all his mess and clutter was on show. 'This won't do', Jamie declared as he stood up from the sofa. His movement disturbed a large bluebottle which buzzed in frustration as it flew away from the remains of last night's pizza.

Beryl, his woefully overweight ginger cat opened one eye, glared at Jamie for the interruption to her all-day nap, closed it once more and buried her head under her paw.

'You suit your name, don't you?' Jamie said as he stroked Beryl's back. Without opening an eye, the cat lashed out and Jamie whipped his hand away. 'Yes, you do, you spiteful, lumpy shit.'

'Just like my boss at work, she's a fat lumpy shit, too.' Jamie, one of the 'grunts' in the HR team – Beryl's word – hated his boss.

She was a manager based on years in the job, rather than competence, and made Jamie's life a living hell. Her favourite jibe, 'oh shamey, Jamie, what have you done now?' made Jamie long for escape. He would, of course, report her to the HR department, if she didn't manage the HR department. And he couldn't risk going above her head, as no senior manager had the balls to cross her.

'I really should apply for another job, Beryl,' Jamie said as he cleared away the pizza box then began loading the dishwasher.

The apartment had its kitchen running down one wall, a settee facing a unit for his TV in the middle and a bed at the far end. There was one window with a view over a park.

'It's not much, but it's mine,' Jamie said, though, as he did, a wave of anxiety rushed through his system. He knew all too

well that the huge mortgage he had on the place meant it would not be his for many, many years.

'Fine Beryl, it's more mine than most of my friends have, that's for sure.' At 27 and living in the capital, most of his peers lived in shared places. One friend shared with six others, yet still paid nearly £1,500 a month and for that, he didn't even have direct access to his kitchen. He had the pleasure of walking through one of the other tenant's bedrooms or outside into the street and back in again. And the other tenant was a huge fan of self-love, which did make the situation even more awkward.

The dishwasher full, Jamie topped up Beryl's food bowl and went back to check his laptop. The second disturbance, as he slumped down into the settee, forced Beryl to open both eyes, send Jamie an 'I would kill you if it wasn't too much effort' glare and then drag herself over to the food bowl.

'Oh, don't do that Beryl, just eat the food out the dish! You don't have to fling it onto the floor first.'

When Beryl didn't reply, Jamie tutted and refreshed his mail.

'Advert accepted.'

'Oh my goodness, Beryl, look, how exciting is that?' The cat didn't look up from her food, but that didn't stop Jamie giddily clicking through to his account on the site that had so graciously allowed him to advertise. He had tried several sites for his advert and most had said no, until now.

His long wiry fingers, reminiscent of the rest of his body, tapped away at the keys.

'Why is the web always on go slow?' he asked Beryl as she finished pushing the last biscuit out of her bowl. She didn't eat this one, instead, she launched it under the kitchen counter, out of reach so that it would eventually rot and smell.

'You're right, it is 6 pm, stupid super-fast city internet isn't super-fast when every muppet in the city is using it.' Rarely was anything Beryl did super-fast, Jamie's Nan, from whom he had inherited the cat just after he had moved in, delighted in feeding the beast human food.

For no fathomable reason the cat hated Jamie, unlike Jamie's nan who loved Jamie dearly and left him a decent sum of money in her will. Not enough to give up work, but enough to put the deposit down on his apartment and fund his aspiring porn empire.

In fact, the only time Beryl let Jamie touch her was when she wanted to sit on the sofa, a jump she could not manage thanks to endless roast dinners – 'but it's her favourite' – Jamie's Nan would declare.

Now eaten, and back at the base of the sofa, Jamie offered a cautious hand for fear of being slashed, and hoisted Beryl onto the sofa, where she pawed and pulled the cushions until she finally sat down.

If a bowl full of cat biscuits rather than a chunk of prime beef wasn't enough to upset the cat, Jamie insisted on calling her Beryl, rather than her given name of Trixie Poo which, despite how much he loved his nan he just couldn't bring himself to call her that.

Though the cat couldn't speak, she did appear to understand perfectly that Jamie used a different name, and of course, knew the dry biscuits weren't a full cooked dinner.

As the advert site loaded, Jamie ran his fingers through his mop of thick blond hair and then clicked his way through to his account.

'Gay for Pay Porn Stars Wanted – Must Be Fit, Hung and Willing – Various Roles'.

The advert gave details of his master plan. Not that it was hugely masterful, he wasn't about to reinvent the wheel. He just wanted to make good quality, amateur porn and make money from ad revenue.

Over the last year, the one thing that had kept him from flinging himself out of the office window or beating his boss to death with one of Barbara, the finance manager's, 'delicious' cupcakes had been searching for the perfect side hustle.

For a while, he lost himself down the rabbit hole that is 'forex' – day trading foreign currency that, according to the adverts, could make him a millionaire in a week for only the small investment of £447.

After many hours of research, and endless messages on Instagram from traders who were so rich, they had nothing better to do than spam people online and help them become so rich too. He gave forex up as a bad job and moved on with his search.

He toyed with the idea of selling NFTs as these were the 'next big thing'. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not quite understand what a non-fungible token actually was so, yet again, he gave that up as a bad job.

And then he asked himself what he wanted from a side hustle. The initial answer was of course money, but more than that, what did he really want? If it was just money, he knew he could look for another HR job elsewhere, with five years' experience now was probably the time to move. But that just meant another bad boss, another boring job and perhaps an office without suicide locks on the windows which could well end badly.

So, if not money, then what? Adventure, interest, a bit of fun. Something that wasn't endless nights on his Xbox or thinking that he should put some effort into finding a girlfriend, or at least sex, and then ordering another pizza.

If it weren't for the fact that he was naturally bone skinny, he would be the size of a house due to his poor diet, lack of exercise, and the oestrogen that leached into the city water.

He did, however, LOVE porn. Hours upon hours upon hours of porn. Not so much the actual act of wanking, that felt far too much effort these days, but the enthusiasm, the passion, the artistry. Well, perhaps not art, but he certainly knew what made good or bad porn. He loved it so much he would often just leave it playing on his laptop as he blasted his way around Call of Duty.

He was a straight guy, though he didn't like to admit this fact in these times. He didn't quite understand why those who

were oppressed couldn't strive for equality by aiming to make everyone equal, rather than making their case by bashing everyone else down. But this wasn't an opinion he voiced. As a straight white male, it was safer these days to not have an opinion at all.

Yet being a straight white male meant his porn of choice was straight porn. However, he knew there was no way he had the guts to audition female porn stars. He could barely bring himself to swipe right on Tinder for fear of the crippling sense of rejection that might follow.

So, the idea of inviting fit, assertive women around to his flat, even if he was offering to pay them, was much too much for his weak constitution. And, without women, it would make it tricky to make straight porn.

Well, he knew he could make solo porn with one guy for straight women, but the money seemed to be in gay porn. The whole subject had taken hours upon hours of research.

Thankfully, he had learned many years ago that most office work is just 'busy' work. Looking busy, making out that what you do is super important, getting lots of opinions on your work, having meetings to set up future meetings, nonsense stuff that allowed for endless hours of free time to research on his phone.

And a story about a frat house in the states where the boys were funding their way from college led Jamie to believe he was onto a winner.

After hours of deliberation and some slightly freaky late-night chats with randoms he played with on Call of Duty, he had decided to call his porn studio 'Capital Guys' – simple, and quite frankly he was in the capital, and it was porn with guys.

Beryl reached out a paw and for no reason, other than being a cat, dug her claws into Jamie's leg.

'What the hell was that for? I wasn't bothering you!' he snapped and then decided to take the gesture as one urging him to crack on. At the bottom of the advert, it listed views. And, though only thirty minutes since the ad went live, there were already fifty views.

On a dark corner of the internet, he had found that the going rate for a porn star was between £300 and £1,000 a session. Though, at £300 a session you weren't really getting a star, more so a wannabe looking to dip their toes, well, their dick into the water.

His ad very much called out for the £300 guys as he had a limited budget and he wanted to stretch it as far as possible.

After the deposit on his apartment and upgrading his console and TV, his inheritance from his Nan left him with enough money to film around ten twenty-minute scenes.

Back in the office, over many hours where his assigned work was easy to finish quickly, and easier still to drag out for hours, he had learned video editing.

Luckily, though he worked in a shared office, he backed onto a wall which left his computer screen out of sight of prying eyes. And though, if you were quick enough, you could sidle up at the side of his desk and get a view of his work, his boss Beryl was not the quick type. She was more the gasping, heavy-footed type, which always gave him plenty of time to flick his screen over to something boring.

'What you up to, Shamey Jamie, hiding away in the corner?' she would often bellow as she stomped her way towards him. More than once she had tried to remove him from his privileged private position, but no one in the office would swap for various tragic reasons.

'I really can't sit that far away from the toilet, not with my bladder!'

'With my gammy knee? Are you mad, I'd never squeeze myself behind that desk.'

'I honestly can't, I'm pretty sure that part of the office is haunted.'

On a recent visit back to his family in the Barnsley area, Jamie had met up with an old friend, Ben, who was home seeing family too and told him his master plan.

'Aren't you freaked out by watching guys have sex?' Ben asked, with no real judgement in his voice.

'I don't think so, it seems an interesting way to make money and, to be honest, I'm pretty numb when it comes to sex these days.'

'That's living in London for you, it's enough to numb the soul of any good northern man,' Ben replied.

Though Ben had literally left their hometown to join the circus, or at least Cirque Du Soleil and now spent his days flinging himself around on a trapeze, and Jamie doubted Ben felt quite so indifferent towards his life as someone who had spent five years working in HR.

Jamie didn't mind that it was men, the whole thing felt strange and out there and his fun little secret.

This meant, when bellowing Beryl flung some paperwork down on his desk and snapped 'add this to the list of the things you're going to do slowly', he could at least smile inwardly at how good it felt knowing he spent so much work time on his own special project.

Refreshing the ad page whipped the counter up to three hundred views, and with it, his inbox pinged with three messages in succession. All, though with varying levels of pleasantries, asked if the audition would be filmed and paid.

'Oh, oh, Beryl, look at that, messages already,' Jamie said and braved prodding the fluffy cat's belly.

'What do you think? Pay, film, what?' He added, though this time he left his hand there a little too long and even without opening her eyes, Beryl lashed out and caught his finger with her claw.

'Ouch, you little swine, I should turn you into mittens!' Jamie shoved his finger in his mouth to ease the sting and deliberated his answer. He picked up his phone and proceeded to use that to tap Beryl's paw. The hefty cat whipped her tail in anger but didn't strike.

'I guess if it's £300 for a full session of, say, a couple of hours, it would be fair to offer £50 for a basic audition.'

Beryl held her tail high in the air and rigid, something she often did when annoyed. Which meant she did this a lot. The phallic nature of her action made Jamie wonder what an audition involved. In his mind, he had gotten as far as the guy comes in, introduces himself, drops his pants and if all is in order then job done.

Though this had quickly led him down a dark path of what it meant if everything wasn't in order, like if their cock looked like a battered chip shop sausage, for example, and he had moved onto other thoughts so not fully thinking the audition through.

These thoughts mostly involved telling bellowing Beryl to shove her job and that he was now a wealthy porn baron. He would give her the finger as his gold-plated helicopter collected him from the office. He had far too much thinking time at work.

He typed out his offer of £50 and said yes, the audition would be filmed and then pasted it into the three replies. As he did, three more, basically asking the same thing pinged into his inbox and he sent them the same response.

A rather abusive reply at the £50 offering left him feeling cold. Thankfully, it had started in English and finished in what he thought must be Russian, so he got the gist, but not

the full force of the disgruntled porn star's venom.

Then there were no other emails for half an hour, which gave him enough time to order a meat feast pizza large enough to feed a small village.

The next reply, polite though in challenged English, read:

'Sounds gud man, am 22, fit, hung & can fuk like a total beast. Wot time do u want me over? Daz.'

Wondering for a moment which beast the guy might mean because there's a huge difference between a fox going at it and an elephant, Jamie realised that thought was stupid and replied.

'That's great, can you send over some pics and we can go from there.'

In his excitement, Jamie tapped Beryl again with the phone, this time she lashed out and got the back of his hand.

'Seriously, I'm making you into mittens, you evil witch! Though, to be honest, there's enough of you for mittens and a record-breaking scarf!'

As Jamie nursed the back of his hand, a reply came from Daz with three pictures attached. The first was a face pic which he turned to show Beryl.

'What do you think? You're a girl after all.' Beryl licked her paw and blanked Jamie's question.

'Well, he looks okay to me, sharp cheekbones and I do wonder what's going on under that cap, but he looks okay?' Not actually being attracted to men now seemed like a slight hindrance so to rectify the issue Jamie typed into google:

'List of best looking men in the world'

'Henry Cavill, Jamie Dornan, Jake Gyllenhaal, Ryan Gosling,' Jamie read off the list. 'Well, I can't say he looks like any of these, though, wait a minute, look at this one.'

Again, Jamie turned the screen towards the cat and read 'Timothée Chalamet'. I guess if you put this one in a baseball cap, and gave him much darker, much scarier eyes, you'd not be far away.'

The next two pictures both elicited at first a gasp followed by a heavy exhale.

'I guess when he said hung, he meant hung – look at that Beryl, it's like a washing-up liquid bottle and not economy size!' Beryl didn't look, she just tucked her head under her paw again and went to sleep.

The last picture disturbed him, well both disturbed and amazed.

'I mean, come on cat, how do you get a shot that close to your anus, and also, dear lord why?!?'

The pic reminded him of the time he had spent ten minutes on Grindr. It seemed sensible to look for future gay porn stars on a gay hook up app, but before he'd had a chance to fill out his profile a very old, very fat man had sent him pics of areas he doubted saw any light without the help of a torch and scaffold.

'Well, to say he's hung is an understatement. He looks fit enough and in his own words, he fucks like a beast, and he doesn't look far off what an internet list says is a handsome guy. What more do we want, Beryl?'

Beryl, bored of the endless questions aimed in her direction, and still unable to speak human, pushed her bulk off the sofa and dragged herself back over to the food bowl.

At her lazy meow and light tap of the bowl, Jamie said, 'no, you've been fed, you know what the vet said? Only controlled amounts of food.' Beryl sat down and closed her eyes.

'Hi Daz, these pics look great, to repeat what it says in the ad, I'm new to this, but I have funding and I'm keen to get started with keen amateurs and make something new and cool. So, when are you free?'

Jamie also had a pretty funky Panasonic HVX 200 which, though second-hand, worked perfectly. The internet had told him that the first incarnations of this camera had 'built the San Fernando Valley porn industry,' so it felt promising.

Within minutes Daz replied, 'Wel am free naw, ur ad said ur in Plumstead, I cud get to u in bout an hr?'

'Do you think he talks like that in real life cat?' Jamie asked Beryl.

With a burst of energy only reserved for food and slashings, Beryl bashed her paw into her bowl and bounced it off the wall.

'The answer's still no. Controlled amounts, remember, and you're right, he can speak how he likes with a monster like

that.'

'Shall we press the fuck it button? I think we should press the fuck it button.' And, with that, Jamie sent his address, waited for a confirmation that Daz was on his way and began rushing around the apartment to get it in good order.

Before he had finished emptying the dishwasher, the buzzer went.

'Tits, he's really early,' Jamie said, though it turned out to be the pizza he had forgotten he had ordered.

'Well, I'm full of nerves now,' he told Beryl as he half-filled her food bowl. 'You better have something or you're going to be a right moody girl when he arrives.'

Jamie envisaged the cat going for Daz's face, or worse, something lower down, though dismissed that idea as he knew she was much too lazy for that. Jamie tucked the pizza away in the cupboard and finished cleaning the apartment.

When the buzzer next sounded, Jamie picked up the phone and looked at the tiny monitor at the entrance door. A tall lad in a tracksuit looked into the camera, no smile, just dark staring eyes.

After a pause, Jamie looked at Beryl who had again pushed most of her food onto the floor before starting to munch it down, and before clicking the intercom he said to himself 'okay then, this is it, ready your chunky self.'

'Come on up!' Jamie said into the phone trying to hide the nerves in his voice.

Moments later, there was a heavy knock on the door.

Though his eyes were dark, in the light of the apartment they turned out to be the deepest of blue. The colour only picked up when the light fell on Daz's face.

The deep blue eyes shone even brighter when Daz smiled, his face friendly, warm and cheerful. Not the scary vision Jamie had pictured in his head.

He realised the dangers of having a stranger over to his place, but he really didn't want to tell anyone what he was up to. Plus, he didn't see it as any different to a Tinder or Grindr hookup.

'How's it going, pretty fucking weird this don't you think? It's my first audition, but I'm totally up for it.'

'Well, that's us in the same boat then, mate. My first one too, but we've all gotta start somewhere. Do you want a drink?'

Daz followed Jamie into the kitchen area, 'yeah, love one. You got a beer? It might ease the nerves.'

Opening the fridge, Jamie pulled out a couple of cans of Guinness. He wasn't much of a drinker as he found the more he drank, the worse he got at Call of Duty. But his nan always told him that the stuff would put hairs on his chest and his skinny body could really benefit from the insulation.

'Can you stick us some porn on mate? I think it'd help with the audition.' Daz said as he opened his can. He took a large swig and then noticed Beryl.

'Oh, wow, look how cute your cat is? Though fuck mate, I'd stop feeding her on chocolate she's huge! Still, you're so beautiful, aren't you?' And before Jamie could offer a warning Daz put down his can and picked up Beryl.

'Look at you, so sweet and heavy, and so cute,' Daz pulled Beryl to his chest and gave her a huge hug.

'Mate, she's not the most friendly, I'd watch out for her claws,' Jamie said at last, when he had gotten over the shock that Beryl wasn't locked onto the lad's face trying to

claw out one of his eyes.

'What you talking about? Look how sweet she is,' Daz said as he managed to hold her with one arm like a baby and pick up his can with the other.

The attention Daz showed Beryl softened his tracksuit wearing roughness and made his face beam even more.

'Well, it's your funeral when she turns,' Jamie said, but the lad was having none of it and went to sit down on the sofa.

'So, how do you want to play this? Want me to strip, get hard, let you have a look at the goods, perhaps bang one out for you so you can see my load?'

The lad's directness took Jamie back, and he wasn't sure how to reply. He had spent much more time thinking of his porn studio name and wondering if gold-plated helicopters could actually fly than the logistics of the audition.

'Yeah, totally, that sounds ideal' he mumbled, not knowing how else to reply.

'Got that porn then mate?'

'Do you want gay or straight?' Jamie asked as he clicked through to Pornhub on his TV.

'Fuck mate, I don't think I've seen porn on such a huge TV, it's nearly as big as the apartment, oh, and gay all the way here, so some beefy dudes with big dicks should do it.'

Jamie typed in beefy into the search bar at the top and a huge selection of videos appeared on the screen.

'This one do?' He asked as he clicked through and a couple of hairy muscular guys with dicks like police batons filled the screen.

'Yeah, that'll do it, a little creepy on this scale and fuck mate the 4K isn't doing them much favours but let's give it a go.'

Moving Beryl off his lap, Daz stood up and started to unzip his tracksuit.

'Don't you want to film this?' he asked, as he watched Beryl half fall, half jump off the sofa and walk over to his feet.

'Oh, shit yeah.' Jamie opened a cupboard and got out his fancy porn camera and sat opposite Daz.

'When you're ready,' Jamie said, holding up the camera.

Under the tracksuit top, Daz had a light blue t-shirt with the word 'vacant' on the front which he quickly removed to reveal a slim yet toned body.

'What do you do for a living mate?' Jamie asked, the moans and groans from the beefy men on screen felt unsettling in such a small place.

He turned the sound down a little as Daz said, 'I'm a delivery driver mate, a lot of rushing around and carrying heavy parcels so keeps me in shape' and he ran his hands up and down his abs.

'Beryl, come on out, you're getting in the way,' Jamie said to the cat.

'Ah, what an amazing name, why's she called that?' Daz said as he pulled down his tracksuit bottoms. Under them, he wore a tight pair of red boxer briefs that showed off his huge outline.

'She reminds me of someone at work, my boss, and my boss hates me and is a chunky lump and the cat hates me, so it seemed fitting.'

'Oh, don't be silly, I can't imagine she hates anyone,' Daz said as he reached down and gave Beryl a stroke. She

purred at his touch and then brushed her head up against his leg.

'Do you want to see it soft, or shall I get it hard and then get it out?'

Again, it was a question Jamie wasn't ready for and the more the men moaned in the background and Daz stood confidently and half-naked in front of him, the more he thought he was in over his head.

'Err... not sure mate, whatever you think is best.'

Daz dropped his pants and let his beast flap free. The huge member hung low past his balls and bashed against the inside of his leg.

Jamie gasped.

'I know mate, a great piece of meat don't you think? If you wanted, you could fluff me to get it hard,' Daz said, giving his dick a shake from side to side.

'Fluff me?' Jamie questioned.

'You know, be my fluffer, that guy who helps porn stars get hard, and helps keep them hard between takes.' Daz bent

down again and gave Beryl a squeeze and the cat took every bit of attention.

'Oh, shit, right?' Jamie said, shocked at the offer. It really wasn't for him, but he was more shocked by how his cat could be so fucking friendly with a total stranger and try to kill him at every opportunity.

'Right, no, the thing is, I'm not actually gay. I just love the idea of building a porn business and if I'm totally honest, girls make me too nervous to film straight porn.'

'Shit mate, you really have no idea what you're doing!' Daz said and pulled his pants back up.

In his mind now, the gold-plated helicopter crashed into his office building taking no one but him, and his hope of a porn empire with it.

Jamie waited for the lad to get angry or have a go at him for wasting his time. But Daz only smiled brighter, and his blue eyes glowed in the apartment's downlights.

'Well, you know what you need? A partner, and a gay one at that. You have the camera, you have funds, you have a place, you just need someone to help get you started.'

'And that's you?' Jamie asked.

'Too fucking right, I mean, I'm pretty sure I'd make a great porn star, I just don't have the backing. And look, even your cat loves me,' Daz said as he picked up Beryl once more and pulled her to his naked chest.

'Well, if my evil cat loves you, what more do I need?' Jamie replied as he saw that helicopter taking off once more.

'Excellent mate, and is that pizza I smell, me and your cat here are starving!'