

## COMING CLOSER by JENI WHITTAKER

### CAST

CHRISSIE  
JEN  
CHRISSIE'S MUM  
JEN'S MUM  
THE STRANGER  
TEACHER  
PUPIL 1  
PUPIL 2  
POLICEWOMAN 1  
POLICEWOMAN 2  
NARRATOR

The play can be performed by as few as four actors, or by five, or six.

Doubling for four actors:

JEN  
CHRISSIE, POLICEWOMAN 1 & 2 [played as one person]  
CHRISSIE'S MUM, TEACHER  
JEN'S MUM, STRANGER, PUPIL 1 & 2 [played as one person]  
NARRATOR - played by different people not in the scene

Doubling for five actors:

JEN  
CHRISSIE, POLICEWOMAN 1  
CHRISSIE'S MUM, TEACHER  
JEN'S MUM, PUPIL 1  
THE STRANGER, PUPIL 2, POLICEWOMAN 2  
NARRATOR - played by different people, not in the scene

Doubling for six actors:

JEN  
CHRISSIE  
CHRISSIE'S MUM, PUPIL 1  
JEN'S MUM, PUPIL 2  
THE STRANGER  
TEACHER, POLICEWOMAN 1 & 2 [played as one person], NARRATOR

The Teacher and Policewomen played as one character with the Narrator will give a 6th actor enough to be examinable. In addition, of course, this is an ensemble piece, with opportunity for group work involving all the cast.

The play runs at about an hour with the physical and ensemble work involved, making it very adaptable for examination purposes.

EXTRACT 1:

***Two girls walking, carrying satchels or schoolbags.***

**NARRATOR** The date is November 16th, 2003. It is a Friday, around four o'clock in the afternoon.

**CHRISSIE** I am Chrissie. I am just arriving home from school. I am fourteen years old.

**NARRATOR** Not much longer now.

**CHRISSIE** See you tomorrow, Jen. About, eleven, right?

**JEN** OK. If I'm up that early after the BIG NIGHT.

**CHRISSIE** God, I forgot. Jen - how could I forget that? When you meeting him?

**JEN** 8 o'clock. Outside the cinema.

**CHRISSIE** You going to see a film?

**JEN** Maybe. More likely not. We'll just go to the precinct . Hang out and stuff.

**CHRISSIE** Him and all his mates?

**JEN** I know - but got to start somewhere. Anyway, I like his mates - some of them.

**CHRISSIE** Blokes feel better when they're with their mates. Braver or something. At least he won't pounce on you.

**JEN** He'd better! I'm counting on it. No pounce - no future. Means he's not interested.

**CHRISSIE** Or he's the type who wants to get to know you first.

**JEN** You met any boys who want to get to know you first?

**CHRISSIE** Only on TV programmes - or in books.

**JEN** See? So he'll pounce.

**CHRISSIE** In front of his mates?

**JEN** Why not?

**CHRISSIE** Well ... snogging in front of others. I wouldn't like that.

**JEN** I wouldn't mind. It'd mean he liked me - was proud of me - if he did.

**CHRISSIE** The other boys might think you're a slag.

**JEN** Chrissie! Girls kiss boys when they're all out together in groups all the time. It doesn't mean they're slags.

**CHRISSIE** You know we call those girls slags at school - Livia, Bev, Tamsin. Don't get like Tamsin.

**JEN** Look, Chrissie - this is so you... you always go right to the end of a situation before it's even happened. It might never happen. We might not even snog. I'm just saying - I hope we do. I like him. If snogging him is what it takes to see him again, well...

**CHRISSIE** *Pause. Chrissie is trying to lighten up* I'd see how he snogs first, yeah?  
*They both laugh a little awkwardly. Jen delayed, hurt.*

**JEN** I'll see you tomorrow.

**CHRISSIE** Before lunch if you can.

**JEN** I won't be able to stay all day though. Loads of homework.

**CHRISSIE** I'll get most of mine done tonight. While you're out for a snog. Think of me, writing that English essay.

**JEN** I hope I'll be too [*Posh voice.*] 'otherwise engaged.' See ya.

[*To the audience.*] I saw Chrissie turn towards her front door and run up the path. She paused briefly on the doorstep whilst she fumbled in the sidepocket of her bag for her key. Then she turned, saw me watching her and waved.

**CHRISSIE** *to the audience* Not long now.

EXTRACT 2:

**JEN'S MUM** She's been a good friend for Jen. Brought her out of her shell.

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** I remember you both arriving for that first day at playschool. As usual, we were early and I was dumping poor little Chrissie before racing off to work. Chrissie saw Jen, half-hidden behind you, ran straight over to her and pulled her out. 'Come on, she said. 'Come and play with me.'

***Chrissie says these lines at the same time as her Mum.***

**CHRISSIE** Come on. Come and play with me.

***Jen puts her hand in Chrissie's and they move forward together.***

**CHRISSIE** What do you like to do? I like to play bricks.

***Jen shakes her head.***

**CHRISSIE** Do you like dolls?

***Jen shakes her head.***

**CHRISSIE** I do sometimes. Do you like to play drawing? I do. I like to paint. What's your favourite colour?

**JEN** Yellow.

**CHRISSIE** Yes, I like yellow too. Like the sun.

**JEN** Yes, the sun!

**CHRISSIE** I have a dress that's yellow too. It's my party dress.

**JEN** Sand is yellow.

**CHRISSIE** Yes! Sand is yellow too. Like by the sea. Let's go and paint.

**JEN'S MUM** And they've never looked back. I hope they go to the same secondary school.

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** They should do, shouldn't they? We live quite close to each other.

**CHRISSIE** Yellow is the colour of happiness. It is the colour of light - the kind of light that is warm and bright - that shadows run from. The yellow sun drives the darkness away.

**NARRATOR** Not long now.

**CHRISSIE, JEN & BOTH MUMS** Not long now.

**NARRATOR** It's coming closer.

EXTRACT 3:

***The stranger rings the doorbell to Chrissie's house. Chrissie answers it.***

**STRANGER** Hello. Chrissie, isn't it?

**CHRISSIE** Yes.

**STRANGER** Do you remember me?

**CHRISSIE** No. I don't know. I can't remember...

**STRANGER** Don't be embarrassed. I expect you've forgotten. I worked for a bit with your mum. As a receptionist. Temping. Just for a couple of weeks really. A couple of years ago now....

**CHRISSIE** Oh. I don't really rem ... Mum's not in at the moment.

**STRANGER** Isn't she?

**NARRATOR** As if she didn't know.

**CHRISSIE** No. She never gets back till about six o'clock.

**NARRATOR** Useful information.

**STRANGER** Well, never mind then.

**CHRISSIE** Can I take a message?

**STRANGER** No. No message. It doesn't matter.

**CHRISSIE** I'll tell her that you called then.

**NARRATOR** Better if you did.

**STRANGER** Not to worry. I shouldn't think she'll remember me either. I was just passing, really. Don't worry her. I'll call again some other time perhaps.

**CHRISSIE** Okay. 'Bye then.

**STRANGER** 'Bye, Chrissie. You're just as pretty as your photo. Your hair... lovely...

*Chrissie stares at her. The stranger retreats. Chrissie closes the door.*

**CHRISSIE** Weird!

*The stranger stands outside staring at the house for a short time and then turns and exits.*

EXTRACT 4

*The Stranger is standing on her own with a notebook and a pencil, as if doing calculations.*

**STRANGER** Home from school, four-ish. Mother home from work, six-ish. Usually goes to friend's house but today went in own house. Alone. Didn't come out. Friend left her.

[*To the audience.*] Coming closer. Coming really near now. [*Triumphantly.*] Nearly there.

*A patterned series of movements where Jen and Chrissie walk together, the Stranger observes from different parts of the stage, the two girls separate and Chrissie mimes entering her house and shutting the door. Vary this, so that sometimes Jen seems to want to go in with her and leaves reluctantly, sometimes the Stranger is seen by one or other of the girls and looked at curiously. Sometimes the Stranger reacts, a little smile, sometimes not. Throughout this sequence, the rest of the cast make sounds that accompany the action. The sounds are composed of breaths, tappings, footfalls, etc. At times, there is a whispered chanting: Close, Close, Nearly there. An 'Aaah' every time Chrissie 'escapes.'*

*Finally: Chrissie and Jen separate at 'door', Chrissie enters and shuts it. Jen stares at the door a little then starts to leave. Stranger starts to approach Chris-*

*she's house, passes Jen leaving and veers off another way. Jen looks curiously after her. Stranger pauses and fiddles with her shoe. She looks after Jen. Jen hesitates but then leaves.*

**NARRATOR** *softly* Don't go.

**STRANGER** *to the audience* Half past four. Plenty of time.

*She wheels and walks determinedly towards Chrissie's 'door. Raps. Chrissie answers it.*

**CHRISSIE** Hello. Oh, it's you again.

**STRANGER** Yes.

**CHRISSIE** Look. I told you before. Stop following me. You're spooking me out. I don't like it. [*She pushes, as if pushing the door shut against the Stranger's weight. Suddenly the Stranger collapses and sobs passionately, hopelessly. The Narrator raises her eyes to heaven, sighs and shakes her head.*]

**CHRISSIE** Wha...? Oh God, what should I do? Don't cry. [*She steps out.*] Why are you crying?

**STRANGER** *through gulping tears* You look... so like. You could just be my daughter... my little girl. I miss her so.

**NARRATOR** What an act!

**CHRISSIE** *awkwardly* I told you before. I'm not your daughter. Please go away. Stop following me about.

**STRANGER** Have you told anyone about me? Have you told your mum?

**CHRISSIE** Thought about it. But I felt sorry for you, I s'pose. Thought Mum would be cross and go round your place, give you a hard time.

**NARRATOR** Hmmph.

**STRANGER** *struggling up* I'm sorry to be bothering you. Don't be scared. It's just ... well, you don't know what it's like to lose someone you love very much.

**CHRISSIE** *softly* I do actually.

**STRANGER** Oh?

**CHRISSIE** My dad... [*She looks away.*]

*The Stranger reaches a hand out and touches her.*

**NARRATOR** I can't watch.

**STRANGER** Well, then. You understand. I knew you seemed a nice girl, a kind girl - and that explains it. You'll understand then, about me, and about Mike?

**CHRISSIE** Mike?

**STRANGER** My husband.... It's been bad for me - losing her - but for Mike, well.... it's been worse, if that's possible. Mike - he's... suffering. He misses her, he misses a young girl around the place. And you look... so like her, you see. I wonder...

**NARRATOR** This is the part I can't watch ... sorry, only it 's hard to bear.

**CHRISSIE** What?

**STRANGER** Would you ...? I know it seems a lot to ask, and I'd only ask it of you once - just the one time - would you? .... [*All in a rush.*] ... come and see him, just quickly, just once... just to smile at him, talk to him... it would give him such peace, you know.

**CHRISSIE** Wouldn't that make it worse - if he saw me?

**STRANGER** Oh no, I think a visit from you would make things much better. Cheer him up. You know - just a bit of young blood in his life... to brighten him up.

**NARRATOR** Time to go. [*She exits.*]

**CHRISSIE** But I don't see how... it would help. Me. Surely me not being your daughter would make things worse? Rub it in, sort of? That she's gone. I'm sorry, I can't explain ... it just seems ... well, wrong somehow. Sorry. I think you ought to go now.

*The Stranger makes a little desperate clutching movement.*

**STRANGER** NO... Come closer....let me explain. Chrissie. I told him so much about you... how pretty you are ... how bright ... just like Annabel... Come with me...

**CHRISSIE** But why? What good would it do? I don't understand.



**STRANGER** It wouldn't be for long. We don't live far away, just round the corner really.  
Close.

**CHRISSIE** I'd have to be back. For when my Mum returns.

**STRANGER** Well, of course....

[*They start to walk together.*] Come closer... hold my hand.

**CHRISSIE** I'd rather not.

**STRANGER** Not long now. Nearly there. My car's just round the corner, up this alleyway.

**CHRISSIE** Your car? But you said you lived....

*And the Stranger grabs her, muffles her with her body.*

**STRANGER** I know... I said I lived .... Close.

EXTRACT 5:

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** I think I had known from the beginning. When she wasn't at Jen's and wasn't at home. I just knew.

**JEN'S MUM** Who can begin to understand the grief of a mother? The emotions that bind mothers to their babies. There is nothing so strong. Nothing so ...basic.

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** By the time they took me down to the mortuary to identify her, some kind of protective shield had grown around me, sealing me off. Nothing seemed quite real - the voices, the questions, the journey in the car. But then ....

**JEN'S MUM** I kept putting myself into Chrissie's Mum's place.... how would it be if it were Jen not Chrissie? My mind screeched away from the thought... couldn't even imagine the horror of it.

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** Nothing could protect me from that moment - her face. Sleeping ... so vulnerable...

**JEN'S MUM** If it were my child, at the mercy of a monster, who ... raped ... her and did .... god know's what other ... unspeakable things. If it were mine ...

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** My child's face. Known and unknown at the same time. Seen anew. Seen different, exposed - by the white light. The clean white sheet up to her chin. Her face. Chrissie.

**JEN'S MUM** But it wasn't my child. Not mine. Chrissie. Jen's friend. A girl I had known since she was four. [***She looks towards Chrissie's Mum.***] What could I say? What could anyone say? My heart filled. My heart went out to her.

***Chrissie's Mum looks towards Jen's Mum. Eye contact. Jen's Mum moves over and puts her arms around Chrissie's Mum.***

**STRANGER** For a time he was pleased. He smiled at me. He ate the food I prepared. The beatings stopped. He did not threaten to leave me. How could he leave? We were bound together, always had been, since the first time. And now once more, the chains that held us together were strong. I was safe.

***She acts as if someone had just come in.*** Hello. Mike. What's wrong? Don't look at me like that. Haven't I pleased you? There's supper on the stove..... of course you do. You want your supper..... I'm not. Not talking to you as if you were a child.... I wouldn't.... [***Pleading.***] Mike... don't you like me, just a little? Don't I make you happy? Don't I know, none better, what pleases you? .... Again? .... You want it again? But Mike, it's too soon.... it's dangerous.... [***She reacts as if being strangled. Chokes and splutters.***] Let go. Mike.... [***He 'lets go'. She rubs her neck.***] All right. I'll try, Mike. You're hungry, aren't you? That's right. You eat. I know you're hungry. I know what you like.

***Jen is walking home. She imagines footsteps behind her. Stops and starts as if to catch them out. The cast create the footsteps, timed at first to match Jen's own, but then going on one step, two steps, beyond her feet stopping. A terrible loud noise and the cast create a monstrous slouched figure, one person sitting on another's shoulders, with a long coat over the pair and a hat pulled down low.***

***Jen screams. From behind the figure steps Chrissie. She turns to the figure. It dissolves under her gaze. She turns to look at Jen.***

**JEN** Chrissie? Is that you? I'm so frightened. I keep imagining ... monsters and ... bogymen and... I know it's silly. It is just me being silly, isn't it? It's broad daylight. And there are people about.

***The cast become people of different ages passing to and fro on the street.***

## SAMPLE PAGES FROM THE PRODUCTION NOTES

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS**

Partly this is a cautionary tale on the old theme of not trusting strangers. But its intention was also to outline the problems facing so many single-parent families who have a time-lapse between the end of school and when they get home from work. Making sure a young child is safe would be normal practice for any single parent - through babysitters or other means, but when the child is older, legally 'all right' to leave alone - what then? A fourteen year-old is still very vulnerable.

Of course, this story is unlikely - but it has happened. There are seriously sick people out there who are beyond the appeal of ordinary human emotions. The Stranger is not herself a murderer but she is obsessed with her husband, who has her in a net of abuse and mental torture to which she has, in a way, become addicted. She cannot leave him; they are tied together by the deeds they have done in the past and are now doing again; and long association with him and his evil have led her so far from human life as to be almost unrecognisable. All she can do is to mimic human life, acting roles which, it must be said she is very good at - good enough, anyway, to take in even a feisty girl like Chrissie.

Because of the monstrous happenings in the play, the style ought to reflect this. It is written to contrast ordinary human beings and the normal 'innocence' of youth with the monsters that lurk beneath the surface of ordinariness. Consequently, the scenes between the girls and their mothers are largely naturalistic in style, whereas the scenes featuring the Stranger, especially the non-speaking ones, should be in a more grotesque and exaggerated style. Even the Stranger's monologues, which could be done naturalistically, I feel should be exaggerated, grotesque - so long as this does not become laughable.

### **CHARACTERS**

**CHRISSIE** The play shows Chrissie at different ages: 4, 11 and 14. She is a strong character, outward-going and friendly. She has an independent nature; she is not afraid to be called a 'geek' for enjoying school-work. In fact, she clearly cares more about school and doing well than she does about following the normal patterns of her peers: boys, not liking school, etc. Though close as children, her best friend Jen and she are in the process of moving apart, as children often do at this age. Their interests have become too different. Nonetheless, the fact they live close, walk home together and share a babysitter until working parents arrive home, keeps them 'best friends.' The way Chrissie handles the Stranger, though taken in by her in the end, shows that she is able to look after herself. She is no push-over. Many times she sorts the Stranger out and sends her packing. It is just her kind heart that in the end makes her vulnerable to the Stranger's lies.

**JEN** Jen is also shown at the same ages as Chrissie: 4, 11 and 14. Jen is more 'typical' of young teenagers, being 'bored' with school and showing more interest in boys instead. She is impatient of Chrissie's different attitudes, while remaining perhaps more needy of Chrissie than Chrissie is of her. This goes back to their early years, where Chrissie was always the leader, Jen the follower. Though flighty, Jen is still a 'nice' girl at heart. Her feelings for Chrissie are genuine. Her kind heart, like Chrissie's, is what makes her vulnerable in the end.

**CHRISSIE'S MUM** A single parent, who has brought Chrissie up from early years on her own. This has made mother and daughter very close. When she says at the end that Chrissie wouldn't deceive her in the important things, she should be believed. The struggles of single parenthood has made Chrissie's Mum strong, but once again, like her daughter, she has a kind heart and a sympathetic nature.

**JEN'S MUM** Jen and her mum don't enjoy quite so close a relationship with each other as Chrissie does with her mum. There is more of an age separation between them - I mean by that, that Jen's mum is always the 'grown-up', whereas Chrissie's mum is not averse to dancing around and being silly with the girls, like one of them. Like Jen, her mum is perhaps more of a follower. She sticks to accepted ideas and ways to behave.

**THE STRANGER** Much of her character is described above, under themes and the play's intentions. It is important that this woman looks on the surface as ordinary as possible. She should be dowdy, even - the sort of person you'd pass by without notice. This will make her behaviour more grotesque still. This is a woman who is playing at being a human being, saying the words, making the moves, but in fact she has lost all but a vestige of her humanity. She is as much a monster as her husband. Care should be taken not to make her sympathetic, even in her solo speeches where she is clearly being abused by Mike.

**THE TEACHER** is caring and well-meaning. She is patient with the sillinesses of her class but not sure of her ground. She is perhaps very young.

THE POLICEWOMEN if played as separate characters should be contrasting. Police-woman 1 is older and more sensitive in what she says, whilst the second one is less so. Play for contrast, the second one younger and more outspoken. However, I have taken care to ensure that they can be played as one person without contradiction. In this case, go for the more sensitive approach, only gently suggesting that she may just be meeting a boy, rather than sharply or aggressively.

THE NARRATOR This role can be divided up between the cast or taken by a separate actor. Sometimes, even when taken by your sixth actor, it becomes more poignant if one of the other characters breaks role and says a narration line. I have indicated in the notes at the end where I think this is preferable.

## **THE SETTING**

This must be played upon as blank a stage as possible. Though doors and areas are indicated, they should be established by light or, preferably, just by where the actors are and all doors etc. should be mimed. It would be a good idea, however, to have a raised area towards the back centre of the stage, high enough for characters to sit on, as well as for other use. This would mean less furniture [chairs] would be needed. Make sure it's not too far back if you have a very deep playing area, otherwise this will detract from some telling moments that occur on it.

If you are finding the mime of letting the stranger in, or shutting her out, is not working, it would be possible to have a free-standing door-frame permanently in place to represent Chrissie's house. But it could mask some essential action, so is better not used.

Some props or furniture are indicated, and I would suggest that these are brought in as part of movement sequences between scenes. I have described this in the Notes further on.

The setting that I refer to in the Notes is the most basic: bare stage, raised area towards centre not too far back and everything mimed except for one or two essential props.

## **PROPS**

If it seems strange that some props are mimed and some aren't, my justification is that the 'actual' props become more meaningful by their presence, e.g. the photograph that the Stranger takes has more impact if other props in the scene, like the cup - perhaps even the phone - are mimed.

PAGE 2 - CHRISSIE & JEN - Schoolbag or satchel each.

PAGE 5 - CHRISSIE & JEN - same bags. In Jen's - a book, or exercise book and pen for her to take out at bottom of page. Could be mimed, alternatively.

PAGE 8 - CHRISSIE & JEN - same bags again.

PAGE 11 - light-to-carry table, with phone[ optional] on it brought on by cast.

CHRISSIE'S MUM - handbag with photo inside.

Bottom of page - CHRISSIE'S MUM - polystyrene cup [optional - probably better mimed.]

STRANGER - handbag [shabby.]

PAGE 21 The monster, made by the cast, needs a slouch hat and extra long coat.

## **LIGHTS**

The whole play can be done in stark white light. The cues below are only if you would prefer some atmospheric additions to the lighting plot. I have not added lighting cues to indicate place, such as where Chrissie's house is. You can do this if you like, but I don't feel it is necessary, and the style of the play is such that all actors should be visible at all times, not excluded by one area at a time being lit.