

## BEAUTIFUL INSIDE by JO HARDY

### CHARACTERS

GIRL 1  
GIRL 2  
GIRL 3  
GIRL 4  
KATE  
LAURA  
SUZY  
JENNA  
MUM  
DEVIL  
BECKY  
NURSE

The following is the suggested doubling of characters for seven players:

KATE + GIRL1  
LAURA + GIRL 2  
SUZY + GIRL 3  
JENNA + GIRL 4  
MUM  
DEVIL + NURSE  
BECKY

For six players:

KATE + GIRL 1  
LAURA + GIRL 2 + BECKY  
SUZY + GIRL 3  
JENNA + GIRL 4  
MUM  
DEVIL + NURSE

The play is also possible for as few as five players:

KATE + GIRL 1 + MUM  
LAURA + GIRL 2 + BECKY  
SUZY + GIRL 3  
JENNA + GIRL 4  
DEVIL + NURSE

There is enough to do for a cast of seven players to make all roles examinable. This would be an ideal piece for GCSE. It is for an all-female cast and runs at about twenty-five minutes.

EXTRACT ONE

SCENE 1

**The four girls walk out, catwalk style, to a Britney Spears song [or any relevant piece of music.] They pose with glassy expressions and freeze. The 'Devil', a well-groomed girl, saunters on and looks at them in turn.**

DEVIL **pointing to Girl 1** She's put on some weight.  
**pointing to Girl 2** And she's not size eight.  
**pointing to Girl 3** She can't fool me that they're her own.  
**pointing to Girl 4** Do I detect some silicone?

**The girls chant the following words with relevant expressions and poses.**

GIRL1 You have to be a fool if you think that fat is cool!  
GIRL 2 Thin is in. Lean is mean.  
GIRL 3 Zap those zits. Uplift those tits.  
GIRL 4 You know it ends in tears ...  
GIRL 1 If you're not like Britney Spears.  
GIRL 3 Your outfit looks just fine, though it's very '99!  
GIRL 2 I'm told on good advice that mauve and green look nice.  
GIRL 1 But we never ask the reason ...  
GIRL 4 We're going by the season.  
GIRL 2 Flat little tums. Tight little bums.  
GIRL 1 Neat feet. Cute cheeks.  
GIRL 3 Up to date fashion. Our only passion.  
GIRL 4 Hair this year is green. It's in the magazine.  
GIRL 2 Just do as you are told.  
ALL Before you get too old!

SCENE 2.

**Kate, Laura and Suzy are making up, brushing hair, etc. using the audience as a mirror.**

KATE ... and not only is she flat-chested, but she's put on *loads of weight!*  
[**She turns sideways and pulls her stomach in.**]  
SUZY You forgot about the spots. [**She leans forward and scrutinises her own face in the 'mirror'.**]  
LAURA And the pig nose. Don't forget the pig nose! [**They all laugh.**]  
SUZY I thought a pig didn't have a nose. I think it's a snout or something!  
[**They dissolve in laughter again and snort like pigs.**]  
LAURA When she turned up to Simon's party in that dress thing, I nearly died.  
KATE I nearly died before you did. I saw Simon's face. He nearly died!  
SUZY Oh no! I never saw her. What was it like? How come I missed it?  
KATE Now let me think. Oh yes. You missed it because you were upstairs in the bedroom with Jason Spencer at the time ... [**Laura giggles.**] Anyway, she didn't stay long.  
SUZY We were *talking!*  
KATE I'm sure you were. Honestly, the ugly rumours that you hear. I'm glad you've cleared that one up.  
SUZY Watch it you ...! [**They square up as if for a fist fight.**]  
LAURA Cut it out, you two. [**Sounding like your mother.**] You're old enough to

play nicely... [**To Suzy.**] By the way, I saw Jason Spencer this morning. He was with ... now, let me see, who was it? Ah yes, Lauren Turner. The siren of Year 10. Every man's favourite pin-up. The leggy-blonde-of-the-upstairs-common-room. The mini-skirt-wearing-temptress. The air-headed boy-catcher ... [**Kate splutters and hides her face.**]

SUZY **after being fazed for a little while** Why should I care? I told you. We were talking. Anyway, he was boring ... He's not my type. [**Applies mascara furiously.**] What was the dress like?

KATE I thought anything in trousers was your type. [**She dodges a punch from Suzy.**] What dress? Oh, *the* dress. It was knee length. It had a high neck and long sleeves. And it was green. Pukey dark green. Honestly, I think it was her mum's or something. When I saw it I nearly died.

LAURA And I nearly ...

SUZY Died, yeah. It's a wonder you two are still alive. Anyway, what do you think? [**She turns to the others and is scrutinised.**]

LAURA Very passable. Eat your heart out, Lauren Turner. What about me? [**They look.**]

KATE Almost human. Me? [**She, in turn, is inspected.**]

SUZY Well, still a bit scary but not so bad now that you're hiding the horns.

KATE Ha ha. Anyway, off we go, girls. So many boys...

SUZY So little time ...

**They exit.**

EXTRACT TWO

SCENE 5

**Jenna's house. Mum is holding two cups of tea. She calls to Jenna.**

MUM Jenna! Come and have a cup of tea with me, I haven't seen you all day. [**Enter Jenna.**] I think they give you too much homework. You should get a bit of free time on a Saturday. You look pale. You need to get outside a bit.

JENNA **taking the tea and sitting down with her mother** Mum ... [**She hesitates for a long time.**] ... I was wondering ... I mean, I wondered if you ever heard from Dad.

MUM **not looking at Jenna and trying to sound casual** Not for a long time. He was in Switzerland, working for a big company. We lost touch ... I'm not sure if he's still there.

JENNA Why did he stop writing? He used to send postcards.

MUM I don't know, Jenna. I guess he thought he should move on. Perhaps he's ... married again.

JENNA He's probably got kids.

MUM Maybe ...

JENNA He used to send me presents. Then he stopped.

MUM Jenna. I don't know why he did that.

JENNA He stopped writing after that last time he visited. It was a long time ago. I was about nine or ten. After that, he never came again and he stopped sending postcards and things. I don't think he liked me.

MUM Jenna. He loved you. When you were little he ...

JENNA Yes, he loved me when I was little. But then, when I got ... older, he ...

Well, I wasn't ... [***She doesn't know how to finish.***]  
MUM What, Jenna? You weren't what?  
JENNA I don't know. Nice... Cute... Pretty...  
MUM Jenna, when you're a parent, things like that don't make any difference.  
JENNA It must have done. He stopped writing.  
MUM ***trying to sound calm and reasonable*** We don't know why he stopped writing. Anything could have happened. But, Jenna - it was nothing to do with you. It's far more likely that he didn't want to see *me*.  
JENNA ***suddenly losing control*** It was because of me! He saw how ugly I was and then he didn't want to see me again!

***There is a shocked silence. Jenna clearly never meant to say it and her mother can't believe what she is hearing.***

MUM ***quietly but urgently*** Jenna. You can't think that. You *mustn't* think that. Look, I know you don't feel very confident just now. Girls of your age often go through that. But you are *not* ugly. Not at all. And your father left us because of other things. [***She obviously makes a decision.***] I hadn't told you this, but I think he doesn't contact us because he has re-married and he hasn't told his new wife that he has a child. I know that's wrong, but I think it's what happened. Your Auntie Jill heard something ... But whatever made him decide not to contact us, it definitely was *not* because he thought you were ugly. He loved you, Jenna. Nothing would ever change that. And I'm sure that one day ...  
JENNA Mum, if he really loved me he wouldn't have left us! It's obvious. He never wanted to see me again.

***She runs out, leaving her mother speechless.***

### EXTRACT THREE

MUM ***on telephone*** The school called again and they virtually accused me of neglecting her. Honestly, Ruth, I do make sure she has breakfast but she takes it to her room or something ... I give her dinner money every day ... But she wears baggy clothes and avoids me a lot of the time ... Yes, she doesn't say much, but ... It was about three months ago ... she started asking about David. She had it in her head that he left because of her ... yes, I know, but she wasn't thinking straight ... so I made some enquiries. I thought I might be able to persuade him to get in touch with her ... put her mind at rest. That was when I found out. ... Well, he was married again so I wasn't next of kin... They had no reason to tell me. Anyway, Joanne didn't think it was any of our business... Six months. Apparently he never regained consciousness...Cremated...  
Abroad...Ruth, I'm so worried. I lie awake at night, thinking she might die....  
I can't bear it, Ruth. It was bad enough finding out that David was dead ... Yes, I'll tell her. When she knows, she'll realise that it wasn't her fault... And I'll go and talk to the school....But I don't know if I can help her get over this... I have to try to do something, but I don't know what ... [***She has to stop because she is on the verge of tears.***] ... Yes, I'm all right. Don't worry about me... No, really, it's nothing. I'll see the doctor but it's really nothing.... Yes. Come round as soon as you can. Thanks, Ruth....Thanks. [***She puts the 'phone down and buries her head in her arms.***]  
JENNA I just stood there and tried to take it in. Dad was dead and Mum was worrying herself sick about how to tell me without making it worse. I just

more  
Letting  
to look  
very

realised how selfish I 'd been. There and then I promised myself that I would try to change things. It wasn't easy. What I was doing was than a habit. It had become a way of life, and it was hard to change. go of my illness seemed like letting go of control. I had to learn how at myself and not see an ugly fat blob in the mirror. And gradually - gradually - it began to get easier. There were setbacks of course.

**Enter Becky.**

BECKY Are you ready? Oh God, I'm so nervous. Emma told Tim Walker I fancied him and he's going to be there tonight. It's just so embarrassing. ... Is Jason going?

JENNA I don't know. Actually, I haven't spoken to him for a bit...

**Enter Suzy, talking on her mobile 'phone.**

SUZY **deliberately stopping and talking loudly so that Jenna can hear her**

Yes, I'll be there. And just wait till you see the sexy little number I've got lined up for tonight... You'll have to wait and see, but it's short and sweet.... [**Glances at Jenna.**] Jason, [**She emphasises the name for Jenna's benefit.**] - I told you, you'll have to wait ... But I can promise you won't be disappointed. Bye Jason. I'll see you soon ... Yes ... Me too ... See ya. [**She smirks at Jenna and exits.**]

BECKY **who has been rolling her eyes and mimicking Suzy throughout the conversation** She is so pathetic. Look, you mustn't bother about Jason. I didn't like to say anything before but he really isn't worth worrying about. He goes out with as many girls as possible just to brag to his stupid mates. Ignore him ... and her.

**Back to Jenna as Narrator.**

JENNA And you can imagine how Suzy behaved. She dangled Jason under my nose all night. I was fed up with it at first but then I took Becky's advice and ignored them. I had a new top that Mum bought me. Poor Mum, she had such a bad time worrying about me and all the time she was still missing Dad. So was I really, even though it had been so long. Mum and me both cried for ages and then we felt better. I know this might sound weird but I felt different after I found that Dad was dead. I realised he hadn't forgotten me and he wasn't ignoring me. It wasn't that I was glad to find out that he'd died, but it sort of explained things.

But perhaps the biggest surprise of all was Laura.

**Enter Laura.**

LAURA Hi, Jenna. I'm glad you're back. Mrs Haslam told us a bit about you being ill but I wasn't sure how bad it was. I must say you look better.

JENNA **cautiously and a bit suspiciously** Thanks.

LAURA And I'm sorry about what happened before ... you know ... before you got ill. I always felt a bit bad about it but the others ... But that day when you collapsed. It frightened me and it made me realise ... Well, we were pretty awful.

JENNA Look, it's OK.

LAURA Anyway, I don't hang around with Suzy any more. Even Kate's getting fed up with her. All she thinks about is boys. You can't have a sensible conversation with her ... I was wondering if ... Look, this is just an idea, but I was wondering if you wanted to see the new film that's on at the multiplex.

It looks good and ... I wondered ...  
JENNA Thanks. I'd like to see it. I've heard it's brilliant.  
LAURA *relieved* Great, tomorrow night then?  
JENNA Sounds good. See you then.  
LAURA See ya. Bye!

***Back to Jenna as Narrator.***

JENNA And as for all the stuff about clothes and zits and fat. Well, I know now that I never really was fat and that at my worst I was really too thin. I feel better now, and I'm sure I look better. I'm not Britney Spears, but ... [***She shrugs.***] I never wore the green dress again, much to my Mum's disappointment. I told her to take it to the charity shop but she never did. She doesn't know that I know that it's still hanging in her wardrobe. She's bought me lots of new stuff and, yes, I bought some trendy tops. Laura is trying to get me to have my belly button pierced and every time she mentions it Becky pretends to be sick. I just laugh when they start. They're my friends. So all I can say is that when things get really bad you have to look for somebody to help. You can't always solve problems on your own. I couldn't. If I had been on my own I wouldn't have known where to start. Then I let people help me and it all got better. I've got Mum and Auntie Ruth, Becky and Laura and even Mrs Haslam. And most of the others are friendly now. Suzy isn't of course, but I reckon I can live with that. Actually, quite honestly, I couldn't care less.

***She exits. The Britney Spears song begins again, but this time only Suzy walks down the catwalk - where she is met by the Devil.***

DEVIL *appraising her* You know, you look good. Very good. You could go places with the right help. I understand you, you know ... Now, [***She puts her arm around Suzy.***] - I understand you want to impress Jason Spencer ...

***Blackout.***

## END OF PLAY

EXTRACT from PRODUCTION NOTES

### **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

N.B. These notes are suggestions only. You may find them helpful; or they may act as a springboard for your own ideas; or you can choose to ignore them entirely!

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.**

The play is an exploration of the issue of anorexia using many of the tools of narrative/ epic theatre. Some of the scenes are quite naturalistic in style, especially those between Jenna and her mother, but this is simply to introduce understanding and sympathy for the central character - a sympathy which is then distanced, though not lost,

when Jenna herself starts to narrate later on in the play. Both Mother and the Devil act as narrators and commentators, the Devil being clearly the voice of the media or social pressures which prey on young people. The rest of the characters are largely 'types' - the kind of people voicing the sort of opinions that can trigger off extreme lack of self-esteem in a sensitive person such as Jenna, though the three central girls achieve some depth and differentiation within their 'type.'

The main theme of the play is Jenna's descent into anorexia and her recovery. The play shows how self-esteem can so easily be punctured at that sensitive age - around fifteen, sixteen. It also shows how media and fashion have a lot to do with instigating this disease. It shows how friendship and the need for emotional support and understanding, whether it be from family, friends or teachers at school is of prime importance in beating this illness.

Though a dark theme, the play is lively and often humorous in approach. Theme and style counterbalance each other effectively.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **JENNA**

The subject of the play, Jenna is the anorexic. She is an only child, living with her mother, her father having left some time ago. Father has kept in touch, writing letters to her and sending presents but recently that has stopped. Jenna suffers from this, believing he has stopped loving her - and this adds to her growing feeling that she is unloveable. This is despite an obviously close relationship with her very loving and supportive mother. The lack of 'listening' to mother's love is, of course, an aspect of the disease; once the anorexic has made up her mind that she is fat, ugly and unloveable, nothing will change that opinion.

During the course of the play, we find out that the reason letters have ceased from her father is because he has been killed abroad. Mother conceals this fact, fearing that it will upset Jenna more - clearly the wrong thing to do.

In the end, Jenna overhears a conversation on the phone from her mother and realises how worried mum is about her. Because of her love for her, she decides to change things around. It is a struggle but she has help and support from the school, a couple of friends and her mother.

The first half of the play shows her growing self-hatred and insecurity. This will require some good 'inner' acting. In the second half, the struggle is mainly described by Jenna as narrator. This puts the audience at one remove from her - we know she has recovered and is looking back on herself in the past - but allows us to focus instead on the issues behind anorexia and how to help someone recover from it.

A good range of voice is required and an ability to cope with long speeches and a wide variety of strong emotions.

**MUM** This is another big part, requiring a good range of emotion and an ability to cope with long speeches. A single mother, deserted by her husband some years before, she has never got over his betrayal. Nonetheless, she is a good mother and has not burdened Jenna with reproaches against her father. She is finding it hard to cope with a teenage daughter, though her remedy of love and understanding - not without wisdom, too - is the right one. Because she is so supportive of Jenna, it is extra hard for her to feel she has lost control of Jenna's fears. She knows that Jenna is going through a really bad time but feels helpless and doesn't know what to do.

A strong voice required for this part, with warmth and sympathy in it. I would play her around 36 years old.

**KATE** is Suzy's side-kick. Not very bright, she allows Suzy to call the tunes. She seems to take a wide-eyed and rather ghoulish delight in all the details of anorexia. Not really caring for Jenna, she becomes something in a freak show to be watched by her. The excitement and drama of Jenna's plight is what appeals. This aspect lifts the role from being just a typical bitchy teenager. Play her as a follower, eyes always seeking Suzy's

approval, voice avid when observing Jenna and when a witness to dramas, such as the ongoing Jason Spencer story. Towards the end, we are told that even Kate is going off Suzy. Though we see no evidence of this, the desertion of Suzy's friends prepares the ground for Suzy to be the next vulnerable victim of the Devil's wiles.

LAURA is the one who turns in the end and becomes friendly and supportive of Jenna. We need to see her change and grow-up. At first, she's as bad as the others - bitchy and shallow. The turning-point is on Page 7 when she reads the article on Anorexia and wonders if Jenna will die. Unlike Kate, whose reaction would be 'how exciting is that?', this possibility brings Jenna into focus for her and she starts to dissociate herself from the others, even going to Jenna and offering friendship. This is important to Jenna's recovery - which is really a recovery of her self-esteem.

SUZY is the arch bitch. She is quite bright, but completely boy-crazy. No one is allowed to be attractive to the opposite sex except her. Her attitude to Jenna gets worse during the course of the play. She sees Jenna's anorexia as a manipulative device to get thin and therefore more attractive. So she sees her as a rival - especially when she gets off with school heart-throb, Jason Spencer. In a clever twist at the end, we see Suzy in another light - as just as vulnerable as Jenna was at the beginning. Her chasing after boys becomes a desperate seeking for approval and she has been deserted by her friends. Next time round, it will be Suzy who is the anorexic and who, consequently, we see with a little more sympathy.

DEVIL. Largely a narrator, the Devil needs to be the voice of temptation. Voice is often scathing - when it is the personification of a character's inner voice - 'You're too fat, etc....' Here the tone is one of loathing and cannot be overdone. More sinister is when the Devil poses as friend and advisor, dripping with insincere niceness - again, played to the hilt. A flamboyant totally non-realistic character, the Devil must be strongly acted to give the necessary emphasis to what she stands for.

BECKY is the smallest of the main characters, so can be doubled. She is a sympathetic character, who is drawn to Jenna and vice-versa because both come from fatherless families. She offers Jenna understanding and somebody to talk to. Though in the scene with Becky where we do not see Jenna coming clean about her father - cruelly contrasted with Becky's, who sees her regularly and buys her presents - we are aware that Becky is offering something solid and her support is helpful to Jenna's recovery. She can't be all bad if one person likes her for herself.

The other characters are physicalisations of attitudes, the most important of which is the Nurse, who portrays the firmly caring side of the school structure - along with Mrs Haslam, who is reported on but who does not appear as a character.

Accents from all the cast could be anything, anywhere - regional or received English - I don't think it matters.

## **SETTING**

Best done on an open empty stage. This could be enhanced by a screen or screens which show relevant images as a background. For instance, the opening image could be of beautiful thin model girls. Other images throughout the play could include other media 'pressurising' images, as well as images of Jenna's inner state - a forlorn figure, head down, slumped head in hands - that sort of thing. Two rostra blocks, angled inwards, would add necessary useful levels. These could be used for such as the devil to watch from. Make sure that the levels are low enough to act as seats for the cast, where seats are required - and there is no need for any more setting....