

# BETWEEN THE LINES

By Dennis Bush

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## CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

SKYLAR (F)	PLUMBER'S WIFE (F)
HANNA (F)	ART (M)
KERRIN (F)	CALIFORNIA (F)
RYAN (M)	NEVADA (F)
NADINE (F)	OREGON (F)
ASHLEY (F)	WASHINGTON (F)
SARAH (F)	HAWAII (F)
SASHA (F)	TAMMY (F)
BEN (M)	DARLENE (F)
PRESTON (F)	ALICE (F)
EMILY (F)	MR. BELASCO (M)
MARSHA (F)	MRS. BELASCO (F)
SUSAN (F)	REPORTERS (4E)
KATE (F)	DARRIN (M)
SHARON (F)	BETH (F)
OFFICER ATKINSON (E)	YOUNG MOTHER (F)
CLEANING WOMAN (F)	MARGE (F)
TIM (M)	LAVERNE (F)
SYLVIA (F)	MELANIE (F)
MARY ELLEN (F)	HELEN (F)
JAKE (M)	TIFFANY (F)
ROSEMARY (F)	FLETCHER BROGHAN (M)
JANE (F)	VERA (F)
PLUMBER (M)	SALLY (F)

**NOTE:** Many roles may be double or triple cast. The play may be performed with as many as 51 actors, or as few as 11.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The script was written, and the production was staged, in the theatrical mode known as “ensemble style.” All the actors remain on stage, during the entire play and each member of the ensemble plays several characters. Changes in time and place are indicated by shifts of focus and movement of the actors from one playing area to another on the set.

The original cast breakdown was 8 female and 3 male, though the script is extremely flexible and can be modified for larger casts (giving each actor less to do) or smaller (adding more characters for each performer to play) and the balance of male and female roles is also easily modified according to the needs of the production.

The set design can be extremely basic. The play's flexibility of interpretation allows directors and performers to bring their own creativity to the production and encourages young actors to develop strong, distinctive characters.

Costume elements should suggest the characters and allow for quick changes by the actors from one character to another. Props should also be simple and help to establish the characters. For example, notepads for the reporters, a pair of sunglasses for Mrs. Belasco, a security radio for Tim, etc. There are a few props that are referenced specifically in the script (a toilet seat and watch, for example). In the original production, all of the actors had newspapers, the pages of which were turned to indicate a shift of scene and also for the actors to reference in certain segments.

*Between the Lines* was originally performed by North Canyon Theatre Ensemble, an elite group of young high school-age actors.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

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***AT RISE: Actors converge on the performance space; each of them carries a newspaper. They move to their places, like commuters walking to a train. They have a sense of purpose but are not too rushed. When they are seated, they hold the newspapers in front of their faces. As the lights come up, the actors lower the papers just enough for their faces to be visible. That position is held for a few seconds, then, the papers are raised again, as the lights fade.***

***Lights up. The actors deliver their lines as if they are reading them in the newspaper and their particular headline has caught their attention and sparked their interest.***

SKYLAR: Celebrity Stalker Arrested

HANNA: Fire Leaves Ten Families Homeless

KERRIN: Fashion Designer Caught Shoplifting at Discount Store

RYAN: New Evidence Reopens 20-Year-Old Murder Case

NADINE: Parents of Quintuplets Speak at Fertility Symposium

ASHLEY: Senator Denies Bribery Charges

SARAH: Man Sues Maker of Faulty Urinal

SASHA: Toxic Cloud Prompts Air Quality Investigation

BEN: Synagogue Vandalized In Hate Crimes Incident

PRESTON: Mother Leaves Baby In Rental Car

EMILY: Suicide Bomber Kills Eleven

### TRANSITION

***(MARSHA and SUSAN are old friends; both in their early 30s. We join them near the beginning of a telephone conversation.)***

MARSHA: ***(on the phone)*** He's usually home by now.

SUSAN: ***(on phone)*** Maybe the gym was crowded and his workout took longer.

MARSHA: I hope you're right.

SUSAN: I'm sure there's a very simple explanation. John's never been one to stay out late. That was more Brian's style. Of course, he wasn't going to the gym after work, either. He was too busy demonstrating just how unfaithful he could be. But that was Brian, not John.

MARSHA: You don't think John could be having an affair do you?

Between the Lines - Page 5

SUSAN: Oh, God, no. I wasn't suggesting that at all. Brian and John are as different as night and day.

MARSHA: He has been coming home later and later the past few weeks.

SUSAN: That doesn't mean he's having an affair. It could be anything.

MARSHA: It could be an affair.

SUSAN: Has he ever given you any reason to think he would cheat on you?

MARSHA: About a month ago, he was talking in his sleep and he said "Jennifer. . . Jennifer. . ."

SUSAN: Who's Jennifer?

MARSHA: I don't know. I don't know anyone named Jennifer but obviously he does.

SUSAN: It could be one of the secretaries at work. . . It could be the name of the checker at the grocery store. They all wear name tags. Maybe one of their name tags caught his eye when he was at the store and it stuck in his mind. Stuff like that happens all the time.

MARSHA: Why are you taking his side?

SUSAN: I'm not taking anybody's side. . . You're getting carried away. John is just running late. He is not having an affair.

MARSHA: I'm about two seconds away from looking in his sock drawer.

SUSAN: His sock drawer?

MARSHA: He hid my Christmas present there, last year. Maybe he's got other stuff he doesn't want me to see stashed in there.

SUSAN: Would you listen to yourself? You're talking like a crazy person.

MARSHA: Maybe so but I'm gonna get to the bottom of this.

SUSAN: What are you gonna do?

MARSHA: I'm gonna call him – right now, before I talk myself out of it. . . I'll talk to you, later. **(SHE pushes the buttons to call JOHN's cell phone. Then, on the phone, listening to his outgoing voicemail message)** God, I hate your outgoing message. You sound so arrogant, so smug. . . **(to herself)** Push 1 to begin recording your message. . . OK, here goes. **(SHE pushes 1)** You're late, John. And not just a little late. You are four hours late! **(getting increasingly agitated)** Did you think I was stupid? Did you think I wouldn't figure it out? Going to the gym every day. . . All that working out wasn't for my benefit, was it? **(brief pause of realization)** Oh, God, I'm talking to your voicemail like you were listening to me and going to give me an answer. Does that give you an idea how upset I am about this? Come home and face me like a man. Look me in the eye and try to lie your way out of it. . . I deserve better than this.

**TRANSITION**

**(KATE and SHARON are strangers sitting on a park bench. KATE is in her mid-20s and is eating her lunch. SHARON is about the same age. We join them as SHARON is putting a “cap” made of aluminum foil on her head.)**

KATE: **(sitting on park bench, notices SHARON putting tin foil on her head)** What's with the tin foil?

SHARON: I'm calling home.

KATE: Don't you need a phone for that?

SHARON: You're funny. **(exaggerated)** Ha! Ha!

KATE: Seriously. Don't you need a phone to make a call?

SHARON: It's not that kind of call.

KATE: **(watches SHARON unroll carpet remnant and place it on the park bench)** And the little carpet?

SHARON: It increases my electrical conductivity.

KATE: For what?

SHARON: **(replies, as if KATE was slow)** For. . . Calling. . . Home. Hello?!

KATE: I was only making conversation. A simple, “I'd rather not chat,” would have been fine. You didn't need to come up with the “calling home” nonsense just to make your point.

SHARON: I *am* calling home.

KATE: OK, really, I get it. Enough is enough. I'm sorry I bothered you.

SHARON: I'm an alien.

KATE: You're. . . ?

SHARON: **(finishing her sentence)** An alien.

KATE: Oh. . . **(moving slightly to her right)**

SHARON: I was in the newspaper two weeks ago. “Alien Visitor Phones Home.” I thought you recognized me from the article. They sell the paper in the grocery store, right in the checkout line, so it's convenient. . . Did you see the article? I'm famous.

KATE: **(even more unnerved)** No, I didn't recognize you. I didn't see the article.

SHARON: E.T. was a crock. I'm the real deal. **(pause, then, trying to get an answer from home)** Hello. Hello. Hello? **(to KATE)** Are you blocking my signal?

## TRANSITION

**(We rejoin MARSHA and SUSAN at the beginning of their second conversation, after MARSHA left the voicemail for JOHN.)**

MARSHA: **(on the phone to SUSAN)** Well, I called him.

SUSAN: What did he say?

MARSHA: He didn't say anything. I got his voicemail.

SUSAN: And you left a message?

MARSHA: I sure did. . . **(pause)** Can you hold a minute? My call waiting is beeping. . . Hello?

***(An actor in another area of the performance space shifts into the character of a POLICE OFFICER.)***

OFFICER ATKINSON: Good evening, ma'am. May I speak with Marsha Warren, please.

MARSHA: This is she.

OFFICER ATKINSON: Mrs. John Warren?

MARSHA: Yes, that's me. Who are you?

OFFICER ATKINSON: I'm sorry, ma'am. I should have introduced myself properly right away. . . I'm sorry. . . I'm sorry to tell you that.

. . .

***(An actor in another area of the performance space shifts into the character of a CLEANING WOMAN reading the paper on her break. Her line delivery cuts off OFFICER ATKINSON.)***

CLEANING WOMAN: ***(reading headline)*** Man Found Dead Outside Health Club. ***(continues reading)*** The man's identity is not being released until next of kin can be notified. The police are examining the crime scene for any clues that will point to a motive or link them to any suspects.

## TRANSITION

***(An airport terminal security area. We join the scene as TIM, the security representative, is leading SYLVIA, MARY ELLEN and JAKE to a separate area for a "prescreening." TIM is in his early 20s and trying very hard to do a good job by following all the procedures HE was taught. SYLVIA is in her 40s, brassy. MARY ELLEN is late 20s, paranoid, appears uneasy and ready to come emotionally unraveled. JAKE is hip young man in early 20s. HE's very focused on the magazine HE's reading. SYLVIA, MARY ELLEN and JAKE all have luggage.)***

TIM: ***(gesturing to SYLVIA, MARY ELLEN and JAKE)*** This way, please. . . If you'll follow me this way, please. We're trying to expedite the security process by doing pre-screening in small groups.

SYLVIA: Why is it that every time I come to the airport, there are more people telling me how they're doing things to get me through check in and security faster but it ends up being more complicated and taking longer? It's annoying!

TIM: I'm sorry you've had that experience, ma'am. We are always trying to improve things. I'll pass your concerns along to my supervisor.

SYLVIA: So, why exactly are we being pre-screened?

TIM: Think of it like get pre-approved for a credit card or pre-qualified for a mortgage. It might seem like an unnecessary hoop to jump through but it helps in the long run.

MARY ELLEN: (**more than a tad paranoid**) But why small groups? Have we been singled out? Did we get red flagged by the airline computer system?

TIM: (**very cheery and soothing**) Small-group pre-screening is designed to be more personal and less stressful. We want you to feel like people being guided through an important security process, not like cattle being herded to slaughter.

SYLVIA: (**sarcastic**) There's a lovely image.

MARY ELLEN: Where are the hidden security cameras? (**to JAKE**) Airports are like casinos, you know. There's always someone watching. . . watching our every move. . . watching us like rats in a maze. . . watching us like we're part of a massive science experiment.

JAKE: (**who has been reading a magazine from the beginning of the scene and not really paying attention**) What?

MARY ELLEN: Nothing. I didn't say a word – not a peep.

JAKE: (**has gone back to reading the magazine**) What?

SYLVIA: She said we're being watched like rats in a casino.

JAKE: Oh. . . cool.

TIM: (**like a kindergarten teacher**) If we could refocus on the security process, please. Now, I'll need everyone to remove his or her shoes and hold them in his or her hand so you're ready to put them in the courtesy bins that will be sent through the scanning machines.

SYLVIA: Take off our shoes?

TIM: Yes. . . let's all – well, not me, but all of *you* – remove our shoes.

MARY ELLEN: (**scans the ceiling above her, then, quickly removes her shoes**) OK. I'm done. (**to the ceiling, with increased volume**) I've removed my shoes.

JAKE: (**removes his shoes in the laziest way possible, while still reading the magazine**) Yeah, ok.

SYLVIA: No.

TIM: Excuse me?

SYLVIA: I said, no. I'm not taking my shoes off. I'm not about to traipse around on these floors in my stocking feet. God knows *who* has

walked here before me with God knows *what* disgusting things on their shoes or feet. There is such a thing as foot fungus, young man, and I am not about to get foot fungus just so you can get your jollies.

TIM: I assure you, ma'am, this is not something I am requesting personally. I am making this request on behalf of this airport's team of security professionals (**gets no response**) . . .the airline industry. . . the Federal Government. (**JAKE laughs out loud at something HE's seen in the magazine.**) Security is no laughing matter.

MARY ELLEN: (**looking up, pointing at JAKE**) He laughed. I didn't. I have *my* shoes off.

SYLVIA: (**to MARY ELLEN**) You're a mess.

MARY ELLEN: (**to SYLVIA**) You shut up!

TIM: (**in his most calm, yet authoritative voice**) Ladies, please. Let's stay calm. Let's be happy passengers.

SYLVIA: I'd be a lot happier if you'd let us move on to the regular security line and stop hounding us to take off our shoes.

JAKE: (**coolly, yet with a hint of attitude**) Just take your shoes off, lady. . . You got something to hide?

MARY ELLEN: I have *my* shoes off! I have *my* shoes off!

SYLVIA: (**pushing MARY ELLEN aside, approaching JAKE, face to face**) Listen, mister. You should just put your face back in your magazine and mind your own business. This doesn't concern you.

JAKE: The heck it doesn't. You're holding things up. So, just be a nice lady and take off your shoes so we can move along.

TIM: I think that's a wonderful idea.

SYLVIA: I think you can all just. . .

MARY ELLEN: (**cutting her off, completely losing control**) TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES!

SYLVIA: I said no, and I meant no. This is where I draw the line. Period. Do you think I'm a terrorist? (**MARY ELLEN shrieks.**) Are you going to arrest me for failure to remove my shoes? What's the worst you can do?!

TIM: (**into a walkie-talkie**) This is Tim. . . We have a situation.

JAKE: Cool.

## TRANSITION

**(ROSEMARY and JANE are a pair of friends in their early 50s. They're reading the paper together, as they often do, so they can discuss the various atrocities in the news. We join them as ROSEMARY spots a headline that is particularly troubling to her.)**

ROSEMARY: (**reading headline to JANE**) "Shoe Showdown Shuts Down Airport." My goodness. It sounds dreadful.

JANE: What happened?

ROSEMARY: It says that an entire terminal at the airport had to be shut down when a potential security breach occurred.

JANE: Well, they can't be too careful with all those terrorists out there.

ROSEMARY: I wonder what kind of shoes were they? There's no picture with the story.

JANE: That's a shame. I love shoes.

## TRANSITION

*(In one area of the performing space we have a PLUMBER and his wife, reading the paper together. In another area we have ART, a businessman in his late early 40s, who is currently in a minimum security prison for a white-collar crime. Behind ART are his five wives from five different states. "CALIFORNIA" is in her 30s. NEVADA is in her early 40s. OREGON and WASHINGTON are mid-30s and HAWAII is mid-20s. In a separate area is TAMMY from Texas. SHE is in her late 30s.)*

PLUMBER: Convicted Felon Has Big Secret

ART: I love women.

PLUMBER'S WIFE: Jailed Executive Has Five Wives in Five States

ART: I love too many women. **(pause)** In the beginning, it was all good. I traveled a lot between California and Nevada so I married a woman in each state. I made good money and took care of them both in high style. Never any complaints. Not even about the amount of time I spent on the road. Then, I started doing business in Oregon and Washington and it seemed like a good idea to have a wife in each of those states, too. It was easier than you'd think. And it was a sweet arrangement, I can tell you that. The following year, I added a wife in Hawaii. She's hot — hot like lava from a volcano. **(pause for brief revelry)** Everything was going along so smoothly. Don't get me wrong. . . It took a lot of planning and scheduling but it was worth it. I mean, I had five wives. **(pauses to bask in wave of envy)** And with each one, I got mostly the good stuff. There was very little nagging or whining. When I was with them, I treated 'em like they were the only woman in the world. . . They'll all tell you that. . . They loved it. . . No complaints from any of 'em.

WIVES: **(the wives, in unison)** How could you do this to me?

CALIFORNIA: You said you loved me.

NEVADA: You said I was the only woman for you.

OREGON: You said I made you happier than you thought was possible.

WASHINGTON: You said you wanted to grow old with me.

HAWAII: You said we were soul mates.

WIVES: *(in unison)* Liar!

CALIFORNIA: Pig

NEVADA: Scum

OREGON: Deceiver

WASHINGTON: Weasel

HAWAII: Bad, bad man.

ART: They loved me. All of 'em.

CALIFORNIA: I hate you.

OREGON: You need help. Professional, psychiatric help.

NEVADA: Don't think for a minute that you're getting the engagement ring back. I already pawned it and I'm going on a cruise!

HAWAII: I cut you out of all our wedding pictures. I'd have burned them but I looked so good in that dress.

WASHINGTON: I hope you rot in jail.

***(An actress in another area of the performance space shifts into the character of a TAMMY.)***

TAMMY: *(typing an e-mail)* Dear Art, I got your e-mail today. I'm so glad you are allowed to use the computer during your. . . unfortunate incarceration. Insider trading sounds like someone using whatever information they had at their disposal to make a good investment decision. With all the murderers and rapists running around loose, you'd think the police would have better things to do with their time than persecuting good men like you. There was a little write up about you in USA Today, on Monday. It was a pack of lies. It may be a big, high-and-mighty national newspaper, but it's nothing more than birdcage liner, as far as I'm concerned. Your wives said horrible things about you. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. My ex-husband never did any of the sweet things you did for those women. They should thank their lucky stars that you loved them enough to marry 'em. I know I'd be honored and pleased as punch to be your wife. Until I hear from you, next time, I will keep you in my prayers. Hugs and kisses, Tammy.

**TRANSITION**

***(DARLENE and ALICE are seated next to each other on the bus. ALICE, mid-40s, is reading a People magazine – or something similar. DARLENE, early 20s, is reading over her shoulder.)***

DARLENE: *(pointing to a photo in the magazine the woman seated next to her is reading)* That's my husband.

ALICE: I beg your pardon?

DARLENE: That's my husband.

ALICE: Jordan Anderson is your husband? Jordan Anderson the actor? Jordan Anderson the star?!

DARLENE: Yes, *that* Jordan Anderson is my husband.

ALICE: Who is the blond woman with him in the picture. It says they're at the premiere of his new movie.

DARLENE: That's just some actress he takes to big events like that, since I prefer to avoid the screaming fans and paparazzi.

ALICE: It says here that he's making a new movie in Cambodia. It must be so hard to be apart for long periods of time while he's working. Do you ever go along when he's on location?

DARLENE: I always know where Jordan is. Always.

ALICE: Don't you have a car and driver? Why would you want to be taking the bus?

DARLENE: I like to live in the real world. I don't need the trappings of wealth and power to make me happy or feel secure, though Jordan loves to spoil me.

ALICE: How did you meet?

DARLENE: It was love at first sight.

ALICE: Just like in the movies. But how did you meet?

DARLENE: I told you, it was love at first sight.

ALICE: I remember reading that he was dating that Brazilian actress for a while but then she disappeared.

DARLENE: She was in the way.

ALICE: Excuse me?

DARLENE: Never mind. It was love at first sight and, since then, it's been happily ever after, all right?

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