

**LINES OF DESIRE**

A play in two acts

By **Mark Scharf**



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## LINES OF DESIRE

### Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

LAURA ..... early/mid 60's, landscape architect; CAL's mother, KATHY's sister and JACKSON's lover

KATHY ..... late 60's, a doctor's widow and retired teacher; LAURA's sister and CAL's aunt

CAL ..... late 20's, aspiring photographer and want to be artist; LAURA's son, KATHY's nephew and BRYNN's lover

JACKSON..... mid/late 60's, famous American sculptor, LAURA's lover

BRYNN ..... early/mid 20's, art student and painter; CAL's lover

TIME: Act One: KATHY's birthday weekend, fall the present  
Act Two, Scene One: three weeks later  
Act Two, Scene Two: three weeks after that

PLACE: Act One: The backyard of KATHY's lake house  
Act Two, Scene One: a loft used as an art gallery  
Act Two, Scene Two: The backyard of KATHY's lake house

## LINES OF DESIRE

### SYNOPSIS

A line of desire can be thought of as the shortest path from one's self to one's desire. Our own lines of desire run in parallel with and intersect and collide with others. Other people's desires may drive us crazy, but it is for their sake that we find the stamina to go on living. Laura is a landscape architect -- a designer of environments. In a larger way, she tries to design the environment of her life in which she can never be happy until she knows her adult child, Cal, is settled and happy.

The play opens as Laura and her son Cal, an aspiring photographer, gather at Laura's widowed sister Kathy's lake house to celebrate her Kathy's birthday. They are joined by Jackson, a famous sculptor for whom Laura left her marriage, and Brynn, Cal's live-in girlfriend who is an aspiring painter.

Laura recently designed Kathy's backyard, which leads down to the lake. Cal struggles to coexist with Jackson, whom he blames for her mother's divorce. Jackson announces he wishes to give Kathy a statue as a birthday gift to be placed in the yard to complement and publicize Kathy's design. Cal announces his first show of his photographs and Jackson offers to help Cal.

Cal's show is a disaster and he flees the wreckage with his mother and sister in pursuit leaving Brynn to fall under Jackson's spell. Later, everyone but Cal gathers to unveil Jackson's statue in Kathy's backyard. Brynn has now left Cal to become Jackson's new personal assistant and to learn the ropes of the art world. Cal arrives later to confront Brynn and his lack of success. The unveiling doesn't go as planned as Cal strikes back against Jackson for the damage he believes he has caused his family by attacking his statue with a hammer.

All of the characters remain trapped in their lives after all that happens to them, but they are changed by their experience; we recognize ourselves in them because we have been allowed to see their hopes, fears and dreams.

## LINES OF DESIRE

### Act One

(The lights rise on the backyard of a lake house; the yard is terraced on three tiers on as it slopes down to the lake, which is where the audience sits.)

(On an upper tier, on a stone patio, sisters KATHY and LAURA sit next to each other facing the water. On another tier is a massive, modern grill. On a lower tier, LAURA's son CAL lounges on a lawn chair sunning himself; his eyes hidden by sunglasses.)

LAURA

I can't be happy unless I know my kids are happy...

CAL

(exaggerated English accent) Mother!

LAURA

...settled, you know.

CAL

Mummy!!!

LAURA

What?

CAL

Who's going to make me a sandwich?

LAURA

Make your own sandwich...

KATHY

We'll be having dinner soon...

LAURA

Cal -- can you wait?

CAL

I guess...

KATHY

I guess I'm lucky that both of my sons and their families are doing well.

LAURA

But are they happy?

KATHY

I think so.

LAURA

I guess I just find it hard to believe anyone can be happy being a financial analyst.

KATHY

They're never going to starve. Their wives and kids are well taken care of. If they need something they can get it...

LAURA

I'm talking about having a sense of fulfilment.

KATHY

I think they're more than fulfilled. Too busy not to be.

CAL

Mother!

LAURA

I just wonder if there's something they love that they're not doing.

KATHY

They can now afford to do whatever hobby they want.

LAURA

I'm not talking about a hobby. Something more like a passion – an avocation...

CAL

Oh, mother mine!!!

LAURA

What?

CAL

Who's going to bring me a drink?

LAURA and KATHY

...

KATHY

Paul Jr. loved to take history courses in college. I think he took every one that was offered. Told me he was thinking of being a history teacher. You know what Paul told him? He said, you can study and major in anything you want. But, he'd only pay for pre-med or a business degree

LAURA

Sounds harsh.

KATHY

Now, he can take care of himself and his family – put the kids in the right schools, stay in a nice house at the beach for the summer -- and there's nothing to stop him from reading and studying all the history he wants. He can take his whole family to England, or France or Greece or where ever to see what he's been reading about.

LAURA

I don't see what's so wrong being a teacher – how many years did you teach Latin?

KATHY

I taught because I liked it – not because we needed me to.

CAL

Boring!!

LAURA

What was that?

CAL

I said all this talk about jobs and houses and vacations is boring.

LAURA

You don't have to listen. You don't have to be part of the conversation.

CAL

There's no escaping the conversation.

KATHY

Go for a walk or something.

LAURA

Don't you have those ear bud things you can put in?

CAL

I left them on the table next to my bed.

LAURA

Then go get them.

CAL

Isn't anybody going in the house?

LAURA

You can get them yourself, Cal.

(CAL makes a production number out of standing and stretching before crossing to LAURA and KATHY)

LAURA (cont.)

When's Brynn supposed to be here?

CAL

I don't know. Sometime today.

LAURA

She didn't give you a time?

CAL

Nope. Probably so no one can say she's late. If she never says when to expect her she can never be late for anything.

KATHY

I guess she shares your mother's fluid relationship with time.

LAURA

What're you talking about?

KATHY

You'll be late for your own funeral.

LAURA

What about you?

KATHY

I was never late for anything when Paul was alive. He always said, "if you're not early, you're late."

CAL

I hate that.

KATHY

These days I don't have much of a schedule. If there's no one waiting on me I'm a little more relaxed about things. Doesn't mean I'm ever going to be late to the airport. The plane leaves with or without you. Airline doesn't care if you miss the plane.

JACKSON

(off) Hellooo!

LAURA

We're back here!

CAL

Fuck.

KATHY

What's the matter, Cal?

CAL

That asshole is what's the matter.

LAURA

Please don't start.

CAL

I'm going in.

(JACKSON enters from the side of the house.)

JACKSON

Good afternoon!

KATHY

Hi, Jackson.

CAL

Asshole.

LAURA

Damn it, Cal...

(CAL exits into the house.)



LAURA

Sorry...

JACKSON

At least he didn't threaten to kill me again.

KATHY

Again?

JACKSON

Sent me a death threat email. I've saved it in case something happens so the police will know where to start looking.

LAURA

He feels things passionately.

JACKSON

So, do I – doesn't give me license to behave badly

LAURA

Things are getting better. He didn't leave when he found out you were coming.

JACKSON

Progress!

LAURA

I'm sure lots of people have called you an asshole.

JACKSON

You have once or twice.

KATHY

What is he angry about?

JACKSON

I exist.

LAURA

He's mourning the loss of his family.

JACKSON

Nobody died. He still has you and his Dad...

LAURA  
But not together.

KATHY  
He needs to find a way to let go.

JACKSON  
He won't do that.

LAURA  
Because he can't.

KATHY  
Sounds exhausting.

LAURA  
He's really a remarkable person full of caring and love... And things are getting better.

(JACKSON crosses to LAURA and kisses her.)

JACKSON  
It's really beautiful back here. You did a great job.

KATHY  
My sister did an *excellent* job.

JACKSON  
All it needs is one of my sculptures.

KATHY  
Don't think I can afford that.

JACKSON  
I'll give it to you for your birthday. At least I'd know the piece was being appreciated. And it would be safe here...

KATHY  
Safe?

JACKSON  
First thing that happens to a public outdoor piece is graffiti. Then it must suffer the indifference of a city or a desire to remove it. And, finally after 20 years or so, it becomes what it was meant to be. A creation that will glide through time itself.

KATHY

You'd give me one of your sculptures? Seriously?

JACKSON

I'm always serious about my work. Not that I don't keep a sense of humor about it...

LAURA

Except when some critic makes fun of you.

JACKSON

Smart ass.

LAURA

That's why you love me.

JACKSON

Love you because of some things and in spite of others.

KATHY

I don't think I could let you give me...

JACKSON

You'd be helping me achieve my goal to embed my sculptures in the world so they become part of it.

KATHY

I don't know...

JACKSON

You'd have to approve, of course. There's no point if you don't like to look at it.

LAURA

Just say yes.

KATHY

Then, yes – assuming I like it.

JACKSON

Fair enough.

KATHY

Do you have a particular sculpture in mind?

JACKSON

Oh, yes.

KATHY

Is it metal or stone or wood...

JACKSON

The medium of sculpture is space – not wood or stone or steel. Sculpture is the antidote to a flat, two-dimensional screened world.

KATHY

I never thought of it that way.

LAURA

He thinks he needs to be profound about his work.

JACKSON

I am the most profound sculptor in America. And the slowest. Take me years to finally finish a piece where I can let it go.

KATHY

Are you sure you want to hide your work away here?

JACKSON

This is a perfect place for it.

KATHY

If you say so.

JACKSON

I do. Here, let me show you what I have in mind.

(HE takes his cell phone out from his pocket and scrolls through his pictures.)

Here it is. It's not a great picture but it will give you an idea.

KATHY

Oh... That looks very interesting. I don't think I've seen anything like it. It has lots of angles...

JACKSON

Yes, it does.

LAURA

Let me see...

(HE shows LAURA)

KATHY

How big is it? How tall?

JACKSON

Five feet and a few inches.

KATHY

Looks really heavy.

JACKSON

It is. What do you think?

LAURA

I think it's beautiful. It'll look great here – and just think how it will increase your property value.

JACKSON

If she moves she can take it with her.

KATHY

I don't think I'd want to move it if this is a perfect place for it.

JACKSON

There are many perfect places.

KATHY

I wouldn't know the difference.

JACKSON

You can always call me to consult.

KATHY

Let me think about it.

LAURA

Do you know how much that statue is worth?

KATHY

No idea.

LAURA

(to JACKSON) Five figures? Six figures?