

Yen

Written by Anna Jordan

DRAMA

Characters:

JENNIFER: (16, Welsh, a caretaker and animal lover, lives in the flat across from Hench in Felsbam)

HENCH: (16, an avid videogamer, looks after his younger brother, Bobbie, where they live in a flat alone in Felsbam estate)

It is Christmas Eve. Three months later. Jennifer sits on Hounslow Heath under a tree. She looks different. She wears jeans and a puffa jacket, her hair slicked back in a high ponytail, a little sharper; a little more like your average teenager. She is using her scarf to sit on. The air is crisp and cold and the heath deserted. She is reading a book. The wind blows a bit and she looks up at the sky. Suddenly, Hench appears. He looks older, more tired. He is dressed in winter clothes too, still scruffy but not quite so much. His hands are wedged deep in his pockets. He stops dead in his tracks. She is smoking and laughing at something in her book. He drinks it in.

HENCH: You're here.

Jennifer is startled. She throws her fag, closes her book, jumps up, begins to gather her stuff as quickly as she can.

Wait! Don't go! –

JENNIFER: I have to / go –

HENCH: PLEASE! –

JENNIFER: I need to –

She goes to walk away and he gets in front of her.

HENCH: Jenny, please I have to –

Hench touches her briefly – not meaning to really.

JENNIFER: DON'T TOUCH ME!

He backs off immediately, putting both hands up in surrender, clearly shaken at her reaction.

HENCH: I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.

Pause. They both breathe deeply.

If I promise to stay here, will you talk to me for a minute? Please? Please?

Beat.

Yen?

JENNIFER: Don't call me that –

HENCH: Will you stay?

JENNIFER: I don't want to –

HENCH: I won't hurt you –

JENNIFER: It's too late –

HENCH: I would never never never hurt you. Please?

Jennifer doesn't move, but looks at the ground. Beat.

I've been walking here, on the heath, every day for three months. Looking for your tree.

JENNIFER: Looking for me?

HENCH: Just to talk. Just to tell you –

JENNIFER: What? WHAT?

Hench takes a deep breath.

HENCH: You look different.

JENNIFER: *(quickly)* I am different.

Beat.

HENCH: I mean your clothes. Where's your dad's jumpers and that?

JENNIFER: Michelle and my mum took them to the charity shop.

HENCH: Shit.

JENNIFER: They thought it was better for me.

HENCH: *(hoping she will share the joke a little)* Bastards.

JENNIFER: They've been alright actually. Keith and Michelle. My mum had a nervous breakdown. They were quite good with her. Got us off the estate; in a little flat. And Kayleigh's been nice.

HENCH: Is it?

JENNIFER: Yeah.

HENCH: Is that Kayleigh's jacket?

JENNIFER: Yeah. *(Coldly.)* Family's important – don't you think?

Beat.

HENCH: So where you living now then?

Jennifer looks at him, incredulously. Hench realises he has asked a stupid question. Pause.

What you reading?

JENNIFER: A book.

Jennifer goes to leave again but HENCH stops her with his question.

HENCH: Can't you stay?

JENNIFER: Why?

HENCH: So we can have a... chat?

JENNIFER: A chat? A CHAT? (Very angry, incredulous.) Do you know how much pain you have caused me? Do you know how much pain you and your family have caused me and my family? DO YOU?

Suddenly she takes a step forward.

Look. (*Points to her mouth.*) Two new teeth. Had to get them replaced because your brother knocked them out with the dog chain. I can't keep my dinner down most days. The only thing I can eat without feeling sick is Twix. HA! Twix! Taliban's favourite. And I feel so ugly inside myself. You know when you have an apple and most of it's okay but one part of it is brown and rotten? So you cut that bit out and then you can eat the rest. Well, that's what I'd like to do. There's a part of my body that's rotten and I want to cut it out but I can't.

She puts her hand between her legs and grips. Then she starts to cry.

And my dreams. My fucking dreams! I dream about Daddy's face, and your face. I dream about your brother wearing my daddy's clothes. I dream Taliban's at my window. I dream I wake up in your bed and I'm covered in blood.

Beat.

I dream about you in that suit.

HENCH: What suit?

JENNIFER: From the court. Why wouldn't you look at me?

HENCH: I couldn't.

JENNIFER: It made me feel more dirty.

Pause. This hits HENCH hardest. He moves towards her but she moves quickly away from him.

She sits on the floor and cries into her hands.

HENCH: Can I come and sit with you?

JENNIFER: (*through tears*) No.

HENCH: You could put your head in my lap.

JENNIFER: NO!

Pause. Jennifer gets herself together a little.

HENCH: I wasn't even going to go to the court. I thought you might feel like it meant I was against you or something. I went for my mum. I didn't know what to do. I wish someone had told me what to do.

JENNIFER: You're very loyal to her, aren't you?

Pause. HENCH feels destroyed. He makes small talk; nothing has ever felt so futile.

HENCH: Where are you going tomorrow?

JENNIFER: Michelle's mum's in Slough.

Beat.

You?

HENCH: Home. Just another day, innit? Christmas.

JENNIFER: Where's home?

HENCH: (*confused*) The flat.

JENNIFER: What, with all the windows boarded up?

HENCH: Just that one window.

JENNIFER: Someone smashed it. I saw the graffiti too. I thought you'd gone.

HENCH: Nah.

JENNIFER: (unable to hide her concern) Are you there on your own?

HENCH: Yeah.

Beat.

JENNIFER: Aren't you scared?

HENCH: Nah. Not scared. It's just kids, innit?

They look at each other, realising what he has just said. Pause.

JENNIFER: Do you go and see him?

HENCH: No.

JENNIFER: Will you?

HENCH: Don't know.

JENNIFER: They made an example out of him.

HENCH: He deserved it. I fucking hate him.

JENNIFER: No you don't.

Beat.

How's Taliban?

Pause.

HENCH: He's okay. He's good. Well, he misses you I think. Won't come out of his room.

JENNIFER: You're walking him though, right?

HENCH: Right.

JENNIFER: Right. I really need to go now.

HENCH: Am I ever going to see you again?

Beat.

JENNIFER: No.

Totally non-aggressively, he stands in her path.

HENCH: Please can I just tell you something first? It's like a memory I had. From ages ago.

JENNIFER: Look, HENCH, I have to / go –

HENCH: Please!

JENNIFER: (sighs) Go on.

HENCH: Well.

Beat.

Thing is...

You know how we always play computer loads? Even in the summer when the other kids were out on their bikes, we were in, playing PlayStation. With the curtains drawn, right, cos the sun hits the screen?

JENNIFER: Right.

HENCH: This one night I must have played all night. Cos it was just getting dark when I started playing it. I didn't piss. Didn't have a drink... Just was on it, you know?

JENNIFER: So?

HENCH: So I got up and lit a fag. And I pulled the curtain back. And – fuck I can't... describe it, Jen. It's like the whole room was – was filled with light. Sunlight.

JENNIFER: Yes, and?

HENCH: And then I sat on the sofa and I blew the smoke into the middle of the room, like where all the light was. And... I just watched it making shapes in the light. I couldn't take my eyes off it. What's that called? That word when you can't take your eyes off something?

Jennifer shrugs.

Is it memorised?

JENNIFER: Mesmerised.

HENCH: (*a little embarrassed*) Yeah. Yeah. I think that is it. I just watched.

Beat.

JENNIFER: (*impatiently*) Then what did you do?

HENCH: I pulled the curtain over and I carried on playing.

Beat.

JENNIFER: Why are you telling me this?

Hench begins to get restless – trying to express himself and failing.

HENCH: Because, I felt like that.

JENNIFER: Like what?

HENCH: Like, when you walked in it felt like that had happened.

JENNIFER: Like what had happened?

HENCH: When you walked in that day.

JENNIFER: What do you mean, Hench???

Beat.

HENCH: It felt like somebody had opened the curtains.

Beat.

She goes. Hench looks after her.