

BELOW THE BELT

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

WILLOW	Female; late 20s; mother of two young children; married to Ray
RAY	Male; late 20s; married with two kids; misses his independence
AMY	Female; early 20s; has health challenges; Selena's younger sister
BILL	Male; mid 20s; cocky; aggressive; Jerry's older brother; not afraid to be harsh or manipulative; dating Amy
SELENA	Female; early to mid 20s; a caretaker, not necessarily by choice; Amy's older sister
JERRY	Male; early 20s; sensitive; tries to be like his older brother, Bill; struggles with what it means to be a man; dated Selena
MOLLY	Female; early 20s; married to Curtis; not happy with the way her life or her marriage are turning out; needs attention
CURTIS	Male; mid 20s; cop; married to Molly; needs a lot of escape time in which he disconnects from his real life
TRISH	Female; early 20s; in a relationship with her live-in boyfriend, Xander; questioning her future with him
XANDER	Male; early 20s; insecure; controlling; in a relationship with his live-in girlfriend, Trish

SETTING

The present and recent past in the homes, driveways, and thoughts of ten people whose lives are linked. Takes place in six separate spaces; each character is in his or her own space.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Below the Belt can be presented with a very simple set. Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting and staging, and to avoid literal use of inferred props or to group actors together so it appears that conversations are happening in places where a character may be speaking directly to the audience.

PROPS AND COSTUMES

A boxing ring gong. No other props or specific costume elements are required.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Below the Belt had its premiere production in Phoenix, Arizona, in January 2008. The original cast included Kelsey Torstveit, Jared Sikes, Alex Rivera, Emily White, Samantha Ortiz, Macy Cobb, Ben Whitmire, Scott McKown, Alex Knerr, and Ariana O'Rafter. The production was directed by the author.

In August 2008, the play had its New York City debut in a production by Misfit Toys Repertory Company (Joe Levy, Artistic Director), as part of its *Mixed Signals One-Act Festival*. The cast included Josh Evans, Alex C. Ferrill, Kerri Ford, Michael Nash, Dina Prioste, Jonathan Harper Schlieman, Joy Shatz, Kimberly Woodman, Karen Berzanksi, and Brian Edwards. The production was directed by Anthony Castellano.

Below the Belt had its Off-Broadway premiere in New York in June 2009, with a production by Element 8 Ensemble. The cast included Kelsey Torstveit, Melissa Teitel, Nick Coleman, Jamie Carroll, Krystal Blackman, Ross Boehringer, Justin Anselmi, Tommy Buck, Sarah Stockton, and Keith Hamilton. Understudies were Alec Head and Sophie Sorensen. The production was directed by Lester Thomas Shane. Technical elements were supervised by Chess Venis.

A revival production was presented in Phoenix, Arizona in October 2011. The revival cast included Cera Naccarato, Rosemary Zinke, Chelsea Karnes, Connery Morano, Alex Reust, Meggy Lykins, Hannah Sanchez, Thomas Hartwell, Tony Potts, and Bishop Shepard. The production was directed by the author.

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AT RISE: The ACTORS are gathered in a tight cluster in the center of the playing space. As each ACTOR begins to speak, HE or SHE contributes to the story being told. It should seem as if THEY are all telling a single story, though it will gradually become evident that THEY are telling several stories.

WILLOW: It was a beautiful summer day.

RAY: *(Adding information, not contradicting WILLOW)* It was a weekend.

WILLOW: *(More specific, with a bit of an edge)* A Saturday. A sunny and beautiful Saturday.

XANDER: It was hot. I don't like it when it's too hot outside.

TRISH: I told him to turn on the air conditioner.

AMY: I didn't feel good.

SELENA: I was tired when I got up. I had to get up early, even though it was a Saturday.

WILLOW: A sunny and beautiful Saturday.

JERRY: I'd been waiting for that day to come.

BILL: Waiting for a chance.

MOLLY: It probably wasn't the smartest thing I'd ever done. But sometimes you don't think things through.

WILLOW: You don't think about...

BILL: *(Interjecting, cutting off WILLOW)* The consequences of your actions.

XANDER: When it's hot outside.

TRISH: That's what you always say.

RAY: When you've got your mind on a million other things.

CURTIS: I wasn't paying attention.

AMY: And I didn't feel good.

CURTIS: I never thought it would happen to me...

SELENA: *(Interjecting)* On a Saturday.

WILLOW: A beautiful summer day.

(A boxing ring gong (bell) is sounded. The ACTORS scatter, except for JERRY and BILL, who move around the center of the playing space, as if THEY were boxers beginning a fight. THEY should not imitate boxers. There should be no actual physical punches thrown, though THEY may have a sense of boxers' foot work as THEY move around.)

JERRY: I've been waiting for this!

BILL: For what?

JERRY: A chance to put you in your place.

BILL: You think you're gonna put me in my place?

JERRY: You bet I am.

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BILL: You think.

JERRY: I *know*.

BILL: It's none of your business.

JERRY: The hell it isn't. You made it my business.

BILL: No, that's where you're wrong.

JERRY: I know what's right and what's wrong and what you did was wrong.

BILL: In your opinion.

JERRY: In everybody's opinion.

BILL: So now it's between me and everybody? I thought it was just between me and you?

JERRY: Oh, you gotta be a joker. You always gotta be a joker.

BILL: I may be a joker, but you're a joke.

JERRY: Don't twist my words around.

BILL: I'm not twisting anything.

JERRY: You're trying to talk your way out of it. You try to put me on the defensive. You've been doing that since we were kids.

BILL: Here we go. You gotta dredge up every unhappy childhood memory you have and blame 'em all on me.

JERRY: Just admit what you did was wrong. That's all I'm asking.

BILL: I'm not saying it's wrong.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

BILL and MOLLY: It probably wasn't the smartest thing I've ever done. But sometimes you don't think things through.

(BILL and JERRY exit. The focus shifts to MOLLY.)

MOLLY: I was acting on an impulse. I didn't think things through. *(Pause)* So, don't judge me. *(Quick pause)* Don't. *(Quick pause)* Being married to a cop isn't easy. I'm always worried about him. Not knowing whether or not he'll come home or get shot at work is a lot to worry about. *(Quick pause)* It's a burden. And when he *did* come home, he was always on the computer. I needed somebody to worry about me. I don't think that's too much to ask. I don't like eating alone. *(Quick pause; resentful)* I *especially* don't like to make dinner for someone and have them show up two hours late without so much as a call to say they were going to be late. I hate that. Someone should publish a guide to being married to a cop. Let unsuspecting women know what they're in for. I was nineteen when we got married. I didn't even get a honeymoon because he was doing the police academy thing and couldn't get time off. I spent my honeymoon sending thank you notes for our wedding presents. *(Pause)* His family sent cheap gifts. And the ones who gave us money were cheap, too. The wedding gift is supposed to have a cash value equal to or greater than the amount of money your meal cost at the reception. I read that in a wedding planning magazine. It was in

bold print in the article, so you know it's important. But it's more than just not having a honeymoon. It's the way he talks to me. And it's how much he ignores me. A marriage is two people. I didn't get married to be ignored. (*Quick pause*) When he comes home from work, I try tell him about what happened to me during the day and he says, "I'm not here." And that really irks me because he's only a few feet away from me – in the same room. He's right there. Right in front of the computer. Almost from the minute he walks in the door. Sometimes, he doesn't even change out of his uniform. Most of the time, he keeps his gun on. (*Sarcastically*) I guess he wants to be ready if things get out of hand in cyberspace.

(*The focus shifts to CURTIS.*)

CURTIS: I need to wind down after a day on the job. I need that. I've gotta be aggressive at work. And I have to let that go or else I'd walk around punching walls or shooting somebody. So, I need to wind down. I need to put some distance between me and my day. I can't listen to her whine about some guy who cut her off when she was turning into the parking lot at the nail salon. I can't listen to that because I don't care about it. I don't care. I *can't* care. So, I go online. I talk to people. It's like I'm somebody else. I *am* somebody else. So, I don't care that she saw the guy across the street taking out the recycling in his boxer shorts. I don't care. I'm somebody else. Somebody who doesn't live here.

(*A boxing ring gong is sounded. JERRY and BILL return to the center of the playing area.*)

JERRY: When you're online, you can be anybody you want. You don't have to be yourself.

BILL: (*A verbal jab*) Especially when who you really are is a loser who can't get a date otherwise.

JERRY: (*A jab in return*) Or you're a guy who has like a dozen different online personas.

BILL: (*Correcting him*) I have *five* different personalities. All with different screen names and profiles.

JERRY: And all five of them try to pick up women.

BILL: That's what the Internet is for.

JERRY: You already have a girlfriend.

BILL: Who I met online.

JERRY: So, why keep looking?

BILL: I might find something better. (*Quick pause*) Besides, you have a girlfriend, too, and you're looking.

JERRY: I had a girlfriend. Past tense.

BILL: Yeah, and I gotta say I'm just fine with that. Brothers dating sisters means there are a lot of potential information leaks. This way, I don't

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have to worry that what I tell you is gonna end up getting shared with Amy just because you told Selena and she couldn't keep her mouth shut.

JERRY: I never leaked any information.

BILL: Maybe not on purpose. But it happened. The waitress story? I told you. And *somehow* Amy found out about it.

JERRY: I didn't tell anybody about that. (*Pause, planting a seed*) Maybe she's been reading your e-mails?

BILL: (*A brief moment of panic*) No... No, there's no way she could do that. She'd never figure out any of my passwords. She doesn't even touch my computer.

JERRY: That you know of. A lot of things can happen when you're out of the room.

BILL: That's why you're better off not letting your girlfriend move in. Separate apartments. Separate computers.

JERRY: Separate secrets...

BILL: If you keep things separate, they aren't secrets. They're just separate activities that aren't any of her business.

JERRY: If you say so.

BILL: Why are you always trying to start a fight?

JERRY: I'm not.

BILL: You *are*. You're an agitator.

JERRY and XANDER: I don't wanna fight.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded. BILL and JERRY move out of the center playing area and are replaced by XANDER and TRISH.)

TRISH: That's what you always say. Then, we get in the car and you start a fight and I'm trapped.

XANDER: You could get out.

TRISH: On the highway?

XANDER: If you wanted to get out, you could. Trapped means that you can't get out and, if you really wanted to get out – even when we're on the highway – you could get out.

TRISH: What am I supposed to do? Throw open the door and do a diving roll onto the side of the road?

XANDER: If it was that important for you to get out, you'd do what you have to do.

TRISH: Or you could just not start a fight when we're in the car. How's that for a novel idea?

XANDER: You make it sound like the only place we fight is in the car.

TRISH: That's what it seems like to me.

XANDER: We're having a fight, right now, and we're not in the car.

TRISH: We're having a fight about having a fight.

XANDER: And we're not in the car.

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TRISH: I get it. You made your point. Think about it, though... When's the last time we went anywhere in the car when you didn't start a fight?

XANDER: I think best when I'm driving. I have a sense of purpose. A feeling like I know where I'm going.

TRISH: You're in control.

XANDER: I hope so. It helps to be in control of the car, when you're driving. It's kinda the goal.

TRISH: I mean, you start fights when you're in situations where you're in control.

XANDER: Doesn't everybody? You'd have to be stupid to start a fight if you didn't stand a good chance of winning.

TRISH: It would just be nice to get in the car without wondering what you were gonna start a fight about.

XANDER: So don't fight.

TRISH: Let you yell at me and not fight back?

XANDER: It takes two to argue. If you're not fighting back, then, we're not having a fight.

TRISH: I'm just trapped in a car having you yell at me, then.

XANDER: So, let me yell and get it out of my system. It ticks me off more when you get all defensive. You always say stuff that you shouldn't say.

TRISH: Like what?

XANDER: I'm not gonna give you an example, because then you'll know what to say to really make me mad. And you already know what things you say. You bring things up. Things you said didn't matter when they happened but, when we're fighting, you bring 'em up.

TRISH: It's ok for you to say things that hurt my feelings, but it's not ok for me to do it?

XANDER: I don't mean it. I'm just getting stuff off my chest. Sometimes, I just need to yell.

TRISH: Yell when you're by yourself.

XANDER: That wouldn't work. I need you to listen when I yell.

TRISH: So, yell at one of your friends.

XANDER: I can't yell at my friends.

TRISH: But it's OK to yell at your girlfriend?

XANDER: It should be.

TRISH: No, it *shouldn't* be. Your girlfriend is the last person you should yell at.

XANDER: Right, because it always has to be what you want.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded. XANDER and TRISH move out of the center playing area and the focus shifts to AMY.)

AMY: I didn't want to be sick. I didn't like not feeling good. *(Pause)* I got sick when my mom was sick. I had gastrointestinal problems. She had cancer. I don't like talking about it. *(Quick pause)* The gastrointestinal problems or the cancer. I don't like talking about either of them. The

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gastrointestinal doctor decided that I have irritable bowel syndrome. It doesn't sound very serious, but it is. Irritable *people* can just stop being irritable. It's not that easy with irritable bowels.

SELENA: Watching somebody get sick and fade away is like being a witness to death. Up close. You can look away – like you do when you drive by an accident and you don't want to see anybody all bloody or trapped inside their car – but the dying doesn't go away. *(Pause)* My mom had cancer. My dad couldn't stand to see her in pain like that. It upset him too much. So, he stayed away from the house a lot. He worked extra hours. He went out drinking. He evacuated the emotional disaster area. *(Pause)* My sister wasn't any help. She was too busy being sick herself. So, most of the time, it was just my mom and me. She was dying and I was the nurse, the housekeeper, the cook, the entertainment and the witness.

AMY: *(With a groan of discomfort)* I don't feel good.

SELENA: What?

AMY: I'm not feeling well at all.

SELENA: Do you *ever* feel good?

AMY: I'm dizzy. Maybe it's an inner ear infection.

SELENA: You haven't been the same since you tripped on the treadmill and fell down and cracked your head open.

AMY: That was an accident.

SELENA: Or, perhaps, a desperate plea for attention.

AMY: I wouldn't purposely trip on the treadmill and try to crack my own head open.

SELENA: Or maybe you would. Depends how badly you needed the attention. When you were six, you ate grass to make yourself throw up. That got you attention.

AMY: I was sick to my stomach. I thought if I threw up, I'd feel better. It worked for the dog. When he was sick, he ate grass and threw up and he felt better. I wanted to see if it would work for people, too.

SELENA: You proved your point. And you got the attention and mom had to clean up your mess.

AMY: I was sick. I couldn't clean up the mess when I was sick.

SELENA: If you hadn't eaten the grass, you wouldn't have thrown up and there wouldn't have been a mess to clean up.

AMY: It's not like *you* had to clean it up.

SELENA: No. Mom did.

AMY: So what are you complaining about?

SELENA: Nothing... Irony, I suppose.

AMY: What's ironic?

SELENA: That all the times you were sick, Mom took care of you and cleaned up your messes. But when *she* was sick, you kept coming up with reasons why you were too sick to help take care of her.

AMY: That's not ironic.

SELENA: Maybe not, but it's true.

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AMY: I didn't invent reasons to be sick. I was sick. I *am* sick. I have several very serious health issues. I have irritable bowel syndrome. I break out in rashes when I'm under a lot of stress. I have trouble breathing, sometimes. (*Quick pause*) I don't think I've taken a really deep breath in ten years.

SELENA: The only time you have trouble breathing is when I ask you to do something that requires physical exertion.

AMY: Physical exertion makes me lightheaded. I was lightheaded and dizzy when I was on the treadmill. That's why I fell down.

SELENA: You were talking to Tina the whole time you were on the treadmill. How out of breath can you be, if you're talking on the phone while you're on the treadmill. I didn't hear you gasping for air. You were talking and laughing until I asked you to come help me get mom into the wheelchair.

AMY: I would have helped.

SELENA: If you weren't too busy falling down and cracking your head open. Dad had to take you to the hospital and I had to get mom into the wheelchair by myself.

AMY: It was an accident!

(The focus shifts to RAY and WILLOW.)

RAY: The neighbors called 9-1-1.

WILLOW: They called from our driveway.

RAY: I'd forgotten that.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded. AMY and SELENA move out of the center playing area and the focus shifts to RAY and WILLOW.)

WILLOW: (*Under her breath*) What a surprise.

RAY: What did you say?

WILLOW: Nothing.

RAY: You said *something*.

WILLOW: I said, "nothing."

RAY: I hate when you do that.

WILLOW: (*Innocently*) Do what?

RAY: Say "nothing" when you said *something*. I wish you'd just say what you wanted to say and say it loud enough so I could hear it and then we could get it over with. It's like a little game you play. Like a dance. And you always have to lead.

WILLOW: It's not important.

RAY: If it wasn't important, you wouldn't have said whatever you said.

WILLOW: Just let it go.

RAY: You won't let me.

WILLOW: (*Her mind elsewhere*) No, I won't.

RAY: So, tell me what you said.

WILLOW: (*Irritated*) You've always gotta pick at the scab.

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RAY: You've always got to make me feel like crap.

WILLOW: You don't need me for that.

RAY: (*Exasperated*) Just tell me what you said!

WILLOW: (*Ferociously*) I said, "What a surprise." (*Clarifying*) What a surprise that you forgot something. (*Bitterly sarcastic*) It's so not like you.

(*A boxing ring gong (bell) is sounded. WILLOW and RAY move out of the center playing area and the focus shifts to MOLLY and CURTIS.*)

MOLLY: You think you know what somebody is going to be like. Then, you get married and you find out how completely you'd been misled. You think wedding vows cover everything but they don't. Not even close. And nobody prepares you for all the disgusting habits you suddenly have to deal with every day.

CURTIS: And she's here every day. I don't know where I expect her to go, but I just wish she wasn't here every day.

MOLLY: Cops have a very high divorce rate. And a lot of alcoholism and marital infidelity. My friends warned me about that, but I didn't listen. I didn't wanna listen. Now, I wish I had. I wish I'd let them talk me out of marrying him.

CURTIS: Pretty much all the mystery in a marriage is gone after about three weeks. A month, if you're lucky.

MOLLY: I thought there'd be a sort of grace period where he'd still be on his best behavior... Like when we were dating. I guess guys don't worry about letting you see them at their worst... Their most repulsive. (*Giving an example*) Once Curtis sits down in front of the computer, it takes an act of God to get him out of that chair. If he has to blow his nose, while he's online, he'll take off one of his dirty socks and blow his nose in that instead of getting a tissue. I couldn't make that up. It's disgusting. Then, he either leaves the sock on the floor next to the computer or he tries to throw it into the hamper from where he's sitting. He never makes it. Which means that I have to pick it up off the floor and put it into the hamper, because he won't do it.

RAY: I hate to run errands for my wife. I always forget something or get the wrong size or whatever. So, usually, when she asks me to "pick up a few things" for her, I say no. I don't wanna do it. I won't do it.

BILL: I never thought I'd do it. When I was younger, I was a one-woman-man kind of guy. (*Cocky*) Things sure have changed.

JERRY: I'd do it, again. There was something really empowering about having two girlfriends at the same time.

SELENA: I didn't have time for the games. As soon as I found out he was seeing somebody else, I confronted him. "So, let me understand this" I said. "You and I were supposedly having an exclusive relationship and, now, I find out you been dating somebody else?" And he was like...

SELENA and JERRY: I don't know what to say.

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JERRY: I didn't think every piece of information I shared with my brother would get passed around like hors d'oeuvres at a party.

SELENA: At least, he didn't try to lie his way out of it. That would have been pathetic. I don't have time for lies.

JERRY: She never made time for me. I was always way down the priority list behind her sick mother and her sick sister. I was sick of being less important than everybody else.

SELENA: Having a boyfriend is like having a low-paying job working for a high maintenance boss.

JERRY: So, I ended things with her.

SELENA: I told him to leave.

BILL: I never thought I'd do it.

RAY: I say no.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded. The focus shifts to XANDER and TRISH.)

XANDER: I saw you talking to him.

TRISH: I wasn't.

XANDER: I saw you.

TRISH: What exactly did you see?

XANDER: I saw you. Talking to him.

TRISH: The guy with the beard?

XANDER: Yeah, him. You were talking to him.

TRISH: He was talking to *me*. We weren't having a conversation. He was asking me a question.

XANDER: If you wanted to go home with him? Is that what he was asking you?

TRISH: He asked me what time it was.

XANDER: Is that the best lie you could come up with?

TRISH: That's what he asked me! He said, "This party feels like it's going in slow motion. What time is it?"

XANDER: I walk away from you for five minutes and you start flirting with strangers.

TRISH: I wasn't flirting with anyone. That's more *your* style.

XANDER: I don't flirt. I get flirted with.

TRISH: How is that different from what happened to me, tonight?

XANDER: So you admit that the guy was trying to hook up with you?

TRISH: No! But, even if he was – which he *wasn't* – it wouldn't be any different than *you* getting flirted with.

XANDER: It would be different because it's you.

TRISH: That's a double standard.

XANDER: It's me not being able to trust you.

TRISH: Since when? When have I ever given you a reason not to trust me?

XANDER: I was gone for five minutes and you were all over the guy with the beard.

TRISH: We were a foot apart. How do you twist that into me being all over him?

XANDER: It was a matter of time.

TRISH: I wasn't flirting with him. I wasn't even *talking* to him. *He was talking to me. It was a party. And, at some point, somebody's gonna talk to you. (Sarcastically) It's kind of the idea of a party. (Quick pause) People talking to each other. Having a conversation...*

XANDER: *(Interjecting) ... Humiliating me. (Quick pause) Do you enjoy making me look like a chump in front of everybody? Do you like having people talk about how my girlfriend is fooling around behind my back?*

TRISH: *(Exasperated) Nobody is talking about that because it's not happening. It's never happened and it's not going to happen!*

XANDER: You're wrong.

TRISH: No, I'm not.

XANDER: Wrong is wrong, and you're wrong.

TRISH: We're not in the car, but I still feel trapped.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded. The focus shifts to WILLOW.)

WILLOW: Sometimes, I just need to feel like he's participating in our life. Like he's making a contribution. Like he's doing something to help keep things running. Sometimes, I need an hour or two without the kids in the house. There are days when all I can think about is being alone. I have to have alone time. Everybody does. I don't need to do the whole bubble bath-and-candles thing. I just need to be alone. Just sitting in a chair with my feet up, not doing anything. Not thinking about anything. *(Pause)* So, I send him on errands. When I know he's going to the hardware store or wherever else he goes, I give him a list of things to pick up for me – for us – while he's out. He puts up a fight. He complains. But he does it. He takes the list, calls me a few names under his breath and takes the kids with him for a couple hours. Lilly's almost five. Link is twenty-one months. They can be a handful. So, when Ray takes them for a couple hours, it gives me a chance to catch my breath. Everybody needs that.

AMY: Everybody needs to feel like they're special to somebody.

BILL: Everybody spends too much time trying to take care of other people. I take care of myself. You can't be any good to other people, if you don't take care of yourself first.

AMY: My boyfriend understands that I have a lot of health issues.

BILL: My girlfriend tells me I don't spend enough time with her. She whines about it. *(Pause)* I tell her she's pretty. That shuts her up.

WILLOW: It's so quiet, now.

MOLLY: He's a loud breather. He inhales and exhales so loudly. It sounds like somebody's choking him and he's gasping for breath. Nobody's actually choking him. I'm definitely not choking him, though sometimes I think about it.

SELENA: When my mom got sick, I took care of her. I didn't think about all the things I'd be giving up to do it. I just did it. She needed to be taken care of and nobody else was stepping in to do anything, so I did it. My dad couldn't. You learn a lot about people's weaknesses in situations like this. Most of what you learn you'd rather not know, but you don't have a choice. After my mom died, I had to take care of my dad because he didn't know how to take care of himself. I had to make dinner and do his laundry. I even had to remind him to shave. Grown men shouldn't be as helpless as babies but they are. It's pathetic, really.

JERRY: I wanted to be like my brother.

RAY: I wanted to be like I used to be. *(Pause)* Before I got married. Before we had the kids. I wanted to be single, again. *(Quick pause)* Not all the time. Not every day. Just occasionally... Now and then... When I needed a break.

SELENA: *(Bitterly)* My sister is sick because she *wants* to be sick. She expects me to take care of her because that's what she thinks I'm supposed to do. What about what *I* think I'm supposed to do? That doesn't seem to matter. *(Sharply)* Your family never lets you be who you want to be. They always want you to be who *they* want you to be. They insist on it. They demand it. You have to play your part. *(SHE begins to cry)* You get stuck in that part.

XANDER: I wanna have kids some day.

TRISH: Our neighbors have kids.

XANDER: Two. A little girl and a boy. I'd want a boy.

TRISH: I figure we oughtta get married first.

XANDER: Buying the house together was a big step.

TRISH: It was an investment.

XANDER: She makes more money than I do.

TRISH: That's a problem for him.

XANDER: It'd be a problem for any man.

TRISH: Not every man would have a problem with it. You can't speak for every man.

XANDER and CURTIS: I can do what I want.

TRISH and MOLLY: I think I'd be a good mother.

XANDER and CURTIS: That's not the point.

CURTIS: Why would you want to bring a baby into the world? Have you watched the news? Do you know what's happening out there?

MOLLY: I know what's going on in the world. I read the newspaper online every day.

CURTIS: You read the entertainment section.

MOLLY: I read a little of everything.

CURTIS: Every day on the job, I see things that would scare the hell out of you.

MOLLY: But you never tell me about any of them.

CURTIS: I don't wanna bring my job home with me. I wanna forget. I... wanna put some distance between me and my day. I...

CURTIS and MOLLY: ... wanna be somebody else.

TRISH: I wanna have kids, but I'm not sure I wanna have kids with *him*.

XANDER: The neighbors have a girl and a boy. The girl is older. I wouldn't mind one of each, but I'd want the boy to be older.

TRISH: (*Pondering what SHE already knows*) I don't wanna have kids with him. What does that say about our relationship?

XANDER: I think it says something when a guy's firstborn child is a boy.

MOLLY: "Boys will be boys." That's what my mother said, whenever my brothers got in trouble. She never punished them. She made excuses for them.

TRISH: (*Resentfully*) Boys are the chosen ones. The world is made by boys, *for* boys.

MOLLY: I met them both online. The same night. Within a few minutes of each other. While Curtis was busy on the computer and busy ignoring me, I decided to get a little busy myself. I took my laptop into the bedroom and went into a chat room and waited for somebody to send me a message. Seventeen seconds. That's how long it took before I got an Instant Message from the first guy. Seventeen seconds. And my profile didn't even have a picture. And while I was responding to the first message, I got one from another guy. In a few minutes, my whole computer screen was filled with messages from different guys. I was feeling really good about myself. It was like walking down the street and having every guy I passed wanna talk to me. That kind of attention is seriously intoxicating for a woman who's used to getting ignored. I couldn't talk to all of them at the same time. That takes way more multi-tasking skill than I have. So, I narrowed it down to four guys, then, picked the two I liked best to keep talking to. It was like a reality show competition right on my computer. (*Pause*) I didn't know the two guys I liked best were related.

BILL and JERRY: How could you do that to me?

(*A boxing ring gong is sounded. The focus shifts to BILL and JERRY.*)

BILL: You knew that was the chat room I used to meet women.

JERRY: Yeah, that's why I figured I'd give it a try.

BILL: You can't eat where I hunt.

JERRY: What?

BILL: (*Slower and louder*) You can't eat where I hunt!

JERRY: What the heck is that supposed to mean?

BILL: It's a saying. It might not be exactly right. Dad used to say something like that to his buddies when they went out to pick up women after him and mom got divorced.

JERRY: It's a chat room. It's not some jungle I need your permission to hunt in.

BILL: You should have scoped out your own chat room and not horned in on mine.

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JERRY: You afraid of the competition?

BILL: From you?

JERRY: Yeah, from me.

BILL: You're no competition.

JERRY: Then, what does it matter what chat room I'm in or who I talk to?

BILL: It matters when you're talking to the same girl that I wanna talk to.

JERRY: You already have a girlfriend.

BILL: So did you.

JERRY: Yeah, past tense, thanks to you. You told Amy I was seeing somebody else and she told Selena.

BILL: You told Selena the story about me and the waitress and she told Amy. I owed you one.

JERRY and SELENA: How could you do that to me?

BILL: It takes skill to juggle more than one relationship.

AMY and MOLLY: How could you do that to me?

JERRY: I was doing just fine. Until you opened your big mouth.

BILL: And, then, you weren't doing so fine anymore.

JERRY: She didn't need to know what I was doing. She didn't *want* to know. Even if a woman knows you're cheating on her, she doesn't want to be *confronted* with it. If she's confronted with it, then, she has to do something about it. And most women would rather just let things go on the way they were.

AMY: (*Loudly*) I don't feel well.

SELENA: (*Resentfully*) I don't have time for lies.

MOLLY: (*Stridently*) I don't like being ignored. (*Pulls back the volume a bit, when SHE feels like SHE's been noticed*) I like attention. I like having guys tell jokes. I like guys who talk to me.

BILL: Amy is sick all the time. It's like having half a girlfriend. When she's feeling okay, it's not bad, but when she starts talking about her irritable bowel syndrome, it totally kills the mood. I needed somebody fun. Somebody who doesn't talk about her problems. Somebody who likes to listen to what I have to say.

MOLLY: I knew Curtis was talking to other women on the computer. I knew it went farther than conversations. I'm not stupid. But I didn't say anything to him about it. (*Pause*) I didn't want to watch him try to lie his way out of it.

SELENA: I don't have time for lies.

CURTIS: I don't care.

JERRY: (*Beginning to cry*) I was doing fine.

CURTIS: I *can't* care.

JERRY: (*Crying*) I was doing just fine. (*JERRY sobs.*)

BILL: (*Mockingly*) You call this fine?

CURTIS: I didn't know what was going on. I needed some distance. I couldn't know what was going on, because I wasn't really here.

(*With tears streaming down his face, JERRY turns toward BILL.*)

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BILL: *(Taunting; harshly)* You call this fine?

CURTIS: If I'd known what was going on, I'd have put a stop to it.

BILL: *(To JERRY)* You're pathetic. I can't even look at you. *(Angrily)* For God's sake, be a man! Be a man!

(JERRY, CURTIS, BILL, MOLLY and WILLOW all speak their lines in unison.)

JERRY: *(Crying, to BILL)* How could you do this to me?

CURTIS: *(To MOLLY)* How could you do this to me?

BILL: *(To JERRY)* How could you do this to me?

MOLLY: *(To CURTIS)* How could you do this to me?

WILLOW: *(To RAY)* How could you do this to me?

SELENA: You can look away – like you do when you drive by an accident and you don't want to see anybody trapped inside their car – but just because you look away, doesn't mean it didn't happen.

BILL: *(Coldly)* Everybody's a witness.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

SELENA: Everybody's a witness.

TRISH: And we all take sides.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

CURTIS: I have to let it go or else I'll walk around punching walls or shooting somebody.

WILLOW: I walked around like nothing was wrong. I went on about my day like nothing was wrong.

RAY: I took the kids and drove all over town running errands for my wife. She got me out of bed at 7:30 on a Saturday, so I could get everything done before it got too hot.

XANDER: I don't like it when it's too hot outside.

TRISH: I told him to turn on the air conditioner.

RAY: The air conditioner in the car isn't working very well. I keep meaning to take it to a mechanic but there's always something else to do that's higher up on my to-do list.

XANDER: Having kids is on my to-do list.

TRISH: I don't wanna have kids with him.

XANDER: Two kids. A boy and a girl.

CURTIS: I have to let it go or else I'll walk around punching walls or shooting somebody.

SELENA: It was almost dinner time and I was already so tired I wanted to go to bed. I'd gotten up early, even though it was a Saturday, so I was tired. I wanted to go to sleep and not wake up.

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AMY: Sometimes, the little girl across the street screams when she's playing in her yard. You know that high-pitched little-girl scream. It's piercing. It's hard to concentrate on the TV or read a book when there's a little girl screaming. But it was quiet, today. She must have been inside. She's spoiled. Her parents built her a playhouse that's almost as big as our garage.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

TRISH: I noticed something strange.

XANDER: I left my cellphone in the car, last night, when we got home from the party.

TRISH: A party I wish I hadn't gone to.

XANDER: I'd gone the whole day without my cellphone.

TRISH: It's got to be a record.

XANDER: I didn't even notice my phone was missing until I started to reach for it to make dinner reservations.

TRISH: He always picks the restaurant.

XANDER: She never has an opinion.

TRISH: Why bother having an opinion, when you never take it into consideration anyway.

XANDER: *(Getting back on track)* So, I reached for my phone to call for dinner reservations and it wasn't there.

TRISH: The last place he remembered having it was in the car.

XANDER: And that's where it was.

TRISH: It was on the back seat.

XANDER: I have no idea how it got there.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

TRISH: And I noticed something strange.

XANDER: Not in our car.

TRISH: It was in our neighbor's car.

XANDER: We walked over to their driveway to get a closer look.

TRISH: We should call 9-1-1.

XANDER: My phone's not working. I think the battery needs to be recharged. *(Shaking the phone)* It was working fine, last night.

TRISH: That was before you left it sitting in the car all night.

XANDER: I didn't do it on purpose.

TRISH: I didn't say you did.

XANDER: You had an accusing tone.

TRISH: I did not.

XANDER and JERRY: Yes, you did. You had an accusing tone.

TRISH, MOLLY and SELENA: No, I didn't.

AMY and BILL: We're all witnesses.

CURTIS: And we all take sides.

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TRISH: If that's what you wanna believe.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

XANDER: Call 9-1-1 on your phone.

RAY: They called from our driveway.

WILLOW: They didn't knock on our door or ring the bell... They called 9-1-1. That ticked me off.

RAY: They said they didn't think we were home. That's what they said.

WILLOW: Why they'd think we weren't home when our car was in the driveway, I'll never understand.

SELENA: The sound of the sirens so close reminded me of the day they took my mom to the hospital for the last time.

CURTIS: When I got the call from dispatch, I didn't make the connection right away.

WILLOW: The neighbors called 9-1-1. *(WILLOW begins to cry; softly and simply, without hysterics.)*

TRISH: I had to use my phone. His wasn't working.

XANDER: It was dead.

RAY: They called from our driveway.

AMY: The sound of the sirens wasn't as annoying as the screaming.

BILL: It takes skill to juggle more than one thing at a time.

JERRY: He was doing just fine.

RAY: I hate running errands. I always forget something.

WILLOW: *(Crying more intensely, but still able to articulate her words)* They didn't knock on our door or ring the bell and tell us the baby was in the car. They called 9-1-1.

TRISH and XANDER: We didn't think they were home.

RAY: That's what they said.

WILLOW: *(Bitterly; anger through her tears)* Why they'd think we weren't home when our car was in the driveway, I'll never understand.

CURTIS: I didn't make the connection right away. Not until I drove down our street and realized it was the neighbors.

MOLLY: They had two kids. A girl and a boy.

XANDER: A boy and a girl.

(A short beat.)

CURTIS: He left his son in the back seat of their car for seven hours.

XANDER: It was hot.

TRISH: It was ninety-two degrees outside and a hundred seventeen in the car.

CURTIS: By the time they noticed him...

TRISH: *(Interjecting)* I saw something strange.

CURTIS: By the time they noticed him strapped in his car seat, he'd probably already been dead for a few hours.

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MOLLY: Two hours after they took the baby out of the car, his body temperature was still a hundred and five degrees.

RAY: I always forget something.

WILLOW: *(Numb)* I walked around like nothing was wrong. I went on about my day like nothing was wrong.

RAY: I brought Lilly into the house with a couple bags of stuff. I don't even remember what was in the bags. Just stuff. Stuff on the list.

MOLLY: It probably wasn't the smartest thing I'd ever done. But sometimes you don't think things through.

WILLOW: You don't think about...

BILL: *(Interjecting, cutting off WILLOW)* The consequences of your actions.

XANDER: When it's hot outside.

TRISH: That's what you always say.

RAY: When you've got your mind on a million other things.

CURTIS: I wasn't paying attention.

RAY: I forgot.

WILLOW: I always go over the list to make sure he did everything on it.

RAY: The baby wasn't on the list.

WILLOW: He got orange juice with pulp. We don't like pulp. And the wrong kind of laundry detergent. He got the wrong kind of laundry detergent.

RAY: She yelled at me.

JERRY: I've been waiting for this!

BILL: For what?

JERRY: A chance to put you in your place.

RAY: I forgot the baby in the car.

WILLOW: I was putting things away. He doesn't put things away.

MOLLY: He won't do it.

SELENA: You have to play your part. *(Pause)* You get stuck in your part.

XANDER: You had an accusing tone.

TRISH: I'm trapped.

CURTIS: If I'd known what was going on, I'd have put a stop to it.

RAY: I forgot. *(HE begins to sob)* I forgot.

(RAY reaches out for comfort from WILLOW. SHE turns away.)

WILLOW: *(With undiluted fury)* What a surprise! *(Quick pause)* What a surprise that you forgot something. It's so not like you.

RAY: I lost a son.

WILLOW: *My* son.

RAY: *Our* son.

WILLOW: *Our* son... but it was *your* fault.

TRISH, SELENA, AMY and MOLLY: We're all witnesses.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

XANDER, JERRY, BILL and CURTIS: And we all take sides.

(A boxing ring gong is sounded.)

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