

# WHEN BIRDS CRY

By Mike Willis

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## CHARACTERS

**JENNA JENKINS:** A teenage girl. JENNA is intelligent and quite outgoing. SHE wears no makeup and dresses in a style that could be described as eclectic casual. In the fifties, SHE would have been called a beatnick, in the sixties, a hippie. JENNA looks for the beauty in things.

**ZAC:** A teenage boy, JENNA'S friend. ZAC is a typical high school boy, interested in girls and sports. He is dressed in jeans, a sweatshirt and running shoes.

**MOM/MRS. JENKINS:** A woman in her late thirties, JENNA'S mother. MRS. JENKINS is very cheerful bordering on flighty, despite being quite ill. SHE is dressed much the same as her daughter, but is wearing a bandanna to cover her hair loss due to her illness.

## SCENE

The living room of the JENKINS' home.

## TIME

The present.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*When Birds Cry* can be played on a bare stage with simple furniture props. There is an imaginary picture window DCS through which the actors look to watch the songbirds feeding in the yard. The AUDIENCE is the yard and above them the songbirds feed and sing.

## HISTORY

*When Birds Cry* was first presented as a staged reading by Platteville High School, Platteville, WI, with the following readers.

Jenna.....Jenna Kelley

Zac.....Matt Rogers

Mom.....Brenna Long, Tracy Turba

## DEDICATION

*When Birds Cry* is dedicated to all breast cancer victims and especially Heather Pick whose courage was truly inspirational.

## SCENE 1

**SETTING:** We are in the living room of the Jenkins' home. The room consists of mismatched furniture. There is an old sofa CS with a coffee table in front of it and a magazine rack on the SR end. Magazines, including National Geographic, litter the coffee table. DS and right of the sofa, there is a cushioned chair. A recliner is sitting DS and left the sofa, and there is a small table next to the recliner. All in all the effect is one of a poorly decorated, yet comfortable sitting area.

**AT RISE:** *It is mid-afternoon. There is no one on the stage. MRS. JENKINS can be heard humming cheerfully offstage right. There is also the sound of a number of birds chirping. JENNA and ZAC enter from SL carrying schoolbooks.*

JENNA: *(calling)* Mom, I'm home. Please be decent, I've got someone with me. *(to Zac)* Don't be shy, come on in. *(JENNA tosses her books on the sofa)* Well, this is it, be it ever so humble.

ZAC: *(enters hesitantly and looks around)* It's... uh, ni...

JENNA: *Different!* It's different.

ZAC: Yeah... and nice.

JENNA: No, not nice... just different.

ZAC: Okay you win...different.

JENNA: I like it that way. It suits me and my Mom... cause we're different.

ZAC: *(looking around)* It's like you. *(catching himself)* Uh, I mean that in a good way. I didn't mean...

JENNA: *(laughing)* I know.

ZAC: You do?

JENNA: Sure. I know you like me. You're just nervous.

ZAC: I'm not nervous.

JENNA: Yes you are.

ZAC: And how do you know I like you?

JENNA: Duh, why else would you walk me home?

ZAC: Maybe I was just going this way.

JENNA: I know where you live and it is in the opposite direction.

ZAC: I was going to a friend's house.

JENNA: I know, and now you're there... at your friends' house, so welcome.

ZAC: I didn't mean here.

JENNA: Yes, you did. It's okay, you can like me if you want to.

ZAC: *(embarrassed by her frankness)* But, I don't want to.

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JENNA: *(acting hurt)* You don't want to?

ZAC: Well... yes, I do but...

JENNA: Well, then just say you like me then... no big deal.

ZAC: *(giving in)* Okay, I like you.

JENNA: I knew it. Now that was easy, wasn't it?

ZAC: Noo.

JENNA: Sure it was. You have to learn to just be free, speak the truth, say what you feel. By the way, I like you too. So there, now that we have that out of the way, we can just relax and be ourselves. Get rid of your books and sit down while I find us something to drink.

*(ZAC sets his books on the table by the recliner, and JENNA starts to exit SR where SHE meets MRS. JENKINS entering.)*

MRS. JENKINS: *(hugging JENNA)* Hello, sweetheart.

JENNA: Hi, Mom. Mom, this is Zac. Zac, this is my mom.

MRS. JENKINS: Hello, Zachary.

ZAC: Mrs. Jenkins.

JENNA: Everybody just calls him Zac, Mom.

MRS. JENKINS: All right, Zac.

JENNA: *(to ZAC)* And you can just call my mom, Mom.

ZAC: Huh?

JENNA: *(laughing)* Just kidding. I'll be right back with some drinks. Keep Zac company, will you, Mom?

*(JENNA bounds off SR and MRS JENKINS crosses to the coffee table.)*

MRS. JENKINS: Yes, dear.

ZAC: That's okay, I'll...

MRS. JENKINS: Sit down, Zac and make yourself at home. I'll just put these magazines away.

ZAC: No, you don't have to bother, I won't be staying long.

MRS. JENKINS: Why's that?

ZAC: What?

MRS. JENKINS: Why won't you be staying long? Do you have someplace else to be?

ZAC: No, I...

MRS. JENKINS: *(smiling)* Then stay as long as you like.

ZAC: All right.

*(ZAC sits on the sofa and MRS. JENKINS picks up a copy of Audubon Magazine from the coffee table and crosses to the recliner and sits.)*

*(very nervous)* You... have a nice place here.

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MRS. JENKINS: It's different.

ZAC: That's what Jenna said.

MRS. JENKINS: I'm not surprised. We're a lot alike.

ZAC: She said that too... that you and her were like this place... different, that is.

MRS. JENKINS: (*chuckling*) She said that? That we were different?

ZAC: (*quickly*) In a good way.

MRS. JENKINS: (*enjoying ZAC'S discomfort*) Of course... for people like us, what other way is there?

ZAC: I'm not sure I understand.

MRS. JENKINS: It's like this. I think you are a good person, Zac.

Otherwise Jenna wouldn't have let you walk her home. And, since you *are* a good person, you wouldn't intentionally say something hurtful. If I thought you were a bad person, then I would believe the opposite. Do you understand?

ZAC: I... think so.

MRS. JENKINS: If you don't understand now, you will someday. I believe there is one constant in life and that is, good breeds good and bad breeds bad. Choose to remain good.

ZAC: (*uncertain*) Yes, Mrs. Jenkins, I'll try.

MRS. JENKINS: Lead a good life, Zac, and you will never have anything to fear. Do you like birds?

ZAC: *What?*

MRS. JENKINS: Birds... do you like birds?

ZAC: Sure, I guess. I never really thought about it.

MRS. JENKINS: (*cheerfully*) I enjoy things in nature, and birds especially. Do you know why? (*not waiting for an answer*) No, of course you don't. I enjoy birds because they are so alive. They are possibly the most alive entity in the universe. Birds can do things that even humans can't do. I'm not just talking about flying. Did you know, when he sings, the common Song Sparrow can hit seven to eleven different notes?

ZAC: No, I didn't know that.

MRS. JENKINS: It's true. The average human can't do that. A tiny chickadee can sit on a small branch unprotected and wait out the fiercest winter storm... yet held in your hand he seems so delicate. Birds make me feel full of life.

ZAC: I've never looked at birds like that.

MRS. JENKINS: You're not alone, not many have. But it's not just birds, it's all things living. There is something special in every living thing. You just need to look for it. When you find it, it can give you great joy... and peace. Don't you agree?

ZAC: Well....

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MRS. JENKINS: Oh, of course you do, or you will... when you've had time to think about it.

*(JENNA enters carrying a tray containing three glasses of lemonade and some Ritz crackers.)*

JENNA: I hope you like lemonade.

ZAC: Sure, that's great.

*(JENNA places the tray on the coffee table and hands a glass of lemonade to her mother.)*

JENNA: Here Mom, I brought you a glass too.

MRS. JENKINS: Thank you dear, that was very thoughtful of you.

JENNA: I brought some crackers too, but I didn't have anything to put on them. *(to MOM)* Did you feed the last of the peanut butter to the birds?

MRS. JENKINS: Just this morning. I'll give you some money so you can pick up four or five jars tomorrow after school.

ZAC: You must like peanut butter.

MRS. JENKINS: Not really.

JENNA: *(explaining)* It's for the birds.

ZAC: Oh...

MRS. JENKINS: Well, I'll just take my lemonade outside with me so you two can be alone. *(starts to leave)* It was nice meeting you Zac... and remember what I told you.

ZAC: I... I will.

MRS. JENKINS: *(smiling)* I know you will. Bye, now.

ZAC: Bye.

*(MRS. JENKINS exits SR)*

JENNA: What did she tell you?

ZAC: I'm not sure. She was talking about birds, and... did you know there's a sparrow that can sing seven to eleven different notes?

JENNA: Sure, the Song Sparrow. We have a lot of them eating from our feeders.

ZAC: And a chickadee can sit on a branch in the middle of a blizzard?

JENNA: I've seen that, almost every winter, out in our yard.

ZAC: Then she said something about looking for something special in every living thing and good breeds good and then she told me to be good.

JENNA: *(laughing)* And, what did you say?

ZAC: I think I told her I would.

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