

# QUEST FOR THE TRUTH



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**Glass** speaks to British actor **JENNA COLEMAN** about her new sleuth TV series *The Jetty* and how she's managed to stay true to herself

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Audiences love a crime thriller. It’s a genre we’re all too familiar with – city back alleys, car chases, trench coats and prolonged gazes out into the distance. But the BBC’s latest addition, *The Jetty*, has far more depth. Writer Cat Jones has deftly managed to cram sexual consent, coming-of-age and grief all within the first 60 minutes of the four-part series.

At the centre of this stunning sweeping landscape lies Jenna Coleman’s detective Ember Manning, who is responsible for joining the dots in an arson and missing person case. However, it’s not so black and white, as Coleman explains. “It’s only in her stepping forward in a case that her own past begins to unravel. You’ve got this really interesting tension, this push and pull. The more information she knows, the less she knows about herself.”

It was the brilliance of Jones’ script that drew Coleman in. “I’ve been sent so many detective series through the years ... but as an actor you’re kind of the vehicle to keep the cogs of a story turning as opposed to being a human or a character. This piece felt really different. It’s as much a human drama as it is a detective drama.”

Unlike most detective series where plots are all tied up in a neat bow, Jones provokes questions from the audience. Post-viewing you’ll find yourself harking back to your own youth, assessing the grey areas found in all of our collective life experiences. In fact, the inspiration for the storyline came from Jones’ time as a teenager spent with older men who would buy her and friends alcohol after school. At the time it was fun, but now looking back, it doesn’t sit so well. Together with Ember, you are confronted with your past and go on a journey of “self-discovery”.

Growing up in Blackpool, Coleman’s first foray into performance arts was through dance and it wasn’t until she crossed paths with an inspiring drama teacher that Jenna caught the acting bug. Soon, she was travelling across the country with a theatre company, but planning to eventually read English literature at York University. But then she was offered a part in ITV soap *Emmerdale*. At 18, Coleman left home and moved to Leeds and hasn’t stopped working since.

While filming *The Jetty*, she took “a lot of comfort” from the “generations beneath me [who] seem a lot more confident in themselves ... more assertive and comfortable than I think I ever could be at that age on a set. I think that’s a really great thing.”

Coleman is one of those lucky actors who has managed to take on a number of diverse roles, having starred in *Victoria*, *Doctor Who*, *Captain America*, *The Cry*, *The Serpent* and *Wilderness*, as well as appearing on stage at the Old Vic and Harold Pinter. Not one to get comfortable, she is now ready break away from the “really intrepid characters that are very internalised ... I’ve got this urge to be really kind of fiery and impulsive, and really emotionally immediate.” And not one to “come home and keep hold of my characters”, she prefers to set firm boundaries between work and reality.

Emotional immediacy is of course the key ingredient to being a good actor and it’s a characteristic Coleman has in abundance. There’s no question that she is beautiful but, like her characters, she is an open book and keen to explore the nitty gritty. Our conversation twists and turns, deep diving into all avenues of possibility. It’s evident that she’s a deep thinker and honest talker, a rare jewel in today’s media filter. How does she remain so authentic and grounded? First and foremost, she cites her family as being “really supportive and laid back”. Enduring friendships are also important. “My school friends are still my close friends now in London, and they all do really different things.” She still revels in “the circus of it”, just as she did back in her theatre company days, and likens the life of a working actor as “being shot out of a canon”. While on set Coleman is “constantly finding equilibrium ... You have to be really porous and really open, yet really rock solid at the same time”. It’s a juxtaposition for the brave hearted – “I think depending on how you use it ... fear is a pretty vital”.

With 20 years of experience under her belt, Coleman has witnessed what she describes as “the wave” of changes tearing through her industry and the wider world, saying she’s still trying to “actually get a bit of retrospect on that”. What with lockdown shutting down sets while she was shooting in Bangkok and major production delays due to the strikes, “it’s been a very stilted, stop-start couple of years”.

Always curious, Coleman reflects on the “aftershocks and after effects” of the current climate on the film and TV industry and hopes for more support in the indie film sector. “You just want to see something human reflected back and I think it’s like a study, an observation, it’s psychology. When you’re tapping into something real, I think that’s really all anybody’s searching for.”

On a quest for the truth, Coleman pauses to reflect. “I think everything’s been shaken up and how it’s going to land is still in the ether.” It’s in that ever-questioning ether that you’ll find Coleman at her most comfortable, starring front and centre.

***The Jetty* is coming to BBC iPlayer and BBC One soon**



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