

BEFORE WE GO

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

HANNA	(F)
ALEX	(M)
LAUREN	(F)
NADINE	(F)
ROCKY	(M)
JAKE	(M)
SCOTT	(M)
KELSEY	(F)
EJ	(F)
EMILY	(F)
BARBARA	(F), mother in her early 40s, raised her son mostly alone, after husband walked out
JOHN	(M), Barbara's son, 18, leaving home
PAMELA	(F), 18, overachiever, obsessive, getting ready to graduate
BEN	(M), mid-twenties, sales clerk in department store
ALICE	(F), early twenties, buying a tie for her boyfriend
GINA	(F), early twenties, flirtatious
RILEY	(F), 18, reached the breaking point
NED	(M), mid-to-late 20s, doesn't like to be touched
DEENA	(F), mid-twenties, in a relationship with Mark, overachiever, successful
MARK	(M), mid-twenties, in a relationship with Deena, not successful, ready to make a change
RANDY	(M), early twenties, flirtatious, sees himself as a ladies' man
JULIE	(F), 19, her relationship with her boyfriend has taken a dramatic turn.
LISA	(F), 18, sweet, has fallen in love with David
DAVID	(M), 18, quirky, nice guy, thinks Lisa is amazing
ELLEN	(F), late twenties, has discovered some unpleasant truths about her boyfriend
AMY	(F), 18, has a special friend who keeps her sane
KIRK	(M), 18, serious self-esteem issues; concerned about what will happen between him and his girlfriend when he goes to college.
ERIN	(F), early twenties, big sister to Jill; has just gotten engaged
JILL	(F), 18, graduating from high school, little sister to Erin
CHRIS	(M), 18, struggles with his identity and what his future holds

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Before We Go was first performed in May, 2006. The original cast included:

Hanna Leister
Lauren Forschino
Emily Kneale
Jake Dennison
Rocky DeMasi
Nadine Lombardi
Kelsey Torstveit
Emily White
Scott McKown
Alex Knerr

SET

Before We Go may be performed with basic setting and costume elements to suggest the changes in location and character.

PROPS

Cellphone (for John)
Wallet (for Barbara to give to John)
Tie or ties (for Ben and Alice)
Dr. Pepper (for Gina)
Note (for Deena)
Engagement ring and box (for Erin)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Before We Go can be presented with a very simple set. There are no special costume requirements. Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting, role assignments and staging.

Before We Go was originally performed by 10 actors (6 Females, 4 Males) playing multiple roles. The play may be done with as many as 20 actors (12 Females, 6 Males) or fewer actors playing multiple roles. Other modifications to cast size and role assignments are possible at the discretion of the director.

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AT RISE: Each actor addresses the audience in turn. The lines should feel connected, yet should not be treated as paired thoughts.

HANNA: Before you say a word. . .

ALEX: I need to tell you something.

LAUREN: Before I go to sleep. . .

NADINE: I need to make you understand.

ROCKY: **(struggles with the confrontation)** Before I tell you. . .

JAKE: Before I tell you what I think of you. . .

SCOTT: I can't help wondering. . .

KELSEY: Did you think I wouldn't notice?

EJ: Did you think I wouldn't care?

EMILY: Before I spontaneously combust. . .

HANNA: I'm going to scream. **(gleefully screams)** I told you I was going to scream.

LAUREN: Before I parallel park. . .

NADINE: Before I eat the shrimp with pea pods. . .

EMILY: Before I get distracted. . .

JAKE: Before I wipe your vomit off my shoe. . .

ALEX: Before I let you have a sip of my Dr. Pepper. . .

KELSEY: Before I knew what was happening. . .

EJ: Before I start feeling guilty. . .

SCOTT: Before you make any assumptions. . .

ROCKY: **(struggles with the words)** Before I. . .

HANNA: Before I say goodbye. . .

NADINE: I'm not ready. . .

KELSEY: It can't be time already.

EJ: I still have so many questions. . .

JAKE: How can I thank you for everything you've done for me?

LAUREN: Why can't I believe that you love me as much as I love you?

HANNA: Do you think I'm pretty? I mean, really pretty?

EMILY: Who is the parent and who is the child?

ALEX: What does it mean to be a man?

ROCKY: I need to know. . . before I go.

TRANSITION

(To BARBARA and JOHN, mother and son. JOHN is getting ready to leave.)

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BARBARA: Before you go, I want you to promise me that you'll call the minute you get there. Not tomorrow or the next day. I want you to promise me that you'll call the minute – the *minute* – you get there!

JOHN: I will. I'll call.

BARBARA: The minute you get there.

JOHN Yes. . . the minute I get there.

BARBARA: Are you sure you've packed everything? Your inhaler? Your allergy medicine?

JOHN: Yep. All packed.

BARBARA: Did you double check? You don't want to get there and realize you forgot something. Where would you be, then?

JOHN: I'd manage.

BARBARA: How? How would you manage?

JOHN: It depends on what I forgot.

BARBARA: You have an answer for everything.

JOHN: Yeah, pretty much.

BARBARA: And an attitude to go with the answers.

JOHN: You have a question for everything. . . And an attitude to go with the questions.

BARBARA: This isn't easy for me, you know.

JOHN: I know.

BARBARA: I don't know what you think I'm going to do when you're away.

JOHN: You'll manage.

BARBARA: You think so?

JOHN: Sure. Why not?

BARBARA: It's not that simple. . . I'm a mother. . . When a mother doesn't have a child around anymore, what is she?

JOHN: (*joking*) A mother with a child living someplace else.

BARBARA: You're funny.

JOHN: I get that from you.

BARBARA: You get that from your father.

JOHN: I wouldn't know.

BARBARA: He did his best.

JOHN: It wasn't good enough.

BARBARA: But it was his best.

JOHN: Why are you taking his side? He walked out on you, too.

BARBARA: I know. He didn't know what else to do.

JOHN: He could have stayed.

BARBARA: We managed.

JOHN: Yeah. And you'll manage when I'm. . .

BARBARA: When you're away.

JOHN: It's not like I'm going to the moon. I'll have my cell phone.

BARBARA: It's not the same as *seeing* you. I'm going to miss seeing you every day.

JOHN: I know. (**making light of it to keep them both from crying**) But that could be a good thing, right? I can be a pain sometimes. You've said so yourself.

BARBARA: (**teasing**) That's true. You can. Your leaving might not be such a bad idea, after all.

JOHN: (**sweetly**) You'll manage.

BARBARA: (**hugging him**) You'll call the minute you get there.

JOHN: The minute I get there.

BARBARA: You might need this (**hands him his wallet**).

JOHN: My wallet.

BARBARA: I found it in the pocket of your jeans when I was doing the last load of your laundry. . .

JOHN: Thanks. (**takes it and puts it in his back pocket**)

BARBARA: I put a little extra cash in it. Just so you have it. . . in case you need it.

JOHN: (**hugs her; pause**) I've gotta go.

BARBARA: Let me look at you. Just one more time. I want to remember you just like this.

TRANSITION

PAMELA: Before you make any assumptions. . . Let me tell you this, right up front: I am not going to cry. . . not now, at least. Maybe, later, I will. . .

But definitely not now. I'm in control. And crying would be a loss of control. I can't have that. Not now. . . Control is important to me. . . You might say I have control issues. (**quick pause**) You've probably *already* said that.

I could tell you that I lost my sparkly belt. . . It was my favorite and, now, I don't know where it is. It disappeared. Poof, gone. That makes me want to cry. But I'm not going to. . . I won't. . . I simply won't allow myself to.

I could tell you about the time I was seen making out with a certain quirky boy at a public event. . . I could tell you that and think about how much time has past since then and all the things that have happened to me between then and now and how far I've come. I could do that. I could tell you. . . And I could cry. But I am not. . . going. . . to. . . cry.

My mom and dad think I'm too sensitive. They think the big, bad world is going to chew me up and spit me out. That whips up a pretty mental picture, doesn't it? There are other people – they know who they are – who are worried about me falling apart out there. . . out in the world. . .

I'm going to show them all. I'm not going to be so sensitive. I'm going to be tough.

So, this is a test. A final exam, really. And I'm going to pass it.

I know what you're thinking. I've cried over some tests, in the past. . . in the recent past. . . ok, like yesterday. . . But I've turned over a new leaf.

This test isn't standardized. This one doesn't involve filling in circles with the correct multiple choice response. Those tests unnerve me. . . upset me (**quick pause**) And, yes, they have made me cry.

Sometimes, there are too many of the same-letter answers in close proximity. That's always a red flag for me. The test, yesterday, had too many B's. Seven of them. (**quick pause**) In a row!

The answer to number 4 was B and number 5 and number 6. All the way to number 10. B, B, B, B, B, B, B. Even four in a row would have been too many. Three in a row is suspect. Dubious. Potentially dangerous. But seven?! That is incomprehensibly disturbing. There is no way a sane person would have that many questions in a row with the same answer. It's wrong. It is just plain wrong.

I went back and double-checked. I still got B for all seven questions. Was it a mind game? Was it a thinly veiled attempt to upset me and make me cry? Am I taking it too personally? (**quick pause**) Probably, but you never know.

And I cried. So, they got their wish.

But, no more. No more tears. Like the shampoo for kids. That's the name of the shampoo – No More Tears. Keep up. I shouldn't have to explain everything to you.

And see? I've passed the test. I haven't cried. Not now. I will, later. . . but so will you.

TRANSITION

(To Cory's Department Store. BEN, the sales clerk, is behind the counter. ALICE is shopping for a tie.)

BEN: Have you settled on that one?

ALICE: **(holding up a tie)** I think so.

BEN: It's a nice one.

ALICE: I need something a little nicer than just nice. I need something special.

BEN: That one is special.

ALICE: But you called it a "nice one."

BEN: I didn't mean it in a negative way. It's definitely not an average tie. It's a City of London.

ALICE: City of London?

BEN: The tie maker. . . the brand. . . City of London.

ALICE: Oh.

BEN: **(taking tie from her and turning it over, displaying the underside)** See. . . Most City of London ties have really fun contrasting fabric inside. It's like walking around with a little secret.

ALICE: I think my boyfriend has enough little secrets.

BEN: So, the tie is for your boyfriend?

ALICE: Uh uh. It's for a job interview. . .

BEN: This is a great interview tie.

ALICE: I hope it's not too good.

BEN: Not too good?

ALICE: The interview. It's for a job out of state.

BEN: Oh. . . so you don't want him to get the job?

ALICE: Right.

BEN: Why not? Couldn't you move with him?

ALICE: We've been going out for about six months. . . six months, two weeks and four days. But we've never talked about the future. I'm not even sure I'm the only girl he's dating.

BEN: That would be good to know.

ALICE: Yeah.

BEN: Before he goes.

ALICE: *If* he goes.

BEN: **(concerned about his sales commission)** Before you buy the tie?

ALICE: I'll take it. Little secret and all.

TRANSITION

GINA: Before I let you have a sip of my Dr. Pepper, I think you should know a little something about me. After all, sipping from someone else's soda is an intimate act. My lips have been where your lips are going to be. It's very different from sharing a bowl of popcorn or a pizza. We might as well be kissing. **(quick pause)** I'm not suggesting that. **(quick pause)** Not at all. I just want you to think about the line you crossed when you asked for a sip.

(Takes a sip and continues to sip from the soda, throughout the monologue)

You may think you know me. . . I look nice enough. . . Pretty enough – on the days my hair does what I want it to. But you don't know me. . . You don't know me. . . Not really. I could tell you things about me that would give you chills. Bad chills. . . Really bad chills. **(shivers)** I give myself the chills. If I can give myself the chills, just by thinking of the things I've done, imagine how bad the chills I'd give you would be.

I won't prolong the anticipation. I won't make you wonder anymore about the things I do that could be so upsetting. . . so. . . **(searching for the word)** so. . . chill-giving. I won't make you wait another second. . . **(pause, looks as if SHE's going to speak, then, stops)**. . .

Or will I? **(pause)** Do you think I'm pretty? I mean, really pretty?

I'm teasing you, now. It's naughty making you wait. **(quick pause)** No, I won't be cruel anymore. . . I'll tell you. . . I'll confess. . . **(pause; milks the pause)**

I. . . am. . . addicted to. . . reality TV. **(quick pause)** Bad reality TV. VH1 reality TV. Has-been celebrities mixed up with never-were and only-in-their-own-mind celebrities. The concepts vary but the shows all have the same guilty-pleasure vibe. There are fat celebrities who want to be not-so fat; celebrities who used to be child stars and now want to be adult stars but can't because they don't have any talent, and celebrities who would do anything for attention – the kind of people who would go to opening of a stall door in the restroom, if there was a red carpet involved.

They're desperate people. Pathetic people. You know they're going to do bizarre and nasty things. I watched one show, *Flavor of Love*,

about an ugly old rap star who wears big clocks around his neck and had a bunch of seriously trashy women trying to be his next wife.

There was one episode where two women – tacky, trashy, disgusting women – got into a fight and one of ‘em spit on the other one. She spit on her! Right on national TV. Big, I’ve spit-on-people-before-and-I-know-what-I’m-doing spit! And they did an instant replay in slow motion so you saw the lugie flying through the air like this. **(demonstrates)** My jaw was on the floor. I was horrified. . . but I couldn’t look away. I told you. . . I’m addicted.

The network reality shows don’t have the same appeal for me. I don’t care about cutthroat business people who wanna work for some jerk with an ego the size of the moon. I’m not interested in people who go live on an island and snuff out tiki torches to tell somebody they don’t like them anymore. **(quick pause)** No. . . give me a has-been child star walking around in his underwear trying to pick up a former model whose face looks like her plastic surgery is melting. Now, that’s entertainment. **(takes a sip)**

Still want that sip of my Dr. Pepper?

(sips)

Oh, too bad. . . it’s all gone.

TRANSITION

RILEY: Before I tell you what I think of you. . . And I *will* tell you. . . I *will*. . . But, I can’t help wondering why it’s taken me so long to tell you. **(quick pause)** No, I take that back. **(quick pause)** I know why. It’s because I never let people know what I’m really thinking. I never let people know when they’ve hurt me.

I’d rather hold it in. . . stuff it down inside so I get an ulcer. . . That’s better than being honest. That’s better than telling somebody off. They might not like me, then. They might say something worse.

(an outburst) Too bad! **(quick pause)** I say that, now. But I wasn’t always like that. As recently as. . . an hour ago, I wasn’t like that. Then, I heard what you said. . . I heard what you said about me. And I heard the cruel tone in your voice. You knew it was mean. And you still said it.

Aren't you the one who always told me, "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all?" I guess it doesn't apply to you. Is that what you think? **(quick pause)** Well, you're wrong. You're wrong about this and you're wrong about a lot of other things.

Were you standing in the wrong line when they were passing out the "good mother" gene? Did you lose your instruction book?

You're the one who's supposed to set an example for me. You're supposed to be the role model. You're a mess. There are people walking around the streets talking to themselves who are more together than you are.

Oh, was that harsh? Did that hurt your feelings?

I'm sorry. **(quick pause)** Sorry that it's taken me so long to tell you how I feel.

Every morning, from the time I was ten, I made breakfast for myself because you were too lazy or too hung over to get out of bed and do it for me. I even left some in the fridge for you. And packed a lunch for you to take to work. On the days you managed to go to work.

While other mothers were driving their kids to soccer games and ballet class, I got my license and drove *you* around because your license got suspended for reckless driving. **(quick pause)** Reckless living is more like it.

(the basic question) Who is the parent and who is the child?

Truth hurts. So does having your mother lock you out of the apartment for a weekend so she can "have some privacy" with her boyfriend. **(quick pause)** I had a real good time trying to explain that one to Ashley's mom when I showed up on at their house with no place to go for two days. **(the memory is painful and her eyes begin to well up with tears)**

I need to get out of here. . . I need to go somewhere. . . Anywhere. . . Anywhere but here.

Do you care? Will you expect a phone call or post card? Probably not. **(lets a few tears fall, then, regains her resolve).**

And before I start feeling guilty about leaving. . . **(pause)** No. . . wait. . . I don't feel guilty. I feel free. And safe. And happier than I've been in a long time. I wanted you to know that. . . before I left. . . Before I was gone.

TRANSITION

NED: I don't like to be touched. Not ever. Not by strangers and not by friends. **(pause; suspicious)** I shouldn't have told you that. Now you want to touch me. I know you do. Everybody does. The minute people find out I don't like to be touched, all they wanna do is touch me. So, squelch the impulse. Sit on your hands if you have to. . . whatever it takes. Just don't touch me.

If you try it, I'll slap you. I'll put on a latex glove and an oven mitt over that and, then, I'll haul off and smack you. I will. Don't test me. You don't wanna go there with me. I don't look like I could be dangerous, but I am. I can put on a latex glove and an oven mitt faster than most people can remember what day of the week it is. And, once I have the glove and mitt on, I'd own you. It'd be all over.

People are walking germ factories, you know. Millions of microscopic germs and viruses and bacteria all over our hands. And that cesspool of infectiousness gets on everything we touch.

I had to quit playing basketball. I hated to do it but it, got to be too much. Every time somebody passed me the ball, I'd worry about whose hands had touched it and where their hands had been. I couldn't concentrate on the game. I can't even go to pro basketball games anymore, either.

Crowds are brutal. People brush up against you and they don't even realize it. It's bad enough just sitting in the stands watching the game with all the people and the germs around me. The situation is like a viral powder keg waiting to explode. One time, this really tall guy was sitting next to me and after a 10-2 run where we regained the lead and sealed a victory, he stood up and high-fived the guy on the other side of me – right over my head. And his armpit. His *sweaty* armpit made contact with my face. I nearly fainted dead away.

Having your face come in contact with a sweaty armpit is as bad as it gets in a public place. If I used public restrooms that would be worse than an armpit, but I never go in those places. It might as

well just swim around in the toilet. That's how bacteria-ridden public bathrooms are. But you knew that. You had to know that. Everybody knows that.

My girlfriend (**quick pause; indignant at the perceived assumption**) Yes, I have a girlfriend – and she's beautiful and has excellent personal hygiene. My girlfriend understands my quirks. She's found a way to help me deal with my . . . issues. We discovered it accidentally. We were sitting on the sofa, six to eight inches apart, as usual for me to feel relaxed and comfortable. We were listening to a bootleg CD from a Strokes concert. You know, The Strokes. The band. . . The Strokes. Anyway, we were listening to the CD and I kinda leaned over and my shoulder touched her shoulder. (**quick pause**) And it was fine. . . It was nice. (**quick pause**) It was seriously amazing.

We tried CDs of other groups – all different kinds of music. Everything from old-school R&B to punk and New Age – everything. The Strokes are the only thing that works. So, we decided to push the envelope. . . put the magic to the test. (**big news**) We went to their concert, last week. I had my iPod on with their songs playing in my head to get me through the crowd hysteria. (**explaining**) My hysteria, not the crowd's. The music helped a lot. Once the show started, it was like I was transported to Nirvana – the place, not the band. Everything was safe and germ-free. And, before I knew what was happening, I hurled myself into the crowd. They lifted me above their heads. I crowd surfed! Hundreds of hands held me aloft, floating, riding the wave on the sea of humanity and I screamed, "Touch me! Touch me! (**reveling in the big moment**) Everybody. . . touch me!" (**sensing a hand reaching out to him; snapping back to the present**) Not you. (**reminding them**) I don't like to be touched. Not now. Not ever. (**quick pause**) Well, almost never.

TRANSITION

DEENA: Is this what you had in mind all along? Is this what you had planned? To leave me this way? With a note? Three sentences?

MARK: I didn't expect to be here when you got home.

DEENA: Exactly. That's exactly what I mean. You had this planned all along.

MARK: Kinda.

DEENA: Kinda. You leave me a three-sentence goodbye note and that was "kinda" what you had in mind?

MARK: I wasn't sure if I was even going to leave a note.

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DEENA: You'd just leave? How could you just leave?

MARK: How can I stay?

DEENA: Stay and work it out. We could work it out. I know we could work it out.

MARK: I'm not sure I want to work it out.

DEENA: Why wouldn't you at least want to *try* to work it out?

MARK: It's the truth. You always said you wanted me to be honest with you. I'm being honest.

DEENA: I never asked you to say things to hurt me.

MARK: You asked me to be honest with you, didn't you? (**very quick pause**) You know you did.

DEENA: Yes. I asked you to be honest. To not keep secrets from me.

MARK: So, I'm being honest. You're getting what you wanted.

DEENA: This is not what I wanted.

MARK: Then, you shoulda been more careful about what you asked for.

DEENA: You're gonna regret this. You're gonna be sorry.

MARK: I'm already sorry. (**quick pause**) Sorry I didn't get out of here before you got home. This is exactly what I didn't want to have to deal with.

DEENA: That's so like you. Always looking for the easy way out.

MARK: (**angry, with increasing volume**) If I wanted to take the easy way out, I'd have left a month ago. (**quick pause**) If I wanted to take the easy way out, I'd have gone and not left a note. (**quick pause**) If I wanted to take the easy way out, I wouldn't still be here!

DEENA: Oh, good, now you've yelled at me. Now the neighbors have heard you scream at me like some kind of lunatic. That's really nice. It's comforting to know that we'll be the topic of conversation at the Skornick's dinner table, tonight.

MARK: I'm a loser no matter what I do.

DEENA: I never said that.

MARK: You didn't have to. I compare myself to you every day and I never win. You're always more successful and make more money and have more friends. You even play golf better than me. How am I supposed to deal with that? How is any man supposed to deal with that?

DEENA: What do you want from me? Do you have any idea – any idea at all? What am I supposed to do? What can I do? (**quick pause**) It's not my fault your life hasn't gone the way you wanted it to. It's not my fault. I'm tired of tiptoeing around, trying not to let any of my happiness. . . my joy. . . slip out and upset you. (**quick pause**) Why are your feelings more important than mine? Please, tell me why – so I can understand. I want to understand. It's funny. . . ironic, really.

. . . you resent my success and my happiness and I resent you for resenting all the good things that I've earned – things I've made happen for myself. You expect everyone to hand you things. All I expect is to be given respect for what I've worked hard to achieve. I deserve your respect. You owe me that.

MARK: (**applauding**) Bravo. You even argue better than me. (**holds her hand up, like at the end of a boxing match**) The winner and still champion.

DEENA: This isn't about winners and losers.

MARK: Maybe not to you.

DEENA: (**reaches out to him**) I love you, Mark.

MARK: Save it. (**quick pause**) I'm outta here.

DEENA: Before you go. . .

MARK: What?

DEENA: Can't we at least say. . . goodbye?

MARK: You just did.

TRANSITION

RANDY: Before she gets out of her car, I have already sized her up. Her face. The line of her neck and shoulders. How much make up she wears. It's all part of the package and all part of the evaluation. I pick up women in the Wal-Mart parking lot. I offer to push their carts for 'em. I tell 'em I'm a college student doing a research project about people's shopping habits. I explain that the best way to do the research is to take mental notes, as I push their cart around the store for them. Most of the time, they say yes. I wear a red shirt. It's kinda like the red vests the Wal-Mart cart pushers wear, so I blend in a little. And I look good in red. Several people have told me that.

So, I push the carts and I pretend to be making "mental notes" about what they buy. (**quick pause**) I smile. I'm charming. I ask questions. I wanna find out who they are. . . What makes 'em tick. But the minute I see a lot of "guy food" start going into the cart, I'm outta there. You know the kind of food I'm talking about. The kind of stuff that would be for a husband or boyfriend: Frozen pizza, meat you'd cook on the grill, Doritos. I don't want to push the cart of another man's woman, if you know what I mean.

I'm looking for single women. Single, *unencumbered* women. No boyfriends, no kids. So, if they reach for diapers or baby food, I am gone. You know how people leave stuff at the check out all crammed in between the gum and the TV Guides – stuff they realized they couldn't afford, when they're checking out. That's how I leave the

women who buy diapers and baby food. Baby wipes are iffy. I once walked away from a hot women who bought baby wipes only to find out that she uses 'em to take off her make up. I don't wanna take that chance again. She hunted me down in the produce section and confronted me.

"What about your research? Why did you just walk away after I put the baby wipes in the cart?"

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