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Family Plays

Apologies

A play about Teenage Suicide
By
Brian Kral



Apologies

Apologies - Drama. By Brian Kral. Cast: 2m., 4w. Three of the female roles are teenagers. *Apologies* is a contemporary drama intended for teenage audiences that deals realistically with a teenage girl's unexplained suicide. Jennifer leaves a letter for her mother, and then silently takes her own life. Instead of asking "Will she kill herself?" her family and friends are instead left to question "Why did she kill herself?" The audience travels back with them through the events leading up to her tragic decision, in an effort to answer this difficult question. The realistic and uncompromising depiction of teenagers and suicide have made this play extremely popular among young people. Previously appearing in slightly different form in *Dramatics Magazine* (1985), *Apologies* has since been produced by many school and community groups. *Flexible, fragmented settings. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: AE6.*

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Characters

Jennifer..... a fifteen-year-old girl

Mother

Jim Jennifer's step-father

Andrea and Valerie..... Jennifer's classmates

Mr. Nelson..... a high school counselor

The play takes place in several locales, and over the course of several days, prior to Jennifer's suicide.

EPILOGUE

Jennifer, a fifteen year-old-girl, enters fully dressed, carrying her school-books. She sets them down on a chair, takes off her coat, and drapes it over the chair. She opens a notebook, takes out a letter, reads it. She folds it, puts it into an envelope; she starts to lick the envelope, then tucks the flap in instead. She turns the chair around so that it faces her, and props the envelope on top of the books. She looks at it. She walks forward, carrying a long thin box. She pulls the box open. She takes out an old-fashioned straight-edged razor. She sits on the floor without expression, and opens the razor. She studies the inside of her forearm, then deliberately sets the blade on the wrist.

Isolated from Jennifer, but arranged in the darkness around her, stand her Mother, Valerie, and Andrea. They are a conscious presence but not clearly visible.

Jennifer pulls the razor up the arm. As blood appears, her face tightens painfully, but she is determined not to make a sound. She closes her eyes, breathing in sharply, holding her breath. Pause.

JENNIFER: (*quietly*) Help me.

MOTHER: (*her voice, from the darkness*) How?

JENNIFER: Help me.

MOTHER: How?

JENNIFER: Help me.

MOTHER: How? (*Pause.*) I can't

JENNIFER: Yes.

MOTHER: I can't.

JENNIFER: Yes.

MOTHER: I can't. (*Pause. Jennifer is standing still.*) How? . . . How?

(In the distance is the sound of an approaching ambulance. The lights fade on Jennifer, replaced by the intermittent flashing of a red ambulance light, unnaturally slow. Pause. Valerie is isolated by a white light.)

VALERIE: Jennifer and I were close friends. You could even say best friends. We weren't the kind who had deep conversations. She was kind of into herself, she made me dig for everything. I did at first. . .but I got tired of hearing the same old depressing stuff.

(Slight pause.)

I started treating her like an adult, you know? Giving her options. "If that's what you want to do, . . ." I didn't baby her. Or feed her cliches. I gave her what I thought she needed.

(Pause.)

It would've worked for me. I guess we weren't as much alike as I thought.

(Slight pause.)

But I'm not going to feel guilty. I'm sad she's gone, . .but I tried to help her. It just didn't turn out right.

(Valerie exits slowly; a white light isolates Andrea. In the darkness, Jim and Nelson enter.)

ANDREA: I feel guilty. I don't want to. But I can't help feeling there wasn't something I could've done.

(Slight pause.)

See, I'm the kind of person who ignores the bad and tries to see the bright side of things. When things are at their worst, they can only get better, right? If you give a problem time it works itself out. So maybe I wasn't a great listener. She wasn't exactly a great talker. I mean, we were supposed to be friends but. . . .

(Pause.)

I haven't decided if I miss her or not. I mean, I do. . . .

JIM: *(in partial darkness)* I just can't understand it.

NELSON: *(in partial darkness)* She seemed perfectly fine. And if there had been a problem. . . .

JIM: *(in partial darkness)* Something inside me keeps asking why.

ANDREA: I wonder if she really hated everyone and everything. Because you'd have to to kill yourself, wouldn't you? . . . I wonder if she hated me?

(Lights fade out on all but the Mother, in partial shadow.)

MOTHER: How? How? . . . *(Lights fade slowly out.)*

SCENE ONE

It is late at night. Jennifer stands in a long nightgown, looking forward, intent on watching something. Although she is either writing or dictating an entry in a personal journal, no attempt is made to mime that action; she speaks directly forward.

JENNIFER: April 15. The red light woke me. By the time I got to the window, they had Mrs. Reilly on the stretcher. I could barely see. It was dark out. Except when the light flashed. Then all the faces were red. . . .They carried her into the back, sealed up the doors, and drove quickly away. I stayed at my window, staring at the street, the dark night, her empty house. And it was weird, like nothing had happened. It could have been a dream or something. She might be inside, sleeping, you know? Snuggled in her heavy blankets with all the lights out. But then I heard the siren start up a few blocks away. I just listened as it got farther and farther, softer and softer. . . .That's how I'll do it. At night, with everybody asleep. No speeches, no cannons, no "flights of angels" leading me on my way. Not even a siren. Just that flashing red light, so they can see me.

(She smiles.)

If anyone's watching.

(Jennifer waits, watching; then slowly exits.)

SCENE TWO

Breakfast in the early morning. Jennifer's Mother is drinking a cup of coffee while she reads a text-book. Jim, Jennifer's step-father, is reading the newspaper.

MOTHER: Did you hear the ambulance last night? The hospital came for Mrs. Reilly.

JIM: Jesus. The poor woman. Was she all right?

MOTHER: I talked to someone outside. They didn't know.

JIM: What was it? A stroke?

MOTHER: I haven't heard.

JIM: (*indicating his chest*) She was always complaining—

MOTHER: I hardly spoke to her.

(*Calling off to Jennifer:*)

Hurry for breakfast, dear!

JIM: Do you think she knew?

MOTHER: Mrs. Reilly? It's hard to say.

(*Jennifer enters, in her nightgown.*)

JIM: Good morning.

MOTHER: You're not dressed yet.

JENNIFER: (*kissing her mother*) I've got time.

MOTHER: (*looking at her watch*) Okay. Sit down.

(*Jennifer sits at the table. Her mother lets out a loud sigh as she returns to her reading. Pause.*)

I swear! If it keeps up like this—

JIM: What are you reading?

MOTHER: A text-book. For an exam.

JIM: Fascinating. While you're studying, you might want to have a look at this. (*He picks up a booklet he'd brought to the table.*)

MOTHER: What is it?

JIM: (*handing it to her*) A pamphlet I had from my days as a Boy Scout.

MOTHER: (*laughing*) Canoeing!

JIM: Yes. I had these terrible visions of you on the Allegheny River, heading right into the rapids of the Monongahela.

MOTHER: This isn't a pleasure trip. We're looking at the oil fields.

JIM: I know. But I thought this might come in handy.

MOTHER: (*kissing him*) Thanks. You're sweet.

JIM: You can always count on the Boy Scouts.

(*Mother gets up for the coffeepot, pours a cup.*)

MOTHER: (*to Jennifer:*) Do you want some coffee?

JENNIFER: No thanks.

JIM: (*holding out his cup*) Could I have a little more? Not much.

MOTHER: (*as she pours the coffee*) You know, I'm not going to make it. I'm going to kill myself before the end of the semester.

JIM: (*pulling back his cup*)

Thank you.

(*Mother sits, resumes her reading. To Jennifer:*)

Did you hear about Mrs. Reilly?

JENNIFER: (*to her Mother*) Why do you say that?

MOTHER: Your father asked you a question.

JIM: Step-father, hon. Don't rush her.

JENNIFER: Why are you going to kill yourself?

JIM: She's not really. Are you?

MOTHER: All this work! They should warn a person first. Especially someone like your mother, who hasn't been to school for ages!

JIM: It was your choice.

MOTHER: It was a good choice! It's the pace I question—can't be good for you. (*She sips her coffee.*)

JIM: (*smiling*) Better be careful. You'll wind up like Mrs. Reilly.

JENNIFER: (*to her Mother*) I feel like that sometimes.

MOTHER: Did you hear about her, dear?

JENNIFER: Who?

MOTHER: Mrs. Reilly. The older lady next door.

JENNIFER: I saw the ambulance.

JIM: Last night? What time was that?

JENNIFER: They woke me up.

MOTHER: No wonder you look tired this morning. You didn't get any rest.

JIM: What time did the ambulance come?

JENNIFER: *(getting up from the table)* I don't know. Late.

MOTHER: Where are you going?

JENNIFER: To get dressed.

MOTHER: Aren't you going to eat anything?

JIM: I'll fix you the world's greatest omelette.

JENNIFER: *(to her Mother)* I'm not hungry.

MOTHER: At least drink your juice.

JENNIFER: I'm not thirsty.

MOTHER: You're getting too thin.

(Jennifer sits, sips her juice. Slight pause.)

JIM: I'm sorry you two didn't get more of a chance to know her. She was kind of a fun old lady. Smoked like a chimney! About eight years back, though, her husband died. After that, all she did was complain about chest pains. We all teased her on, of course, told her she was pining away with a broken heart, but she was dead serious.

(He makes an embarrassed face.)

Oh, Christ. I hope that doesn't turn out to be a bad joke.

(Jim laughs to himself, then continues.)

But there are a lot of interesting people in this neighborhood. If you take the time to introduce yourself, they'll tell you their whole life history.

(Pause.)

JENNIFER: Yeah. I've got to go change. *(She leaves the room.)*

MOTHER: Watch your time. *(She stirs her coffee, notices Jim.)* What's the matter?

JIM: *(smiling at her)* Wish I knew. She doesn't talk to me.

MOTHER: Don't be silly.

JIM: I'm not being silly, I can sense it. She doesn't want to talk to me. Perhaps it's too soon?

MOTHER: Could be. It takes a while for anyone, right? I mean, look how long it was before I got used to you.

(She leans over and kisses him.)

JIM: All right. Maybe I'm being silly.

(They kiss again.)

It's rough, though. You guys have a relationship already. You communicate.

MOTHER: Not so much lately.

JIM: You know what I mean, though. . . .Was she close to him, too?

MOTHER: Her father? She was too young, she didn't even know him.

JIM: Well, she must have known him a hell of a lot more than she knows me. I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm getting upset about. It's just. . . I'm on the outside. I feel like. . . I'm not even part of the family. I'm sorry.

MOTHER: You're going to be late.

JIM: Yeah.

(She resumes reading, sipping the coffee.)

Does she ask about him?