It's all about the holidays

Micah Smith

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**Act 1 - training**

**Jenna**, *a trainee teacher in her early 20s,**walks to front and centre stage reading a book about teaching. The following lines are then said to her and can be shared out in any way you like among the actors. They may be delivered by any number of actors. As the Act progresses, the characters hand more and more documents and books to* **Jenna**, *until by the end the amount of material she tries to hold at once is overwhelming.*

So you’ve got six weeks to learn and then it’s up to you, it’s just you, in the class, with the kids.

And you want to be good? You want to make a difference? Well the most important thing is this.

You don't smile.

Not until Christmas

Easter

Never. You just don’t smile.

No you *do* smile.

You have to smile

Your smile might be the only smile they see the entire day

Entire week

So will you think about the children?

Because it's not about you.

It's about the kids, and these kids –

*These kids –*

They have it hard

And you have to make things work for them

And make them work for you

And I'm telling you – they won't want to

What they'll want to do is crush you

Make you blubber, make you break

And then they'll want to point and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh

Well. At least that's what they'll all think they want

But what they'll really, truly want -

Are boundaries.

So show them there's a line

And make it clear, and make it strong

And never waiver – you stay firm

But also flexible.

Because you'll find there are exceptions

There are always

Exceptions.

The challenge is that that's what most kids are –

Exceptions.

Most of all remember why you're here

To do good.

Because you care.

Also, for the holidays.

But mostly because you care

Because you really

Truly

Care.

*Lights out. The sound of a school bell. A staff room. A notice board in the background.*

**Act 2 - free period**

**Susan** *walks in holding scissors, a staple gun and a folder. She walks to the notice board. She removes from her folder photos of students, which she then staple-guns onto the notice board. She then removes from the folder a page with students’ photos on it, which she cuts out. While she does this* **Dave** *enters and slumps into one of the chairs.*

**Susan** Morning Dave.

**Dave** Not in the mood.

**Susan** It's only the first day.

**Dave** That's why I'm not in the mood.

**Susan** Nice break?

**Dave** Too short.

*Beat.*

**Susan** My break wasn’t great.

**Dave** Not up to your usual glamorous standards?

**Susan** Actually. My husband divorced me. It all takes a while but that's what he wants, he said, when we broke up, from school, I mean. At half-term, he said, we’ll sort and end things formally.

**Dave** Susan –

**Susan** It's okay.

**Dave** I'm sorry.

**Susan** I don’t want to talk about it, I just want people to know. Can’t bear the thought of all the questions about where we went and what we did this summer.

**Dave** Your holidays are always amazing.

**Susan** They were… Anyway I'm glad I’m back.

**Dave** Suppose it’s good, in a way, being here – distracts you from everything outside with all the stress they give you.

**Susan** The kids?

**Dave** Management.

*Jenna walks in, weighed down by documents. She searches for her pigeon hole.*

**Susan** Hi Jenna

**Jenna** Hello.

**Susan** Do you want some help?

**Jenna** I'm okay.

**Susan** Have you met Dave

**Dave** Hi Jenna

**Jenna** Nice to meet you.

*She looks for her pigeon hole.*

**Dave** You sure you don't want a hand?

**Jenna** I can’t find my pigeon-hole. I thought I’d leave these there.

**Dave** It will have your name on it.

**Susan** It's alphabetical.

**Jenna** Right.

*Jenna looks for her pigeon hole.*

**Dave** What's your surname.

**Jenna** Penthany.

**Dave** So it will be with the Ps.

*Pause.*

**Susan** Are you sure you don't want a hand?

**Jenna** I just don't seem to have one.

*Susan gets up and checks the pigeon holes.*

**Dave** It should be with the Ps.

**Susan** Yes Dave we're not idiots.

**Dave** Just being helpful.

**Susan** Actually she’s right. Jenna I'll speak to the guys downstairs and get them to sort you one for tomorrow.

**Dave** In the meantime you can stick things in my hole.

**Susan** David!

**Dave** I’m being helpful!

**Jenna** [*To Susan*] Could I leave these in your classroom?

**Susan** Of course.

**Jenna** Thank you.

**Susan** Oh and I’m looking forward to seeing you with your year nines on Friday. Send me your lesson plan the day before so we can have a little chat about it okay?

**Jenna** That would be great.

**Susan** It's what I’m here for.

**Jenna** Thank you.

*Jenna exits.*

*Pause.*

**Dave** She’s not going to last the term.

**Susan** She’ll be fine.

**Dave** I doubt it.

**Susan** I’m her mentor.

*She resumes staple-gunning photos of students onto the notice board.*

**Dave** Is that just for fun?

**Susan** What?

**Dave** Sticking staples in kid’s faces. I’m asking is that just for fun.

**Susan** It's a target board. Shows the borderline kids in English and maths - could get Cs, could get Ds. What do you think?

**Dave** They’ll mostly get Ds.

**Susan** What do you think about the target board?

**Dave** It looks like a dart-board. Actually it looks like some bullshit academy attempt to please Ofsted, make us feel even worse when our students struggle.

**Susan** Want to help make it?

*Susan passes him scissors. David helps her cut out photos, while she staple-guns them.*

**Dave** We were better when we weren't an academy.

**Susan** Our results weren't.

**Dave** The kids were happier, we were happier. This won't work long term.

**Susan** The target board?

**Dave** *All* of this *–* it's a different job. If you're bad you don’t get time to get good. If you're good they burn you out in a matter of months.

**Susan** You're still here.

**Dave** Who says I'm good?

**Susan** I do.

*Beat.*

**Dave** I'm glad we've both got frees at this time.

*Beat.*

**Susan** Me too – I did the timetable.

 *Beat.*

**Dave** Who else has a free at the moment?

**Susan** I don’t know the whole timetable off by heart… Okay I do. There's Martin from Maths.

**Dave** Boring Martin

**Susan** There's Sally, but she stays in her room.

**Dave** Thankfully

**Susan** The two new girls in Science. The Aussies.

**Dave** Agency?

**Susan** Yep. And finally us two and Jenna.

**Dave** With the pigeon hole?

**Susan** *Without* the pigeon hole.

**Dave** And where’s the name Jenna from?

**Susan** Genevieve.

**Dave** So Genevieve Penthany? Why would a Genevieve Penthany choose to teach here?

**Susan** She said she wants to make a difference.

**Dave** Oh yeah.

**Susan** What?

 *Beat.*

**Dave** Look if it helps her feel good about herself, more interesting to her friends, whatever, fine. But she won't last the term.

**Susan** Give her a chance –

**Dave** You know just this morning I see her in the corridor. It's first thing, before form time, and she's doing this whole serious pose. Eyes darting about the place as if to say "I'm watching you, I'm watching you". But the moment a kid comes close to her she retreats. She physically retreats. I see Malik come up to her –

**Susan** Which one?

**Dave** The little one, the chatty one, year 8. He comes up to her he says "morning miss". You know what she says in return? She says "morning sir". *Morning Sir*!? The kid's twelve!

**Susan** She was probably nervous.

**Dave** But you can't teach if you're nervous. And the thing is it will be me, or you, or one of the one or two others who actually have some ounce of experience who’ll have to bail her out! Seven weeks of that before half-term! Seven weeks.
God I hate school.

**Susan** (*Mimicking the voice of the headteacher)* David we’re not a school. / We’re an academy.

**David** We’re an academy. (*He sighs and shakes his head)*
Seven weeks until half term...

*Lights out. When they come up Susan is sitting by a table, waiting for a meeting with Jenna.*

**Act 3 - review**

**Dave** It's half term it's half term thank fuck / it's half ter-erm!!

**Susan** David! There are kids in the building.

**Dave** No chance. / It’s been half term for ten minutes

**Susan** There are. There's the chess club.

**Dave** The chess club?

**Susan** Yes, Martin from maths takes it.

**Dave** If you've got kids staying into half-term it would be the chess club.

**Susan** And your excuse?

**Dave** What?

**Susan** It's ten minutes into half-term –

**Dave** Eleven now -

**Susan** So what’s keeping you?

**Dave** I’ve come to get you! Let’s for a drink.

 *Beat.*

**Susan** No.

**Dave** Oh go on.

*Beat. She considers it.*

**Susan** No I really can’t. It’s tonight we’re discussing the divorce tonight.

*Beat.*

**Dave** Susan I don’t know if this is any consolation but. If I was older, or if you were younger, I hope you know I'd want to take advantage. (*Beat)* I don't know if that is any consolation.

**Susan** It isn't.

**Dave** / Right.

**Susan** It's actually a hideous thought. Anyway you go – I’m sticking around for Jenna – we're having a sort of, review.

**Dave** You gave her detention *today?*

**Susan** She’s not a student it's not detention

**Dave** She couldn’t say no though, could she?

**Susan** Dave – I’m helping her, I helped her, I got her to half-term.

**Dave** And her kids?

**Susan** They’ll get there.

**Dave** (*Points to the target board)* She’ll get Cs?

**Susan** They’ll get there! I’m helping her help them get there!

**Jenna***enters, rushing in and holding a folder*

**Dave** / Alright Jenna

**Jenna** Hi sorry sorry sorry I’m late

**Susan** It’s okay

**Jenna** I had to deal with this kid / who called me a bitch.

**Susan** It’s fine / well that’s not fine

**Jenna** Anyway I’m here now for detention!

**Susan** No! It’s not detention, you’re not a student.

**Jenna** I know I was / I was joking. (*Jenna opens up the folder. It’s her ‘reflective journal’ – a weekly record she is required to keep of her teaching)*

**Dave** You coming for a drink later?

**Jenna** As soon as this finishes – it won’t be too long will it?

**Susan** It shouldn’t do.

**Dave** Great – I’ll keep a seat for you.

*Dave exits.*

**Susan** I mean these things take as long as they take.

*Jenna sits down with Susan and hands over her reflective journal. This is clearly something they do often. Susan looks through the entries for the most recent week.*

**Susan** So it’s half-term and I’m so glad you’re here.

**Jenna** I thought these meetings were compulsory?

**Susan** They are but -

**Jenna** I know I was late –

**Susan** I mean in general. I’m glad you’re here in general.

**Jenna** Oh. (*Jenna gives a pathetic, ironic fist pump*) I made it!

**Susan** How does it feel?

**Jenna** Honestly I just feel tired. Like for weeks I've been counting down the days and now it's here and all I want to do is sleep. I can’t see what difference it’s all made.

**Susan** It takes time.

**Jenna** And the kids don’t respect me.

**Susan** They will.

**Jenna** You know Malik, in year 8, still insists I call him sir.

**Susan** Don't let him.

**Jenna** I don't "let him" he just… You know the last seven weeks have felt like this long, unending countdown while everyone tells me to do what I don't seem able to do. And everyone's so depressed and counting down. Seven weeks until half-term. Six weeks to go. Five weeks to go. Four weeks. Three weeks. Then it’s ten schooldays left, nine schooldays, eight, seven, six, five – and then it's one more week so you count in terms of lessons and so it goes until the last one and then you count down the minutes and then some kid calls you the c word – again – and you wonder what's the point. It's like all you live for are the holidays.

**Susan** It gets better.

**Jenna** Does it?

 *Beat.*

**Susan** Just enjoy half-term. You can relax and feel proud and come back refreshed. And also plan a few lessons and mark some books.

**Jenna** My boyfriend’s taken time off work. Says he’s planned a surprise because I work too hard.
He keeps telling me I work too hard.

**Susan** It’s probably difficult for him. Here you are dealing with the life chances of children who need you, who depend on you, and of course it’s hard to see how the cinema or dinner or whatever can be more important. He probably feels threatened. What does he do?

**Jenna** He's a paediatrician.

*Beat.*

**Susan** Your reflective journal looks good, by the way. You saw Dave teaching this week?

**Jenna** I did, he’s brilliant. I think I’m in love with his behaviour management.

**Susan** What did you learn?

**Jenna** This is great.He does this. (S*he stands, laughs to herself, and pretends to write on a whiteboard).* When you’re at the board, when the kids can’t see your face, when they think they can get away with it, Dave does this. He’s writing at the board and all of a sudden he'll dramatically. (*She stops)* Like this. And then, without turning his head, he goes all menacing: “I can see you. I can see everything that you're doing. And I really, really think you should stop.”

**Susan** And what can he see?

**Jenna** Nothing, just the board, that’s the point! But the kids are all like “what can he see? How does he do that” and inevitably some kid just confesses to something. Honestly - Dave’s the best. He’s saved me so many times. He’s like, Mr behaviour management. Which is what we need. Not me trying to be Miss nurturing. Really, without him, I don't think I'd have got through half-term.

 *Beat.*

**Susan** As your mentor I’m glad to hear the other teachers support you.

**Jenna** I mean obviously you've been. Crucial. Really. I know this sounds cheesy but. I actually find you very inspiring. You know that advice you get – "don't smile till Christmas" – when you teach you really embody that. And it's so clear you devote so much to this and are so totally focussed. It’s like there's nothing distracting you. Like the kids are the absolute only thing that matters in your life.

**Susan** This isn’t my whole life.

**Jenna** / I don’t mean –

**Susan** Jenna I'm more than my job – I didn't become boring I didn't stop being exciting.

**Jenna** I just meant you’re an amazing teacher. The kids are lucky to have you, I'm lucky to have you.

*Beat.*

**Susan** Thank you it's good to hear that sometimes.
Right I'll let you get off for that drink.

**Jenna** I'm free? I can go?

**Susan** You’re free.

**Jenna** Thank you. *(She gets up to exit)* Susan if I upset you, just now, I’m sorry. I really only meant to say the way you teach – it’s beautiful. And I know it takes a huge amount, but I really hope that one day – if I can give everything to teaching and just work and work and work and work – one day, I hope, I can be just like you. Anyway, I hope you have a really nice half-term.

*Jenna exits. Susan sits alone.*