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**Product Code A0860.3**

# **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**  
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*(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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

Dan

Yeah.

Jenny

Where are you, Dan?

Dan

Uh, I'm at the social services building at 7<sup>th</sup> and Main. The address is (*Looks at binder, reading*) 121 South 7<sup>th</sup>. 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 deser...  
deserv... *(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 moments 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?

Dan

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

Jenny

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

Dan

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

Jenny

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

Dan

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

Jenny

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.

Jenny  
*(Picks up phone)* You're hanging up?

Dan  
 No, not on you, Jenny.

Jenny  
 Oh, you helped the other person that fast.

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

Jenny  
 Yes.

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

Jenny  
*(Crying)* There aren't any... not any that will care a couple of months from now.

Dan  
 What about your family?

Jenny  
 Just my brother.

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

Dan  
 He'll miss you.

Jenny  
 He'll understand. He'll understand why.

Dan  
 You think so?

Jenny  
 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)*

Dan

I'm sorry, Jenny.

Jenny

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.

Dan

I'm sorry.

Jenny

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

Dan

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

Jenny

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

Dan

Which university bought it?

Jenny

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.

Dan

Someone cares about you. Your brother cares.

Jenny

Not anymore.

Dan

We could call him.

Jenny

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

Dan

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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...

Jenny

Why do you care?

Dan

What?

Jenny

Why do you care, Dan?

Dan

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 peoples' 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.

*(JENNY turns off her phone.)*

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