

ON THE LINE
a short play

by Jason Pizzarello

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CHARACTERS

JENSEN, 28, from Tallahassee
the “old man,” rank of Specialist

FOSTER, 18, from St. Louis
the Private

TIME

2009.

PLACE

An remote mountain outpost. Afghanistan.

Night. Very little moonlight.

Two US Army soldiers, pull security at an outpost on the side of a rugged mountain.

JENSEN, 28, leans against a sandbag barrier with his M4 rifle positioned out, downrange into the darkness. He spits some dip.

FOSTER, 18, is on the side and above the foxhole doing push ups. He's completely exposed and JENSEN looks over annoyed.

FOSTER keeps pushing and grunting.

JENSEN

Stop that shit, man.

FOSTER

Stop, what?

FOSTER makes each pushup sexual by bumping and grinding the ground.

Stop this?

JENSEN

Fuck, man.

FOSTER

That's what I'm doing, baby. And she doesn't want me to stop. *(To the ground below him:)* Do ya? *(Waits for response.)* No, I didn't think you would, you little slut.

JENSEN pushes him over.

FOSTER starts cracking up. JENSEN returns his focus downrange.

FOSTER

Damn. You scared her away.

JENSEN

Get the hell back over here.

FOSTER slides behind the barrier and takes up post.

JENSEN

You're gonna get us both shot with that shit.

FOSTER

(still giggling) Okay, okay, why do men like getting blow jobs so much? ...Because it's the only time they can get anything straight inside a woman's head.

FOSTER loves this one. JENSEN nods.

JENSEN

What time you got?

FOSTER looks at his watch.

FOSTER

Twenty three hundred.

JENSEN

(Looking up and out:) Where're the stars?
Must be afraid to come out tonight.

FOSTER

Little pussy stars.

JENSEN

Me and Porgy saw Orion's Belt coupla nights ago. Tonight: nothing.

FOSTER

Mother fuckin' cloud cover. To think we coulda been star gazing. Got our astronomy on.

JENSEN

Ah well.

FOSTER wipes his mouth and spits out some dirt.

FOSTER

I hate this fuckin' dirt. Wasteland. What're we doin here? Tryin to preserve a pile of dirt and the worms that live in it. I never wanna see another mountain or rock as long as I live.

JENSEN

Mountains are different here. Not like back home. The Appalachian, the Smokies, the Rockies. Shit. They're beautiful. We got good rocks back home, too. I used to collect rocks, when I was a kid.

FOSTER

You used to collect rocks?

JENSEN

I'd even have rock sales.

FOSTER

What the fuck is a rock sale?

JENSEN

It's exactly what it sounds like, man. I'd sell rocks. Other kids would have lemonade stands and sell lemonade. And I had a rock stand and sold rocks.

FOSTER

Man, Jensen, you such a hick.

JENSEN

I had some good rocks.

FOSTER

And people would buy your rocks?

JENSEN

They should have. I'm telling you, I had some good shit. Not like gravel or granite. I had quartz. Or some really interesting shapes. I had one that looked like a three-legged giraffe. I wouldn't sell that one.

FOSTER

Sounds priceless.

JENSEN

To me it was. I wish I still had it. I loved it.

FOSTER

It was your pet?

JENSEN

For sure.

FOSTER

Why didn't you go into the rock business?

JENSEN

Guess I just love dear ol' Uncle Sam too much.

JENSEN laughs for the first time.

Or maybe I just hate all these critters. Fuckin' towel hat booger eaters.

FOSTER

I don't hate anybody, man.

JENSEN

Yeah, right.

FOSTER

I don't. Seriously. Don't doubt me, I'd put two in the head no hesitation. But that's only because they're tryin to kill me. Or you. Doesn't mean I hate 'em.

JENSEN

Well, I do. I have to. I don't think I could kill 'em otherwise.

FOSTER

My God doesn't let me hold hate in my heart.

JENSEN

My God doesn't mind. He says, feel what you need to feel to do what you need to do.

FOSTER

Huh. Pretty open-minded.

JENSEN

And He forgives.

FOSTER

Gotta forgive yourself, too.

JENSEN

Not quite there yet, brother. Maybe one day.

FOSTER

I can see the weight you carry. It's a heavy load.

JENSEN

Yeah.

FOSTER

Oughta try and shed some of that.

JENSEN

Yeah.

Pause. JENSEN starts counting the magazines in his vest.

JENSEN

Where's my other magazine?

FOSTER

Our Gods aren't that different.

JENSEN

Will you shut the fuck up, Foster? I don't give two shits about your God. Help me find my fuckin' magazine.

FOSTER helps him look a little. There's a uncomfortable silence.

FOSTER

I'm gonna get so much pussy when I get back.

JENSEN

Uh, huh.

FOSTER

What, you don't believe me? Man, I'll tell you what: there's pussy waiting for me. There's pussy on deck. Double deck. I got enough to go around. I'll hook you up.

JENSEN

It's not like that.

FOSTER

It's not like what? You don't want pussy cause you're fuckin married? You get all the pussy you want, right? Bullshit. Do you even get a boner anymore?

JENSEN

Married life is great. I love my wife. She's my best friend.

FOSTER

That's gay.

JENSEN

(holding up his magazine:) Found it.

FOSTER

Not gay gay. You know what I mean.

JENSEN

You'll see. You'll meet the right woman, and that will be that.

FOSTER

This player ain't never gonna wrap his game up, son. Never.

JENSEN

You'll see. I'm telling you, you'll see.

FOSTER

Not now. Not for a long ass time. Too many fine ladies on the line. I want experience. I'm still a youngin', you know.

JENSEN

Yeah, yeah, I know.
What time you got?

FOSTER

Twenty-three twenty.

JENSEN

Is it going backwards?

FOSTER

Time?

JENSEN

Everything. I'm waiting for the sun to unrise.

FOSTER

That's basically what's going to happen.

JENSEN

But reverse order.

FOSTER

So you'll be young again, like me?

JENSEN

No, I'll still be old. But I still lose time. That's what's happening here. Time is being stolen from me.

FOSTER

See, this is exactly why you need some pussy.

JENSEN

You know if you were in space you'd age slower?

FOSTER

What the fuck am I doin in space?

JENSEN

That's what happens with the astronauts. Because of the gravity difference or something. Not by much, but if you travelled light years, you'd come back and everyone would dead and gone. But

you'd still be young. Now it's the opposite for us. By the time we get back everyone will still be in their prime, fresh faces intact, and we'll be wrinkled and grey.

FOSTER

And all my pussy will be shriveled and dried up. Dust balls in there and shit...
I don't know, man. I don't let time affect me like that. Time is perception and time is my bitch.

JENSEN

I'm just sayin' ...I miss... I miss Cornflakes.

FOSTER

I miss Pop Tarts. The cinnamon kind with frosting.

JENSEN

Buttermilk pancakes with maple syrup.

FOSTER

Waffles. Hot Waffles.

JENSEN

Coffee and donuts.

FOSTER

Jelly donuts.
Frosted donuts.
Any kind of fuckin' donuts.

JENSEN

Vanilla bean ice cream and warm apple pie.

FOSTER

Pudding. Jello. Without the fruit in it.

JENSEN

Canolis. Have you ever had a Canoli?

FOSTER

Canolis? No.

JENSEN

Hmmm. The Eye-talians make them with ricotta cheese. My uncle brought 'em to Christmas one time. So good. Have to have it with espresso though. You gotta do these things right. You ever had espresso?

FOSTER

I don't drink that fruity coffee shit, man. Latte mocha-whatchamacallit. My girl, though, she loves her some Starbucks. Starbucks be takin all my money.

JENSEN

Your girl?

FOSTER

You know, one of my girls.

JENSEN

Uh huh.

FOSTER

Nobody's locking me down.

JENSEN

What's her favorite flower?

FOSTER

What are you insinuating?

JENSEN

Answer the question.

FOSTER

Is this an integrity check? You better not be.

JENSEN

What your girl's favorite flower?

FOSTER

Shit, man. I don't know. I don't pay attention to what she's saying.

JENSEN

What's her favorite flower?

FOSTER

I just tol you—!

JENSEN

—What's her favorite—!?

FOSTER

—Lilacs! Alright? She loves mother fuckin lilacs. Shut up, Jesus.

JENSEN just smiles and adjusts his sights.

FOSTER

Shut up. Damn.

JENSEN keeps smiling, as he adjusts his weapon.

FOSTER

I said shut up.

JENSEN

I'm not saying anything.

FOSTER

Yeah, you're not saying anything but you're saying everything.

JENSEN shrugs.

FOSTER scoffs at JENSEN and returns to his push ups.

FADE OUT.