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LINE

by Craig Kenworthy

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

BRENT/BRENDA; a counselor between 30 and 50 years of age
DAN; an underemployed young man in his early-mid 20s
JENNY; a substitute teacher in her late 20’s to early 30’s

SETTING

A “Crisis” Center
LINE
by Craig Kenworthy

(AT RISE: DAN is seated at a desk Stage Left with BRENT standing to his left. On the desk is a phone with a headset, a notepad, a three-ring binder, a newspaper and a paper coffee cup.)

Brent
Look, Dan, don’t worry. It’s forwarded to my cell phone.

Dan
Then why even have me here?

Brent
Just so if somebody comes in, someone is here.

(BRENT exits Stage Left. DAN picks up the newspaper and thumbs through it until he reaches the classifieds. HE takes a swig of coffee as HE reads through the classifieds.)

Dan
(Blanches) Why doesn’t it ever say, “Nine hours short of bachelor’s degree required?”

(SOUND: Phone Ringing. DAN puts the paper down, looks at the phone and picks up the receiver on the 6th ring.)

Dan
Uh, this is Dan… I mean suicide hotline.

(LIGHTS UP on JENNY seated Stage Right in a kitchen chair, speaking into her phone.)

Jenny
You know what, never mind. What’s the point?

Dan
(Fumbles for three-ring binder, opens it) Wait, what’s your name?

Jenny
It’s Jenny. Is Dan your real name?

Dan
Yes. I am kind of new. In fact, if you want to call back, my friend Brent is… (Flips pages in binder.)

Jenny
You don’t want to talk to me. Maybe you’re right.
Dan
No. No, I just thought you might want someone more experienced. How are you feeling today, Jenny? *(Lays binder flat)*

Jenny
Well, I am about to end it all, Dan. How do you think I’m feeling?

Dan
Sorry. *(Reading from binder)* Where are you, Jenny?

Jenny
At my apartment.

Dan
I mean where is your apartment? *(Looks at phone)* You’ve blocked the caller ID.

Jenny
That’s kind a personal question, for the first time we’ve talked, isn’t it, Dan? I know why you want to know. So you can call the police and send them here.

Dan
What if I promise not to do that?

Jenny
You’d be lying.

Yeah.

Dan
Where are you, Dan?

Dan
Uh, I’m at the social services building at 7th and Main. The address is *(Looks at binder, reading)* 121 South 7th. Do you want to come by?

Jenny
Is that how this works, Dan? Drop in service for the suicidal?

Dan
Did you want to write down the address here? There are counselors here.

Jenny
I don’t think I need the address, Dan.

Dan
I’d feel better if you wrote it down, Jenny.
Jenny
You’d feel better. Well, let me get a pen. I wouldn’t want you to feel bad about this.

*(JENNY writes the address on her left hand.)*

Dan
That’s not what I meant. Jenny, tell me why you’re thinking about… killing yourself?

Jenny
Well, Dan. Last week, I got home after a day as a substitute P.E. teacher. You ever been a substitute, Dan? You know where you aren’t really prepared for it because it isn’t what you do?

Dan
*(Flips pages in binder)* I think I know what you mean.

Jenny
See, my degree is in Art. So, when I got home from that horrible day my boyfriend had moved out. He just… he just left.

Dan
I’m sorry. Had you been together long?

Jenny
Long enough. Six months. The worst part is that he was right to leave. He didn’t deserve… (Crying)

Dan
He didn’t deserve you.

Jenny
*(Soft laughter)* Yes, Dan, he didn’t deserve the worthless piece of shit that I am.

*(SOUND: thud.)*

Dan
Jenny, what was that noise? Jenny?

Jenny
Calm down, Dan. Just the newspaper hitting the front door.

Dan
Don’t you want to go get it? Garfield is actually funny today.

Jenny
Well, that’s great. Fine, I’ll get it.

*(JENNY exits. DAN picks up his cell phone and dials BRENT.)*
Dan

OK. *(Dialing)* Brent, get back here. Someone called and I am on the phone with her.

*(JENNY returns a moment later with five rolled-up papers and drops them on the floor. In the* 
*DAN, hearing the noise, sets down his cell phone and looks at binder.)*

Jenny

So, I’ve spent a week trying to come up with a reason to live. Want to hear my list?

Of course I do. *(Long pause)* Jenny?

Dan

You are kind of slow, aren’t you, Dan?

Jenny

You didn’t come up with anything. Jenny, do you have some kind of plan for... killing 
yourself?

Dan

Yes. I have been working on it since Peter left. I started saving up my anti-depressants and did 
some research on the Internet.

Jenny

So, you are on medication? Do you have a doctor who is helping you? Have you ever tried 
this before?

Dan

You sound like you are reading off a checklist or something.

*(SOUND: Cell Phone Rings.)*

Dan

*(Knocks cell phone off desk; it skids away)* Jenny. Can I answer this? It might be someone 
else needing help. I just have to connect them with someone. I’ll be a second.

Jenny

Sure, I need to do a couple of things.

*(JENNY sets her phone down, lays out a plastic bag and begins counting out pills.)*

Dan

Brent, you asshole, get down here. Oh, hi, Mom. Listen, this isn’t really a good time. I’m on 
the other line. Yes, in fact, I am talking to a girl. Mom. It is not one of those kinds of calls. 
God, that was just one time you found that on the phone bill. I am hanging up now.
(Picks up phone) You’re hanging up?

Jenny

No, not on you, Jenny.

Dan

Oh, you helped the other person that fast.

Jenny

The other person was my mother and no one can help her. Listen, Jenny, are you alone?

Dan

Yes.

Jenny

Is there a friend of yours we could call to come over?

Dan

(Crying) There aren’t any… not any that will care a couple of months from now.

Jenny

What about your family?

Dan

Just my brother.

Jenny

(JENNY takes a photo off the wall, looks at it then sets it down.)

He’ll miss you.

Dan

He’ll understand. He’ll understand why.

Jenny

You think so?

Dan

Maybe you’d understand this better if I just read the note to you. Note. Sounds kind of silly, doesn’t it? Maybe it should be suicide essay. Well, here is what my note says: (Picks up letter) Dear Thomas, I have departed this veil of too many tears. I think you’d understand why this was the right thing to do. Do you remember when we moved to Wichita from Topeka and Dad said we could not take Trigger until we got a house? That was our dog, Dan. I was six. He told me that Trigger was going to live with a neighbor. We found later that didn’t work out and he asked them… he asked them just to put him down. He couldn’t be bothered to drive three hours to find him somewhere else to live. (Sets down letter)
I’m sorry, Jenny.

Dan

Do you know what I’ve been doing? Sitting around the apartment, playing solitaire on the computer. If I was a guy, at least I might be downloading porn. My sculptures, they’re crap. All but one. The stone bird that the U bought. Being dead can’t be any worse than things are now.

Jenny

I’m sorry.

Dan

Now is when you make a speech about why life is worth living or sing that annoying song from Annie.

Jenny

Tell me about the stone bird, Jenny. Why is it good?

Dan

No. I did one thing right. It doesn’t matter.

Jenny

Which university bought it?

Dan

The same one that put it in storage a year later. They probably can’t even find it. *(Head in hands, starting to cry)* They don’t care. No one cares.

Jenny

Someone cares about you. Your brother cares.

Dan

Not anymore.

Jenny

We could call him.

Dan

No, no. He died when I was eighteen. He fell asleep and crossed the centerline…

Jenny

I’m sorry, Jenny. I’m so sorry.
Jenny  
*(Crying)* Yeah, right. You don’t know what it’s like to be worthless. You ever get ready to brush your teeth at night and just end up standing there for an hour? You wonder why anyone ever wanted to be with you. You lock the bathroom door, look at the mirror and wonder why God hates you so much that he gave you this life. You ever do that, Dan?

Dan  
No.

Jenny  
You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.

Dan  
No, I don’t.

Jenny  
I can’t even help anyone. In the PE class, the kids told me they got to play dodge ball. Pretty soon there are four guys left and one fat... sorry, proportionally challenged girl. The boys are throwing at her, but just missing on purpose. Making her run... run back and forth. I didn’t stop them. I just let it go on.

Dan  
High school boys can be pretty intimidating.

Jenny  
*(Yelling)* They were 3rd graders. When they almost hit her in the head, she looked at me. They tell us to never touch the kids, but I should have gone over and just hugged her. I turned away. That’s why no one should care when I’m dead.

Dan  
But I do care about you, Jenny.

Jenny  
You have to say that. You’re supposed to.

Dan  
No, I’m not. Do you remember when I agreed that I don’t know what I’m talking about? It’s true. I’m not even supposed to be here.

Jenny  
What?

Dan  
Listen, I am only here because Brent had to leave for a few minutes. His ex-wife’s car broke down. You are only talking to me because somebody at Sprint doesn’t know what they are doing.
(DAN starts to cross Stage Right carrying the binder.)

Jenny
I can’t even get a real counselor. Well, that about sums up my existence.

Dan
But don’t you see, Jenny. I don’t have to care. It’s not required. But I do. I do care.

(JENNY starts to move Stage Left towards DAN.)

Jenny
Really? (Puts her hand out as if he is there)

Dan
Yes, really. (Crossing Right, puts his hand out)

Jenny
(Stops) Wait a minute. Oh, you’re good, buddy. How often do you pull this one out of your bag of tricks? “I am just another human being who cares.”

Dan
It’s not a story, Jenny. Listen, I am reading from a manual. If the person is alone, have they done something to ensure they will not be interrupted? Has the person disposed of personal items?

Jenny
You’d say anything to get me not to do it, so why should I believe you?

Dan
I don’t lie, Jenny. That’s one thing I’ve always been proud of.

Jenny
Let’s say I came down there to talk to you. What if I weigh 300 pounds and have buck teeth. If I asked you if I was beautiful, you’d say, “No,” because you never lie.

(JENNY and DAN stand but three feet apart from one another.)

Dan
Uh, I don’t know, but I do care, damn it.

Jenny
You’re just a guy doing your job. I’m just another depressive.

Dan
You want me to prove that I don’t have to care? That I don’t have to care about you, Jenny? I’ll prove it.
(DAN turns back to the desk and hangs up phone: BLACKOUT on JENNY.)

Dan

Oh, God.

(SOUND: Phone Rings.)

Dan

Jenny, I’m so sorry, but I… Yes, this is the suicide hotline. Listen, I’m sorry to hear your husband is depressed… He’s passed out on the couch… how many beers…? Can I get your number and have another counselor call you back? (Hangs up)

(SOUND: Phone Rings.)

Dan

(Answers) Hello?

(LIGHTS RESTORE on JENNY. SHE is seated in her chair.)

Jenny

You know hanging up was one thing, but being busy when I hit redial, that takes nerve.

Dan

Jenny, I’m so sorry. I just wanted you to believe me. I thought if I hung up…

Why do you care?

Jenny

What?

Dan

Why do you care, Dan?

Jenny

Have you ever been the first one in the door at a bakery at 5 a.m.? You smell everything, even more than the people who work there. You get first pick of the croissants or the turnovers. It’s your world, for a moment.

Jenny

You’re one of those sick bastard morning people, aren’t you, Dan?

Dan

You know why you get first pick, Jenny? Not because of who your parents were. Not because you are rich or talented. Because you can. Because you got up first. There are so many things like that in life. I guess for me they just add up. I guess I’d like you to find them.
Jenny
Going to the bakery is your philosophy of life?

Dan
OK, like right now, it’s July. Do you know what Rainier Cherries are?

Jenny
No.

Dan
They’re sweeter than Bing cherries. They’re red and yellow and you can only get them for a few weeks. In fact, if you were here, we could walk over to Safeway and get some.

Jenny
Dragging yourself out of bed for cookies and a fruit you can only get for one month out of the year. Those are reasons to go on? That’s all you’ve got?

Dan
Like you said, Jenny, I don’t know you. I can’t fix everything everyone’s done to you or tell you your art changed people’s lives. (Beat) It’s not much, is it?

Jenny
No, it’s not much, Dan.

Dan
Is it enough, Jenny? (Enter BRENT Stage Left) Jenny, Brent is here, can we talk with him?

Jenny
I don’t think so, Dan. (Crying softly, wipes face)

Dan
Jenny, you could come down here. You could talk with someone who knows what they are doing.

Jenny
Thank you for talking to me.

Dan

(JENNY turns off her phone.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes