Whispers

By Kendra Thomas

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WHISPERS
By KENDRA THOMAS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

KATE ..................................teen coping with the death of her father, an Iraq War casualty 61
JAMIE .................................Kate’s best friend from the base; another “military brat” 50

The Whispers
JENNY ................................lost her father four years ago and worries she may forget 74
JASON .................................wonders how different things would be “if Dad were here” 65
DANE ....................................misses camping and other “father-son” moments 61
MARIE ...................................forever regrets her father’s ill-fated second tour 63
HAYDEN ...............................younger than the others; remembers Mom as a superhero 63
KELLY .................................tries to cope with the loss of her father by writing letters to him 64

SETTING

Time:  2011. (See PRODUCTION NOTES.)
Place:  A small wooded area. It’s a special place where Kate and her father used to go together, and where Kate now goes to reflect.

SET DESCRIPTION

The set should resemble a small wooded area. The “trees” can be wooden ladders, perhaps painted camouflage and entangled with leaves or branches. It is on these trees that WHISPERS sit, obscured from sight. In the original production, the set consisted of four ladders and three stage boxes painted green and brown. On each ladder, there were framed photographs of trees.
WHISPERS

AT RISE: LIGHTS UP SLOWLY on a small wooded area. WHISPERS are hidden in the trees. (See PRODUCTION NOTES.) LIGHTS UP FULLY as KATE ENTERS, holding tightly to a photo of a man in a military uniform. She moves to one of the trees and places the photo at eye level.

OPTIONAL MUSIC CUE: “Taps.”

WHISPERS: (Sing.) Day is done,
    Gone the sun,
    From the hills, from the lake, from the skies.
    All is well,
    Safely rest,
    God is nigh. (MUSIC OUT.)

KATE: (To the picture of her father.) Well, we’re here again, Dad. In our grove. Just you and me for old time’s sake, I guess. (Pause.) I came here ’cause I wanted to tell you something. It’s important, so you need to listen. It’s just that Mom and I... Mom is... Well, I can’t come back here anymore. I just… (Suddenly frustrated.) Oh, who am I kidding?! (Turns away from the photograph and starts to pace.)

JAMIE: (From OFFSTAGE.) Kate! Kate, are you out here?

KATE: (With a heavy sigh, she picks up the photograph before responding.) I’m over here, Jamie.

JAMIE: (ENTERS.) Hey, Kate! Your mother figured I might find you here.

KATE: (Turns away, clutching the photograph.) Hi, Jamie.

JAMIE: You weren’t at band practice, and someone said you turned in all your books to your teachers. Your mom said you were moving. Are you moving?

KATE: My mother is moving us back to Texas. She wants to be closer to her family.

JAMIE: Oh. (Long pause.) You didn’t tell me.

KATE: No.

JAMIE: Well, why not?

KATE: Because… it doesn’t matter.

JAMIE: (Hurt.) It doesn’t matter?! I’ve been your best friend since, well, for a long time. And—

KATE: A long time? What has it been, three years, maybe? I mean, really, Jamie, you’d think you’d be used to this by now. You live on a military base. People move all the time.

JENNY: Move!

HAYDEN: All the time.

KELLY: Moving.
WHISPERS: Always moving.
JAMIE: Maybe they do move all the time. But at least they tell people that they’re leaving. Why didn’t you tell me?
KATE: Because there’s nothing you can do about it.
JASON/HAYDEN/KELLY: It’s not your fault.
JASON: Nothing you could do.
JAMIE: I don’t know about that, Kate. I throw some pretty great going away parties. Let’s see, what did the last one involve? Whipped cream. Popcorn. Cream soda. (Pause. No reaction from KATE.) It’s not normal, Kate! I could have at least helped you pack.
KATE: I guess I just thought that if you didn’t know I was leaving, you’d just kind of forget about me and move on and find other friends.
JAMIE: You didn’t think I’d miss you?
KATE: I didn’t want you to hurt. You and I know what it’s like when people… go away.
WHISPERS: Go away.
MARIE: Gone.
DANE: Lost.
JENNY: Going away.
JENNY/MARIE/DANE: Away.
WHISPERS: Away…
KATE: It’s just not something you forget—people who leave. People who… It’s like a whisper in the back of your mind. They’re always there.
JAMIE: Kate, stop it. It’s not like you’re going to war. It’s not the same. You may be moving across the country, but you’re not... you’re not going to be... You know what I mean.
KATE: (Angry.) Shot at? Killed? (Indignant, then finally, a small smile.) Well, it is Texas. You know, he was from Texas. Both him and my mom. His first assignment was at Fort Hood. We lived on the base when I was little.
JAMIE: You’re talking about… your dad, right?
KATE: (Nods.) You know what’s funny? My mom says she wants to go back to Texas to be closer to her family, but we’ll be closer to my dad’s, too.
JAMIE: Has it gotten any better? At your grandparents’ house?
KATE: No. His military portrait hangs on the wall right in the middle of their living room where everyone can see it, and they look at my brother like he’s some kind of living ghost of my dad. I don’t know what it is, but it just makes me queasy. It’s like their entire house is filled with the whisper of a memory…

For Preview Only.
JASON: Dad.
JENNY: Father.
MARIE: Papa.
HAYDEN: Daddy.
KELLY: Abba.
DANE: Pop.
KATE: It’s like something that needs to be said, gotten out in the open, but nobody wants to talk about it!
WHISPERS: Shh!
JAMIE: Did that camp help? (WHISPERS react to this, turning slowly and focusing on JAMIE and KATE, but remaining silent.) The one with all the other kids who lost someone? I mean, I know you don’t get over it, Kate. Not really… ever. But did it at least help?
KATE: I don’t know, Jamie. I really don’t know. Sometimes I think of those other kids. I hear them in my head, and I know it’s good not to be alone. We all remember clearly the day everything changed.
JENNY: (LIGHTS FADE on KATE and JAMIE. SPOTLIGHT UP on JENNY, who emerges from her tree and steps forward. To AUDIENCE.) That day is seared into my mind. It was a Monday. August 4, 2009. There was a sale at the mall, and my mom and I had gone to get school supplies and new clothes. Sixth grade. I was so excited about starting middle school! I couldn’t wait to write my dad and tell him everything.
KELLY: Everything.
WHISPERS: Everything.
MARIE: Tell him.
HAYDEN: Tell him everything.
JENNY: But when we turned onto our street, I saw a car I didn’t recognize parked in our driveway, and as we got closer, two men in Army uniforms got out. In my heart, I knew. I don’t know how. No one told me how it would be. I just knew.
MARIE/HAYDEN/KELLY: No.
WHISPERS: No!
JENNY: I remember the moment they told my mom and how they asked her to send me to another room. I just sat on my bed praying and praying and praying. Maybe it was a mistake, maybe it wasn’t him, maybe God could fix things somehow—go back in time like in the movies and make it all turn out to be some terrible dream.
KATE: (To JENNY,) Everything is… different. And it will never be the same again.
HAYDEN: Please, God.
WHISPERS: Please!

JENNY: It’s been years now. I know he’s not coming back. I know God won’t fix it—at least not in the way I want Him to. I’m okay now, I guess. My mom and I are okay. But I worry sometimes. You see, I remember the day I lost my dad. I can’t forget it, no matter how hard I try. But my father’s face? The memory of him is fuzzy now, and sometimes I have to look at pictures. And I know there are things we did together, but the details seem to be slipping away. Like fragments of shattered glass, I can’t pick them up or put them back together. I can’t remember the details. I can’t hear his voice clearly or feel his arms lifting me up. I don’t want to forget! (Pause.) My name is Jenny Kirkland. My dad died in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded and flipped his Humvee. He was 35.

JASON: Memories.

DANE: Slipping away.

KELLY: Forget.

HAYDEN: Forgotten.

MARIE: Lost.

JASON: Gone.

JENNY: Please don’t let me forget! (Becomes a WHISPER again and returns to her tree as LIGHTS COME UP on KATE and JAMIE.)

KATE: Those stories were all so similar to mine, just in different ways. (Pause.) Jamie, I—I don’t want to lose you, too. I don’t want to forget you when I go away—like I’m afraid I’ll forget my dad’s face.

JAMIE: (Tries to comfort her.) Come on, Kate. It’s not like that. I mean, we can still be friends. We have Facebook, and I’ll text you and write letters and stuff.

KATE: (Curt.) Letters are stupid. I don’t like writing letters.

JAMIE: You’ll just have to get over that ’cause I’m going to email you every day! I promise.

KATE: (Scoffs.) Don’t do that. Don’t make promises you can’t keep.

JAMIE: I can keep it.

KATE: (Angry.) My dad couldn’t keep his, so don’t say you can keep yours!

JAMIE: (Hurt, becomes reserved.) I won’t do this, Kate. I know you’re hurting, but I’m hurting, too. I don’t want to sit here and listen to you be sad. I just want to say goodbye to my best friend.

JENNY: Goodbye!

HAYDEN: Later, ’gator.

DANE: So long.

KELLY: Bye.

MARIE: Goodbye.
JASON: Gone.

KATE: You can do that. It’s easy to say goodbye. We’re military kids. We do it all the time!

JAMIE: (Frustrated.) I don’t understand sometimes what’s happened to you.

WHISPERS: No one understands.

KATE: It’s okay. Really, I’m fine.

JENNY/MARIE/KELLY: She won’t understand.

JAMIE: I wish that were true.

KATE: It is! Come on, Jamie. You know me. It’s not like I go around crying or moping all the time. I know things are different, and if my dad were here... If my dad were here...

JASON: (LIGHTS FADE on KATE and JAMIE. SPOTLIGHT UP on JASON, who emerges from his tree and steps forward. To AUDIENCE.) The first time I said it, my mom’s face got really red and she turned away—wouldn’t look at us kids.

WHISPERS: If Dad were here...

JASON: My older brother told me not to say it anymore, but I didn’t understand why. All I said was, “If Dad were here...”

DANE: Dad.

JENNY: Father.

MARIE: Papa.

HAYDEN: Daddy.

KELLY: Abba.

DANE: Pop.

JASON: That’s how it started, but I don’t remember how I was going to finish the sentence. Something like, “If Dad were here, he would take us all to the baseball game.” I didn’t say it to be mean. I was just saying it ’cause it was true. There are so many things that I could say that about. If Dad were here, we’d still go skiing at Christmas like we used to. If Dad were here, I’d know how to pitch a fastball by now. If Dad were here, I’d have gotten a paintball gun on my birthday like he promised. If Dad were here, my mom wouldn’t cry all the time, and if Dad were here, my older brother would stop acting like a dad and just be my older brother again. If Dad were here, my little brother would have clear memories of him—better yet, he would actually know him—and he wouldn’t be getting in so much trouble at school. If Dad were here... If Dad were here... If Dad were here, I wouldn’t feel so lost and so alone.

MARIE: Alone.

JENNY: Forgotten.

DANE: Gone.

End of Script Sample
WHISPERS

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OPTIONAL MUSIC CUE: “Taps.”

WHISPERS:

(Sing.)

Day is done,
Gone the sun,
From the hills, from the lake, from the skies.

All is well,
Safely rest,
God is nigh.

(MUSIC OUT.)

KATE:

(To the picture of her father.)

Well, we're here again, Dad. In our grove. Just you and me for old time's sake, I guess.
(Pause.)

I came here 'cause I wanted to tell you something. It's important, so you need to listen. It's just that Mom and I... Mom is... Well, I just… (Suddenly frustrated.)

Oh, who am I kidding?!

(Turns away from the photograph and starts to pace.)

JAMIE:

(From OFFSTAGE.)

Kate! Kate, are you out here?

KATE:

(With a heavy sigh, she picks up the photograph before responding.)

I'm over here, Jamie.

JAMIE:

(ENTERS.)

Hey, Kate! Your mother figured I might find you here.

KATE:

(Turns away, clutching the photograph.)

Hi, Jamie.

JAMIE:

You weren't at band practice, and someone said you turned in all your books to your teachers. Your mom said you were moving. Are you moving?

KATE:

My mother is moving us back to Texas. She wants to be closer to her family.

JAMIE:

Oh.

(Long pause.)

You didn't tell me.

KATE:

No.

JAMIE:

Well, why not?

KATE:

Because… it doesn't matter.

JAMIE:

(Hurt.)

It doesn't matter?! I've been your best friend since, well, for a long time. And—

KATE:

A long time? What has it been, three years, maybe? I mean, really, Jamie, you'd think you'd be used to this by now. You live on a military base. People move all the time.

JENNY:

Move!

HAYDEN:

All the time.

KELLY:

Moving.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE

Ladders painted and decorated to resemble trees.

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON

Framed picture of a man in a military uniform (KATE)
Pasted-together photo of Dane and his dad (DANE)
Drawing of a superhero mom; pencil, pen, or crayon (HAYDEN)
Handwritten letter (KELLY)

ABOUT THE WHISPERS

WHISPERS remain “hidden” in the trees and background, moving CENTER only to tell their stories. How KATE and JAMIE interact when WHISPERS interject is up to the discretion of the director, but the understanding is that WHISPERS are memories exclusive to KATE, as demonstrated by KATE’S occasional responses to WHISPERS.

COSTUMES

KATE and JAMIE wear ordinary street clothes. WHISPERS also wear street clothes, but in fall tones to blend into the “trees.”

TIME SETTING

At the director’s discretion, dates and details about the parents’ deaths can be changed to suggest a more current war.

OPTIONAL MUSIC

“Taps”

FLEXIBLE CASTING AND SIZE

HAYDEN can be played by a male or female actor. The cast size may be expanded with additional WHISPERS.
ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*Whispers* received its world premiere in 2013 at the North Carolina Theatre Festival, where it was performed by Cary Christian School and won several awards. The biggest honor, however, was the extremely positive feedback given by students from Fort Bragg schools, including a handwritten note from one “military brat” that said, “Thank you for telling our stories.”

ORIGINAL CAST

Kate........................................Elizabeth Finnegan
Jamie ........................................Katie Cook
Jenny .......................................Ashlyn Main/Casey Fitzgerald
Jason .......................................Stuart Till/Thomas Andrews
Marie .......................................Caroline Cearley/Danielle Schmidt
Hayden .....................................Christian Shriver/Eilish Urgo
Dane .........................................Sean King
Kelly .........................................Sarah Insko/Hannah Waters
Stage Manager .........................Joy Self
Running Crew.........................Claudia Edge
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

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